

Castles-Mirror of

Castles represent the wisdom and craftsmanship of their times. They reflect the social evolutions of their era. Their construction was master-minded by a selected few who knew what to build in style and who could whip their ideas into enduring and impressive architecture.

Castles had their own styles born of their age. At the same time, however, they had common features — gigantic in size, overpowering in looks, sturdy in construction and strategic in location. Designed as springboards for expansion, the castles were the primary instruments of feudal reign to impress and keep in submission all those who worked for the lords and all those who simply obeyed them.

It is not clear when the castle was introduced into Japan. But it is gathered from historical data that the first castles were built after the Taika Evolution of 645 when a semblance of a state was organized in the country. Earlier citadels were hemmed in by makeshift defenses against arrows and intruders such as

straw bundles, moats and rivers. Subsequently, they were replaced by wooden fences and stone piles, backed by mountainous terrain.

In the middle of the Heian Era (792-1192), the fragile system of centralized government went to pieces and powerful provincial clans fought with each other in scrambles for power and territory. As the situation worsened, the wooden fences and stone piles, protecting their living quarters, ceased to be sufficient to serve the purpose for which they had been intended. Consequently, footholds were fixed on top of the wooden fences and towers built above the residences to watch intruders and shoot arrows.

With the advance of knowledge, however, improved structures were built at vantage points such as atop mountains, with rapid streams in front and steep cliffs in the back. This was called the "mountain type of castle".

In this era, fighting methods underwent a radical change. Cavalry was replaced by more mobile infantry as battlefields

Social Evolution

shifted to mountains from the plains. Replaced also were the farmer-warriors by the professionals who came to live in and near the castles. The part-time warriors went back to their rightful occupation of farming. As a result, there sprang up at the foot of mountains communities of traders and craftsmen whose merchandise and services the lords and their warriors needed in their daily lives as well as in the pursuit of their profession.

But as such towns developed in the wide expanse of plains, warlords and warriors found it far more convenient to live in or near them than on mountain tops, where coolies had to be hired to carry up everything necessary, ranging from war-making materials to food and clothing. Thus did the plains type of castle come into being. The construction of such castles became widespread especially after the Portuguese introduced the matchlock gun into Japan in 1543. For the "flying (shooting) tool", as it was called then, was of little use on tim-

ber-covered mountain sides or in narrow bushy gorges.

But inasmuch as castles of this type had nothing to rely on in nature to cover themselves, they had to be so constructed as to keep off and baffle enemies. Around the castles, therefore, were dug a number of wide and deep moats completely secret to outsiders.

Castle architecture reached its height in the latter part of the 16th century, popularly called the Momoyama Era. During this period Hideyoshi Toyotomi carried out overseas expeditions. With the turn of the 17th century, peace gradually returned to the battle-torn country under Iyeyasu Tokugawa whose family reign lasted until 1868. Castles, which had been simply military institutions in nature, became the seats of political, economic and military administration.

Accordingly, castles grew in size and scope, bringing under their shelter towns of the common people their master ruled. The castles were located in the central parts of

large and fertile plains for the sake of easy transportation. To impress the people at large, the warlords built magnificent-looking watch-towers, either three or five storied, atop their castles. As were expected, the watch-towers were looked up to as symbols of culture in the regions.

An outstanding example was the Nagoya Castle with an impressive five-storied tower which looks down upon thriving Nagoya City today. Now a national treasure and tourist attraction, the Nagoya Castle was built in 1601-12 in the midst of the Nobi Plains, surrounded by a river, marshes and a sea. It served to develop the central region of Japan as nucleus of its culture and civilization.

The Osaka Castle, completed a little earlier in 1585 with labor brought in from all parts of the country, was the seat of government by adventurous Hideyoshi Toyotomi whose national reign was taken over by the Tokugawas. The castle, a national treasure in good shape today, is the landmark of Japan's Manchester, Osaka.

The Edo Castle, completed in 1636, was an architectural beauty and grandeur until part of it was reduced to ashes by air-raids during the last war. Situated in the heart of

Tokyo Metropolis, the remaining portion of the castle is occupied by Their Majesties, The Emperor and the Empress. The moats that surround the castle or Palace estate remain the way they were centuries ago.

Both the Edo and the Osaka Castles have watch-towers, but the Nagoya Castle's is the most dazzling and gorgeous. It was the watch-tower at its best as a piece of architecture and as a fortress. The towers, built in the Edo Era under the Tokugawa Shogunate, were standardized and rather ornamental; practically all of them were three-storied. For they had no military mission to perform, so to speak, since peace prevailed all through this era.

Today there still remain intact scores of castles, throughout the country, out of a little more than 300 that existed at the end of Shogunate rule in 1868 when the Emperor began to reign again. Of the existing castles today, 28 have their watch-towers looking down upon the surrounding areas. Wherever they are in Japan, they are tourist attractions of the first magnitude.

Ramparts that walled the castles off from the outside world also developed with the lapse of time. In the period of 1570-1600, ramparts were

He (to lady in ultra gown)—Do you like wearing evening dress?

She—I feel that nothing is more becoming to me.

He—I have no doubt of that; but wouldn't that be going a trifle too far?

* * *

The Psychic's Wife: It didn't use to be so bad with his Shakespeares and Napoleons, but the way he's carryin' on nowadays with that Cleopatra woman is more than I can stand.

* * *

made up of piles of natural rocks, but from the beginning of the 17th century, rocks were pounded and made to fit one another before they were piled up. In the latter part of the century, squared stones were used to build up ramparts, all of considerable height, as seen around the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

The Osaka Castle is noted especially for the rampart made up of astonishingly large stones, some of which were said to have been brought all the way from Kvushu Island, although they were four by four meters or larger in size.

A question rises here as to how rocks of such size were brought and piled up. The answer is rather simple. Some wise man, seeing that igno-

rant workers were trying to load such big stones on a boat, taught them to "load the boat on the stones rather than load the stones on the boat". Whether he knew the Archimedeian principle, he actually applied it in this case.

Some of the stones tied to the bottom of boats sank deep in the seas before they reached their destination in Osaka. But the beauty of the Osaka Castle remains perfectly intact today thanks to thousands and thousands of laborers who hauled and piled up rocks, large and small, by the sheer force of their stamina.

A similar story can be told of all the castles of various sizes that still exist throughout Japan today. They candidly reflect the evolutions that took place in feudal Japan, long past.