

Changes in the Meiji Era (1868–1912)

(1) The End of Matsumoto Domain

In 1868, daimyos across Japan are faced with the choice of aligning with one of two factions: the imperial government under Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) in Kyoto, or the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) in Edo (now Tokyo). Imperial loyalists had already begun the march to Edo to overthrow the shogunate, and officials in Matsumoto domain found themselves in a predicament: imperial troops would soon be passing along a major road south of Matsumoto. Should the domain remain loyal to the shogunate, or should they join forces with the loyalists? After much debate, Matsumoto allied with the emperor and quickly implemented numerous military reforms.

The last daimyo of Matsumoto, Toda Mitsuhsa (1828–1892), proactively joined a movement to “return the lands and people to the emperor” (*hanseki hōkan*). Mitsuhsa surrendered his territory and position as daimyo in 1869 and was appointed governor of Matsumoto domain. Around the same time, an imperial edict separated the previously syncretic religions of Shinto and Buddhism, launching a movement for the eradication of Buddhism. Mitsuhsa was particularly aggressive in the suppression of Buddhism in Matsumoto: he abolished his own family temple, Zenkyūin Temple, and ordered that all his retainers should hold only Shinto-style funerals. As a result of this movement, many temples throughout Matsumoto were demolished or abandoned.

The autumn of 1870 brought the symbolic end of an era at Matsumoto Castle. Entry to the castle grounds had always been a privilege reserved for the social elite, samurai, or guests with special permission. For the first time, regular citizens were also permitted to pass freely through the gates.

In 1871, the domain system was abolished. Matsumoto domain was renamed Matsumoto Prefecture, and Mitsuhsa was relocated to Tokyo. Control of Matsumoto Castle was transferred to the Ministry of War, and an official named Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), who would later serve twice as prime minister, was sent to seize the weapons stored in the castle.

(2) The Partial Destruction of Matsumoto Castle

After the second bailey of Matsumoto Castle became the property of the prefectural government, many of its gates, earthen walls, and towers were demolished, and the building materials were reused elsewhere. For example, it is said that lumber from a tower on the wall of the second bailey was used to build a police station in the third bailey, and stones from the Ōtemon Gate were used to build the Sensaibashi Bridge over the Metoba River. It is believed that several gates on the outskirts of Matsumoto originated from the castle grounds, but there is little evidence to support this claim.

Kinoshita Naoe (1869–1937), a social activist and author born in Matsumoto, witnessed the numerous changes to the castle grounds when he was a student at the Kaichi School. He recounted scenes from this time in his novel *Hakaba* (Graveyard):

“The stone walls of the gates, the large trees on the banks of the moats, everything was

disposed of unceremoniously. That old tree on the bank, which they said a *mujina* had mischievously set on fire, where a three-eyed *ōnyūdō* demon had supposedly appeared, even it was quickly put to the axe. Anyone who heard the chopping came to a halt and gazed on from across the moat. None of us could stand to think that we were hearing its roots being hacked apart.”

In 2012, excavations were conducted at sites near the Ōtemon Gate courtyard and near a portion of the moat to the east of the gate. An unexpectedly large number of roof tiles were discovered, and it is believed that tiles from the Ōtemon Gate and the surrounding walls were simply dumped into the moat when the structures were destroyed in the early years of the Meiji era (1868–1912).

最後の藩主戸田光則	Toda Mitsuhsa, the Last Daimyo of Matsumoto
大手門枅形総堀発掘の様子	Excavations of the Ōtemon Gate Courtyard