Styling Japan
The Case of Josiah Conder and the Museum at Ueno, Tokyo

ALICE Y. TSENG
Boston University

In 1881, as visitors to the Second National Industrial Exhibition in Tokyo proceeded along the central axis of the fairgrounds in Ueno Park, they were ultimately confronted by a monumental building (Figure 1). In one of the printed guides to the exhibition, they read the following description of this prominent visual marker: “The art gallery is the brick building standing in the center of the grounds behind the middle gate. Its height is over 45 shaku [45 feet], its length is over 354 shaku [352 feet], and it covers over 724 tsubo [25,700 square feet]. Twin round towers add to the impressive height and beauty of the façade. This structure was built to the design of a professor at the Imperial College of Engineering, the Englishman Mr. Conder. . . . The solidity of this building is for sure matched by no other [in Japan].” The publication also informed visitors that after the exhibition closed, the building would become the permanent home of the national museum collection, its debut here being a preview of its long-term function.

When the building reopened in March of the following year as the nation’s museum, the occasion was marked by the fanfare of two military bands, the attendance of ranking statesmen and aristocrats, and the appearance of the emperor Meiji. From opening day, the new museum was touted as an institution of conspicuous national significance. In its heyday, it was more accessible to the general population than any other public institution in the nation, and it epitomized the Meiji bureaucracy’s mission to engage Japan in the international standards and practices of the time. Nothing could have prepared the leaders and citizens of Japan for the untimely demise of the museum structure four decades later.

The rise and fall of this building made indelible marks on the discipline and ideology of building in a “Western” architectural style in modern Japan. The completion of the museum in 1881 to the design of Josiah Conder (1852–1920), in collaboration with Japanese workmen and students under the English architect’s training, signaled the successful implementation of European technology and professionalism in Japan (Figure 2). The devastation of the same building in the Great Earthquake of 1923 (Figure 3) accelerated the waning of confidence in the mode of architectural science and aesthetics that the museum had originally represented.

Although the structure has been physically absent for eight decades, it still looms large in today’s survey books as a familiar departure point for discussions on the ideal of a modern national architecture in Meiji-period Japan (1868–1912). As a subject of architectural history, it remains relevant for several compelling reasons. The building was in many ways the embodiment of the complex power relations between a non-Western nation that struggled to maintain its independence and a host of Western nations encroaching on this right. A product of the alliance between a foreign expert and his Japanese host, the museum in Ueno engaged the idea of nation-building and its architectural expression from both sides. The central government’s support of the
Figure 1  Second National Industrial Exhibition, Tokyo, 1881, map. The art gallery is indicated by the arrow.

Figure 2  Josiah Conder, Museum at Ueno Park (demolished), Tokyo, 1878–81
museum institution constitutes a vivid illustration of its dualist policy to preserve the past—both ancient and recent—and to adopt new ways of organizing that past. In designing a structure to house the unique material culture of Japan, Conder understood the need to impart Western technical savvy and Japanese cultural character in equal measure. He sought to express the national identity of his host nation primarily through style, choosing what he called a “pseudo-Saracenic” appearance to signify Japan. Although in hindsight this choice might come across as eccentric at best, a more constructive approach to understanding the building would be to examine the legibility of this design in the context of the architect’s own time and places, late-nineteenth-century Britain and Japan.

The unprecedented and unorthodox application of Islamic architectural elements by Conder to signify Japanese identity has, surprisingly, elicited no thorough criticism or analysis from the time of the building’s erection to today. Historians have acknowledged the design as a remarkable product of the encounter between a Western architect and modernizing Japan, but most have qualified it as a “miscalculation” or “misunderstanding” of Japanese culture, thereby implying a “right” or “wrong” way of expressing Japan. Rather than pursue this reductive line of analysis, I propose to examine the design as a process rather than as a product. As national architecture, the building encompassed multiple layers of meaning, both intended and projected. The complexity arose from Japan’s ambiguous global standing in the aftermath of its forced economic opening to the West in the 1850s. Because the rally for national unity and the creation of a shared identity was compelled by the threat of Western domination, and because the strategy to mold Japan into a vanguard international force was selective, calculated assimilation, the modernity usually posited as “Western” actually constitutes the very core of the Japanese national imaginary.

Architecture was a key component of the westernizing reforms driving the nation’s ambitious modernization policy. The self-imposed European forms therefore demand a different reading from what would have been coded the “style of the conqueror” under colonization; the process of implementation from the beginning required the Japanese to assume a dominant position, as initiator and sponsor. Because the ultimate objective of assimilation was to maintain autonomy, a design such as Conder’s museum embodied the visual order of ambivalence, of the contradictory desire to simultaneously collapse and maintain cultural/racial difference between Japan and the imported other.

While the institution underwent multiple changes in name, administration, and structure in the Meiji period, I will focus on its formative stage, from 1876 to 1889. Although during this time its official name was The Museum, I refer to it throughout this article by its better-known, popular name, the Ueno Museum.
Building for Exhibition

Grounding the Ueno Museum in the world history of the late nineteenth century links Japan to two distinct phenomena of the era—the international culture of exhibitions that originated with the 1851 Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace, London; and the rise of museums within the energetic institutional building of many nations. The earliest scrutiny by the Japanese of the museums of Europe and America was undertaken in the 1860s and '70s as part of a general inquiry into the sources of Western strength and prosperity (Figure 4), and the study of museums was fundamental to Japan's comprehension of the intellectual culture of the West and its own subsequent entry into this culture.

Hakubutsukan, the term coined by the Japanese to capture the essence of the European museums they visited, literally means “a hall of diverse objects.” But beyond suggesting the physical attributes of the museum, the word evokes rich associations of rational knowledge and national progress. Writings that resulted from firsthand investigations of the West set up the discursive arena for the transplantation of the museum to Japan. Kume Kunitake, who traveled with the highest-ranking political leaders of the day to the West, recorded his impressions: “When one looks at the objects displayed in its museums, the sequential stages of civilization through which a country has passed are immediately apparent to the eye and are apprehended directly by the mind.”7 Sano Tsunetami, leader of the first organized effort to institute a museum in Japan, asserted that “the aim of the museum is to promote man’s wisdom and craft through the teaching of the eye.”8 Consistent in these definitions of the museum was a belief in the propagation of knowledge through visual examination of the material object—a tenet that corresponds to what the historian Steven Conn has characterized as an “object-based epistemology” that informed the operation of late-nineteenth-century Euro-American museums.9 Japanese visitors found European museums to be an accessible and immediate source of information on the material goods, cultural values, and scientific knowledge of the West. They concluded that the same display strategies could be used to represent Japan to audiences both domestic and foreign.

Kume and Sano also shared the perception that the museum belonged to a matrix of institutions that linked knowledge to progress and national strength. With factories and schools, it formed part of a larger machinery for politico-economic success. The image of Victorian Britain—its industrial progress and commercial prowess—served as the model of development for Japan. One significant consequence of the Crystal Palace and its museum offspring at South Kensington was an emphasis on the substantial place that the decorative arts could occupy in a nation’s economy. The pragmatic and commerce-driven ideology of the South Kensington Museum (renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899) dovetailed neatly with the early Meiji policies of developing technology and expanding trade. Moreover, the nationalist mise-en-scène of the international exhibition culture cannot be overemphasized. In the late nineteenth century, competition in the industrial arts generated explicitly political and even belligerent responses among rival nations—particularly France, England, and Germany; success in the fields of commerce and industry was often cast as an affirmation of the nation’s martial prowess.10 Japanese government officials learned from the Crystal Palace and the South Kensington Museum that art industry could serve as a source of income and national pride in the international competitions of the time. Interlaced with this pursuit of improving craft design and production for trade were discourses on the perpetuation of national heritage, the attainment of a unique national style, and the embodiment of a national self-image. The same issues would pertain to the architecture of display.

