



Dwelling in Asia: translations between dwelling, housing and domesticity

Lilian Chee & Eunice Seng

To cite this article: Lilian Chee & Eunice Seng (2017) Dwelling in Asia: translations between dwelling, housing and domesticity, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 993-1000, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1362145](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362145)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362145>



Published online: 18 Sep 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4576



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Introduction

Dwelling in Asia: translations between dwelling, housing and domesticity

Lilian Chee , **Eunice Seng**

Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore; Department of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong
(authors' e-mail addresses: l.chee@nus.edu.sg; eseng@hku.hk)

What we call Asia has never been much more than a networked region.¹

The relationship between dwelling, housing, domesticity and architecture remains tenuous. The term 'dwelling' necessarily forces one to consider the traffic between these discrete terms, and where one's subject(s) may be firmly, although not exclusively, positioned. Its ambiguity demands critical reflection on how to reposition an architectural discourse on dwelling that will be pertinent to one's contexts.

This special issue is positioned precisely at the intersection of dwelling's double motives and motivations: between the formative act of building and that of maintenance and/or preservation. The question remains, as Martin Heidegger obtusely states, what does it mean to dwell?² Here, the question is posed in a completely different setting, and distinctly removed from the Heideggerian notion of a stable, nostalgic *heimat* or homeland. If the question of dwelling must ultimately be interrogated through an architectural setting—a home, a house, a homeland, a nest, somewhere to lodge, belong, return to, depart from—then the circumstances of this context become more complex with the onset of globalisation, gentrification, privatisation, immigration, migration, forced and elective dislocation, and self-exile. Consequently, the category we call 'dwelling' must be reappraised. 'What

does it mean to dwell?' takes on completely different implications. We adopt two contexts for these questions.

First, there is the understanding of Asia as an emergent site for rethinking modernist notions of dwelling. Asia is complex. It is an intricately entangled geopolitical structure loosely categorised as a single entity only through its member countries' non-Western affiliations. Yet, Asia is collectively bound to particular socio-cultural and political tendencies such as filial piety, the suppression of the individual in favour of the importance of family and affinity to tradition, as well as being, conversely, also complicated by a neo-liberal capacity for uninhibited development. These tendencies are central to the construct and construction of dwelling.

Secondly, there is the site of academia, the ground of architectural research and design as generative of speculative responses to what it means to dwell. *Where* and *how* does architecture intersect with dwelling's myriad terms of reference? What inflections are relevant to current (and future) architectural discourse? Can these discussions be strategically fluid in shifting knowingly between scales, subjects and methodologies, thus moving the notion of dwelling away from established epistemological foundations: for instance, how specific knowledges of dwelling are consistently pegged to

specific geographies (vernacular and disaster typologies are frequent topics for developing countries) or cultural and economic structures (psycho-social, consumerist fantasies and *avant-garde* designs are linked to advanced economies)? Thus, the papers in this special issue attempt to re-conceptualise dwelling within a non-Western, post-colonial tradition, and use the backdrop of Asia as viable grounds for interrogating dwelling.

As Asia's social, economic and geopolitical boundaries rapidly transform, issues of dwelling—conventionally attached to notions of fidelity towards country and family, the suppression of the individual in favour of the importance of family and affinity to tradition—are unravelling. Upward trends of social and economic mobility have made it possible for more and more people to travel and resettle across international boundaries. Conversely, increased incidents of strife due to war, social unrest, severe economic inequalities or poverty have necessitated emigration and relocation to spaces and places other than one's own. Amidst these global narratives of movement, Asia is emerging as a fertile site wherein new modalities of dwelling are being inscribed. Here, we suggest that the fluid redrawing of political and emotive boundaries inscribing the loaded entities of 'home', 'nation' and 'country' may be mapped against the more specific and located practices of dwelling. In the dwelling, the self becomes constituted, whether as a free agent or as a repressed being. Spaces of dwelling contain residues that may hint at more intractable questions of identity formation, both related to the self and the family, and of forces beyond the control of the self, these entangled with econ-

omic, social and political configurations that involve nation, multinational conglomerations and the insidious influences of neo-liberal, capitalist or developmental policies. The dwelling is a microcosm in which such worldly affairs are condensed, transformed and enacted within the limits of daily life, occupation and use.

The papers in this special issue examine different yet relational themes on dwelling in Asia driven by specific social, economic and/or political circumstances. Yet a caveat needs to be made about the how the papers might 'fit' into the topic of 'dwelling in Asia'. For a start, none of the papers, which are drawn from Southeast, East and South Asia, were written with the explicit aim of highlighting what it means to dwell in Asia. If anything, the contributors to this volume approach the subject of dwelling in Asia in very much the same way as they would treat the same subject in any other part of the world. Rather than reifying Asia, the contributions lie instead within a diverse Asian milieu in their specificity and attention to contexts, agencies and productive modes of architecture. The collection does not represent the immense reach of Asia's geo-political contexts. To approximate any venture of such a nature would surely result in a gross oversimplification of the complexities surrounding this vast geopolitical entity.

Significantly, this special issue highlights six architectural conditions, which suggest particular patterns of resonance and convergence of ideas, relationships and processes across Asia's multifaceted nations and spaces. Acknowledging that 'Asia' is strung together as much by circulating networks of differences as it is by commonalities, 'Asia'

is understood here in at least three registers: as a physical and political territory riven by different ideologies and competing modes of government; as an imagined space or idea articulated by myriad myths and cultures; as a crucible for new methods and questions in approaching research within radically different scenarios of access to information and evidence. With the move towards the sharpening of 'Southern' theories gaining momentum in many other academic disciplines, this issue attempts to make a contribution to architectural research not only by formulating Asia as 'method'—using Asia as an 'imaginary anchoring point' and its societies and spaces as 'each other's points of reference'³ to produce a new subjectivity and understanding of this still often essentialised territory—but also to visualise and map through texts and images a frequently flattened and generalised architectural geography. 'Dwelling' is used here as a concept which intersects and contests these three modes of 'Asia'.

The different issues and spaces traversed in the six papers, implicitly and obliquely, contemplate and question what 'Asia' means as a space, an idea and method. They cover diverse dwelling conditions from the extreme circumstances of war (Pieris), to dwelling locales and historical representations that foregrounded formations of urban cultural identity (Chu, Seng) and are over-calibrated by politics and government (Park, Chee), to contemporary notions of dwelling-on-the-move fuelled by advanced capitalism and financial mobility (Hirsch, Seng). The methods and evidence include historical methodologies and contemporary analysis; historical and contemporary objects; popular media represen-

tations of dwelling; housing policies; original fieldwork, as well as literary representations of domestic spaces. The diversity of conditions, methods and evidence indicate the complexities of dwelling as well as the myriad contexts where the shifting modalities of dwelling might occur. The papers point equally to a convergence of what it means to dwell in Asia and to the impossibility of reducing this understanding to a single underlying concept.

The idea of domesticity as paradoxically complementary and opposed to the architecture of dwelling is a recurrent argument in these essays. The subject of domesticity, with its focus on the co-production of space through occupation, has been actively taken up by cultural geography, material culture, ethnographical studies and anthropology. Its recent re-entry into architecture almost a decade ago resulted in a series of architectural publications which re-examined the construction of the architecture of dwelling whether as idea, type, interior or specific case study.⁴ In their edited volume *Negotiating Domesticities*, Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar inflect the architectural histories and theories of modern architecture through the previously neglected realm of domesticity.⁵ They argue for a critical rethinking of the architectural entities of housing, house and home through domestic politics and practices that challenge the inherent meanings and understanding of modern architecture, and revise modernity's definitive architectural geometries and narratives with perspectives and motivations connected to the more slippery notions of occupation. More than a supplement, the role of domesticity is, at times, central to the

articulation of dwelling. In these situations, the domestic scale, its materiality and its subjects, destabilises a hermetic object-centric definition of dwelling. The inclusion of domesticity in the architectural equation shifts dwelling from a 'thing' into an architecture-in-the-making—one which is continuously produced, co-produced and re-produced through everyday domestic practices and rituals. In turn, these domestic practices reveal struggles that arise because of gendered, race- and class-based biases.

Similarly, the notion of 'excess'—which accompanies the practices and objects of domesticity—becomes a key issue in many of the papers. 'Excess' refers to that which is more than, or outside the norms of discourse. In her philosophical chapter on architecture's 'outside', the feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz writes about architecture's excess as that which is monstrous and cannot be fully measured through architecture's normative principles.⁶ Grosz calls for a radical rethinking of how excess may be folded into architectural conversations. Excess is also what the discipline rejects but nevertheless also the very premise which ultimately holds that discipline together. The study of the architectural interior or the material objects that make the interior what it is, for instance, has long been considered excessive, decorative and superfluous to the discipline of architectural history and theory. In the edited volume *Sexuality and Space*, Beatriz Colomina places what is excessive to the discipline, the sexualised body, as vital to the critique of status-quo architectural histories and theories.⁷ The question of gender as a spatial and architectural category is further interrogated, and argued as being fundamental, in *Gender, Space, Architecture*, edited by Jane

Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden.⁸ Elsewhere, Diana Agrest, Jennifer Bloomer and Catherine Ingraham have written from the edge of the architectural discipline, looking in from its outside by considering the influence and outcomes of popular media, literature, animality and various forms of embodiment (as opposed to anthropometry) in the construction of architectural meanings and their dissemination.⁹ In *The Emergence of the Interior*, Charles Rice frames the historical formation of the interior in the nineteenth century within the boundaries of modern architecture and domesticity.¹⁰ Through psychoanalytical and philosophical readings, Rice argues that the concept of the interior critically doubles as both space and image.

Together, the papers grapple with the changing norms of privacy. The definitions and boundaries of the private are examined, challenged and revised in each context. Indeed, privacy may be argued to be no longer an exclusive architectural or a spatial attribute. It is a condition that must be enacted viscerally by the body through the architecture of the dwelling. Within the modern architectural canons, from Adolf Loos' introspective interiors to Mies van de Rohe's open dwelling plans, to Le Corbusier's monastic interior arrangements, to Alvar Aalto's search for individuality amongst the collective, to the post-war attempts by CIAM and Team Ten to re-centre the humanist subject, to the self-help and bottom-up approaches and imaginations that emerged in the 1960s, mainstream architectural discourses on housing have moved from the social project.¹¹ Despite valiant attempts to locate other agencies to forestall housing crises, architecture, for the most part, has

been subsumed under the hegemony of the market, its development foregrounded by Martin Pawley in *Architecture versus Housing*.¹² Market housing has been the predominant model in most parts of the world since the 1970s.

The reconsideration of notions of privacy in these papers is built upon penetrating work by architectural and urban historians such as Robin Evans, Sharon Marcus and Beatriz Colomina. Evans' analysis of the architectural plan unfolds the social development of bodies in domestic space.¹³ Colomina argues that architecture only becomes modern in its engagement with the mass media and, in so doing, it radically displaces the traditional sense of space and subjectivity, private and public.¹⁴ In addition, Marcus provides a framework for understanding the urban and the domestic, particularly the intersections of public and private, by examining representations of the nineteenth-century block of flats.¹⁵ A deeper interrogation of privacy is covered by Witold Rybcznski, whose book *Home: a short history of an idea*¹⁶ discusses the notions of comfort and the cultural attitudes that have shaped it since the Middle Ages. Rybcznski examines cultural variables such as intimacy, privacy and ideas on light, air and efficiency. Departing from Rybcznski's anthropological discussion, *Home Rules*, by Denis Wood and Robert Beck, looks at the relationship of the occupant with his/her immediate built environment, the room, by navigating the network of rules and systems of beliefs that come with it.¹⁷ They argue that the room is more a space of memory than simply an architectural construct.

Such work has opened up various new forms of scholarship for rethinking the intersections of mod-

ernity and domesticity, city and home, public and private, masculine and feminine; the question, then, of domesticity in Asia, or the prefix 'Asian' to domesticity and its contemporary status, is at the heart of this special journal issue. In this regard, the sociologist Chua Beng Huat's study of the implementation of Singapore's housing policies, the housing forms and organisations, and their sociological implications in *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore*, acknowledges the specificity and locality of domestic processes that are explicitly, even inherently, transcultural. In the chapters discussing the comparative adaptations made by the Chinese, Hindu Indians and Malays from a village house to an flat, he posited that 'a practicable concept of community' is produced in the reconfigured public spaces of the modernist high-rise housing environment.¹⁸ More recently, the geographer Jane M. Jacobs and the architectural theorist Stephen Cairns have shifted the scale and agency of Singaporean public housing through their work on the interior spaces of these flats.¹⁹ Their research not only challenges the terms of a well-established public housing dialogue, it also introduces a rich and under-examined interdisciplinary post-design terrain which needs to contend with issues of interiority, class, popular tastes and national ideology, amongst other issues. Such scholarship highlights the fact that current architectural discourse on dwelling must necessarily be precariously positioned if it is to remain relevant.

Extending these multi-disciplinary trajectories, Anoma Pieris's 'Dwelling in ruins: affective materialities of the Sri Lankan civil war' posits the question of dwelling in crisis by examining the dwelling para-

digms altered by war. Drawing on original interviews, architectural drawings and fieldwork, Pieris invokes a new architectural framework for such a context by contemplating the imaginaries of exile and the potentialities of ruins as a productive and critical form of place-making in the context of 1980s Sri Lanka. Melany Park's 'The paradox of excess: Kim Swoo-geun's *Môt* and his economical architecture' re-examines the legacy of the South Korean architect Kim Swoo-geun, who was typically known for his contribution to the architecture of luxurious residential projects. Park argues that Kim's methods of economy and parsimony have been overlooked. Through a case study, she discusses the architect's inventive techniques of sustaining perceptions of luxury yet enabling an economical approach to housing which was consistent with the political outlook of his milieu.

Couched within the context of Singapore's tightly managed public housing programme, Lilian Chee's 'Keeping cats, hoarding things: domestic situations in the public spaces of the Singaporean housing block', argues that the ubiquitous public spaces in the housing block, namely, the void deck and the common corridor, are in fact only fully explicated through an alternative framework of at-the-margin occupational tactics. Chee makes a case for how the mensuration of such spaces through politics and policies focussed on efficacy delimits their public affiliation and economy. Tapping instead into the contemporary domestic situations of hoarding and illegal cat-keeping as alternative theoretical frames to appraise these spaces, Chee discusses the implications of an affective framework for the rethinking of future housing policies, particularly in

the renewal of public spaces. In 'Constructing a new domestic discourse: the modern home in architectural journals and mass-market texts in early twentieth century China', Cecilia Chu traces the changing ideals of the modern home as these were articulated in China's building journals and popular press between the late 1910s and mid-1930s. Looking at the design of residential houses and their interiors, Chu analyses their transformation through the discourses of domesticity and argues how the design of domestic environments became a subject of intellectual and political concern amongst social reformers, architects and cultural producers with divergent agenda.

In 'Temporary domesticities: the Southeast Asian hotel as (re)presentation of modernity, 1968–1973', Eunice Seng examines the phenomenon of the Southeast Asian luxury hotels and how they were presented and discussed in the popular press, trade journals and governmental reports, in relation to the composite housing complexes that were built concurrently in the Southeast Asian city. In analysing the slab-tower and podium buildings that were designed for housing but became utilised as hotels, and the reverse, she posits that the metropolitan condition of the rapidly modernising Asian city produced a 'temporary domesticity' that was predicated on the development of the buildings before their eventual purpose was determined—and at the same time, anticipated their future re-programming. She argues that the architecture of the 'big hotel' underscores the rationality for urban architectural development based on notions of economic, constructional and formal efficiency, and reached its apogee in the 1970s.

Sharing a similar trans-national perspective, Max Hirsch's 'Redefinitions of dwelling and the trans-national production of temporary housing in Asian cities' investigates the implications of inter-Asian middle-class mobility through the contemporary history of the Asian serviced-flat business. Hirsch focusses specifically on the serviced-flat infrastructure developed by the Singapore-owned Ascott Group, a short-term private housing provider founded in the 1980s. Focussing on a case study in Bangkok, his paper delineates how this relatively nascent temporal Asian domestic arrangement might compare to the more extensively documented cases of American serviced flats.

The conclusions drawn from each paper are specific. Persistent in the respective contexts is the obdurate nature of dwelling, which implies notions of 'home' and of wanting to belong. Often dismissed in academic studies as overly romantic, nostalgic or sentimental, questions of rootedness and home are nevertheless critical blind spots, which should still trouble any deliberation on dwelling, even those which profess complete disavowal of such premises. Especially in Asia, where the institutions of family and nation are inherently constituted within the formation of the self, questions such as these may be raised: Are there specific practices of dwelling, both historical and contemporary in Asia, which problematise the social stratification of the self in relation to society and family? What does it mean to dwell in Asia today? What are the ramifications for domesticity of the rapidly changing urban milieu of the Asian city? What are emerging definitions of dwelling specific to Asia, given its differentiated contexts and priorities?

In unravelling the reconceptualisation of 'dwelling' within a non-Western tradition, 'Dwelling in Asia' critically explores and repositions the term 'dwelling' in relation to housing, domesticity and architecture within the physical, social, cultural and imaginative geographies of Asia and its academic contexts. It recognises late-industrial modalities and recent developments in Asia as viable research grounds for rethinking questions of modernity and the post-colonial. Collectively, the papers seek to advance 'Asia' as a new reference point to forefront new theories and to articulate knowledge strategies for conceptualising 'dwelling' and emerging issues.

ORCID

Lilian Chee  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1738-1941>

Notes and references

1. Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 16.
2. Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Basic Writings*, 2nd edition (New York, HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 343–64.
3. Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2012), p. 212.
4. Christopher Reed, ed., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (New York, Thames & Hudson, 1996); Joel Sanders, 'Curtain Wars: Architecture, Decorators, and the Twentieth-Century Domestic Interior', *Harvard Design Magazine*, 16 (2002), pp. 14–20; Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers That Shaped Them* (Google eBook), vol. 9 (London, Routledge, 2004); Mark Taylor, Julieanna Preston,

- INTIMUS: Interior Design Theory Reader (London, Wiley, 2006); Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London, Routledge, 2007); Barbara Miller Lane, *Housing And Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture* (London, Routledge, 2007); Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London, Reaktion Books, 2008); Graeme Brooker, Lois Weinthal, *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design* (London, Bloomsbury Press, 2013).
5. Hilde Heynen, Baydar Gülüm, eds, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London, Routledge, 2005).
 6. Elizabeth Grosz, 'Architectures of Excess', in *Architecture from the Outside* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 151–166.
 7. Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality & Space*, 4th edition (New York, NY, Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).
 8. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden, *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London, Routledge, 2000).
 9. Diana I. Agrest, 'Architecture from without: Body, Logic, and Sex', *Assemblage*, no. 7 (1988), pp. 29–41, doi:10.2307/3171074; Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995); Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998); Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture, Animal, Human: The Asymmetrical Condition* (New York, Routledge, 2006).
 10. C. Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, op. cit.
 11. The post-modern turn in architecture that emerged in the 1970s and the refashioning and quotations of earlier Euro-American modernisms dominated the global discourse to a large extent, overshadowing other discourses. The trajectory of housing work by architects and writers such as John Habraken and John Turner, whilst recognised as significant, were not part of the universalised architectural canon, largely predicated on the visual and formal. See, for example, N. John Habraken, *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing* (London, Architectural Press, 1972; c.1961); John Turner, *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (New York, Macmillan, 1972); John Turner, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments, Ideas in progress* (London, Marion Boyars, 1976). The ideological break between the impetus for housing and the project of architecture is by now irreconcilable.
 12. Martin Pawley, *Architecture versus Housing* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1971).
 13. Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1997).
 14. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1996).
 15. Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 1999).
 16. Witold Rybczynski, *Home: a short history of an idea* (New York, Penguin Books, 1987).
 17. Denis Wood, Robert Beck, *Home Rules* (Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
 18. Chua Beng-Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (London, New York, Routledge, 1997): see especially, Chapters 4, 5 and 6; pp. 70–123.
 19. Jane M. Jacobs, Stephen Cairns, 'The Modern Touch: Interior Design and Modernisation in Post-Independence Singapore', *Environment and Planning A*, 40, no. 3 (1st March, 2008), pp. 572–95, doi:10.1068/a39123.



Redefinitions of dwelling and the transnational production of temporary housing in Asian cities

Max Hirsh

To cite this article: Max Hirsh (2017) Redefinitions of dwelling and the transnational production of temporary housing in Asian cities, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 1137-1153, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1362023](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362023)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362023>



Published online: 29 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 387



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Redefinitions of dwelling and the transnational production of temporary housing in Asian cities

Max Hirsh

Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Hong Kong (Author's e-mail address: hirsh@hku.hk)

The article investigates the history of the Asian serviced-apartment industry in order to shed light on the shifting relationship between dwelling, housing, domesticity and architecture in contemporary Asian cities. It studies the architects, developers and itinerant professionals who have propelled the circulation of residential models and architectural ideas across borders and between cities. In so doing, the article investigates how designers have engaged with the growing demand for short-term housing among Asia's geographically mobile middle class. At the same time, by tracing the cross-border movement of design and management expertise related to serviced apartments, the article demonstrates how key Asian hubs, such as Singapore, operate as model cities that influence ideas about urban development throughout Asia. Drawing upon fieldwork conducted in Bangkok, the article concludes by studying how these models are subsequently modified by local regulatory norms, spatial practices, and urban design traditions.

Introduction

This article investigates the emergence of serviced apartment complexes in order to shed light upon two intertwined phenomena that are significantly altering the social and spatial contours of what it means to 'dwell' in the contemporary Asian city: the emergence of an upwardly and geographically mobile Asian middle class, and the evolution of a distinct housing typology designed to accommodate transient, middle-income inhabitants.¹ Often marketed as a 'home away from home', serviced apartments recombine distinct elements of two well-established housing types: the hotel, tailored to the needs of short-term, non-local visitors; and the high-rise apartments building, the dominant locus of domesticity in Asian megacities. In studying the hybridisation between hotel and home—which the serviced apartment surely aspires towards, combin-

ing the flexibility and rootlessness of an hotel with the intimacy and identificatory potential of a home—how can we conceptualise the synecdochal insights afforded by this emerging form of transient domesticity? In other words, how does the rapid growth of serviced apartments illuminate broader social, cultural and economic changes in the contemporary Asian city, and to what extent does it serve as a proxy for systemic shifts in the formation of family structures, the spatial organisation of labour and the social contract between city and citizen?

In this paper, I argue that the multiplication of serviced dwelling types—some catering to affluent executives, others to transient families, and yet others to middle-income students and knowledge workers—testifies to the pluralisation of Asia's migrant workforce. That deracinated labour pool is most often studied through investigations of the

very rich and the very poor: a bifurcated lens that ignores the broad migratory middle class in between. The focus on socioeconomic extremes is certainly understandable: our age is witnessing excesses of poverty and wealth that are, quite frankly, appalling. At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the middle class that has been steadily rising at the interstices of nation-states, toggling across borders both more comfortably than the underclass of migrant workers, yet also much more modestly than traditional transnational elites such as diplomats and corporate executives.

A study of serviced apartments thus affords an unusual insight into the paradigmatic social and spatial shifts that have exacerbated a widening disjuncture between received notions of house, home and homeland in contemporary Asian societies. One crucial factor is the emergence of a transnational middle class, evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of middle-income students and professionals who are working, training and studying abroad for a fixed period of time. Their movement has been driven by paradigmatic changes in the global economy, national migration regimes and cross-border transport and telecommunication systems. For the most part, these professionals have settled in hub cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore, which host corporate headquarters, universities and trade fairs; and where the rapid pace of urban development depends on a steady stream of architects, developers and engineers. These cities have experienced an influx of transient inhabitants and a multiplication of short-term dwelling types that are designed to accommodate them.

The phenomenon itself is, of course, not new; indeed, many Asian metropolises have hosted substantial itinerant populations throughout history, and Southeast Asian cities in particular, have housed millions of sojourners who made remittances to distant home towns—in Tamil Nadu, in Fujian—while at the same time building up cosmopolitan centres such as Singapore and Penang.² Yet, as a number of recent studies in the fields of anthropology and urban geography have demonstrated, contemporary trans-national migrants differ from their historical predecessors in that they are both much larger in number and more diverse in terms of their socio-economic background, profession, country of origin and length of stay.³ Whether or not they settle in their new place of employment, these mobile professionals often begin their time abroad by living in serviced apartment complexes, which function as *de-facto* arrival cities for specialised workers.

With that in mind, the article investigates the development of the Asian serviced apartment industry over the past three decades. Relatively unknown in Asia before the 1980s, serviced apartment complexes were designed to accommodate foreign businessmen, knowledge workers and, increasingly, students for a fixed period of time: typically three to six months. The rapid expansion of these short-stay apartments testifies to the substantial increase in the number of people who were working, training and studying outside their home countries; and provides physical evidence of these short-term populations' impact on the urban fabric of the contemporary Asian city.

Focussing on serviced apartments in Bangkok and Singapore, the paper studies the architects, planners,

developers and itinerant professionals who have propelled the circulation of residential models and architectural idea(l)s across borders and between cities. In so doing, the paper has two goals. First, it investigates how the demands of a geographically mobile Asian middle-class have driven changes in the short-term housing sector. Whereas serviced apartments initially catered to affluent Western expatriates, in recent years middle-income tenants from Asian countries have emerged as the industry's core constituents. The concomitant shifts in the planning and design of short-stay apartments serve as a useful lens for illuminating the expanding socio-economic contours of migrants in Asian cities, as well as the changing institutional needs of the organisations for which they work. Secondly, by tracing the cross-border movement of design and management expertise related to serviced apartments, the article demonstrates how key Asian hubs, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, operate as model cities that influence ideas about urban development throughout Asia. To do so, the article focusses on the largest developer of serviced apartments in Asia: the Ascott Group, which operates more than 200 properties in Bahrain, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Oman, the Philippines, Qatar, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

The paper traces the origins of the Ascott Group from its founding in the 1980s through its subsequent expansion across Asia. It charts the development of one of the defining architectural typologies of Asian modernisation—the serviced apartment complex—in order to illuminate the broader urban design changes entailed by the accelerated mobility of capital, labour and architectural expertise.

Through archival research and interviews with Ascott's senior management team in Singapore, as well as fieldwork in Bangkok, this paper demonstrates how an urban model, developed in Singapore, was exported to cities across Asia in order to meet the residential needs of a highly mobile class of students, businessmen and technical experts.

In so doing, I make three main arguments. First, whilst serviced apartments initially catered to affluent, middle-aged executives working in the central business districts of Asian financial hubs, my fieldwork documents the emergence of less prestigious properties that offer fewer amenities and are located outside of major financial districts. These serviced apartments appeal primarily to middle-income tenants who, since the turn of the twenty-first century, have become the industry's fastest growing clientele. I argue that the concomitant changes in the planning and design of serviced apartment complexes serve as a useful lens for illuminating the emergence of a geographically mobile Asian middle class, along with the accompanying increase in demand for temporary housing in hub cities such as Bangkok, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Secondly, whilst scholars have typically focussed on the role of multinational corporations in the development of standardised architectural typologies and their dissemination on a global scale,⁴ my research suggests that the siting and physical appearance of Asian serviced residences are largely determined by these multinationals' local partners, who hail from both the private and public sectors. Moreover, I argue that these partnerships rehearse historical patterns of travel and trade between Asian societies and particular ethnic

minorities: patterns whose roots can be traced back to the region's pre-Second World War geographic and economic order. Rather than applying the dominant conceptual model deployed in studies of Asian urbanisation—that is, the documentation of an emerging 'global' city and its panoply of deracinated urban design strategies—I contend that the rise of serviced apartments is symptomatic of a distinctly inter-Asian process of urbanisation whereby *diapora* business communities construct an infrastructure of short-term housing for itinerant businessmen, technical experts and their assistants.

Thirdly, in conclusion, I argue that a shifting conception of residency, or dwelling, is at the core of Ascott's business model; and informs the serviced apartments' design, siting and programmatic details. In effect, Ascott's development model testifies to the larger need to create spaces of temporary domesticity in the contemporary Asian city: living environments that are neither permanent nor transient, but somewhere in between. In so doing, the serviced residence decouples the concept of 'home' from the idea of 'settling down': implying, instead, a permanent condition of temporariness that has come to characterise a growing proportion of Asia's middle-class urban workforce.

In October, 1984, the Singaporean daily newspaper *Straits Times* published a short article entitled 'Life in a service [*sic*] apartment'. The article profiled Mollie Elizabeth Cowsill, the wife of an engineer and 'one of a growing number of expatriates living in a service [*sic*] apartment':

Sipping a tall cool glass of lemonade and lazily tanning herself beside the pool, she could spend the whole day just lounging in the deck chair

without feeling guilt that the housework is not done or the clothes not ironed. For she knows that when she gets back to her apartment, everything will be spick and span with every piece of crockery in place.⁵

Detailing the many services that expatriates like the Cowsills enjoyed—'daily maid service, laundry, health club and even free transportation to and from the airport'—the article introduced its Singaporean readership to what was, at the time of publication, still a relatively novel concept: the Asian serviced apartment complex. 'Like [the Cowsills], the bulk of the expatriates renting these apartments are ... here on short-term work contracts. The freedom of living in a private apartment with all the comforts afforded by hotels have [*sic*] made them a popular alternative to hotels and apartments.' The article goes on to note that the new serviced residences popping up in central Singapore:

... have had very encouraging response from ... multinational companies in search of short-term accommodation for their expatriate staff. The Ascott, for example, had to speed up the furnishing of the apartments when the first 20 of their 177 apartments were quickly snapped up so as to keep up with the demand for them.

Leaving the author's blatant advertorialising aside for a moment, I find this article useful because it takes us back to a time when the concept of serviced apartments was relatively unknown. The serviced apartment and corporate housing industries emerged in the United States and United Kingdom between the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to the increasing mobility of workers employed by large corporations.⁶ *Ad-hoc* 'serviced' apartments

that imitated these US and UK models—typically dwellings that had been converted for short-term use, and that offered hotel-like amenities such as housekeeping and laundry service—likewise appeared in cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore around the same time.⁷ However, large-scale purpose-built serviced apartment complexes did not appear in Asia until the early 1980s. These structures differed considerably from their Western precedents. Whereas serviced apartment complexes in the United States were designed as one- to two-storey blocks located near highway interchanges and suburban office parks, in Asian hub cities they were articulated as high-rise towers, anchored by a podium devoted to shopping and entertainment, and located in inner-city business districts.

The first purpose-built serviced apartment complex in Singapore opened above a shopping arcade in 1984 near Orchard Road, the city's premier retail district.⁸ Developed by Scotts Holding, a property company controlled by the Singaporean-Indian Jumabhoy family, the Scotts Shopping Centre combined a high-rise residential tower—Ascott Executive Residences—with a podium-level shopping arcade. The following year, a competitor of Scotts opened a similar development at Liang Court: a Japanese-themed shopping centre built beneath a tower block of serviced apartments called The Regency.⁹ Both facilities functioned as flagships of technological novelty and retail innovation: the Scotts Centre, for example, featured Singapore's first air-conditioned food court; whilst Liang Court was anchored by a high-end Japanese department store. The two properties differed in terms of layout and clientele: whereas Scotts con-

sisted primarily of studio and one-bedroom apartments that catered to single persons, Liang Court mainly featured two-bedroom apartments designed for workers travelling with their spouses and children. Both complexes appealed to the growing number of foreign executives and technical specialists who were spending increasingly long stints in Singapore: a demographic shift in the city's population that accompanied the rise in foreign investment in Singapore's urban development.¹⁰ The sudden popularity of these serviced apartments testified to the inadequacies of Singapore's housing supply.

As a port city that had been home to colonial administrators, migrant workers and foreign traders for centuries, Singapore was used to accommodating strangers.¹¹ But from the 1980s onwards, the city began to play host to a new type of short-term resident: skilled foreign professionals who had been posted to Singapore not for a period of several years, but rather for short-term projects and internships that lasted just a few months. Many of the people who lived in serviced apartments were Western and Japanese managers and engineers, dispatched to work on large-scale infrastructure projects, such as airports and underground systems; or to set up and manage factories in less-developed hinterland locations such as Batam, which lacked services and accommodation that catered to foreign visitors. A disproportionate number of them were engineers—such as the husband of Mrs. Cowsill, profiled above—who came to Singapore to work on the new airport at Changi, which opened in 1981; and on the city's first underground line, which broke ground in 1982.¹² Their residential needs fell between the cracks of Singapore's existing

housing typologies: as their stays of three, six or nine months both outwore the welcome of hotels designed to provide accommodations for less than a week; yet still fell far short of the two-year rental contracts that were typical for most apartments in the city.¹³ Serviced residences represented something in between: offering more space and utilitarian amenities—such as kitchens—whilst not binding their tenants to long-term commitments or to the vagaries of local tenancy laws. The Asian serviced apartment complex thus developed as a hybrid housing typology, combining the flexibility, services and representational spaces of an hotel with the quotidian comforts, privacy and domesticity of a traditional apartment building.

Having acquired the expertise needed to design and operate serviced residences, in the early 1990s Singaporean companies started to look beyond the borders of their own tiny country and invest in the rapidly developing economies of Southeast Asia. The first to do so was Liang Court. Capitalising on the boom in foreign investment that began pouring into Vietnam following the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* policy, in 1994 the company opened Regency West Lake Hanoi, Vietnam's first serviced apartment complex; and developed three more properties in short order: Regency Chancellor Court Ho Chi Minh City (1996); Regency Hanoi Towers (1997); Stamford Ho Chi Minh City (1997).¹⁴ European and Japanese businessmen and engineers, sent to Vietnam to upgrade the country's infrastructure networks and expand its manufacturing base, made up the majority of tenants.¹⁵ The properties were developed as joint ventures between the Singaporean serviced apartment operator and Vietnamese

government authorities and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that controlled large tracts of land in the inner cities of Hanoi and Saigon. None of these local partners were directly linked to the property industry. But in line with the broader *Đổi Mới* goal to create a 'socialist-oriented market economy', these state-run bodies were seeking to commercialise their operations and diversify their assets through lucrative projects in Vietnam's nascent hospitality industry. Stamford Ho Chi Minh City, for example, emerged from a joint venture with the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense; subsequent partners included an agricultural SOE and a state-owned brewery.¹⁶

In effect, the Vietnamese SOEs supplied the land and the labour; and the Singaporean serviced apartment operators provided the capital investments, managerial expertise and technical equipment necessary for designing serviced residences that met 'international standards'.¹⁷ Beyond the formal need to adhere to legislation governing the foreign leasing and ownership of land, these joint ventures proved expedient in navigating the opaque operating procedures characteristic of Southeast Asia's transitional economies. The approach pursued in Vietnam—that is, to provide the management expertise in exchange for access to land and facilitation of bureaucratic procedures—served as a blueprint for Ascott's subsequent expansion plans.¹⁸ Following their first foreign ventures in Vietnam, the various companies that became subsumed under the Ascott brand expanded their reach across East and Southeast Asia throughout the second half of the 1990s: opening properties in Indonesia (1995), China (1998), Malaysia (1999), Thailand (2000) and the Philippines (2000) (Fig. 1).¹⁹

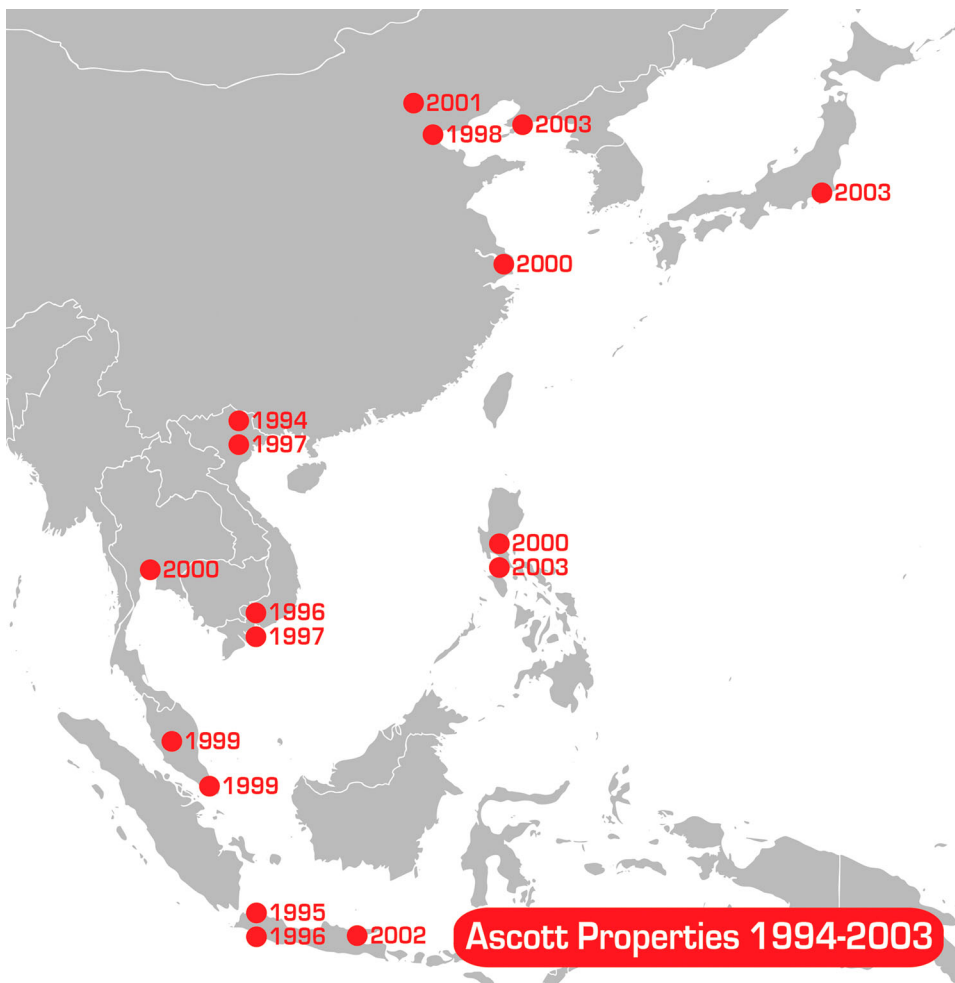
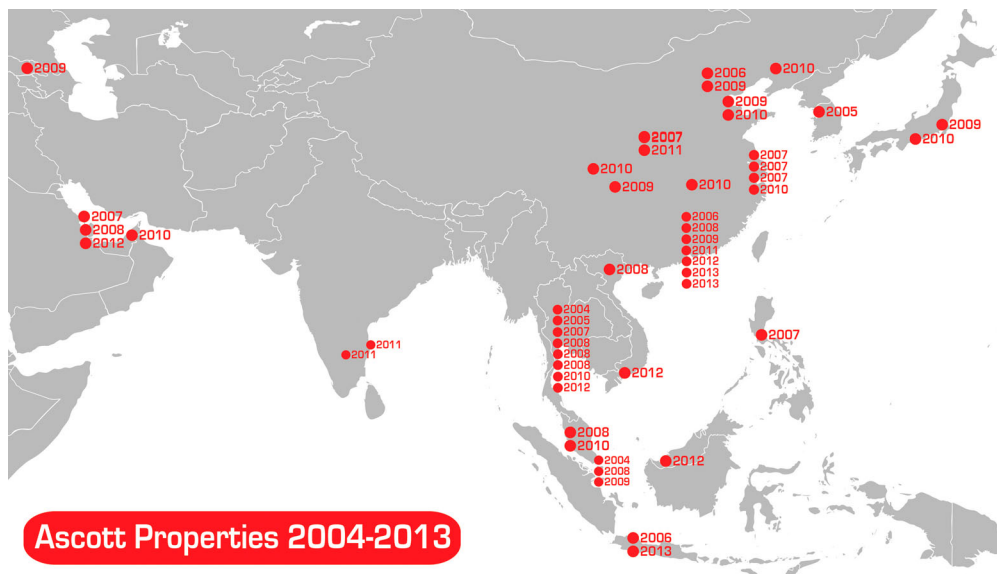


Figure 1. Ascott properties opened between 1994 and 2003.

