

## **【The Ii Family and Hikone Domain】**

### **The Ii Family**

During the Edo period (1603–1867), the country was ruled by a succession of warlords called “shoguns.” The Tokugawa government, or shogunate, was founded on the subjugation and systematic taxation of individual fiefs (*han*). Each *han* was governed by an official called a “daimyo,” a hereditary position that was typically awarded by the shogun to the head of a powerful family. A daimyo exercised significant power over his *han*, but the land was also assessed and taxed by the shogunate. Each daimyo was also required to provide military support to the shogunate as needed and make regular visits to the capital in Edo (now Tokyo). In 1600, the head of the Ii family was made daimyo of Hikone domain (now part of Shiga prefecture) and the family resided in Hikone Castle from 1606 to 1871.

The Ii were supporters of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) during his unification of Japan, and they were granted considerable power within the Tokugawa government. When the shogun was forced to delegate administrative matters, he turned to the *tairō*, a senior official who functioned like a prime minister. Ii Naotaka (1590–1659) was made *tairō* in 1632, and of the subsequent nine *tairō* who served the shogun during the Tokugawa period, four were members of the Ii family.

### **Hikone Domain**

Hikone domain was established in 1600 as the *han* of Ii Naomasa (1561–1602). He was awarded the position of daimyo in recognition for his performance that same year at the Battle of Sekigahara, a crucial battle whose outcome is viewed as having cemented the unification of Japan. Hikone was important both commercially and strategically as a rich agricultural area situated on Lake Biwa and a major stop on the Nakasendō, one of two roads that connected the capital of Edo to western Japan. It was also a wealthy domain with an income of approximately 300,000 *koku*, or enough rice to feed 300,000 adult males for a year.

### **Hikone Castle**

The Ii family began building Hikone Castle in 1604 on orders from the shogunate. Tokugawa Ieyasu wanted to establish defenses against a possible attack by anti-shogunate daimyo in the western part of the country. The main parts of the castle, including the keep, were completed in 1607. Construction was temporarily halted while the Ii family assisted Ieyasu in securing control of the country with the Siege of Osaka

(1614–1615), and the entire castle complex, including its moats, was completed in 1622.