Following the advice of Sano and a German technical consultant Gottfried Wagener (1831–1892), the Japanese government established a museum emulating the South Kensington Museum in its continual collaboration with domestic industrial exhibitions.11 The trajectory from the initial proposal in 1875 for a museum of art and industry (eventually the Ueno Museum) to its grand opening in 1882 was neither unswerving nor uneventful. The presence of a second museum, also sponsored by the central government and aiming to settle permanently in Ueno Park, stirred up
competition for recognition and land. The focus of this article, the Ueno Museum, is the museum founded under the Home Ministry, while the competitor is the pedagogical museum founded under the Education Ministry.

The early histories of the two museums were closely intertwined in the early 1870s with the brief merger—from March 1873 to February 1875—of the Museum Bureau (Hakubutsukyoku) founded in 1871 and The Museum (Hakubutsukan) founded in 1872, both under the Education Ministry, with the Exposition Bureau (Hakurankai Jimukyoku) founded in 1872 under the Grand Council of State (Dajokan). After the collapse of the merger, the Education Ministry was the first to designate its institution a museum and erect a building for it in 1877, but the Home Ministry ultimately won the battle in the acquisition of the name and site originally sought after by both ministries. On 24 February 1876, the Grand Council of State, at the request of the Home Ministry, declared that the entity under the latter’s jurisdiction would be named The Museum (Hakubutsukan), while those under any other administration, whether national or local, would be required to affix geographical or classifying prefixes to their names. Taking on the status of a typological epitome, The Museum was set up by its administrators under sanction of the government as the standard against which all other museums in the nation must measure themselves. The Home Ministry envisioned the definitive Museum of Japan as a centralized place for the maintenance and exhibition of the country’s artifacts, manufactures, and arts. Its purpose was to enrich the minds of the general public and to educate designers by providing an exemplary collection.

The Home Ministry’s victory was secured in December 1876, when it acquired the northern apex of Ueno Park for its permanent museum, effectively elbowing out the pedagogical museum to a peripheral site. The new site held the great promise of high visibility. The first public park in Japan, Ueno provided both an open expanse suitable for a large-scale building and the buffer zones necessary to protect against fire hazards and to accommodate crowd circulation. In early 1877, the stage was set for the erection of the edifice. Overseeing the construction was the Public Works Ministry, which had just entered into a five-year contract with Conder that January. The request to execute a design for the Ueno Museum was formally approved by the Grand Council of State on 27 December 1877, and the groundbreaking took place on 14 March 1878.

Before construction began on the Ueno Museum, the vacant site was utilized for the nation’s First National Industrial Exhibition for more than three months in 1877. One building raised for the occasion, the Art Gallery designed by Hayashi Tadahiro (Figure 5), remained standing to serve as a permanent extension to the future museum complex. When Conder’s museum was on the verge of completion four years later, it also served as the Art Gallery, hosting the temporary Second National Industrial Exhibition of 1881. A brief comparison of the structures by Hayashi, a Japanese carpenter who learned Western-style masonry construction formally at the foreign settlement in Yokohama, and Conder, an English architect who had trained in London but practiced exclusively in Japan, brings out some conditions of cross-cultural translation that molded the early examples of exhibition building in Japan.

Hayashi’s Art Gallery shared two important characteristics with the Memorial Hall of the Centennial Exhibition held one year earlier in Philadelphia. First, both were built as permanent structures among many temporary ones. Second, both were art galleries whose comparatively elaborate design stood apart physically and symbolically from that of the surrounding buildings. The Art Gallery in Tokyo, situated at the apex of the exhibition’s triangular plan, was a red brick, one-story, one-room structure. The volumetric simplicity of the gabled top and boxy body calls to mind the kura—the traditional Japanese storehouse for goods and valuables—rather than a contemporary European museum; however, the use of brick instead of heavily plastered wood frame was an endorsement of Western masonry construction as the latest technology for fire- and earthquake-resistance. Another feature that simultaneously engaged the old and the new was the oversize imperial chrysanthemum crest affixed on the pediment of the entrance portico; although the floral motif had had a long history of association with the Japanese imperial family, it held “no exclusively national or imperial meaning until the modern era” when it was made the sole insignia of this institution. The use of the majestic sixteen-petal crown along with another recently appropriated emblem of the nation, the Rising Sun flag, highlighted the importance and visibility of the structure as the amalgamation of familiar and unfamiliar conventions.

Hayashi’s building was innovative not only in material and form, but also in function. The Art Gallery featured several architectural attributes derived from museums in Europe and America. The walls were left entirely solid so that lighting would come only from above, through an elevated row of dormer windows. The uninterrupted wall surface allowed maximum space for hanging pictures, just as the open interior accommodated the bulky dimensions of the display cases. Both traditional Japanese ink paintings and contemporary Western-style oil paintings were framed and mounted on the upper section of the walls. Objects such as lacquers, bronzes, and porcelain were placed in glass cases and cabinets (Figure...
These were completely new formats for displaying paintings and objects in Japan, and were conscious replications of the way Japanese works of art were being exhibited at international expositions abroad (Figure 7). Accounts by visitors to the National Industrial Exhibition indicate mixed feelings about this format. An Anglophone writer for the Tokio Times described the building as small and unsuitable to “any full display of pictures or other art treasures,” and faulted the architecture, the art, and the installation for their experimental nature. On a more positive note, the American Clara Whitney declared the building to be “perfectly fascinating to [her] and appeared to be most attractive to the Japanese also.” The two observations, although expressing opposing sentiments, acknowledged that this art gallery implemented exhibition design that was conventional in neither Japan nor Europe and America.

The 1881 exhibition took place on approximately the same site as the last one had, and the planners made use of the new museum building under construction in front of the Hayashi building as the venue for the special event. Paralleling the overall expansion of the second exhibition...
(double the size of the last), the structure designed by Conder was a two-story, thirty-room block with ten times more floor space than the modest edifice of four years earlier. Brick was again the material of choice for its resilience against natural devastation, in contrast to the wood that composed the shedlike temporary pavilions housing the majority of the fair. Also like its predecessor, the Conder building involved the use of cross-cultural imagery and techniques. However, working in counterpoint to Hayashi’s method, Conder approached the project as an interpretation of Japan through Western construction techniques, which he believed was his greatest challenge. In a watercolor most likely executed at the completion of construction, the architect delineated the Ueno Museum as a picturesque backdrop to the leisurely commingling of Japanese figures, some in traditional dress, some in Western dress, and some in a combination of the two (Figure 8). The sartorial hybridity resonates with the novel activities that the museum and its gardens promoted: viewing the nation’s artifacts and antiques, strolling with the family through the new park, and admiring the cherry blossoms and pines that surrounded the mechanical water fountain.

Conder’s design as an architectural expression of “Japanese character” is explored in detail below, but it is significant to mention here one salient attribute shared by this and Hayashi’s art gallery that is distinctive to exhibition architecture of Meiji Japan: the use of brick construction to signal both permanence and innovation in building. This imagery is in marked contrast to the status of masonry construction in contemporary Europe and America, especially in the three decades since the erection of Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace.
The differentiation between permanent and temporary building, both in material and “character,” was a well-known practice at the international exhibitions, with the former seen as architecture and the latter as engineering: “Architecture presumed more of a familiarity with the art of building and the functional arrangement of space [and] engineering with the design of long-span structures based on a more precise knowledge of building science.” While the first category had the responsibility of both physically withstanding and visually signaling “permanence,” the second provided an efficient, low-cost solution to the problem of presenting large-scale, impermanent exhibitions. The dichotomy first arose at the 1851 Great Exhibition, when the original proposal for the architecture—essentially a colossal brick pile—was deemed unwelcome as an enduring presence in Hyde Park, while Paxton’s executed design of iron and glass captured the public’s imagination for being “light, airy, novel, and temporary.” Similarly, at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, the architectural press posited the expansive stretch of the Main Building and the enclosed shell of the Memorial Hall as antipodes, representing the contrast between the transient but timely and the permanent but dated.

