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# 2015 KYOTO LECTURES

Wednesday, May 13th, 18:00h

## Oleg Benesch Samurai, Castles, and the Search for the Soul of Japan

### SPEAKER

As two of the most romanticized symbols of traditional Japan, samurai and castles feature prominently in popular culture and tourist promotions, and serve as important markers of both regional and national identities. In spite of their ancient roots, popular images of them were largely formed during and after the late nineteenth century. After the Meiji restoration of 1868, samurai and castles faced the new order as relics of the discredited old regime. Viewed as backward and "feudal" in an age of "civilization and enlightenment," they suffered similar fates in the 1870s and 1880s as victims of popular apathy and even resentment. It was only after this time that attitudes towards Japan's "feudal" heritage began to change, with modern concerns and ideas playing a vital role in the rehabilitation of Japan's past.

Bringing together themes from Benesch's recent book, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai*, and his current research project, this talk explores the development of Bushido in modern Japan, comparing the ideological "revival" of the samurai spirit with the growing appreciation for castles, as efforts increased to "save" both of these "national" symbols in an era of growing national strength and confidence.

**Oleg Benesch** is Anniversary Research Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of York. His book, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan* was published by Oxford University Press in late 2014. He also recently published "The Samurai Next Door: Chinese Examinations of the Japanese Martial Spirit," (*Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* No. 38, Jan. 2015), and is currently engaged in several projects on Japanese and Chinese intellectual, social, and cultural history. For contact details and further information, please see his website, [olegbenesch.com](http://olegbenesch.com).

**This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room 1, 1st floor).**

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