At the time Japan exhibited in London in 1910, it had already been doing so for nearly fifty years. The first display of Japanese objects at an international exhibition, also in London in 1862, had coincided with the arrival in the city of a mission from Japan, provoking the first of an ongoing series of waves of enthusiasm for Things Japanese; the excitement continued in Paris in 1867, which saw the first official participation by Japanese exhibitors. For their part, the Japanese authorities quickly saw the purpose and potential of such events. Following the Meiji revolution of 1868, the new government seized on exhibitions both at home and abroad as a catalyst for industrial promotion and a medium through which to prove to the Western powers that it belonged in a world of Euro-American industry and empire. The enthusiasm persisted throughout the Meiji period (and indeed continues today). By 1910, the archipelago had much to show, not least its own colonial possessions, even if its demonstration of such achievements provoked some ambivalence abroad. But it was also difficult for Japan to escape older ways of being seen. The Japan-British Exhibition proved a familiar double bind: promoter, press and public demanded that Japan exhibit a story of development, but looked askance when it appeared, preferring instead that the White City render a familiar ‘far-east fairyland for Londoners’.

International exhibitions (expositions universelles, world’s fairs) were the media events of the second half of the nineteenth century. They had their predecessors: the French were the first to seize on the ‘principle of display’ as a matter of national policy, staging an industrial exhibition in Paris in 1797. It was London, however, that famously saw the first international exhibition in 1851, memorably depicted by George Cruikshank, who drew the Crystal Palace atop the globe, with ‘all the world’ flocking to Hyde Park. Cruikshank’s drawing says something not only about the crowds and so (presumably) the attractions of such events, but also the world in which they took their place. The real Crystal Palace bestrides the planet, British industry rendering productive the resources to which the British military
and empire provided access. At the bottom of the picture and beyond the under-populated, over-heated tropics, a miniature Crystal Palace, sur-
mounted by a Union Jack, suggested that analogous if somewhat dimin-
ished enlightenment might dawn even on the other side of the world. The confidence suggested by the picture was a little disingenuous: the Great Exhibition seems to have been motivated as much by industrial anxiety as imperial assurance; but the moral was clear enough, as was the place at the exhibition for countries like Japan.

The archipelago was there from the start, albeit unrecognized and unremarked. Japanese objects were on display in 1851, listed under China. Two years later, however, the country began to attract its own attention, with exhibitions in Dublin and New York capitalizing on the news value added by the Perry expedition, then under way. By 1862, the interest was intense. The Japanese exhibits in London had not in fact been provided by Japanese exhibitors. They were the property of Sir Rutherford Alcock, the then British Minister, who had assembled a comprehensive miscellany of some 614 exhibits, ranging from the already familiar ceramics and lacquer-ware to rain cowls made of bark and reeds and the ‘short sword of

![Fig. 1](image)

Fig. 1 George Cruikshank, 1792–1878.

*All the World Going to See the Great Exhibition of 1851.* Etching, 1851.