

The Transfer of the Exposition Form from Europe to Japan and China:  
The Case of Jury Awards

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Though large-scale events bringing merchants from distant lands together in ephemeral marketplaces have existed across cultures for over a millennium, the "exposition" form that emerged from Europe's Industrial Revolution was qualitatively different than earlier trade fairs. Beyond adding comprehensive arrays of technological innovations to the variety of exhibited products, the events themselves were held for a greater variety of purposes, some of which could be at odds with its functions as a consumer marketplace. Goals of educating the public to inspire continued technological innovation and to inculcate the value of modernizing efforts in society at large were emphasized by the originators of this new exposition form yet the notion of the free exchange of ideas stood in contradiction with the more commercial purposes of the events from their outset.

Emerging from this conflict was the feature of jury awards for exhibits which came to be a near requirement for events to be deemed an exposition. By examining the context in which the jury awards element was first incorporated and tracing how it was transformed over time as the exposition form was transferred beyond the West to Japan and China, we can see how the tension between educative and commercial functions of expositions were ultimately resolved in favor of the host-locale's primary interest. More developed nations like those in the West employed jury awards primarily to confirm the quality of exhibits for commercial purposes while late-developing nations such as Japan and China used jury awards to promote domestic innovation and technology transfer.

## Emergence of the Exposition Form

There has been a great deal of research on the origins of the exposition form stemming from scientific and technological societies in Europe as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century, but the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (commonly referred to as the Crystal Palace Exhibition) held in London in 1851 is widely understood as the seminal 'international exposition.'<sup>1</sup> In contrast to earlier events, the creators of the Crystal Palace aimed to provide an entirely comprehensive exhibition of all manner of products and state-of-the-art technological innovations. The more than 100,000 exhibits from Britain, its colonies, and foreign nations were classified into four broad categories 1) Raw Materials, 2) Machinery, 3) Manufactures, and 4) Fine Arts and these were subdivided into more specific classifications to generate what historian Jeffrey Auerbach describes as a 'taxonomy of all things.'<sup>2</sup> This all-inclusive approach represented an entirely new conception of the exposition form and immediately came to define what international expositions should be.

The explicit goal of this grand-scale approach was to exhibit the best of human achievement in order to encourage continued development. Though the arts were included in this construction, the overriding emphasis was industrial progress. With the exposition's roots in the events held by scientific and technological societies, the educative purpose of exhibiting the latest innovations was vigorously promoted. The notion that people – be they engineers or common laborers – could learn and be inspired to produce new and better inventions by viewing exhibits of technology was a guiding philosophy of the exposition and touted by Prince Albert, the famous patron of the 1851 exposition, and other founders of the event such as Henry Cole.

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<sup>1</sup> Toshio Kusamitsu, 'Great Exhibitions before 1851,' *History Workshop* no. 9 (1980), 70-89.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 92-93.

The exhibition of state-of-the-art technologies was envisioned to facilitate innovation and technology transfer.

Despite the rhetoric in support of this ideal, the organizers of the 1851 exposition also perhaps surprisingly viewed the public exhibition of technological inventions as inherently dangerous in that such displays would subject exhibitors to having their best ideas and innovations pillaged by those who viewed their inventions.<sup>3</sup> This concern over the piracy of private innovation motivated Henry Cole to press parliament for emergency legislation to help exhibitors bypass England's antiquated Statute of Monopolies (1642) which made patents difficult, time consuming, and expensive to acquire. The Protection of Inventions Act that emerged was a quick, free, and easy process that fast-tracked the awarding of patents to certify the rights of inventors who exhibited at the Crystal Palace.<sup>4</sup> Though the stated goal of the exposition was to educate the public and facilitate industrial development, the insistence on patent protections for exhibitors was a conscious choice by the creators of the first international exposition to limit the potential educative functions of their event to commercial awareness of the new and best products available.

In England and throughout Europe at the time, however, an anti-patent movement had been emerging since the early nineteenth century and was vocal in its advocacy for patent reform and even abolishment. With the premise that invention was more the product of civilization as a whole than the work of any individual, they challenged the granting of patents as antithetical to progress in that it allowed one to monopolize innovation which was in essence common

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<sup>3</sup> Louise Purbrick, "Knowledge is Property: Looking at Exhibits and Patents in 1851," *Oxford Art Journal* 2 (1997): 54.

