

Hikone – The memorable hosting place



Fig. 1: Dr Koji Nishikawa, former president of the University of Shiga Prefecture, and Dr Takashi Doi – our experts on Hikone.



Fig. 2: Hikone Prince Hotel on Lake Biwako.

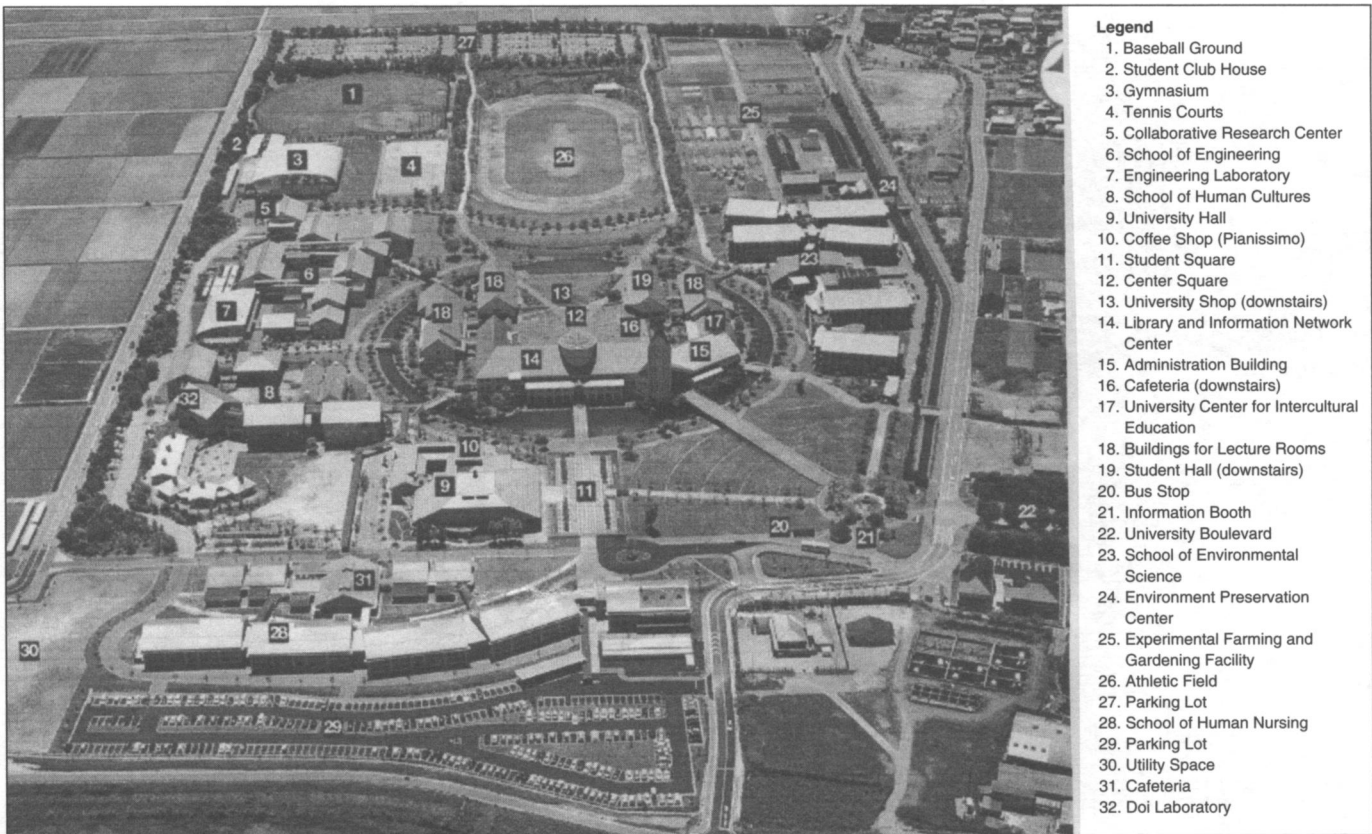


Fig. 3: The campus of the University of Shiga Prefecture.

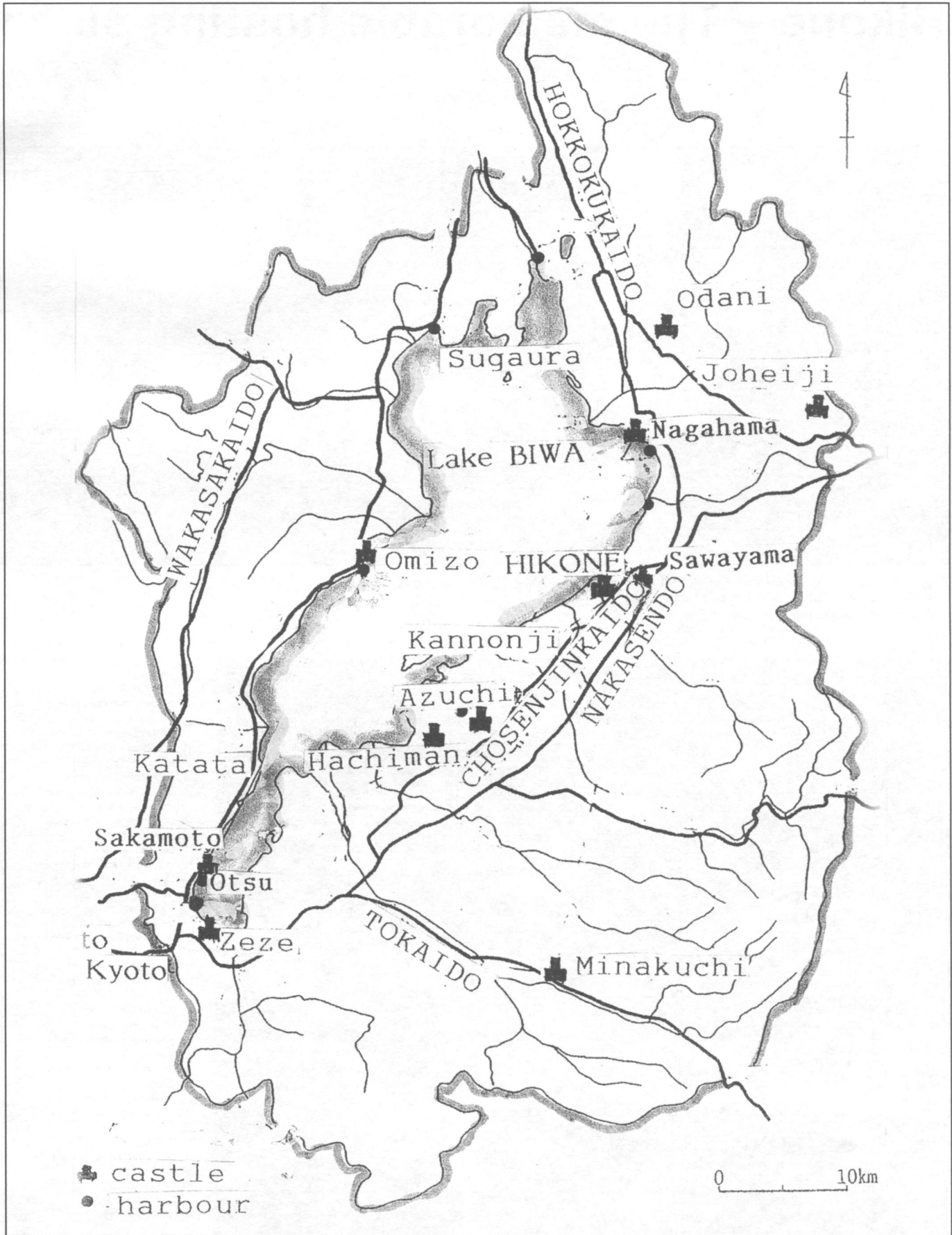


Fig. 1: Transportation routes in Edo Period.

The castle town of Hikone and its future

Koji Nishikawa

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Introduction

Japan at the end of the medieval period, around 1600, was truly in a state of *Sturm und Drang*, war and chaos. In this period of upheaval, many kinds of thoughts, beliefs and religions, and aspects of arts and culture had arisen and spread throughout the country, though not without conflicts among each other. In and around the newly emerging cities, great development and changes were also taking place.

Ohmi, which we now call Shiga Prefecture, is located in almost the center of the Japanese Islands, and in the center of Ohmi is Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan. From ancient times to the beginning of modern times, transportation on Lake Biwa played a vital function in carrying goods and in the exchange of information (fig. 1). The land of Ohmi played an especially important role due to its proximity to Kyoto, which, from 794 until 1868, was the capital of Japan with the traditional prestige.

Town development in medieval times

Town development in Ohmi was remarkably intense at the end of medieval times. Two types of town construction can particularly be noted:

- horizontally connected towns by townsmen (*chonin*); and,
- vertically linked towns by warriors (*bushi*)

One was the move for town development by the populace making use of horizontal connection. In the tumultuous society of the Warring States period, a tendency toward self-defense and self-rule emerged.

● In the Katata area, the south-western part of the lake, *Katata-shu*, the townsmen of Katata, exerted strong control over ship transportation on Lake Biwa. They were active in the coastal areas on the Japan Sea also, connecting with Lake Biwa. In Katata even today there remain temples such as Shozui-ji and Honpuku-ji, where *Katata-shu* assembled. Moats, which protected the towns against invaders, are still found today as active waterways.

On the south-eastern side of the lake, across the lake from the Katata side, in Kanagamori and Akanoi, canals and temples which tied peoples lives together can still be seen. In Sugaura on the northernmost side of the lake, there still stands a village community gate, which was indicative of the people's solidarity, self-rule and self-defense. It follows from what has been said that the tradition of town building based on a horizontal connection among people of equal social status was clearly noticeable in Ohmi and we can find it even today.

