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Meiji Restorations: Defining Preservation, Education, and Architecture for Modern Japan

Japan's modern age began with the Meiji period (1868-1912), an era of government-sponsored Westernization in art, education, and architecture. In this climate, government policy barely concerned itself with traditional Japanese architecture. However, historical buildings soon attracted attention from disparate figures, including priests, government officials, educators, art reformers, architects, and master builders. Some groups drew on pre-Meiji precedents to argue for government support, citing the historical state funding of religious institutions. Others, such as the artist and critic Okakura Kakuzô, used modern concepts of art and history to argue for the relevance of historical art. The architect Itô Chûta, learning from both Okakura and the master builder Kigo Kiyoyoshi, used historical Japanese architecture to place Japan in the context of world architecture. Preservation concepts became fundamental in the development of architecture and the fine arts for modern Japan. Preservation matured at the intersection of these diverse approaches and, in turn, served as a forum for officials, critics, architects, engineers, and builders to conceptualize architecture for modern Japan. The 1897 Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law incorporated these debates and codified architectural preservation as a modern national practice.

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The temple of Hôryûji in Nara, Japan, boasts what are frequently cited as the world's oldest extant wooden buildings. Built in the early seventh century and then reconstructed later in that century after a fire, the five-story pagoda and the main hall (kondô) demonstrate the antiquity and richness of Japanese historical architecture. Yet, in spite of their ancient origins, these buildings are also thoroughly modern: in 1949, a fire broke out during restoration of the Golden Hall, charring the ground floor structural members. The damaged elements were removed and re-erected in a nearby warehouse, creating a spectral counterpart of the newly reconstructed hall, which was built in situ with a mix of old and new members. In fact, after several major reconstructions beginning as far back as the twelfth century, relatively few of the original seventh-century timbers remained even before the 1949 fire. Thus, the present state of Hôryûji depends on centuries of repairs and restorations by people ranging from seventh-century builders to twentieth-century archaeologists, historians, and government officials.

From the early 1870s through the turn of the century, architects, officials, master builders, and art reformers developed the concepts, policies, and practices that led to modern architectural preservation. Some aspects of preservation in the 1870s and later stemmed from historical practices. For example, in *Architectural Preservation in Japan*, Knut Einar Larsen examines historical motives and methods for preservation, noting the necessary maintenance and repair of wooden temples, as well as the periodic reconstruction (shikinen sengû) of Shinto shrines.¹ Certainly, many of the techniques used in modern preservation are derived closely from historical building

practices. For instance, the modern preservation practice of disassembly, repair, and reconstruction (kaitai shûri) developed from similar techniques used by earlier master builders. On a more abstract level, the concept of a building as a changing, ephemeral entity—best illustrated by the twenty-year shikinen sengû cycle at Ise Jingû—undoubtedly supported the idea that historical buildings could contain new members without contradiction.

However, while the principles and practices of nascent architectural preservation in the late nineteenth century incorporated indigenous elements, they also drew from disciplines newly imported to Japan, in particular Western concepts of art and architecture. Rather than being either a continuation of historical practices or a transplantation of Western ideas of preservation, architectural preservation in Japan developed as a synthesis of local and international concepts. In fact, preservation, modern architecture, engineering, seismology, and other building-related fields in Japan evolved simultaneously during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Beginning in the early years of that period and maturing with the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law of 1897, architectural preservation served as a crucial factor in the definition of architecture in modern Japan.

This paper examines the early development of architectural preservation in Japan to show how disparate motives and mechanisms produced particular approaches to the past. These perspectives were syncretic, comprising values and practices developed by various interests in both the pre-modern and modern eras. In a nation committed to rapid modernization, addressing the relationship between the past and the present demanded an ad hoc, eclectic approach.

EARLY MOTIVES FOR PRESERVATION

The earliest preservation efforts sponsored by the Meiji government stemmed from the legacy of the Tokugawa Period (1615-1868) and the consequences of early Meiji political policies. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was itself both progressive and retrospective; political reformers attempted to create a new national government based on the restoration of imperial rule (*ōsei fukko*) and the reestablishment of ancient practices (*kyūgi no gosaikō*). At the same time, the government sought to introduce Western technology to strengthen the state and catch up to the Western powers such as England, France, Germany, and the United States. The government soon took an explicit stance on Western-style architecture, promoting masonry buildings in the modes popular in the West at the time, mainly variations of historical revival styles. The development of this type of Western-influenced architecture served as a central theme in the scholarly literature on Meiji architecture.

However, Meiji architecture was also profoundly shaped by government policies that at first might seem to have little relevance to the development of modern buildings. Most notably, the government attempted to separate Buddhism and Shinto, suppressing the former and refashioning the latter as one pillar of the modern state. This policy impoverished Buddhist institutions and led to the closing of many temples. As the historian Nishimura Yukio has noted, the 1871 Koki Kyūbutsu Hozonhō (Preservation of Ancient Articles and Antiquities Law), the first preservation regulations in Japan, addressed religious institutions whose financial base had suffered from the nationalization of shrine and temple property (Nishimura 1984, 101). These regulations targeted thirty-one categories of objects but did not include buildings. The government sought to support the institutions, rather than to preserve and exhibit the objects themselves. Religious buildings and objects continued to hold value through their association with institutions rather than as independent art.

In addition to stabilizing shrine and temple finances, the government selectively funded construction. During the Tokugawa period, the government supported certain religious institutions linked to the Tokugawa family and

to the imperial line. The Meiji government continued this practice but in 1874 limited funding to Shinto shrines, appropriating monies for construction, maintenance, and operating expenses (Nishimura 1984, 105). Like the measures taken for the economic security of shrines and temples, the funding for construction and repair at these shrines targeted the institution more than the physical structures. In this case, the motivation was clearly political: state support of shrines was crucial to the control of religious institutions and to the establishment of Shintō as the state religion.