The signification of masonry construction as exhibition architecture in late-nineteenth-century Japan was distinct from that in contemporary Europe and America in that brick and stone represented novel methods of construction, as opposed to the traditional timber frame. Although fundamentally this is due to the initial practical limitations of adopting the material and technological practices of Western architecture, masonry structures, in addition to being pragmatic solutions for solid, fire-resistant construction, took on cultural stature as emblems of the aesthetics of newness and enlightenment. A leading intellectual of the day, Nishi Amane (1829–1897), even made use of the tectonics of brick construction as a metaphor for strength and moral righteousness: “When traveling in Europe, I saw brick buildings five to six stories high and six hundred to a thousand feet wide. Moreover, they are so firm and strong that they cannot be rocked or bent, and they are formed on four sides by magnificent high brick walls. . . . Fineness and strength as well as squareness and uprightness is the nature of bricks, and protecting human rights is the nature of man. Once their natures have been altered in the least by rounding off the brick or by compromising sycophancy among men, there will be no room for the builder or the statesman to exercise their powers even though the builder exhausts his arts and the statesman fully exerts his talents.”

Conder was one of the key figures in the group of British engineers and architects hired by the Japanese government in the first two and a half decades of the Meiji period who propounded the invincibility—and the unequivocal superiority—of masonry construction, especially against the frequent, destructive effects of earthquakes. One major problem with this claim, besides its being largely speculative, was the pitting of brick and stone, the touted scientific remedy from the West, against wood, the norma-
Japanese national character in the architecture of the Ueno Museum versus non-architecture were frequently called into play to support the British experts’ undeniable racial reading of their own indomitable Western technology in service to the insubstantial native tradition. While Conder was not an extremist in upholding a Eurocentric view of world architecture (he did his best to promote the artistic and historical significance of Japanese architecture to an English-speaking audience), his premise for expressing Japanese national character in the architecture of the Ueno Museum was anchored in his subjective position as a Westerner and an architect. His design for the museum was his way of addressing what he perceived as the “lack” and “failings” of indigenous Japanese architecture.

Josiah Conder

Conder was one of a small, specialized group of foreign experts hired by the Japanese government to develop the nation’s public architecture along Western lines. The deliberate adoption of a new architecture taken from outside Japan’s existing tradition was in step with its economic opening to the West in the 1850s and the nominal restoration of imperial rule in 1868. The new Meiji government regarded Western building technology as an essential component of the overall strength and prosperity of Europe and America, and promptly set up the Public Works Ministry in 1870 to launch the process conventionally termed the “Westemization” or “modernization” of Japan’s urbanism and civic infrastructure. The British would dominate the coterie of foreign engineers and architects hired by this ministry.

Among the foreign experts, Conder acted as a principal force in laying the foundation of Japan’s new architecture. Commonly referred to today by historians as “the father of modern Japanese architecture,” he first entered the service of the Public Works Ministry as an instructor and architect, and ended up spending his entire career and life in Japan. Though Conder’s official assignment in Japan was to institutionalize the architectural profession according to extant Western models, his motivation for accepting it paradoxically hinged on his interest in traditional Japan. During his pre-Japan years in the 1870s, he, like many English artists and architects of his generation, had developed an ardent admiration for Japanese design and workmanship in response to the art objects circulating in Europe. However, it was not until Conder’s expatriation to Japan that he became familiar with its architecture. His appreciation of the continuing artistic traditions of Japan and his professional commitment to the “advancement” of Japan through European building materials and technology engendered the ambivalence that colored his view of the nation.

Because very little has been published on Conder in English, it is useful to provide an extended discussion of his background and design philosophy. Conder arrived in Japan at age twenty-four, armed with an education and training acquired in England. Born in London in 1852, he descended from the artistic lineage of his great-great-grandfather, the sculptor Louis François Roubiliac (d. 1762), and his paternal grandfather and namesake, the writer-poet Josiah Conder (1789–1855). Although there appear to have been no architects in his immediate family, he was able to secure a promising start to his career at the architectural office of a distant relative, Thomas Roger Smith (1830–1903).

From age sixteen to twenty-four, Conder underwent his education and training as an architect. His background was unusual in that he was one of the few in his generation to receive instruction both in the classroom and an architectural practice. Consequently, he was conversant in both the theory and practice of his profession. Conder apprenticed in Smith’s office for four years. During this time, he also attended lectures at University College and drawing classes at the South Kensington Art School. In 1874, he moved to the firm of William Burges (1827–1881) on Buckingham Street, and his first task as an assistant was to work on a new design for Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. In the evenings, Conder fine-tuned his drawing skills at the Slade School of Art. One year later, he transferred to the studio of Walter Lonsdale, a stained-glass artist working with Burges on ecclesiastical designs. Culminating Conder’s eight-year architectural training were two remarkable events in 1876. On 13 March, he won the prestigious Soane Medallion Competition held by the Royal Institute of British Architects (R.I.B.A.). On 18 October, he signed a five-year contract with the government of Japan as technical consultant to the Public Works Ministry and professor at the Imperial College of Engineering (Kōbu Daigakkō).

Having received his training in the 1870s, Conder matured in a decade epitomized by the displacement of the dogmatic Gothic Revival by the eclectic, uninhibited Queen Anne style. Replacing the rigor of the former was the development of a new relativism in the use of historical and “exotic” styles and a general gravitation toward aestheticism and pragmatism. Conder shared many of the convictions of his peers, especially those of his mentors Smith and Burges, concerning the cultural signification and function of archi-
First and foremost, the contemporary phenomenon of historicism deeply influenced Conder's approach to design. The only extant record of Conder's professional work before he went to Japan is his design for a country house that won him the Soane Medallion in 1876 (Figure 9). The drawings confirm the strong imprint of Burges on his assistant, and the latter's confident command of the master's Gothic vocabulary. The country house displayed an exuberant massing of asymmetrical volumes and was highly elaborated with symbolic sculpture and stained glass. The drawings also appropriated Burges's signature pictorial contrivances, such as the insertion of lettering in Old English script and figures in period costumes. More than an exercise in historical accuracy, Conder had created a rigorously artistic and totalizing vision of medieval times. This propensity for a romantic reverence of a past era would also fuel his desire for Japan, a place where, according to Burges, the European Middle Ages could be experienced in the nineteenth century. Throughout his career, Conder remained at his most expressive and adroit when designing in the Gothic idiom, although his repertoire was not limited to this style. He, like many of his contemporaries, ultimately made use of the full palette of historical building styles.

J. Mordaunt Crook has characterized the tension built into the relationship between Victorian architects and the past as dilemmas revolving around choice and contemporaneity: the architect faced not only a panoply of historical styles to work with, but also the challenge of putting the...
chosen style or styles in the service of a progressive age, particularly in light of the changing demands born of new construction technology and building types. For Conder, the latter demand was heightened in his work for the Japanese government, for his position as a foreign expert obligated him to spearhead the adoption of advanced technologies above all else. Furthermore, the experience compelled him to carefully consider the purpose of reproducing past European styles, Greek or Gothic, in the context of a nation that claimed no cultural roots in Europe.

Another belief that Conder carried to late-nineteenth-century Japan was that architecture should be the reconciliation of science and art. In an 1878 lecture to his Japanese architecture students, he pronounced in the opening statement: “It is necessary that you should master... the rules and results of all scientific investigations, so far as they concern the strengths of materials, and mechanics of structures, in connection with buildings... You must not however forget, that, although the education necessary to an Architect is partly a Scientific education, it is equally necessarily an Artistic one. The utilitarian age in which we may be said to live is one in which there is a tendency to disparage the value of the Arts... The Fine Arts, appealing as they do to the emotions and senses, their causes and effects cannot be clearly reduced to mathematical proofs and limited laws.” Despite calling attention to the duality of architectural practice, the talk posits a separation of architecture’s scientific and artistic components. As the lecture progressed, Conder betrayed his bias for the artistic education of an architect when he relegated scientific construction to the observation of predetermined laws and rules while elevating architectural art to the cultivation of “certain feelings, considerations, and passions.” Once again, the influence of Burges looms large in this notion of the artist-architect. Conder’s own training stressed the integration of architecture with the other arts, as demonstrated by his continuous enrollment in drawing classes and his apprenticeship in stained-glass design. During his years in Japan, he would continue to pursue architectural design in conjunction with studies of Japanese costumes, gardens, flower arrangement, painting, and, of course, traditional architecture.

