Gentil

T heir history and served as the court of Awadh. These drawings were commissioned from Indian artists by Jean-

tural drawings rendered on gridded paper, this is a collection of large-scale architectural renderings that followed.

Dadlani depicts the tomb as a link between Shia shrines forms the bulk of this chapter. Shah Jahan but with the innovative architectural forms of seventeenth-century structures and recast them to serve as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reminders of a glorious past. Among the many artists, Indian and international, who drew these structures, and among the architects, again Indian and international, who used them as a basis for their own creations, the concept was well understood. Dadlani has produced an intriguing volume that will surely generate considerable interest.

Catherine B. Asher
Lake Minnetonka

Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, eds.

Southeast Asia’s Modern Architecture: Questions of Translation, Epistemology and Power

This is an interesting and timely volume, not only for the contents of its individual chapters but also for the ways in which the editors, and a majority of the contributing authors, either contest the meaning of modern architecture in Southeast Asia or propose its reframing. Like many edited books developed from conferences or symposia, Southeast Asia’s Modern Architecture bears traces of the effort involved in massaging diverse topics, agendas, and approaches into a coherent narrative. Nevertheless, the book convincing argues that the architecture of Southeast Asia must be seen within contemporary social, cultural, and political contexts, and that architecture is critical to interdisciplinary debates about the region’s development.

Editors Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen begin the book with an introductory chapter, in which they explain that scholarship on Southeast Asia’s modern architecture has tended to be either divided along national lines or presented in the form of grand, totalizing regional theories and themes. They state their ambition to steer a course between these tendencies and to reframe the terms modern and architecture within grounded but intraregional social and political contexts. The chapters are divided into three sections—reflecting the “translation, epistemology, and power” of the book’s subtitle—and framed according to three periods of history as well as “sociocultural formation” and “conditions of architectural production” (7–8). Collectively, they represent a diverse range of subject matter.

The book covers a lot of conceptual and geographical territory. The editors’ effort to frame all of this in their introduction is assisted by Anoma Pieris’s chapter, which surveys a range of positions on architectural and modernist subjectivities. Pieris interrogates the domination of statist or nationally based narratives, the way that “postcolonial geopolitical borders are seen as normative,” and the tendency for local architectural academics and professionals to hold essentialist positions (140). Pieris also interrogates current counternarratives to Western hegemony, noting that the Asia-centricity of “Asia as method”—despite its usefulness as an “analytical counterpoint” to European domination—tends toward an East Asia-centricity (152). The book’s other chapters all treat more specific and nationally situated subjects within varying temporal frameworks. The book’s other chapters all treat more specific and nationally situated subjects within varying temporal frameworks.
investigates Tagore’s role as a global celebrity. Coming from British India, Tagore identified with both Indochina’s local Hindus (a despised minority there) and the region’s precolonial, Indian-influenced civilizations of Angkor and Champa. Tensions over his visit became apparent when local authorities blocked his trip to Angkor and his efforts to meet with local Hindus. The vexed political and social context described by Hahn provides a counter to the chapters on Thailand. Lawrence Chua studies the role of what he calls “mutated translations,” a means by which regional themes in Thailand became part of “universal” modern architecture (61). Chua describes how “militarized aesthetics” were translated and mixed with notions of Thai-ness between the early 1930s and the late 1950s. He thus reminds readers that disciplinary narratives that now seem universal are inevitably situated in particular spatial and temporal contexts. His argument makes for a fascinating comparison with Koompong Noobanjong’s chapter on forgotten Thai memorials. According to Noobanjong, these are buildings whose original meanings have in many cases been erased, yet the structures remain as physical reminders of ideologies now banished from public view. Noobanjong here addresses the question of what might constitute modern Thai architecture between the 1930s and the present, considering how elements such as domes can be viewed as hybrids of modernist concepts and traditional Thai typologies.

Politics also underpins the chapter by Peter Srivener and Amir Sivastava. Discussing “Bali-style” architecture since the 1960s, the authors suggest that the very existence of this style—a generalized tropical traditionalism—gestures toward both resistance and acquiescence to Western modernity. Such an architecture’s embodiment of particular aesthetic preferences, and the deliberate use of these to resist imported forms and ideas, indicates the power wielded by transnational actors. Like other chapters in the book, this one raises questions of agency. Who, the authors ask, was in control of this architectural imagining? Can local design agency alter the overarching architecture of global hegemony? The question of agency is also central to Tim Winter’s chapter on Bagan in Myanmar (Burma) and the contestations around restoration of its many ancient monuments. Western views that building fabric is intrinsic to historical authenticity have long run counter to local beliefs that the sacred power embedded in Bagan’s monuments requires ritual reinforcement and renewal. However, Winter notes how the local view has recently been lent authority by statements from Japanese, Korean, and Indian experts on the importance of intangible heritage.2 Given this fascinating shift, the author might have explored further how contemporary Asia-centric positions relate to Burmese views on the value of ancient national architecture.

Tuin Aryanti’s chapter on Islamic women’s prayer spaces in Indonesia focuses on underrepresented buildings and gender politics. Aryanti considers the invisibility of women and their architecture in Indonesia from the eighteenth century to the present. This invisibility becomes literal as Indonesian men are socially conditioned to not look at women in public places and are proscribed from entering women’s spaces. The author makes a more general point about how scholarship on mosques, like the study of other building types in Indonesia, has focused on form rather than on user interactions with architecture. This provides an argument for a broader reframing of the terms modern and architecture, one that better accommodates distinct regional conditions.

Other chapters are organized around more conventional framings of modern architecture. Gerard Lico examines the rhetoric of hygiene in relation to modern architecture. He argues that during their colonization of the Philippines from 1898 to 1942, Americans saw disease and contagion not as the results of their occupation but as outcomes of “unsanitary” conditions in traditional Filipino dwellings and settlement layouts. Eunice Seng’s chapter on People’s Park in Singapore links that site’s monumental modernist forms and spaces to the Chinatown shophouse district, recreational park, and marketplace that it replaced in 1967. Seng describes tensions between the project’s idealistic architects and the developer and considers how the project has, since its inception, embodied Singapore’s efforts to express multiculturalism through infrastructural and architectural development, although this has often led to conflict, as have many of the government’s efforts to blend consumerism and public space. In an interesting coda, Seng describes the current usage of People’s Park as consisting largely of “Mainland Chinese people activities,” suggesting a recent sociopolitical twist to Singapore’s cultural and architectural identity (260). In the book’s final chapter, Mark Crinson reinforces the introduction’s overarching themes of translation, epistemology, and power. He evokes notions of “fluviality” in an effort to argue that a more relational view of modern architecture is necessary within the Southeast Asian context.

The framing of the various subjects covered here as constitutive forms of modern architecture might be arguable, but this, perhaps, is the point. Considering all of the attention paid to national identity in the book’s chapters, there would appear to be a multitude of parallel intra- and interregional topics awaiting similar exploration. This book should spark further productive and creative explorations and reframings of Southeast Asia’s modern architecture. Its importance lies in the fact that it brings together several scholars who are doing exactly that.

DAVID BEYNON
University of Tasmania

Notes

Jindřich Vybíral
Leopold Bauer: Häretiker der modernen Architektur, 1872–1938
Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018, 580 pp., 346 color and 253 b/w illus. $91.99 (cloth), ISBN 9783036516309

When Otto Wagner decided to retire from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna at the end of the 1911–12 academic year, he recommended his former student Jože Plečnik as his successor. Had Wagner opted to step down only a few years before, he likely would have put forward either Joseph Maria Olbrich or Josef Hoffmann to take

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