● On the other hand, military warlords, the *daimyo*, of the Warring States period, from the middle of the 15th century to the end of the 16th century, were fighting ceaselessly with each other trying to unify the entire country through their powerful military forces. They aimed to get control of Kyoto, the seat of the imperial court, so that they could be invested with full authority by the emperor to exercise their hegemony throughout the country. To attain this goal, especially for military commanders from eastern Japan, Ohmi stood as a gateway leading to Kyoto, which they had to pass through at any cost. The *Daimyo* thus made many attempts to build castles and to construct castle towns in Ohmi.

Accordingly, a number of remains of old castles and castle towns can be found in Ohmi. Kannonji-jo, Joheiji-jo and Odani-jo are the remains of such castles, and Nagahama, Hino and Hachiman are survivors of the castle towns. Little remains of the magnificent but short-lived Azuchi-jo and its castle town, constructed by Oda Nobunaga in the 1570s in his ambitious design to conquer and unify the country, and establish his capital and stronghold here. In Ohmi, military commanders overwhelmed the horizontal town creation of the townsmen, and constructed their castle towns linked vertically by a chain of command of military commanders, and vertically in the castle towers.

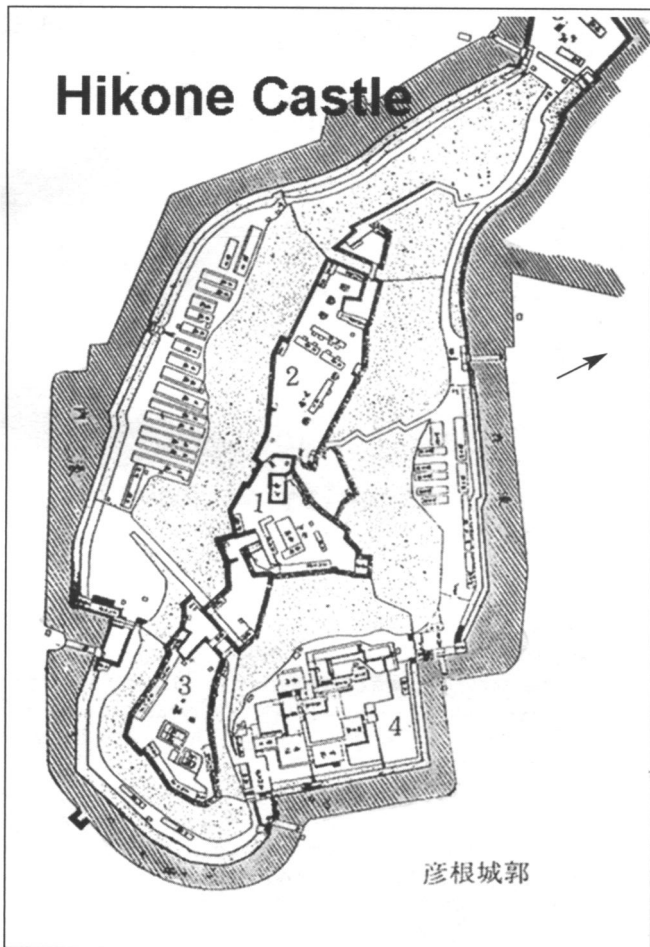


Fig. 2: Hikone Castle.

The castle town of Hikone

In 1600, or, as the year was known at that time, Tokugawa Ieyasu managed to seize and consolidate enough power to control the entire nation. In 1603 he was duly appointed *shogun* – supreme military commander of the country – by the emperor, and constructed his castle town and center of administration at

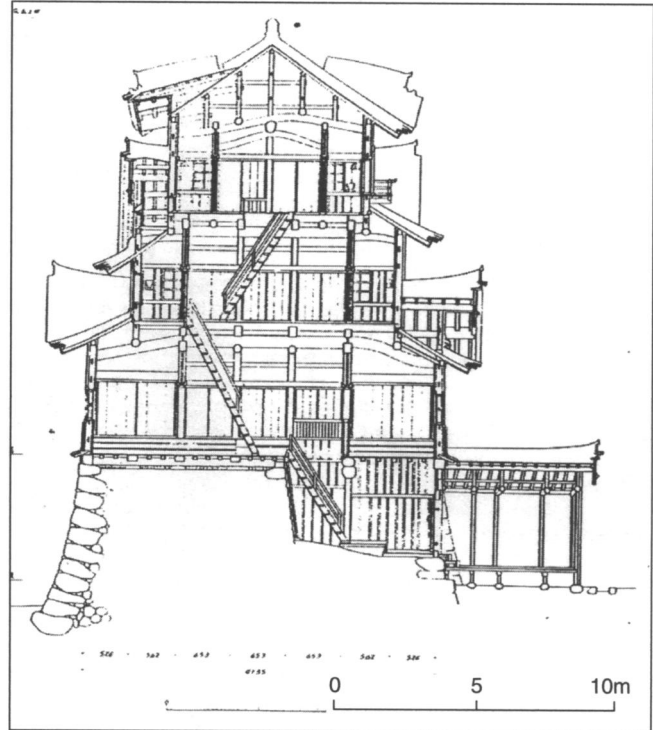


Fig. 4: Cross section, Tenshu, Hikone Castle.