Although Conder was not the first foreigner to be hired by the Public Works Ministry to design and build in Japan, he contributed something crucial to its new Western-aligned architecture: a sense of artistry brought to the design process. He promoted architecture as more than the pragmatic implementation of Western technology and technique, indeed, as an “artistic conception” conceived in accordance with rationality, convenience, and economy of construction. One crucial reason that Conder, rather than any of his predecessors, has been recognized as the father of modern Japanese architecture is that he established a viable profession by providing a comprehensive approach to the field. Following the credo of his mentors, he trained his own students to appreciate the significance of artistry, scientific precision, and historical awareness in architectural design.

A third factor that influenced Conder’s initial approach to instating modern Japanese architecture was Japonisme, or the cult of Japan in Britain. His most direct link to designers engaged in collecting and drawing inspiration from Japanese arts were Burges and his close friend E. W. Godwin. The two were pioneer collectors of Japanese prints and works of art in Britain, their interest having been propelled in the 1860s by the 1862 International Exposition in London. Both wrote and lectured on the subject of Japanese art and its affinity with European medieval craft, and they incorporated Japanese motifs, forms, and finish in their designs. Conder’s exposure to Japanese arts at the office of Burges was inevitable.

Precisely what and how Conder learned about Japanese arts through Burges is undocumented, although it is easy to speculate that he absorbed it in the same breath with his study of European medieval and other “Oriental” arts and architecture. This is indicative not only of how comprehensively Burges influenced him, but of how Japonisme fits into the pursuits of the nineteenth-century British art world. In the multiple volumes of sketches kept by Conder, this intersection is exhibited by the free juxtaposition of drawings of Japanese landscapes, Gothic cathedrals, and Islamic ornamental patterns (Figure 10). Japanese people, scenery, and design patterns interwoven with Gothic and Islamic forms epitomized the knowledge base that informed his view of Japan prior to his arrival there. This way of seeing Japan, as disembodied design motifs or as part of an idyllic, homogenous other time-place remained firm, even in the face of his later firsthand observation and experience of Japan. The fact that while in England he was familiar with only the applied arts and not the architecture of Japan would also be crucial to his perception of traditional Japanese architecture and his vision for a new architecture.

On 28 January 1877, Conder landed in Yokohama Bay to begin the formidable task of “modernizing” Japanese architecture. Conder’s professional experience in Britain is especially relevant to this study because the Ueno Museum was the maiden commission of his career in Japan. At this early juncture—the first year of his professional duties—the modes of thought and practice that had shaped him as an architect in England were being directly converted into a practicable approach to building in Japan. Together with his winning Soane competition drawings and volumes of
Figure 10 Conder, from Sketchbooks, undated: Finedon Church capitals (top left), dado in mosaic pattern (top right), Honganji Temple bracket (bottom)
sketches from a just-completed grand tour of Europe, Conder carried with him to Japan the ideological baggage of a Victorian architect.

It remains an unsolved mystery why the Japanese Public Works Ministry invited Conder, a relatively young Englishman without a single built project on his résumé, to be the primary instructor responsible for educating a new generation of Japanese architects. What is clear is that Conder accepted the invitation in full recognition of the weight of his position; he was later fondly remembered by his Japanese students for his unstinting devotion to their academic and professional progress.

Conder's Design

No documentation of Conder's commission to design the Ueno Museum remains today, although his assignment to the project occurred for certain between his arrival in Japan in January 1877 and the groundbreaking for the building in March 1878. However, the design process had most likely begun before Conder's participation did. There is some ambiguity as to whether Conder was asked to work with a preexisting set of floor plans (Figure 11), and if those plans were drawn by Giovanni Vincenzo Cappelletti (in Japan from 1876 to 1885) or Antonio Fontanesi (in Japan from 1876 to 1878), who were both Italian and art instructors in the employ of the same Public Works Ministry at the Technical Fine Arts School (Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō). However, once Conder assumed full design responsibility, no other foreign expert appeared to take a role.

The location inside a spacious park separated the building from existing historical neighborhoods, and the distinct architecture of the museum intensified the idea of its newness. Distinguished by a combination of exceptional size, material, and style, the building was a tall two-story brick structure with windows punctuating the full horizontal length of the exterior wall. The central entrance bay and the two end pavilions formed shallow projections from the otherwise perfectly rectangular floor plans. The interior was composed exclusively of exhibition rooms, configured as enfilades that set out a fixed, linear circulation path. The most conspicuous feature of the museum was a set of decorative bulbous domes crowning the front façade. These and other elements that Conder labeled Saracenic were entirely alien to the architectural traditions of Japan. The unprecedented decorative program, together with the equally striking location and material (especially the juxtaposition of the red brickwork against the green, wooded surrounding), marked the museum as an unmistakable symbol of a new institution and a new architecture in Japan that had no obvious indigenous links.

The most famous examples of institutional designs by Western architects that attempted to express "Japanese character"—including proposals for the Imperial Diet Building and Law Courts (1887) by the German architects Hermann Ende and Wilhelm Böckmann (Figure 12) and the executed design of the Imperial Hotel (1913–23) by Frank Lloyd Wright—all postdate the Ueno Museum. Before the completion of this building, the customary method of European and American experts was to employ the techniques and styles they were
already familiar with, adapted to the available materials and skills. The Japanese government had employed them precisely for the expediency of implementing existing skills rather than for their ability to adopt traditional carpentry and joinery. Conder, who was contracted for the same reason, also stressed the incompatibility of the traditional styles with the new requirements intrinsic to modern institutions such as colleges, assemblies, and hospitals. Nonetheless, the museum posed an exception. Although it is possible to argue that the very idea of the institution represented an intrusion of the foreign and a break with existing modes of organization and expression, Conder responded to its role in the conscious reconstruction of a nation’s historical and cultural lineage by integrating two cultural legacies. While the collection objectified the nation on a literal level, the architecture presented an opportunity to do the same on a metaphorical level.
Styling Japan

As museum architecture, the Ueno Museum established a visual link to a body of well-known contemporary designs in Britain and America. It was an homage to the line of museum projects in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain that departed from the classical tradition: the Trinity College Museum in Dublin (1852–57), the Oxford University Museum (1854–60), and the Natural History Museum in London (1868–81), to name three prominent examples. Participating in the turn toward the Gothic manner, his preferred style, Conder followed these projects in the animated use of constructional polychromy (that is, the use of alternating colors of stone or brick) on his façade and carved ornamentation for both exterior and interior articulation.

While the Ueno Museum can be counted as one of the numerous museums that fell under the strong influence of the South Kensington Museum, it is unique for being an Anglo-Japanese example. The Ueno Museum had its start at the same time as two of the most influential art museums in the United States—the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. All three were originally founded in the 1870s, in emulation, to various extents, of the South Kensington model, both institutionally and architecturally. The permanent buildings of the South Kensington Museum designed by Francis Fowke (Figure 13) as well as the aforementioned British sources inspired the penchant for color and detailing that distinguished the first buildings for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1874–80), by Calvert Vaux and Jacob Mould, and the Museum of Fine Arts (first section, 1870–76), by John Sturgis and Charles Brigham (Figure 14). Apart from the bulbous domes, the Ueno Museum externalized many similar stylistic features, including the use of red brick with stone and terra-cotta dressing and pointed, banded arches.

It was no coincidence that Conder designed his building with the distinctive philosophy and visual attributes of the South Kensington Museum in mind, for the application of the arts to architecture formed the core of his education under Burges, who called architecture the mother of all the other arts. Moreover, Conder’s four-year attendance at the South Kensington Art School drawing classes and lectures honed his aptitude and appreciation for ornamental design (not to mention the prominence of the Oriental arts as decorative motifs under Owen Jones's influence at that school). His experience also intersected with that of the architects Sturgis, Vaux, and Mould, who all trained in London, and he shared with them an interest in the English picturesque and the Gothic Revival. Just as the Boston and New York museums have been described as “small, American versions of the South Kensington,” Tokyo’s Ueno Museum can claim kinship as a small, Japanese version.

Although the debut of Conder’s building at the 1881 National Industrial Exhibition as well as its 1882 reopening as The Museum were fully reported in the newspapers, the Japanese press made no remarks about this latest monument as a work of architecture or art. Toshio Watanabe has offered two plausible reasons for this, the first being that “at this stage there was no tradition of media criticism of such government buildings ... a less-than-favorable comment would probably have been regarded as lèse-majesté,” and the second being that “architecture was not yet regarded as properly pertaining to art [and therefore] there was no tradition of discussing buildings in aesthetic...
terms." Furthermore, there was also no professional opinion available, for the modern architectural field was in its infancy, being fostered by none other than Conder himself. Even decades later, when his professional progeny had formed the leading association, the Institute of Japanese Architects (Kenchiku Gakkai), in 1886 and the accompanying journal Kenchiku zasshi in 1887, most members spoke of him and his work only with the utmost respect.

Conder himself, however, offered a revealing commentary about the Ueno Museum at the end of his career in a moment of retrospection in 1920, shortly before his death at the age of sixty-seven. The Institute of Japanese Architects had organized an award ceremony to honor his lifetime achievements. The acceptance speech Conder gave was conventional except for the explicit mention of the Ueno Museum out of the more than 130 buildings in his oeuvre. The remark is especially significant in light of his customary reticence about his own work and his ardent tone in addressing a project so distant in time:

I have always remembered Baron Hamao by the predilection he was kind enough to bestow upon me for my design for what is now called the Imperial Japanese Museum at Uyeno [sic]. . . . Now, a foreign architect arriving in this country imbued with the idea of the continuity of a national style, generally first attempts to find some way by which he can perpetuate the national architecture, whilst giving it the modern improvements of arrangements, solidity, and scientific advantages. So far as my studies of the national styles went (and I was an enthusiast in the beauties of Japanese art) there were no decorative or ornamental forms, or forms of outline or contour, which lent themselves constructionally to a ligneous or wooden style, and it became necessary to seek in Indian or Saracenic architecture for forms which, having a logical treatment in brickwork or stonework, would impart an Eastern character to the building. Hence this first effort to impart a character not too much at variance with a Museum of Treasures for the Far Eastern Arts. I do not know whether or not some other person has ever properly understood my motive in introducing a pseudo-Saracenic style of architecture in Japan, but I have always remained grateful to Baron Hamao for reminding me of my first and, in his opinion, successful attempt.

As is apparent from this speech, Conder's overwhelming concern with the design of the museum was its style rather than its function or construction, even though at the time the innovative building type (museum) and construction method (masonry) would have been equally challenging concerns. The high visibility of the Ueno Museum as a public, monumental statement of the central government's modernizing ideology must have impressed Conder deeply. The crux of his argument for designing in a "pseudo-Saracenice style" is located in the sentence that asserted Saracenic forms as more "logical" than Japanese forms for imparting Eastern character to a building in brick- and stonework. While Conder appears to have been offering a materialist argument, echoing the position originally put forth by A. W. N. Pugin that form and style must be generated by structural utility and therefore contending that in this case ornamentation derived from wooden construction had no legitimate place in a masonry structure, Conder's explanation glossed over deeper, more complex issues of architectural representation that were in play.

Conder's conceptualization of Japan in this speech grants us access to the base of logic and semantics from which he was operating. First is his assertion of an existing, homogenous "national style" or "national architecture" and the need to both perpetuate and improve it. Second is his deliberate semantic fusing of the terms "Japanese," "Indian," "Saracenic," "Eastern," and "Far Eastern" as equivalent signifiers of Japan. Third is his definition of these non-Western styles solely by their ornamentation and architectural fragments. Underlying these constructions was the notion that his interest was not in architecture that was Japanese but in architecture that he believed to represent Japanese-ness.

At the most fundamental level, Conder's use of the Saracenic was reflective of the contemporary European attitude that homogenized the geocultural diversity of the so-called Orient. Here the Saidian framework is applicable,
namely, the assertion of an “Eastern” or “Oriental” image as
dominant over the “European” self, and the essentialization and immobilization of this Other to com-
plement the complex, progressive West. Conder shared
the outlook of his contemporary Basil Hall Chamberlain
(1850–1935), an influential Japan specialist and a fellow-
Englishman who spent most of his life in Japan. Despite the
extraordinary length and breadth of their exposure to that
country, they, like Edward Said’s Orientalists, still saw their
world as divided clearly between West and East. (Remark-
ably, at the turn of the century, a similar worldview would
be endemic to self-representational writings on Japanese
culture by native writers such as Okakura Kakuzō
[1862–1913]; the strategies of colonial control Said identi-
cifies—cultural essentialization and polarization—ironically
became common approaches for asserting Japanese unique-
ness and conscious markers of difference from the West.)

Conder’s attitude toward his own discipline, archi-
tecture, sets off his Orientalist vision with the most clarity. In
his 1878 paper “Notes on Japanese Architecture” read at the
R.I.B.A., he maintained an inviolable boundary between
wooden construction and masonry construction as the basis
of differentiation between Japan and the West, and between
past and present. Conder would eventually present a total
of four papers on Japanese architecture for English-speaking
audiences, and he remained resolute in enforcing the polar
categories of what he called “the ancient style of building”—
in essence, the whole chronological range of architectural
works in Japan up to the 1850s—and the “modern, revolu-
tionary” contributions of Europeans and Americans like him-
self. Thus, he joins Chamberlain and many other European
and American scholars of Japan in “praising selective aspects
of the Japanese past while denying relevance for the future to
any but Western practices.”

When Conder eschewed the direct quotation of Japan-
ese architectural forms and turned to the Saracenic, he was
able to maintain the inviolable line between the Japanese
past—“beautiful,” “elegant,” and “fragile”—and the West-
ern-inspired present—“rational” and “solid.” His knowl-
edge of the Saracenic style as a classification and terminology most likely derived from James Fergusson’s A
History of Architecture in All Countries (London, 1865), a sur-
vey of Western and non-Western architecture. Fergus-
son’s History did not include a section on Japan; in fact, at
the time, no major architectural publication, including Owen Jones’s Grammar of Ornament (London, 1856), con-
tained a visual index of Japanese architecture. In designing
the Ueno Museum, Conder appears to have relied on Euro-
pean sources on “the East” and given form to modern Japan
based on the materials devoted to Islamic architecture that
were available to a British architect, such those by Jones and
Fergusson.

Adding another layer to the complexity of Conder’s
employment of Saracenic architecture in his design is the
revelation that in the classroom he consciously asserted the
difference between Indian, Japanese, and Saracenic archi-
tecture, teaching all three as separate sections in his lecture
course “History and Art of Architecture” at the Imperial
College of Engineering. In addition, he had been actively
conducting research on traditional building types, specifi-
cally, religious and domestic architecture, since his arrival in
Japan. He displayed an eagerness to assume the position of
Japanese expert to his professional peers back in England.

A set of his sketches illustrating Japanese architecture was
exhibited at the R.I.B.A. in December 1877, and his afore-
mentioned paper “Notes on Japanese Architecture” was
read there on 4 March 1878. The exhibition and lecture
took place before the groundbreaking for the Ueno
Museum. It was entirely possible for Conder to draw on his
specialized knowledge of Japan in the museum design, but
for unknown reasons he chose not to.

Another reason that the Saracenic style was a conspicu-
ous choice for a British architect building overseas was the
prominence of the “Indo-Saracenic” style being developed
by the British Raj in the 1870s. The historian Thomas Met-
calf has proposed that this architecture “proclaimed the
supremacy of the British as they sought to reshape India” and
that “by drawing together and then melding forms distinctly
labeled ‘Hindu’ and ‘Saracenic,’ the British saw themselves,
the self-proclaimed masters of India’s culture, as shaping a
harmony the Indians alone, communally divided, could not
achieve.” Museums erected under the Raj, Metcalf points
out, “were invariably housed in Indo-Saracenic-styled struc-
tures” because the museum institution and this style of archi-
tecture were both powerful manifestations of the colonial
ruler’s organization and classification of India’s past. In
Conder’s professional circle, both of his mentors, Smith and
Burges, had experience with designing for India, although
their involvement predated the rise of the Indo-Saracenic
style by a decade and neither employed such forms. Burges is
best known for what was dubbed by the Ecclesiologist as “a kind
of quasi-Orientalizing Gothic” design for the Bombay
School of Art (Figure 15), while Smith is remembered for his
advocacy of building in “essentially European” styles blended
with features of the “best Oriental styles.” Their designs
and writings grounded the contemporary debates on the suit-
ability, adaptability, and legibility of European versus indige-
nous forms in the East.

