



*Sites of Learning:  
Reconstructing New Primary Schools for the  
Imperial Capital of Japan, 1923-1930*

A Public Lecture presented by Dr Janet Borland  
Asia Research Centre

When the Great Kantō Earthquake and Fires destroyed two-thirds of Tokyo's primary schools in 1923, educators seized upon the post-disaster reconstruction program as an opportunity to build modern schools fit for the imperial capital of Japan and its subjects. The reconstruction of 117 primary schools was a massive project which took seven years to complete and cost ¥38,610,000, or 7% of the total reconstruction budget. When the city celebrated the completion of the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Project in 1930, the three-storey reinforced concrete primary school buildings were heralded as the new model for schools throughout Japan and impressive symbols of modernity. In this paper, I will examine the educational and civic goals behind the reconstructed schools and consider how these goals manifest themselves in the physical design, layout and appearance of the buildings and facilities. I argue that educators and architects sought a design for school buildings that expressed the educational philosophy of the late-Taisho period and incorporated knowledge gained from the destructive earthquake and fires of 1923. Specifically, I suggest that the growing emphasis on health and hygiene, as well as the ongoing moral and physical cultivation of Japanese subjects in the 1920s influenced the design, location and facilities incorporated into Tokyo's reconstructed primary schools.

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10:30 am

Senate Room

All Welcome

Janet Borland is an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University. Her current research project, entitled "Sites of Learning, Spaces of State," examines the reconstruction of primary schools and small parks in Tokyo following the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake.