

9 Castles and castle towns in Japanese tourism

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A deep water-filled moat, high stone walls, and a castle keep on top of the stone walls – but above all, the keep is the symbol of a castle, and the place that we imagine became a stronghold during battles and where warlords and their vassals gathered. This is probably the common image of Japanese castles in the Warring States period (1467–1590, hereafter Sengoku period). However, most such images of castles are formed by television dramas and films and are entirely fictional.

For example, in the film *Kagemusha* (1980) directed by Kurosawa Akira, the stone walls and keep of Kumamoto Castle (Figure 9.1) were shown in the scene where the warlord Takeda Shingen (1521–1573) attacks Noda Castle, and the stone walls and keep of Himeji Castle were used as the residence of the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582). Hikone Castle and Iga Ueno Castle were also used as filming locations.

However, none of the castles used in *Kagemusha* date from the Sengoku period. The same issue existed in Chapter 4 – *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, which featured a castle from a later period than when the game was supposedly set. In reality, Sengoku period castles were very different to the castles used in the film and game. Stone walls and keeps only became part of general castle design from the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573–1603), when warfare in various parts of the country was subsiding. There were no keeps in the castles of the Sengoku period, and stone walls were found in only a few castles. Keeps were built from the Early Modern period (1573–1868) and therefore played little to no role in actual wars. Today, there are 12 original keeps that have survived from the time when they were built. None of them was used in actual wars, although the survival of these original castles to the present inevitably incorporates a narrative of how they were spared destruction not only in the period of castle demolition after the Meiji Restoration (1868) but during the air raids of 1944–1945 (Benesch and Zwigenberg 2019).



Figure 9.1 Kumamoto Castle. Author's photo.

Furthermore, the feudal lords who ruled the surrounding territory rarely entered the keeps.

Despite such historical inaccuracies, castle tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, bolstered by the image of castles in popular culture. When we climb the keeps as castle tourists, we can look out over the surrounding area and feel like a Sengoku period warlord, even though the lords did not actually see such a landscape. Castle tourism playing on the imagination and tourism imaginaries can be fun, and it is not necessarily bad to enjoy fictional images like this. But this chapter demonstrates the more authentic way of enjoying castle tourism, namely via knowledge of the meaning of the original castle.

Sengoku and Early Modern castles

Broadly speaking, castles began as moated settlements built by villages during the Yayoi period (third century BC to third century AD). A castle can be defined as 'a facility to protect certain areas under the control of a group of people from enemies'.

In the period of the Northern and Southern Courts (1337–1392), war broke out across the whole country. Many forts were built on steep

mountains as defensive positions and used the natural terrain to their advantage. They were called *yamajiro*, ‘mountain castles’, and built specifically to fight wars. From the Northern and Southern Courts period to the middle of the Sengoku period, when warfare was fierce nationwide, all castles were *yamajiro*. During the Sengoku period, the technology for building *yamajiro* developed significantly. They were built with *dorui*, walls of heaped soil, and *horikiri*, ditches cut out of the soil. There were no buildings such as keeps in *yamajiro*, and only simple huts and turrets to observe enemy movements.

Yamajiro were fortifications to protect the surrounding area, but people stayed there only during wars. In peacetime, people lived in *kyo-kan*, residences at the foot of the mountain. *Yamajiro* were never used as residences. In the latter half of the Sengoku period, *yamajiro* became larger. Sometimes stone walls were built and residences where people lived during wartime were built on the mountains. However, the design of *yamajiro* as fortifications remained, and keeps were never built. The remains of *yamajiro* fortifications can still be seen in various places around Japan, although there are no surviving *yamajiro* buildings.

Then Azuchi Castle was built by Oda Nobunaga in 1576–1579. This was the first castle in which a keep was combined with stone walls. Its luxurious tall keep was decorated with gold leaf tiles. It became the prototype for castles in the Early Modern period. Nobunaga had asserted his control over the warlords in the Kinai area of central Japan and presided over a certain level of peace. Nobunaga used the castle as a means of demonstrating his power to the people and other feudal lords. It is said that Nobunaga lived in the keep and looked out over his realm. Thereafter, while maintaining its defensive function the castle became a symbol of power with an element of being ‘for show’. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) and other warlords followed suit, building castles with large keeps to demonstrate their power. However, warlords usually lived in a residence called a *goten* in the castle compound. It was separate from the keep and lords never lived in the keep itself. Most warlords did not even go up to the keep. Nobunaga was the only warlord who lived in the keep, either before or after his death (Nakai and Saitō 2016).

Early Modern castles and castle towns

In the Edo period (1603–1868), the Tokugawa shogunate ordered the *daimyo* (feudal lords) of various domains to carry out civil engineering and construction work. Castles were built under this *tenkabushin* policy at strategic points in each region. These are the castles with keeps at various places around Japan today. For example, Hikone Castle (completed in

1622) was at a strategic point connecting the Kinki district and the Tokai district to protect the shogunate from the Toyotomi clan in Osaka. It was built under the *tenkabushin* policy. Construction was started by Ii Naotsugu (1590–1662) in 1603. It is one of the five castles whose keep is designated as a national treasure (the others are Inuyama Castle, Matsumoto Castle, Himeji Castle, and Matsue Castle). Hikone Castle is famous for its *nobori-ishigaki* (vertical stone walls to prevent attackers from moving around the slopes up to the keep). *Nobori-ishigaki* are rare in Japan and required considerable engineering expertise to construct.

After the Tokugawa clan defeated the Toyotomi clan in the Battle of Osaka (summer 1614 and winter 1615 campaigns), the Edo period was a peaceful era without major warfare (Chapter 7). This changed the role of the castle as a military facility. In Sengoku period castles, the fortifications (*yamajiro*) and residences (*kyokan*) were in different places. However, in the Early Modern castles, it was common for the daimyo's residence (*goten*) to be built inside the castle. Castles were visited by vassals and played a central role in the politics of the land. Residential areas grew in the areas around the castles. Vassals and common people lived in castle towns (*jōkamachi*), which grew into Japan's major cities today (Nakai and Kamiyu Rekishi Henshūbu 2018).

The main function of the castle was as the political centre of the city, but it was still a military base, too. The keep was almost useless militarily. However, keeps were still built more luxuriously than other buildings in the castle. Even in peaceful times, the keep was indispensable 'for show' as a symbol of power. Walking up to Hikone Castle, the keep looks unexpectedly small because the width of the keep is narrower when seen from the path up to it. The façade facing the town is wider and looks dignified when viewed from the town. The sides not visible from the town were narrowed to reduce construction costs. This demonstrates that the keep was built specifically 'for show'. They are now familiar to people as symbols of their respective cities. Indeed, many of Japan's castles today – including those in Hiroshima, Osaka, Okayama, and others – are modern reconstructions built to recreate a historical landmark and to attract tourists (Benesch and Zwigenberg 2019).

Castles and (war-related contents) tourism

Sengoku period castles were fortifications designed for defence. In the mountainous regions of Japan, you can still find many remains of *yamajiro* from the Sengoku period. They use subtle engineering of the terrain and are essentially remodelled mountain tops. The best way to enjoy Sengoku castle tourism is through appreciation of the engineering of

the terrain while imagining the actual wars fought at these places. By contrast, the surviving original castles from the Early Modern period exist to this day precisely because they did not experience destruction or significant damage in war. Rather they were centres of regional politics. However, the cityscapes of Japan's modern cities are centred on these castles. These cityscapes are not only familiar to local people, but also attract tourists, including contents tourists who have seen these castles used as locations in films and television dramas.

Given their historical roles, Japan's surviving castles present an irony. They were buildings constructed to project the power and self-esteem of the castle owners and were not particularly necessary for war. Some castles with keeps did see fighting – most notably Osaka Castle (1614–1615), sites of Boshin War battles (1868–1869, Aizu–Wakamatsu, Nagaoka, Matsumae), and Kumamoto Castle during the Satsuma Rebellion (1877) – and others were destroyed during the air raids on Japan in 1944–1945. But, for the most part, Japan's keep castles can hardly be seen as sites of war-related tourism because wars were not fought there. However, through the imagination of them as sites of battles among samurai created by historical films/dramas/games and their use as locations for other historical dramas (like *Clouds Above the Hill* – Chapter 12) and even James Bond (Himeji Castle was a shooting location for *You Only Live Twice*), castles are often important sites of war-related contents tourism.

References

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