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS AND EARLY MEIJI ARCHITECTURE

In the years immediately following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government promoted Western-style architecture for buildings such as train stations, schools, and government ministries. The Department of Public Works (*Kōbushō*, often called the Ministry of Engineering) established the Imperial College of Engineering (*Kōbu Daigakkō*), employing British teachers to train scientists, engineers, and architects for the state. Josiah Conder, a young London architect, arrived in 1877 to take charge of the architecture program and teach European-style architecture. In spite of this mandate, Conder at first argued that modern architecture in Japan should be based on national history:

During this course, as also in the Drawing Office and during visits to buildings, great notice will be taken of the principles and beauties of the Architecture of the Country, with a view to encourage the retention of the best characteristics of the National Architecture in future building, so far as is consistent with stability and security of construction, and with all modern requirements (Imperial College of Engineering 1877, 54).

At the time, architects in England commonly believed that buildings should develop from the national past. Conder attempted to apply this

framework to Japan but encountered obstacles as he attempted to relate the Japanese past to the European architecture desired by the Meiji government. First, he could find few points of intersection between the wooden, post-and-lintel architecture of Japan and the masonry buildings of Europe. The functions, symbolic content, spaces, structure, and ornament all differed. In addition, there existed no body of scholarship on historical buildings in Japan. In teaching architectural history, Conder relied on the standard texts, *A History of Architecture* by James Fergusson and *A Handbook of Architectural Styles* by Alfred Rosengarten; neither book contained material on Japan. When authors did include Japanese architecture in English-language texts, they often presented it as non-historical or even as non-architectural. Banister Fletcher, for example, assigned Chinese and Japanese architecture to the “non-historical styles,” giving them only an isolated branch in his famous *Tree of Architecture*. The American journalist and art critic James Jackson Jarves and many other critics saw Japanese buildings as structures that lacked the permanence and monumentality associated with true architecture. In his 1875 book on the art of Japan, Jarves wrote, “architecture, in its noblest condition, is... unknown in Japan. There is shown no elaborate attempt to develop it, either in intellectual or spiritual shapes” (Jarves 1875, 21).

Thus, in the 1870s, when the government first sponsored the widespread adoption of Western-style architecture, there was as yet no viable Japanese architectural past that could be used by Conder and others for modern purposes. Only in the 1890s, with the second generation of Japanese architects, would the architectural history of Japan become a major academic topic.

THE FINE ARTS AND THE REDISCOVERY OF HISTORICAL OBJECTS

Far more celebrated than Conder’s efforts were the activities of art reformers in the 1880s. In the 1870s, historical Japanese art had received little official support. The 1876 establishment of the Technical Art School (Kôbu Bijutsu Gakkô) as an adjunct to

the Imperial College of Engineering suggests that the government initially viewed art as an adjunct of architecture, which itself was seen within the rubrics of engineering and practical construction. The Department of Public Works created the school to train Japanese students in Western-style painting, sculpture, and other arts the government viewed as useful to architecture, engineering, and the natural sciences. In the 1870s, traditional Japanese art had no official place in the Westernization of architecture and thus no role in the Technical Art School.² As the historian Ellen Conant has noted, the influence of the Technical Art School ultimately exceeded the limited role originally assigned to it. As with the concepts of architecture introduced by Josiah Conder at the Imperial College of Engineering, the principles, forms, and methods taught at the Technical Art School helped shape development independent of initial governmental goals.

The most flamboyant proponent of traditional methods was the American Ernest Fenollosa, whose legend is too rich to allow a full treatment here.³ Fenollosa arrived in Japan in 1878 to teach philosophy at Tokyo University but soon turned to Japanese art. Through his activities and publications, such as *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, he became perhaps the most successful proselytizer of Japanese painting during the late nineteenth century. He took great pride in his role as discoverer and explicator of Japan’s artistic past, and in a famous 1882 speech, he argued that the Japanese should return to their native traditions rather than adopt the art of the West.⁴ In the same year, Okakura Tenshin and Kuki Ryûichi of the Ministry of Education began a series of surveys of historical art objects. Okakura, who studied under Fenollosa at Tokyo University, also became a major figure in the dissemination of Japanese culture abroad, most famously through his books *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1903) and *The Book of Tea* (1906).

Fenollosa made his most celebrated “discovery” in 1884 at the Yumedono Hall of Hôryûji in Nara, where he, Okakura, and Kano Tessai unveiled the Guze Kannon statue. Fenollosa recalled, “at last the final folds of the covering fell away, and this marvelous statue, unique in the world, came forth to human sight for the first time

in centuries.... But it was the aesthetic wonders of this work that attracted us most. From the front the figure is not quite so noble, but seen in profile it seemed to rise to the height of archaic Greek art" (Fenollosa 1913, 50). This passage suggests that Fenollosa viewed the statue primarily as an aesthetic object; rather than seeing it as a ritual object in a Buddhist context, as the temple priests did, Fenollosa considered it in the context of historical art objects, comparing it to Gothic statuary, Egyptian art, and even the Mona Lisa. Both Fenollosa and Okakura strove to transform works such as the Guze Kannon from religious objects to "art" objects—objects to be evaluated, catalogued, and sometimes bought and sold. Fenollosa, after all, was a collector and connoisseur, as well as a critic and educator. As the historian Stefan Tanaka notes, "Okakura and Fenollosa are giving meaning to the object, regardless of prior utility or historical significance" (Tanaka 2004, 103). In other words, their framing of art objects contrasted starkly with pre-Meiji concepts that assigned importance to objects based on their association with institutions and events rather than on qualities intrinsic to the object such as form, color, and technique. The efforts of Kuki, Okakura, and others prompted the Imperial Household Ministry (Kunaishō) to establish the Extraordinary Department for the National Investigation of Treasures (Rinji Zenkoku Hōmotsu Torishirabekyoku). Over the next decade, this agency catalogued over 215,000 items.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, buildings initially held no clear place in the world of art objects imagined by Fenollosa and Okakura. In his account of the unwrapping of the Guze Kannon, Fenollosa says nothing about the building that housed it, even though the Yumedono is an extremely rare surviving example of eighth-century architecture (Fig. 1). Fenollosa believed that architecture lacked the individuality and expression that he deemed fundamental to the fine arts; although he championed Japanese painting and sculpture, he had little to say about buildings. In *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, even though he calls the main hall of Hōryūji "one of the noblest examples of Japanese or of early Chinese architecture," he mentions the temple buildings only briefly, presenting them as settings for the paintings and sculptures rather than as art objects