Figure 2. Ascott properties opened between 2004 and 2013.



Beginning in the early 2000s, Ascott embarked on a second push to internationalise its operations. By and large, these foreign endeavours concentrated on the growth poles of Asia's megacity regions, such as the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta in China; as well Southeast Asian capital cities such as Jakarta and Manila (Fig. 2).²⁰ Between 2005 and 2010, the company added seven new serviced residences in Bangkok; as well as its first properties in Bahrain, Georgia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. By 2015, Ascott managed nearly one-third of all serviced apartments in Asia, making it by far the largest operator on the continent.²¹

Ascott divides these properties into three tiers, each with a distinct target demographic. The most expens-

ive properties are called 'The Ascott', described as 'exclusive residences [that] offer refined luxurious city living in modern elegant apartments located in the heart of... the world's most vibrant cities.' One step down in price and standard is the 'Somerset': which are sited in inner-city neighbourhoods adjacent to the Central Business District (CBD), and are intended to house business executives who are accompanied by their spouses and children. These properties often include a 'kids club' with extensive playground facilities; and sometimes offer full-time daycare facilities. The lowest rung in Ascott's three-tiered hierarchy is 'Citadines', tailored to 'the independent traveller' and offering 'comfortable spaces and flexible services to suit your global lifestyle'.²²

The three brands' distinct clienteles are reflected in their geographical distribution in Asian cities. According to Lee Chee Koon, Ascott's chief executive officer:

Primarily we want to be in the city center because our target clients are still corporate travelers. In some instances we do go off city centre, but still in good locations that are convenient for people to move in and out of.... For Ascott, it has to be in the city centre, we give no exceptions. For our Somerset brand, it targets more at family [sic], so [we focus on] proximity to international schools and to the needs and lifestyle of the family.... For Citadines, it's more for the younger crowd, singles or couples, I think they are a lot more flexible.²³

Lee's comments reflect the pronounced demographic changes that serviced residences have undergone across Asia, in line with the increase in students and mid-level professionals who are being posted abroad.²⁴ Thus, whilst serviced apartments historically catered to a very small number of affluent executives, in the past decade middle-income tenants have rapidly become the industry's core constituents.²⁵ Moreover, occupants of serviced apartments have become much more diverse in terms of their professional background. Data collected in several Asian hub cities, for example, revealed that the proportion of tenants working in the financial sector declined significantly between 2009 and 2014; whilst those active in education, media, hospitality and information technology have more than doubled.²⁶ At the same time, whereas serviced residences once clustered around the central business districts of Asian cities, over the past decade they

have become increasingly scattered throughout the urban landscape. A case in point is Singapore, where the relocation of knowledge-intensive employment sectors beyond the urban core, such as education and media, has resulted in a counterpart expansion of serviced apartments outside the CBD.

A detailed investigation of Ascott's middle-income properties in one particular district of central Bangkok illuminates the socio-economic diversification and geographical diffusion of the serviced apartment complex, as well as the crucial role of local partners in their design and development. In many parts of Bangkok, it is impossible to walk more than five yards without coming across a serviced apartment building or an advertisement hoarding identifying the presence of one in an adjacent alleyway. The city's serviced residences come in all sizes and are available for any budget: from tiny, subdivided apartments to luxury penthouses. Ascott manages nine properties in the Thai capital, mostly within walking distance of a Skytrain station. It does not own any of them outright: four of the properties are joint ventures, whilst the other five are operated by Ascott but owned by local developers.²⁷ Ascott's top-end residences are located in Sathorn, home to many of the city's multinational corporations, embassies and luxury hotels. However, the largest cluster of properties can be found at the lower end of Sukhumvit Road, where the firm manages five serviced apartment buildings within a one-kilometre radius of the Nana and Asok Skytrain stations.²⁸ The area is known as a lifestyle and entertainment district favoured by tourists and expatriates, functions as a commercial hub for Bangkok's

Figure 3. Exterior of
Citadines Sukhumvit Soi
11, Bangkok, 2013.



Arab and Indian communities and hosts many low-end guesthouses and mid-range hotels.

In contrast to the serviced residences in Sathorn, Ascott's properties along Sukhumvit Road cater to a younger, less affluent and more ethnically diverse clientele. Interviews conducted on site with serviced apartment managers, reception staff and cleaning personnel suggested that the four Citadines properties hosted a wide range of younger Europeans, Americans and Australians working in the Thai capital; as well as middle-class professionals from China, Indonesia and the Philippines.²⁹ Guest demographics likewise varied across the properties: Citadines Sukhumvit 11, for example, attracts a sub-continental crowd due to its proximity to the Indian shops and restaurants that line the streets around Nana.³⁰

The Citadines residences in Bangkok are the product of a joint venture between Ascott and the Boutique Group, a developer founded in 2004 by Prab Thakral. Thakral is the descendant of a wealthy Sikh merchant family whose ancestors emi-

grated from Punjab to Bangkok in the early twentieth century as textile traders.³¹ Through family connections that permitted him to acquire small parcels of land in the ethnically Indian enclave around Nana, Thakral sought to develop 'mid-market' properties for an underserved clientele: short-term guests from developing countries such as India and China, who had disposable income but could not afford to stay in four- and five-star properties.³² The result was a line of 'economy serviced apartments', branded under the Citadines name, that offers a scaled-down version of Ascott's more expensive properties (Fig. 3). They feature cheaper finishes, fewer services and modular room elements designed to maximise the functionality of the units, which are about half the size of those at Somerset and Ascott. A standard studio apartment separates a small sleeping, sitting and bathing areas by means of a glass wall panel and moveable divider such that the mattress, couch and sink can be placed directly next to one another (Fig. 4). On the opposite wall, a flat-screen TV is mounted to a metal rail such that it can be slid back and forth between the 'bedroom' and 'living room' (Fig. 5). In the larger one- and two-bedroom units, chairs and dining tables on wheels afford the tenant a modicum of flexibility in the spatial layout of the unit. Leong Teng Wui, Ascott's Chief Development Officer, notes that:

Citadines is meant to be affordable, meant to be for the working professionals who are there for project work. So it's more modern and catering to a younger group. We make sure that the space is very flexible, so you cater to different lifestyles. Some people prefer to lie on their bed and



Figure 4. Bathing, dining and sleeping areas in a studio apartment, Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 8, Bangkok, 2013.



Figure 5. Sliding wall element between the dining and sleeping areas of a studio apartment, Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 23, Bangkok, 2013.

do their work, some people prefer watching TV. So we design the furniture to be able to support that kind of requirements.³³

In effect, the mobile and modular elements spatialise the lifestyle predilections of Citadines' tenants: with the geographic mobility of the tenants, as well as a fuzzy porosity between private and professional activities, reflected in the modularity of the units' furnishing.

The programmatic flexibility and porosity of functions found in the private units extends to the buildings' public spaces. Ascott and Somerset properties are visually striking, skyscraper apartment buildings that tower above their surroundings. Citadines, by contrast, are often difficult to spot: sited on exceptionally bounded plots, fitted out with street-level bars that afford residents an up-close view of activities taking place on adjacent properties. They are also magnets for local entrepreneurs—such as seamstresses, food vendors and motorbike drivers—who occupy the pavements in front of the serviced apartments and whose customers are primarily Cita-

dines residents. In contrast to the higher-end properties, where manicured hedges and security staff are deployed as defensive measures, the perimeter of the Citadines residences is characterised by a consistent blurring of public and private space, and of domestic and commercial functions. Thus, while more expensive serviced apartment complexes often include amenities such as a supermarket or a laundromat in order to minimise tenants' exposure to the local economy, Citadines actively relies on the presence of local service providers in order to satisfy the needs of temporary residents.

In Bangkok, the typical Citadines façade reflects a 'cheap chic' aesthetic, articulated in shades of grey or brushed aluminium, that is echoed in the residences' interior design and soft furnishings. Whilst the properties must adhere to a set of quality standards developed at Ascott's headquarters in Singapore, decisions regarding the buildings' exterior and interior design is largely left up to the Boutique Group, which employs Thai architects and source the residences' soft furnishings through the local textile industry.³⁴ These aesthetic choices aim to

provide 'interesting public spaces to hang out' for tenants who are younger and less affluent than the traditional inhabitant of a serviced apartment; yet are also more image-conscious and keen to live within walking distance of entertainment and recreational facilities.³⁵ (For example, one Citadines property in Bangkok's Asok neighbourhood hugs the podium of a skyscraper that contains a rooftop bar that is popular among foreign visitors. Nearby, a second Citadines is within walking distance of the red-light district around Soi Cowboy. Whilst the young professionals whom I interviewed expressed little interest in hiring prostitutes, they commented that the area's reputation for nightlife had attracted a wide range of trendy restaurants and bars, and they enjoyed not having to contend with Bangkok's notorious traffic in order to access them.)³⁶ In effect, the design and use of the Citadines properties in Bangkok testifies to the social and spatial diversification of serviced apartment complexes in the contemporary Asian city. The interviews and fieldwork conducted for this article revealed that serviced apartments have increasingly become the domain of a geographically mobile middle class, made up of middle-income individuals who are working, training and studying outside of their home countries.

Conclusion

In every interview conducted at Ascott, I asked each manager what he or she thought was driving the expansion of serviced apartments across Asia. One responded:

The transnational migrant, the nomadic tribe of professional workers are very much a fact of life

in major gateway cities... around Asia. The region has come into its own and we are doing a lot more business and trading with each other, among ourselves. Whereas in the past, if you're just an export processing zone like Singapore used to be in the 1970s, it's more of a one-dimensional economy. But now we are so networked, and with the advent of budget travel people are just traveling a lot more. Asia used to be constrained by its archipelagic condition, because geographically we were dispersed as island states and not as well linked as compared to, say, Europe. But because of all these new airlines and airports, we are really well-connected. Businesses are also flowing from one place to the other, and that drives the demand for housing that's longer than a transient hotel stay. But you're not staying there for, like, the rest of your life—unless you like the place so much that you decide to become a citizen. Even this concept of what it means to be a resident is also shifting. For ourselves, we travel so much, we might live in certain cities more than even our hometown. It's a fact of life.³⁷

The shifting conception of residency is at the core of Ascott's business model and informs both the serviced apartments' 'hardware'—that is, the interior design of the properties, and their strategic siting within the city—as well as their 'software,' ie, the types of services that Ascott provides to its clients. In effect, Ascott's development model testifies to the larger need to create spaces of temporary domesticity in the contemporary Asian city: living environments that are neither permanent nor transient, but somewhere in between. In so doing,

the serviced residence decouples the concept of 'home' from the idea of 'settling down': implying, instead, a permanent condition of temporariness that has come to characterise a growing proportion of Asia's urban workforce.

As the fieldwork in Bangkok and interviews in Singapore reveal, that mobile workforce has become much more heterogeneous since the turn of the twenty-first century: a development that is linked to paradigmatic changes in the region's political and economic framework. On the one hand, the deregulation of international air travel and emergence of a robust budget airline industry, coupled with the simplification of cross-border migration regimes, have made it both easier and cheaper to work and vacation abroad.³⁸ On the other hand, the incipient regionalisation and globalisation of Southeast Asia's labour market—a major goal of the evolving ASEAN Economic Community—is evidenced by the Citadines' popularity amongst white-collar workers from the Philippines and Indonesia. These upwardly mobile professionals are neither subaltern labourers nor highly paid executives, but rather are members of an emerging class of what Michael Peter Smith has called 'middling' transnational subjects.³⁹ Inside the serviced apartments, they live amongst 20-something Westerners who, facing dwindling job prospects in the stagnant labour markets of Europe and North America, have relocated to rapidly growing Asian hubs like Bangkok in search of more promising career opportunities. Extremely diverse in their geographical origin—on one visit to a Citadines, I heard guests speaking Polish, Tagalog, Malay, French, Cantonese and Australian-inflected English—these young pro-

fessionals typically stay in a serviced apartment for three to twelve months and share the Citadines' common spaces with budget-conscious tourists from China, Singapore and Malaysia before moving into more permanent accommodations, or moving on to a new city.⁴⁰

Designed as temporary residential quarters for middle-income transnational workers, Citadines essentially decouples one of the key markers of expatriate living—the serviced apartment complex—from its traditional socio-economic basis. In so doing, these properties operate as a support system for a mobile middle class whose temporary housing needs reflect the emergence of a geographically flexible labour market in Asian cities that has largely been ignored by urban planners. Throughout much of the post-war period, urban housing policies in Asia aimed to provide dwelling spaces for intransient, full-time residents who were permanently tied to a specific place and/or welfare state, as was the case with Singapore's Housing Development Boards (HDBs); or to a particular state-owned entity, as exemplified by work-unit housing in China and Vietnam. In both the socialist and capitalist spheres, housing policy sought to provide a permanent place of residence and did not anticipate a large amount of occupant turnover. Yet in concert with paradigmatic changes in the political and economic *mores* that govern Asian societies, we can observe an increasing segmentation of dwelling practices according to specific life phases, particularly amongst Asia's influential middle class. This is evident both in the proliferation of residential university dormitories—historically uncommon in Asia—and in the popularity of retirement condominiums, particularly in cheaper,

slower-paced secondary cities such as Penang and Chiang Mai.

Moreover, the liberalisation of Asia's labour supply has produced a large and socio-economically diverse transnational workforce, as well as a counterpart demand for short-term and part-time housing for employees who are working on a project in a particular place for a specified period of time, or are commuting at regular intervals between two or more locations. Whilst scholars have devoted much attention to the housing typologies occupied by lower-end migrant workers—such as China's urban villages—relatively little attention has been paid to the dwelling practices of Asia's influential mobile middle class. These students, knowledge workers, mid-level managers and retirees spend a significant amount of their lives living outside their official place of residence: working, training, studying or relaxing abroad for a fixed period of time before returning home, or moving on to yet another location. In so doing, these transient populations are placing new and unpredictable demands upon municipal housing systems. Their temporary accommodation inevitably points to a problematic contradiction between the uniform way in which urban housing stocks are planned and the manifold ways in which they are used. Thus far, the formal implications arising from that contradiction have been largely ignored by both scholars and designers of the built environment. Raising awareness of the programmatic requirements, institutional needs and aesthetic predilections of Asia's mobile middle class is thus crucial in order to understand how broader social, cultural and

economic changes are radically and irreversibly redefining the spatial and temporal boundaries of what it means to 'dwell' in the contemporary Asian city.

Notes and references

1. The Author would like to thank Eve Blau, Lilian Chee, Cecilia Chu, Eunice Seng and Helen Siu for their helpful comments and suggestions. He would also like to thank Philomena Ang and Anthony Khoo for facilitating the interviews with Ascott's management team.
2. Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984); Philip Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Singapore, NUS Press, 2008); Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (New York, Palgrave, 2008); Anthony Reid, ed., *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of South-east Asia and the Chinese* (Saint Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1996); Gungwu Wang, ed., *Global History and Migrations* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1997); Seng Guan Yeoh, et al., eds, *Penang and its Region: The Story of an Asian Entrepôt* (Singapore, NUS Press, 2009).
3. Max Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism: Infrastructure and Mobility in Asia* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Sanneke Kloppenburg, 'Confined Mobilities: Following Indonesian migrant workers on their way home', *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 103:5 (2012); Ah Eng Lai, Francis L. Collins, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, eds, *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts* (Singapore, ISEAS, 2013); Weiqiang Lin, 'Beyond Flexible Citizenship: Towards a Study of Many Chinese Transnationalisms', *Geoforum*, 43 (2012); Johan Lindquist, *The Anxieties of Mobility: Migration and Tourism in the Indonesian Borderland* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Eric

- Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, Peter C. Perdue, eds, *Asia Inside Out: Changing Times* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2015); Richard Y. C. Wong, Ka-Fu Wong, 'The Importance of Migration Flow to Hong Kong's Future', in, Helen F. Siu, Agnes S. Ku, eds, *Hong Kong Mobile: Making a Global Population* (Hong Kong, University of Hong Kong Press, 2009); Tai-Chee Wong, Jonathan Rigg, eds, *Asian Cities, Migrant Labor, and Contested Spaces* (London, Routledge, 2011).
4. See, for example, Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996); Hans Ibelings, *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalization* (Rotterdam, Nederlands Architectuurinstituut, 2002); Donald McNeill, *The Global Architect: Fame, Fortune, and Urban Form* (London, Routledge, 2008); Ananya Roy, Aihwa Ong, eds, *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Malden, Mass., Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
 5. 'Life in a service [sic] apartment', *Straits Times* (5th October, 1984), p. 3.
 6. On the history of Oakwood, one of the first purveyors of serviced apartments in the United States, see Matthew Lasner, 'Swingsites for Singles: New Housing for New Households in Mid-Century America', *Places* (October, 2014): <https://placesjournal.org/article/swingsites-for-singles> [accessed 10/12/16].
 7. On broader shifts in Hong Kong's and Singapore's housing system during that time, see R. Ronald, Rebecca L. H. Chiu, 'Changing Housing Policy Landscapes in Asia Pacific', *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 10:3 (2010).
 8. Ascott Executive Residences, 'The Bed's in the Bedroom Where It Should Be', Advertisement, *Straits Times* (5th November, 1984), p. 3.
 9. Mei Sin Yeow, 'Liang Court to Release 187 Apartments for Short-Term Lease', *Singapore Monitor* (25th January, 1984).
 10. Anthony Khoo, Senior Vice President, Brand & Marketing, The Ascott Limited: interview at AXA Tower, Singapore, 27th June, 2013. Khoo noted that 'the URA [Urban Redevelopment Authority] was clear to make sure that [these properties were] for long stay. Because Singapore was starting to attract FDI and companies were coming to set up. They needed to give accommodation to this kind of people: American companies were sending people with budgets of 6,000–8,000 Dollars [per month] and so you needed to find an accommodation class for that.'
 11. Carl A. Trocki, 'Singapore as a Nineteenth-Century Migration Node', in Donna R. Gabaccia, Dirk Hoerder, eds, *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s* (Leiden, Brill, 2011), pp. 198–224.
 12. Vincent Fong, 'Liang Court's Bid to Win Portion of "MRT Market"', *Straits Times* (9th January, 1985), p. 12.
 13. Alfred Ong, Managing Director, Strategic Development, The Ascott Limited: interview at Ascott Centre of Excellence, Singapore, 5th July, 2013.
 14. Liang Court Holdings was absorbed by Somerset International in 1998. The properties were subsequently renamed Somerset West Lake Hanoi, Somerset Chancellor Court Ho Chi Minh City, Somerset Grand Hanoi and Somerset Ho Chi Minh City, respectively.
 15. Alfred Ong, Managing Director, Strategic Development, The Ascott Limited: interview at Ascott Centre of Excellence, Singapore. 5th July, 2013. Ong noted that 'In those days you've got a lot of Japanese agencies like JICA [Japan International Cooperation Agency] that provided a lot of funding to the Vietnamese government to build infrastructure, and a lot of Japanese manufacturing companies, too.... And there was a long queue of expats waiting to stay, because during that time there was a severe lack of

