

Origins of Shinjuku Gyoen

The land on which Shinjuku Gyoen now stands is one part of a huge estate given to Naito Kiyonari (1555–1608) by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in 1590. Naito Kiyonari was one of the most loyal vassals of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the great feudal lord who at the time ruled this area of eastern Japan from Edo Castle (now the Imperial Palace). In 1590 Japan was close to the end of a period of near constant civil war that had begun in 1467. This area to the west of Edo castle had enormous strategic importance because it is located close to the crossroads of the key highways leading to Kyoto and Osaka, and also to Kamakura in the south, which had been the political capital of Japan from 1185 to 1333. Since guarding the highroads was so important, a huge estate here was given to Naito Kiyonari as his Edo residence. After the great battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu reunified Japan and established the Edo shogunate, which ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867.