in themselves (Fenollosa 1913, 58). At this early stage of the reevaluation of historical Japanese artworks, for Fenollosa and Okakura, buildings were closely affiliated with but also distinct from the Japanese fine arts of painting and sculpture.

Later, though, both men wrote at length on architecture. For instance, Okakura, in his widely influential *The Book of Tea*, argued that the teahouse and its garden were uniquely Japanese creations that could serve as antidotes to prevailing historical styles in modern Japan: "We can but weep over the senseless imitations of European buildings which one beholds in modern Japan. We marvel why, among the most progressive Western nations, architecture should be so devoid of originality, so replete with repetitions of obsolete styles" (Okakura 1912, 32). In other words, Okakura came to see historical architecture, like painting and sculpture, as an embodiment of aesthetic principles that should guide artistic development in the modern age. What he and Fenollosa sought to preserve, then, were the "fine arts" qualities of historical artworks, namely their formal, material qualities and their craft.

Thus by the mid-1880s, three disparate approaches to the architectural past had begun to create nascent sentiments related to architectural preservation. The earliest were the Tokugawa period legacies of shrine and temple maintenance codified in the first preservation-related regulations of the early Meiji era. Several years later, at the Imperial College of Engineering, Josiah Conder argued for the place of historical Japanese architecture in modern design, believing that architecture in any nation should be based on historical precedents. His efforts, however, were limited by the general mandate of the Department of Public Works, whose mission was to produce practical Western-style structures, and by the absence of useful histories of Japanese architecture. Beginning in the late 1870s, Fenollosa and Okakura succeeded in drawing attention to historical artworks and defining them as fine art freed of other contexts. That the Meiji government supported all three of these perspectives on historical architecture suggests the complexity of motives and players involved in inventing a useful architectural past.



Fig. 1. The Yumedono at Horyu-ji in 2006. Nara, Japan, built 739 (Photograph by Don Choi).

In fact, behind the sponsorship of these diverse programs lay a basic governmental desire: to make art and architecture into exports that would garner both hard cash and cultural prestige. For example, the Japanese art objects and buildings at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 helped create the "Japan Craze," a popular infatuation for Japanese art that lasted into the 1890s. For the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Japanese government commissioned Kuru Masamichi, an 1881 architecture graduate of the Imperial College of Engineering, to design its pavilion. Kuru, advised by Okakura and others, produced an eclectic structure that combined Japanese motifs from three distinct historical eras. Popular with the general public for its exoticism and fine craft, this building, the Ho-o-den, also provided Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles and Henry Greene with their first in-the-flesh experience with Japanese

architecture. Through most of the 1880s, tentative steps towards architectural preservation stemmed from a variety of sources, including the various government-sponsored regulations and institutions and people with widely divergent goals. However, in the late 1880s, these interests began to converge in the figures of Kigo Kiyoyoshi and Itô Chûta.

KIGO KIYOYOSHI, PRESERVATION, AND ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

In 1889, the master builder Kigo Kiyoyoshi offered the first classes in Japanese architecture at Imperial University in Tokyo, the successor to the Imperial College of Engineering.⁵ The Kigo line of builders had a long association with the Imperial Household, and Kiyoyoshi supervised the rebuilding of the

Imperial Palace in Tokyo from 1887. Trained through an apprenticeship, Kigo represented an alternative paradigm of conceiving, designing, and constructing buildings. Hired as a lecturer, Kigo was the first faculty member whose background lay outside the European model of architectural training originally established by the Department of Public Works and Josiah Conder. At the time, the architecture faculty included Tatsuno Kingo and Kojima Noriyuki. Tatsuno, a member of the first graduating class, had studied and worked in London before replacing his mentor Conder as architecture professor in 1884. Kojima, too, had been educated abroad, matriculating at Cornell University after beginning his architectural education at the Imperial College of Engineering. Kigo's appearance on the faculty thus represented a basic shift in the acceptance of historical Japanese architecture, one prompted by growing government interest in sponsoring construction in traditional modes. In fact, by Kigo's second year (1890-1891), the curriculum included more classes on "Japanese Architecture" than on "History of Architecture" (Imperial University of Japan 1891, 102-103).

The separation of these subjects illustrates not only different content but also different approaches to architecture. Josiah Conder had been unable to reconcile historical Japanese buildings and modern architecture. For Kigo, the distinction between tradition and contemporary buildings was moot; his training was as relevant to the design and construction of the new Imperial Palace as it was to the surveying of ancient temples. His invitation to join the university suggests that Tatsuno and Imperial University no longer believed in the antithetical relationship between pre-modern Japanese buildings and modern architecture that had spurred the establishment of the Imperial College of Engineering in 1873. Although the courses on Japanese architecture and on the history of architecture remained separate, faculty and students began to synthesize and integrate the subjects through historical surveys, lectures, and writings.

In addition to teaching at Imperial University and supervising government projects, Kigo led surveys of historical architecture and published his findings in *Kenchiku Zasshi*, the journal of the Architectural Institute

of Japan. Architecture students participated in some of these surveys, learning about Japanese architecture from extant structures, as well as from Kigo's lectures. Kigo's 1889 article "The History of the Great South Gate at Tōdaiji" ("Tōdaiji Nandaimon no Enkaku") was the first lengthy account of a single historical Japanese building to appear in the journal. As Nakatani Norihito has indicated, in succeeding years the number of articles related to Japanese architecture grew rapidly, reaching a peak around 1900 (Nakatani 1993, 32-33).

ITÔ CHÛTA, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY, AND PRESERVATION

At Imperial University, Kigo taught the first students to become specialists in Japanese architectural history. If Tatsuno Kingo and the first generation of Japanese strove to adapt contemporary European styles to Japan, the next generation attempted to define a place for the Japanese past. No figure embodies this shift more clearly than Itô Chûta, an 1892 graduate of Imperial University. Itô studied Western architectural history with Josiah Conder and Japanese architecture with Kigo Kiyoyoshi. He also learned from Okakura, who became a companion and mentor. Through Okakura's influence, Itô came to see Japan as the culmination of pan-Asian culture. In 1894, he contributed an article titled "Concerning the Necessity of Research on Japanese Architecture and the Goals of That Research" to *Kenchiku Zasshi*. He claimed that Europeans and Americans "disregard the architecture of Japan" and that they were under the misconception that "in Japan there was no art (geijutsu) that should be called architecture (kenchiku)" (Itô 1894, 228).

Itô's famous 1893 publication "Essay on the Architecture of Hōryūji" ("Hōryūji Kenchikuron"), based on his graduate thesis, was the first extended academic treatment of a historical Japanese architectural site. Previous students had attempted brief histories of Japanese architecture, but Itô was the first to author a rigorous analysis of a single site.⁶ He examined the buildings themselves and then placed them in an extended chronological and geographical matrix; he argued that Hōryūji terminated a line of architecture that

extended back to the empire of Alexander the Great. He stated that the style of Hôryûji “clearly keeps the appearance of the Chinese style, faintly preserves the old traditions of India, and furthermore retains vestiges of the Greek style” (Itô 1893, 321). Itô attempted for a Japanese building what Fenollosa and Okakura had essayed for Japanese art objects, namely to create a legitimate place for Japan along the chronological and geographical axes of art and/or architectural history. Where Okakura used paintings and sculptures such as the Guze Kannon to support his claim that “it is in Japan alone that the historic wealth of Asiatic culture can be consecutively studied through its treasured specimens,” Itô used Hôryûji (Okakura 1920, 6).

THE 1897 ANCIENT SHRINES AND TEMPLES PRESERVATION LAW

By the mid-1890s, a broad range of groups and individuals had contributed to preservation attempts in art and architecture. Kuki, Okakura, and Fenollosa had succeeded in obtaining strong government support for investigating traditional art objects. Kigo Kiyoyoshi had surveyed dozens of shrines and temples, and along with Itô Chûta and others, had published articles on these historical sites. The increasing number of such pieces in *Kenchiku Zasshi* demonstrated the acceptance of historical architecture by mainstream architects. In 1897, the Meiji government passed the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law (Koshaji Hozonhō), which established architectural preservation as a standardized, nationwide project; it remained in effect until the National Treasures Preservation Act of 1929 and marked the maturation of early preservation thought and practice in Japan.⁷

The 1895 Application Regulations for Preservation Funds for Ancient Shrines and Temples (Koshaji Hozonkin Shutsugan Kisoku) reveal that up until the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law preservation in Japan continued to draw upon a wide range of objects and approaches (Nishimura 1985, 39-40). The 1895 regulations covered not only buildings but also stone monuments, religious artifacts, and everyday utensils. Of the seven criteria used for

determining eligibility, three had explicit roots in the Tokugawa period. Of these three, the first criterion was a close historical relationship with the Imperial family or important military families (for instance the Tokugawa family). This view of historical importance continued the Tokugawa period practice of funding shrines and temples that were affiliated with the Tokugawa family and the Imperial House; the Meiji government had continued this practice during the early Meiji period.

The second criterion concerned the beautiful scenery of famous places and historical sites (*meisho kyûseki*). During the Tokugawa period, the idea of the “famous place” became a standard framework for presenting sites of historic, scenic, or poetic value. As the historian Mary Elizabeth Berry has noted, “‘Famous places’ (*meisho*) were almost always marked on large-area maps of Tokugawa Japan and quite copiously laid out in a cartographic genre of their own.... The famous place was all but unavoidable” (Berry 1997, 575). The third category, drawn directly from pre-Meiji practices, included shrines and temples that customarily carried out reconstruction.

The remaining four criteria were based on perspectives on historical architecture that had developed between the 1870s and 1890s. One criterion, national historical content, reveals a distinctly modern approach to the past. Although there was a long history of valuing proximity to the Imperial House and major military families, the modern concept of a unified nation-state developed only in the Meiji period. In fact, the Meiji government took the formulation of such a state as its fundamental goal. Another criterion was magnificence or beauty that made an object a suitable model for the fine arts. This perspective derived directly from Okakura and Fenollosa’s 1880s transformation of paintings and sculpture from ritual objects into fine art.

The final two criteria addressed age: shrines and temples with buildings constructed before 1486 (Bunmei 18) were automatically eligible, as were those whose buildings conformed to the above criteria and were erected before 1703 (Genroku 16).⁸ The use of specific dates implies that antiquity for its own sake had become important and suggests that the past could now be organized by abstract numbers, as well as by traditionally important elements such as the Imperial House.

In contrast to the complexity of these 1895 categories, the 1897 Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law presented simple criteria. Article two states that buildings and treasures (*hōmotsu*) deserving national funds for support and preservation are those that serve as evidence of history, possess a unique lineage, or show superior manufacture. These three general standards replaced the seven disparate criteria from the 1895 regulations. Article four paraphrases the new criteria, stating that buildings and treasures that serve as evidence of history or as models for the fine arts (*bijutsu*) may be granted the status of “specially protected building” (*tokubetsu hogo kenzōbutsu*) or “national treasure” (*kokuhō*). These two criteria suggest that preservation had two distinct motives, one related to aesthetic relevance and the other to historical importance.

This conception of historical importance owed a great deal to practices and attitudes from the Tokugawa period and the first years of the Meiji era. For instance, as its title indicates, the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law took for granted that Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples (rather than castles, palaces, or private residences) most deserved government support. This emphasis on religious institutions was a legacy from the Tokugawa era and from the 1871 regulations that sought to support financially weak shrines and temples. In addition, in the early years of the Meiji period, the term *kokuhō* (now translated as national treasure) appears to have referred not to the nation but to the individual domains of the feudal lords (Guth 1996-1997, 315). Over the following decades, as the concept of the nation-state grew stronger, the term *kokuhō* came to refer to the nation of Japan.

In contrast, the phrase “objects that should become models for the fine arts” (*bijutsu no mohan to naru beki mono*) stems from the work of Fenollosa, Okakura, and other champions of Japanese art in the 1880s. They at first had relegated buildings to secondary status, seeing them mainly as backdrops for the fine arts. However, the 1897 law overturned this bias, creating separate but equal categories for buildings and art objects. The status of architecture under the 1897 law justified the efforts of Itō, who as early as 1892 had argued for the inclusion of

architecture in government-sponsored art surveys. It was also a major step in the definition of architecture for modern Japan, placing the field closer to the fine arts.

PRESERVATION AND THE MEIJI DEFINITION OF ARCHITECTURE

Architecture in Japan developed its peculiar shape through relationships with other disciplines. The figures at the core of orthodox architecture, namely the officials, faculty, and students associated with the Department of Public Works, worked closely with engineers and seismologists, as well as with Japanese master builders. For instance, Itō and Kigo, one trained as an architect and the other as a master builder, both conducted seismic damage surveys following the massive Nobi earthquake of 1891. Tatsuno Kingo, professor of architecture at Imperial University and pillar of the architectural establishment, studied with engineering students, worked in London for the Victorian architect William Burges, promoted Japanese architecture through Kigo, and served on the Imperial Earthquake Investigation Committee, for which he designed an earthquake-resistant brick house. Architectural preservation served a particularly productive role by creating unique configurations, for instance allying the architectural student Itō Chūta with the art educator Okakura Kakuzō and the master builder Kigo Kiyoyoshi.

The long process of restoration at the Daibutsuden, or Great Buddha Hall, of Tōdaiji, in Nara, illustrates some of the relationships among architects and others involved in architectural preservation. Prior to the promulgation of the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law, the poor condition of the Great Buddha Hall had already prompted attempts at preservation and restoration. As the largest religious building in Japan, it represented the glory of the ancient capital of Nara (even though it had been entirely rebuilt twice, once in 1190 and again in 1709 and no longer retained either the scale or style of the original structure). Sporadic attempts at fundraising and repair had begun in 1880, but the national government did not offer support until 1891 (Figs. 2, 3).



Fig. 2. The Great Buddha Hall before the Meiji-era restoration. Tōdaiji, Nara, Japan (Washio and Hiraoka, 1915, *Daibutsu oyobi Daibutsudenshi*). Used with permission of Tōdaiji.

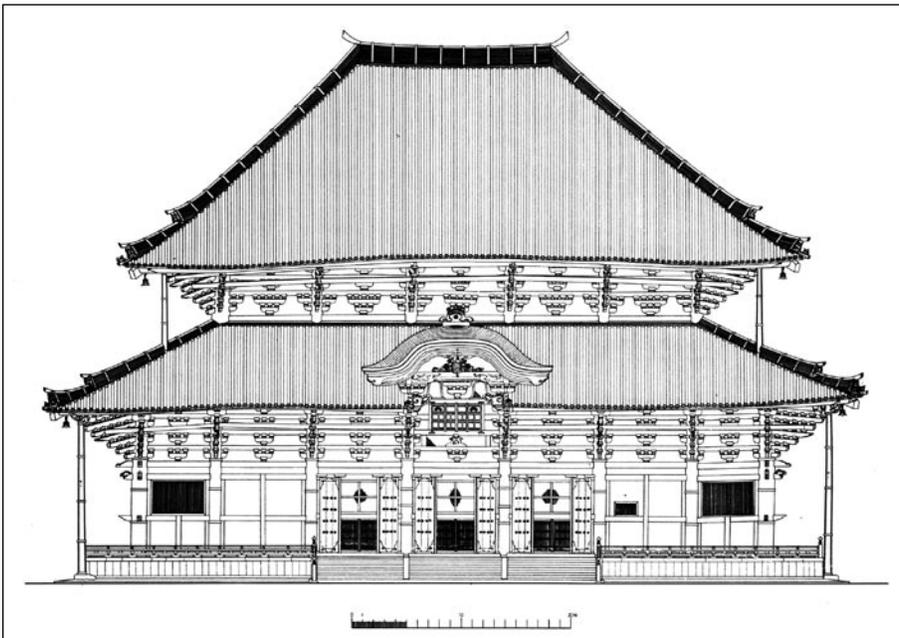


Fig. 3. The Great Buddha Hall before the Meiji-era restoration. Tōdaiji, Nara, Japan (Nara-ken Bunkazai Hogo Jimusho, 1980, fig. 26). Used with permission of the Office of Cultural Assets, Nara Prefectural Board of Education.