Conder’s characterization of his design as “pseudo” sig-
nals two levels of substitution, or two degrees of separation
from Saracenic architecture; that is, his cognizance of this work as a nineteenth-century European derivative of historical Saracenic models, and the deliberate use of this derivative as a stand-in for Japan’s national identity. The prefix “pseudo” is not pejorative, but, rather, underscores the architect’s knowing imposition of an unusual model for modern Japan. The so-called pseudo-Saracenic forms composed the ornamental features of the Ueno Museum (Figure 16, left and right). Most prominent are the flanking chattris, or open pavilions, above the central bay of the façade. Pointed arches and floriated windows line the full horizontal expanse on all four sides and two stories of the building. A decorative balustrade and intermittently placed finials crown the base of the roof structure. Visible in one detailed drawing of the central bay, column bases and capitals are decorated with animal and plant forms. Polychromatic masonry construction consisting of contrasting red brick and light-colored stonework highlighted the varied shapes of the windows and patterns of the tracery. These details on an otherwise Classical body resonated with prevalent British architectural modes of the time, that of the Gothic Revival styles and the later Queen Anne mode. Rather than working from rigorous, firsthand examination of original Islamic architecture, Conder made a fairly simplified Saracenic composition that could have been inspired by a study of Fergusson’s books, illustrated travelogues, or even other buildings in the neo-Islamic idiom. As Smith indicated, a European of the time with some knowledge of art or architecture would have been acquainted with elements of Saracenic architecture even if he had never traveled to the Orient.
While architects and architectural historians of the period might have placed India and Japan under the same classificatory heading—“non-Christian,” “non-historical,” or even “non-architectural”—the two cultures were obviously sustaining very different political relationships with Europe. Because Japan maintained its sovereignty in the late nineteenth century, British building in Japan and British building in India operated under distinct sets of patron-architect power dynamics (or simply put, Conder was acting on the authority of the Japanese, not British, government to build for the Japanese). After all, Japan was never part of the Orient of Said’s Orientalism; in addition to not falling under the control of British or any other colonizing force, it did not have the history of geographical, cultural, and religious adjacency to and contention with Europe that ignited the specific struggle analyzed by Said.

However, the “abrupt, massive, and menacing” penetration of the West into Japan in the 1850s did constitute a potent catalyst that activated the island nation’s self-preservation imperative to modernize and to form a unitary polity; as Marilyn Ivy succinctly puts it, “Japan is literally unimaginable outside its positioning vis-à-vis the West. . . . The articulation of a unified Japanese ethnos with the ‘nation’ to produce ‘Japanese culture’ is entirely modern.” Though Japan had to endure extraterritoriality and unequal treaties, it had the freedom to look on the appropriation of select Western institutions and of specific elements from its own historical past as common strategies toward maintaining an autonomous sense of self.

While British employment of the Saracenic style in the colonies was, in the most simplistic terms, a mechanism of control by the colonizer over the colonized, as argued by Metcalf and Mark Crinson, and the use of the same at home in Britain was a display of imperial triumph, as recently argued by G. Alex Bremner, the style did not carry the same oppressive overtones in Japan. One recorded response to Conder’s design was from Baron Hamao Arata (1849–1925), given at the same 1920 ceremony held in the architect’s honor. Hamao, an honorary member of the Institute of Japanese Architects and the former president of the Imperial University of Tokyo, was not an architectural expert, although he was a leading figure in the promotion of a national art for Japan through his roles in the Fine Arts Commission, the Imperial Museum, and the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. As a member of the cultural elite, Hamao was joined by the well-known art critic and historian Okakura in seeking to create a linkage with the pre-Meiji past as part of the modern national-cultural identity.

In his speech, Hamao made an emphatic mention of the “pains” (kushin) that Conder went through to make a building appropriate to the site—Japan in general and Ueno Park in particular. He lauded Conder for forgoing the design of a “typical Western building” (junji naru seiyo no tatemono) and attempting one in Western style mediated by “Eastern taste” (Tōyōshumi). Hamao praised the suitability of Conder’s design to its function as a museum and to the surrounding topography, in contrast to the more recently executed Hyōkeikan, completed in 1909 and now standing adjacent to it (Figure 17). According to Hamao, in its “pure Western style of white masonry” (shiroki ishizī nojun seiyo no sutairu) the Hyōkeikan not only failed to harmonize with the style and material of the older building, but made no attempt to address the specific purpose and location of the building. Hamao, like Conder, believed in the importance of exhibiting in the museum design a visible sign of alterity from Western forms, as well as the need to make an associational link between the architectural style and the collection of Japanese objects inside. Hamao appeared satisfied with the insertion of Saracenic elements to signal a generalized “Eastern” identity, and this is perhaps more reflective of the intellectual trend at the time of his speech in 1920 that asserted Japan as not just a strong, independent nation, but as leader of the greater geocultural region of the East.

Conder undertook the task to express Japan’s national character in the Ueno Museum, and in that respect he did not succeed in what he set out to do, for his design encompassed a much wider region—the East or the Orient as an elastic, relative construct of the West’s opposite. While the Japanese administration approved the design for execution, the ambiguity of expression was undeniable, to the extent that even Conder himself openly doubted whether anyone besides himself found it legible. What the Saracenic represented as a style in the mid- to late nineteenth century was something
that was distinctly separate from the Greco-Roman tradition, although Conder’s peers building in British India had manipulated it as a non-European style under European control. In choosing to participate in the use of this established style, Conder forfeited a major opportunity to innovate by incorporating his unique, firsthand knowledge of Japanese architecture, structural and ornamental, as the means to signifying difference from the West.

Conclusion

In 1893, the World’s Congress of Architects invited Conder to give a paper on the architecture of Japan. Speaking as an authority on—rather than a representative of—this nation, he had the following to say about the difficult search for a modern national style:

The desire to perpetuate national characteristics of style in modern works is a most laudable one; it is one which has been pursued with some success in India; and is one which must inspire every art-architect on commencing work in a strange country. It is therefore a pity to see the failure of attempts in this direction unfairly ascribed to fickleness on the part of the employers, as was done in the English periodical, the Builder, of April 15, 1893. To design a civil building in masonry having all the characteristics of the classical styles of Europe, and to crown it with fantastic lanterns, roofs and turrets of timber in imitation of portions Japanese religious constructions, is not adapting the national style to modern purposes—it is to create a bizarre and hybrid ensemble as revolting to Japanese taste and common sense as it is wanting in the permanent and fire-resisting qualities which are the first conditions of the programme imposed.74

The “failed” design discussed in the Builder was the proposal by Ende and Böckmann for the Law Courts in Tokyo.75 Conder dispensed this thinly veiled invective against the German firm, no doubt out of a mixture of personal frustration and professional conviction. The gargantuan commission for a suite of bureaucratic offices just south of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo had pitted Conder unsuccessfully against Ende and Böckmann, who offered several designs that vigorously incorporated “fantastic lanterns, roofs, and turrets” as allusions to Japan’s architectural lineage (see Figure 12). The fantastic elements in question, such as the bow-shaped gable (karahafu) and plover gable (chidarchafu), were recognized forms from Japanese religious architecture, and were arguably more legible as symbols for Japan than the Islamic arches and domes that Conder implemented in his museum design.76 Evidently, for the nation’s public architecture, the English architect had definite ideas as to what not to do, but provided little direction for what to do. His own students, the first generation of Japanese architects and the leading state architects responsible for the countenance of modern Japanese architecture, had no strong stylistic legacy to follow and each went in his own direction for the answer.77