<sup>4</sup> Purbrick, 54-55.

property.<sup>5</sup> While not discounting that inventors should be rewarded for the product of their labors, they envisioned other solutions to address this issue such as prizes or bonuses paid to the inventor. Different schemes were imagined as far as whether industrial, governmental, or even international bodies would pay these bonuses, but the essential approach was to reward inventors in a way that would not inhibit the free sharing of innovation which would improve "civilization" as a whole.<sup>6</sup> The debate between patent advocates and opponents raged in the lead-up to the 1851 Exposition and continued throughout Europe to the planning for the 1873 Vienna Exposition where ultimately patent advocates began to win out as the guaranteeing of protection to inventors was seen as essential in enticing them to exhibit their best work at these events. The first proposal was made for an international bureau of patents at the 1873 Vienna Exposition and the Union for the Protection of Industrial Property was formed ten years later in Paris.

The event of an international exposition apparently then gave impetus to the solidification of patent law in both a host country and beyond, but the "jury award" feature of expositions which was employed even in the seminal 1851 Exposition seems to provide at least a nod to anti-patent advocates who wished to find alternative means to reward inventors.<sup>7</sup> Such medals and prizes were of course in addition to the rewards of a temporary monopoly already confirmed by a patent grant, but they nevertheless came to be expected by exhibitors who participated in international expositions as they served to establish the quality of their wares. Though the 1851

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<sup>5</sup> Fritz Machlup and Edith Penrose, "The Patent Controversy in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History* 10, no. 1 (1950): 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Machlup and Edith Penrose, 13-22.

<sup>7</sup> An interesting case representing this dual-nature of the jury award can be seen at the 1873 Vienna Exhibition where the Corliss engine was awarded a prize despite the fact that it was not exhibited there. The rationale being that "a large proportion of the steam-engines entered having been copied from his designs, he was really represented in every section of the Exhibition and by the engine-builders of every manufacturing nation." See Nathan Rosenberg and Manuel Trajtenberg, "A General-Purpose Technology at Work: The Corliss Steam Engine in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 1 (2004): 76.

Exposition had also set the standard for the exposition form in the prevention of pricing the exhibits<sup>8</sup> which would serve to make the event merely a "vast bazaar" the award of a prize medal or honorable mention could subsequently be used by exhibitors in their marketing and so were highly coveted for their commercial value.<sup>8</sup>

As the exposition form was transferred from Europe and the United States to Asia, the feature of jury awards was as essential a component as the general architecture of exhibit halls and the principles of display within them for an event to be deemed an exposition. Though a fully-realized international exposition (World's Fair) was not held in Japan until 1970 and China did not hold one until 2010, both nations held small-scale expositions in the first decade of the twentieth century that invited foreign participation and so could be understood as Asia's first international expositions. By examining two such events, Japan's 1903 exposition in Osaka and Qing Dynasty-China's 1910 exposition in Nanjing, we can gain a better understanding of how this common exposition feature could be deployed for different purposes.

### **Japan: Fifth National Industrial Exposition (Osaka, 1903)**

After participating in several international expositions held in the West starting with the 1867 Paris *Exposition Universelle*, Japan hosted its first national exposition in 1871 and continued to hold domestic expositions on a semi-regular basis. Where the first of these fairs had a significant impact in raising awareness of new technologies and promoting Japanese commercial endeavors, the Fifth National Industrial Exposition held in Osaka, Japan in 1903 was an especially significant event. Modeled closely after the expositions Japan had been visiting in the West, the Osaka Exposition included the palaces common to period fairs and filled them with exhibits of domestically produced products and innovative technologies. For example, the

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<sup>8</sup> Auerbach, 118.

Machinery Building at the Osaka Exposition was described by the local press as being replete with ingenious working exhibits of Japanese design including a massive steam-powered excavator from the Osaka Iron Works, the electrical motors of the Mitsui Company, and many other novel small-scale inventions.<sup>9</sup>

Another important feature of the Osaka Exposition was the substantial foreign participation it received. The involvement of many American and European commercial firms and the participation of Canada and the State of Oregon helped increase Western awareness of the advancing sectors of Japan's economy and allowed less-developed countries in East Asia such as China (who also exhibited there) to learn from both the West and Japan through the various exhibits. The Chinese entrepreneur Zhang Jian had the opportunity to visit the Osaka Exposition and was very much inspired by the new products and inventions he saw on display. Moreover, much like the Japanese who learned of the value of world's fairs by their travels in the West, Zhang Jian's attendance at the Osaka Exposition helped motivate him to transfer the technology of the international exposition to his country and the resulting Nanyang Industrial Exposition of 1910 held in Nanjing similarly received foreign participation.