In 1891, in response to a request from the Nara prefectural governor, the Ministry of the Interior dispatched Tsumaki Yorinaka to survey the state of the building (Yamazaki 2000, 240). Employed as a technical expert (gishi) by the Ministry of the Interior, Tsumaki had studied architecture first at the Imperial

College of Engineering under Josiah Conder and then at Cornell University. Although both universities taught mainly Western-style architecture, Tsumaki wrote his 1885 Cornell thesis on historical Japanese architecture. Like other elite figures in the architectural world, he took a position in the Meiji government after

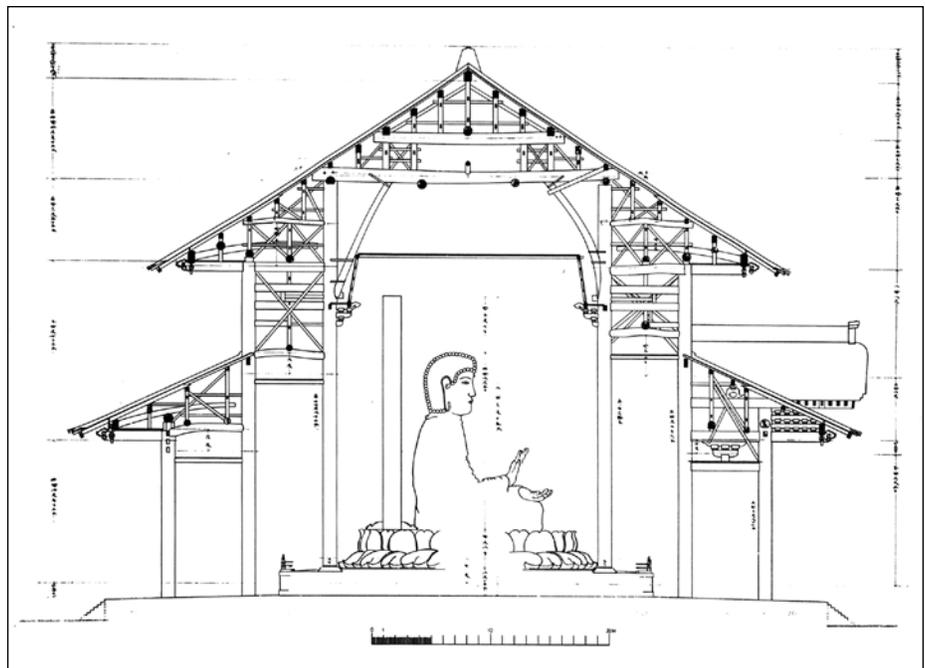
graduation. At Tôdaiji, he determined that fundamental repair was necessary but lacked necessary funds. In 1896, however, Tsumaki was selected as a member of the Ancient Shrines and Temples Committee, and two years later the Great Buddha Hall was given the status of “specially protected building” under the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law. In 1899, Tsumaki, Itô Chûta, and Sekino Tadashi conducted a survey of the building and produced a restoration plan (Yamazaki 1999, 391). Sekino, along with Itô, became one of the pioneers of architectural history in Japan, and his work with architectural preservation was central to his development.

Over the next several years, technical specialists from the national government and from Nara Prefecture produced several plans for repairing and restoring the Great Buddha Hall. In 1903, Tsumaki and Kigo Kiyoyoshi were appointed honorary advisors.⁹ The pairing of these men reveals how preservation brought together the disparate strands of architecture and construction at the turn of the century. Educated at the Engineering College in Tokyo and at Cornell, Tsumaki represented the world of Western-style architecture. Kigo had trained within the traditional world of master builders. Kagotani Suketarô, who

supervised construction at the Great Buddha Hall from August 1904 on, embodied the synthesis of these two streams of Meiji-period building. As a graduate of the department of architecture at Tokyo Imperial University, Kagotani was an elite figure in the world of Meiji architecture. His initial government assignment to Tôdaiji rather than to a Western-style project demonstrates the growing importance of preservation projects at the prefectural and national levels. His later career would encompass both historical preservation projects, such as the supervision of repairs at Kakurinji (a temple in Hyogo Prefecture), and the creation of designs in reinforced concrete, such as the main building for Takushoku University in Tokyo.

For this first great preservation project in twentieth-century Japan, Kagotani, Tsumaki, Kigo, and other experts ultimately synthesized concepts, materials, and techniques to create a uniquely Japanese structure. Some maintenance and localized repairs had been left to master builders experienced in traditional construction, but two basic structural problems required a more fundamental and comprehensive solution. First, over the central area, only two pairs of stacked beams carried the extreme roof load. Although ingenious cantilevers

Fig. 4. The roof structure of the Great Buddha Hall before the Meiji-era restoration. Tôdaiji, Nara, Japan (Nara-ken Bunkazai Hogo Jimusho, 1980, fig. 28). Used with permission of the Office of Cultural Assets, Nara Prefectural Board of Education.



helped support these beams, the roof's instability also distorted the structural frame as a whole (Fig. 4). Second, the cores of the columns, whose great height made them particularly vulnerable to buckling, were severely decayed. Addressing these points without fundamentally changing the timber structure seemed problematic, yet the status of the Great Buddha Hall as a "specially protected building" required that changes to the appearance of the building be minimized.

Ultimately, Kagotani and his colleagues in Nara created a hybrid structure by inserting steel elements into the timber frame. Over the central space, which was the most ritually important area, they inserted steel trusses to replace the paired wooden beams (Fig. 5). Neither the material nor the structural principle stemmed from conventional wooden construction (trusses were not used in traditional Japanese framing), but the ceiling over the Great Buddha statue made the trusses invisible from both inside and outside the building. To address decay and strengthen the columns, steel bands and angles were attached to the polygonal cores of fifteen of the columns. This steel reinforcement was covered by wooden cladding, which was in turn secured by

steel bands (Fig. 6). This arrangement maintained the earlier concept of column core and cladding and changed the column appearance only slightly. Thus the steel-reinforced wooden columns were both historical and modern, with the former largely concealing the latter (Fig. 7).