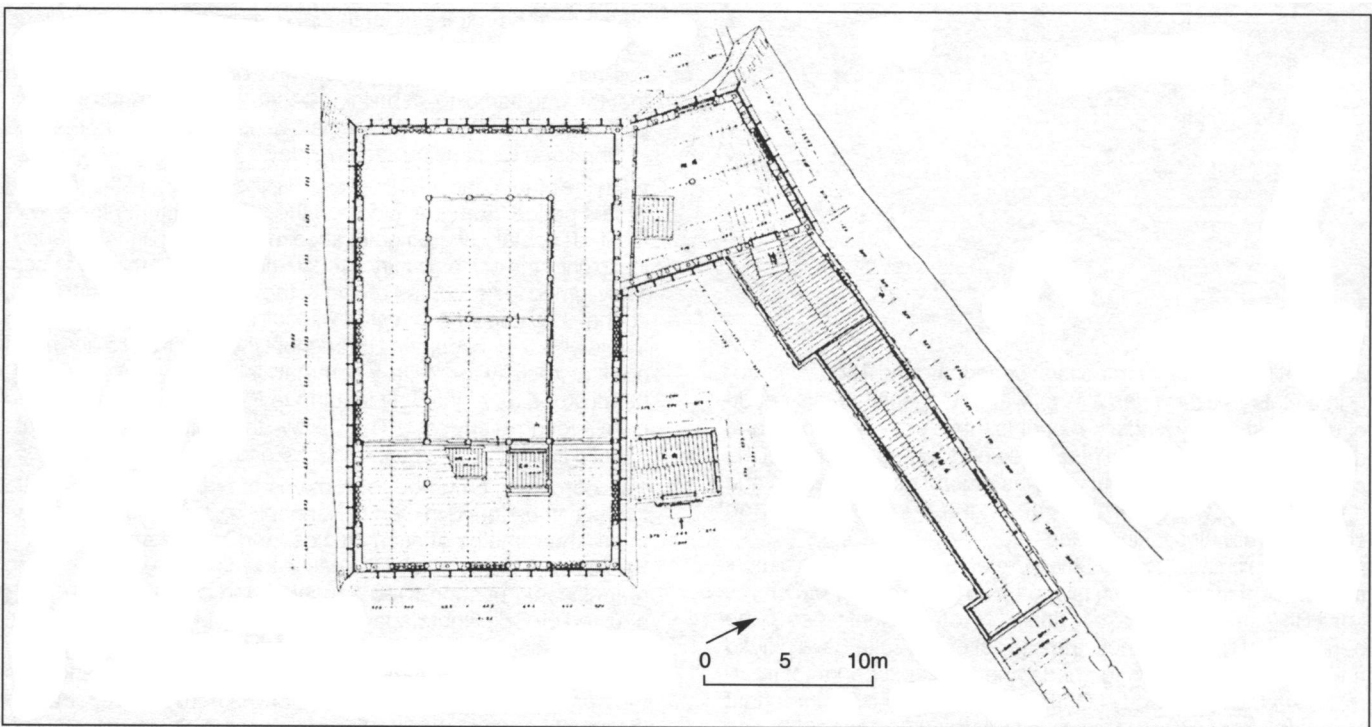


Fig. 3: Plan of first storey, Tenshu, Hikone Castle.

Edo, the present-day Tokyo. One of his vassals, Ii Naomasa, was granted rule over the area around Hikone, and he ordered a castle to be built on the hill of Hikone and laid out the castle town incorporating all design ideas (figs. 2 to 6). Thus Hikone became the complete castle town of the early Edo period. All castle towns built at that time, I should add, followed the same design concepts (figs. 7 and 8).

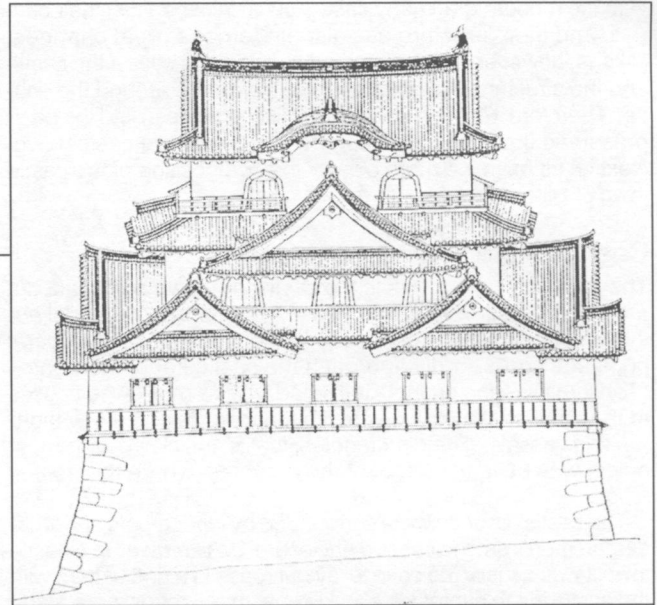


Fig. 5: South elevation, Tenshu, Hikone Castle.

