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Centre de recherches sur le Japon (EHESJ)

Histoire du Japon moderne et contemporain : permanences et ruptures

“Colonization”, Capital Relocation and Emergence of Binary Structure: Edo/Tokyo and the Meiji Revolution

Megumi MATSUYAMA (Meiji University)

Abstract

This lecture will explore the changing socio-spatial structures of Edo-Tokyo as the city emerged as the dominant political, economic, and cultural center of modern Japan through the Meiji Revolution.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese archipelago basically existed in a feudal state, ruled by more than 250 domain lords and hundreds of direct retainers of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which presided from the massive castle town of Edo. Such a governance system was also reflected in the physical structure of Edo.

During the Meiji Revolution, in which new political leaders claiming the legitimacy of the throne in Kyoto disposed of the Tokugawa regime, Edo was renamed Tokyo, or the “Eastern Capital.” The title was conferred in contrast to Kyoto which had been the historical capital city since 792. Hereafter, Kyoto was designated the “Western Capital,” one of the country’s two capital cities, alongside Edo/Tokyo. However, the Meiji Government pushed to construct a centralized national government based in the Eastern Capital, moving the political center of gravity gradually from Kyoto to Tokyo. Thus, the urban structure of Edo, which had symbolized the federal governance of the Shogunate period, had to be dismantled through a “colonization” process led by the new government. This would transform the city into a fundamentally new shape by the mid1870s.

I trace the above transition of Edo/Tokyo’s political and social-cultural role in the archipelago, revealing the importance of urban space and architecture as crucial factors in the Revolution. The lecture will consist of the following four sections:

1. From a double-headed federal state to a single-headed unitary state
2. Capital relocation: from Kyoto to Tokyo
3. Emergence of a binary spatial structure in Tokyo: *kaku-nai* (郭内 ; “inner precincts”) and *kaku-gai* (郭外; “outer precincts”)
4. Aftermath: Effects of the binary structure in modern Tokyo’s development