

## **What Mayor Asukata's city administration of Yokohama left behind** **By Akira Tamura**

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### **Mayor Asukata and myself**

On October 11, former Yokohama Mayor Ichio Asukata passed away. Although he became chairman of the Socialist Party and left the mayoralty in 1978, the city of Yokohama shone for 15 years from 1963. These were the days when the city of Yokohama shone not only within the narrow framework of *Kakushin Jichitai* (Annotation by editor: group of progressive and/or reformist municipalities), but also in the sense that it greatly advanced citizen autonomy and the policy capacity of local governments in Japan, attracting the attention towards local governments nationwide regardless of whether they were conservative or reformist. From the sixth year of the Asukata's mayoralty term, I was given the opportunity to work closely with Mayor Asukata in Yokohama City Government as the director and director general of the Planning and Coordination Bureau for ten years. The meeting with Mayor Asukata was a combination of several coincidences, but I suppose it was also a matter of fate.

I had been searching for a vocation for my entire life. So, after graduating from university three times (different courses), I joined several central government ministries as a career employee (senior bureaucrat), but then quit those jobs to work in the private sector, and finally found my vocation as an urban planner, which at that time was not yet established in the private sector. When I returned to the Tokyo region from Osaka, I lived in a rundown city of Yokohama, which had just been liberated from the U.S. military occupation after World War 2. Shortly after I moved there, Mayor Asukata was elected, but I did not know him. Later, my office was assigned to work on a plan to rebuild Yokohama, and I began to get to know Mayor Asukata. At that time, I worked with Ehime, Kagawa, Osaka, Mie, and Ibaraki prefectures, as well as several municipalities, sports associations, private companies, and the Osaka Exposition, so Yokohama was my first experience with a so-called *Kakushin* municipality (Annotation by editor: Ichiro Okada 2016 defines that *Kakushin* mayors are of being supported by either socialist or communist parties).

Since I lived in a public housing complex in front of Yamashita Park with a view of the harbor, the plan from a resident's point of view is still different. It is naturally motivating for urban planner to create a fundamental vision and strategy to revitalize Yokohama, a city in ruins, without money or power. Therefore, we proposed a "Project Approach" in which the City of Yokohama would take the initiative in policy, and by mobilizing the government, public corporations, and private companies, and by issuing corporate bonds, the City of Yokohama would carry out its core projects without relying on taxes or other general foundations as much as possible. These are the strategic and core projects that are now nearing completion, such as the city center enhancement projects (centering on Minato Mirai 21, etc.), municipal subway networks, urban expressway networks, Yokohama Bay Bridge, Kohoku New Town, and Kanazawa seaside industrial zone.

### **A Change in Secretive City Government**

At the New Year's press conference in 1965, Mayor Asukata announced our proposal to the citizens as the six major projects. He wanted the citizens to discuss the proposal thoroughly. At the time of the proposal, I was told, "we understand the need for this project, but it is impossible to carry out six major projects at once when there is no money." Bureaucratic chiefs would not rush into announcing a project that had limited chance of success. They would work out the budget and discussions with outside parties, and only announce the projects when they were certain to be realized. However, Asukata, a

citizen politician, was different. If the direction was correct, he would boldly propose it in front of the citizens. He would not keep the information inside the city office, but would present it to the citizens and change the secretive city administration. He showed his dreams, hopes, and direction to the city's staff, who had been reluctant to take action, and strengthened their self-confidence. This helped to break through obstacles that had seemed difficult to overcome and to promote projects.

The six spine projects were assigned to departments, and the Planning and Coordination Bureau (at the time of its establishment, it was called the Planning and Coordination Office, meaning that it was not an ordinary bureau that integrated other bureaus but reported directly to the mayor) was established in April of 1968 to promote the city from a comprehensive standpoint. Although I had only proposed the idea and had never dreamed of joining City Hall, I ended up joining the City of Yokohama as the Director of the Planning and Coordination Office, which would be at the center of this management. I was the architect of these projects, and I lived very close to City Hall. It was during this period of coincidence that I came to have a close relationship with Mayor Asukata on a daily basis.

### **Mayor Asukata and Citizen Autonomy**

The basic stance of Mayor Asukata, who was elected in April 1963, was to change the attitude of the local government toward the citizens and to make it more reliable to them. Until then, the local government had been a traditional "superior" government that only had to follow the laws and policies set by the central government and never listened to the voices of citizens. The government is about to change that by 180 degrees.