- serviced apartments in Vietnam, even no serviced apartments, I would say, not even local ones.'
16. *Ibid.* See also 'Tập đoàn Ascott đầu tư 23,5 triệu USD vào dự án Somerset Hòa Bình Hà Nội' Hà Nội Mới', 14th December, 2006; Hoabinh Group, 'Introduction': www.hoabinhgroup.com/ENG/gioithieu.asp [accessed 01/02/16].
 17. Alfred Ong, Managing Director, Strategic Development, The Ascott Limited: interview at Ascott Centre of Excellence, Singapore, 5th July, 2013. Ong, who spent several years in Vietnam during the late 1990s, recalled that 'there were not many [people] at that point in time who could speak English. We flew trainers from [Singapore] to Vietnam to train the staff. We ... sort of forced them to speak English, even among themselves, so that they can picked [sic] up the language much faster ... And in those days, I had to bring machinery parts [with me on the plane] because the machines that we installed were all foreign appliances, so we have to bring it from Singapore.'
 18. Lee Chee Koon, CEO, The Ascott Limited: interview at AXA Tower, Singapore, 27th June, 2013.
 19. Data provided by Philomena Ang, Vice President, Marketing Communications, The Ascott Limited: e-mail correspondence, 23rd June, 2013. Through a series of mergers and acquisitions, the properties controlled by Scotts Holding, Liang Court and a third operator called Somerset International ultimately became agglomerated into The Ascott, which was established in 2000 as the serviced apartments arm of Singapore's CapitaLand property group.
 20. Lee Chee Koon, CEO, The Ascott Limited: interview at AXA Tower, Singapore, 27th June, 2013.
 21. Mark Harris, Bard Vos, *The Global Serviced Apartments Industry Report 2013/2014* (London, The Apartment Service, 2013). The Report recorded 49,480 units at 419 properties across East, South and Southeast Asia.
- Of these, Ascott operated 15,411 units at 126 properties, ie, slightly more than 30% of the total supply of serviced apartments. By comparison, Ascott's two closest competitors—Fraser and Oakwood—operated 3,501 (7%) and 2,700 (5.5%) units, respectively.
22. 'Corporate Profile—History', The Ascott Limited: www.theascottlimited.com/en/aboutus/history.html [accessed 15/01/15].
 23. Lee Chee Koon, CEO, The Ascott Limited: interview at AXA Tower, Singapore, 27th June, 2013.
 24. See Jonas Larsen, John Urry, Kay Axhausen, *Mobilities, Networks, Geographies* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2006); Michael Peter Smith, Adrian Favell, *The Human Face of Global Mobility: International Highly Skilled Migration in Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific* (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction, 2006).
 25. M. Harris, B. Vos, *The Global Serviced Apartments Industry Report*, op. cit.
 26. Denis Ma, et al., 'Room for Growth? An Update on the Hong Kong Serviced Apartment Market', Industry Report (Hong Kong, Jones Lang Lasalle, 2014): www.ap.jll.com/asia-pacific/en-gb/Research/JLL%202014%20Serviced%20Apartments%20Research%20Report_May2014.pdf [accessed 10/12/16].
 27. Alfred Ong, Managing Director, Strategic Development, The Ascott Limited: interview at Ascott Centre of Excellence, Singapore, 5th July, 2013.
 28. Site visits to Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 8, Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 11, Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 16 and Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 23, Bangkok, 25th-26th May, 2013.
 29. Interview with shift manager and other staff members at Citadines Sukhumvit Soi, 23rd- 25th May, 2013.
 30. This is comparable to the disproportionately Japanese clientele at Somerset Thonglor, which is surrounded by an abundance of bars, restaurants, clinics and massage parlours that cater to Japanese customers. On one visit, Japanese guests at the Somerset included

well-heeled businessmen, young families and a large group of engineers and construction workers. Site visit to Somerset Sukhumvit Thonglor, Bangkok, 16th February, 2013.

31. Jayati Bhattacharya, *Beyond the Myth: Indian Business Communities in Singapore* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), pp. 113–116; Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (New York, Palgrave, 2008); K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969).
32. Prab Thakral, 'Three Gold Stars', *Education Post* (10th January, 2013): www.educationpost.com.hk/resources/mba/three-gold-stars [accessed 21/01/15].
33. Teng Wui Leong, Chief Development Officer, The Ascott Limited: interview with the Author at AXA Tower, Singapore, 5th August, 2013.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Interviews with tenants at Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 16 and Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 23, 26th May, 2013.
37. Teng Wui Leong, Chief Development Officer, The Ascott Limited: interview with the Author at AXA Tower, Singapore, 5th August, 2013.
38. See M. Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism*, *op. cit.*
39. On the phenomenon of 'middling' transnationalism, see Michael Peter Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (London, Blackwell, 2001). See also David Conradson, Alan Latham, 'Ordinary and "Middling" Transnationalism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:2 (March, 2005); J. Larsen, J. Urry K. Axhausen *Mobilities, Networks, Geographies*, *op. cit.*
40. Site visit to Citadines Sukhumvit Soi 11, Bangkok, 25th May, 2013.



Temporary domesticities: The Southeast Asian hotel as (re)presentation of modernity, 1968–1973

Eunice Seng

To cite this article: Eunice Seng (2017) Temporary domesticities: The Southeast Asian hotel as (re)presentation of modernity, 1968–1973, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 1092–1136, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1365270](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1365270)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1365270>



Published online: 18 Sep 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 499



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Temporary domesticities: The Southeast Asian hotel as (re)presentation of modernity, 1968–1973

Eunice Seng

Department of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong (Author's e-mail address: eseng@hku.hk)

This essay examines the building of the Southeast Asian luxury hotel during the 1960s and 1970s as instrumental to the reshaping and consolidation of the global image of modernity for the region. While the war against slums and homelessness was being fought in the new towns, with public and private housing estates and blocks of flats for the working and middle classes, the branding of the modern Asian city was taking place at the waterfront and in the main thoroughfares of these cities. Not only did the luxury hotel present a stark contrast to the crowded, slum-filled imagery of these developing industrialising cities, its proponents— governments, developers and architects—sought to use it to replace 'Third World' impressions with 'First World' experiences. Driven by economic pragmatism, the proliferation of the slab-tower and podium building, and its interchangeable use as hotel and residential flats in the Southeast Asian city, witnessed a period of regional networking, investments, brand building, knowledge expertise transfers and the rise of a mobile class of international travellers. This essay argues that in response to Cold War political and economic contingencies, these temporary spaces of domesticity and consumption were part of an incipient complex of regional cultural identification in which architecture was paramount. It challenges the reading of the hotel interior as simply an *orientalised* space of consumption for foreign tourists and, instead, posits that it was complicit in the production of the citizenry as participants in these new public spaces of the emerging economies of Hong Kong and Singapore. Focussing on how such hotels were presented and described in newspapers and specialist trade journals, the essay seeks an alternative way to understand modern domesticity in these cities beyond the centre-periphery *schema* of one-way transfers of knowledge and expertise.

Introduction

In 1972, in the inaugural issue of *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (renamed *Travelnews Asia* in 1974), intended for readers who were part of the exploding travel industry, the editors invoked the term *volkerwanderung*, that outpouring which periodically sent whole nations of people wandering far from their homes, to explain the growth of travel to Asia since 1970.¹ Contemporaneous with the

post-war phenomenon of the big American hotel internationally (from the 1950s), is the proliferation of the big luxury hotel built in Asia, especially major cities in Southeast Asia from the late 1960s through the 1970s and in particular Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore.² New technology, notably the introduction of the Boeing 747 in 1969, along with cultural and social changes, catapulted hotel develop-

ment.³ These cities saw the opening of the Hilton, Sheraton, Holiday Inn, Hyatt and Intercontinental hotels; and the founding of Asian-owned brands such as the Peninsula, Marco Polo, Merlin, Furama and Shangri-La. From the exterior, the reinforced concrete multi-storey buildings painted in white recalled the by-then familiar 'home away from home' international hotel that corresponded to the ubiquitous 'international style' architecture deployed in Cold War corporate, big-government America and Europe.

Despite their different political and ideological contexts, the similarities between these hotel projects are striking, though not surprising, when we consider the regional capital investments of the owners and trans-national exchanges amongst the architects and managers. In order to understand the reasons for their coincidence, we need to expand our analytical ambit to include the governmental regimes underlying the development of these projects and the production of the forms. In her study of the Hilton International hotels, as 'weapons on the frontlines of the Cold War', Annabel Wharton argued that the expansion of America as a global economic and political power was realised through architecture.⁴ For the developing cities and nations of Southeast Asia, where actual battles were being fought during the Cold War, those not directly involved were embroiled in their own internal dilemmas of decolonisation and nationalisation. Extending Wharton's analysis, if Hilton International Hotels 'helped naturalize American capitalist practices in foreign cultures', then it in turn exoticised the cultures in those cities that embraced its 'monumental modernity' in a relation-

ship deemed mutually beneficial economically and politically.

To what extent did the Asian hotel reveal and embody the urban character of a city and the regional affiliations and anxieties? In his essay 'Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a region of our times', Prasenjit Duara interrogates the space of Asia by making a distinction between a region and regionalisation.⁵ He challenges the domination of a nation state as a phenomenon that can describe fully the complexities and multiple spaces of Asia through a socio-historical investigation of Asia as a region and its regionalisation.⁶ Beginning with imperial regionalism, through the anti-imperialist regionalisation project in Asia during colonisation, Cold War alliances and post-Cold War regionalism with economic integration of East, South and Southeast Asia, he argues that the new order in contemporary Asia must be seen in its totality and calls for a reconfiguration or restructuring of the nation state in adaptation to global capitalism. In historicising the Asian hotel, this means taking into account how its reception as a cultural product within Southeast Asia can remain as a site of circulation and interaction that challenges a singular identity by recognising multiple connections and interdependence, without getting absorbed as a solely national project.

Amid the Cold War political instability of the region—the Korean War (1950–1953), the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963–66), the Vietnam War (1955–1975) and local disputes, including the Singapore race riots (1964) and the Hong Kong riots (1966, 1967) —the late 1960s marked a turning point in concerted attempts towards regional consolidation through tourism.

Hong Kong and Singapore took the lead in spearheading the regional tourism industry. The multi-prong strategies included the establishment of the Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA) and the Singapore Tourist Bureau in 1958 (replaced by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, STPB, in 1964), the expansion of Cathay Pacific Airways in 1959 and the rebranding of the Malaysia-Singapore Airlines (MSA) in 1966 (in 1972 MSA split into the two entities of Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airlines).⁷ In 1961, the Pacific Air Travel Association (PATA) charter was established in Hong Kong aimed at reaching the untapped markets of Southeast Asia, which saw frequent visits and exchanges between the tourism executives of the cities. Amongst the most visible products of such public and private cooperation were the luxury hotels, offering first-class facilities of a recognisably international standard.

The implications of the geographical displacement of the big American hotel to the cities of Southeast Asia were threefold. First, it offered a much-needed economic boost for these cities and thrust them into the global economy of tourism, and within an international circulation network of people and images. Secondly, it reinforced the modern identity of these Southeast Asian cities, which during this period of political exigencies in the region, stood in for the idea and image of the 'Asian' city. Thirdly, it altered the urbanism of the city by offering itself as an enclave of imported 'first-world lifestyles' that allowed tourists—mainly Americans, British and Japanese—to continue their own familiar lifestyles. At the same time, its publicly accessible interior spaces such as the lobby, restau-

rant, café, shopping arcade and discotheque, offered new leisure venues for the burgeoning local middle class.

In contrast to the first generation of Hilton hotels in the 1950s, where the austere minimalism of the slab block extended into the interior, the Hiltons in Southeast Asia were vernacularised from the outset. In the case of the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore Hiltons, their designs were replete with the post-modern codification of 'east and west ... with murals and materials reflecting the vivid cultural patterns of Malaysia'.⁸ Less than two months after the Malaysia-Singapore merger, the building of two new Hilton hotels—one in Singapore, the other in Kuala Lumpur—was announced in the *The Straits Times* of Singapore on 1st November, 1963. Three months later, Curt Strand, vice-president of Hilton Hotels International, flew in to advise on hotel planning, especially on the 'décor, furnishings and designs' with 'an emphasis on giving a Malaysian character'.⁹ Originally intended to open at the end of 1965, only piling works were completed by November that year. The architect for the Singapore Hilton was compelled publicly to identify undisclosed 'snags' as the cause of the delay.¹⁰ By this time, Singapore had an urgent nation-building agenda that saw the fledgling government take up the role of public-housing developer and make a comparatively limited but significant attempt at hotel development. With the end of the Indonesian Confrontation policy in 1966 and post-independence efforts in industrialisation and economic development, through foreign investment and the expansion of the commercial air travel industry in the 1960s, a final push was made in the late 1960s to complete

the hotel.¹¹ It was finally opened in 1971 by Singapore's first Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sinnathamby Rajaratnam (Minister of Culture from 1959 to 1965), who laid emphasis on the hotel as a place 'which forms a crucial part of a tourist experience in any country'.¹²

This assertion of the hotel as the vital place for a tourist experience illustrates Dean MacCannell's now-classic analysis of tourism as a phenomenon of the post-industrial age, during which the middle class acquired leisure time for international travel.¹³ MacCannell identifies the touristic cultural experience as imbued with values, including economic values, to the extent that the hotel is part of a closed loop for organising the economic life of the city around cultural production: from the airport to the hotel to the sights of the city and back to the airport.¹⁴ His argument that in the establishment of modern society, the individual act of sightseeing is less important than 'the ceremonial ratification of authentic attractions as objects of ultimate value', takes on an added meaning in the context of a new nation, which had previously relied on its 'Malaysianness' for its cultural authenticity. Disconnection from the hinterland meant the recapitulation of the essence of traditions that were at once of the place, the region of Southeast Asia, and invented. A Hilton public relations manager expressed this when she was in the city to survey the building progress of the Hilton Singapore. She suggested that Singapore should work with Malacca 'to develop a tourist-drawing situation' because it was 'the natural complement to Singapore as she has greater historical and architectural interests to offer the tourist'. She

emphasised that it was important to give the tourist 'something to do instead of shopping all the time'.¹⁵

The idea that the country had nothing but shopping to offer tourists affected the subsequent planning and design of hotels, and the planning of tourism organised within the 'multicultural' framework throughout the 1970s. Although the notion of cultural growth and nation building had been introduced as early as 1959, immediately after Singapore gained self-governance, and was relaunched with the 'Visit the Orient Year' campaign in 1961, it was still based on the imagination of a Malayan society, rather than an autonomous Singaporean one.¹⁶ In his address to the Singapore Polytechnic architectural society, the then Minister of Culture Rajaratnam stated that 'only in the development of a Malayan culture and a Malayan consciousness can we find protection against communal rivalry and conflict'. Referring to the racial conflicts in India, Ceylon and other newly independent countries in Asia and Africa, he asserted that since 'culture is man-made', the government can help accelerate the development of 'a Malayan culture by conscious deliberation'.¹⁷ In other words, speaking in connection with the government's cultural agenda, Rajaratnam was outlining Singapore's *modus operandi*—that culture can be invented—first within the geopolitical imagination of Malaya, and, from 1965, within an independent nationalist *schema*.¹⁸

Neo-colonial connections

The convergence of tourist space and nation calls for an understanding of the cultural and socio-political complex in which the Southeast Asian luxury hotel

emerged. Like the post-war American-brand international hotels that catered to an increasingly mobile middle and professional class, the Southeast Asian version differed from the grand luxury hotels built by industrialists and railway companies, as well as the palace and flat hotels in Europe and North American cities in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. These hotels catered specifically to the socially prominent and wealthy level of the city, and international royalty.¹⁹ In Southeast Asia, amid the colonial backlash, the Cold War opened up mobilities that did not previously exist. Inasmuch as the Hilton hotels were architectural and spatial extensions of international relations and American capitalist goodwill, and were also sites that incited local resistances, the new luxury brand hotels in Hong Kong and Singapore, with their international style forms and ‘consciously deliberated’ ‘man-made’ cultural elements and interiors, were new symbols of resistances (against the pervasion of communist ideology). Neo-colonial connections were formed that approximated colonial models, especially the franchising of brand companies and institutions, and the movement of specialists: hotel managers, public relations officers, interior and garden designers.

Notwithstanding their geo-political differences—one still a colonial territory facing an impending return to the Mainland; the other in the midst of its nation-building programme—the rapid industrialisation and economies in Hong Kong and Singapore constituted the shared cultural experiences of an increasingly mobile population of a large diaspora Chinese ethnic base. The hotels in these cities, with their new privately owned public spaces, attest to

the analysis by Scott Lash and John Urry of the impact of rapid forms of modernity on people’s experience of the modern world, especially on the production of subjectivity, and their extension to new public areas such as railway stations, airports and hotels.²⁰ Beyond that, and distinct from the nineteenth-century palace hotels in Europe and the colonies, and the skyscraper hotels of the North American metropolises, these late- and post-Empire hotels deploy the same cultural and aesthetic tropes of luxury and class in their designs and interior spaces that catered to a regional and international tourist population but were also publicly accessible to their own citizenry. The orientalist interiors were readily consumed by the economically emancipated middle class: many of whom were working in the service industry and also engaged in office work. In addition to the shops, emporia, themed restaurants and cafés, the public areas of the hotels were lively venues for fashion shows, bazaars, high teas, life skills demonstrations, exhibitions and talks.²¹

In considering the extent to which the Asian luxury hotel affected the experience of domesticity and revealed the character of the developing urbanism in these cities, the crucial role of print media must be highlighted. As the two cities in the region that had embarked on a full-scale economic development following more than a decade of colonial-communist and colonial-nationalist tensions, Hong Kong and Singapore became home to many international presses, including those with anti-communist backgrounds, to cover the region’s news. The loose regulation and the availability of English writers and editors, as well as a large English-language readership in both cities, made

them the natural Asian bases for such presses. Immediately upon its Independence in 1965, Singapore adopted English as the *lingua franca* and the colonial newspaper the *Straits Times* became the national paper.²²

The *Far East Builder* began as the *Hong Kong and South China Builder* in 1935 in Hong Kong with representatives in Tsingtao, Kobe and Manila. Positioned as a regional journal right from the beginning, the bi-monthly trade journal featured building, property and urban development in the British colonies, with circulation and readership in Mainland China, Macao, the Philippines and Malaya.²³ In 1948, after a seven-year break, the journal continued as the *Hong Kong and Far East Builder*, and focussed on post-war reconstruction, planning and housing development throughout the 1950s. From the mid-1960s, the Hong Kong-based Far East Trade Press was co-owned by Singapore Straits Times Publishing, which became a major shareholder in 1977. The colonialist-named *Far East Builder* was renamed *Asian Building and Construction* in 1971 and, in 1972, the *Asian Hotel and Tourism* was established. This explains the substantial coverage of Singapore events and projects in the journals and the movement of the publishers, editors and managers.

The Far East Trade Press journals' and the newspapers' features on luxury hotel projects in the region dealt not only with the design and construction of these hotels and urban development in these cities. Often, they were also projective: presenting blueprints, plans and renderings of future hotels as well as the economic potential and ambitions of building regional identity for tourism and invest-

ment. Through these reports the physical ramifications of the city revealed the deals made between the government and the 'Western chain' hotel developers, that included building new infrastructure such as efficient roads between the modernised airport and the hotels, and safe sanitised streetscapes around the hotel that separated these routes from the dirty, crowded markets and lanes.

Regional domesticity: Southeast Asia's new hotels

In the expanding economies of Hong Kong and Singapore, market speculation and prevalent industrial techniques for high-rise construction, in anticipation of a growing class of citizens with new-found economic and physical mobility, brought about the interchangeability of the architecture of housing with that of the hotel. Reiterated in public discourse was the idea that there was very little land for building: high-density development had become accepted as the only option.²⁴ Driven by the economy of construction and of the site, the slab-tower and podium building became the architecture for flats and the large hotel complexes that proliferated in these cities. In Hong Kong, the surge in high-rise construction techniques coupled with increased land speculation and development from the 1950s saw the rise of mixed-use composite buildings that contained domestic functions with commercial ones: the most ubiquitous type was the slab-tower of flats above and ground-level shops. By the early 1960s, the two- to three-storey podium of shops emerged. Singapore, in the same period, also experienced the use of the slab-tower and podium for flats and hotels, premised on economic rationality.

