

# Urban Planning in Edo

By Domon Fuyuji

Immediately after the Tokugawa shogunate (*bakufu*) fell and the new national government was established in 1868, the city of Edo was renamed Tokyo, meaning “eastern capital.” Interestingly enough, there are no laws or imperial decrees, even today, explicitly naming Tokyo as the nation’s capital. Consequently, Kyoto is still the official national capital of Japan. Thus, Japan has come to have two capitals. That aside, let us examine the particulars of how the town of Edo developed into the eastern capital, Tokyo.

Edo first began taking the shape of a town during the lifetime of Ota Dokan (1432-1486) at the Warring States Period (from the middle of the 15th to the end of the 16th century). Ota Dokan was a warrior for the Uesugi family, shogunal deputies in the Kanto region (*kanrei*) of the fallen Kamakura shogunate. Thus, Edo castle, built by Dokan, was a subsidiary castle of the Kamakura shogunate. Full of the literary spirit, however, Dokan invited many cultural figures from Kyoto to the castle. Trade flourished in the seas near Edo, which had a good port around the Hirakawa River. It saw the arrival not only of domestic ships, but also of vessels from China and Southeast Asia. Thus, the town of Edo was quite prosperous around the time of Dokan. When the Go-Hojo (“Go,” meaning “the latter,” is added before the name “Hojo” to avoid confusion of this name with that of Hojo, Regent of the Kamakura period from 1185 to 1333), based in Odawara, gained power, however, Edo Castle became a mere base and its influence declined. The thriving trade also suffered because Edo Bay had gradually turned into a shallows, making it impossible for vessels to approach the port.

In 1590, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-

1598) conquered the Hojo of Odawara, and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) received the former domain of the Hojo clan. Ieyasu entered Edo Castle, which at the time was slightly slanted and had a roof made of straw. Its moat had no bridge, and to cross over one had to lay a ship plank. Surprised by the condition of the castle, Ieyasu’s vassals suggested that they begin renovations. Ieyasu refused, however, and said that “developing the city must come first.” Thus the first real urban planning effort was undertaken in Edo. Urban planning for Edo at that time was determined by Ieyasu’s goal of “filling in the sea near Edo Castle and creating a land-filled area.” The reason for this was that former beneficiaries of the Hojo were still widespread in the land, and the people longed for the Hojo. They would not bow to the newcomer, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Opposition movements occurred occasionally in various regions. Ieyasu thus installed generals in the volatile areas, and commanded them to suppress these threats. Ieyasu intended to “...make Edo a center for government. However, the core of the city should not be built on the existing land. If it is, supporters of the Hojo could stage an uprising. This would be dangerous. The safer option is to fill in the sea off the shore of Edo and to center the city on this land-filled area.” The enormous land reclamation project was begun using soil taken from mountains, such as Kanda Mountain. Since the area encompassing present-day Marunouchi, Hibiya, and Kasumigaseki was entirely under water at that time, the fact that it was reclaimed from the sea and that Edo Castle was built in the center of it has left a legacy that remains even today. That is, Kasumigaseki is now the seat of the modern Japanese government. A government district had

been created.

For Ieyasu’s plan to make Edo a center of government to work, other cities were needed to serve several functions, for example, to serve as the site of the imperial palace or as a center of economic activity. These functions were clearly divided during the Edo Period. For example, the imperial palace was in Kyoto, as was the Imperial Household Agency, the government office that oversaw palace affairs. The center of culture was surely in Kyoto as well. Virtually all forms of entertainment and literature flourished in Kyoto. In that sense, we can assume that the cultural functions as well as the Agency for Cultural Affairs were both located in Kyoto. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance, which was in charge of the economic functions and handled the government’s finances, as well as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (now), which coordinated the flow of goods, were located in Osaka. The Japanese economy during the Edo Period was a “rice economy,” as is evident by the fact that all the feudal lords (*daimyo*), including those of the Tokugawa clan, and their vassals were paid in rice (*koku*). That is, the unique economics learned by Japan’s bushi was that “if the price of rice can be stabilized, the prices of other goods can also be regulated.” This continued until the end of the Tokugawa shogunate. However, each feudal lord, unlike today, had 100% control over their local regions (*han*). They had to implement their policies in accordance with their own supply of resources. They did not receive any kind of financial support from the national government. Given these circumstances, each feudal lord had to actively conduct industrial promotion within its own region of control. This inevitably resulted



in the development of a currency-based economy. They could not thoroughly be controlled by only a rice-based economy. The growth of such contradictions eventually resulted in the Meiji Restoration. The origin of the rice economy was in Osaka. The rice market was centered in Dojima in Osaka, and became the basis of the Japanese economy. That was likely the reason that the

Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry were located in that city. Also, Japan's international contact after the employment of the national isolation policy (*sakoku*) was limited to China and the Netherlands. All negotiations with foreign ships that would occasionally show up in the waters near Japan were conducted at Nagasaki. Hence the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to be located in Nagasaki. Whether or not Ieyasu specifically planned the functional decentralization that occurred during the Edo Period, it resulted in a relatively balanced system that was very different from the centralized government of contemporary Tokyo.

The Tokugawa shogunate was a militaristic political regime. At the same time, it was also what Minamoto-no-Yoritomo (1147-1199, the founder of the Kamakura shogunate) had striven to achieve, "a political regime of the bushi, by the bushi, and for the bushi." Consequently, the center for government that Tokugawa Ieyasu built on the reclaimed land of Edo was fundamentally designed to be a place where the bushi would reside. It was impossible, however, for only bushi to live there. Naturally there had to be business people to take care of the needs of everyday living. Ieyasu thus invited a minimum number of people from the various territories (*kuni*) to



An old map of Edo (now Tokyo), which shows the highly developed urban planning of the time (Bushu Toshima-gun Edo-no-Shozu)

Photo: The Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library

along the way and would have to pay for the accommodations and expenses of their entire entourage. This revenue paid for roads, bridges, river improvements, and other local infrastructural projects. If a feudal clan did not spend very much money, he would earn a reputation among the locals as being stingy. Feudal lord processions thus spent a lot of money, sometimes more than they had, to avoid such embarrassment.

come and reside in Edo. The many commercial names like Owari-ya, Suruga-ya, Ise-ya, and Mikawa-ya that still exist today speak of the origins of the merchants who came from regions that supported Ieyasu and that were controlled by him. These merchants made the following plea:

"When you were in Sunpu Castle, we used Mt. Fuji as a target, and could get to Sunpu by looking at Mt. Fuji from the sea. Edo today, however, contains only filled land and grass fields that lack any special landmarks. Please build something there as a marker."

Upon hearing this, Ieyasu built a castle tower in Edo that stretched up toward the sky, a landmark that could be seen by merchants sailing into Edo Bay. This tower was later destroyed by the great Edo fire, never to be rebuilt.

One of the systems instituted by the Tokugawa shogunate to control all of its feudal clan was the alternate attendance system (*Sankin Kotai*). Under this system, the feudal clan had to leave their domains to go and stay in Edo for one year (*sankin*), after which they would then return to their domains (*kotai*). It was an ingenious system. Because of it, the feudal clan had to assemble a large procession and travel from their own domains to Edo. Since the trip could not be made in one day, they would have to stay at inns located

The alternate attendance system was also a hostage system in which the wife and child (successor) of the feudal lord had to remain in Edo. Under this system, the feudal lord's wife and children as well as his assistants and vassals had to reside in Edo. Naturally this meant that the number of merchants had to increase to meet their everyday living needs. Tokugawa Ieyasu's original intent was to have the "minimum number of merchants necessary to meet the needs of the bushi in Edo, the center of government," but their number exploded when the alternate attendance system was implemented. The number of merchants further increased to meet the needs of the increasing number of merchants. Until this time, the merchants had existed to serve the bushi, but now their numbers began to increase so they could serve other merchants. Generally this merchant class (*chonin*) was not concerned with the codes of the bushi. Culture and entertainment began to flourish. Playhouses were built, and a pleasure quarter developed. The number of eating and drinking establishments increased. The number of "merchants for the merchants" increased dramatically. Swelling to an enormous one million people, Edo eventually became the world's most populated city, surpassing London and Paris.