Japan has already become a democratic nation with the defeat in the war in 1945 and the enactment of a democratic constitution in 1945, and local governments should have been positioned as the mother of democracy. In reality, however, the centralization of power had been strengthened since the prewar period, and citizens still lacked a sense of self-government. It was during this period that Mayor Asukata advocated "direct democracy," in which the citizens would be the management body of the municipality. This was not to deny the parliamentary system, but it was a return to the basics of democracy, whereby citizens were given the opportunity to participate in the city government not only once every four years, but at all times, so that they could touch and activate the city government themselves.

The policy of "10,000 Citizens Rally" and the establishment of a deputy mayor in charge of citizen participation were concrete examples of this policy. Meetings between the mayor and other city officials and citizens were held in various locations. The city council was the most opposed to this, on the grounds that direct participation by citizens would negate the city council's legally mandated status as a city council. The "10,000 citizens' rally" is not significant for the number of 10,000 people itself, but rather for the fact that it will turn the eyes of citizens who had little interest in the city government to the local government and change it into a familiar and trustworthy entity for the citizens. Mayor Asukata, coming from a lawyer's background, was good at logical arguments, but he did not like to end up in abstract debates. He always tried to show how politics can be presented in a clear and concrete way to the citizens. Therefore, while holding up the principle of "direct democracy" as a theory, he also presented a vivid picture of the "10,000 Citizens' Assembly" in the eyes of the citizens.

### **Developing a concrete and tangible method**

Mayor Asukata was a man of ideas. He developed a variety of concrete and tangible methods to bring the city government closer to the citizens by changing the city administration more democratic. For example, he set up a "citizen consultation room" in the city hall at the entrance where the mayor and the bureau chief, who were usually located in the back of the government building, directly answered the questions at the counter, and provided the consulting citizens with chairs suitable for the protagonists of the city government. In addition, a "Letter to the Mayor" was established to allow citizens to express their opinions about the city government at any time. To change the rigid image of

City Hall, he also held a small classical music concert in the hall on the first floor of City Hall, which was open to the public during lunch breaks.

All of this was 27 years ago. Today, citizen participation is all too commonplace, regardless of whether it is conservative or reformist, and the council has nothing to complain about it. Also, the methods mentioned here have been adopted quite naturally in each municipality. What may seem obvious today was astonishing at the time when it began, and it was a leading reform that transformed local governments from "bureaucrats" stuck in a formulaic framework into entities of citizen self-governance worthy of the name.

### **Municipalities as Subjects of Citizen Defense**

The Asukata administration tried various experiments to see what it could do without money, under the slogan of "creating a town that is comfortable for anyone to live in" and "taking a child-centered approach. But above all, it is about concrete pollution control from the standpoint of self-governance to protect citizens, moving away from being a subcontractor of the central government. The local community had requested that pollution control be implemented for factories located on reclaimed land in Negishi Bay, which had been done under the previous mayor's administration. The time was the early 1960s, a period of rapid economic growth. However, the city did not take up the issue, claiming that it did not have the authority to do so. The common sense of the local government at that time was that it would not be concerned with anything that was not stipulated by the national government, no matter how much it might affect the health of the citizens.

Mayor Asukata was the first to take up this issue after assuming office. He expressed his stance that local governments should act as municipalities should, based on the trust of citizens, proactively respond to protect the lives of citizens, rather than to enforce laws and regulations decided by the central government. First, it established a pollution center, equivalent to a department, staffed it with specialized personnel, and furthermore, sought the cooperation of outside experts to conduct a scientific sampling of pollution. Based on the data, they asked for cooperation from companies that cause pollution. He was a realist who did not like to run only on idealism. The first company he approached was Power Development Co. a state-owned special corporation, with the attitude, "What is a local municipality going to say when it has no legal basis to do so?" The regulatory authorities also supported the stance of the company.

### **Yokohama Method in Pollution Prevention**

Any municipality that is based on its citizens must act to protect the health and safety of its citizens, regardless of the legal basis of its responsibility. The mayor, as a representative of the citizens, asked for cooperation from the companies, and after many twists and turns, the first "pollution prevention agreement" in Japan was finally concluded, in which the mayor, as a representative of the citizens, and the companies signed an agreement, since the national legal framework concerned with the pollution control did not exist at the time. One after another, agreements were concluded with other leading companies, and this is known as the "Yokohama method" of pollution control.

Local governments, which had been struggling to deal with pollution due to the lack of laws and regulations, saw this and began negotiating with companies in their respective regions, and the method of pollution control agreements quickly spread throughout the country. This demonstrated that local governments could take necessary actions on their own for the benefit of their citizens even in the absence of laws and regulations.