The slab-tower and podium building was the predominant architecture of a modern, sanitised and healthy domesticity.²⁵ It represented the most prevalent architectural imaginary of the modern Asian city, especially during the intensive period of regional consolidation and identification.²⁶ Whereas tensions between the social and economic imperatives for housing were visible in working-class housing projects, especially in the change from residents sharing the communal spaces of the segregated units of high-rise blocks, this was not the case for the luxury hotel. Its interiors were filled with materials, textures and objects that explicitly connoted regional opulence. Ideological and social meanings in architecture and design were dominated by economic and technocratic imperatives. The 1970s' issues of the *Far East Builder*, for example, presented a decade of urban infrastructure and housing development at an unprecedented scale. As a signifier of global modernity in its exterior form, the hotel was *domino par excellence*. The blank interior of the slab-tower and podium building would be filled with *other* spaces, surfaces and objects: invoking the atmosphere and imagery of a lush tropical region with diverse intersecting cultures and histories.

Between 1968 and 1973, the *Far East Builder* represented 'Asia' through Southeast Asian cities, the majority of its content focussed on urban and building development in Hong Kong and Singapore. Building news from mainland China was not featured in the journals' reports on 'Asia' and the Asian city, with the exception of a June, 1973, special issue on Canton, featuring the twenty-seven storey Kwangchow Hotel, the tallest hotel in

Canton, where most buildings were no higher than six storeys.²⁷ In the same year, 'Asian-ness' was played up in the cover images and the section on 'The Asian Scene' in *Asian Hotels and Tourism*. In January, 1973, the journal featured Singapore's 'Instant Asia' programme where places, festivals and old traditions were repackaged with ethnic emphasis and new hybrid traditions were invented, including a Chinese junk and outdoor barbecues in a Hawaiian village with the island's 'longest bar' to attract both tourists and locals.²⁸ The idea was that tourists and citizens alike could experience the diversity of 'Asia' simply by visiting or being at home in Singapore.

Asian Hotels and Tourism published two special issues on Hong Kong and Singapore in September and November, 1973, respectively, each filled with the latest reports on new tourism projects and advertisements from travel agencies, the major airlines and hotels. Including news on the development of the underground railway, of Lantau Island and of the Oceanarium, with a capacity of 40,000 people a day, the issue featuring Hong Kong focussed on promoting the key assets of the city: spectacular harbour views and a shopping paradise. It presented the range of hotels in the colony from luxury to the smaller with 'basic facilities', many of which emphasised the idea of the 'real' Hong Kong. The November issue on Singapore was similar in many respects, promoting the city as 'Asia's showplace city'—a 'compact and orderly' Garden City with diverse cultures—and as an Asian hub for international conventions.²⁹ Fronted by a cover photograph containing a 'local scene' (crowds of Chinese worshippers at a Taoist temple in Wong Tai Sin in

Hong Kong and a crowded road leading to the Sultan Mosque in a Muslim-populated district known as Kampong Glam in Singapore) the Asian city was presented as a blend of old and new, East and West, traditional and modern, local and international.

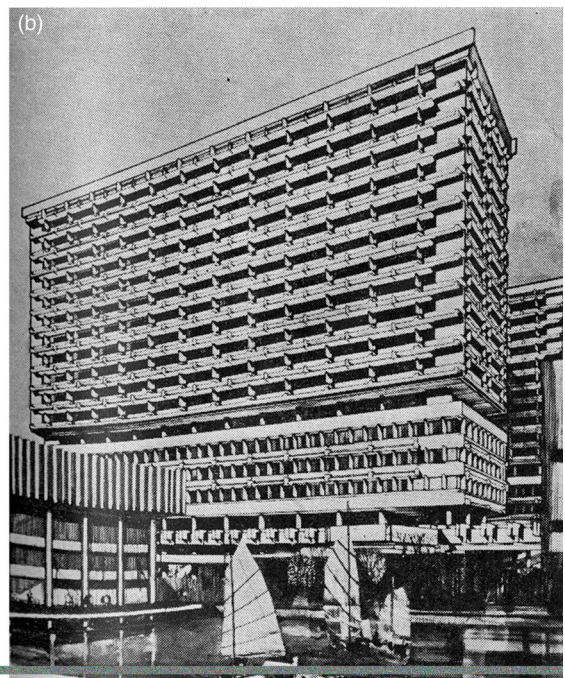
In the early 1960s, reports on individual hotels began to appear in anticipation of the influx of tourists to the city. One of the earliest feature on the 'international hotel' in Asia was the announcement in 1962 of the plans for the seven-storey Hotel Singapura in Orchard Road, the city's main shopping thoroughfare. Designed by a Singaporean architectural office, Kee Yeap, and operated by the Intercontinental Hotels Corporation, the hotel was converted from an office building into an hotel. Reporting that '[m]odern concepts of international style hotel planning and equipment, together with all amenities from over the world were studied before the local plans were set on paper', the article highlighted the fact that guests would recognise that these were in Asia and not anywhere else.³⁰ A September, 1968, article on the newly completed Hotel Malaysia in Singapore stated that the design intention behind the hotel was to give guests 'a strong sense of being in this part of Asia'.³¹ This sense of 'being in' Southeast Asia was repeatedly emphasised in reports on the Asian hotel.

Invited to Singapore in 1969 as design consultant to the Malaysian-owned Merlin Hotel (part of the 'Golden Mile' urban renewal project), Morris Lapidus, the American architect known for his resort-style hotels and interiors, commented that while the general trend in hotel design was 'towards international architecture', Singapore was 'a unique

Asian city with many cultures, including Chinese, Indian and Malay. Hotels, in order to attract and fascinate tourists, must reflect the spirit and tradition of the country.'³² Lapidus' words aptly reflected the international-style hotels with their 'vernacular art and craft'-filled interiors that were changing the urban streetscape in the cities. By 1973, there were over ten Merlin hotels across Southeast Asia, each celebrated for its 'distinctive oriental décor' and 'splendid locations' with 'high international standard of service and comfort': the one in Singapore overlooked a mosque, another enjoyed the harbour views in Hong Kong and a third nestled in the lush green Malaysian mountains in Kuala Lumpur.³³

The *Far East Builder* dedicated two issues in 1968 and 1970 to the 'Asian hotel'.³⁴ The first article, in the section 'New Hotels in S.E. Asia' from September, 1968, featured hotel projects on the drawing board and in construction. These included: in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Hotel designed by Eric Cumine Associates and the Fu Centre by Wong, Ng, Ouyang and Associates; in Singapore, the Hilton Hotel by BEP Akitek, the Hotel International by S.K. Chan and Associates, the Sheraton hotel by Minoru Yamasaki and Palmer and Turner (a local architectural office) and the Ming Court Hotel by Kampulan Architect; in Bangkok, the Dusitthanee by Yozo Shibata of Kanko Kikeku Sekkeisha; in Manila, the Riviera by C.D. Arguelles and the Hotel Inter-Continental by Leandro Locsin (Fig. 1).³⁵ The hotels were located on the waterfront or on a major thoroughfare in the commercial districts. In Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Hotel was located at the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront in Kowloon and the Fu Centre in the heart of the Central District.

Figure 1. Hotel projects in Southeast Asia on the drawing board and in construction; in 'New Hotels in S.E. Asia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), pp. 15–17. **Figure 1(a)**. Cover of *Far East Builder* (September, 1968). **Figure 1(b)**. The Hong Kong Hotel, designed by Eric Cumine Associates. **Figure 1(c)**. The Hilton Singapore, designed by BEP Akitek. **Figure 1(d)**. The Riviera Manila designed by C.D. Arguelles. **Figure 1(e)** The Dusitthanee Bangkok designed by Yozo Shibata of Kanko Kikeku Sekkeisha. **Figure 1(f)**. The Ming Court Hotel, Singapore, designed by Kampulan Architect.



Significantly, Hong Kong was identified as a South-east Asian city in these reports.

The theatrical interior

The idea of the Asian luxury hotel was projected by means of the interior. The hotel lobby and adjoining atrium, with its grandiosity elaborated by rich textures and colourful materials, and with dramatic decorative lighting, were a stark contrast to the grey, polluted and noisy urbanism of the developing city. In contrast to the white monolithic slab-tower with the repetitious floors, the interior reinforced the

agenda of regional identity for tourists as well as for local residents. The lobby in the modern South-east Asian hotel of the 1960s and 1970s was incongruent with Sigfried Kracauer's description of the modern hotel lobby in 1927, which was characterised by anonymity and autonomy, containing a congregation of individuals within a contained space of self-referential meanings. The former was foregrounded as the place that offered a setting with a local and regional flavour through art, craft and design, as a public gallery space that displayed the commissioned work of artists and as a location for

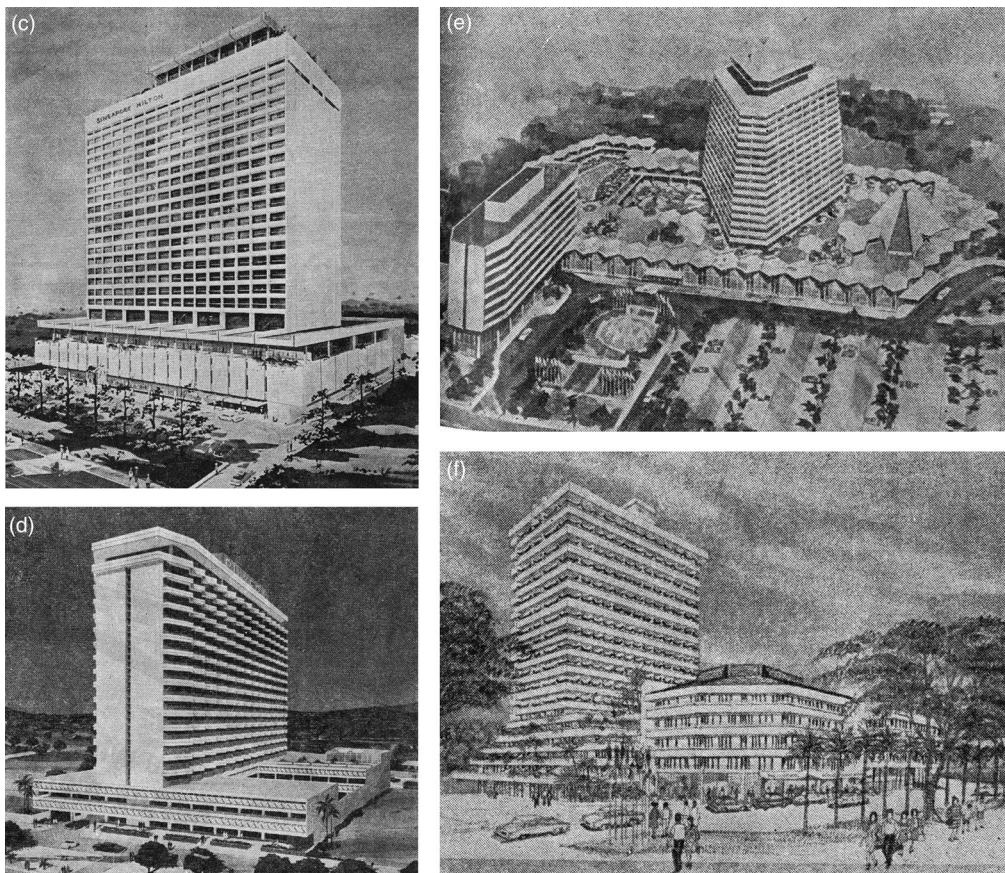


Figure 1. Continued

organised events.³⁶ The meanings behind the commissioned art pieces, furnishings and souvenirs were narrated through text inscriptions and descriptions on labels, extending beyond the hotel interior into the spaces of the city.

'Step into the lobby of any one of S.E. Asia's newly completed hotels and you have forsaken the grey turmoil of the outside world for an environment of color and studied elegance', began an article on 'Asian hotels' colorful interiors'.³⁷ The fan-shaped

lobby floor of the Hotel Malaysia in Singapore was laid with segmented jade-green onyx marble, the walls lined with teak carvings and batik murals by a Singaporean artist. The interiors of the lifts comprised bronze and gold panels and a full-height mirror. The architect Alfred Wong, in consultation with the interior decorator Don Ashton, whom the clients retained from the earlier management, developed the materials and themes for each room. The Sheraton-Philippines in Manila was cited twice as an example of the exuberant hotel interior: first in an article featuring the hotel and then as the example of the grand lobby. Presented as a resort and cultural centre, its architect, Leandro Valencia Locsin, was given an art fund by the hotel owners to acquire locally excavated Chinese porcelain, Muslim brassware, woodcuts and artefacts—and to commission original pieces by home-grown artists.³⁸

The tourist boom in the late 1960s saw the emergence of the interior decorator as a sought-after specialist figure.³⁹ In contrast to the slab-tower and podium building that was by then a familiar architectural aesthetic for multi-storey structures that included flats, hotel, office and mixed-use buildings, hotel interiors in the Asian cities were themed to showcase particular national and regional identities. The surge in demand for hotel-commissioned art saw local artists showcasing their artisanal work, ranging from wood carvings to textile murals to lighting and floral designs. The building of the 'international hotel' in Asia was attributed to the ongoing nationalism and regional consolidation, which included the boosting of regional cooperation in the tourist and airline industries. Amidst this political and economic climate, the creation of the 'Asian

hotel interior' has been explicitly attributed to a few interior designers, mainly from North America and Europe, who were able to cross national boundaries in their work with interiors which were, consistently, contemporary interpretations of stylistic and material traditions in the country or region where the hotel was located.

Dale Keller was one of the most prolific interior designers in a fledgling profession. His office designed thousands of interiors in over twenty countries in the Asia-Pacific region during the hotel building boom between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, as well as in Europe and the United States.⁴⁰ He was a student of Kenzo Tange at Tokyo University (1953–1954), where he studied Japanese and Chinese architecture.⁴¹ With his wife Patricia, whom he met in Tokyo, Keller designed there the hotel interiors for the Marunouchi Hotel (1961), the Hotel Okura Tokyo (1962) and the Hilton Hotel Tokyo (1963) during the post-war reconstruction period in Japan, when the international hotel was still in its infancy.⁴² In 1962, the Kellers set up International Design Associates Ltd. in Hong Kong (renamed Dale Keller and Associates in 1969), which mostly comprised architects from Asia and Australia.

Their first commission in Hong Kong was the Hilton Hotel, owned by Hutchinson Whampoa. Hilton was the first 'international hotel' company that entered East, Southeast and South Asia in the 1960s.⁴³ Towards the end of the decade, the 'Asian' hotel owned and operated by Asians became participants, along with other 'western' hotel chains like Sheraton, Hyatt and Inter-Continental. Dale Keller and Associates was engaged in the

evolution of the hotel, from being an 'American' import to becoming 'Asian'.⁴⁴ Writers in the July, 1972, Issue of *Asian Hotels and Tourism* were explicit in their praise of the American designer's contribution to Asia by 'restoring indigenous Asian styles':

Perhaps the single most important contribution that Dale Keller has made to Asia lies in showing Asians how to appreciate their own cultures. Dale Keller is Asia's top interior designer... [He] holds a near monopoly of hotel design jobs throughout 20 countries in the region. When projects currently on hand are completed, he will have been ultimately responsible for the creation of 22,000 hotel rooms, or put in another way, Hong Kong, Singapore and Djakarta rolled into one. Yet this little, well-dressed man apparently tranquil at the center of a hurricane of creative activity, embodies a curious double paradox. As Asia's number one designer, he is not Asian. But, as an American, he is dedicated to restoring indigenous Asian styles to hotels turned dreary from too much Americanism.⁴⁵

Keller's geographical versatility points to how the hotel embodies the narrative of regionalisation during the decades of the Cold War. Less commented upon was the irony that an American architect educated in Tokyo was embraced as the exemplar of contemporary Asian interior design—since governments and businesses alike placed more trust in the tried and tested achievements of the foreign specialist and expert—and how Keller and his designs moved fluidly between overlapping hotel worlds and national boundaries. He stated that each interior was the product of research, so as to

'delight... both natives and foreigners'.⁴⁶ The *Far East Builder* described how Keller and his team took a 'great deal of research to achieve this ideal', including spending time in the Thai provinces of Chiangmai, Sukhothai, Sawankaloke and Ayuthaya, and cooperating with the National Museum and Thai art collectors in Bangkok. The authors highlighted the notion that 'the feeling of national identity' in the rooms was invoked through the use of four colour schemes, each with a distinct Thai arrangement, an antique Thai motif painted on the ceiling and the furniture in Thai teak and metalwork following eighteenth-century Thai designs.⁴⁷

In an interview in the November, 1975, issue of *Asian Building and Construction*, Keller articulated his role in the Asian interior design industry as helping to establish new industries in developing economies and industrialising societies.⁴⁸ Citing the Hilton Hong Kong as an example, he explained how he worked with an existing parquet floor company to develop a new industry of mass customised furniture.⁴⁹ For him, the hotel 'expresses the national identity of the country in which it is to be built—not just the hotel's interior mood, but right up to the guest room'.⁵⁰ Asserting that the interior should inform the guests which country they are in when they wake up in the morning through 'some tangible quality of national identity', Keller's design philosophy was in tune with the post-war transnational movement of architects from Europe and North America to Asia and Africa to build their national institutions. At the same time, his emphasis on vernacular arts and crafts and industry as a shift from the 'international' to the 'national' and 'regional' was aligned with the nascent nationalism

and regionalisation amongst Southeast Asian countries.⁵¹

At the June, 1963, opening of the 900-room Hilton Hong Kong, Conrad Hilton emphasised that the hotel's contribution to international relations was that it would not only bring more jobs to Hong Kong but that guests would return to their home countries and report on the city's development and their own personal experience of the Orient, whilst 'enjoying the comforts of the recognizable international hotel'.⁵² 'The more human understanding between nations grows and develops', he stated, 'the greater will be the prosperity and equality of all people.'⁵³ Hilton Hong Kong accommodated key regional meetings, including those of the International Chamber of Commerce, and housed the Cathay Pacific office.⁵⁴ A few months before its opening, its architect, James Kinoshita of Palmer and Turner, referred to the simplicity of Japanese design for domestic architecture in Hong Kong, suggesting that the city could harness the rich design sensibilities of neighbouring Asian cultures.⁵⁵ In contrast to the simplicity of its form and spaces, Keller designed the Hilton interior to showcase the arts and crafts of the region. First to open was the Australian Room on the fourth floor, at the hotel's inauguration in June, 1963, one of six 'national' rooms for use as private function rooms.⁵⁶ The New Zealand and the Philippines rooms were opened in August.⁵⁷ In addition to the perennial batik and fashion displays, a Philippines Arts and Crafts Centre was established in 1970 to give a permanent home for Southeast Asian works of art.⁵⁸

Keller articulated the main difference between the flat and the hotel to be the amount of time spent in the interior: the former should reflect the pleasures and tastes of the home owner, whilst the latter should be an entertaining environment where 'good service, accessories and the general interior environment come together to create... a special experience', which he felt would be justified to be, 'for theatrical purposes, a style that creates a mood to give the individual an experience he had never had before—and at the same time a good time'.⁵⁹ Keller's emphasis on the 'theatrical' Asian hotel interior, in contrast to the international aesthetic of the modernist slab-tower podium building, was a criterion shared by interior designers through the 1970s. Celebrating the theatricality of the hotel interior, *Far East Builder* dedicated a section to 'Asian hotels' colourful interiors', presenting snapshots beginning with the hotel lobby—which the writers stated to be the first space of separation from the 'grey turmoil of the outside world'—then the dining rooms and public restaurants to the guest rooms.⁶⁰ The journal made little differentiation between the interiors and described them simply in terms of decorative trends. The décor for the public areas were themed to invoke an idea of the region or an abstract but recognisable Asian motif. For the lobby, these were typically marble floors with luxurious carpets, wall murals featuring local artists, oversized custom-designed chandeliers, coffered and articulated ceilings, and red and golden yellow colour schemes. The dining rooms and public restaurants were mostly designed

around the theme of flowers or an historical place (Fig. 2).⁶¹

National and Asian

The building of luxury hotels owned and developed by Asian companies epitomised the phenomenon that was a product of the swiftly changing conditions in the building industry in the fast-developing economies of Hong Kong and Singapore. In the process of promoting regional identity, the city or region was foregrounded. There were three exceptions in Singapore: the Hotel Singapura (operated by Intercontinental) completed in 1963, the Hotel Temasek (operated by Hilton) and the Hotel Malaysia, which opened in 1968. Whereas the names of the first two were changed to identify the international chains that operated them, the Hotel Malaysia, embodying the vision of a nation of which Singapore was briefly a part between 1963 and 1965, remained unchanged.⁶² Conceived in 1962, during Singapore's brief merger with Malaysia, the original building was designed for a group of entrepreneurs who were not directly involved as hoteliers but were sufficiently interested by a report on the tourist industry submitted by the architects to plan an hotel project on the site. Located at Tanglin in the residential area at the edge of the commercial district, the Hotel Malaysia was developed by Central Properties (one of the largest investors in the hotel industry of Malaysia and Singapore), which was a sister company of Town and City Properties Ltd. In 1963, the company announced that it would develop a range of projects, including the twenty-storey Hotel Malaysia, a garden-city

estate, two multi-storey flat projects, a city centre shopping complex and two housing estates.⁶³

Plans changed the following year and Central Properties brought in a management company, Island Hotels Ltd: it was decided that the project would be an international-class hotel of fourteen storeys with three hundred rooms. Projected to cost \$10 million, it was to have 'a Chinese dining room probably the largest in the world', amongst other 'world-class facilities'.⁶⁴ The company survived the 1966 economic depression and emerged as a public entity in 1967.⁶⁵ By this time Singapore was an independent nation. Singapore Goodwood Park Hotel Ltd was engaged as the new management company for the hotel.⁶⁶ The original architects, Alfred Wong Partnership, and the interior decorator, Pacific House (Singapore) (Dale Keller's Singapore registered company), were retained.⁶⁷ The previous provisions were reviewed and the original concepts of the public spaces and the articulated structure were kept. The ratio of public rooms to bedrooms was increased, compared to other contemporary projects, and the public spaces were designed as extensions from the exterior into the interior (Fig. 3).

