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Bracken, G.

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H. Hazel Hahn, ed. (2019). *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary*. Singapore: NUS Press, 310 pp., notes, bibliography, index, $42 (paperback).

Cecilia L. Chu (2022). *Building Colonial Hong Kong: Speculative Development and Segregation in the City*. London: Routledge, 228 pp., notes, bibliography, index, $89.35 (hardback).

Peter G. Rowe and Yun Fu (2022). *Southeast Asian Modern: From Roots to Contemporary Turns*. Basel: Birkhäuser, 343 pp., bibliography, index, $56 (hardback).

Reviewed by: Gregory Bracken, *Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands*
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How knowledge is transmitted within and across cultures is the broad theme linking the three books under discussion here: *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary*, edited by H. Hazel Hahn, *Building Colonial Hong Kong: Speculative Development and Segregation in the City* by Cecilia L. Chu, and Peter G. Rowe and Yun Fu's *Southeast Asian Modern: From Roots to Contemporary Turns*. In them, we see how networks facilitate knowledge exchange and the effects this can have on society and, in particular, the built environment of East and Southeast Asia. The first two books deal with the colonial era. H. Hazel Hahn and her contributors cover the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, British Malaya and Ceylon, and the Philippines to undertake nuanced examinations of places and practices; in them, we see the fragmented nature of cultural exchange, as well as its continuous and dynamic evolution. Cecilia L. Chu focuses on Hong Kong to offer fascinating insights into the territory's history through dual lenses of property and race. Finally, Peter G. Rowe and Yun Fu treat their readers to a magisterial discussion of contemporary architecture (and its roots) in Southeast Asia and beyond (including parts of Austronesia). Their analysis is grounded by examining different influences: Austronesian vernacular; India, China, and Islam; Western colonization; and the postcolonial era of independence. This is an original and rewarding approach because it allows the tracing of currents of knowledge exchange and transfer across the region's built environment through its long history.

Cross-Cultural Exchange in Colonial Southeast Asia

H. Hazel Hahn's illustrated collection of essays examines the specifics of cross-cultural exchange in Southeast Asia during the colonial era. And while colonization is undeniably an important part of the region's history, this book helps us move away from the usual view of all-powerful empires with a standard narrative of domination and an assumed superiority on the part of colonizers—with their insistence of clear distinctions between themselves and those they colonized. Hahn's approach is more nuanced, allowing for dynamic interpretations through in-depth examinations of shared spaces, cultures, and strategies that enabled integration, adaptation, appropriation, and resistance. These show the region's history to be so more "entangled" than the existing narratives would have us believe. Once we free ourselves of the reductive binaries of "precolonial/colonial" or "colonial/postcolonial," we see colonization as a *process*, one whose nature has *always* been contested. We see this through the various objects, buildings, and cultural practices discussed in the book, all contextualized to allow patterns of flows to become apparent. This is important because political history, even when emphasizing agency for the colonized (in, for example, independence struggles), tends to maintain these binaries, meaning that continuities are hidden. What Hahn and her contributors do very well is show these continuities. They also show how ethnically and culturally diverse colonial societies were, with complex motivations, diverse worldviews, and varying degrees of agency (we also see how relatively diverse the colonizers were as well).

One of the book's most important points is its focus on exchange for what Hahn calls the modern period. This is unusual (as Hahn herself admits) but useful because it is not very well understood (particularly when compared with, say, the early-modern). The evolving meanings of objects, places, and practices can be interpreted in a variety of ways. This book's ten chapters examine things like buildings and places, photography, modes of dress, private diaries, the findings of scholarly societies, and (perhaps most interestingly) jazz to offer fresh perspectives through multi-layered interpretations that highlight the fragmented nature of exchange and show it to be fluid, multi-linear, and multi-layered, thereby contributing to a more dynamic understanding of culture as it evolves.

