

Non-Western Architecture and the Roles of the History Survey

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*Oh, East is East and West is West, and never
the twain shall meet*

*Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's
great Judgment Seat;*

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor
Breed, nor Birth,*

*When two strong men stand face to face, tho'
they come from the ends of the earth!*

Rudyard Kipling

Readers who know only the first line of Rudyard Kipling's famously misconstrued "The Ballad of East and West" might fear the worst for the prospects of a survey of global architectural history. Frequently overlooked, though, is the closing line of the refrain, in which Kipling suggests that problems created by differences in geography and culture indeed can be overcome.

In fact, many of the historical impediments to incorporating non-Western material in the architectural history survey no longer loom so large. First, in 2006, few architectural historians would deny that architecture outside the West deserves a place in architectural education. Postmodern cultural studies, area studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and other fields of inquiry have divested the canon of its clothing. In addition, although in the past many architectural historians felt uncomfortable roaming outside Western topics, many recent Ph.D. recipients specialize in non-Western fields. For instance, the three students

entering the doctoral program in architectural history at UC Berkeley in 1994 chose for their dissertation topics South Africa, the ancient Andes, and Japan. The growing pool of non-Western specialists has also created a deeper, broader, more detailed literature on non-Western architecture and urbanism.

At the same time, other issues render non-Western material problematic in the context of the conventional history survey. In fact, this paper will suggest that the framework of the traditional survey cannot accommodate non-Western architecture. In 1995, an art historian wrote, "The art history survey is at an impasse and may perhaps have reached the end of its own history. The paradigm is waning. I, for one, say, let it wane."¹ In architecture as well, the desire to create a global history survey may extinguish the survey as we know it. In its place, though, a new type of survey may emerge, one more capable of addressing several basic questions surrounding the role of architectural history.

First, how does non-Western architecture fit into the methods and goals of the history survey? I will suggest that non-Western architecture calls into question the basic assumptions of the survey; it disrupts the typical historical narrative in ways that demand a fundamental rethinking the survey's nature and goals.

Second, how do the potentials of a new survey complement the broader architectural curriculum? How can non-Western architecture further the integration of history with other architectural topics?

Finally, how can the history survey—often seen as a necessary but intellectually unrewarding teaching assignment—be more closely related to the research and teaching interests of the architectural history faculty? How can the inclusion of non-Western material encourage connections between faculty members in different areas?

Here I should point out that these issues are framed by the context of the architecture department at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) and by my training as an architectural historian of modern Japan. Other historians will surely see other opportunities in rethinking the survey, but the issues noted above should be relevant to many situations.

The History Survey and Non-Western Architecture

In 1995, the art historian Mark Miller Graham wrote, “Art history may be unusual, even unique, in the trust that it has placed in textbooks that are, by almost any definition, dreadful exemplars of art history.”² It is probably fair, though perhaps injudicious, to say that architectural history shares this predilection. Although classic architectural history texts such as Spiro Kostof’s *A History of Architecture* (New York: Oxford, 1985) and Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman’s *Architecture: From Prehistory to Post-modernism* (New York: Abrams, 1986) are exceptional books, they are not necessarily exemplary works of architectural history. For one, they either treat non-Western architecture as peripheral or they exclude it entirely. Perhaps more importantly, their narratives are removed both from recent historiographical trends and from the needs of architectural curricula. Moreover, these texts (although slightly updated in newer editions) are now as old as many of the students who use them.

