**Chapter 4:**

**Medievalism, Modernity, and Militarism in Imperial Japan**

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Abstract:

Samurai and castles are among the most popular symbols of Japan, and recognized worldwide. They are prominent emblems of Japan’s medieval past, which is widely seen as one of the most important formative periods of Japanese culture. As in Europe, however, medieval symbols were not retained and transmitted to the modern age unchanged. Instead, they were discarded, rediscovered, and reinvented in a series of complex processes that began in the medieval period and continue even in the present day. The Meiji period (1868-1912) was arguably the most significant period for the construction of Japan’s idealized medieval era, as interpretations of the Japanese past were intrinsically linked to emerging global discourses on history and heritage. The age of high imperialism drew heavily on medievalist and nationalist symbols and ideologies. The European powers, especially, recast their idealized medieval heritage to support their imperial projects, as advanced technology was blended with supposedly ancient martial ideals and traditions. Similarly, in Japan “feudal” symbols were first cast off and rejected, and then rediscovered and reinvented as part of the nation’s own “medieval” past as part of the construction of “national identity.” Visual and material culture were key to this refashioning of Japan’s martial history, as castles and samurai served as vehicles for combining supposedly ancient traditions with the modern imperial state. Focusing on Nagoya Castle, site of the largest keep to survive into the modern period, this study examines the close relationship between medievalism and militarism in Meiji Japan. I argue that representations of medievalism travelled between societies and influenced one another in a mutually reinforcing process that continues to impact our understanding of Japanese history and culture today.

**Introduction**

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, the fate of Nagoya Castle hangs in the balance for the third time in the past 150 years. Originally built at the start of the seventeenth century, the great keep (*tenshu*) of Nagoya Castle was the largest to survive into the modern period before its destruction by American bombs in 1945. The keep was rebuilt with steel-reinforced concrete in 1959 to faithfully recreate its external appearance, while on the inside it was a nondescript modern building with elevators and air-conditioning that served as a historical museum. [Image 10.1] This aging structure now faces demolition and subsequent reconstruction using traditional methods and materials such as wood, and on completion is intended to demonstrate Japanese craftsmanship as well as historical displays. These themes can be seen at many other castles, from the seventeenth-century Himeji Castle keep – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – to the 2001 wooden reconstruction of the main watchtowers at Kanazawa Castle. In Nagoya, the completion of the new keep was originally planned to coincide with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, but has faced repeated delays and conflicts over issues including cost, authenticity, barrier-free access, as well as complications with the historic stone foundations and ramparts. The ferocity of these debates echoes similar struggles around the 1959 reconstruction, which was similarly contested, as many felt that scarce funds would have been better invested in schools, dikes, and much-needed infrastructure.[[1]](#footnote-2)

In the years after 1945, dozens of castle reconstructions throughout Japan were used to symbolize the nation’s recovery after the war, but also to physically erase the problematic history of the imperial period (1868-1945) and reconnect with the premodern past.[[2]](#footnote-3) While Nagoya and some other keep reconstructions were accurate in terms of their external appearance, others, like Hiroshima, Odawara, and Aizu-Wakamatsu, were embellished to make them more visually striking than the lost originals had been. Other concrete constructions were largely fantastical, such as those at Shimabara, Gifu, and Atami. In Nagoya, the reinvention of history in the castle site entailed the removal of structures used by the Third Division of the Imperial Japanese Army, which dominated the castle site from the Meiji period (1868-1912) until Japan’s surrender in 1945. More recently, the Heisei period (1989-2019) was marked by the demolition of early postwar concrete reconstructions and a new focus on “authentic” wood constructions of lost castle structures across the country. In line with this trend, the Agency for Cultural Affairs loosened its tight restrictions in order to enable more reconstructions on national historic sites.[[3]](#footnote-4) In 2020, Nagoya finished reconstructing the Honmaru Palace, which burned along with the keep in 1945 and had not yet been rebuilt. By destroying the concrete keep, however, the city will be expanding the erasure of history to include the early postwar recovery, thereby linking the early twenty-first century directly to the premodern era.