The host of an international exposition enjoyed significant privilege over the foreign nations who wished to exhibit there. In the published rules and regulations of the Foreign Samples Building, the Osaka Exposition's organizers made clear that "the primary object aimed at by their inclusion of foreign exhibits within a separate building was to afford the Japanese manufacturers an opportunity of studying the latest products of Western invention with a view to the improvement of Japanese industries."<sup>10</sup> To further cement this advantage, the regulations required that foreign exhibitors not only provide detailed explanations of their exhibits as part of

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<sup>9</sup> "At the Osaka Exhibition," *The Japan Weekly Chronicle*, March 25, 1903, 267-268.

<sup>10</sup> *The Regulations of the Foreign Samples Building of the Fifth National Industrial Exposition*, file 3.15.1.10, Japanese Foreign Ministry, Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo.

their applications, but to also include drawings of any machinery they intended to display and stated that they would have no right to object to the photographing of exhibits by the Chief Commissioner's Office.<sup>11</sup> For Japan, a nation eager to improve and expand its industrial production, the event provided an opportunity to facilitate the transfer of new technologies; requiring detailed sketches of exhibited machinery and securing the ability to photograph such inventions certainly aided such efforts.

As in the West, however, the holders of the Osaka Exposition were compelled to ensure patent protection for foreign exhibitors despite the educative aims of the event. Japan had joined the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property in 1899 and this was doubtless a factor that aided in securing foreign participation at the Osaka Exposition. Though the event's rules and regulations empowered exposition officials to collect technical specifications and images of all the inventions on display, it also provided that "No person shall be allowed to photograph or make sketches of any exhibit without the consent of the exhibitor and the permission of the Chief Commissioner's Office."<sup>12</sup> Such restriction on the public's ability to maximize the educational potential of their observations of foreign machinery was certainly included to assuage exhibitors who might fear the "pillage" of their designs and innovations, yet press accounts of both the Machinery and Foreign Samples Buildings at the Osaka Exposition frequently commented on the number of Japanese fairgoers who minutely examined the exhibits of technology on display with a sketchbook in hand.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the general rules and regulations governing exhibitors, the jury award feature was another way in which the host nation could exert great privilege and direct the exposition to

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<sup>11</sup> *The Regulations of the Foreign Samples Building of the Fifth National Industrial Exposition.*

<sup>12</sup> *The Regulations of the Foreign Samples Building of the Fifth National Industrial Exposition.*

<sup>13</sup> Several articles in the *Kobe Chronicle* cover the Osaka Exposition in detail but fairgoers studying the exhibits on display is best described in "Foreign Exhibits at the Foreign Section," August 5, 1903: 139-140 and "The Exhibits and Its Results," August 5, 1903: 126-127.

better meet its aims. At Osaka, the event's organizers took the bold step of excluding foreign exhibitors from receiving competitive awards and elected instead to just offer each a letter of thanks for their participation. Where this greatly frustrated foreign exhibitors, limiting the system of jury awards to only Japanese exhibitors was an effective way to emphasize and encourage domestically-produced innovations.<sup>14</sup> As in the West, Japanese exhibitors receiving awards could of course use them in their subsequent marketing efforts, but the limiting of awards to domestic exhibitors must have also helped in generating wider markets for Japanese products and so aided Japan's overall development.

### **China: Nanyang Industrial Exposition (Nanjing, 1910)**

The Qing Dynasty's 1910 exposition held in Nanjing similarly demonstrated how the event of an international exposition and use of the jury award feature could be used to accomplish developmental aims by the host nation. Learning from some of Japan's missteps at the Osaka Exposition, the event's organizers required that foreign exhibitors provide signage with detailed explanations of their exhibits in the Chinese language.<sup>15</sup> This had been a great oversight in Osaka where Japanese-language displays were only inconsistently provided in the Foreign Samples Building and in most cases this accommodation was not made until the fair had been well underway. Clearly, such a feature would be of particular importance in helping communicate information about these new technologies to a wider audience than just those with a Western education.

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<sup>14</sup> The stated reason for the exclusion of foreign exhibits from consideration for awards was that the Exposition was "not considered an International one" as it was technically a "national industrial" exposition yet this seems merely a pretext as the event drew considerable international participation. See "Distribution of Awards at the Exhibition," *The Japan Weekly Chronicle*, July 8, 1903, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Michael R. Godley "China's World's Fair of 1910: Lessons of a Forgotten Event," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 3 (1978): 520.

