Cultural Constructions of Asian Cities

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Description

Virtually all of the world’s expected population increase between now (6.3 billion) and the anticipated leveling off around 2100 (9.5 billion) will be in the cities of the developing world, mostly in Asia. China, India and Indonesia are already the first, second and fourth largest nations by population. Together with their neighbors, Asia is home to a majority of humanity and is becoming the most significant economic and environmental field of action. As the global center of gravity shifts to Asia, the ongoing negotiations of collective concerns (climate change, resource scarcity, violent conflict) are increasingly dependent upon a more inclusive perspective. The rapid urbanization occurring in the cities of Asia has taken place under conditions of extreme cultural diversity, vast demographic pressures, and unprecedented speeds of social change. The study of Asia from colonialism to nascent nationalisms, to more recent speculations on global phenomena has long provided vivid grounds for investigating important questions about the relationship between human societies and their built environments: What forces operating in the west account for the shifting definitions of “Asia” over time? How have visual and spatial representations played a role in this process? How has the design of the built-environment been used as an instrument for reproducing power relations? How have images and mythologies of the developed west played a role in the construction of space in Asia’s cities?

An important premise of the course is that the special relationship between cultural forces and the built environment is more vividly revealed in the recent histories of architectural and urban formation in Asia than commonly found in other places and times. Of particular interest are the methodologies emerging in recent decades around the changing conceptions of “culture.” The literatures associated with the so-called “cultural turn” are developed and applied to our cases to critique and supplement the more familiar analytical tools of political-economy. Even for students never intending to operate in an Asian context, this course offers the opportunity to step outside of their own world long enough to look back and see it with a critical clarity otherwise difficult to attain.

The sequence of topics is designed to posit a series of theoretical framings juxtaposed with relevant case studies drawn from the historic and contemporary accounts of specific contexts offered by the region. Class discussions will build upon the readings to test the various methodologies for their power to account for phenomena presented in each case study. In each case, we will examine the cultural operation of architecture and urban form within a specific context and how this operation relates to contemporary challenges in architecture and urbanism. Some of the issues examined include the concept of “development,” religious identity, colonial power structures, postcolonial nationalisms, the role of women, the rise of civil society, heritage conservation, national housing and “new town” efforts, tourism, mega-projects, globalization/counter-globalization, social dualisms, critical regionalism, and various phenomena of hybrid cultural formation.

Each participant is required to develop an individual research project employing some aspect of the methodologies explored in the seminar. These projects may or may not be sited in Asia but should demonstrate the capacity for some methodology of cultural analysis to extend understandings of key phenomena.
Content
Your responses are not a summary of the readings. Instead, they should be your own personal, analytical, and/or critical responses to them.

- What are the implications of what the author is expressing?
- How are the ideas expressed manifested in the built environment?
- What connections can you make to other issues you have studied?
- What connections can you make to aspects of your own life experience?
- What is useful (and what is less useful) in what the author is expressing?
- Do you agree with the point of view expressed in the piece?
- If not, how would you counter the author's points with your own views?

Introduction: Cultural Construction of Jakarta Term Project Assignment given


What is “Asia”? Discourse Theory from Foucault to Säid

- Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004).
Design and the Colonial Project: Norm Follows Form


World Systems Theory from Marx to Wallerstein

National Identity Construction: Imagining Culture


Culture and Critical Regionalism: Form-Identities


Regime Theory: Power and Markets


Islam and Modernity

• Georg Stauth, Politics and Cultures of Islamization in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia in the Nineteen-Nineties (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2002).
**Mega-Projects and Identity: Sukarno & Mahatir**


**Media and the Imagined West: Occidentalism**

China: The Next Global Order

- David Bray, Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System From Origins to Urban Reform (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005) [being cataloged].
- Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

New (Built) Form of Social Dualism

- Suggested: Herman E. Daly, Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).