**HAA 18j**

**Lecture 17: Edo**

**Historical Eras**

Edo (1615-1868)

Meiji (1868-1912)

**Edo**

The shogunal castle town of Edo (“Bay Entrance”) began construction with the relocation of Tokugawa Ieyasu there in 1590. During the medieval period Edo was a fishing village that looked out upon the Musashino Plain, with a small fortification built in 1457 by the warlord Ota Dōkan. Upon Ieyasu’s assumption of the title of shogun in 1603, Edo became the de facto capital of Japan. The city was built upon hills and swamplands, along with land reclaimed from Edo Bay, and was connected to the rest of Japan by a network of five major highways. Edo grew to become the largest city in the world by the early 18th century, with a population of over one million. 65 percent of the land was occupied by the samurai elite, even though commoners made up the majority of the population. Edo was renamed Tokyo after the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

**Edo Castle**

Initial construction on Edo Castle was completed in 1607 and continuously rebuilt over succeeding decades. Its five-story keep (*tenshu*) was completed in 1636 and at the time was the tallest structure in Japan at 275 feet. The keep was destroyed in the **Meireki Fire of 1657** and never rebuilt. During the Meiji period the emperor took up residency in Edo Castle.

**Daimyo Mansions**

All daimyo were forced to maintain a residence in Edo under the alternate attendance system. Many of these mansions were located in the **Yamanote** district (“High City”) and had ornamented main gates modeled on the Nikkō Mausoleum and Nijō Castle. The famous Akamon (Red Gate) of the University of Tokyo was a structure of the former Maeda family mansion. Daimyo estates also had gardens, of which the Mito family Kōrakuen Garden is an example.

**Shitamachi (“Low City”)**

The commoner district, consisting of only 20 percent of the land area but with a density of 67,000 inhabitants per square kilometer, many living in tenement housing. The Shitamachi area grew to encompass fire breaks and riverbanks, especially along the **Sumida River**, as public spaces.

**Yoshiwara**

The licensed prostitution district founded in 1617. Along with the kabuki theater district, Yoshiwara became one of the sites associated with the concept of the “floating world” (*ukiyo*), a fantasy of urban life represented in woodblock prints of “floating world pictures” (*ukiyo-e*).

**Recommended Reading**

Edward Seidensticker, *Low City, High City* (Knopf, 1970)

Hidenobu Jinnai, *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology* (UC Press, 1995)