Architectural history surveys that include non-Western material date as far back as 1721, when the Austrian architect J. B. Fischer von Erlach published a survey of world architecture that included Islamic and Asian buildings. In the nineteenth century, James Fergusson’s ubiquitous *A History of Architecture in All Countries* (1867) included the “Pagan Architecture” of India, China, and Central America along with the architecture of the West. In this century, there has been a burst of survey texts treating non-Western

architecture. At Cal Poly, we have used Kostof’s *A History of Architecture* for many years, but we now supplement it with Dora Crouch and June Johnson’s *Traditions in Architecture: Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania* (New York: Oxford, 2001). In terms of geography, at least, these texts between them offer a global history. Two one-volume world histories also have been published: *A World History of Architecture* by Marian Moffett, Michael Fazio, and Lawrence Wodehouse (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005) and *A Global History of Architecture* by Francis Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2007).³

Although the geographic scope of these new texts, especially the Ching book, far outstrips that of the classic textbooks, these global and non-Western texts remain problematic. There is of course the inescapable tradeoff between breadth and depth, since an increase in coverage without an increase in pages means less information on each topic. In addition, no single author or small group of authors can know all topics equally well, which often increases the probability of errors in fact and concept. For example, the passage on Japan’s Ise Jingu in *A Global History of Architecture* contains both trivial and significant mistakes, including the misspelling of a deity’s name, the erroneous claim that the sacred necklace of the imperial line is kept at the shrine, and questionable dating of the development of the shrine’s current form. Although the authors skillfully describe the forms and spaces of Ise Jingu and other Japanese sites, they show a more tenuous grasp of Japanese culture and history. Needless to say, this is not a fault of these authors in particular—everyone who teaches a history survey knows the “jack of all trades” conundrum.

Diligent editing can address the factual errors, but all of the global and non-Western survey texts bring up deeper questions. To begin with, the organization of these three recent texts questions the basic nature and goals of the history survey. A Western survey such as Trachtenberg and Hyman’s *Architecture: From Prehistory to Post-modernism* can present a chronological narrative; this is the implicit structure of most broad architectural history texts. The architecture of the non-West, of course, cannot be ordered through this kind of story; the non-West is defined as exterior to

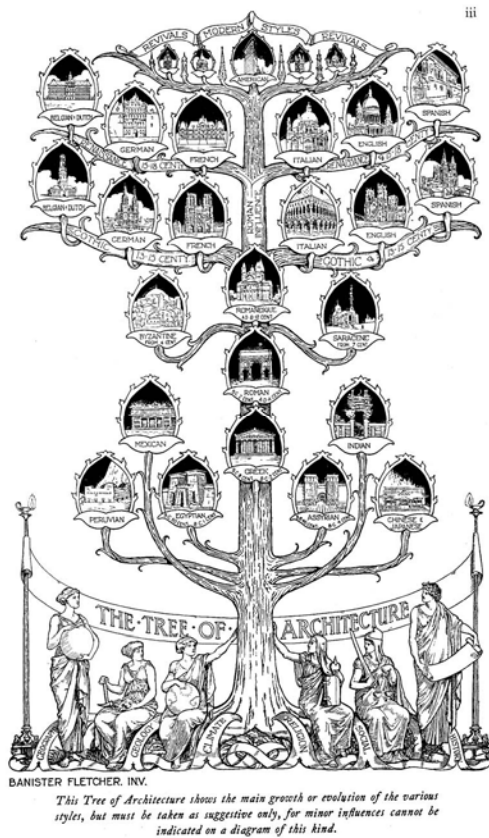


Fig. 1 Fletcher's Tree of Architecture

Traditions in Architecture between chapters from Kostof's *A History of Architecture*.

The jacket blurb for Crouch and Johnson's *Traditions in Architecture* states, "in contrast with traditional chronological surveys of architectural history, this volume is arranged thematically to show the basic commonalities of all human communities." The authors organize buildings under five categories: multiplicity and continuity in tradition; practical solutions; purposes of traditional architecture; planning and design; and cultural values. In other words, *Traditions in Architecture* is more of an introduction to the anthropology of architecture than a history of architecture. We have found that its particular structure and approach make it difficult to use alongside Kostof's *A History of Architecture*. The Crouch and Johnson book might serve better as a stand-alone survey of non-Western architecture, which some schools offer as a complement to a Western survey, but dividing the history of architecture in this way is inimical to the idea of a global architecture.

the West, and because it does not comprise a group of related cultures it requires multiple narratives, all tangential to the West. Banister Fletcher's hoary "Tree of Architecture" puts this in graphic form, showing non-Western architecture as irrelevant to the main stream of development (Figure 1).⁴

Moffett's *A World History of Architecture* demonstrates a common organizational strategy for adding non-Western material. It sandwiches non-Western topics, placing them between Western topics to which they bear little connection. Pre-Columbian architecture in the Americas resides between Gothic architecture and Renaissance architecture, while Asia finds itself dividing Greece and Rome. For convenience, the Cal Poly history survey has taken this approach to teaching non-Western sites, inserting sections from

The most recent attempt at a world survey, Ching's *A Global History of Architecture*, takes an alternative approach by substituting chronology for history. Each chapter bears a date (e.g. 400 BCE) for its title and comprises a number of relatively self-contained sections. Each chapter is thus a synchronic cross-section of global architecture and urbanism. This structure offers great convenience, as individual pieces can be read without losing context, but the text as a whole is more of an encyclopedia than a conventional history.

My point is not to criticize these recent texts as incompetent or useless; all of them are products of great effort and learning, and some contain sections of inspired prose. Rather, the difficulties inherent to these texts lie in the fundamental concept of the history survey. Whether seen as a linear narrative, a series of synchronic slices, or a collection of themes, the history survey as implied by survey textbooks cannot be both inclusive and coherent in the manner of a Western survey. As the architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer has asked, "In a postmodern world characterized by aesthetic relativism and cultural pluralism, the genre of the survey text has obviously become problematic. How can new survey texts eschew notions of trans-historical structure, inter-national hierarchies, and universal values for art and perfect beauty and still maintain coherence?"⁵ Indeed, perhaps letting go of the desire for the coherence of the linear narrative will prove useful when

	History (Arch 218)	218 Reading	Design (Arch 252)	Practice (Arch 242)
Existing week 16	Edo urbanism, Himeji Castle, Nijō Castle, Katsura Detached Villa, Daisen-in, Ryōanji, Taian	Crouch, <i>Traditions in Architecture</i> 120-24, 154-56, 226-31, 259-62, 266-70, 277-80.	Design Fundamentals (materiality, form, space, organization, light, construction, function)	methods, documentation
Proposed week 16	structural systems (kiwarijutsu), spatial systems (tatami, fusuma, shōji), materials	Coaldrake, <i>The Way of the Carpenter</i> 30-55; Nitschke, "Ma-Place, Space, Void"	Building Design	materials, methods, documentation, codes, specification, site planning

Table 1. Example of proposed coordination in week 16 of second year

revisiting the survey in the broader context of architectural education.

The History Survey and the Architectural Curriculum

Over the past several years, the faculty of the Cal Poly architecture department has begun to revise the curriculum in order to integrate architectural design, environmental control systems, and professional practice. History has remained aloof to this point, perhaps in part because the National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB) criteria regarding architectural history are so basic. They include only the understanding (to use the NAAB term) of Western traditions, Non-Western traditions, and national and regional traditions. NAAB also requires that students possess the ability to use historical precedents. These are the minimum standards, of course, and say little of the potential role of architectural history in the curriculum as a whole. However, if we redefine architectural history as an inclusive, flexible field rather than an autonomous, linear narrative, the history survey takes on richer potentials.

For example, instructors teaching second-year practice (Cal Poly's term for building technology) have proposed that the introduction of issues of materials, methods, documentation, codes, and specifications be coordinated with projects in the design studios. In this model, the history survey courses, currently placed in the third year of the

flowchart, would move to second year to allow the introduction of historical materials, methods, documentation, and regulations. Although we would continue to teach the survey in a roughly chronological sequence, once we admit the possibility of deviating from linear narratives we can more easily choose our history topics to reinforce the issues seen as important in the curriculum as a whole. The

course would shift from a survey of architectural history to a survey of historical architecture; that is, the meta-narrative of "architectural history" would be replaced by examinations of certain aspects of a set of historical buildings. To some extent, the demands for internal consistency in the linear narrative would be replaced by the exigencies of the larger architectural curriculum.

Table 1 suggests how one history lecture, on early modern Japan (1600-1868), can suggest relationships among design, practice, and the survey lecture. In the existing framework, there is no articulation between history and the other areas, and the relationships between practice and design are tenuous.

In the proposal for the new history survey, the lecture topics become themes rather than buildings or periods, although for convenience the survey will still present material in a loose chronological order. The readings come from specialized texts rather than from a general survey, allowing more thorough treatments of particular themes. The buildings introduced in the Japan lecture become case studies for

exploring questions of materials, structure and space, topics fundamental to building design in second-year design studio. Documents such as drawings illustrating *kiwarijutsu*, a method of determining dimensions based on the size of main structural members and on the module of the *tatami*, can reinforce material on methods and documentation presented in the practice classes. Topics such as site planning and even codes can be addressed through the Japanese buildings—for instance, from the seventeenth century the Japanese government strictly regulated architectural expression in urban buildings. By offering unfamiliar buildings that treat issues familiar from other classes, the survey lecture can both reinforce and question material from other classes. For instance, the differences between modern American codes and pre-modern Japanese sumptuary laws reveal the range of objectives and methods within the broad concept of architectural codes. Given this knowledge of basic historical Japanese spatial and structural systems, students in design studio or practice courses can now grapple with documents and concepts drawn from more specialized material. This preparation allows the architectural historian to work with the design and practice faculty to introduce material more closely related to the historian's own research and teaching interests.

The History Survey and Faculty Development

One obvious objection to the integrated model suggested above is that architectural history, which is often marginalized in professional departments, will be co-opted by other fields, causing the loss of autonomy for the historians. In fact, though, all courses—in the mythical ideal department, at least—should be developed to guarantee scholarly freedom for the instructor on one hand and curricular effectiveness on the other. By relating history more closely to broader pedagogical goals, the new survey may in fact offer the possibility of bringing into the classroom more specialized history topics—perhaps drawn from the historian's particular interests. The sites for teaching architectural history may expand to the practice and design classes.

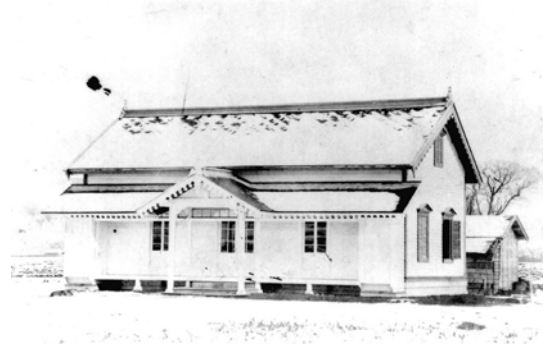


Fig. 2 Chokusôtei in Sapporo (1873)

For many historians, the history survey is both challenging and stultifying: the former because of the range of material, and the latter because of the superficiality of conventional survey treatments. Only rarely can the instructor use the survey to pursue her own research interests. However, if history is integrated with other fields, greater opportunities arise for creative uses of history and for collaborative work among faculty members.

For example, as an architectural historian I research the development of new types of residential architecture in modern Japan. One of the major themes of my work is the development of modern social, spatial, and technical systems in nineteenth-century Japan. For instance, in Sapporo, an early center for architectural modernization, the government hired Japanese carpenters to build Western-style houses for Japanese officials (Figure 2). These 1870s houses combined conventional Japanese construction and structure with novel concepts, elements, and technology imported from the United States and Europe. The results were buildings comprising hybrid structure and spaces.

These buildings are too obscure to appear in a conventional history survey; none of the buildings I examine are treated in standard textbooks, nor have I used them in my own survey lectures. However, topics in the survey lecture on Japan can serve as background or context for the changes made by the Sapporo builders. For example, these builders relied in part on the techniques and concepts of conventional Japanese nineteenth-century carpentry. These techniques in turn relate to historical topics such as *kiwarijutsu* and framing. With knowledge of basic historical Japanese spatial and structural systems,

students in design studio or practice courses can grapple with documents and concepts drawn from these 1870s hybrid houses.

They will see, for instance, that although the exterior of one of these houses, the Chokusôtei, looks American, the structure appears to be composed of square-section columns typical to conventional nineteenth-century Japanese

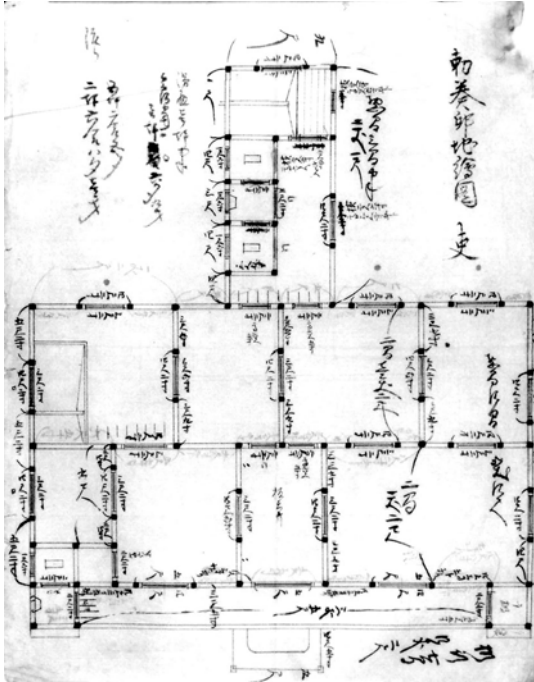


Fig 3. Plan of Chokusôtei showing framing

framing (Figure 3). A comparison of this framing with American Type V construction will show that lumber of similar dimensions may be used in for different structural systems for different spatial and formal effects. In this case the historian can offer information to explain the conditions of the 1870s buildings, just as the design and practice instructors can explicate the modern American context. The learning objectives of the practice, history, and design courses can overlap, providing the reinforcement and reiteration necessary to effective learning. For students, this process will further the synthesis of material learned in different contexts.

Pre-Modern as the Next Non-Western?

Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West" ultimately suggests less that the barrier between East and West can be eradicated than that it can be rendered irrelevant under particular circumstances. Indeed, the poem dates from 1889, the era of Banister Fletcher's tree. In fact, though, more than a century later the dichotomy of East and West seems almost quaint. The Japanese architect Arata Isozaki has written, "It should be stressed that despite being Japanese ourselves, today we see Japan with the eyes of a foreigner . . . having gone beyond the process of modernization, we see Japan from a viewpoint similar to that of Westerners."⁶ If this is true, the conventional history survey may have to address another schism, this time between pre-modern and modern. Needless to say, the non-Western and the pre-modern too often are conflated, as suggested by the subtitle of Crouch and Johnson's *Traditions in Architecture: Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania*. However, the issues are different, and probing the rift between pre-modern and modern may well further disrupt the future of the conventional history survey.

Endnotes

¹ Mark Miller Graham, "The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey," *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 34

² *Ibid.*, 33.

³ *A World History of Architecture* appears in paperback as *Buildings across Time: An Introduction to World Architecture. A Global History of Architecture* bears the copyright date 2007 but is available as of September 2006.

⁴ Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 16th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), iii. The original diagram dates to the first edition of 1896.

⁵ Mitchell Schwarzer, "Origins of the Art History Survey Text," *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 28.

⁶ Arata Isozaki, *The Island Nation Aesthetic* (London: Academy, 1996), 8.