Two chapters specifically refer to the built environment: chapter 6 by Caroline Herbelin rethinks the relationship between "colonial" and "local" by examining the Governor General's palace in Hanoi and a number of so-called "French" houses built by wealthy Vietnamese in rural Cochinchina. Chapter 7, by Sarah Moser, brilliantly exposes the Malaysian government's unwitting reproduction of British colonial tropes in their design of Putrajaya (a new government city). These are arguably the most insightful chapters in the book. Herbelin uses seemingly disparate examples of architecture to uncover the shared mechanisms that go into the manufacture of interculturalism which shows how these can provide active and complex exchanges allowing different sides to impact each other. Moser examines Putrajaya, which was designed as a sort of "anti-Kuala Lumpur," intending to break ties with the colonial past by pivoting away from the West to strengthen links to the Middle East. Yet all it has done is show that the Malay governing elite has internalized the values and ideals that symbolized colonial Britain (ironically, long abandoned there). Seeing town planning as heroic, something gifted by the ruling elite to the masses, or by maintaining strict zoning for the separation of races, or the creation a new "national" style, which resurrects the fantasy Orientalism of the British Raj, all are signs that the Malaysian state is maintaining the grandiose gestures and top-down planning of late colonialism. Having sought to distance itself from its colonial past, all they have managed to do is design a place, not for the benefit of its people, but for the projection and sustaining of government power.

The two other chapters in the book's central section examine material exchange. Dawn Odell's analysis of a carved "Chinese" screen in the Dutch colonial city of Batavia seems at first glance to be a successful cross-cultural translation yet, as Odell shows, the screen only manages to

reveal social and ecological particularities of the space it inhabits. Screens like this were popular in the Dutch colonies but never made it to the Netherlands. Odell suggests that this is a result of unresolved imitation, or an incoherent translation, which suggests the possibility of failure as an aspect of cross-cultural exchange. The next chapter is by the editor, H. Hazel Hahn. Here she draws our attention to some incongruous decoration on the *vimana* of the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. Dating from the 1880s, it features Hindu boys dressed in European clothes. Hahn relates patterns of cross-cultural exchange to the politics of cultural heritage and, by focusing on the interwar era (a period of intense and pivotal change in colonial Vietnam), shows how the *vimana*, in its own unique way, manages to reflect meanings unique to its specific location.

Section One deals with knowledge exchange. The first chapter, by George Dutton, presents the diaries of Philiphe Binh, a Vietnamese priest who lived in Lisbon from 1796 until his death in 1833. Never published, these were intended for readers back home, to prepare his countrymen for their own visits to the West. An unusual example of cross-cultural exchange, but one that gives a fascinating insight into everyday life in Portugal, and, more unusually, from an Asian perspective. The next chapter is by Matthew J. Schauer; it examines the work of scholarly societies in British Malaya in the decades around 1900. Run by enthusiastic amateur scholars, often men who worked in the colonial service, their dissemination of local knowledge was intended to aid colonial expansion but also sought a more culturally sensitive empire (clearly influencing the post–World War II "hearts and minds" policy). Wanting to preserve cultural traditions from the threat of modernity, these societies saw themselves as the custodians of ethnological knowledge. Interestingly, Schauer shows how these networks allowed for exchange across imperial divides, and while they also contained some pro-imperial rhetoric, they were less overtly propagandistic than, for example, the colonial exhibitions taking place in Europe at that time. The last chapter in Section One is Arnout H.C. van der Meer's analysis of a confrontation between a young Javanese colonial official and his European superior. This was over issues of dress and deference and took place in 1913, a time when the Dutch reliance on adopted symbols of indigenous power (imitating the local ruling elites) was falling foul of new colonial directives to modernize. Here we see cross-cultural exchange that both supports and simultaneously undermines Dutch colonial legitimacy.

The third and final section deals with leisure exchange. Here we see photographs from colonial Ceylon, and Benita Stambler makes clear that these images require additional information if they are to be understood properly. Susie Protschky highlights the cultural encounter between Europeans and Javanese via two portrait photographs of European women dressed in indigenous Javanese clothing. Acts like this demonstrate a competence across cultures but one which she claims is also transgressive because of what they reveal about class and race. The final chapter is by Frederick J. Schenker and is perhaps the book's most interesting. In it, he traces the proliferation of jazz throughout the British empire in Asia, showing how leisure activities (like dancing) could strengthen imperial structures via cultivation of distinction. Dancing to jazz showed new forms of modernity that allowed colonizers thoroughly domesticate foreign spaces by reproducing the practices of Europe. Perhaps even most significantly, the demand for jazz led to the emergence of Asian jazz professionals, which complicated their position as static, immobile, colonized subjects to create a new category of cosmopolitan labor, bolstering the capacity for independence.