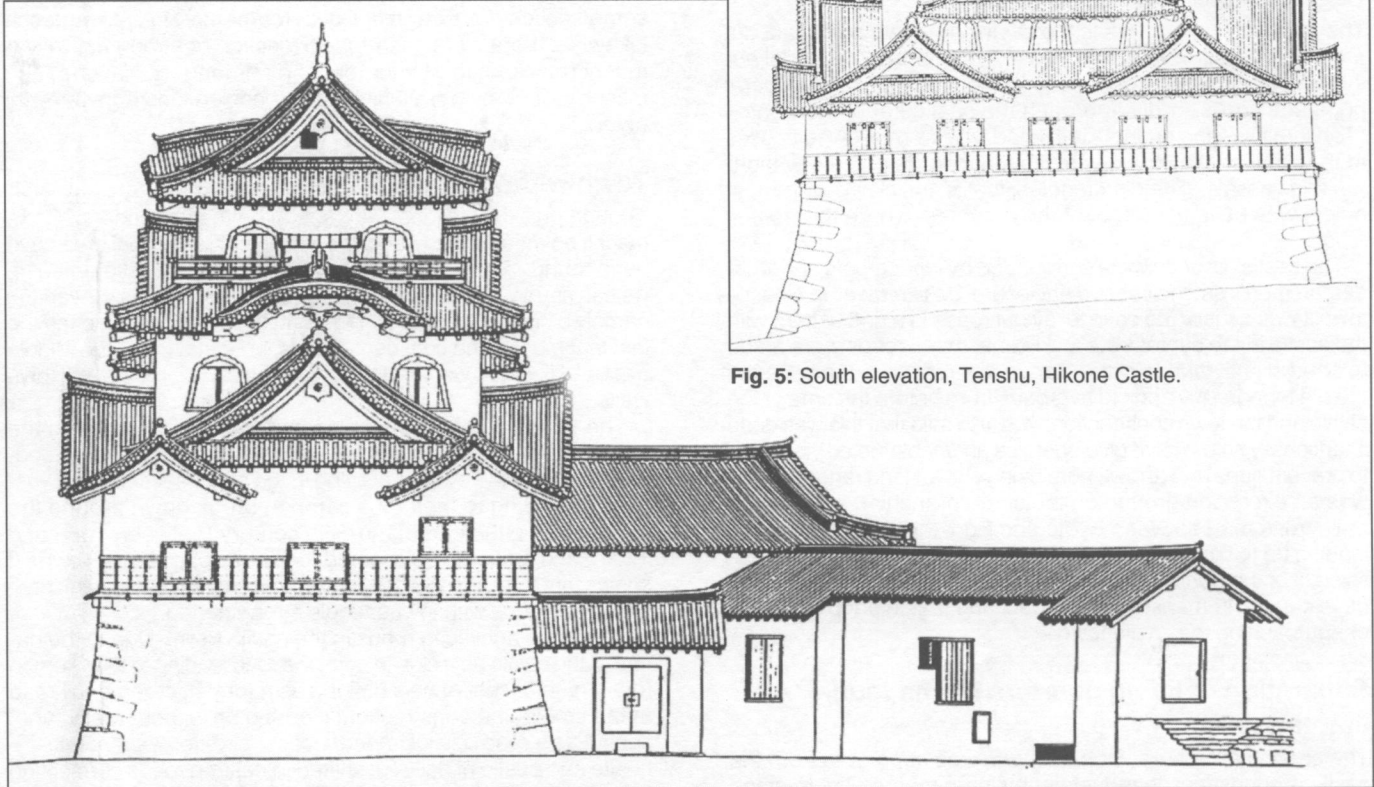


Fig. 6: East elevation, Tenshu, Hikone Castle.

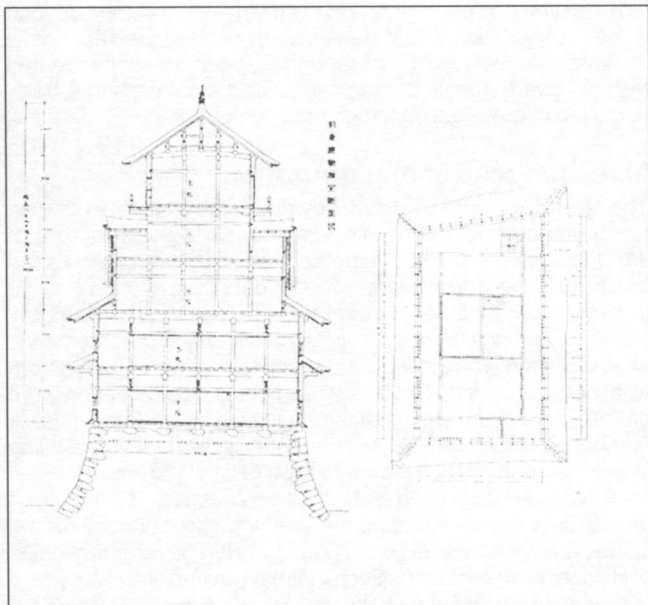


Fig. 7: Donjon of Otsu Castle which is supposed to have been removed to Hikone Castle.

