

# **Report of the Council for the Relocation of the Diet and Other Organizations**

December 20, 1999

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## **Chapter 1: Historical Significance of the Relocation of the Capital Functions**

When the Meiji government looked for a site for its capital, it chose Tokyo. It aimed to establish a strong centralized system to modernize the nation under the close cooperation of the politicians, the bureaucrats, and the people. This basic policy has remained to date despite the tremendous changes the nation has experienced in its political structure and social environment. After successful reconstruction subsequent to the devastation caused by the Second World War, the efforts directed by this policy greatly contributed to Japan's evolution into one of the world's leading economic powers.

Tokyo has been inundated with a myriad of companies and individuals seeking information and economic success. This tendency became stronger during the postwar period, resulting in a concentration of political, administrative, economic, and cultural functions as well as others.

The excessive concentration of activities in Tokyo has lowered the level of similar activities in local communities around the nation and has caused the stereotyping of information and culture. An increasing number of people began to point out the detrimental effects of excessive concentration.

Since the late 1950s, when Tokyo's overcrowding reached the point that the detrimental effects were conspicuous, scholars, researchers, and others concerned have offered many proposals for relocating the functions of the capital. In 1977, the government issued the Third National Comprehensive Development Plan and, in 1987, published the Fourth National Comprehensive Development Plan. In both of these plans, the government positioned relocation of the functions of the capital as a significant issue in the government's national land policy. In 1990, the Diet passed a resolution stating that the Diet and other functions of government should be relocated as a basic response to rectify the bias in overall national land use, to eliminate excessive centralization in Tokyo and to establish political and administrative functions that would be more appropriate for the 21st century.

The 1995 earthquake in Kobe wreaked havoc in this region. It forced us to realize the catastrophic effects that such a great disaster could have on a large city and the importance of preventing simultaneous damage to both the core functions of the capital and the centralized economic and other critical functions located in Tokyo. In June 1996, the Relocation Act was revised in response to the issuance of the Investigating Committee Report. The preamble to the revised Relocation Act states that the unprecedented damage from the Kobe earthquake had prompted a renewed awareness of the necessity of maintaining core functions even in the event of a major disaster as a means of disaster preparedness.

When we review Japan's history, we cannot but notice that this nation usually reformed its political structure by relocating its center of politics during periods of major historical transformations as a means of satisfying the demands imposed from the surroundings at the time. At the end of the Nara era, the system of government based on Ritsuryo legal codes began to decline. The ruling class moved the nation's capital from Heijokyo (Nara) to Heiankyo (Kyoto) to free itself from all that was wrong with the old system. This relocation led to successful reform. Next, the samurai class began to supersede the aristocratic class, which ruled the nation during the Heian era. The center of politics then moved to Kamakura, where the basis for a samurai-ruled nation was formed. At the time of the Meiji Restoration, the ruling class chose Edo rather than Kyoto, where old traditions and customs remain influential, as the capital of the nation that they wished to build. They renamed Edo as Tokyo and there established a centralized regime, endeavoring to achieve rapid modernization under the slogan of "Enrich the Country and Strengthen the Military." The foundation for today's prosperity was thus begun.

Five decades have passed since the end of the Second World War. The environment inside and outside the country is completely different, and Japan has reached an important turning point. To cope with the problems involved in this turning point, every effort is being made to implement a historical reform of the nation's entire structure, including the decentralization, deregulation, and restructuring of national governmental offices. Directing these efforts toward the correct goal and building a strong foundation for a new age requires a thorough review of the current systems that have continued since the Meiji era while having a clear vision of the future as it could and should be. The subject of this review must include Tokyo, the city that has remained the center of political and administrative activities for about four centuries since the beginning of the Tokugawa regime. The review must be made from the standpoint of devising a solution to the problems brought about by Tokyo's excessive concentration of activities as well as the enhancement of the means of disaster preparedness.

As mentioned before, when confronted with a historical turning point, Japan relocated its capital in an attempt to reform the political system, thereby inspiring the people to prepare themselves for a new age. Considering both the internal and external conditions of today, it is time for Japan to take a historical turn.

The Council conducted its inquiries and deliberations based on the recognition that the relocation of the capital functions is extremely important and must be studied from the view that the results will last over a period of centuries, and that any decision is deeply concerned with the nation's future and will greatly influence how and what the nation will be. This report is the result of these inquiries and deliberations.