

Castle Cities and their contribution to Modern Japan

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Abstract

Following a period of over a hundred years of war between small lords, Japan was able to reunite under the rule of a powerful military lord. Although powerful enough to conquer and become uncontested lords, their might came not only from military power but also mainly from political and governmental reforms. These reforms redistributed power from the old imperial capital of Kyoto to the newly emerging cities.

This paper analyses the emergence of the castle cities in the late sixteenth century. Not mere fortifications these constituted poles of commerce, arts and the new urban life of Japan. It will be discussed how the new traits of the city contributed to the evolution of culture, transforming a warring country into a peaceful and culturally advanced modern nation under one absolute ruler.

Two significant examples of this new phenomenon will be analysed: Himeji for its towering presence, standing as the most massive fortification, an example to several devices and edifices of defence; Edo for its status as the new capital of the bakufu (the shogunate) and a critical model of a sprawling city not restrained by physical boundaries.

The significance of these new urban forms was vast. Inside and outside they were the catalysts for new ways of thinking and new cultural forms that would change Japan and the eastern world.

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