Shortly before its opening, the local newspaper presented Hotel Malaysia as 'one of the most luxurious hotels in South East Asia', which would 'give to the traveling public, and to Singapore, not only over 300 first class rooms and suites, but also five restaurants, nightclubs, discotheques and supper clubs'.⁶⁸ The hotel boasted that it was 'the modern biggest hotel complex in Singapore', and that its Golden Lotus restaurant, with a seating capacity of 1,000, was 'the largest Chinese

Figure 2. Lobbies of newly completed hotels in Southeast Asia; in 'Asian hotels' colourful interiors', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), p. 31. [Figure 2](#) (a). Double-storey Manila Sheraton lobby. [Figure 2](#)(b). Main entrance lobby of the Hotel Malaysia—batik mural by Singapore artist Seah Kim Joo and glass tube chandelier designed by the architect Alfred Wong.





Figure 2. Continued

dining hall in the world'.⁶⁹ Keller's lobby interior of jade-green onyx marble flooring, Italian tiled walls and teak furniture was topped off with a twenty-three feet by eight feet batik mural by the Singapore artist Seah Kim Joo and cast stone panels of Ibanese design.⁷⁰ When the hotel opened its doors on 9th April, 1968, only its first restaurant, the all-American 24-hour glass-panelled Coffee Shop, was operating:⁷¹ it was opened officially on

17th November, 1968, by the Finance Minister, Goh Keng Swee, witnessed by 1,000 guests.⁷²

Built on 125,000 square feet of landscaped grounds in a prime district, the Hotel Malaysia was intended to be 'a public building'. Whilst targeting 'top-flight businessmen', the hotel was the chosen venue for national-level galas, including the 150-year anniversary of Singapore's founding (1819–1969), the annual dinner of the University

of Singapore and corporate dinner and dance events. The planning and design of the Hotel Malaysia embodied the intersection of three agendas: international recognition, national representation and regional affiliation. In the first instance, the split between the modernist slab-tower and the colourful, richly decorated interiors was not unlike the other hotels that were concurrently built in Southeast Asia cities (especially Bangkok, Hong Kong, Jakarta and Manila).⁷³ Conceived in 1962 at the cusp of Singapore's short-lived merger with Malaysia, the name Hotel Malaysia held a national significance.⁷⁴ Its original owners, Malayan Holdings Ltd, claimed that it would 'symbolize the importance of Singapore as the focal center of Southeast Asia'.⁷⁵ At its completion, it was the first in Singapore to provide full convention facilities: the convention hall had seating for up to 800 people, equipped with soundproofing, a public address system, and sound and lighting facilities for performances.⁷⁶ In 1983, it was renamed the Boulevard Hotel as part of extending it and upgrading its image.⁷⁷

The hotel as economic frontline

Large building plots were made available to hotel developers through the Land Acquisition Act of 1966 followed by the Urban Renewal Department's (URD) Sales of Sites Programme in 1967.⁷⁸ The government offered subsidies and mortgage incentives to encourage the commercial development of the auctioned sites.⁷⁹ The government also ventured into hotel development. The Economic Development Board (EDB) invested \$2.5 million in the \$18 million

Ming Court Hotel development in the commercial district of Orchard Road, and made a \$5 million loan to help speed up completion.⁸⁰ The Singapore-based Kumpulan Architects designed the seventeen-storey 350-room Ming Court Hotel (Fig. 4). Originally conceived as a mixed development of three towers on top of a sloping podium integrating an hotel shopping complex and offices, construction began in 1966, but due to uncertainties caused by the Indonesian Confrontation, work was stalled and the project was revised as a luxury tourist hotel. Owned and operated by Goodwood Hotels, the podium was redesigned as a swimming pool area and two floors were added to the slab-tower in place of the original office tower.⁸¹ It was the first time that pre-cast concrete units—five hundred inverted 'U-shaped planks' holding air-conditioning ducts and cables—were used in hotel construction in Singapore.⁸²

Extending Kracauer's analysis of the modern space of the lobby into a post-modern context, Fredric Jameson offered the theory that the developer-architect John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles 'aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city, to this new total space, meanwhile, corresponds to a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd'.⁸³ He described it as a post-modern capitalist space characterised by fragmented and multi-directional spaces that simultaneously disorient and reorient the guests. Until 1976, before the 'Portman'-atrium became the popular ubiquitous international hotel type—the first Portman atrium-

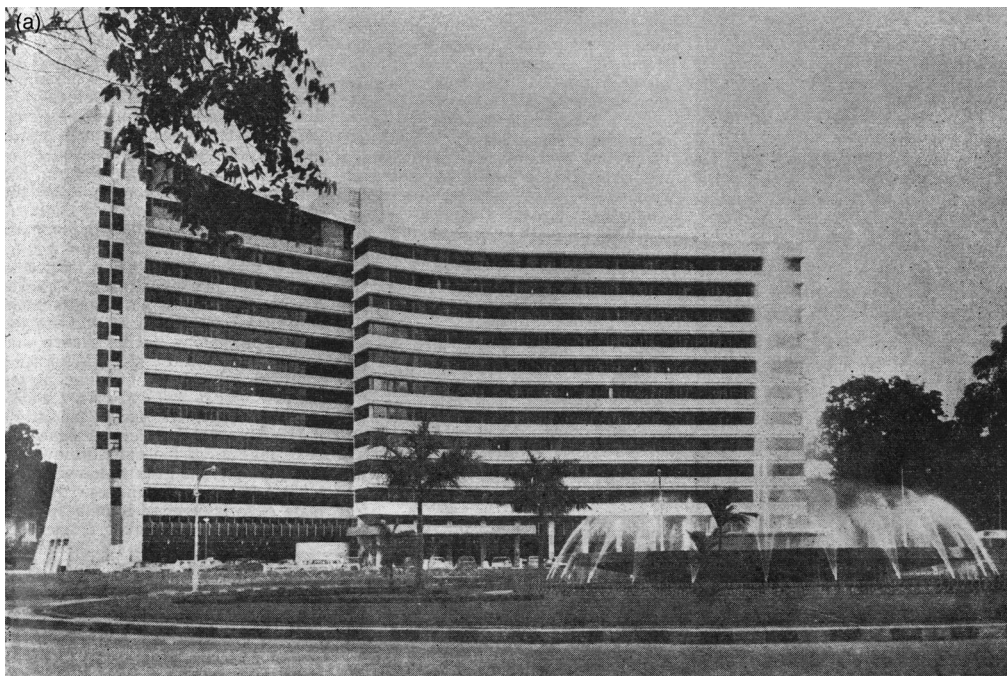


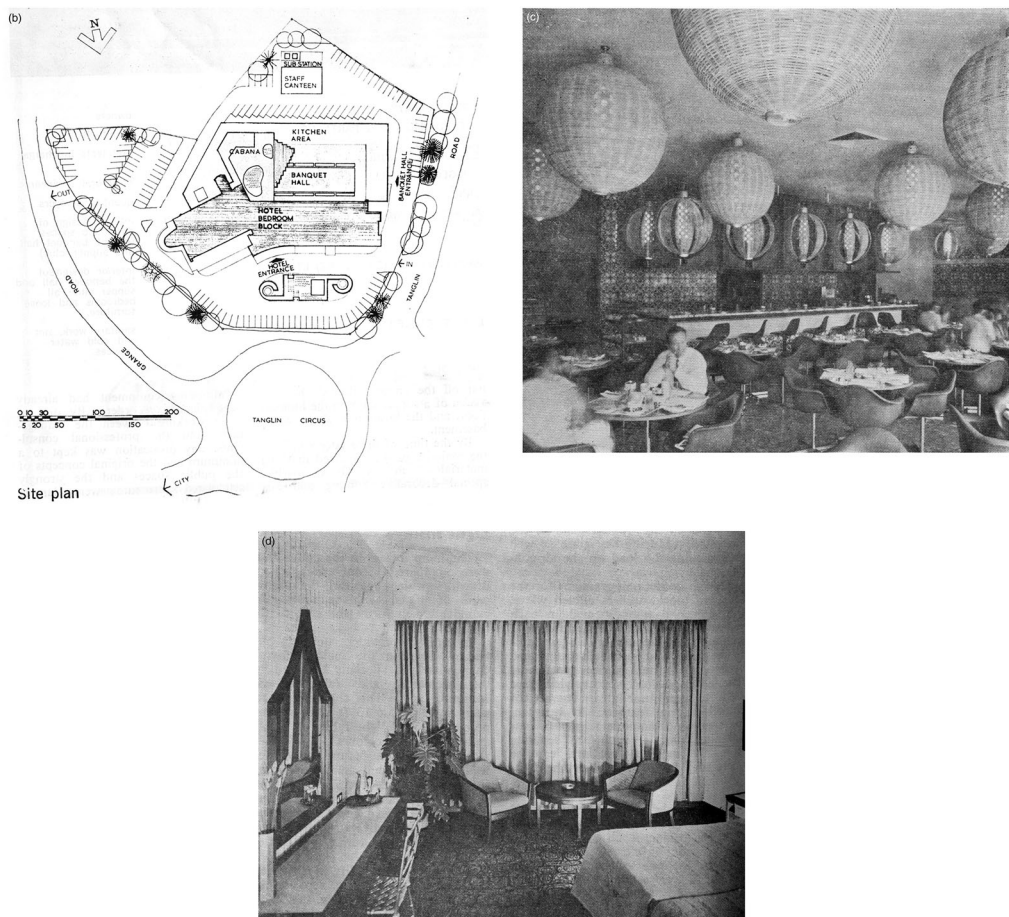
Figure 3. Images from 'The Hotel Malaysia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), pp. 27–30. Figure 3(a). Photograph of the newly opened Hotel Malaysia, 1968. Figure 3(b). Site plan showing how the site is sloped so that the surrounding roads are lower to provide an unobstructed view of the hotel. Figure 3(c). Coffee shop—interior decoration by the architects in consultation with the interior designer Don Ashton. Figure 3(d). Typical bedroom—design and furnishing by Pacific House.

type hotel was reported in *The Straits Times*, Singapore, in 1977 and the first hotel Portman designed with DP Architects in Singapore, the Marina Mandarin, opened in 1987—the atrium was typically two or three storeys high, characterised by richly coloured and tactile interiors.⁸⁴ The Ming Court Hotel was an exception, with two lobbies, one with a two-storey atrium covered by a double-domed glass ceiling that opened up 'through views' to the multi-level open-air courtyard above. Whilst not exactly a 'Portman', since only the first two storeys of the atrium were enclosed and air-

conditioned, it represented an attempt to take full advantage of the podium block for the lobby atrium and to maintain the intimate gallery-style Southeast Asian atmosphere like the others. Touted as a 'pagoda-like building' that was an 'Inn for Emperors' offering a 'blend of tradition and modern comfort', the reference to all these Chinese analogies, especially to Ming-Dynasty China, began with the door attendants, in fourteenth-century warrior dress.⁸⁵

At its opening in May, 1970, by Singapore's first Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sinnathambay Rajarat-

Figure 3. Continued



nam, there were 1,500 guests, including diplomats, top government officials, business leaders and representatives of the tourist industry.⁸⁶ The *Straits Times* newspaper reported each of its

special features: from the interiors to the glass lift to the podium roof's swimming pool. The project was fully described in the *Far East Builder*, which detailed the architectural, structural and

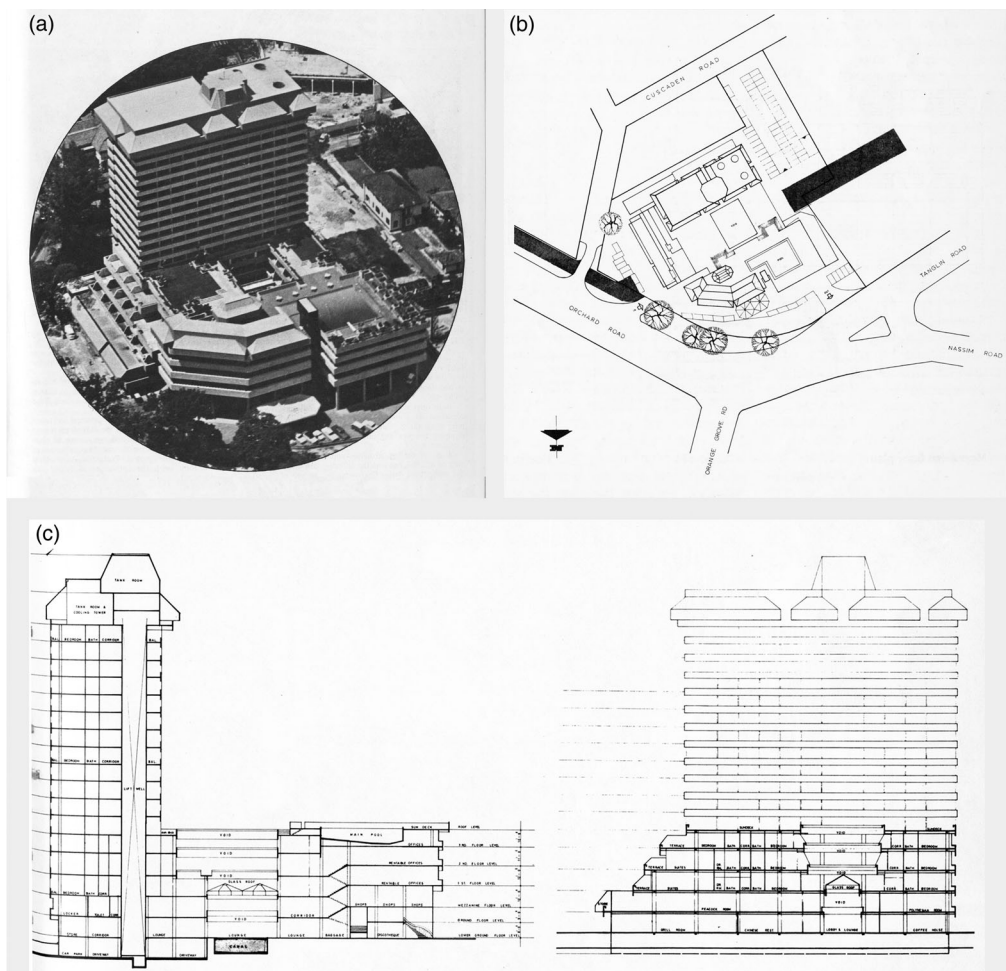
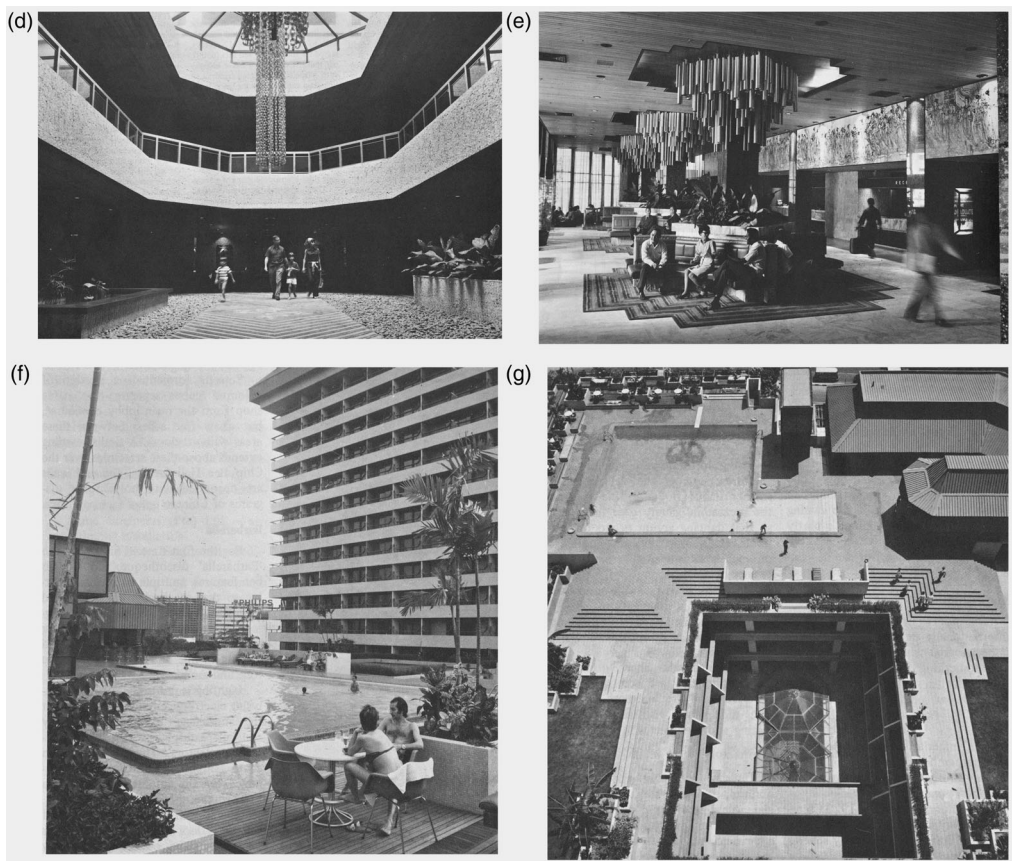


Figure 4. The Ming Court Hotel, Singapore, 1970: feature article, 'Ming Court Hotel—a design landmark', *Far East Builder* (September, 1970), pp. 13–19. Figure 4(a). Aerial view showing open-air courtyard and swimming on podium rooftop (p. 13). Figure 4(b). Site plan (p. 13). Figure 4(c). Longitudinal section and cross-section of the hotel: the longitudinal section shows the first lobby on the right, and the lobby-atrium and courtyard above on the left (p. 15). Figure 4(d). Courtyard in the second lobby (p. 16). Figure 4(e). Main lobby and reception area (p. 16). Figure 4(f). Tower block from landscaped swimming pool deck (p. 17). Figure 4(g). Swimming pool deck seen from the tower block; the ground floor lobby can be identified from the octagonal glass domes (p. 17).

interior designs, as well as the key spaces: the main lobby, the Grill Room, the Chip Bee Hall and the Coffee Shop. Interior finishes and

elements were regionally sourced. The white marble with jade-green veins was from Pakistan, the carpet from Beijing. The Grill Room had

Figure 4. Continued



'Malayan style' decorated timber carvings and furniture, woven rattan and cotton window screens from the Philippines. Traditional Chinese motifs ran through the guest rooms' walls. The three large function rooms, with references to the South and East Pacific—the Peacock, Polynesian

and Fuji, with 650, 200 and 150 meeting capacities respectively—were equipped with translation services, blackboard and projection equipment and maintenance crews.⁸⁷ The theming of the rooms reinforced the idea and image of Asia as reflecting the 'exotic' places of island Asia and

Southeast Asia (previously French Polynesia, Dutch Indies and British East Indies).