Beyond ensuring easily accessible materials to explain the exhibits, the rules and regulations for China's Exposition explicitly stated that exhibitors "must not hinder the Executive Bureau in the matter of photographing exhibits, or making drawings, *and publishing them for the instruction of the people* [emphasis added]."<sup>16</sup> Such a provision allowing exposition officials to not only collect detailed information of the exhibited technologies but to disseminate them broadly must have greatly enhanced the educative potential of the event and its ability to facilitate technology transfer. It is unclear why exhibitors from the fourteen participating foreign nations including Japan, the United States, England, and Germany would accede to a condition that could facilitate the piracy of their exhibited inventions especially since Qing Dynasty-China was not a signatory to the Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property. Perhaps China's limited overall industrial development suggested that the theft of innovation would not be a pressing threat and that the potential gains of securing share in China's massive market significantly outweighed such concerns. It is clear, however, both through this provision in the rules and regulations as well as public statements by the organizers of the exposition such as Viceroy Tuan Fang that the purpose of the exposition was geared more toward learning from exhibited foreign technologies than introducing foreign participants to domestic Chinese products.<sup>17</sup>

In the application of the jury award feature, exposition organizers similarly sought to maximize the educative potential of the event. Far from replicating the Osaka Exposition's model of excluding foreign exhibitors from consideration, however, the approach taken was to liberally award medals to both foreign and domestic exhibitors alike. Where such treatment tended to render the granted awards meaningless in the context of the exposition itself

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<sup>16</sup> *Guide to Nanking and the Nanyang Exposition* (Nanking: The University of Nanking Magazine, 1910), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Godley, 515.

something that was roundly criticized in the local press—the awards themselves were not the essential feature of this process.<sup>18</sup>

In his role as Inspector of the Exposition, Zhang Jian organized the Research Society of the Nanyang Industrial Exposition with Li Ruiqing acting as the group's director. Comprising of 790 members, the group was tasked with studying all of the over 440 classifications of exhibits and compiling their findings in a published report.<sup>19</sup> In sections that cover domestic provincial exhibition halls as well as Foreign Buildings Number 1 (English and Japanese) and 2 (American and German), the report systematically investigated all manner of products and provided comparative analyses of foreign and domestic goods.<sup>20</sup> Though the awards granted by the investigating juries could of course be useful to exhibitors in their subsequent commercial advertising, the deliberate study, comparison, and final publication of these investigations would certainly have great value in helping promote rapid development in the host nation.

### **Conclusion**

The international expositions that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century entailed certain features such as grand exhibition halls and the principles of display for exhibits within them that help define these events but their actual functions—despite superficial similarities—could be adapted to best meet the interests of the host nation. Though from its inception in Europe the exposition was idealized as an ephemeral event that could bring the world's best products and inventions together to help educate and stimulate the progress of "civilization," concerns about the theft of proprietary designs and innovations ultimately superseded such high-minded ideals.

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<sup>18</sup> Hyungju Hur, "Staging Modern Statehood: World Exhibitions and the Rhetoric of Publishing in Late Qing China, 1851-1910," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012), 151-152.

<sup>19</sup> Hyungju Hur, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Ma Min and Ai Xianfeng, "Zhang Jian and the World Exposition in the Early Years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Inter-Cultural Observation," Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Trans-Pacific Relations, Princeton University, September 2006 (<http://www.princeton.edu/~colcutt/>), 17-18.

Yet such views were not uncontested in the seminal period of the international exposition and perhaps a vestige of this controversy can be found in the common exposition attribute of jury awards.

In the industrialized West, where the desire to advance the progress of society as a whole was tempered by the needs of inventors who wished to protect their ideas and secure the fruits of their labors, the jury award feature remained as a bonus that could be used by exhibitors in their marketing to help secure additional rewards. In late-developing nations, however, expositions represented an opportunity for the host nation to facilitate the education of their public in the latest technological advances and so spark domestic innovation. For China, the holding of an international exposition afforded an occasion to view and learn from the latest technologies. Awards were generously granted but the process of investigation used—examination and comparison—and the publishing of findings enabled a late-developing nation to leverage this standard feature of expositions to facilitate its own industrial development. Japan similarly took the opportunity of its first broadly international exposition to learn of current trends and innovations in the West but, having already achieved considerable industrial progress, used the jury award component in a targeted way to promote domestic industries and products.

Nations that held international expositions were afforded great power to alter the standard features of the form in ways that best suited their needs. Though foreign nations and private exhibitors might rely on the promise of potential trade and perhaps the guarantee of protection from theft of their ideas and innovations to participate, the devised rules and regulations for exhibitors and the application of something as common a feature as jury awards could all be used to manage the flow of technological information toward the host nation's primary interests.

When considering their initial conception as promoted by Prince Albert and other founders of the first international exposition, as events that could educate and stimulate continued development and progress, it seems as if the needs of countries like China and Japan were highly consistent with these goals and the manner in which they adopted the exposition form most faithful to their original ideal.

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