

Tokyo- research paper



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Tokyo- An Urban Giant According to the theory of existence of cities, cities exist because they are not self-sufficient and there is a need for trade.

However, Tokyo, unlike other urban cities does not derive its existence for purposes of trade; rather it was formed due to political and military reasons in Japan. Originally known as Edo, Tokyo was founded in the twelfth century by a local lord named Edo Taro Shigenada. Tokyo was further established in the late sixteenth century by a military general or “ shogun” named Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Ieyasu became a military dictator of Japan after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. His initial action was to shift the civil, political and military power from Kyoto, Japan’s capital at the time, to the city of Edo, thus, making the city of Edo a military capital of Japan. Ieyasu ruled Japan during the Edo period and controlled the city. His first task was to build a castle in Edo. He divided the daimyos (feudal barons), merchants and samurais of Japan into two groups. The Daimyos who supported him in the war of Sekigahara were considered to be his allies.

In contrast, those who failed to support him were forced to become part of the military army, contribute as laborers and pay for the construction of the Edo castle. The castle was enormous as it was made of concrete walls which defended against external attacks. Illustration I in Appendix shows the Edo Castle in Tokyo currently known as Imperial Palace. Moreover, the shoguna government made it almost impossible for other individual groups to create military groups or troops stronger than their own. According to Ades and Glaeser (Feb. 955) “ over the seventeenth century Ieyasu’s descendants amassed a monopoly of political and economic power far beyond than any

European King” (pp. 221). Furthermore, since, the city of Edo was along a water body called Edo Bay (Illustration II in Appendix), Ieyasu saw this as a potential opportunity to further increase trade and therefore established coastal routes for ships in the area. Though, he discouraged foreign trade, he ordered the development of 160-foot wooden structure of Nihonbashi bridge (Illustration III) which connected five great roads going out of the city.

This bridge was considered to be a meeting area for trade among cities of Japan. Since Edo was established due to military purposes by Ieyasu, his fear of rise in foreign armies allowed Japan to be inevitably closed to all outside influence for almost two and a half centuries. However, this seclusion did not affect the city’s development; instead it promoted individuality and variety in the city. In 1853, as a result of American military vessels anchoring threateningly in the bay of Edo, the city finally emerged from seclusion. This action by the Americans, forced Edo to start trading with foreign countries.