A Brief Description of "An Historically Reconstructed Map of the
Shitamachi Area of Edo in the Period of 1846-54; Scale 1/2500"

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During the Edo Period (1603-1867) of Japan's history there were two capitals. The most ancient was Kyoto which for centuries had been the residence for Japan's emperors. Over time, however, the city had lost all but symbolic importance as the emperors steadily lost practical political power to military rulers. With the rise to power of the great Shogun, Ieyasu Tokugawa, the political capital was located in Edo (modern name, Tokyo). It is estimated that by the middle of the nineteenth century the population of Kyoto was about 350,000 while that of Edo was one million. This made Edo not only the most important of the two capitals of Japan, but also one of the most populated cities in the world in that period.

The population of Edo was divided into two numerically equal classes: the military and the commoners (artisans, merchants and a small number of farmers). In political terms the most important area of the city was that containing Edo Castle, the residence of the Shogun, and its surrounding districts which housed the military and bureaucratic aristocracy of the nation. However in economic terms the locus for the city was the Shitamachi area which is the subject of this map. The Shitamachi (loosely translated: "downtown", "lower city") area occupied only some four or five per cent of the total area of Edo and yet of the half-million commoners fully thirty percent of them (150,000) were concentrated here. Further, it is estimated that some sixty percent of the city's total economic activity was transacted in this small area.

It is with a view to better understanding this economically important area of Edo that I have made this historical re-creation of the Shitamachi. It is accompanied by an overlay map drawn to the same scale by which the same modern area of Tokyo can be compared to that of its Edo predecessor. It is my hope that you will find these maps of use and that they will aid in furthering research of Shitamachi of Edo.