These shifts are significant, because the imperial past that is being jumped over in the reconstruction of history at Nagoya and other castles is one of the most turbulent and important periods in the long history of these sites. In the Meiji period, especially, Nagoya Castle underwent a series of transformations that saw it narrowly avoid demolition before becoming one of the symbols of the Japanese nation and empire on a global scale. Visual elements were at the heart of Nagoya Castle’s influence. Its size awed foreign visitors, while Japanese travelers abroad came to compare it with great structures in other countries. In this way, the fate of Nagoya Castle was closely linked to transnational developments regarding heritage, while also becoming an inspiration for other regions throughout Japan. This chapter argues that Nagoya Castle became a key site in Japan’s engagement with a larger medievalist movement in which societies around the world discovered, defined, and recreated their own medieval periods and symbols as tools for the creation of identity and community, often on a national scale.

The age of high imperialism in the nineteenth century was heavily influenced by medievalist symbols and ideologies. The European powers drew on their idealized medieval heritage to support imperial projects, as advanced technology was blended with supposedly ancient martial ideals and traditions. This development was echoed in Japan from the Meiji period onward, as “feudal” symbols were first cast off and rejected, and then rediscovered and recast as part of the nation’s own “medieval” past. Images, architecture, and material culture were key to this refashioning of Japan’s martial history, as castles and samurai served as vehicles for combining supposedly ancient traditions with modern agendas. In this chapter, I will first look at the concept of “medievalism”—the use of medieval symbols after the end of the middle ages—in the context of Europe and its settler colonies. I will then look at the pre-Meiji history of castles and samurai, before discussing the fate of these “medieval” symbols in Japan in the trans-restoration period from the 1860s to the 1880s, when they were widely neglected or even rejected. I then consider the rediscovery and appreciation of castles and samurai in the context of Japan’s increasing engagement with other nations. Around the turn of the twentieth century, medieval martial symbols were used in Japan and other countries to create new national, regional, and local identities supposedly anchored in ancient traditions. The concluding section considers the West’s encounter with Japanese medievalisms, which became important symbols of the nation both at home and abroad. This chapter uses the example of Nagoya Castle to argue that representations of medieval martial traditions travelled between societies and influenced one another in a mutually reinforcing process that carried on into the twentieth century and continues to impact our perceptions today. It further argues that the visual played an important role in this process, as physical and other non-textual materials were essential for the effective transmission of medievalism across cultures and languages.

**Medievalism in the Western context**

In Europe, the medieval period has long been a source of popular aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual ideals, as well as a major subject of academic scholarship. The phenomenon of “medievalism” has been studied extensively for more than a century, and now includes dedicated book series and journals, as well as academic societies and international conferences.[[4]](#footnote-5) Research on the medieval period itself has increasingly expanded its scope to include many non-Western societies, as in the projects Defining the Global Middle Ages (Oxford) and Global Middle Ages (University of Texas Austin). In contrast, scholarship on Europe and its former settler colonies, especially the Americas and Australia, continues to dominate the study of medievalism.[[5]](#footnote-6) I argue that Western medievalism could not be overlooked by the societies that encountered the European imperial powers in the nineteenth century, as medievalist concepts were at the heart of art, architecture, literature, and diplomatic ceremony that were increasingly disseminated around the world.