### **Promotion of Outline Administration**

The Pollution Prevention Agreement took the initiative with citizen-oriented local governments in filling the administrative vacuum left by the national government. Finally, in 1965, the national

government convened a Parliament session on pollution and passed the Pollution-Related Law, which recognized the pioneering role of local governments, and the National Environmental Agency was established the following year. Such gaps and inadequacies in the legal system are everywhere in the problems faced by local governments. Besides, the current laws lack the comprehensiveness of each vertically divided government ministry with jurisdiction, and are uniform in their disregard for local perspectives and the actual conditions of citizens. Moreover, difficult policies are always doomed to be delayed from the time they are needed, since they will not be discussed at the national level unless problems arise nationwide.

If local governments are not entity for citizens, they can get away with saying that there are no instructions or laws and regulations from the national government. This is why local governments have been separated from citizens and have not earned their trust. However, a municipality that takes a standpoint of citizen autonomy must think of some means and implement what is truly necessary for citizens and the community, even in the absence of laws and regulations.

In the hilly areas of Yokohama City, there were no laws and regulations until after the mid-1960s, and unchecked overdevelopment took place. This led to the annual loss of lives due to landslides, and municipalities in Kobe, Yokohama, and other areas became impatient and created ordinances requiring notification of development on sloping land. The national government, seeing the success of local governments, later enacted the "Housing Land Development Regulation Law" and the "Housing Land Development Project Law." Preventing landslides is a normal procedure done by municipalities. How else can school sites and parks and green spaces be secured, and are the attached roads and connecting streets well maintained? There are too many issues to be addressed, such as how to deal with sewage and rainwater, how to secure transportation from the stations, water sources to accommodate the growing population, and even waste disposal, medical, welfare, safety, and cultural facilities. However, according to the law that has been passed, as long as the procedures are justified, permission must be granted even if none of the problems associated with such residential land development have been resolved.

The local government then has to scramble to clean up the mess. In particular, the immediate problem was securing land for an elementary and junior high school as a compulsory education facility. When a major development takes place, the number of children in a school district can increase several times in one swoop. It has become impossible to purchase that land after the rise of land prices by the development, but we cannot afford to wait for enrollment. These problems involve many ministries and agencies, and cannot be solved by vertically divided legislative system. Therefore, in 1968, Yokohama City enacted the "Housing Land Development Guidelines (Local Development Exaction System). Kawanishi City in Hyogo Prefecture had enacted its own guidelines the year before Yokohama, but Yokohama was the first to start examination of its formulation. Moreover, it was significant that a government-designated city (big cities), which has the same authority to grant permission seconded from the prefecture government, enacted the guidelines. Gaining strength from this, many cities began to administer by various guidelines, which has now spread to more than 1,000 municipalities.

The "guideline administration," in which local governments create necessary local rules under the responsibility of the head of the municipality, has become a policy method for local governments to respond to the times by incorporating the requests of citizens, and it is highly significant that this idea has spread and taken root. The legal status of the "guideline" is beyond the scope of this report. However, Mayor Asukata, who is also a lawyer, has also made sure to provide for flexibility in legal interpretation at the very last minute. Without this guideline, the City of Yokohama would have been destroyed during the period of rapid economic growth.

### **Positioning of Local Governments as Policy Makers**

Mayor Asukata demonstrated through his anti-pollution agreements and the guideline administration

that local governments could become policy actors for local residents, rather than subcontractors bound by laws and regulations, by being rooted in citizen autonomy, and continued to show in concrete terms that many other policies were possible.

As early as in 1964, he established the "Urban Beauty Council," and in 1968, he had the expressway through the center of the city converted to underground for the sake of the urban landscape and the greenery of Odori Park, claiming that it was a "wound on forehead." In 1970, he created the Urban Design Team. Nowadays, there are declarations of design cities and an emphasis on urban landscapes, but at the time this was done in the face of fierce opposition from the central government. The very founder of the term "urban agriculture," which has now taken on a somewhat different meaning, was Mayor Asukata. Later, the City Planning Law also established the system of "production green areas in urbanized areas." The "Citizen's Forest" system was introduced to conserve green spaces under contract with citizens, rather than by purchasing them.