The Ming Court Hotel opened amidst increasing anxieties about the over-supply of guest rooms, a concern first raised publicly by the Minister for Finance, Goh Keng Swee, at the laying of the foundation stone of the Mandarin Hotel and followed by a report, 'The Demand and Supply of Hotel Rooms in Singapore 1970–1975', produced by the Singapore Tourism Promotion Board's (STPB) Head of Research, Wong Loke Jame, in 1969.⁸⁸ Whilst the Board began stepping up its efforts to attract international tourists, especially from the United States, Australia and Japan, the consensus amongst hoteliers was to use the convention industry to help get around the 'glut of rooms'.⁸⁹ The Ming Court was one of sixteen hotels on the Board's directory of convention venues. To increase its share of the lucrative world convention market and to boost hotel occupancy, the Board set up a convention bureau in 1974: its closest rival in the region was the Hong Kong Tourism Association, which was also actively promoting itself as a convention city.⁹⁰

Between 1970 and 1973 an urban transformation occurred, which saw the conversion and realisation of embryonic hotel projects into luxury flat or office complexes. According to a 1972 report on Singapore in *Asian Hotels and Tourism*, nearly all the high-rise buildings in the Republic seemed to be hotels.⁹¹ Citing the Chairman of the STPB, Tan Sri Runme Shaw, that '[n]owhere in Asia have so many hotels sprung up in so small a land area', it reported that the small country had 160 hotels, of which seventy-three were gazetted. Nearly all the international major chains (Hilton,

Ramada, Hyatt, Western International, Intercontinental and Sheraton) had built one of their hotels in Singapore. The author referred to the problem of over-supply predicted in the 1969 report and called for tourism promotion and an advertising campaign to sell the concept of Singapore itself as well as the hotels.⁹² It pointed out that the Report, echoed by the visiting Hilton hotel management experts' warning on the 'over-projection' of luxury hotel rooms, had produced anxiety amongst hotel owners.⁹³ Hilton's withdrawal of its second project in Singapore in late 1970 added to the uncertainty.⁹⁴

Transformable architecture of domesticity

Shortly after the release of the STPB Report, the Hotel Equatorial opened in late 1969, garnering attention in the local and regional press. It was the first block of flats turned into an hotel, built and developed by the builder and first-time hotelier, Lim Kah Ngam and the first hotel in Singapore to be managed by an Asian international hotel group, Orient Hotels.⁹⁵ Opened in December, 1969, with 1,500 guests, the Hotel Equatorial employed a staff of 400, most of whom were trained at the Hotel and Catering Centre nearby.⁹⁶ A builder for thirty-eight years, who had contracted and built prominent luxury hotels in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, including the Hotel Malaysia, the Ming Court Hotel, the Mandarin and Hilton hotels, Lim was an active participant in the spurt of skyscraper hotels in Singapore. Standing on two acres of land in the residential district along Bukit Timah and close to the shopping district of Orchard Road, the hotel was originally planned as a fifteen-storey

block of fifty-nine luxury flats. The cruciform-shaped tower with a central service core was designed to consist of four flats on each floor, with one flat in each wing. The reinforced concrete structure was already erected when Lim decided to take advantage of Government incentives introduced in 1967 for building new hotels, to transform the flats building into an hotel. Familiar with building technology trends in hotel designs of the 1960s, Lim asked the architects, Iversen van Sitteren and Partners, to express climatic and architectural developments in Singapore with ‘first class supporting facilities and a “personalized atmosphere”’ (Fig. 5).⁹⁷

The first move in the conversion of flats building to hotel was the introduction of a three-storey podium to connect the four wings of the tower block and to accommodate all the hotel facilities. The podium contained a ground-level shopping arcade, a two-storey lobby, a conference room, meeting rooms, four speciality restaurants (Chinese, French, Japanese and Steakhouse), a lounge, a twenty-four-hour coffee bar and discotheque, on the first and second floors, and a swimming pool on the roof. The first eleven floors of each of the four twelve-storey towers contained standard guest rooms and one suite. Three of the four wings on the top floor contained a two-bedroom suite, each with a living and dining room, for VIPs or longer-stay guests. To reduce the additional load on the towers, the floors in the podium were suspended from the main roof structure, supported by the external columns.⁹⁸ Compared to the Hotel Malaysia, the interiors of the public spaces were simpler and stripped

down, and consistent with the brutalist architecture of its exterior. The focus appeared to be more on its materials than its decorative elements. In line with the State’s endeavour to promote national consciousness of Singapore-made products, the interiors were finished in local timbers and furnished with locally manufactured furniture as well as lighting fixtures designed by the architects and the interior designer, Lesley Ho.⁹⁹

In Hong Kong, where the number of tourists was predicted to reach one million in 1971, the shortage of hotel rooms continued to be reported as the government urged hotel development.¹⁰⁰ The Harbor Centre Development Ltd, a consortium of four owners, who had developed the Ocean Terminal and the adjacent Star House office block, added the Hong Kong Hotel to complete its multi-purpose complex of buildings along the waterfront of Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon (Fig. 6).¹⁰¹ The Hong Kong Wharf and Godown Company originally planned the development in 1965 as an eighteen-storey composite building with 670 ‘bachelor flats’, a cinema, supermarket, shopping arcade, offices and a restaurant.¹⁰² It was designed by Eric Cumine Associates and was to be constructed by Hsin Chong and Company, which was building Hong Kong’s largest and first self-sufficient private housing development, Mei Foo Sun Chuen.¹⁰³

In 1967, the consortium was formed when Metropolitan Investors joined, and the decision was made to transform the building into an hotel. The conversion scheme was completed in September, 1967, but due to leftist riots, reactions to the proposition were not favourable and it was only in April, 1968, that the architects were asked to proceed with the

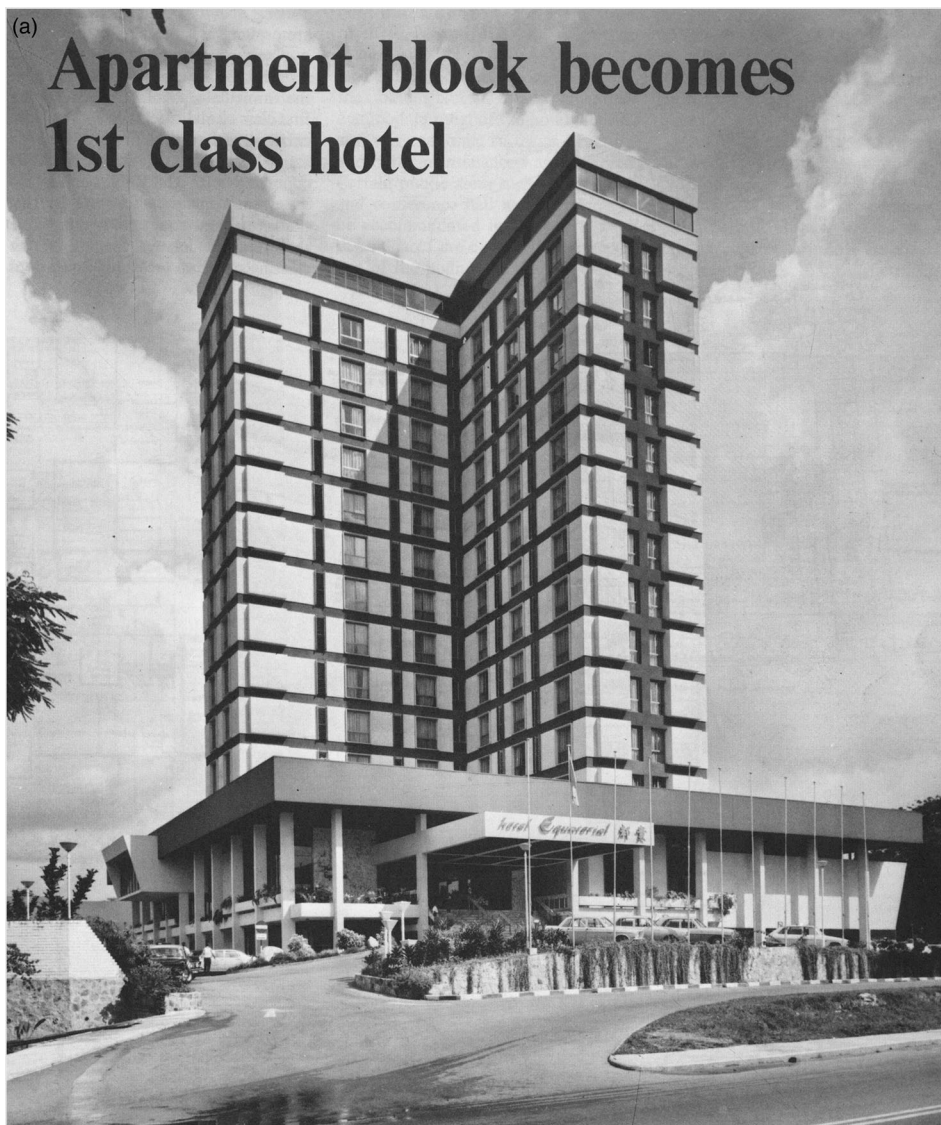


Figure 5. Images from 'Apartment Block becomes first class hotel', *Far East Builder* (September, 1970), pp. 33–38. Figure 5(a). The Hotel Equatorial, Singapore, 1969—originally planned as a multi-storey block of fifty-nine luxury flats. Figure 5(b). Site plan showing the cruciform residential tower on the square podium, and ground-level parking places. Figure 5(c). Main entrance foyer on raised first floor. Figure 5(d). Main lobby foyer with illuminated timber ceiling.

Named after the Colony's first large hotel, the Hongkong Hotel was managed by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels, which owned the Peninsula and Repulse Bay hotels. All members of the hotel



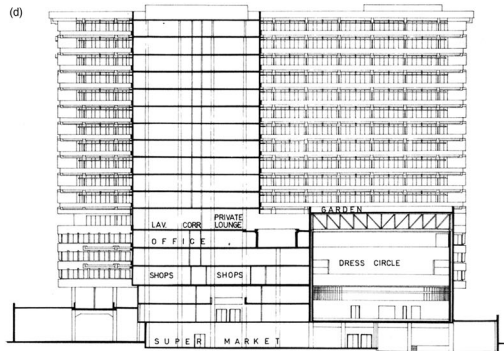
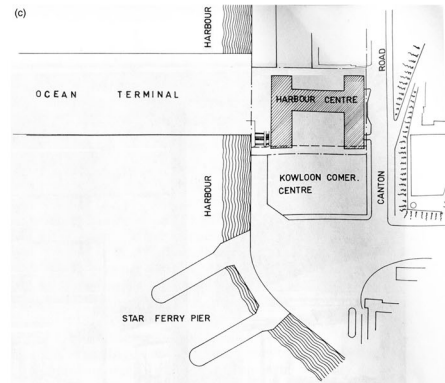
Figure 6. The Hong Kong Hotel, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong, 1969. Figure 6(a). The Marco Polo Hotel (previously the Hong Kong Hotel) from the ferry, with Star House on the adjacent right. (Photograph © 2016 the Author.) Figures 6 (b)-(h): feature article, '800-bed hotel completes Harbour Centre project', *Far East Builder* (November, 1969), pp. 13–20.

staff were trained at the Peninsula Hotel. The hotel was fully booked by January, 1969, months before the official opening in November.¹⁰⁶ In a twenty-four page spread in the *South China Morning Post*, the hotel was described as being 'almost a city on its own, having every facility a traveler could wish for'.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the contemporaneous hotels in Singapore and other Southeast Asian nations, the interior design of the public areas and private guest rooms was more abstract and graphic, without overt reference to any particular local or regional aesthetic and craft tradition: the Bauhinia restaurant was named after the pink orchid found in Hong Kong and the

interior was replete with abstract versions of it in the carpet, ceiling designs and furnishing. The coffee shop, Taipan Grill and Gun Bar, with walls adorned with cartoon figures, were furnished to invoke a 'colonial atmosphere'. The lounge was covered with colourful murals and the design theme of the cinema used geometric patterns and shapes.¹⁰⁸

In 1973, the Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf & Godown Company acquired the Hotel Malaysia in Singapore and renamed it the Marco Polo Hotel. It was managed by the Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels Group (renamed The Peninsula Group in

Figure 6(b). Kowloon peninsula showing the new H-shaped hotel located between the Ocean Terminal and Star House (right) (p. 13). Figure 6(c). Site plan (p. 13). Figure 6(d). Cross-section of the hotel (p. 17). Figure 6(e). Shopping arcade at first-floor level, looking towards the escalator connection with the Ocean Terminal (p. 14).



January, 1972), which owned fifteen percent of the shares. In the same year, the Company announced that construction of the new 1,400-room Marco Polo Hong Kong would begin in July. It would also be managed by Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, which bought the majority of the shares.¹⁰⁹ In early 1974, the hotel project was abandoned due to high building costs, especially the soaring prices of raw materials (cement) and declining occupancy rates at existing hotels.¹¹⁰ The curved building orig-

inally intended to house the Marco Polo Hotel became an office and shopping complex, consisting of a four-storey retail podium and fourteen floors of offices. In January, 1974, a strategic alliance was made to appoint Cathay Pacific Airways as partner to promote the Peninsula Group's hotels and accept reservations on their behalf in its eighty offices throughout the world.¹¹¹ Following the recovery of the hotel industry in the late 1970s, a new but smaller 441-room Marco Polo Hotel



Figure 6(f). Marble-floored lobby featuring raised circular seating and columns in textured marble. Figure 6(g). Bauhinia restaurant where carpet and ceiling decorations were matched (p. 18). Figure 6(h). Double suite with bedroom and lounge area (p. 19).

opened nearby in 1981.¹¹² With the merger of the Omni Hotels and Marco Polo International, the Hong Kong Hotel was renamed Omni Hong Kong Hotel in 1989, together with the company's three other hotels.¹¹³

The transformation of flat complexes to hotels and *vice-versa* mirrored the development strategies for domestic housing and the tourism industry by the State and private enterprise in Hong Kong and Singapore. In early 1969, the Hong Kong and

Shanghai Hotels Group, in anticipation of an increase in demand for luxury hotel rooms, began to make plans for a bridge to link the Peninsula Hotel and Peninsula Court: the ten-storey serviced flats complex with fifty-five flats and twenty-five bedrooms that it built in 1955.¹¹⁴ The bridge and the conversion of the serviced flats to accommodate fifteen suites, a hundred double rooms and ten single rooms, were completed in March, 1970. A typical two-bedroom flat containing a bedroom

with attached bathroom, a smaller bedroom, a living room, a kitchen and a closet, was transformed into two guest rooms, each with a bathroom and built-in wardrobe. The corridors and the rooms were finished in the same manner as the Peninsula Hotel, with suspended ceilings, marble, mirrors and teak furniture made in Singapore and assembled in Hong Kong. The framed etchings in the room contained aspects and scenes of Hong Kong commissioned from the artist, Van Lau (Fig. 7).¹¹⁵

Also in 1970, Central Properties, a property investment company tied to the Goodwood Hotels Corporation, which owned and operated the Hotel Malaysia, revealed in *The Straits Times* newspaper its project for high-rise flats promising 'hotel type privacy'.¹¹⁶ Identified as 'hotel like structures', the luxury high-rise flats complex, designed by Palmer and Turner, consisted of two thirty-five storey arc-shaped blocks in Cairnhill Road. It aimed at bringing 'hotel luxuries to every one of its 192 mansions'. Each flat was described as a 'penthouse by itself'. The project introduced a paging system for flats that was the first of its kind and allowed for the screening of visitors, which was deemed to be 'part of sophisticated living which the top executive in America... is used to'. According to the Director of Goodwood, the flat complex was intended for 'new Singapore apartment dwellers': highly paid executives who would enjoy hotel facilities such as boutiques, a coffee house, a *cabana*, swimming and wading pools, and a car park. Each of the two-, three- or four-bedrooms at between 2,700 to 3,400 square feet contained a servants' room, bathroom and service verandah in the service area.¹¹⁷

Temporary domesticities

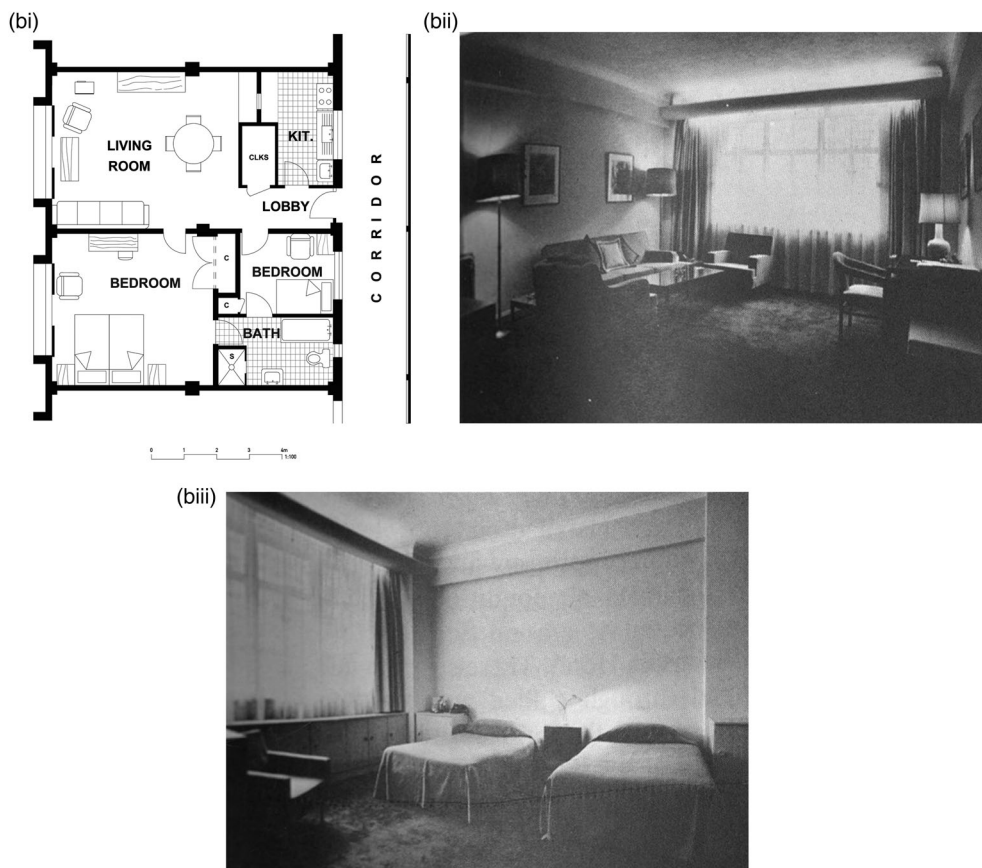
Consistent amongst the trade journals and newspaper reports was the description of the hotels in terms of the provision of rooms: earlier, in response to a shortage of luxury temporary accommodation and later expressed as oversupply.¹¹⁸ And due to the increased regional movement of tourists, room shortage in Hong Kong saw a reciprocal increase in room reservations in Singapore. Specifically, European tourists travelling through the region to the 1970 Osaka World Exposition took rooms in Singapore, as they were unable to get them in Hong Kong.¹¹⁹ Within popular media, trade and government reports, descriptions of room shortages were consistently similar to those relating to housing provision in terms of units or numbers of flats. In 1967, a plan was proposed by the Finance Minister, Goh Keng Swee, whereby paid-for accommodation in private homes could be offered to tourists. Referring to the bed-and-breakfast model in Europe and America, he suggested that Singaporeans who were willing to let out rooms to tourists could register with the tourist authorities.¹²⁰ But the idea was quickly rejected by foreign tourism experts, who felt that it would not be feasible to put paying guests in private homes in the context of Singapore's social customs and conditions. The Chairman of the Singapore Tourist Association, Herbert Lim, attributed the unpopularity of the plan to the 'reserved nature' of 'oriental people' and the conditions of private homes, which were deemed generally unsuitable for tourist accommodation.¹²¹

In 1973, Holiday Inn entered Southeast Asia, building its first hotel in Singapore in June, in Kuala Lumpur at the end of the year and in Hong



Figure 7. Photographs from 'Service apartments transformed for hotel extension', *Far East Builder* (June, 1971), pp. 13–17. (Plans drawn by C.F.A. Chan from originals.) Figure 7(a). Enclosed bridge linking the Peninsula Hotel and Peninsula Court, Hong Kong. Figure 7(b). Old flat—plan and photographs of living room and bedroom. Figure 7(c). Typical guestroom—plan and photographs showing suspended aluminium ceiling and concealed lighting.

