



**POLITECNICO
DI TORINO**

Honors thesis

Master of Science in Architecture Construction City

Abstract

**Castles and urban landscape modernization in Japan from
the Tokugawa era until today**

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The image that we all associate with the idea of a castle is certainly very different from the typical appearance of a Japanese castle. As you can easily guess, their history, and the use which is made of them, is also different from European castles; the first types of fortifications in Japan precede the written sources, and for this reason, the information about them is uncertain, but it is from the feudal period that castles begin to assume a relevant role, first as small strongholds located on top of mountains, in places easily defensible, then as luxurious residences on hills or plains with the rising of *Oda Nobunaga*, to finally become a simple symbol of the power of influence of the individual feudal lord during the period of peace brought by the *Tokugawa*. The castle towns that formed around them from the end of the 16th century onwards are unlike all the other towns that arose in the same period for their peculiar spatial organization: this in some cases is still visible today within the urban fabric of some of the country's major cities, which developed from the corresponding castle towns. The relationship between the castle and the city profoundly changes in the course of history, as does the perception of the castle itself; periods of extreme rejection, in which *damnatio memoriae* leads to the destruction of numerous structures, alternate with the first acknowledgements of their value. The protection of cultural heritage, with all its facets, comes into the picture, not only recognizing and preserving individual castles, but also protecting entire portions of the urban fabric, such as ancient samurai quarters, where the typical atmosphere of the *Tokugawa* era has been maintained. The revaluation also resulted in a renewed desire to rebuild the structures lost over the centuries, which in the years following the Second World War led to the construction of numerous castles, all strictly in reinforced concrete: this type of intervention is closely linked to the revitalization of regional territories, for which the castle becomes a landmark, a symbol of distinction but above all a tourist attraction capable of relaunching the economy of areas located outside the Pacific Belt. So what are castles today? What role do they play within the city that hosts them and how do they relate to each other? In order to find an adequate answer to these questions it is necessary to refer to the traces that can be read inside the city territory, and above all to take into consideration the dynamics linked to the reconstruction of a castle today, the motivations that guide the proposal of new projects related to them and the new trend, supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, that encourages the use of traditional materials and techniques, to create castles entirely made of wood that come as close as possible to the ancient lost image.