Building Colonial Hong Kong

Cecilia L. Chu's *Building Colonial Hong Kong: Speculative Development and Segregation in the City* is based on painstaking archival research that looks at some of the classic instruments of colonial rule: *laissez-faire* economics, sanitary modernity, and racial segregation, yet her work

leads to a significant rethinking of the territory's colonial history, showing it to be the result of far more nuanced dynamics than hitherto realized (echoing H. Hazel Hahn's move from the view of all-powerful empires toward the more dynamic interpretations of "entangled" histories).

Containing atmospheric illustrations and clear maps, Chu highlights specific case studies to show the contradictory colonial logic of urban development: this encouraged native investment in a *laissez-faire* housing market while simultaneously seeking to segregate populations based on race. Here we see discourses about development, segregation, modernization, market freedom, and economic justice consolidating over time. We also see that Hong Kong's urban landscape was not top-down but evolved through ongoing negotiations between different vested interests. It was, in fact, key to attaining individual and collective goals in a racially divided, highly unequal, but ultimately upwardly mobile city.

Racial segregation was associated with the civilizing mission but also with cultural preservation, protection of health, and the maintenance of racial peace, yet, as Chu points out, little attention has been paid to the economic rationalities behind this segregation. One of the most obvious symbols of segregation was the Peak, a supposedly European reservation. Few have investigated the economic rationale behind such discriminatory planning policies, or the impact on property distribution, yet as Chu points out, the Chinese never ceased purchasing property at the Peak (even after a 1904 law prohibited them from living there) because there was nothing stopping them from purchasing property and renting it to Europeans. This lacuna, according to Chu, is because of the limited interaction between humanities/social sciences and the disciples of planning economics and real estate management.

Chu's investigations are based on four key arguments: (1) construction was not top-down but involved continuous negotiation between different parties, including a native propertied class who did well under colonial rule; (2) (echoing Hahn's book) that colonial social structures may have differentiated colonizers from colonized, but this actually obscures the internal stratifications as well as mutual interests cutting across these groups; (3) colonial urban development must be contextualized against the dynamics of the global economy and the local housing market (where fluctuations in value can influence decision-making on segregation, building regulation, etc.); and (4) building in the colony was tied to new knowledge in planning, architecture, and urban management, which was produced in response to emerging social and political concerns within larger colonial networks. What made it work in Hong Kong was that Chinese immigrants saw the British administration as superior to that of late Qing China; immigrants tolerated bad living conditions because they believed in upward mobility—an idea that remained remarkably intact throughout the territory's long colonial history.

Yet Hong Kong did not have a promising beginning; it was seen as a burden on the British exchequer. As a free port, it could not impose taxes so the only option was to raise money through rent, property rates, and licensing fees. By strictly limiting land supply and not imposing too many regulations, development ensured good revenues but led to housing shortages and rampant property speculation. A municipal government was ruled out because it was thought that a minority of British citizens could not be trusted to rule over Chinese, and this led to a tension between the need to attract Chinese while trying to maintain Hong Kong's hierarchical colonial order. Segregation by race was supposed to protect different racial interests. It also allowed successful Chinese to develop a paternalistic relationship with fellow countrymen (echoing Confucian hierarchies). Support networks like *kaifong* (street committees) helped enhance these people's power and benevolent image. They became key anchors in colonial rule and strengthened mutual dependence within the British administration. Different self-images and values of Chinese and Europeans are an example of collaborative practices that unsettle commonly held assumptions about race under colonial rule.

The ability of the Chinese to take care of themselves aroused collective pride and thereby reinforced colonial *laissez-faire* practices. Yet the colonial government was not ready to cede

self-governance, claiming a need to protect Chinese interests from self-serving Europeans. This remained as European colonies moved away from an "enclavist" approach (servicing colonial and military officials) to a more "public health" one, where indigenous populations were better integrated into a centralized regime. This shift in perspective introduced new governing techniques for improving health and productivity. Sanitary problems were no longer addressed by coercive regulations but by the promotion of new social norms that relied on moralization, self-discipline, and environmental determinism (i.e., that a good environment would produce good citizens). The challenge came when trying to recast assumptions about Chinese cultural practices and align them with the processes of modernization.

Interestingly, the rise of labor consciousness among Hong Kong workers never transformed into an anti-colonial movement. Social unrest seems to have only strengthened people's appreciation for the colony's political and economic stability. The aspiration to lead a better life, bolstered by the economic success of earlier migrants, contributed to this positive outlook among poorer Chinese despite the discrimination they were subjected to. Chu shows how attitudes contrasted sharply with the "poor Europeans" who framed their grievances around the double injustices of the colonial capitalist system (which seemed to disproportionally benefit those with capital) and the perceived failure of the government to defend their (i.e., white) privilege.

The idea that Hong Kong was a regressive colonial society premised on primitive accumulation was not widely shared by visitors or residents. Many were critical of the city's appalling housing conditions, but Chu's work shows that the local Chinese population taking a more nuanced view of the colony, with criticism often mixed with admiration. Notwithstanding widespread complaints about high rents, the housing problem was seen as the result of the unethical actions of profiteers: selfish individuals who abused the legitimate capitalist system. And despite dissatisfaction with everyday living conditions, there was strong consensus among the Chinese that Hong Kong was in fact better than the home country because of its superior legal system and a benevolent government that maintained good urban order.

Chu (referencing Ackbar Abbas) notes that decolonization since 1997 has not ushered in a critical postcolonial consciousness, and that Hong Kong still has not developed effective strategies for interrogating its colonial past. Abbas singled out the preservation of architecture as problematic because, as the main material support of visual ideology, its preservation tends to present the past through romanticized built form. Culture as preservation, according to Abbas, leads not to the development of a critical sense of history but keeps the colonial subject in place, occupied by gazing at images of identity (Ackbar Abbas, Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance. Hong Kong University Press, 1997). This is the context for the surge of interest in local heritage and culture and the new calls to preserve Hong Kong's dwindling colonial-era heritage as a collective memory. Chu sees this new preservation movement, which does not seek to interrogate the past in any critical postcolonial sense, in fact strengthens momentum and dynamism to shed new light on the continuities and ruptures of colonial development, as well as the complex material relationships that obtain within the built environment.

Colonial-era buildings, both Chinese and European, have assumed a prominent role in retelling Hong Kong's story. The colonial past is reclaimed as a resource against a threatening larger nationhood. There is, however, a double irony in the assertion of local identity and agency through historic preservation: the first is that the stability and monumentality conveyed in heritage buildings belie the fundamental spatial logistics of the city, that is, the relentless cycle of rebuilding propelled by speculation and capital accumulation, and that preservation under these circumstances sets itself against long-standing development practices, that is, the salvaging of old buildings is expensive and complicated. The second irony is in the perceived symbolic and cultural significance of Hong Kong's built heritage (particularly its vernacular architecture) which has come to be seen as the embodiment of the Chinese building tradition, yet was actually the by-product of its colonial system.

The rarity of these buildings today has made them prominent. In trying to represent the common history of a people who moved upward from a humble past, the preservation of these buildings diverts attention away from the many disadvantaged who are still living in subdivided tenements. Nostalgia for the cherished forms of "old Hong Kong" has transformed them into idealized images of identity that erase the actual historical conditions that shaped their formation. By tracing some of the trajectories of Hong Kong's building practices, Chu's book highlights the tensions and paradoxes of urban development today, showing in fact a continuation of those of the past (again, echoing Hahn's continuities).

Chu admits that her book could have done more to explore the connections between Hong Kong's forms of development and those of the larger network of empires, and while her work does (in her words) gesture toward those linkages through its case studies, a more systematic analysis of developments could have enriched the discussion of colonial urbanism and its transnational manifestations. This is perhaps where the next book under discussion here might be helpful.