Indeed, of all the building-related fields in the early years of the twentieth century, architectural preservation perhaps required the widest variety of skills, participants, and concepts. Drawing on materials and structure from engineering, tools and techniques from historical timber construction, methods of representation from Western-style architecture, and regulations issued by the national government, men such as Tsumaki Yorinaka, Kigo Kiyoyoshi, and Itô Chûta contributed to the making of architectural preservation as a fundamentally hybrid phenomenon. Moreover, many of them played similarly important roles in other fields. For instance, as a member of the first generation of architects in Meiji Japan, Tsumaki represented a small, elite group of men charged with adapting Western architecture for modern Japan. Kigo was the most influential master builder of the era, and Itô was a founder of the discipline of architectural history in Japan.

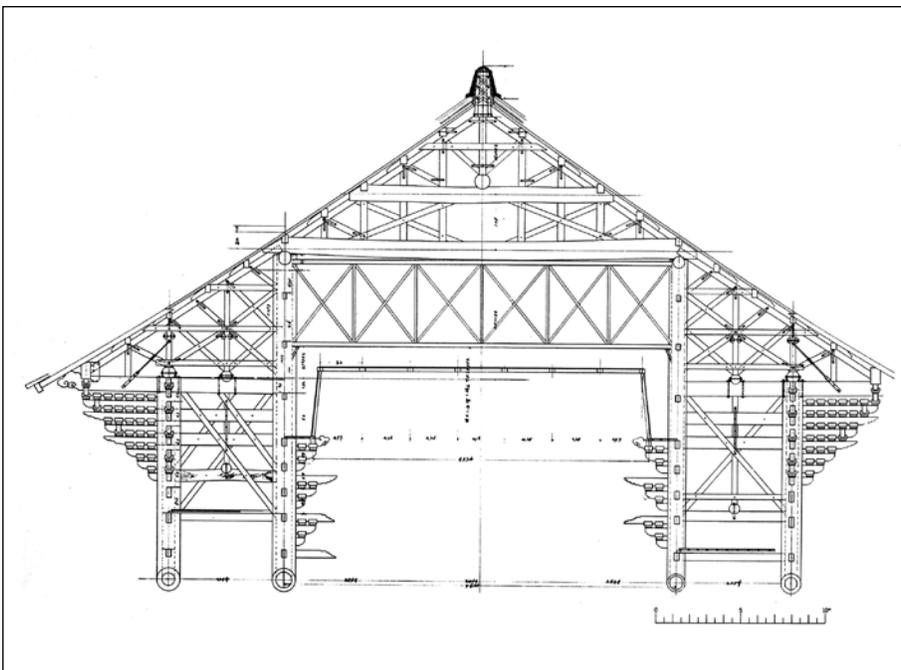


Fig. 5. The Great Buddha Hall, roof structure with trusses after the Meiji-era restoration. Tōdaiji, Nara, Japan. Restoration completed in 1913 (Nara-ken Bunkazai Hogo Jimusho, 1980, fig. 15). Used with permission of the Office of Cultural Assets, Nara Prefectural Board of Education.

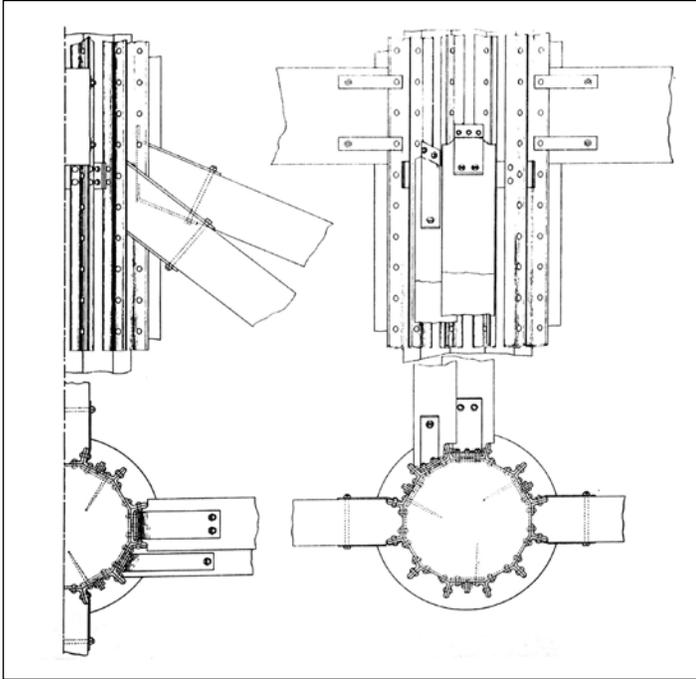


Fig. 6. Drawings of the steel reinforcements of the columns of the Great Buddha Hall. Tōdaiji, Nara, Japan. Restoration completed in 1913 (Nara-ken Bunkazai Hogo Jimusho 1980, fig. 21). Used with permission of the Office of Cultural Assets, Nara Prefectural Board of Education.

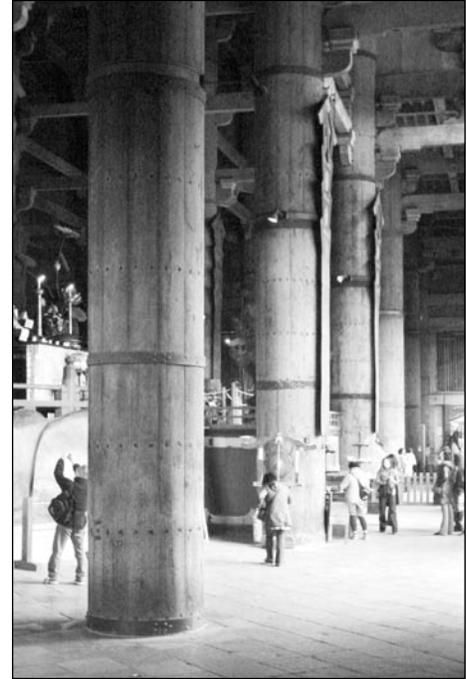


Fig. 7. The columns of the Great Buddha Hall in 2009. Tōdaiji, Nara, Japan (Photograph by Don Choi).

