Japan’s Castles

An innovative examination of heritage politics in Japan, this book studies how castles have been used to reinvent and recapture competing versions of the pre-imperial past and to project possibilities for Japan’s future. Oleg Benesch and Ran Zwigenberg argue that Japan’s modern transformations can be traced through its castles. They examine how castle preservation and reconstruction campaigns served as symbolic ways to assert particular views of the past and were crucial in the making of an idealized premodern history. Castles have been used to craft identities, to create and erase memories, and to link tradition to modernity. Until 1945, they served as physical and symbolic links between the modern military and the nation’s premodern martial heritage. After 1945, castles were cleansed of military elements and transformed into public cultural spaces that celebrated both modernity and the pre-imperial past. What were once signs of military power have become symbols of Japan’s idealized peaceful past.

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Japan’s Castles

Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace

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This book has been a collaborative effort from the start, and draws on the expertise and experience of both authors. Oleg’s previous work has focused on the imperial era, while Ran is a specialist on the postwar period. The book is comprised of eight chapters, and we each drafted four chapters that reflect our respective areas of expertise either side of 1945. While this ensured a rough division of work, the research and writing process was one of continuous discussion and revision, which served to highlight the many trans-war continuities in the modern history of castles. Close collaboration was especially important when discussing sites that played a prominent role throughout the modern period. We visited a total of more than fifty castle sites, and countless archives, libraries, and other institutions in Japan and abroad in the course of the project. We frequently gathered materials required for one another’s chapters, requiring us both to have a detailed knowledge of the entire project. Sharing materials necessitated a greater deal of organization than a single author would normally undertake, and this close collaborative process while often being on different continents was made possible
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A note on language: this book uses the standard Japanese, Chinese, and Korean format of family name before given name. In cases of scholars writing primarily in English, the family name is placed last as it is for Western scholars. Macrons are used throughout except for names and places that are used widely in English, such as Tokyo or Osaka.