

Research Project Flyer

The Postcolonial Global City

This research examines the postcolonial cities of South and East Asia, and how some of them have made the successful segue from nodes in formerly colonial networks to global cities in their own right. This is intended to be an inter-disciplinary approach bringing together architects and urbanists, geographers, sociologists and political scientists, as well as historians, linguists and anyone else involved in the field of Asian studies. The area under investigation consists of South, East and South-East Asia, and includes India, China, Japan, the Koreas, Indochina, Australasia and Micronesia, and concentrates on cities that have successfully made the transition from colonial to postcolonial nodes in the global network (e.g. places like Hong Kong, Singapore or Shanghai).

The research examines the cities themselves, their design, and how they are governed. Institutions of governance, rule of law and the role of language, as well as issues of environmentalism and sustainability are also very important. The research also examines non-western models of social and commercial organisation, e.g. tongs versus hongts, as well as how bazaar or native economies can exist alongside the more dominant western commercial models. It also looks at illegal networks and informal economies (e.g. the triads). This also touches on the issue of race and the effects multi-culturalism, juxtaposition and hybridity can have on city life.

One of the most important factors in the research is architectural typology. Architecture's role in the city is examined to see how it can create identity and ethos, e.g. colonial railway stations, port facilities, post offices, courthouses, grand hotels, etc., and how in the postcolonial era these building typologies have been superseded by the office building, the skyscraper and the shopping centre, all of which are rapidly altering the older urban fabric of the city. One of the most important architectural typologies is of course that of the house, and it is one of the central topics in this research. Everything from the luxury villas of the colonists, to the now rapidly vanishing alleyway houses in Shanghai and the shophouses of Southeast-Asia where the vast majority of these cities' inhabitants lived and worked. One of the key questions in all of this is what role can there be for these typologies in the future?

Gregory Bracken