In the nineteenth century, interest in an idealized medieval past grew rapidly with the proliferation of nationalist sentiments and the formation of new nation-states. The medieval period also seemingly provided a stable refuge of traditional ideals in a world that was quickly changing through industrialization, urbanization, and upheavals in political and religious institutions. Many Europeans came to seek their distinctive national origins in the medieval period, which was often portrayed as the age when national borders, languages, cultures, ethics, and religions emerged. National founding myths across Europe were placed in the medieval period, which accordingly served as the supposed wellspring of European nations’ martial traditions. Nations were portrayed as having been forged on battlefields, such as Tours (732) for France, Grunwald (1410) for Poland, or Agincourt (1415) for England. In what was then Germany, the ruined medieval castles of Hohkönigsburg (Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg in France) and Marienburg (Malbork in Poland) were reconstructed on a grand scale in order to, in the words of Kaiser Wilhelm, “serve as…emblem[s] of German culture and power into the most distant times…!”[[6]](#footnote-7)

Medievalist ideology was also at the heart of the imperialist push. Soldiers and colonial administrators drew on an idealized knightly and crusader past as they imposed Western ideals of Christianity and “civilization” upon colonized societies.[[7]](#footnote-8) This same ideology was eagerly picked up in Europe’s current and former settler colonies, including South America, Australia, and especially the United States. The medievalist fantasies of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) were among the most popular, with Mark Twain writing that “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the [U.S. Civil] War, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Twain was a lonely voice against the medievalist trends, however, and these also took physical form. In cities across the United States, National Guard armories, prisons, and other official buildings were built to resemble European castles, bringing together medieval symbolism with the modern military. National Guardsmen in New York and other cities saw themselves as members of a noble elite and drew heavily on medievalist symbolism.[[9]](#footnote-10) Around the world, martial gothic architecture came to represent power and authority, as also seen in countless courthouses and military facilities, yet also universities and the homes of the upper classes. Prison designs from Wisconsin to Sri Lanka to Lisbon combined the modernity of the panopticon with medievalist facades.

As in Europe, medievalism was used across the political spectrum in the Americas. In the United States, the extreme nativist medievalism of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was juxtaposed by the internationalism of the Knights of Labor, who were a major labor organization in the late nineteenth century.[[10]](#footnote-11) In Latin America, as Nadia Altschul has shown, medievalism was used by white elites who sought to draw links with their supposedly noble European ancestors. At the same time, medieval imagery was used by nationalist movements that criticized the Iberian colonial powers as “feudal” and “backward.” This “Black Legend” discourse held that the problems in Latin America were due to the continent having been ruled by the most “medieval” states of Spain and Portugal, rather than the supposedly more advanced nations of Northern Europe.

In Britain, tales of King Arthur and the works of Sir Walter Scott and Kenelm Digby were complemented by art, literature, and architecture that celebrated medieval themes. Through its empire and the spread of English as a global language, British medievalism was the most influential in much of the world, including in Japan. The Victorian chivalric revival was readily apparent to visitors to the UK, especially those who engaged with the centers of political and industrial power. Visiting dignitaries were received at Windsor Castle, restored in a much grander fashion in the 1820s and 1830s that greatly increased the size of the Round Tower and enhanced many of the castle’s Gothic elements.[[11]](#footnote-12) Similarly, the Tower of London was a popular site for foreign visitors, as were the countless country houses built in a Gothic style from the late eighteenth century onward.[[12]](#footnote-13)

**Japan before medievalism**

Before the Meiji Restoration, there were several scholarly, cultural, and social trends that ultimately contributed to the later development of powerful medievalist currents in Japan. The transition in understandings and the changes in Japanese medievalism can be better understood by examining castles and samurai. Although they are largely products of the early modern Edo period (1603-1868), samurai and castles are martial symbols that had their origins in the medieval period (in this context circa 1185-1600) and are most strongly associated with this earlier time in the popular imagination. This is not merely a recent development, however, and nostalgia for the medieval emerged even before the period had ended.

During the 250 years before 1868, Japan was ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate in an age known as the Great Peace. While there were no major domestic or international conflicts involving Japan between the early seventeenth century and the Meiji Restoration, the state was organized along military lines and many Edo thinkers promoted the idea that Japan was an inherently martial country. The importance of both civil and martial virtues (*bun* and *bu*; Chinese *wen* and *wu*) has been a key thread throughout East Asian thought for centuries, and Chinese thinkers often focused on their own supposed “civility” (*wen*) as opposed to the “martiality” (*wu*) of the surrounding barbarian peoples. Prominent thinkers in the Tokugawa age fundamentally agreed, although they reversed it to argue that Japanese martiality was superior to Chinese civility. This notion of a unique Japanese martial spirit was influential into the modern period, and would seemingly be reinforced by Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.[[13]](#footnote-14)

The samurai and castles that were so prominent in urban life in Tokugawa Japan – and later popular images – were to a large extent products of the late sixteenth century. As armies grew larger and more powerful under the leadership of the famous warlords of the late sixteenth century, new fortification technology resulted in the construction of monumental castles with broad moats, massive stone walls, and multi-story keeps that still define the image of Japanese castles today. The great keep at Azuchi Castle, constructed by Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) in 1579, is widely seen as the catalyst for all later keeps, and the subject of long-standing debates concerning whether Japanese castle designs were influenced by European models.[[14]](#footnote-15) Just as Japanese castles are often traced back to Azuchi, the samurai as a distinct warrior class emerged from reforms begun by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 1590s, as he sought to pacify the countryside and remove warriors from the land.

Hideyoshi’s policies were further refined and codified in the early seventeenth century under the Tokugawa shoguns, who ensured that samurai generally had to live in castle towns. Movement between classes was essentially prohibited and the samurai became a ruling administrative elite with little application for their martial skills. The samurai were given the right to bear swords as markers of their status, but firearms were tightly controlled and warriors were prevented from traveling freely to prevent collusion and potential unrest. Castles were also closely regulated by the Tokugawa, with any modifications or construction requiring explicit permission. This was intended to prevent the establishment of threats to the Tokugawa, who also ensured that the families of major lords remained as hostages in the capital, Edo, the greatest castle-town of all. Through a system of alternate attendance, or *sankin kōtai*, the Tokugawa forced regional lords to spend considerable resources on maintaining residences in the capital, as well as on elaborate processions to and from their home domains.[[15]](#footnote-16) Castles also placed a considerable burden on local rulers, who typically spent roughly 10-20 percent of their total domain budgets on the required upkeep and maintenance.[[16]](#footnote-17) Unsurprisingly, by the mid-nineteenth century many domain rulers were keen to tear their militarily obsolete castles down and relieve themselves of this burden.[[17]](#footnote-18) In fact, many structures that burned down or collapsed during the Tokugawa period, including the shogun’s great keep in Edo Castle, were never rebuilt.

In spite of the obvious practical obsolescence of both samurai and castles, they were essential to the ideological underpinnings of the Tokugawa garrison state. For the samurai, one significant challenge was to justify their elite status as warriors in a time of peace, and the Tokugawa age produced the vast majority of writings theorizing the proper role of the samurai that were much later selected to form the *bushidō* (“way of the warrior”) canon when it was invented around the turn of the twentieth century.[[18]](#footnote-19) Perhaps unsurprisingly, many samurai commentators in the Tokugawa period had a nostalgic view towards an earlier era when martial skills were more highly valued. The now-famous eighteenth-century manuscript *Hagakure* (*Hidden by Leaves*) is an extreme example with its focus on loyalty and honorable death that was not published until the twentieth century. However, its pronounced nostalgia is representative of many samurai writings, and the sense that warrior society had declined from an earlier ideal was widespread.[[19]](#footnote-20) The concerns with the purpose of the samurai in society grew louder in the mid-nineteenth century, as many were underemployed and unable to fulfill their martial responsibilities when called upon.[[20]](#footnote-21)