Less than a decade after the completion of the Ueno Museum, when from 1886 to 1889 the institution was undergoing reorganization as the Imperial Museum, Conder’s building was criticized for several deficiencies specific to exhibition, namely inadequate natural lighting, insufficient display areas in the individual rooms, and ambiguous spatial differentiation for the various departments.78 The South Kensington model as a whole was deemed passe in the eyes of the new Imperial Museum administration,79 which also decried the commingling of art, industry, and science under one roof.80 The two museum structures sited in the cities of Nara and Kyoto that they commissioned as part of the reorganization were now catering exclusively to art and history. Stylistically and organizationally, the new buildings designed by Katayama Tōkuma, a student of Conder, did little to acknowledge their predecessor (Figures 18, 19). Rather than make use of the Victorian Gothic style that he learned under Conder, Katayama preferred Neoclassicism, the shared language of “cosmopolitan modernity”81 among world powers and aspirants at the end of the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, the precedent of monumentality—of scale and style—that the Ueno Museum established, as national architecture and as museum architecture, is undeniable. As the first project by Conder, the single most influential practitioner and instructor of architecture in Meiji Japan, it served as the archetype for institutional architecture for the new era and exerted considerable influence on the developing public face of the government. After its debut at the Ueno Museum, the Saracenic style was not explicitly used for a project of equal national stature, not even by Conder,82 although fragmentary traces were detectable in two later exhibition buildings by other architects, for the Third National Industrial Exhibition (1890; Figure 20), which at one point stood adjacent to the Ueno Museum, and the Prefectural Exhibition Hall for Nara Products (1900–2; Figure 21), located immediately east of the Nara Imperial Museum.

In addition, the idea of expressing the nation’s identity through ornamental forms and fragments was passed on to ensuing public projects. Even after the physical toppling of masonry structures in the strong earthquakes of 1891 and 1923, the tendency was to follow Conder’s example of asserting meaning through façade treatment without alter-
ing the overall formal and structural integrity conferred by European building technology. For the most part, the architectural gesticulation of cultural difference and national identity operated at the surface and ornamental level, not the structural or programmatic ones.

Rather than account for Conder’s “pseudo-Saracenic” design as the fanciful concoction of a single architect, I have attempted to situate the Ueno Museum within the matrix of professional practices and cultural attitudes that accompanied the negotiation of a new architecture in Japan, one that treaded the line between importation and imposition. As a newly arrived foreign expert, Conder was still designing within his own tradition rather than seeking continuity or compatibility with indigenous conditions and traditions. This is exactly what the Japanese government hired him to do. At the time of its completion in 1881, the Ueno Museum represented a high point of excitement in an age of acculturation and profound changes. It stood as a symbol of new Japan, one no longer saddled with the myopia and provincialism of the old shogunate regime and fully willing to enter the Western-centric world arena. Popular woodblock prints of the period readily and repeatedly took on the museum as subject matter, conveying the great delight that the visitors felt in the presence of the exotic grandeur of this building (Figure 22).
Figure 21 Sekino Tadashi, Prefectural Exhibition Hall for Nara Products (now Research Center for Buddhist Art), Nara, 1900–2, window detail

Figure 22 Utagawa Hiroshige III, The Fine Arts Museum and the Shōjō Fountains at the Second National Industrial Exposition in Ueno Park, 1881, woodblock print
As an institution, the Ueno Museum emblematized the type of cultural interchange that was driving notions of progress, civilization, and modernization in Japan in the first two decades of the Meiji period. The emphasis on the empirical and visual as the indices of difference between Japan and the nations of the West structured the fundamental need for a museum, a substantive repository for the nation's past, present, and future. It is fitting that the archetypal museum of Japan, the institution dedicated to the exhibition of the nation through its material goods, was the first commissioned project in the modern period to deliberately assume the challenge of national representation.

Notes
An early version of this paper was presented at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery, Washington, D.C., in April 2003 while I was in residence as the Itohelen Fellow. Insightful comments from the members of the Center helped me to refine the major points raised. I am grateful to Jonathan Reynolds, Carla Yanni, and Elizabeth Pergam, who were kind enough to read the earliest draft of this manuscript. I would also like to thank Nancy Stieber and the two anonymous readers for their critical questions and comments.

2. Only the first floor of the building was used for the 1881 exhibition. The interior of both floors of the building was not completely finished until the opening of the building as The Museum in 1882. See Onogi Shigekatsu, “Ueno Hakubutsukan no sekkei oyobi kensetsu jijo” (The circumstances surrounding the design and construction of the Ueno Museum), Nihon Kenchiku Gakkai ronbun hokokushibi (Transactions of the Architectural Institute of Japan), no. 179 (Jan. 1971), 87–94.
3. All members of the public, with the exception of “drunkards” and “insane persons,” were allowed into the museum. It was open year-round, with the exception of Mondays and twenty days in the winter (December 16 through January 4), for at least seven hours daily. The admission was three sen on weekdays, two sen on Saturdays, and five sen on Sundays (one sen being one-hundredth of a yen). Just under 175,000 people visited in the first year of the museum’s opening. TKHH, 1: 208–9.
4. Muramatsu Teijirō, “Ventures into Western Architecture,” in Yamada Chisaburo, ed., Dialogue in Art: Japan and the West (Tokyo and New York, 1976), 145. Other scholars such as Kirishiki Shinjiro and Yasuhara Morihiko overlook Conder’s attempt to link the Saracenic style with Japan and regard the former as one of the many European styles that the architect introduced to Japan.
5. Here I refer to Benedict Anderson’s definition of nation as “an imagined political community.”
6. The museum was popularly called the Ueno Museum (Ueno Hakubutsukan) or the New Building (Shikan) from the time of its inception to 1889, when it was renamed and reorganized as the Imperial Museum (Teikoku Hakubutsukan). In 1900, its name changed again to the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum (Tokyo Teishitsu Hakubutsukan). In 1923, the building was damaged in the Great Earthquake; its replacement, the current Main Building of the Tokyo National Museum designed by Watanabe Jin, was opened in 1938.
12. In addition to the Museum Bureau and the Exposition Bureau, the merger included a library (shosekikan) and a medicinal garden (yakuen).
13. TKHH, 1: 120.
15. For more on the architecture of Hayashi Tadahiro, see Fujimori Terunobu, Nihon no kindai kenboku (Modern Architecture of Japan), vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1993), 97–102.
16. For more on the architecture of the Centennial Exhibition, see Bruno Giberti, Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia (Lexington, Ky., 2002).
20. This was done primarily for cost-cutting reasons. TKHH, 1: 195.
26. Conder was of the school of thought that conflated the appearance of strength with the reality of strength in masonry building. At the time, an opposing view suggested that flexible material such as wood would be better at withstanding earthquakes. For more on this subject, see Gregory Clancy, “Foreign Knowledge, Art Nation/Earthquake Nation: Architecture, Seismology, the West, and Japan, 1876–1925” (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998).
27. For example, see R. Henry Brunton, “Constructive Art in Japan,” pts. 1 and 2, Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan 2 (22 Oct. 1873–15 July 1874), 64–86; 3 (13 Jan. 1875–30 June 1875), 20–30; and George Cawley, “Some Remarks on Constructions in Brick and Wood and Their Relative

28. Muramatsu Teijirō describes Conder as “the Westerner who exerted the most influence on Japanese architecture during the first half of the [19th] century.” Muramatsu, “Ventures into Western Architecture,” 128 (see n. 4). Suzuki Hiroyuki, Fujimori Terunobu, and Kawaiagishi Yoshiyuki have all portrayed him in similar terms in their writings (see nn. 15, 29).


30. Following Josiah’s footsteps, younger brother Roger Thomas Conder also became an architect and won the Soane Medallion in 1881. He initially studied with Thomas Roger Smith in London, but relocated to the Argentinian Republic in 1889 to embark on his building career. In 1905, when he was elected a fellow of the R.I.B.A., he was still practicing in that country.


33. The Soane Medallion was instituted in 1838 in memory of Sir John Soane (1753–1837) as an annual design competition for rising young architects. As the 1876 winner, Conder received £50 in prize money for travel to the European continent, with the understanding that his sketches from the trip would be later exhibited at the R.I.B.A.


36. Josiah Conder, “A Lecture upon Architecture” (lecture given at the Imperial College of Engineering, Tokyo, Mar. 1878).

37. In Burges’s words: “It ought to be as disgraceful for an architect not to know the [human] figure, as it would be not to be able to design a piece of tracery.” William Burges, in Orby Shipley, ed., The Church and the World (N.p., 1867), 589.


39. The set of bound sketches known as the Josiah Conder Sketchbooks consists of four large albums and one small notebook. They have been kept in the architecture department of the University of Tokyo since 1966, when the architect’s daughter, Mrs. Helen Grut, gave them to the university. The sketchbooks themselves as well as the sketch segments in each album are in no apparent chronological or thematic order. Inscriptions, dates, and signatures accompany some segments, although most are undated and unsigned. Sketches by hands other than Conder’s also appear in the volumes; Conder’s Japanese painting teacher, Kawanabe Kyosai, is one of them. Of the dated sketches, the earliest are from October 1874 and the latest is from August 1905. In addition, there is a calendar design for the month of January 1920.

40. Kawai Kôzo, a graduate of the Imperial College of Engineering in 1882, recalls Fontanesi as the person who drew the original plan. Kawai Kôzo, “Meiji kenchiku zadankai” (A discussion of Meiji architecture), Kenchiku zasshi (Journal of Architecture) (Jan. 1933), 154. However, another source names Cappelletti as the person responsible. Meiji kôgôshi (History of Meiji industries), vol. 4, Kenchiku (Architecture) (Tokyo, 1930), 680. Cappelletti is the more likely candidate because he was trained as an architect, taught architectural drawing at the Technical School, and executed at least two buildings in Japan—the Yûshûkan arms and armor exhibition hall (1881) and the Army Staff Headquarters (1882). Fontanesi, by contrast, had no known training or expertise in architectural design.

41. For instance, see the description of the building in Kondoru hakase isakubû (Collection of the posthumous works of Dr. Josiah Conder, F.R.I.B.A.) (n.p., 1931).

42. For more on the Japanese designs of Ende and Böckmann, see Jonathan Reynolds, “Japan’s Imperial Diet Building: Debate over Construction of a National Identity,” Art Journal 55 (fall 1996), 39–41; for more on Wright’s Imperial Hotel, see Neil Levine, The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (Princeton, 1996), ch. 5.


7. Conder echoes this point in his 1878 lecture by stating that “the fine arts of painting and sculpture are the off-springs of architecture” (see n. 36).

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Watanabe, “Rokumeikan,” 26 (see n. 29).

10. The original name of the association was Zōka Gakkai; it was changed to Kenchiku Gakkai in 1897. The English name “Institute of Japanese Architects” was coined in 1906 and changed to today’s “Architectural Institute of Japan” in 1947.

11. Conder’s speech is transcribed in Kenchiku zasshi 34 (June 1920), 54–55.


15. Josiah Conder, “Notes on Japanese Architecture,” in Royal Institute of British Architects Sessional Papers, no. 9 (1877–78), 180–92. Thomas Roger Smith read the paper on Conder’s behalf at a meeting held on 4 March 1878.

16. For instance, Conder wrote in the opening of the paper: “Japanese architecture, until the employment of foreigners within the last few years, has been, with very few exceptions, entirely of wooden construction. In certain parts of the country, where stone lies hand to hand in boulders or is otherwise naturally exposed, there are a few instances of its use in the construction of the walls of small houses and simple temples.” In the same month, in a lecture to his students at the Imperial College of Engineering (see n. 36), he said, “It seems to me that there is little use of changes in building in your country, if the chief aim is not solidity and strength.”


18. These descriptive terms appear frequently throughout Conder’s paper “Notes on Japanese Architecture.”

19. Jonathan Reynolds confirms that “two of the four volumes of the second edition are still preserved in the Architecture Library at the University of Tokyo [the department of architecture is the successor to the Imperial College of Engineering],” in Teaching Architectural History in Japan: Building a Context for Contemporary Practice, JSAAH 61 (Dec. 2002), 311.

20. Conder’s syllabus was printed in the sessional calendar of the Imperial College of Engineering for the year 1877; repr. in Meiji bunka zenbaitō (Compendium of Meiji Culture), supp. vol. 3, Nikōken (Agriculture and Engineering) (Tokyo, 1974), 105–99.

21. Conder openly challenged other foreigners’ knowledge of Japanese architecture. His own papers read at the R.I.B.A. in the 1880s were in reaction to the popularity of Christopher Dresser’s Japan: Its Architecture, Art, and Art Manufactures (London, 1882) and Edward Morse’s Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings (New York, 1885).


24. Eeckhoudt, no. 172 (Feb. 1866), 119. In the same issue, the design was also referred to as “a kind of Orientalizing Pointed style” (244).


26. Burges did only one design for India (it was unexecuted), while Smith appears to have executed a number of institutional buildings there. The latter left behind two informative papers on British building in India: “On Buildings for European Occupation in Tropical Climates” and “Architectural Art in India,” Journal of the Society of Arts 21 (22 Nov. 1872–14 Nov. 1873), 278–86.

27. James Fergusson’s A History of Architecture in All Countries was organized under the headings “Ancient Architecture,” “Christian Architecture,” and “Pagan Architecture.” Banister Fletcher’s A History of Architecture was divided into sections called “Historical Styles” and “Non-Historical Styles.” R. Phene Spiers and Charles Barry, after Conder’s presentation “Notes on Japanese Architecture” at the R.I.B.A., concluded that “with regard to the architecture of Japan, there is no architecture, as we understand it.”


32. Hamase’s speech is transcribed in Kenchiku zasshi 34, 57–59 (see n. 51).

33. The ideology of Japan as the sole repository of the historic wealth of continental Asian culture was established as a major theme in Okakura, Ideals of the East (see n. 54).


36. Even if Conder insisted that structural compatibility be maintained—that is, incorporating only those forms originating from stone and not wooden construction—more probable options would have been to refer to the stonework in Buddhist or Chinese architecture, both of which he could also have read about in Fergusson’s book.

37. The work of the first class of graduates, Tatsuno Kingo, Katayama Tōkuma, and Sone Tatsuzō, reveals few stylistic intersections. One major reason might be that they embarked on distinctly different paths immediately after graduating from the Imperial College of Engineering. Tatsuno traveled to London to continue his architectural studies, Katayama entered the service of the Public Works Ministry, and Sone stayed on at the Imperial College to assist in teaching architecture. Tatsuno and Sone eventually opened their own firms, while Katayama remained a life-long state architect, becoming the preeminent designer to the imperial court. The fourth person in this class, Satachi Shichijirō, had an unfortunately short career; according to Suzuki Hiroyuki, after Satachi witnessed the deleterious effects of the Nōbi earthquake in 1891, he appeared to suffer overwhelming mental anxiety over the possibility of buildings collapsing and quit the profession.

38. TKHH, 1: 251–52.


40. The Imperial Museum administration attempted to do away with the natural products department from its new organization in 1889, but did not manage to transfer it to the Education Museum until 1925.


42. The Kaitakushi Exhibition Hall (1881) and the Rokumeikan (1883) were two buildings roughly contemporaneous in design and construction to the Ueno Museum that featured similar Islamic and Venetian Gothic detailing. Conder later used some Islamic elements in private architecture, but only in the interior decoration.

496 JSAH / 63:4, DECEMBER 2004
Illustration Credits
Figures 2, 3, 5 (top), 6, 8, 16. Tokyo National Museum
Figure 4. Illustrated London News, 24 May 1862
Figures 5 (bottom), 11. Drawings by Derrick Choi
Figure 7. The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition, vol. 3 (1876)
Figure 9. Building News, 21 Apr. 1876
Figures 10, 20. Architecture Department, University of Tokyo
Figure 12. Builder, 15 Apr. 1893

Figure 13. V&A Picture Library
Figure 14. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © 2004
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Figure 15. Sessional Papers of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 16 Dec. 1867
Figures 17–19, 21. Photographs by the author
Figure 22. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf Collection. Photograph © 2004 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston