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Author(s): BRET WALLACH

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EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA†

BRET WALLACH

ABSTRACT. In this article I draw attention to the galaxy of European buildings built over the last five centuries in Asia. I show how quickly and accurately European styles of the day were adopted in Asia, whether that style was Renaissance, Neoclassical, Gothic, Idiosyncratic Revivalist, or Modern. I argue that recent attention in Asia to architectural and urban preservation is itself of European origin. Although I suggest in conclusion that this architectural galaxy is part of an overwhelmingly one-sided process of globalization, my primary focus remains on the buildings themselves as the residue of one culture diffusing across distant domains. *Keywords: Asia, colonial architecture, cultural diffusion, European architectural styles, globalization.*

In the spring of 1980, shortly after arriving in India for the first time, I went to a lecture in Hyderabad by Mildred Archer, at that time a fine-arts curator at the India Office Library. She mentioned in passing that Hyderabad's former British Residency was one of the most noteworthy examples of Georgian architecture in India. I had never heard of the building, which then, as now, was hidden within the secure perimeter of a women's college, but I arranged to take a look at it. Figure 1 shows the building as I first saw it. I was impressed, as the builders presumably would have wanted. We know that at least one early Resident wanted the building to impress visitors because in 1811 the high and mighty twenty-seven-year-old Henry Russell, newly appointed as Resident, wrote that Indians could "judge of power and authority by no other standard than the external marks of it" (quoted in Davies 1985, 96). What struck me most, however, was the building's sense of insecurity and sentimental mortality. The insecurity came from a corner of the building where a veranda was protected by massive iron bars, installed perhaps after the building came under attack in 1857. Mortality came from behind the building, where a small cemetery was filled with disintegrating British tombstones. India has so many. Sentimentality came from a tiny memorial set into the front of the building. It bore the name of the daughter of the last Resident, the date 1947, and the words: "My beloved Fifi, whose tail still wags in my heart."

† Additional information on all of the buildings discussed in this article is available at my Web site, [www.greatmirror.com].

DR. WALLACH is a professor of geography at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73019; [bwallach@ou.edu].

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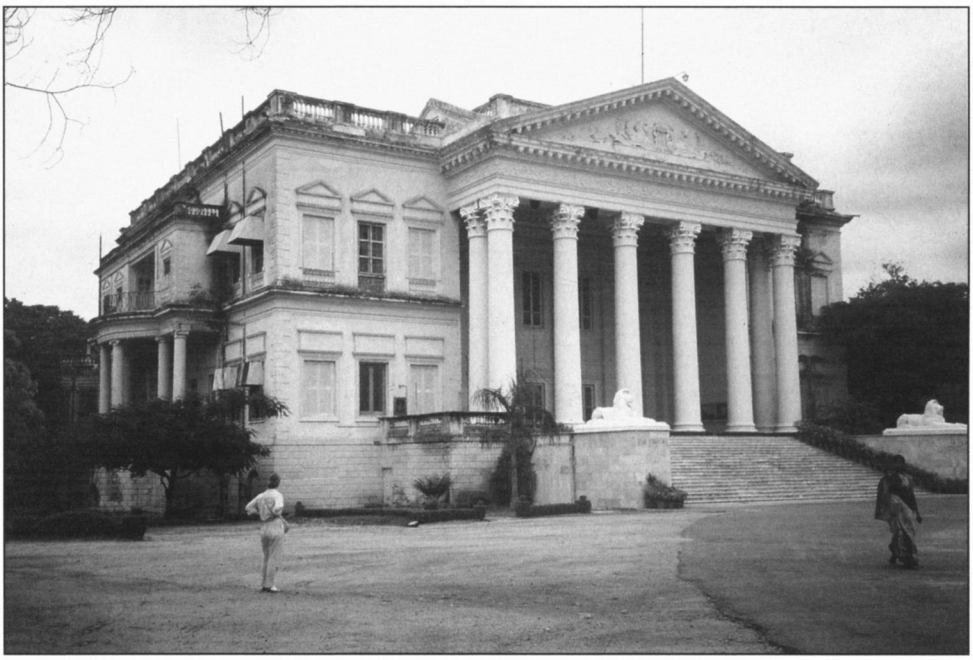


FIG. 1—The Residency, Hyderabad, India, 1803–1806. (Photograph by the author, 1980)

What I did not appreciate at the time was that the Residency was a star in a galaxy of colonial structures. It wasn't that I denied that fact; I simply was unaware of it. Gradually, and without any plan or intention, however, I began to learn more. A few months after visiting the Residency, I saw—but only from the outside—Calcutta's Government House, which had been the model for the Hyderabad Residency though built on a still grander scale. Commissioned by the duke of Wellington's older brother, Calcutta's Government House served for a century as the home-away-from-home for the East India Company's governors-general and, after 1857, India's viceroys. By 1980 it had become the official residence of the governor of West Bengal.

Raj Bhavan, as it was now called, had a grand entrance with six great columns. So did the Residency. Both buildings had a great flight of stairs, and above the columns both had pediments displaying the arms of the East India Company. Unlike the Residency, Government House had four arms reaching out from the central block. Those arms, like the central block, had been closely copied from Kedleston, a Derbyshire mansion that happened to be the home of George Curzon. Arriving as viceroy in 1899, in other words, Curzon immediately knew his way around the building even in the dark, although the Government House verandas would have been unfamiliar and there were some other modifications.

Meanwhile, a Hyderabad nobleman had built a hilltop palace a few miles from the Residency. Falaknuma, "the mirror of the sky," adopted the Kedleston plan of block and arms, although its pediment was—and is—crowned by a star and cres-

cent. The palace soon became the property of the ruling prince of Hyderabad, but by 1980 that state no longer existed, and the high iron gates were shut tight. I climbed a wall and had a good look at the building, although voices—caretakers?—soon scared me away from the open doors. Curzon had not scurried about when he visited Falaknuma. I wonder now, when Falaknuma has become a Taj hotel, if on his arrival in 1902 he was again reminded of Kedleston.

Neoclassical Asia

One of the fundamental characteristics of this galaxy is that it mirrored the architectural tastes of Europe both promptly and with great fidelity. The Bombay Town Hall of 1833 (Figure 2), which was built to house as well the Asiatic Society library and museum, has been judged by one authority as "the finest neo-classical building in India" (Davies 1989, 445). Another admires its "exceptional Neo-Classical *gravitas*" and considers it "hardly inferior to many of the works of the masters of French Neo-Classicism" (Tadgell 1990, 283; italics in the original). Surely this is exaggerated: the building is tiny compared with Claude Perrault's facade on the Louvre. (A stronger contender might be Bangalore's huge Karnataka High Court, originally the Public Offices Building.) Granted, the fluted columns of the Bombay Town Hall, imported from Britain as ballast, were considered so overwhelming that the original plan, by the otherwise unknown Thomas Cowper of the Bombay Engineers, was modified. Instead of pairing the columns, as they are paired on the Louvre, they were arrayed in a simple line. The leftovers were used on the nearby Christ Church.

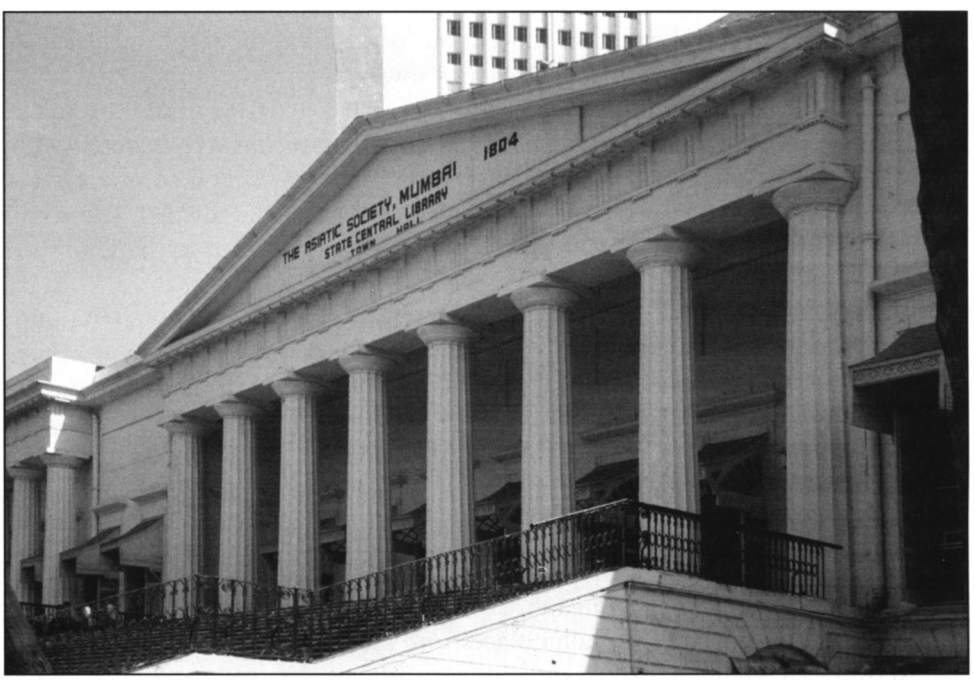


Fig. 2—Town Hall, Mumbai, India, 1833. (Photograph by the author)

Greek-temple look-alikes were soon scattered far beyond India. The Dutch employed the form strictly, even grimly, in Batavia's Hall of Justice (Figure 3). The French adopted it for the Hue National School, attended by both Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap. So did the Americans after their acquisition of the Philippines. Fresh from three years at the École des Beaux Arts and the New York office of John Galen Howard, William E. Parsons arrived in Manila in 1905. He had been hired at the suggestion of Daniel Burnham, and he proceeded to design a set of public buildings closely modeled on those of Washington, D.C. One critic dismisses them as "grandiose," although he has much good to say about Parsons's smaller projects (Hines 1973). And let us not overlook the great assemblage of classical buildings facing the Shanghai Bund. Rangoon's Sparks Road, now Pansodan Street, is not far behind.

Gothic Asia

Devoted as they were to classical forms, the patrons of nineteenth-century European architecture were equally wed to Gothic architecture, and here again Asia served as a mirror. Mumbai in particular remains not only India's but the world's Gothic museum. William Wurster and Catherine Bauer sensed this in the 1950s, when they called the city "the most thoroughly Victorian metropolis extent" (1959, 38). A later author calls Mumbai's collection of Gothic buildings "unrivalled in the world" (London 2002, 37). Still another, comparing Bombay with postwar London, calls Bombay "India's present and Britain's past" (Tindall 1982, 210).

Fresh from designing the jewel box of the Albert Memorial and the immensity of the Midland Grand Hotel at St. Pancras Station, George Gilbert Scott designed Bombay University's library and iconic clock tower (Figure 4). Philip Davies considered it "one of Scott's finest and least-known works" (1985, 164), but Scott makes no mention of it in his autobiography, *Personal and Professional Recollections* ([1879] 1977). Possibly he completed the manuscript before completing the tower's plans, but it could also be that he did not consider a project in India worth recording. Certainly Scott never visited India, which was far less important to the English in England than it was to the English on the spot.

Again the style spread. Figure 5 shows the High Court in Cuttack, a building ignored in the literature but significant, I think, because it is such a direct copy of Calcutta's much-better-known High Court. That building itself is a near copy of the Cloth Hall of Ypres, although both in Cuttack and Kolkata the central tower was reduced for fear that the ground was too soft to support the weight of the massive original.

All of the buildings I have mentioned to this point were secular, but the Gothic style was almost inevitably chosen for the cathedrals that in the 1870s and 1880s alone were built in Lahore, Singapore, Saigon, and Canton. Far less important churches were built in many smaller places, and many of those churches were also very substantial. Figure 6, for example, shows the Coles Centennial Telugu Baptist Church, which has a tower fit for Rapunzel yet stands in a town, Kurnool, that had

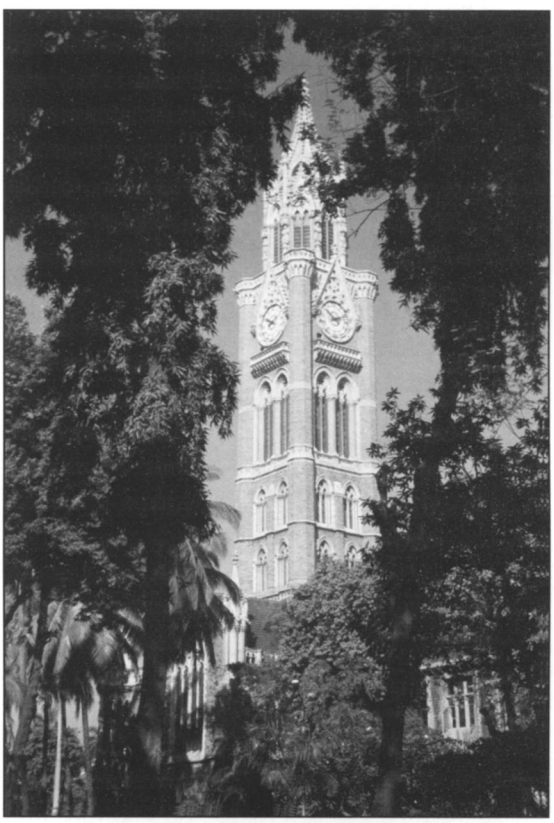


FIG. 3 (*above*)—Hall of Justice, Batavia (Jakarta), Indonesia, 1870. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 4 (*right*)—Rajabai Tower, University of Bombay Library, Mumbai, India, 1878. (Photograph by the author)

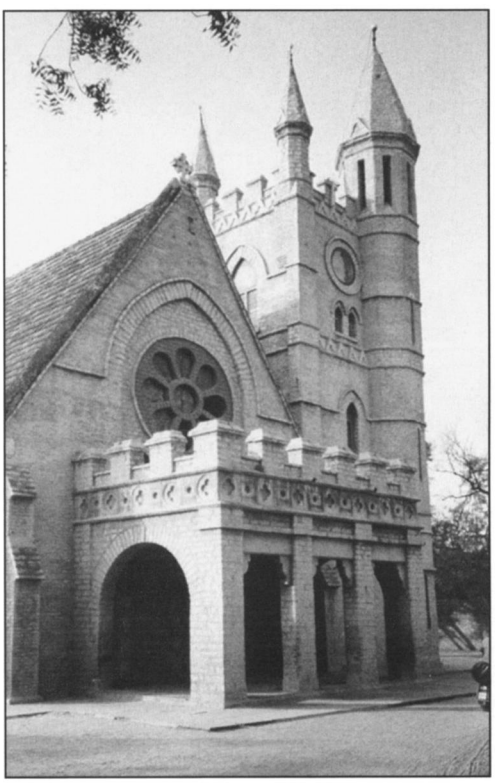


FIG. 5 (*above*)—High Court, Cuttack, India, ca. 1916. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 6 (*left*)—Coles Centennial Telugu Baptist Church, Kurnool, India, 1919. (Photograph by the author)

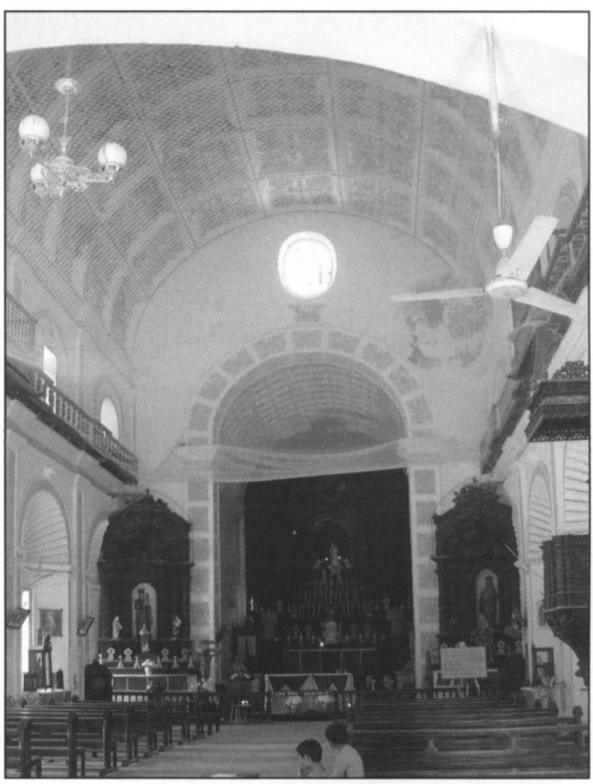


FIG. 7 (*above*)—Our Lady of Divine Providence Church, Goa, India, 1661. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 8 (*right*)—St. Paul's Church, Diu, India, seventeenth century. (Photograph by the author)

fewer than 30,000 residents at the time the church was built. The church exists because an American missionary, recruited while a student at Colgate University, spent forty years in Kurnool. While there, he found a donor in J. Ackerman Coles, a New York City physician whose own father had been a biblical scholar (Stanton 1950, 99). Coles gave $20,000 for the church as a memorial to his parents.

Renaissance Roots

One might well argue, and I would entirely agree, that this mirroring of Europe in Asia was nothing new and that it had been going on since the arrival centuries earlier of the Portuguese. The style of that day was the style of the Renaissance, and the Portuguese put it to work. A good example is Our Lady of Divine Providence (Figure 7), completed in Goa in 1661. With its giant-order columns and pilasters between corner towers, it combines the facade of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, as built, with Donato Bramante's earlier plan for the church. In cynical moments it occurs to me that the biggest difference between the church in Goa and the one in Rome is that visitors to the Goa church do not have to wait in line and pass through a security check.

Jesuits, meanwhile, built many churches in Portuguese Asia on a plan derived from Rome's Gesú Church, where the preaching space was maximized by widening the nave and eliminating the aisles. Bom Jesu in Goa is a good example; so is the smaller St. Paul's in Diu, whose interior is shown in Figure 8. And of course there are the Portuguese fortresses, which are built like a chain around the Indian Ocean from Mozambique Island on the west to Diu, Goa, and Malacca on the east, with an extension in Macao. Some of the fortress walls survive, along with ornamented gateways faithful to the inspiring form of the Roman triumphal arch.

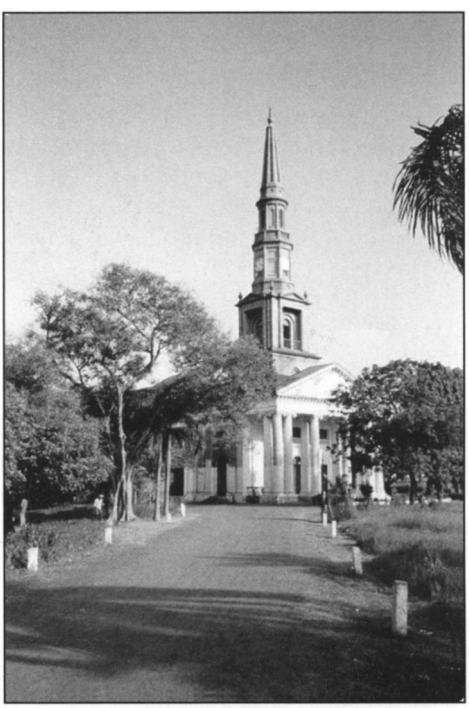


Fig. 9—St. Andrew's Church, Chennai, India, 1821. (Photograph by the author)

Idiosyncratic Revivalism

Asia mirrored later and more original European styles, too. How many visitors to Chennai today happen upon St. Andrew's (Figure 9) and see, as I failed to see, that its facade is a near copy of London's St. Martin-in-the-Fields? The London church, which appears from the front to be a Greek temple sprouting a slightly setback steeple, had been devised by James Gibbs and was subse-

quently emulated very widely, not least in the United States, where it appears at St. Paul's Chapel, the only colonial church surviving in Manhattan. It also appears at St. Andrew's in Bombay (1815), St. John's in Meerut (1815), St. George's in Madras (1816), and farther east, at St. George's on Penang (1818). I wonder if the women of those parishes wore clothing that was as *au courant* as their church.

Chafing at the stylistic straitjacket of a world in which architects were so often confined to classical or Gothic forms, the very successful Norman Shaw cried in 1882, "Old work is *real* and . . . ours is not real, but only like real" (Watkin 2000, 474; italics in the original). His response was another idiosyncratic form, known today as Queen Anne. It has little to do with Queen Anne, who died more than a century before Shaw's birth, but Shaw did mine the past. Selecting carved brick, ornamental gables, and white woodwork, he managed to create something new, even if it looked old. The style is perhaps most congenially demonstrated in the University of Cambridge's Newnham College, but the best-known example in England is the Norman Shaw Buildings, originally New Scotland Yard. The first of the two near twins was completed in 1890. Strikingly, Kolkata's Royal Insurance Buildings (Figure 10) is a near copy and was completed before the second Scotland Yard building was finished in 1906.

Much as Shaw reworked European traditions to develop a new form in the Queen Anne, so European architects reworked Asia's indigenous styles, most famously in the Indo-Saracenic style displayed by Bombay's Municipal Corporation Building. Other examples abound. Among them, the Lahore Museum has the distinction of having been designed by an Indian, Bhai Ram Singh, whose remarkable but little-known rise from a family of carpenters has been traced in a recent monograph (Vandal and Vandal 2006). The style spread eastward, too, prominently to Kuala Lumpur and its public buildings, especially the railway station.

FIG. 10—Royal Insurance Buildings, Kolkata, India, 1902. (Photograph by the author)

Figure 11 shows an unroofed stairway deep within the huge Madras High Court, completed in 1892. Davies calls this building the culmination of the Indo-Saracenic style (1985, 198), but this does not mean that the style has been universally praised. One critic calls it "no more than a superficial appliqué of Indian motifs on otherwise conventional European buildings" (Evenson

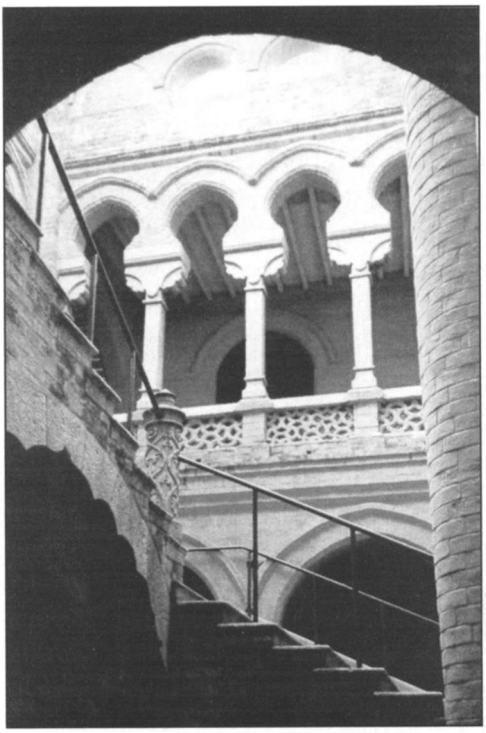
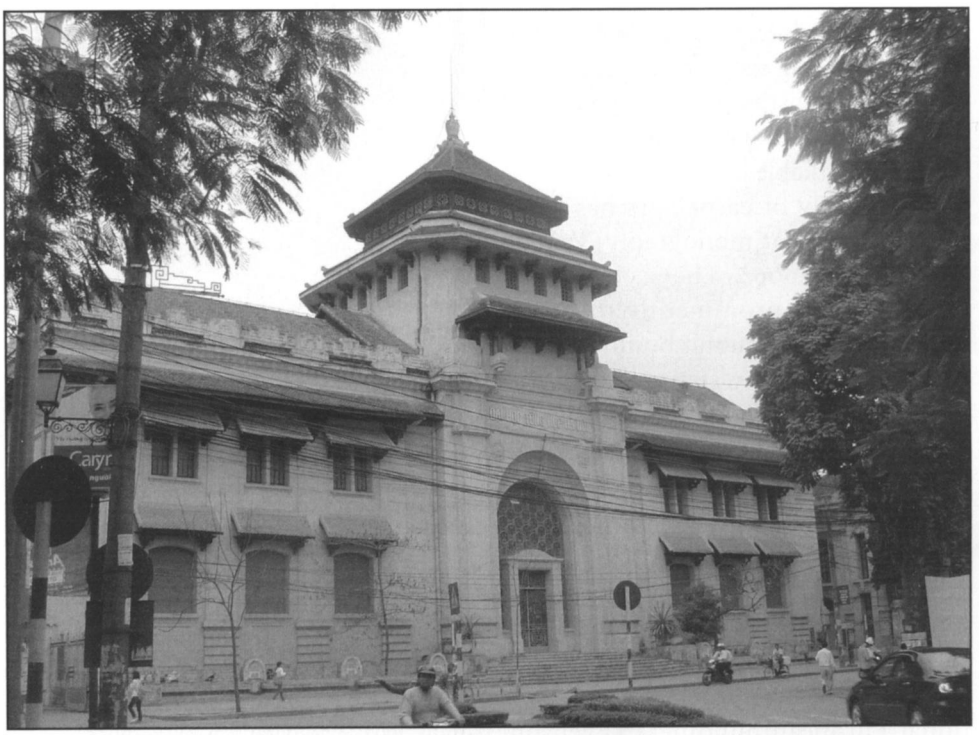


FIG. 11 (*left*)—Madras High Court, Chennai, India, 1892. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 12 (*below*)—University of Indochina (Vietnam National University), Hanoi, Vietnam, 1926. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 13 (*facing page, top*)—West Hall, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia, 1920. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 14 (*facing page, bottom*)—Interior of West Hall, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia, 1920. (Photograph by the author)



1959, 93). Another mocks the Empress Victoria Memorial Hall, also in Madras, as a "flagrant late Mughal Revival" (Tadgell 1990, 328). And that is not the worst. The grand buildings designed by Edwin Lutyens for New Delhi are trimmed at the roof corners with empty stone parasols. Although he dutifully installed them, Lutyens called them "stupid, useless things" (quoted in Wolwahsen 2002, 59). In a still broader attack he wrote, "I do not believe there is any real Indian architecture" (quoted in Evenson 1959, 93).

Perhaps the Indo-Saracenic style was intended to strengthen British rule by adopting the outward forms of India's earlier rulers. Arguably, the French tried a comparable tactic. Ernest Hébrard, best known for his work planning the reconstruction of Thessalonika after a fire in 1917, went on to serve as head of the Indochina Architecture and Town Planning Service from 1923 to 1931. Figure 12 shows the main building he designed for Hanoi's University of Indochina, now the Vietnam National University; other examples of his work include the Musée de l'École Française de Extrême-Orient (now the Louis Finot Museum) and the Ministry of Finance. One historian writes that in these buildings Hébrard "superimposed a pastiche of exotic details on a Beaux-Arts plan." She continues that, consistent with his instructions from Albert Sarraut, the colonial minister at the time, Hébrard sought to build "artificial expressions of mutual engagement and benefits." Put more simply, the idea was to buy political support from the Vietnamese by making "architectural concessions" (Wright 1987, 307–308). A much more sympathetic account instead calls Hébrard an architect of "*l'interculturalité*" who was inspired to create "*une nouvelle synthèse*," a "*régionalism critique*" (Yiakoumis 2001, 166–173).

An even more striking example of a European architect working in an indigenous style can be seen at Bandung, in the highlands of Java, where the West Hall of the Bandung Institute of Technology looks from the outside like a traditional Sumatran longhouse (Figure 13). Inside, the building is very different, its floor space unencumbered with columns and its massive roof supported instead by incongruously light parabolic arches of laminated wood (Figure 14). The building was the work of the Java-born-but-Amsterdam-trained Henrí Maclaine Pont. Combining modern engineering with traditional forms, the hall was very nearly the thirty-six-year-old Pont's last commission. I find it hard to believe that he designed it as an experiment in political manipulation, because for the remaining forty-three years of his life Pont devoted himself to Javanese archaeology. Some may call this expiation, but I call it fascination.

Modern Architecture

Two or three miles from the Institute of Technology is yet another architectural mirror, this time reflecting a style that appeared in Paris in 1925 and is now commonly called Art Deco. The building I have in mind, Villa Isola (Figure 15), is now part of a college campus but was built as the private house of a newspaper magnate. When new, it stood surrounded by rice paddies; hence the name "Island House." Despite its massive appearance, it is actually a stone-clad-but-steel-framed

building, the work of Wolff Schoemaker, another Java-born Dutch architect who enjoyed a more extensive practice than did Pont. Schoemaker also earned a truly remarkable honor. The young Sukarno had studied under him at the Institute of Technology. Many years later, after he had become the first president of Indonesia, Sukarno said: "Professor Wolff Schoemaker was a great man. For him there was no difference between whites and non-whites. For him there were no Dutch or Indonesians. No free men or slaves. All that mattered for him was what a person could do" (quoted in van Dullemen 2009, 159).

The Villa Isola is the most spectacular and best known Art Deco building in Indonesia, but the style was briefly popular elsewhere in Asia. Good examples include the lineups of apartment buildings on Mumbai's Marine Drive and along the west side of the city's Oval Maidan; another collection survives in Hanoi's Bay Mau neighborhood.

Deco was only one branch of modern architecture, however, and in the work of Le Corbusier it had a sibling of greater longevity. It arrived in Asia when Jawaharlal Nehru commissioned a capital for the newly created Punjab State. The result was Chandigarh (Figure 16), where Nehru anticipated "a new city of free India, totally fresh and wholly responsive to the aspirations of the future generations of this great country" (quoted in Evenson 1966, 6).

Nehru remained enthusiastic as the city took shape. "The world's architects," he said, "come to see what is going on in Chandigarh" (quoted in *Time* 1958). Still, the city has not worn well, although it retains enough mystique that its public buildings are reportedly being mined by dealers selling its furniture and fittings into the international art market" (Gentleman 2008). Other modernist icons meanwhile arrived in India, not least Edward Durell Stone's U.S. embassy, dedicated in 1958. (Geographers may recall that Stone also designed not only the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., but also the National Geographic Society's headquarters there.)

Since the 1950s, of course, Asia has become not only the equal of Europe in the display of high-rise buildings but its clear superior. What began as European buildings for Europeans in Asia has become European buildings for Asians in Asia. Yes, a case can be made that modern architecture is no longer European at all and that it long ago became, as it claimed to be, international, but whether in Dubai or Kuala Lumpur or Shanghai the proudest towers are still designed by foreigners. For people as proud as Asians and as sensitive to colonial wounds, this continuing reliance on outsiders is astonishing, as though the only difference between the architecture of the colonial era and the architecture of today is that today, unlike Scott and the University of Bombay's Rajabai Tower, architects at least fly in to inspect a site before the steel begins rising.

Architectural Preservation

The belated preservation of a few Singapore shophouses, shown in Figure 17, brings us to an ironic sequel. The battles between developers and preservers are as intense

FIG. 15 (*above*)—Villa Isola, Bandung, Indonesia, 1933. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 16 (*below*)—The Secretariat, Chandigarh, India. (Photograph by the author)

FIG. 17—Shophouses, Singapore. (Photograph by the author)

today in Asia as anywhere. Even in China, where the hand of development so often fills the glove of government, the tension between development and preservation is not only real but almost certain to grow stronger.

The irony is that preservation itself is a European idea. Perhaps the story begins in 1590, when Sixtus V ordered the restoration of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. The idea arrived in Asia about 1900 with the restoration of the monuments that fell within the colonial empires. It is, of course, one thing to restore a Taj Mahal, an Angkor Wat, and a Borobodur; it is another to protect historic districts. Figure 18 shows one case in which the British did just that, with the construction of a walkway opened to the public after the British took charge of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1919. The wall was part of a broader scheme aimed at wrapping the city with a greenbelt, parts of which survive today. They are the largely forgotten contribution of C. R. Ashbee, an Arts and Crafts designer hired by the then-governor of the city, Ronald Storrs. A lengthy description of Ashbee's work for the Pro-Jerusalem Society survives in Storrs's polymathic autobiography, *Orientations* ([1937] 1945).

Surprisingly, perhaps, such an interest in the preservation of historic architecture was almost unknown in Asia until introduced by foreigners or graduates of Western universities. An easily overlooked case is the Soviet program of restoring—often rebuilding—the monuments of Samarkand, Bokhara, and Khiva, but a more poignant story comes from China and concerns Liang Sicheng, a Penn-

FIG. 18—Walkway on the Old City wall, Christian Quarter, Jerusalem. (Photograph by the author)

and Harvard-trained architect and architectural historian. Liang's father, an eminent historian, discouraged Liang's interest in fieldwork by warning that "90 percent of ancient architecture has been destroyed" (quoted in Fairbank 1994, 32). Liang persisted, his explorations culminating with his discovery in 1937 of the Foguang Temple (Figure 19), one of the few wooden buildings to survive from the Tang Dynasty. Liang wrote that "the importance and unexpectedness of our find made those the happiest hours of my years of hunting for ancient architecture" (quoted in Fairbank 1994, 95).

Liang fought to save not just isolated buildings but whole cities, preeminently Beijing. Here he ran into insurmountable opposition from Mao Zedong, whose notion of urban planning amounted to demolition and smokestacks. In this, Mao was more traditional than he knew, for, as Liang wrote in 1935, "The only objective of past repairs was to replace the old building with a glorious and sturdy new building; if this meant the demolition of the old building, it would be all the more praise-worthy as virtuous achievements of an high order" (quoted in Li 2010, 134). Liang's efforts to save Beijing were crushed, as he himself was during the Cultural Revolution. Posthumously, he has been rehabilitated and in recent years become respected to the point of veneration, although this has not saved his own courtyard house in Beijing from recent and illegal demolition (Jacobs 2012). A later architectural historian reminds us that "there is a whole western tradition of classical archaeology and visiting the Parthenon. But there is no such tradition in China" (Dyer 2007).

Simple Truths

For most readers, this story is an obvious sliver of the much grander narrative of globalization. What else, one might ask, should one expect from a colonial age and its aftermath? Architectural styles would inevitably be introduced, along with languages, administrative systems, infrastructure, and commercial enterprises. I would only add that this reading has unwelcome implications for anyone who wants to understand globalization as hybridization or cross-fertilization. The diffusion of European architectural styles doesn't offer much support for that benign reading.

True, a strong current of diffusion from the East to the West once existed. More than 500 years ago Leon Battista Alberti wrote that the architects of ancient Greece "began by examining the works of the Assyrians and the Egyptians" ([1450] 1988, 157–158). Later historians have agreed. The Mycenaean palaces at the start of the architectural history of Greece, they write, were "inspired by the great columnar halls of Egyptian temples" and "profoundly influenced by oriental architecture" (Dinsmoor 1975, 124; Lawrence 1996, 3). Still, the last 500 years is a long time for the ball to have been in the European court.

It is also true that one can find recent examples of Asian-styled buildings in Europe, most familiarly perhaps with the pagoda at Kew Gardens and the Indian-

Fig. 19—Foguang Temple, Shanxi Province, China (Photograph by the author)

inspired Royal Pavilion at Brighton. Still, these are no more than puff balls against the battering ram of European styles in Asia. I think of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew saying, "I think we have to go in whatever direction world conditions dictate. . . . If we are not connected to this modern world, we are dead. We'll go back to the fishing village we once were." What does this mean in practice? "I don't like casinos," Lee has said, "but the world has changed and if we don't have an integrated resort like the ones in Las Vegas—Las Vegas Sands—we'll lose" (quoted in Mydans and Arnold 2007). A casino opened in 2010, and in that year Singapore's tourism revenues jumped 50 percent.

For myself, I prefer to focus less on the cultural implications of this story than on the architectural galaxy itself. The buildings illustrated in this article are inevitably only a tiny sample of the hundreds and probably thousands of buildings left over from Europe's collision with Asia. I suppose that, in the style of Wilbur Zelinsky's 1955 article on place-names in the northeastern United States, it would be possible to produce maps of Asia loaded with dots showing relics of this or that European architectural style surviving in Asia today. I lack the Zelinskyian indefatigability to produce such maps, but my continuing amazement at the galaxy increases as the decades go by. Perhaps I am easily amazed. I hope so. But if geography addresses the face of the earth, and if others, too, overlook this architectural galaxy as I once did, then perhaps it is worthwhile to point it out and describe it even with a very broad brush.

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