

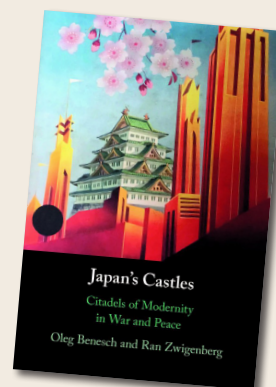
BOOK REVIEW

Japan's Castles: Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace

By Oleg Benesch and Ran Zwigenberg

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xv + 360 pages.

Reviewed by Zachary LONG



Japan's Castles: Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace by Oleg Benesch and Ran Zwigenberg is a timely and well-positioned book that traces the various transformations of modern Japan through an examination of its castles. The book is organized into two major parts, the first being a chronologically organized history of castles from the end of the Edo period to the end of the war in the Pacific, and the second a collection of thematically organized case studies on castles in both the immediate postwar period and the following “castle boom” of the 1950s and 1960s.

From the earliest sections of the book the authors point out the strictly symbolic nature of the most widely known parts of the Japanese castle, the keep or *tenshu*. They explain that the wooden structures, fragile and vulnerable to fire, were largely decorative and were financially onerous displays of power during the Edo period. In the early Meiji period, there was no coordinated push for castle preservation; castles in the early years of the Meiji period were slated to be either reused by the military or torn down for scrap.

Chapter 2 examines the “rediscovery of castles” as the increasing desire for public spaces and exhibitions to make use of that space began to bring castle grounds back into use. While early efforts focused on the reuse of castle grounds as modern communal spaces, Japan’s increasing stature on the world stage allowed for the previously “embarrassing” feudal relics to be rehabilitated as symbols of regional and national identity.

The third chapter on castles, civil society, and the paradoxes of “Taisho militarism” (p. 96) is one of the book’s most illuminating with its use of castles and the castle garrison to weave together some of the more paradoxical trends in modern Japanese history. By showing that both the military and urban population interact over castle grounds, the authors show that “[c]astles allow us to see how the two trends of militarism and democratization evolved and competed in urban Japan, demonstrating the complex relationship between the two trends in the long Taisho period” (p. 98). The chapter begins with descriptions of military hard power and their deployment in the castle garrisons, and shows how that position was leveraged against popular unrest. In order to ease some of the public tensions, military castle garrisons were slowly opened for public events such as parades, flower viewing, and most pointedly the *shōkonsai* or the “spirit-inviting” commemoration ceremonies for those who had fallen in the emperor’s service. While the characterization of “spirit-inviting shrines”

or *shōkonsha* in this chapter is highly generalized, the role of *shōkonsai* and their associated entertainments in bringing the army, the people, and the emperor together on castle grounds is undeniable.

The fourth chapter serves as a capstone for the first section and springboard for the next. It illustrates how castles came to be celebrated national objects and how the emergence of castle studies solidified their use as symbols of idealized martial history. Alongside the reopening of Nagoya Castle and the reconstruction of Osaka Castle's *tenshu* in 1931, these trends would set the stage for the postwar "castle boom."

The latter half of the book is a collection of case studies set either during the occupation or during the Showa castle boom. These chapters plot castles' transformation and rehabilitation as the military bases of the U.S. and Commonwealth forces of the occupation, and their rebuilding and recasting as either modern public spaces or idealized representations of tradition that bypass the discomfort of the more recent past. The authors' thorough exploration of a variety of case studies drawn from across Japan makes the point that conflicts over the practical use of land and interpretations of the past and future meant that the fate of castles varied greatly with location and local history. The most common example presented by the authors through newspaper articles and exhibition posters is the *wakon yōsai* juxtaposition of castles with modern technology such as the Great Recovery Exhibition in Hiroshima. Another major trend of the postwar period proves to have been the use of castles by regional actors to establish a foundation for regional identity in resistance to Tokyo. In this case, however, the outcome is typically somewhat dismal, with the often ahistorical castle reconstructions serving more as a reminder of mid-Showa excess than a successful reclamation of an idealized past.

Japan's Castles: Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace provides a new look at the modern history of Japan through the context of its castles. It illustrates how from the beginning *tenshu* served mainly a symbolic function. This symbolic function was subject to constant change and renegotiation over the course of Japan's modern history with the most significant continuity being the role of *tenshu* in reinventing, rehabilitating, or rearranging the modern past. The book provides a foundation for further research into the function of a wide variety of historical sites, several of which are referenced in the book itself. Examples include the Meiji-era industrial sites and the remaining structures of the military garrisons that shared the castle grounds. The authors provide a template for future research through their use of both local and national archival and print media materials. The book's publication happily coincides with a new popular and scholarly focus on issues surrounding tourism in Japan: the large-scale tourism promotion behind the Tokyo Olympic Games, the pushback related to overtourism, and dark tourism. All in all, the book is a clear and concise guide to the complex roles that castles and castle grounds have served within the modern history of Japan.