The list is endless. The news that originated in Yokohama spread throughout Japan and stimulated local governments to implement many of these ideas. Even if they did not make the news, many of them have since become the policy or common sense of national ministries and agencies, even though they were opposed to them at the time. By becoming a policy entity on its own, the City of Yokohama was always able to come up with policies that were ahead of the national government and in line with the times.

The Six Spine Projects that led me to join the City of Yokohama would have been commonplace if they had been implemented, but they seemed completely impossible according to the framework and common sense of local administrations at the time. It was an act of madness for the municipality to launch those major projects without financial resources or authority. However, without comprehensive leadership by local governments, projects would be carried out at the behest of ministries and agencies and corporations, and urban development would fall into disarray. There can be no other comprehensive policy entity than the local government based on citizen autonomy. The meaning of the Six Spine Projects is that they clearly put this into practice, and it does not mean merely that a large building was erected or a large bridge was constructed.

Although much smaller than these, the Yokohama Stadium in 1978, which was realized at the end of the Asukata administration, is an example of the city's persistence. For this, the city planned the project, but used very little taxpayer money. Instead of a city-owned stadium, it was realized as a joint-stock company by raising funds from citizens and local businesses, and the stadium was donated to the city by the company. At that time, the term "privatization" was not used, but this is exactly the kind of project practiced by the private sector with citizen participation. It was the city's role to clear difficult legal restrictions and solve problems with related government agencies and baseball-related issues behind the scenes. It was the establishment of a practical, comprehensive system in Yokohama that enabled many related departments to "collaborate" and realize this project in a short period of time and by the deadline.

Although small municipalities may function as policy-making entities, it is absolutely necessary for large municipalities to have systems in which the functions of the entire city are comprehensive, work practically, and add a qualitative element to them. This will allow various entities, including vertically-divided municipal organizations and private companies, to produce toward a single goal from the perspective of the community and its citizens.

### **Establishment of an Integrated System Unprecedented in Municipalities**

The Planning and Coordination Bureau began to function quite effectively in the 1970s. It became possible to implement the city's policies in an integrated manner, from the ideological stage to the concrete implementation of city policies, overcoming obstacles, strategic spillover to related projects, and the design of spaces.

Integration does not just mean creating a comprehensive plan as a document. Nor does it mean that the planning and coordination bureau has a monopoly on strategic projects. Nor does it mean that the Planning and Coordination Bureau is a close unit that does the mayor's bidding. One of its roles is to suppress assertions of the mayor from time to time. It is to provide all related departments with their own roles, and to allow them to participate and exert their power while not being subservient to the central government, but allowing related departments and the agencies and companies they bring in to act fully from the comprehensive standpoint of the municipality. Today, the same names and similar bureau names can be found everywhere in each municipality, but none has yet to emerge since then with the practical and real comprehensive power of Yokohama in this era. The city of Yokohama, too, split up its organization and eliminated its bureau three years after Mayor Asukata resigned.

Mayor Asukata was an entirely folksy and civic personality, and he did not like the organizational and personnel messes and the organizational and formal problems that bureaucratic people like to deal with. So, he may have been less concerned about the need for such an integrated system, but without this function, it would be impossible to solve difficult urban problems in a concrete way and realize them toward solutions, even if one-off events and fireworks displays could be created.

It would have been very difficult to promote the Six Spine Projects as strategic projects from the standpoint of the City of Yokohama without money and power. In addition, new laws were emerging at the time, such as development control measures and the floor-area system in the City Planning Law. These could have been utilized from the standpoint of the local government, rather than under the guidance of the national government's vertically divided ministries and agencies. The mayor used to tell me, "You are the expert on urban matters, so I will leave the final decision to you. In the internal meetings of the city, we always had lively discussions regardless of rank. Because of such a free atmosphere and final decisions, we were able to work and practice an integrated system that is still wondered by people and is unprecedented in other municipalities.

After all, it is the people who carry out the work. This is due to Mayor Asukata's friendly and unpretentious personality and his ability to create an atmosphere that makes people around him enjoy themselves. For those who have always been confined to the old frameworks, the idea of integrated movement is seen as an invasion of their own sphere.

It is necessary for the organization as a whole to have a harmony that encompasses them. It was the magnitude of Mayor Asukata's personality that made this system work in a human way.

### **The Future of Local Government**

The achievements of Mayor Asukata as mayor of Yokohama cannot be fully described in this essay. One of his achievements is that he was one of the first to actively promote international exchange not only through national diplomacy, but also through citizen-led international exchange. This has extended to countries that do not yet have formal diplomatic channels, as well as to Arab countries. The internationalization referred to by local governments today was anticipated and implemented as "citizen diplomacy" 20 years ago. He believed that citizens understanding, interacting, and helping each other would lead to world peace.