The Roots of Southeast Asia's Contemporary Architecture

Southeast Asian Modern: From Roots to Contemporary Turns is by Peter G. Rowe and Yun Fu. This is a well laid out and graphically attractive gazetteer of contemporary Southeast Asian architecture. Its approach is both original and intelligent: it traces the genealogy of seventy contemporary architectural projects via four broad influences: Austronesian indigenous vernacular, early dynastic variations (i.e., India, China, and Islam), Western colonization, and postcolonization. Clustered by type, not date or place, this clever strategy allows readers trace the currents of knowledge exchange and transfer across the region's built environment throughout parallel histories.

Lavishly illustrated with photographs and drawings, the book also contains helpful tables and maps as well as straightforward architectural descriptions of projects, some of which are well known, others less so. The Introduction sketches the book's geographical compass (which covers Southeast Asia and parts of Austronesia—a geomorphologically complex and ecologically diverse region, with volcanos, earthquakes, and tropical cyclones). The authors also note that there is a considerable difference in wealth, with Singapore being one of the richest nations on earth and Myanmar one of the poorest (the regional median is the Philippines; hardly wealthy).

The book expertly traces the largely separate roots that culminated in contemporary regional architectural production, beginning with prehistory and geomorphology and outlining tropical and sub-tropical eco-regions where rainforests are some of the world's oldest and largest and most biodiverse—sadly they are now being rapidly depleted. They then trace premodern cultures, noting the Austronesians' ability to sail vast distances, before turning to the emergence of modern states, beginning with European colonization, a period when Asia modernized and began to seek independence.

They foreground their analyses by discussing path-dependent modernization and challenge its perceived Eurocentrism and unilinearity. Citing Charles Taylor's different understandings of modernity (i.e., the difference between Medieval and present-day Western society and change that evokes development, where traditional societies give way to modern ones), these are contrasted with "acultural theory of modernity" where transformations are seen as culture-neutral (things like scientific consciousness or a secular outlook). They see this latter view as distorted, with everything belonging to one great Enlightenment package. Instead, they support Dilip Gaonkar's argument for culturally framed "alternative modernities" and note Jürgen Habermas's contention that modernity is never finished. They also refer to "multiple modernities," a school which argues that modernity's forms are so varied and contingent that the term itself must be plural. Finally, they cite recent path-oriented variants of a more conventional modernization based on grounded empirical observation.

In short, they see modernity as shaped by the historical path dependencies of three things: technological advancement, outside influence, and economic growth and decline. Even when subjected to similar forces, modernization exhibits quite different trajectories, so their stance is interpretative: a well-grounded cultural modernity with empirical depictions that highlight hegemonic moments of production and turning points. These they see as coinciding with four defining features: (1) emancipation (usually extensive secularization); 2) renovation, with adoption of technical innovations in fields like architecture; (3) the promise of democratization and equity; and (4) expansion, particularly in economic well-being with a tendency to make modernity hegemonic as a way of life. They see these features in moments of architectural production that are influenced by multiple cultural roots, quests for identity, and programmatic requirements. And finally, they point out that given the relatively uneven national postcolonial development in the region, contemporary architectural production has also been uneven, often involved modest beginnings in domestic structures and community service facilities. Much of the production appears reactive to what was created in the past (as we saw in Sarah Moser's highlighting of the unwitting use of colonial tropes in Putrajaya). The adoption and re-use of older structures of local heritage has figured strongly in globalization and its attendant competition for leisure-time and tourist pursuits. Although a rootedness in pre-modern cultures (and even the colonial period) is also obvious, an architectural reckoning with both the past and the future has unfolded in a present where the extremes of these different orientations have to be moderated.

Chapter 2 focuses on indigenous vernacular architectural traditions, particularly those of Austronesian peoples, where attention is drawn to typal precedents like hut dwellings, longhouses, and village configurations, all of which share characteristics which allow for (even require) collective discussion. Many of these characteristics are about providing shelter from the tropical climate: raised floors and pitched roofs to allow for passive climate control; using woods with termite-resisting oil, and the absence of nails, help resilience. The praxis of using readily available material is highly developed, time-tested, and suitable, yet none of these qualities explain *why* the buildings look the way they do. This, the authors contend, is because shape and appearance have social and symbolic significance, and they identify three distinct features: (1) pile foundations and skeletal wooden frames; (2) the presence of large, almost all-encompassing roofs; and (3) decorative elements. The roofs are particularly noticeable, often in thatch, they come in a variety of shapes, including saddleback, high-hat, and beehive. Reminiscent of boats, particularly the Austronesians,' is deliberately symbolic. The authors also note that settlement patterns were sprawling and lacked clear boundaries or strong distinctions between farm and jungle. The contemporary projects reflect both the formal and figural aspects of these buildings, with examples from almost all countries in the region (although mainly from the island communities of Indonesia, Polynesia, and Taiwan). Grouped according to building and settlement type, these works are by local architects and also feature some international practices, such as Renzo Piano, Foster and Partners, and Thomas Heatherwick.