THE LEGACY OF THE 1897 PRESERVATION LAW

For more than three decades, the 1897 Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law served as the basis of architectural preservation. In 1929, the National Treasure Preservation Law (Kokuhō Hozonhō) reaffirmed most of the basic criteria from 1897 but generalized the principles of preservation. The most fundamental change was to expand the realm of preservation beyond shrines and temples. The desire to support and control religious institutions had been one motive behind the earliest preservation law, the 1871 Preservation of Ancient Articles and Antiquities Law; the 1897 Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law implicitly continued this orientation by limiting the purview of preservation to items belonging to religious institutions. However, the basic criteria for preservation—namely historical importance and aesthetic superiority—had no direct ties to religion, and the 1929 law recognized that items owned by private individuals and non-religious institutions also merited preservation.

The National Treasure Preservation Law further generalized preservation by combining buildings and art objects as “national treasures,” rather than separating the architecture into its own category of “specially protected buildings.” Early preservationists had viewed buildings and art objects as qualitatively different. For instance, in the 1870s and before, the government had provided maintenance funds for temple buildings but not for art objects. In contrast, in the early 1880s, Fenollosa and Okakura placed greater importance on sculpture and painting than on architecture. By 1929, the field had developed to the point where the abstract principles of preservation rather than specific agendas could dictate the language of preservation legislation.

The basic principles of aesthetic quality and historical relevance continued to underlie architectural preservation until the passage of the 1950 Cultural Properties Protection Law (Bunkazai Hogohō). This law, which remains in effect in 2009, expanded the range of preservation, replacing the 1929 National Treasure Preservation Law and other laws pertaining not only to

art and architecture but also to historical sites (shiseki), places of scenic beauty (meishō), and important natural objects (tennen kinenbutsu). The Cultural Properties Protection Law established six categories of cultural assets: tangible cultural properties (yūkei bunkazai); intangible cultural properties (muken bunkazai); folk cultural properties (minzoku bunkazai); monuments (kinenbutsu); cultural landscapes (bunkateki keikan); and groups of traditional building (dentōteki kenzōbutsugun)

Within the category of tangible cultural properties, buildings and objects were recognized for their historical and artistic value, as they had been since the late 1880s. However, architecture appeared in other categories as well. For instance, the description of folk cultural properties explicitly mentions houses (kaoku) as necessary for understanding changes in national living patterns. Under the category of monuments, sites where cities, castles, and houses once stood were noted for historical and scientific importance. The final category included groups of structures that “are integrated with the surrounding environment to form historical landscapes.”

By 1950, the motives for architectural preservation had spread beyond aesthetics and earlier concepts of history. History was now seen to reside not only in singular monuments of historical import and aesthetic superiority but also in the lives of common people, in landscapes, and in objects of scientific value. In fact, as the historian Cherie Wendelken has observed, the inclusion of “traditional” (rather than “historical”) building groups reveals an alternative perspective on the architecture of the past, one derived not from ancient monuments such as Hōryūji and Tōdaiji, but from common buildings, especially folk houses. Wendelken writes that in contrast to European concepts of history, “this notion of tradition suggests something which lives and has relevance in the present, and has a ‘timelessness’ which gives it a legitimacy in contemporary experience” (Wendelken 1994, 23). The emphasis on the continuity of the past with the present, and on vernacular rather than monumental buildings, shows the influence of the folklore movement in creating visions of the past divorced from earlier perceptions of historical architecture. If the 1929 National Treasure Preservation Law had simplified

and generalized the preservation principles of its 1897 forebear, the 1950 Cultural Properties Preservation Law expanded the theoretical perspectives as well as the scope of architectural preservation.

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ENDNOTES

1. Larsen 1994 addresses historical methods and attitudes of preservation and reconstruction in chapter two, “Cultural Traditions and Values.”
2. For an analysis of this school, see Conant 1990. Conant makes it clear that the Technical Art School was conceived as a supplement to architectural training and not as a comprehensive school of art.
3. See, instead, Brooks 1962 and Chisholm 1962.
4. This speech to the Ryūchikai exists only in a Japanese translation. It appears in Yoshino 1928, 159-174.
5. For an examination of Kigo’s classes at Imperial University, see Inaba 1987. The best English-language source is Wendelken 1996.
6. For instance, Tatsuno Kingo and Sone Tatsuzō began their 1879 theses on the future domestic architecture of Japan with brief outlines of the development of Japanese architecture, and in 1881, Kuru Masamichi submitted “History and Theory of Japanese Architecture.” Ishii Keikichi wrote “Honpō butsuji kenchiku enkaku ryakushi” (“A Short History of the Development of Buddhist Temple Architecture in Japan”) and later lectured on Japanese architectural history at Imperial University but apparently based his thesis on modern, secondary sources. See Ōta 1983, 11-12.

7. A treatment of the basic outline of the development of preservation activities can be found in Bunkazai Hogo linkai 1960. Chapters two and three treat developments through the Koshaji Hozonhō.
8. Nishimura postulates that the years 1486 (the 18th year of the Bunmei era) and 1703 (the 16th year of the Genroku era) were chosen because they were the final years of the eras that preceded the date the regulations were drafted by 400 and 200 years, respectively. The date 1486 first appeared in 1878 in an early government document concerning ancient shrines and temples (Nishimura 1985, 38-40).
9. This summary is based on Yamazaki Mikihiro's analysis of the development of the Tōdaiji restoration plans. See Yamazaki, Nakagawa, and Nakatani 1997; Yamazaki 1998, 1999, 2000.

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