

Japan's Modern Castles in War and Peace

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Castles are some of Japan's most iconic structures, and have become prominent symbols of local, regional, and national identity. Contemporary celebration of castles obscures their troubled modern history, however, when the vast majority of these structures were abandoned, dismantled, or destroyed before being reinvented as physical links to an idealized martial past. From the turn of the twentieth century to the end of the Second World War, castles contributed both symbolically and physically to the militarization of Japanese society. After 1945, castles were at the center of the postwar transition. Shorn of their overt militarism, castles became symbols of local and regional identity, linking these to their "safe" premodern pasts by skipping over problematic aspects of imperial modernity. This paper examines the history of Japan's castles from the late nineteenth century to the present to provide a new approach to narratives of continuity and change in modern Japan.

Oleg Benesch is Senior Lecturer in East Asian History at the University of York, and is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. His publications and research interests cover a variety of fields, including Japanese intellectual, religious, and social history, Chinese intellectual history, as well as the transnational history of modern East Asia. Benesch's first book, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan*, examines the historical development of the ostensibly traditional Japanese ethic of bushido—the "way of the samurai"—from the nineteenth century onward. He is currently engaged in a long-term collaborative research project examining the history of Japanese castles in the modern period. For more information, please see www.olegbenesch.com

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