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Jiat-Hwee Chang, Puay-Peng Ho

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Editorial Introduction:

Colonial Spatial Orders

JIAT-HWEE CHANG and PUAY-PENG HO

How did colonialism affect the production, maintenance and reproduction of spatial orders in Southeast Asia historically? The six essays in this special themed section seek to cast new light on this old question by dissecting the three inter-related aspects of colonial spatial order: representation, typology and agency. They investigate how a range of techniques of visual and spatial representation—such as cartography, photography, painting and model-making, in various media like newspaper, pictorial and exhibition—were used to inscribe order and project power. A number of them delve into how colonial norms and interventions in the design, planning and management of building and urban typologies that range from nipa huts to villas, kampungs to segregated cities, contributed to the ordering of colonial spaces and the spatialization of colonial classifications and hierarchies. Central to these essays are various forms of under-explored colonial spatial agencies that include colonial elite intermediaries like wealthy Chinese *Kapiteins* and *towkays*, colonial professionals like architects and public health experts, and regular colonial subjects, who variously impose, implement, appropriate, correct, subvert, resist and invert colonial spatial orders.

Behind the theme of colonial spatial orders is the assumption that every political system produces its own socio-spatial structure just as every socio-

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spatial structure shapes politics in systemic ways. In saying this, we are not suggesting that there is an easy correspondence between a particular political system and a specific socio-spatial structure, nor that economic and cultural variables have no impact on politics and space. Rather we are pointing out how politics through the way it governs human relations and manages the distribution of resources—including territorial and spatial ones—would inevitably influence the organization of society and space.

As a political system, colonialism also produced its own spatial structure in the past that corresponded to its own political, social, economic and cultural order. Many scholars—both within and outside of art and architectural histories—have written about the various aspects of this colonial spatial order. As colonialism is distinguished from other political systems in having one people dominating over another through asymmetrical power relations, scholars who study a colonial spatial order tend to emphasize how that dominance was both reflected in and enabled by architectural configurations and urban structures. Just as scholars influenced by post-colonial theories understand colonial dominance happened not just militarily or economically but also culturally, art and architectural historians have also begun to explore architecture and spaces not just materially but also discursively through various modes of representation and regimes of power-knowledge.¹

Colonialism has affected large parts of the world across the different continents in the past few centuries alone. While there were common structural conditions, institutional norms and shared practices that undergirded the various forms of colonialism, they did not lead to monolithic systems or created similar outcomes. Localities and their contexts matter in understanding how colonialism operated previously and is still being perpetuated today. Therefore, even though there is an extensive body of scholarship on how various forms of colonialism shaped or were shaped by spaces in diverse geographies and contexts, what has been observed elsewhere might have played out differently in Southeast Asia. By focusing on cases from Southeast Asia, the six essays in this special issue explores how colonial spatial politics operated in manners that were distinct even if they intersected with modes of spatial representation, taxonomies of spatial typology, articulations of spatial agency, and techniques of spatial production in other colonial contexts.

Spatial Representation

Our perceptions of spaces are often mediated by, among other things, visual technologies that augment our senses and forms of representation that make spaces more legible. A spatial order is often the most intelligible in a drawing.

For large urban spaces, this drawing frequently takes the form of a map. Thus, unsurprisingly, two of the essays—Robert Cowherd’s “Batavia Apartheid” and Hadi Osni’s “Mapping Shifting Formations”—deal specifically with maps. Cowherd combines the close reading of various Dutch colonial maps of Batavia (today’s Jakarta) with careful historical analyses to reveal how diagrammatic simplifications and strategic omissions in cartographic practices worked alongside colonial census and sumptuary codes to produce a reductive representation of both urban populations and the spaces of their habitation. Maps and censuses do not just represent reality and serve as means for the governing to know the governed, they also shape reality by allowing ways for the governing to intervene in the governed.² In the case of the Dutch East Indies, Cowherd argues that Dutch colonial cartographic practices helped to transform what was originally a heterogeneous, multi-ethnic population that comingled spatially into three homogeneous ethnic groups that were spatially segregated. The resulting socio-spatial construct was apparently so compelling that the renowned British writer John Sydenham Furnivall would misread it as a natural state of affairs which he famously called “a plural society”.³

While maps have been used by the powerful to represent and shape spatial reality in accordance with their political priorities and governing strategies, they could also be deployed by researchers as historical resources, especially for communities that have left behind scant historical records. In Hadi’s study of the urban history of the Baweanese in Singapore, he critically scrutinizes colonial records, particularly maps and toponyms, to trace the shifting settlement patterns of this community from the mid-19th to the early-20th centuries. Despite the inherent biases and silences in these maps and records, Hadi was able to discern the fluid settlement pattern of the Baweanese in the riverine world of colonial Singapore.

Maps are but one of the many forms of visual representation in the modern world. As Robin Hartanto Honggare discusses in his essay “Disease on Display”, maps were combined with statistical visualization, photographs, illustrations, objects and models by the Dutch colonial officials to form an “optical assemblage” at the First Hygiene Exhibition in the Netherlands Indies in 1927. Honggare shows that ethnographic knowledge was central to the optical assemblage that displayed diseases and disease vectors in vernacular landscapes, structures, interiors and everyday settings. This combination of ethnographic knowledge and visual technologies was deployed by colonial public health officials to help the indigenous populations in the colony understand the importance of good hygienic habits and put them into practice. In other words, Honggare argues that visual communication was

inextricably connected to the colonial biopolitics of inculcating self-care and disease prevention.⁴ This is also where he departs from the early architectural history scholarship that examines world and colonial expositions through the lenses of postcolonial theories. These pioneering scholars tend to focus on how the architecture of the Orient was spectacularly constructed as an exotic and primitive Other for Western consumption.⁵ In contrast, Honggare draws our attention to a much more mundane and intimate portrayal of the vernacular environment directed inward at the colonial populations in order to encourage the remaking of the indigenous selves.

The above exhibition that Honggare carefully dissects took place alongside a trade fair. In many metropolitan and colonial settings, the two—which tended to happen in conjunction, even merging to become indistinguishable—proliferated in the 20th century to promote the increasing number of commodities produced and put into circulation by colonial capitalism and world trade.⁶ These exhibitions depended on an array of visual technologies, many of which were new and had only emerged due to the revolutions in technologies of imaging and pictorial production and reproduction since the second half of the 19th century. Alongside the proliferation of exhibitions was the rise of a new print culture of newspapers, magazines, pictorials and posters. Together, the exhibitions and the new print culture constituted a novel visual culture that was inextricably linked to the commercialism of many early 20th-century colonial and semi-colonial cities. Jiat-Hwee Chang's essay "The Visual Culture of Sinophone Modernism" explores the architecture commissioned by Aw Boon Haw in East and Southeast Asian port cities in relation to this novel visual culture. Chang argues that Aw's architecture drew influences from and incorporated elements of other visual fields, particularly graphic design and decorative arts, in order to promote Aw himself, while at the same time advertise and market the products from his pharmaceutical and media empires.

Spatial Typology

A spatial order is not only represented and rendered intelligible in various visual forms, it is also often embodied in a particular building or urban typology.⁷ The spatial and material configuration of a particular building typology is very often also a manifestation of the socio-cultural practices that revolve around it, and a product of the resource ecologies and relations of labour within which it is embedded. Will Davis's essay "Prism of Difference" looks at the genealogy of one such building type—the nipa hut in the Philippines. Through a few key historical episodes, Davis argues that the

idealization of the nipa hut in the national imagining of the Filipinos has to be understood in relation to its history as an object of local resistance and defiance against the Spanish and American colonial rule. Besides the nipa hut, other typologies, such as the colonial villa and the vernacular stilt houses, also received some analytical attention in relation to the colonial spatial order in the aforementioned essays by Chang and Hadi respectively. But the main attention has been directed at colonial city typologies, specifically, the segregated colonial city that Cowherd examines closely through Dutch historical maps and the margins of the colonial entrepot city that Hadi evokes through his own mapping of the Baweanese in Singapore.

Just as a particular building or urban typology might reveal the underlying social order, it might also conceal broader social dynamics. For one, the labour that was invested in constructing a building or a city might not be apparent from its appearance.⁸ This is where Pinai Sirikiatikul's essay "Practice as 'Theory'" makes an important contribution. Although Songkla in Thailand, the site that Sirikiatikul investigates, is not a formal colony, scholars drawing from Marxist and post-colonial theories have argued that Thailand could be considered crypto- or semi-colonial due to its semi-dependent economy, incomplete sovereignty and ambivalent relations with the West.⁹ Sirikiatikul's incisive analysis shows that even though the Faculty of Engineering building at the Prince of Songkla University might appear to be a modern structure prefabricated using an industrialized mode of production in a factory, it was in fact fabricated by large number of workers relying on pre-industrialized, labour-intensive methods cleverly devised by the architect Amorn Srivongse. Sirikiatikul argues that Srivongse's creative approach to construction based on resource constraints and technological limitations of the region constitutes a form of practical theory.

Spatial Agency

Both spatial representation and spatial typology entail some form of spatial agency to produce and reproduce. In colonial architectural histories, such agency is often attributed primarily to major European figures—even in critical histories.¹⁰ The essays in this special themed section go beyond such conventions on colonial spatial agency. The essays by Cowherd and Chang, for instance, look at the roles of Chinese intermediaries in colonial economies and the major spatial transformation they brought about. Cowherd examines the critical role played by Souw Beng Kiang, the first *Kapitein* of the Chinese, in helping the Dutch establish the Fujianese port town system in Batavia in the 17th century. However, the subsequent conflicts between the Dutch and

the Chinese, culminating in the Chinese Massacre of 1740, led the Dutch to introduce socio-spatial measures to contain and control the Chinese and other ethnic groups. Chang focuses on another intermediary figure—in this case the Singapore-based Aw Boon Haw. Chang explores how Aw mobilized a Sinophone network of architects, artists and designers across port cities in East and Southeast Asia to help him create a distinctive visual culture for the architecture and landscape he commissioned for his businesses and philanthropy.

Colonial intermediaries appeared in many different forms. Besides the elite middlemen covered by Cowherd and Chang, there were also the ordinary intermediaries. One of those was the *djongos*, a male servant commonly found in Dutch colonial households in the East Indies that Honggare directs our attention to. In the Dutch colonial sanitary discourse, the unhygienic practices of the *djongos* turned him into a figure of sanitary threat in the domestic lives of the Dutch colonials, and hence had to be surveilled and controlled. The spatial agency exercised by the *djongos* was rather ambiguous, somewhere between the invisibility of a docile servant adhering to—if not reinforcing—the pre-existing spatial order and the visibility of a disruptive threat that might upend the pre-existing spatial order. Due to this ambiguity, the *djongos* was a source of colonial anxiety. Many colonial subjects were much less ambiguous and far from being docile. Many were openly anti-colonial as Davis's essay shows through the major figure of the Filipino nationalist José Rizal and the revolutionary society of Katipunan. Their spatial agency resided in countering the colonial spatial order by overturning colonial rule.

In between the docile and the revolutionary colonial subjects was a whole spectrum of agencies that included different ways of living with colonial structures of dominance without total submission or overt resistance. An example of which is the casual evasion of control by a colonial subject by their donning of the costume prescribed for another ethnic group discussed in Cowherd's essay. Another example is that of colonial subjects simultaneously occupying different socio-cultural worlds between colonial structures, as in the case of Chinese artists and architects like Tchang Ju Chi and Ho Kwong Yew described in Chang's essay.

Lastly, as Southeast Asia is a complex and diverse region with different colonial histories involving various imperial powers, the essays in this themed section can neither claim to be comprehensive nor representative. But by focusing on the different aspects of colonial spatial orders, these essays seek

to further the enquiry into Southeast Asian colonial architectural histories by making connections between spatial representation, typology and agency.¹¹ We also hope that these discussions would resonate with scholars researching colonial architectural histories and cognate disciplines outside the region.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Jiat-Hwee Chang is Associate Professor of Architecture at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture* (2016, winner of International Planning History Society’s book prize 2018), and co-editor of *Southeast Asia’s Modern Architecture* (2019) and *Non West Modernist Past* (2011). He is also the co-author with Justin Zhuang and Darren Soh (photographer) of *Everyday Modernism*, a book on modernist buildings and society in Singapore that will be published in 2022. Jiat-Hwee is currently working on a book on the socio-cultural histories and technopolitics of air-conditioning and climate change in urban Asia.

Puay-Peng Ho holds the UNESCO Chair on Architectural Heritage Conservation and Management in Asia and is currently Professor of Architecture and Head of Department of Architecture, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore. He received PhD degree in art and architecture history at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Ho’s main research and publication focus is in the areas of Buddhist art and architecture, Chinese architectural history, vernacular architecture and the history of modern architecture in China and Hong Kong. His research has been located at the intersection of art, architecture and the wider societal context.

NOTES

- ¹ See, for example, G.A. Bremner, "Introduction: Architecture, Urbanism, and British Imperial Studies", in *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*, ed. G.A. Bremner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1–16; Jyoti Hosagrahar, "South Asia: Looking Back, Moving Ahead—History and Modernization", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, 3 (2002): 355–69; Anthony D. King, "Writing Colonial Space. A Review Article", ed. Mariam Dossal et al., *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 3 (1995): 541–54. One of us has also written about these issues elsewhere. See Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–17; Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, "Historiographical Questions in Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture", in *Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture: Questions in Translation, Epistemology and Power*, ed. Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019), pp. 1–21; Jiat-Hwee Chang, "Multiple Power in Colonial Spaces", *ABE Journal [Online]* 5 (2014).
- ² See, for example, Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), chap. 1; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- ³ J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice* (New York: New York University Press, 1956).
- ⁴ For similar discussions of vision, exhibition and self-regulation, see Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", in *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and David Boswell (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 332–59.
- ⁵ See, for example, Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), chap. 1.
- ⁶ See, for example, Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880–1931*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006); Brian L. McLaren, "The Tripoli Trade Fair and the Representation of Italy's African Colonies", *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 171–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1504187>.
- ⁷ For building typology or type, see Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 304–11; Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London: Routledge, 1993); Anthony D. King, *Buildings and Society:*

Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

- ⁸ On how landscapes—including buildings—conceal rather than reveal labour and social relations, see Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Richard Walker, “Unseen and Disbelieved: A Political Economist among Cultural Geographers”, in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 1–24.
- ⁹ Hong Lysa, “‘Stranger within the Gates’: Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials”, *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004): 327–54; Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, eds, *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁰ There are of course exceptions, many of which are cited in the essays. They include Swati Chattopadhyay, “Blurring Boundaries: The Limits of ‘White Town’ in Colonial Calcutta”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59, 2 (2000): 154–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/991588>; Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996); Preeti Chopra, *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- ¹¹ For recent scholarship on Southeast Asian architectural histories, see Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, eds, *Southeast Asia’s Modern Architecture: Questions in Translation, Epistemology and Power* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019); Kah-Wee Lee and Lawrence Chua, “Modernity’s Other”, *South East Asia Research* 28, 2 (April 2, 2020): 111–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2020.1768800>.