The stability of the Tokugawa order was increasingly challenged by the arrival of American and European ships in the 1850s, as the Western powers sought to “open” Japan. The inability of the shogunate to face the foreign threats ultimately led to its collapse in 1868 following a brief civil war. Although the later popular image of Japan would indicate that the country was covered with massive fortresses filled with fearlessly loyal warriors who would choose death over surrender, the course of the Meiji Restoration challenges this myth. The famous 1868 siege of Aizu-Wakamatsu Castle notwithstanding, the vast majority of castles were surrendered with little or no resistance, and the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle by the shogunate is representative of the conflict. [Image 10.2] The new government placed the Meiji emperor in power after almost 800 years of samurai rule, and although this was an ostensible return to tradition, the Meiji period promoted a radical modernizing and Westernizing agenda. The abolition of the old warrior government was followed by the elimination of samurai stipends and other privileges, and disturbances related to samurai discontent were only decisively quashed after the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. This violent failed insurrection starkly demonstrated the gap between mainstream society and the former samurai, who were popularly dismissed as relics of the “feudal” past.[[21]](#footnote-22)

Castles suffered a similar fate in the early Meiji period. After centuries of neglect, there were almost 60 surviving keeps in Japan in 1868. Like warriors, castles were widely viewed as unpleasant and embarrassing reminders of the “feudal” age that many sought to forget. For both regional authorities and the central government, the Meiji transition was an opportunity to rid themselves of these expensive and obsolete structures. While the largest and most strategically important castles were given over to the new imperial army, the vast majority were given to the finance ministry for “disposal.” Castles were demolished across Japan, with their materials used to build schools, administrative buildings, or other more “useful” structures in their place. Many castle gates and other structures found their way into temples, shrines, and private residences, where they can still be seen today. Salvage rights to castle structures were often sold to make money, and many larger keeps survived primarily due to the complex logistics of demolition.[[22]](#footnote-23) The keep at Nagoya Castle is a prominent example of this dynamic, and played an important role in changing attitudes towards castles later in the Meiji period.

**“Medieval” Japan and Internationalism in the Early Meiji Period**

In the upheaval of the early Meiji period, interactions with Westerners both at home and abroad were key to the development of Japanese attitudes towards their own society and heritage. Foreign views of samurai were often mixed, due to the constant threat of violence and even assassination by radical samurai whenever foreigners left the relative safety of the treaty ports. The killing of the merchant Charles Lenox Richardson (1834-1862) in Kanagawa by Satsuma samurai was the most famous case, ultimately leading to the shelling of Kagoshima by British ships in 1863.[[23]](#footnote-24) Even in the 1880s, the American educator William Elliot Griffis (1843-1928) reflected popular – if exaggerated – sentiments when he wrote that, “the majority [of samurai] spent their life in eating, smoking, and lounging in brothels and teahouses, or led a wild life of crime in one of the great cities. When too deeply in debt, or having committed a crime, they left their homes and the service of their masters, and roamed at large.”[[24]](#footnote-25)

In contrast to samurai, Western visitors were enamored with Japanese castles. They recognized these structures from the European context, and were also influenced by the medievalist ideals they had absorbed at home. Many surviving photographs of castle structures from the early Meiji period were taken or commissioned by foreign visitors.[[25]](#footnote-26) At the same time, the many Japanese officials and delegations who travelled to Europe visited castles wherever they went. The famous Iwakura Mission, a high-level government delegation that travelled to the West in 1871-73, visited dozens of castles, and also encountered modern gothic architecture everywhere they went.

One of the most prominent sites in Japanese accounts was the Tower of London, which was an essential stop for visitors to London in the Meiji period and beyond. Kume Kunitake (1839-1931), the official chronicler of the Iwakura Mission, was deeply impressed by the Tower’s armory, with “a huge array of old armour and weapons, each item labelled with its date.” This included “a set of Japanese armour said to have been sent from Japan as a gift to King James I. There was also a collection of Japanese swords, but they were inferior pieces of the kind found in any antique shop and not worth looking at.”[[26]](#footnote-27) Kume and other Japanese visitors, such as Machida Hisanari (1838-1897), the later director of Japan’s first national museum, were fascinated by the idea of military museums for exhibiting the nation’s historic weapons and accounts of great victories.[[27]](#footnote-28) The Iwakura Mission witnessed a great number of armories on their travels, with the monumental Gothic arsenal in Vienna making its educational function clear: “So Austria has an illustrious history of relations with other countries, and to see these pieces of armour is to revive memories of those days of old.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

The Iwakura Mission’s visit to Vienna in 1873 coincided with the opening of the World’s Fair, the first with a significant Japanese display.[[29]](#footnote-30) One of the most eye-catching components of the Japanese collection in Vienna was one of the two golden *shachi* figures from roof of the Nagoya Castle keep, which had been slated for demolition as the site was converted to military use. The two *shachi* were gifted to the emperor and transferred to Tokyo, where initial plans were for them to be melted down for their precious metal. However, the Austrian Gottfried Wagener (1831-1892), who was hired by the Japanese government as a consultant to assemble the exhibit for the World’s Fair, selected the *shachi* as a centrepiece that would draw excited European visitors to the expo.[[30]](#footnote-31) While one *shachi* went on an eventful journey to Vienna and back, the other was exhibited in Tokyo and around Japan during this same period.[[31]](#footnote-32) [Image 10.3]

As the *shachi* basked in adoration, the Nagoya Castle keep remained in a precarious state as preparations for its demolition progressed. According to the German diplomat Max von Brandt (1835-1920), he was shocked to learn about these plans as he was visiting Nagoya, and intervened personally by convincing the government officials to spare this magnificent structure.[[32]](#footnote-33) Other versions credit Japanese officers, rather than von Brandt, with recognizing the value of the structure and appealing for its preservation.[[33]](#footnote-34) The accuracy of these competing versions is not clear, but the debate reflects both the influence of developing international understandings of heritage in Japan in the early Meiji period, as well as nationalistic concerns over subsequent credit for preservation activities. Ultimately, the keep was saved and the most urgent repairs were done with funding from the Meiji emperor, who also returned the *shachi* to be restored to the roof. It is important to note that the preservation of Nagoya Castle was also inspired by foreign models, and early plans saw the keep being converted to a Japanese equivalent of the Tower of London to showcase the nation’s great martial heritage.[[34]](#footnote-35)

At the same time, the preservation of Nagoya Castle did not reflect a broader appreciation of castles in Japan beyond certain elites with considerable foreign experience. The tensions were clearly seen in the dynamics surrounding the shogun’s former Edo Castle in 1871. While the government and military decided to tear down many of the gates and walls in order to upgrade and modernize the site, there was also a certain appreciation of its historical value.[[35]](#footnote-36) The art expert and administrator Ninagawa Noritane (1835–1882) requested and received permission to hire the photographer Yokoyama Matsusaburō (1838-1884) and document the castle structures before they were lost forever, and a high-quality album of his photographs is one of the best surviving sources on Edo Castle today.[[36]](#footnote-37) As Judith Vitale argues, Ninagawa was also inspired by European Romantic ideals towards ruins as picturesque and evocative sites.[[37]](#footnote-38)

**The Rise of Japanese Medievalism**

On the whole, throughout the 1870s and 1880s, many in Japan continued to reject their own “feudal” heritage, even if the destruction of castles slowed considerably after the 1870s. The rejection of Japanese heritage must also be considered in light of the dominant Social Darwinist ideals of the time. Just as the Western powers had supposedly moved beyond the “feudal” stage of development to reach the highest stage of “civilization,” Japan sought to make the same progress, but much more rapidly. This was complicated by the boom of medievalism in the West, especially Britain, which was, on the one hand, the world’s most powerful empire and built on the most modern technology. On the other hand, people in Britain were fascinated by medieval culture and traced their own rise to medieval ideals. Above all, the English gentleman was seen as the heir of medieval knighthood and chivalry, defending “national” virtues that had been passed down through the centuries.

By the late 1880s, Japanese attitudes towards the past began to shift, as memories of the Tokugawa age started to fade. Most Japanese no longer had meaningful memories of the samurai order, making possible a symbolic rehabilitation of the samurai and other “feudal” symbols. The reinvention of the samurai was directly inspired by the Victorian chivalric revival, as Japanese education relied heavily on English moralistic texts, with Samuel Smiles’ *Self Help* one of the most influential books in Meiji Japan.[[38]](#footnote-39) Japanese writers were deeply influenced by idealized notions of English gentlemanship as the basis for the strength of the British Empire, including the links that were drawn between medieval knights and modern gentlemen. Inspired by these dynamics, the journalist and politician Ozaki Yukio (1858-1954) and other prominent Japanese thinkers around 1890 proposed that, like England, Japan had also had a “feudal knighthood,” the samurai, which could serve as a reference for a native gentlemanship, or *bushidō*.[[39]](#footnote-40)

This was part of a process by which Japanese rediscovered their own medieval past as a source for a modern national identity. The wholesale demolition of castles ceased, and the first moves towards their preservation were initiated even as dozens more castles across Japan were converted to modern army bases. Nagoya Castle again played a key role, as the headquarters of the Third Division of the Imperial Japanese Army. In 1893, the center of the castle, including the keep, was designated an Imperial Detached Palace, further raising its profile through a direct connection with the emperor. [Image 10.4] This was reinforced through the production of a wide variety of visual materials, including woodblock prints, the newly-invented postcards, and large glossy photographic albums that commemorated military maneuvers.[[40]](#footnote-41)

Through castles and *bushidō*, medieval symbols were linked to the modern state, especially the modern military that were seen as the heirs of the samurai. This connection developed rapidly after victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, during which Hiroshima Castle served as the Imperial General Headquarters and base for the Meiji emperor as supreme military commander. The martial elements of *bushidō* were brought to the fore as *bushidō* focused on self-sacrifice, patriotism, and love for the emperor. *Bushidō* became a key pillar of the emperor-centered state ideology during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, a role it would fulfill until the end of the Second World War. At the same time, castles were established as the tangible sites of Japan’s martial heritage, dominating the urban space in major cities and containing garrisons, command centers, and arsenals. [Image 10.5] Soldiers traveling across Japan for maneuvers or deployment overseas would remark on the Nagoya Castle keep as they passed through the city by train, helping build a sense of identification with the nation.[[41]](#footnote-42)

By the end of the nineteenth century, the notion that Japan had recently emerged from its own medieval period was widespread both in Japan and abroad. Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850–1935), professor of Japanese at Tokyo Imperial University and one of the most knowledgeable Japan experts of the Meiji period, opened his famous book *Things Japanese* with direct reference to Japan’s medieval past. In the 1891 edition, Chamberlain wrote:

To have lived through the transition stage of modern Japan makes a man feel preternaturally old; for here he is in modern times, with the air full of talk about Darwinism, and phonographs, and parliamentary institutions, and yet he can himself distinctly remember the Middle Ages. … The Japanese boast that they have done in twenty years what it took Europe half as many centuries to accomplish.[[42]](#footnote-43)

In the 1898 edition, “talk about Darwinism, and phonographs, and parliamentary institutions,” became “talk about bicycles and bacilli and ‘spheres of influence,’” but the medieval aspects remained the same. Chamberlain was writing two decades after the Meiji Restoration. In Chamberlain’s day, the Middle Ages were held to extend all the way to 1868, when Japan embarked on a course of rapid modernization. The medieval reflected European views of “backwards Oriental cultures,” and Japan’s new government emphasized the feudal nature of the Tokugawa to legitimize its authority and modernizing agenda.

As Japan’s largest surviving castle keep, with both imperial and global connections, Nagoya Castle had an outsize impact on castles in the Meiji period and beyond. In 1903, at the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition in Osaka, the largest domestic expo at the time, the Aichi Prefecture Pavilion took the shape of a mock Nagoya Castle, filled with regional products.[[43]](#footnote-44) [Image 10.6] There were also plans to build a miniature version of Nagoya Castle as the Japanese pavilion at the World’s Fair in St. Louis following year.[[44]](#footnote-45) Domestically, the Aichi pavilion was a great success and in 1906 the city of Kōfu to the West of Tokyo was inspired to temporarily build a castle keep on the barren historic ramparts as part of a large exhibition, combining traditional architecture with garish electric lighting that enhanced the spectacle and its links with modernity.[[45]](#footnote-46) In 1910, Gifu City just to the North of Nagoya followed suit by reconstructing its own lost keep to raise the profile of the city and promote prosperity.[[46]](#footnote-47)

**Japan in Western Medievalism**

By the end of the Meiji period, castles and samurai were firmly established as visual and spiritual reminders of Japan’s idealized medieval past, and Japanese medievalist discourses had reached a global standard. While this chapter has focused largely on Japanese responses to European, especially Victorian, medievalism, this was not a unidirectional process from West to East. Certainly, the trend towards medievalism originated in Europe and its spread was aided through imperialism, colonialism, and the spread of European technology, institutions, culture, and languages. At the same time, medievalism was transmitted, transformed, and reinterpreted within and across national boundaries. There were multiple influences on the development of medievalism in any society, and Japanese medievalism also made the journey “back” to the West.

Following Japan’s victory over China in 1895, the samurai came to be seen as a positive heritage of medieval Japan. Western commentators increasingly invoked them to explain various aspects of Japan, and even held the samurai spirit up as a potential model for Western societies. In his *Feudal and Modern Japan*, the Unitarian missionary Arthur May Knapp argued that “the name of samurai is in Japan to-day the untarnished name, to its people the synonym of the same lofty virtues and heroic devotion which we associate with the truest knight of Mediaeval Romance.” Furthermore, not only was the “name untarnished, but also knightly virtue itself has escaped the degeneration which it has suffered in Europe, and has remained to this day a stainless glory.” Knapp continued, “Our age of chivalry was of the briefest, its flowering lasting only two centuries, while the knightly past of Japan is coterminous with the history of the Empire.”[[47]](#footnote-48) For Knapp and many others, Japan had become the medievalist model.

The medievalist view of Japan in Britain and other countries was also heavily mediated by the images of the country produced by both Japanese and foreigners. The early photographic studios set up in Yokohama by Felice Beato (1832-1909) and others produced many staged photographs of Japanese in samurai costume for sale to foreigners.[[48]](#footnote-49) The quality of these images improved along with the technology over the course of the Meiji period, even after the samurai had ceased to exist. Photographic impressions were bolstered by greater numbers of writings on the samurai in English, by both foreigners and Japanese. The American-educated Quaker Nitobe Inazō’s (1862-1933) book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* became a bestseller in America and Europe soon after its publication in 1900, presenting an idealized image of the samurai using countless comparative examples from Western history and culture. While Nitobe’s book had little impact in Japan at the time – and indeed, arguably not until the 1980s – it was instrumental in popularizing the samurai image abroad and tying it in with European medievalist ideals.

In Britain, idealistic views of the samurai and Japan spread widely following the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, and medievalism was a key part of a Japan boom that took place in Britain in the decade before the First World War, culminating in the elaborate Japan-British Exhibition at White City in London in 1910, which featured model castles and samurai symbols along with modern technology.[[49]](#footnote-50) *Bushidō* became a popular concept and model for Britain to emulate, especially after the Russo-Japanese War.[[50]](#footnote-51) This trend lasted until the First World War, by which time a variety of factors combined to undermine British fascination with Japan, and some scholars argue that the Great War marked the end of the chivalric revival.[[51]](#footnote-52) That said, the powerful and often monumental visual and material symbols of this high point of transnational medievalism, in which Japan played a key role as both influencer and influenced, continue to play prominent roles in the twenty-first century in Nagoya, in Japan, and around the world.

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