Chapter 3 looks at early dynastic variations, tracing influences from India and China, when settlements and architecture embraced Buddhist, Hindu, and even Islamic influences. Initially occupied by a mosaic of communities, from bands to chiefdoms, and with different levels of social integration, successive waves of Indianization came from the west and Sinicization from the north. Indian influence should not be underestimated; it accounted for a significant part of the wealth of the region, for long the world's largest economic zone. Rowe and Yun Fu introduce temples such as Borobudur in Indonesia and the Angkor complex in Cambodia (built for Hindu worship and converted to Buddhism). We also see pagodas, stupas, and the *candi bentar* (split gates) of Java and Bali, with elements from Islamic architecture creeping in (like domes, arches, minarets, etc.). The contemporary projects include temples, mosques, and houses as well as an office building, a museum (the Hanoi Museum), and an airport (Taoyuan Terminal One in Taipei), all by local architects.

Chapter 4's subject is Western colonization, and here we see the importation and local adaption of forms and styles from colonial homelands with little attention paid to endogenous cultures or ways of building. What the colonizers built was aimed at communicating power and prestige, preferably using the neoclassical style, as exemplified by Singapore's Istana. Later on, there was some adaptation of endogenous approaches as neoclassicism gave way to other newer international styles like Art Deco and Modernism. As colonization was premised on trade, godowns (warehouses) were also constructed. The etymology of this is unclear, although this reviewer has suggested elsewhere that the word is probably a corruption of the Malay *gedung* (building) (Gregory Bracken, "Thinking Shanghai: A Foucauldian Interrogation of the Postsocialist Metropolis". PhD thesis, TU Delft, 2009), https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A2bceb450-3023-46bb-8a55-9425f4712000?collection=research). The contemporary projects span three categories: (1) adaptations to local environmental factors and materials, the most striking being the Kontum Indochine Café, Vietnam and the Panyaden International School's Bamboo Sports Hall in Chiang Mai; (2) Art Deco conservation and refurbishment of existing structures (particularly the Tiong Bahru Estate in Singapore and Phnom Penh's Central Market in Cambodia); and (3) the continuation of shophouse and terrace house traditions to fit contemporary circumstances (one particularly interesting example being Lorong 24A Shophouse by seven different architectural firms in Singapore).

Chapter 5 focuses on postcolonial architecture, a period when modernization was embraced with a sense of freedom and national pride. Generally, the region embraced global modernism (neo-brutalism looms large), although this was rarely without some local inflection. We see the projects of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, President Sukarno in Indonesia, and the military rulers of Burma (now Myanmar). The Jengki style in Indonesia was a whimsical corruption of "Yankee Style" and reflected the aspirations of post-war America while representing a spirit of political freedom by producing architecture that was a stark contrast to the sober neoclassicism of the Dutch colonial era. Malaysian architect Jimmy C.S. Lim is shown to have rejected much of the region's modern architecture with his turn to low-energy tropical buildings, conservation, and adaptive re-use and the sustainable development and reuse of materials and traditional construction techniques. We also see the iconic modernist complexes of People's Park and Golden Mile in Singapore (sadly, this latter is slated for demolition in 2023). Designed by DP Architects in 1973, People's Park was a particularly influential prototype for much of Singapore's subsequent urban development. Contemporary projects include Ken Yeang's Mesiniaga Tower in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia which incorporates bioclimatic principles, while the PARKROYAL hotel in Singapore, by WOHA, luxuriates in lush tropical greenery (greened facades are good for cooling and regulating building temperature). We also see the more obvious icons of Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers by Cesar Pelli. Completed in 1998, these were for a while the world's tallest buildings and have façades and footprints that incorporate Islamic motifs. Knocked from their lofty pinnacle by Taiwan's Taipei 101 in 2004, this pagoda-like skyscraper makes use of Chinese symbols. One other tower of note, mainly for its memorable upward-spiraling "pixelation," is MahaNakhon in Bangkok by Ole Scheeren in 2018. Another new icon is Singapore's Marina Bay Sands by Safdie Architects (2010), a vast hotel and casino complex topped by a sky-park. And finally, something interesting in social housing: Singapore's The Pinnacle@Duxton, the world's tallest public housing project, also featuring sky-gardens (on the 26th and 50th floors).