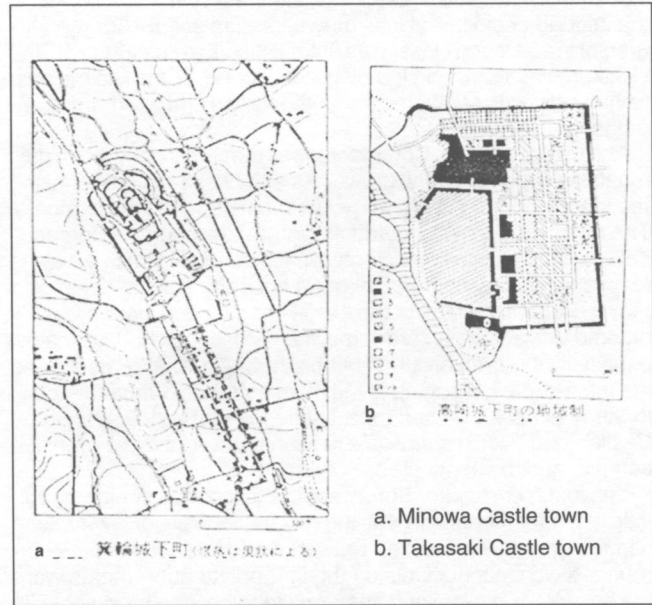


Fig. 8: (a) Minowa Castle town; (b) Takasaki Castle town.

In the modern era, many castle towns in Japan lost their castles, and their structure has also undergone great changes. Hikone, however, has maintained its characteristics – the castle and the structure – as *jokamachi* or town area around the castle. Therefore it is often said that in Hikone you can find the best-preserved flavor and atmosphere of a Japanese castle town. Next let us examine more closely the composition of the castle town of Hikone (fig. 9).

Castle as the closed core

The core of a castle town is the castle, the town being laid out around the castle. The castle was the symbol of the feudal authority of the *daimyo*, the military lord of the area. The general populace could hardly approach the castle keep, the *donjon* (*Tenshu*) towering on the hill. Those who were allowed access to the main castle tower were limited to lords and a few high-ranking vassals. The *Omotegoten*, that is, the clan government office, was built at the foot of the mountain where the *donjon* stood.

The castle grounds were surrounded by inner moats and were demarcated from the second enclosure *Uchikuruwa*. In a castle town it was usually the case to lay out roads in a grid pattern with the castle in the center. But, in Hikone, many roads were made to bend slightly and to cross diagonally, reflecting the traces of the old topography and old riverbeds from before the time of the castle and the town construction. It is also said that this was done intentionally so as not to give enemies an unobstructed view, and to prevent guns and arrows from being shot at long range. There was an execution ground on the street branching off from the main trunk road between Kyoto and Edo, the *Nakasendo*, and leading up to the castle town. This site, coupled with the majestic sight of the *donjon* high above in the center of the town, must have caused immense awe, respect and fear in people living in or approaching the castle town.

Separation of living quarters by the feudal status system

The second enclosure, *Uchikuruwa*, was separated from the castle grounds (castle mountain) by inner moats. There stood the residences of vassals who received the highest stipends, facing the wide roads surrounding the inner moats. In the latter half of the 17th century, the private living quarters of the lord inside the *Omote Goten* was shifted to the *Keyaki-Goten*, built in the second enclosure, *Uchikuruwa*. A clan school, for the children of the samurai class, was established to the north of it. The *Uchikuruwa*, also encircled by bulwarks and moats like the castle grounds, was separated from other areas and was hard to approach.

The third enclosure, *Uchimachi*, was demarcated by the middle moats surrounding *Uchikuruwa*. Residences of middle-ranking retainers stood along these middle moats and the outer moats. The outer moats demarcated the fourth enclosure, *Sotomachi*. Townspeople's houses and stores were arranged in such a way as to be encircled by samurai (warrior) houses. Townspeople who moved here at the time of the castle construction were probably ordered to live starting from somewhere in *Honmachi*. *Uchimachi*, especially the area around *Honmachi* which was formed along the main street leading up to the main entrance *Kyobashi-guchi*, looked suitably dignified for a castle town; it is now known as *Castle Road*. *Uchimachi* was a residential area for middle-ranking samurai and townspeople.

The fourth enclosure, *Sotomachi*, was the area stretching outside the outer moats and was the residential area for low-ranking samurai and townspeople. Bulwarks and the outer moats surrounded *Uchimachi*. Outside the immediate outer moats were the houses of low-ranking samurai standing side by side, while those of the townspeople were found along the streets linked to the *Nakasendo*.

The castle town *Hikone* was laid out in such a way that the residences of the retainer corps were arranged according to their ranks and the duties they were in charge of, with the towering castle at its center. Names such as *Takasho* (falconers), *Kodogu* (property masters), *Kanjyonin* (counters) and others were given to the sections of the town they lived in. Townspeople's houses were arranged in *Uchi-machi* and *Soto-machi*: merchants' houses were along main streets, whereas craftsmen's houses were on the back streets. Houses were arranged according to people's occupations. People of the same occupation lived in the same section, for example, *Daiku* (carpenter) in *Daiku-machi*. Likewise, there were such *machi* (section or street) as *Kajiya-machi* (blacksmith), *Uoya-machi* (fishmonger), *Kawarayaki-machi* (rooftile maker), *Renjaku-cho* (peddler), and *Konya-machi* (dyer).

Town without town walls

Though guards' stations were set up on the periphery of *Soto-machi*, no moats or bulwarks encircling the *Sotomachi* area have been found. From the standpoint of the entire castle defense, we can say it was a city without any fortifications against invaders, namely a city without walls. This is quite striking, considering the fact that most of the continental cities, in China, India, the Middle East and Europe, were fortified and enclosed by moats and town walls.

The structure of castle towns experienced changes in the course of the Edo period. As the living standards of urban people improved, the system of living in the same section for townspeople according to their jobs came to break down around the Genroku era, the end of the 17th century (between 1688 and 1704), and craftsmen dispersed to various parts of the town. It shows that their ties with the feudal government had diminished, while the bonds with townspeople strengthened.

The same applies to roads in the castle town. Due to the nature of the castle as a closed core, the road leading to the *Otemon* (main gate of castle) was defined as a formal, ceremonial road at the time of the construction; it ended up without really functioning as a road of vital importance for city life. As a result, the hustle and bustle of daily life shifted to eastern roads connecting *Sotomachi* with *Uchimachi*.

Transportation on Lake Biwa and the trunk road *Nakasendo* developed centering on Hikone as the *Ohmi* merchants' economic activities became brisk. Eventually, the distribution zone, which at first had been limited to the town area, widened beyond its boundary, which in turn weakened the limited town economy. Furthermore, waves of new technological innovations created big changes in manufacturing, replacing the conventional, traditional techniques, and in the economy in general.

In the process of modernization

The Meiji Restoration of 1868, however, was by far the greatest force that compelled the biggest change in the structure of Japanese castle towns. It toppled the structure of the castle towns from their foundations. The feudal status system of ranking and separating people according to their status (*samurai-warrior*, *hyakusho*-farmer, *shokunin*-craftsman, *shonin*-merchant) was abolished, and the feudal domain system with a castle town at its core collapsed. Castle towns in many parts of Japan were on the verge of demolition at the beginning of modern times. A number of castle buildings were eventually dismantled, resulting in a drastic change in the composition of castle towns.

Likewise, Hikone castle underwent big changes. Gates around the castle grounds including the *Otemon*, the main gate of the castle, as well as the *Omote-goten*, the clan government office of Hikone, were removed. Even the main castle tower was about to be dismantled with the scaffolds already set in place. However, luckily enough, the *Tenshu*, main castle tower, was spared the fate. The *bushi* (warrior class) residential area and *Uchikuruwa*,

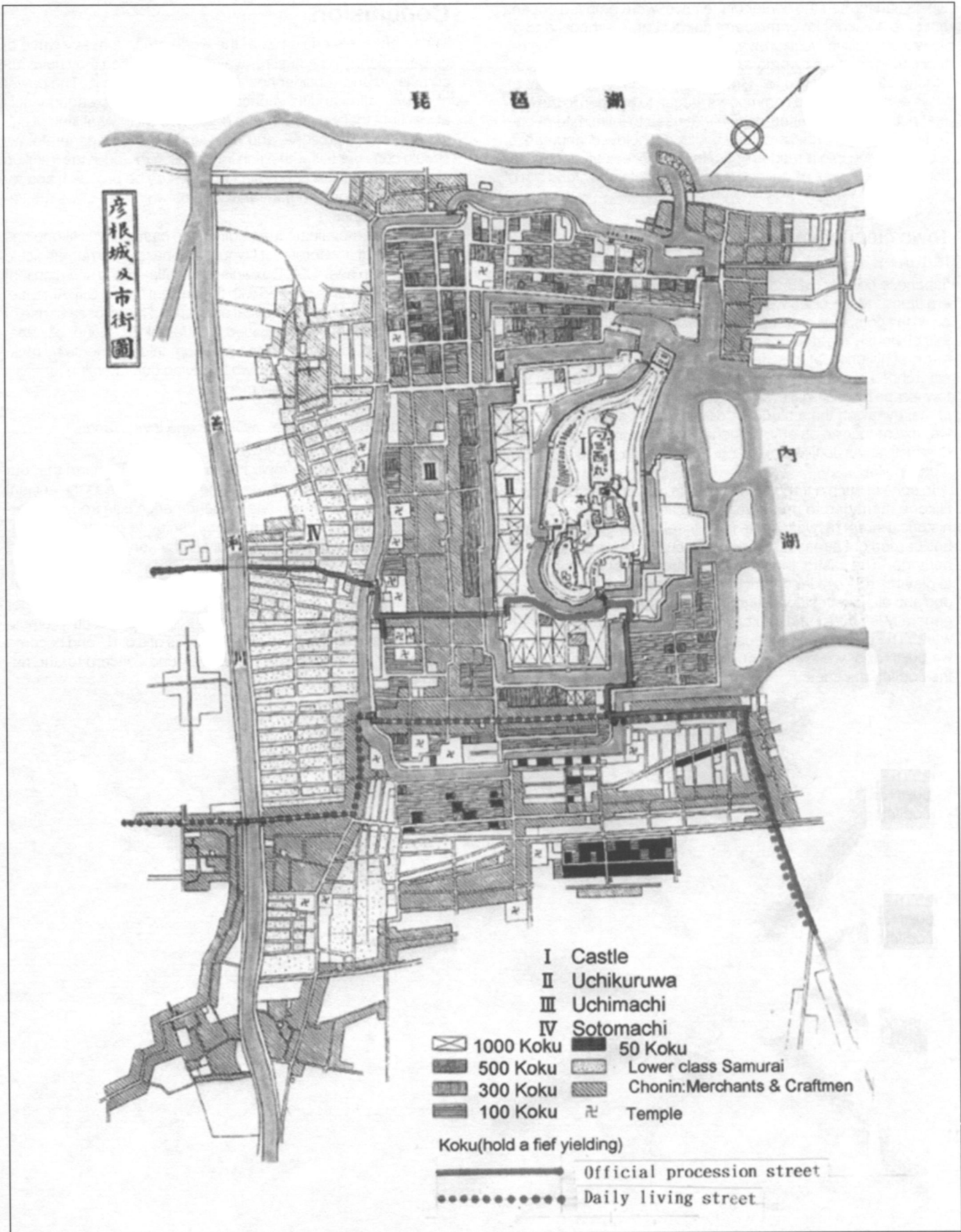


Fig. 9: Hikone Castle town, 18th-19th centuries.

which had formed the center of the town, were emptied out and became a vacant lot or mulberry fields. Later, schools and offices were built in *Uchikuruwa*. As the *bushi* status became defunct, many of the ex-warriors and the ex-daimyo (regional lords) among others, left Hikone. Gradually, the castle, which had always denied access to commoners, began to be open to the general public. The towering *donjon* that used to intimidate people by its embodied feudal authority became a beloved landmark of a city evolving into a modern city. In the process of modernization, the castle was re-defined as a symbol of the historic city of Hikone.

Town creation making the best use of historic features

Japanese cities have undergone great transformations in modern times. Many cities were greatly damaged, almost obliterated, in the bombings and subsequent firestorms of the Pacific War; this obviously created drastic changes in their appearances in terms of historic features. In addition, many cities lost their local differences and the unique individuality of their characters and townscape by uncritically adopting construction technologies and ideas, by taking the attitude of "development above all," which we now recognize as environmentally and socially harmful and destructive. As Joni Mitchell put it, "They paved paradise, put up a parking lot."

In spite of such a trend of the times in Japan, the castle town Hikone managed to preserve the castle at its center and the historical street network of the town in relatively good form, and has carried out a reassessment of its cultural and architectural heritage. The castle, the symbol of feudal prestige, has come to play the role of a landmark of a town open and accessible to one and all. The residential quarters of feudal times have been generally left intact and can be seen throughout the street network. The question still needs to be addressed again, how will we build, and what will we build, on these historic features in the coming decades.

Conclusion

These days, historic cities of the world are in a heavy wave of globalization. They must re-evaluate the tradition they have accumulated and consider how to keep maintaining it. The power of globalization and its impact are indeed serious enough. It is at this time that we should give deep thought to what kind of culture we should preserve and what kind we should generate; we should consider this with a rich imagination rooted in the tradition of green and landscaped cities that we can be proud of; and remember the close human relationships which our cities are capable of producing.

We must re-evaluate the tradition the castle town Hikone has built up. First and foremost I would emphasize the human scale a castle town has. C.A. Doxiadis took notice of the situation that modern cities, as compared with the ancient Greek City Athenae, are constructed by mechanical means and have lost a sense of the human scale. He proposed the idea of Ecumenopolis, that is, the establishment of large scale human settlements by making good use of technology, while paying due attention to:

- the bonds between family members;
- a human scale for living;
- spaces between people, dwellings and towns; and,
- mutual bonds between humans.

Similarly, in the castle town Hikone, we should affirm that our town was constructed with the same human scale as the ancient Greek cities, and re-evaluate our landmark castle from a historical perspective as an "open center," so as to promote the creation of a town where we can truly feel a sense of identity and belonging.

To realize this goal, we should keep a close eye on the environment and the communities around us; we should, in other words, look at human space with "the eyes of an insect," promote wider regional cooperation with "the eyes of a bird," and become masters of technology through a profound concern for the human spirit.