During the Edo Period, Japanese



houses were mostly made of wood. Interior sliding doors were made of wood and paper. Once a fire broke out, it would quickly spread out of control. It has been said that "fires and fights marked the Edo period," but this is no sign of prestige. In January 1657, an enormous fire broke out in Edo, killing 100,000 people. The great majority of Edo was burned down. The fire even spread to Edo Castle, destroying the castle tower mentioned above. The shogunate devised a Restoration Plan. The person who primarily guided this process was the minister (*rojyu*), Matsudaira Nobutsuna (1596-1662). Nobutsuna had such a sharp mind that he was often called "*Chie Izu* (wise man in Izu)." The first topic he addressed was "whether or not to rebuild the tower at Edo Castle." Matsudaira Nobutsuna and Hoshina Masayuki (1611-1672) agreed that "...the castle tower need not be rebuilt. A structure that symbolizes battle is unnecessary in a land of peace. The money should be used to help the people instead." Their suggestion was accepted. This is somewhat strange, however, since the shogunate itself was, after all, a militaristic regime, as were the feudal lord beneath it. Since the castle tower was a symbol of status, one would expect such a tower to be needed at Edo Castle. It was actually probably not rebuilt due to financial considerations. Still, the decision was appropriate.

Matsudaira Nobutsuna was thinking of "making Edo a city focused on disaster prevention," and he developed a plan for achieving this. Temples and shrines where fires tended to start were removed far from the city. Also, the pleasure quarters in the heart of Edo, such as the red light district, were moved to the remote rural area of Asakusa. Town roads were improved, and bridges were built. A new bridge was built across the Sumidagawa River, and since it "linked two territories, Musashi-kuni with Shimosa-kuni," it was named the Ryogoku ("two territories") Bridge. "*Sumikiri* (extra spaces at a corner)" were provided at

the intersections in the town, and barrels of rainwater were prepared for extinguishing fires. Vestiges of these provisions were evident in the small pools and rainwater barrels that were placed at town intersections during World War II.

The roofs of houses of the people at that time were made of straw, but these too were partly replaced with tiles and oyster shells. Also, most feudal lords' mansions had been located within the grounds of Edo Castle, but Nobutsuna had these moved outside the grounds. The feudal lords' Edo mansions were scattered to various regions. The shape of modern Tokyo has been largely influenced by Nobutsuna's efforts at this time to "make Edo a city focused on disaster prevention."

Earlier I mentioned that there was an increase in the number of merchants for the bushi, as well as a separate increase in the number of merchants for other merchants. I also mentioned that new cultural activities and forms of entertainment emerged out of the everyday lives of these merchants. It was the fifth Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646-1709), who incorporated these developments into his policies and indicated a desire to "completely eliminate the lingering stench of the Warring States Period and transform the militaristic government into a civil government." The Genroku politics (end of the 17th century) that Tsunayoshi developed may be referred to as cultural politics. The industrialization of this culture spurred economic development and brought about unprecedented rapid growth. This period can be called the "Genroku bubble era." It was a time when people who made great contributions to culture emerged not only from the refined bushi, but also from among the merchants. Culture sustained the Genroku bubble. Under these circumstances the "bushi spirit" that had sustained the militaristic government thus far was inevitably weakened. The merchants grew stronger. The Genroku era eventually collapsed, and a great recession hit