The book's final chapter consists of five observations and a conclusion. The first observation notes that the Southeast Asian region, in common with many in the world, has a natural environment that constantly influences its buildings, both with constraints and opportunities. This is evident in contemporary projects, especially those working toward minimal environmental footprints. As Modernism waned, there was a reassessment of vernacular architecture, which contrasted favorably with the former style's apparent ignorance of environmental contexts, uninterest in climatic conditions, and lack of cultural references. This led to what the authors call "contemporary vernacular," which may seem at first glance self-contradictory but when viewed from a more

dynamic (or at least less static) perspective is a way of modernizing vernacular as a process that can bring culturally accepted values and ways of doing things to the fore in a contemporary context. Tradition, in other words, is a continuum (something that resonates strongly with H. Hazel's Hahn's book).

A second observation sees the region's architectural identity as involving an equal immediacy for all time periods (except the recent past) and a syncretic form of engagement in its different orientations; this can be seen in the shophouse, a type that has persisted formally even as its figuration has changed. A third observation is about the object quality of the region's architecture, where buildings are conceived as objects to be rearranged, moved, or combined, leading to a mosaic quality in the urban environment. The fourth observation is about the increasing awareness of the natural environment, particularly in the face of climate change, but here they lament the almost ubiquitous use of concrete throughout the region. The fifth and final observation is that all but a few of the region's nations are relatively poor and unurbanised, meaning that material and the availability and sophistication of technology is constrained. This is likely to continue, with low-tech building practices and passive climatic and environmental approaches.

They conclude by summing up the essential character of Southeast Asia's architecture: (1) the persistence of local natural environmental conditions and their role in lasting, useful, and comfortable places to live, work, and engage in recreation, (2) working with appropriate technologies and local levels of development; and (3) timeless and more immediate temporal aspects are deeply ingrained and persistent. This final point begs the question about the real roots of the region's architecture, which they feel are varied but definitely present (to a greater or lesser degree) in contemporary projects. In them, we see the continuity of traditional rules and spatial topologies, even as figuration and materiality change.

Conclusion

H. Hazel Hahn's examination of cross-cultural exchange in colonial Southeast Asia provides us with a fuller picture of exchange networks obtained through geographical, temporal, and intergroup frameworks. Reassessing long-standing interpretive divisions, such as metropole-periphery, colonizer-colonized, precolonial-colonial, and colonial-postcolonial, her book's chapters show how cross-cultural exchange was (and continues to be) more than simply a trading of objects or information, it can and does lead to new lifestyles, new ways of thinking, and new identities. Cecilia L. Chu's examination of the building practices of colonial Hong Kong shows how a shared belief in upward mobility enabled immigrants tolerate bad living conditions because they saw themselves in a land of opportunity—an idea that remained substantially intact throughout the territory's long colonial history. And finally, Peter G. Rowe and Yun Fu's tour of Southeast Asia's contemporary architecture shows how deep roots can run. Their tracing of the currents of knowledge exchange and transfer across the region enrich our understanding of its built environment today and points to a rich and equally dynamic future.

Author Biography

Gregory Bracken is Assistant Professor of Spatial Planning and Strategy at TU Delft. He is the author of *The Shanghai Alleyway House: A Vanishing Urban Vernacular* and editor of *Ancient and Modern Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West*, *Contemporary Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West*, *Future Challenges of Cities in Asia* (with P. Rabe, R. Parthasarathy, N. Sami, and B. Zhang), *Asian Cities: Colonial to Global*, and *Aspects of Urbanization in China: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou*.