Mayor Asukata is either a leader of progressive municipalities movement, or his struggle to stop U.S. army tanks bound for the Vietnam War has become too well known as a topic of discussion at the time. Today, the number of so-called progressive local governments is decreasing, the Vietnam War is over, and things are different.

But more than his politically prominent work, Mayor Asukata's most widespread and deepest impact on the nation over the ages was, first, his efforts to put local governments in the position of self-government by citizens and to establish citizen participation as a normal procedure. Second, it has thereby reformed local governments as policy entities rooted in citizens and communities. Local

governments took the initiative to implement necessary policies beyond many constraints if they had the will to do so. To this end, he steadily changed the system of local governments and inspired people to move forward. He also awakened the potential of local governments throughout Japan and gave them confidence. Many of the principles and methods he implemented in Yokohama were unaware of where they were initiated and are now being adopted by innovative municipalities, neither conservative nor reformist.

Since the time Asukata left the mayor's office, there have been calls for a "local era" and many unique governors and mayors of municipalities have emerged. This also shows the activities of both conservative and reformist mayors, but many of the so-called famous mayors were rather conservative. These people have shown in practice that through the leadership of their chiefs, it is possible to go beyond the fixed framework of conventional local administration and manage a municipality with its own unique regional characteristics. In addition, "Machizukuri (town making activities) " by citizens have begun. It was Mayor Asukata who demonstrated this era's pioneering practice.

### **Breaking out of the conventional framework**

Although the current local trends seem to be somewhat stagnant, the global trend moves towards democratization, liberalization, decentralization, globalization, and environment conscious, compared to Asukata's era. When truly implementing this trend, citizens and local governments, not relying solely on the national government, have to play outside their traditional frameworks. Correcting the national land structure, which is concentrated in Tokyo, is another issue that must be resolved. In addition, even though Japan has become economically affluent, it is far from the affluence that citizens can truly feel. It is only natural that there should be no pollution, etc., and furthermore, it is highly desirable that unique, rich, and beautiful regions be nurtured. The key to solving these problems lies in the growth of aware citizens and in the ability of local governments to become self-reliant policy makers.

In a uniform nation with strong centralization of power, true humanity, local culture, and individuality do not come alive. This would not be a prosperous society. A centralized state that does not nurture its citizens is an old system or a country at an immature stage. In developed countries, the spontaneous actions of citizens and the autonomy of local communities have long since led to the implementation of policies that are necessary for human beings, nurturing unique communities and making the entire country truly democratic. Yet, in Japan, which is supposed to be positioned as an advanced liberal country, the voice of citizens has been more distant than in other advanced countries, and the country has adhered to a lagging system that has persistently maintained a centralized structure. This has been a major cause of the increasing concentration of power in Tokyo.

The old socialist countries are now finally beginning to have a human face and are seeking to reflect the democratic voice of their citizens. Mayor Asukata's advocacy of reforming local governments with citizen participation and proactive management, which began 27 years ago, was not aimed at the bureaucratic system of the old socialist countries of that era, but was an advocacy and practice that would move the current structure of Japan toward more democratic and advanced countries. Mayor Asukata's assertions and practices, with their outlook on the times, have had a fresh surprise in many places, completely different from the old ideology, and have continued to have an advanced universality.

### **Opening the "Era of the Regions**

Japan cannot cope with a full-fledged democratic and international society in its current state. Nor will it be able to create prosperous regions and cities for its citizens. Now is the time for Japan to realize unique and democratic regional communities with independent local governments that are appropriate for Japan as a member of democratic nation. This would save Japan from unipolar concentration and maximize the potential of the Japanese archipelago as a whole. The direction Mayor Asukata took was

to break through the lagging social conditions of the time and to open a new situation that must be realized for Japan in the 21st century.

A fundamental paradigm shift in the Japanese state is required, toward citizen awareness and participation, and the creation of vibrant, individualistic, and attractive regions. This will require fundamental institutional reform. First, however, it is necessary to open an "era of regions" that is full of enthusiasm once again by producing shining municipalities that prove their potential and inevitability in practice one after another.

The "era of the region" is often emphasized in terms of the relationship between the central and local governments, but the "era of the region" will be created by autonomous municipalities of self-reliant and self-generating citizens. The seeds were planted 27 years ago, and buds have already sprouted everywhere. It is to be hoped that many flowers will bloom there.