Japan. Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751), the eighth shogun, tried to end this great recession with strict fiscal policy reform. Yoshimune established a "suggestion box" (*meyasu-bako*) at the front gate of Edo Castle (*Ote-mon*) because he wanted "to restore the health of the city of Edo and return to the initial intent of Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu." In other words, he was asking that the city of Edo that had come festering out of the Genroku era be restored to its pure form. Consequently, the unhealthy entertainment industry was strictly controlled, and places for healthy recreation were erected. Cherry-blossom parks were built in places like the bank of the Sumidagawa River, the bank of the Tamagawa River, and Mt. Asuka, and many peach trees were planted among the ruins of the doghouse of Nakano that was established in the Genroku years. This is why this place is called Momozono ("peach tree park") today. Yoshimune's installation of a suggestion box for "gathering opinions directly from the people regarding city construction and government administration" would today be seen as a form of direct democracy. The flip side of that, however, is that the Tokugawa shogunate, which was supposed to be a "political regime of the bushi, by the bushi, and for the bushi," had become unable to run the government without addressing the opinions of the swelling ranks of Edo commoners. That is, "commoners had to start being thought of as the targets of politics and government administration." Yoshimune tried to minimize such sentiment, and kept attempting to restore Edo as a center of government as envisioned by Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Tempo Era (1841-1843) reformer Mizuno Tadakuni (1794-1851) also tried to do this through strong government policies. Mizuno set Yoshimune's aim of "restoring Edo as the center for government" as the foundation for his reforms. He instituted a law that required young people who had come to Edo seeking pleasure without a regular occupation to





Photo : Edo - Tokyo Museum

The development of the autonomous fire-fighting teams can be seen as early as the Edo period

return to their home towns: “All entertainers must return to their home towns and engage in agriculture.” He demanded complete frugality, strenuously suppressed Edo’s pleasure quarter, and issued various regulations against court dance and performing arts. He thought nothing of suppressing “freedom of speech.” Mizuno also issued a law that brought “twenty-five miles square around Edo under the direct control of the shogunate.” This was one of Mizuno’s policies aimed at “purifying the functions of Edo and restoring it as a center of government.” However, many feudal lords, including some with a great deal of power, held territories within this area and thus fiercely waged opposition movements against the action. Mizuno thus had to withdraw this decree. The united feudal lord thus undermined him.

Under Mizuno there was an Edo magistrate named Toyama Kinshiro (?-1855) who was popular with the Edo townspeople. He spoke on behalf of the townspeople in saying, “Edo is going to fall apart if this kind of government administration continues.” Mizuno laughed upon hearing this, and declared brazenly, “That’s what I’m hoping for. It would be better for Edo to fall apart. My reforms will have succeeded when the entertainers and pleasure quarter are gone, and the city is once again a purely political center.” Disgusted by this,

Toyama ran to the groups of feudal lord that wanted to undermine Mizuno, and Mizuno eventually fell out of power.

One of the ideas adopted by Yoshimune from his suggestion box called for “welfare facilities for elderly people with no relatives.” Such a facility, called the Koishikawa Nursing Home, was established by Edo magistrate Ooka Tadasuke (1677-1751) based on a suggestion submitted by a local doctor named Ogawa. When this facility encountered financial hardship, the shogunate asked for donations from the town associations in Edo. The associations gladly contributed funds. Economizing on their association dues, the associations donated 70% of their funds. Consequently these were called “70% deposits.” This practice continued until the end of the Edo period, and by the time the Tokugawa shogunate fell, the enormous sum of 1,700,000 *ryo* had been collected. The new Meiji government returned this to Tokyo City Hall, the new incarnation of the Edo Magisterial Office. In doing so the City of Tokyo changed the name of the Koishikawa Nursing Home to the Tokyo Municipal Nursing Home and set aside money for its operation. At the same time it built roads, dug waterways, and reclaimed land to use for construction in Tsukiji. The new government also had the good sense to say, “because the 70% deposits were

originally contributed by the commoners of Edo, that money needs to be given back to the commoners.”

In this way, Edo, which had been a “city of the bushi, by the bushi, and for the bushi,” could no longer ignore the existence of the commoners who also lived there. From the mid-Edo Period, the shogunate was driven into a position of having to seriously consider “urban planning for commoners.” This was the same as the urban planning conducted in the castle towns of the feudal lord, called their *han*. There is a saying in Japan that “water conforms to the shape of its container.” If water symbolizes the people, and the container the living environment, then one might say that “changing the living environment (urban planning) will produce changes in people’s attitudes.” This is not necessarily the case, however. Something like water that can flexibly change shape may also change the shape of its container. The role of the commoners in Edo might be described by the saying, “water changes the shape of its container.” **UJI**

*Domon Fuyuji is a writer and a lecturer, and a member of the Japan Writers' Association. His works focus on the study of leaders and management reforms in Japanese history.*