Figure 7. Continued



Kong the following year.¹²² Hyatt was directing his hotels in Asia towards the business sector, focussing on conventions: 600 rooms in Bangkok, 250 in Pattaya, 900 in Singapore, 800 in Hong Kong, 400 in Bali and 265 in Manila.¹²³ Hoteliers in Asia consolidated, with Hong Kong-based compa-

nies taking a substantial lead. By 1973, Hongkong Land had acquired City Hotels, and became the major shareholder of the Mandarin Hotel and the Excelsior Hotel in Hong Kong, and the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. That same year, Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels and Hongkong and Kowloon

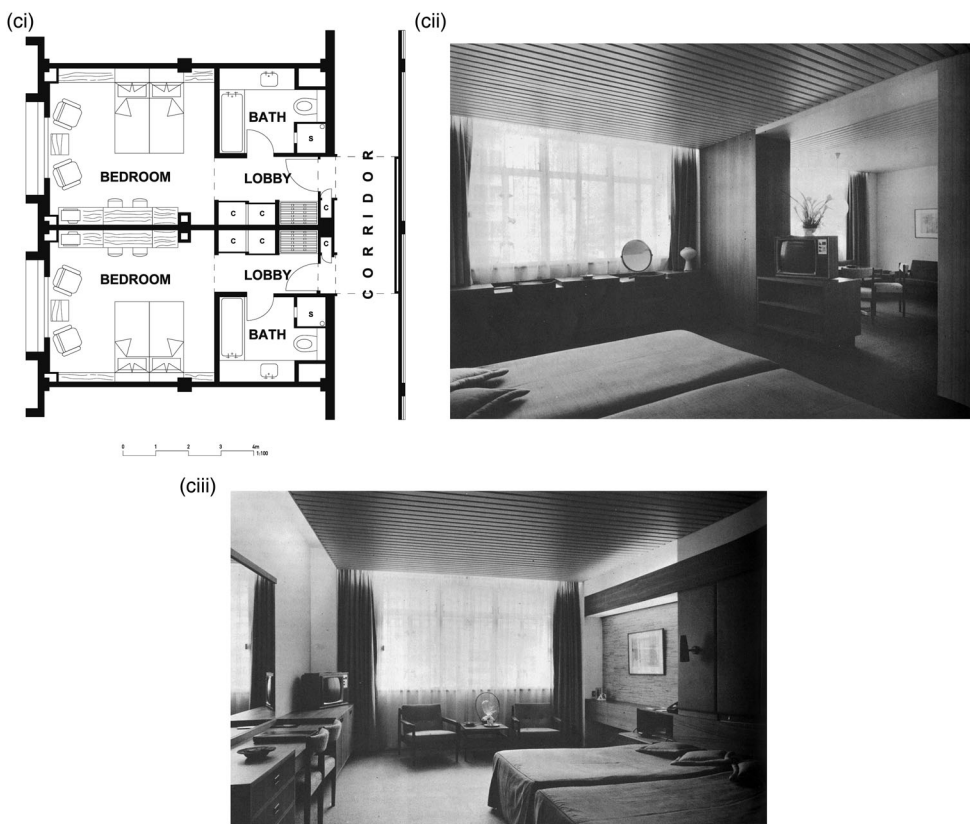


Figure 7. Continued

Wharf joined hands with Cathay Pacific Airways to establish the Marco Polo club, a new hotel management company, marketing programmes and reservations network. This followed the creation earlier in the year of the Peninsula Group, which owned the Peninsula, Repulse Bay, Hong Kong, Empress and Marco Polo in Hong Kong, and the

former Hotel Malaysia (rebranded Marco Polo) in Singapore.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, in 1971, the Malaysian hotel company, Merlin Hotels, purchased six hotels and began expanding into new destinations, in what its leadership called the creation of a circle that would be 'part of a new development in tourism rather than continuing to build existing

destinations'.¹²⁵ The circle comprised 265 rooms in the Singapore Merlin (750 more in construction), 700 in Kuala Lumpur, 180 in Hong Kong, 150 in Penang, 70 in Cameron Highlands (rebuilt after a fire) and 27 in 'undiscovered' Kuantan, West Malaysia.¹²⁶

The Southeast Asian hotel underscores the rationality for urban architectural development based on notions of economic, constructional and formal efficiency, which reached its apogee between 1968 and 1973. In Singapore, building luxury hotels was an integral part of the national tourism agenda. Within a decade, an urban landscape of slab-tower and podium buildings with privately owned interior public spaces had emerged. The predominance of the slab-tower and podium building for hotels was driven by an economic pragmatism where state initiatives intersect with private interests. The split between the hotel's 'international style' exterior and the 'Asian and regional' interior was a conscious strategy for branding identity: the hotel as the modern Asian city. Innovation occurred in terms of management and organisation. The hotel atrium, which comprised the lobby and shopping arcade, found its counterpart in the private housing complexes that were concurrently built—the most famous were Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong (1961), originally intended for the middle class but which, by the early 1970s, became the place for 'cheap sleeps'¹²⁷ and the People's Park Complex in Singapore (1967–1973).

Relevantly, the metropolitan condition of the rapidly modernising Asian city emerged from anxieties driven by the political exigencies of the

region and saw the development of and speculation in slab-tower and podium buildings even before their eventual built purpose was determined. Amid the speedy expansion of the international hotels and the building of the Asian-owned hotel empires, these impatient opportunists, private and state enterprises alike, capitalised on the aftermath of regional consolidation to generate global and regional capital, and anticipated their probable re-programming in the near future.¹²⁸ As subjects of the impatience of capitalist development, these spaces were always in transition and poised to be transformed between temporary and more permanent states of domesticity, between the communal spaces of flats and the public areas of the hotel, between individual flat units and standard guest rooms.

The adaptability of the architecture from housing the temporary domestic functions of the hotel to the relative permanence of the domesticity of the home continues into the present time. In 1998, the Singapore government put a freeze on land release for hotel development in response to the economic downturn, which affected both the tourism industry and the private housing market. Anticipating a slow recovery for hotels which were outdated and not as competitive as newer hotels, the owners of Hotel Equatorial sold the property for \$58 million to City Development for shared-ownership redevelopment in 1999, returning full circle to its original purpose as luxury housing. *The Straits Times* reported that this move, along with the conversion of other hotels into this type of accommodation, would add over 1,000 new flats to the prime districts.¹²⁹ Fifteen-story *The Equatorial* was opened in 2001.

Post-independence Singapore and post-riots Hong Kong sped ahead as the representative cities for the region's tourism industry. With illustrations ranging from artists' perspectives to blueprints, orthographic drawings and photographs, the journals and newspapers narrated the regionalisation of the luxury hotel. Borne out of the regional tourism phenomenon, *Asian Hotels and Tourism* featured articles and advertisements focussing on 'selling the country, selling the region'.¹³⁰ They presented the modern hotel in Southeast Asia as a public equity for the nation and the symbol of a modernising region. The architecture of temporary domesticities furnished the city with interior public spaces—atria, rooms and gallery passages—covered with figurative and abstract imagery of the art and craft traditions in the region, and filled with planned international and national institutional and corporate events, organised social and educational activities. These temporary spaces of domesticity and consumption were part of an incipient complex of regional cultural identification in which architecture is paramount. The hotel interiors were not simply *orientalised* spaces of consumption for foreign tourists, but instead, complicit in the formation of local inhabitants as participants in the new public spaces of the emerging economies of Hong Kong and Singapore.

By the 1970s, the slab-tower and podium already constituted the normative architectural aesthetic for new public spaces in Singapore's fledgling nation-state. The hotel, shared-ownership accommodation and shopping-cum-office complex were the most prominent urban renewal developments amid the unfolding architectural modernity where govern-

ment planners and architects were grappling with the problematic search for a national identity against the background of regional rivalries and a colonial past. In conclusion, let us consider the Shangri La Hotel in Singapore, the first international hotel complex and convention centre in a tropical garden setting. Construction began on the eve of separation from Malaysia in 1965. The hotel opened in 1971.¹³¹ With an international team of hotel and resort architects and designers, the architectural staging of authenticity and regional exoticism converged with the national invention of Singapore as a garden city that is tropical Southeast Asian as well as international in its site planning, architecture, interior design, quality of service, management and technology.¹³² Shangri La Singapore epitomised the transnational space where nation, region and world intersected seemingly without contradiction, encapsulated within the aspirational urbanism of and housing in a 'garden city'.¹³³

Notes and references

1. 'Asia possesses, of all the globe's regions, depths which exploratory man may plumb. Now with jets ... hundreds of thousands can journey deep into Asia's heart. In this inaugural issue of *Asian Hotels and Tourism* we have sought to examine the larger parameters of travel to this vast region. Travel in Europe and North America is well developed, but the Far East is just beginning to attract the masses of people who feel a call to wander. Growth of travel—and consequently the service industries, which serve it—has erupted in Asia since 1970. Through the remainder of the Seventies, travel to the fifteen Asian and Pacific countries double approximately every three years. No *volkerwanderung* in

ancient history even remotely approaches in sheer numbers the wandering now of the earth's people.' 'Taking Off', Editorial, *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (April, 1972), p. 1.

2. The 'big American hotel' that culminated in the post-modern 'Portman'-type was discussed by the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner in *A History of Building Types*, and was identified by the geographer Edward Soja and the cultural theorist Fredric Jameson. Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 169–92.
3. Patrick Mullins discussed the urban economic impact of international tourism on Southeast Asian cities and paralleled the concept of tourism urbanisation with industrial urbanisation. Patrick Mullins, 'International Tourism and the Cities of Southeast Asia', in *The Tourist City*, Dennis R. Judd, Susan S. Fainstein, eds (New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 245–260.
4. Annabel J. Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotel and Modern Architecture* (Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press, 2001). Since its publication, there has been increased scholarship on global histories of architectural types that substantially expanded upon Pevsner's *History of Building Types* by taking a lateral view across geographies and acknowledging the reciprocal, even multi-directional, flows of information, expertise and money. These include, more recently, Florian Urban's *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (London, Routledge, 2011), which discusses the vicissitudes of the form of housing that is ubiquitous yet iconic, and was proffered as a radical reorganisation of domesticity when it first emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century.
5. Prasenjit Duara, 'Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region of Our Times', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (November, 2010), pp. 963–983; republished in Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Conceptualizing a Region For Our Times* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), pp. 5–31.
6. Duara calls for a more inclusive description and analysis beyond the dominant imagination of Asia or East Asia as Chinese or China.
7. These were followed by the development of the respective international airports: Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport was expanded in 1974 and Singapore's Changi Airport (1975–1981) was built on the largest land reclamation site in Southeast Asia.
8. Soh Tiang Keng, 'Hiltons to run two hotels in Singapore and K.L.', *The Straits Times* (1st November, 1963), p. 1. Both hotels were designed by the Malaysian-based architectural firm Booty, Edwards and Partners, and according to the partner-in-charge, Ong Eng Hung, they would be designed for 'maximum operational efficiency'. The Singapore Hilton was announced as a seventeen-storey, 300-room hotel costing of \$18 million (later increased to twenty-one storeys) and The Kuala Lumpur Hilton was to be a twenty-storey, 400-room hotel costing \$24 million: construction was financed by Cho Jock Kim, Chairman of Far East Publishers.
9. 'Hilton Hotel planner in for look around', *The Straits Times* (2nd February, 1964), p. 3. Two days later, Strand agreed a deal with a Manila business group to set up a 400-room Hilton in Manila.
10. 'Snags hit building of two luxury hotels', *The Straits Times* (25th November, 1965), p. 15.
11. 'A rush now to get Hilton completed', *The Straits Times* (1st August, 1968), p. 7; 'Hilton may get off to a good start tomorrow', *The Straits Times* (4th August, 1968), p. 4.
12. 'S. Rajaratnam at opening of Singapore Hilton', 30th January, 1971: Television Corporation of Singapore;

NAS Audiovisual and Sound Recordings, Acc. No. 1998006960. 'One of the places which forms a crucial part of a tourist experience in any country is a hotel in which he stays. Perhaps a third or more, depending on the age of the tourist, of a tourist time in Singapore is spent in the hotel. His next most important and decisive impression after the treatment he gets at the airport from the immigration and customs official is the one he'll receive at the hotel—how he is received, how he is handled by the staff at the hotel, constitutes among his first and most important impressions of a country.' excerpt from Rajaratnam's speech.

13. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, LA, London, University of California Press, 1999; c.1976).
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–37; Chapter 1, 'Modernity and the production of Touristic Experiences'.
15. 'Singapore urged: Join with Malacca to draw tourists', *The Straits Times* (26th June, 1969), p. 7.
16. 'Art could unite the People', *The Singapore Free Press* (12th September, 1959), p. 5; "'Festival of Culture" Week', *The Straits Times* (19th August, 1961), p. 4.
17. 'The Safeguard from Race Conflict', *The Straits Times* (3rd December, 1960), p. 6.
18. The building of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society was repeatedly emphasised by the Government's leaders, including the Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew himself, up to the eve of separation in August, 1965: 'Lee: Place in Malaysia for all cultures', *The Straits Times* (20th April, 1965), p. 6.
19. Examples of publications on the architecture and social histories of these hotels include: David Watkin, *Grand Hotel: the golden age of palace hotels: an architectural and social history* (New York, Vendome Press, 1984); Elaine Denby, *Grand hotels: reality and illusion* (London, Reaktion Books, 1998); Paul Groth, *Living downtown: the history of residential hotels in the United States* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994); Marianne Lamonaca, Jonathan Mogul, eds, *Grand hotels of the jazz age: the architecture of Schultze & Weaver* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, c. 2005); Jennifer M. Volland, Bruce Grenville, with Stephanie Rebick (*Grand hotel: redesigning modern life/Vancouver Art Gallery* (Ostfildern, Germany, Hatje Cantz, 2013).
20. Scott Lash, John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space* (London, Sage Publications, 1994), p. 255.
21. Specific examples of the plethora of organised activities and themed events include a fashion show offered by Isetan, the anchor tenant at the Apollo Hotel; a wig demonstration over high tea at the Hyatt Hotel's Jasmine Room, arranged by the Teachers' Union; a special Chinese New Year menu at the Mandarin Court in the Mandarin Hotel; ticketed shows; company events; birthday celebrations. 'What better way to know your neighbours than a personal visit', *New Nation* (5th January, 1972), p. 4; 'Refreshing new faces at this fashion show', *New Nation* (15th May, 1972), p. 4; 'Children's joy', *New Nation* (11th October, 1972), p. 4; 'It's time to splurge on something special', *The Straits Times* (30th November, 1972), p. 18; 'A birthday boost for AIA agents', *New Nation* (23rd January, 1973), p. 4; 'Touch of everything for the real swingers', *New Nation* (26th January, 1973), p. 14.
22. For a discussion of the new government's efforts to shut down any form of opposition from the press, see Chan Heng Chee, Hans-Dieter Evers, 'National Identity and Nation Building in Southeast Asia', *Working Paper No. 6* (Singapore, Department of Sociology, NUS, 1972), pp. 22–24.
23. The publication's multiple editorial and name changes, and shifts in the focus of its contents, mir-

rored a city undergoing accelerated development and tremendous modifications to its environment. They also reveal colonial Hong Kong's increasingly tenuous relationship with the Chinese hinterland, especially from 1950 into the 1970s, and its identification and affiliation with the other cities in the region, especially in terms of financial investments and transfers of technical expertise. It was launched in 1935 as *The Hong Kong and South China Builder*, a bi-monthly periodical of building and property development activities in Hong Kong and Asia ('the far east') published by Hong Kong Builder Ltd, with Henry Grave serving as the managing editor. A Chinese editor, Kuo Yuan-Hsi, joined briefly in February, 1941 until the end of the year, when the onset of the War resulted in a seven-year break in publication. In 1948, the periodical continued as *The Hong Kong and Far East Builder* and Grave returned as editor up to early 1958, handing the reins briefly to Bernard Croft between November, 1953, and the end of 1955. Grave passed away suddenly in December, 1958: 'Mr Henry Grave', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (12th December, 1958), p. 9. Ron G. Whitehead took over as editor for two issues between May and September, 1958, until Croft's return as editor in October, 1958. Concurrently, the publisher also underwent changes of name: from The Hong Kong Building Service Ltd to Federal Publications Ltd to Far East Publications Ltd in December, 1960. The two decades of Grave's editorship straddling the War indicated an explicitly racialised Hong Kong, where projects were described either to be in the European or Chinese style or, in housing projects, for the European civil servant or the Chinese masses. The periodical's name was changed again, to *Asian Building and Construction*, in October, 1971, following the editorship of Peter Leung from August, 1971, to December, 1973. It was acquired in 1973

by Thomson Publication Asia Ltd, which was a subsidiary of the British consumer magazine and book-publishing house. Barnett's previous publishing experience was also in building and construction, with the UK-based Thomson Publications in London. Having enjoyed his time as managing editor in an independent publishing house, he stepped down in 1973 and set up his own publishing house, Asia Trade Journals Ltd. See Beverley Howells, 'They look after "neglected" readers', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (27th August, 1977), p. 11. After a rapid succession of temporary editors, George Mitchell took over in September, 1974, and was editor until 1982. In November, 1982, it was relaunched as *Asian Architect and Contractor*, as the official journal of the International Federation of Asian and Western Pacific Contractors' Associations. Published by Thomson Press, it absorbed the *Asia Pacific Contractor* in 1983 and the *Asian Interior Designer* in 2001. It survived until 2003.

24. This solution was propagated by experts such as Patrick Abercrombie and George Atkinson, the Colonial Office Building Liaison Officer, who advised on the revision of the Colony's Building Ordinance in the 1950s. See Patrick Abercrombie, *Hong Kong Preliminary Planning Report* (Hong Kong, Government Printer, 1948). Abercrombie proposed the introduction of a maximum density limit for the Island and the rehousing of the re-centralised population in Kowloon. See also 'Abercrombie Report: overcrowded Population Transfer to Kowloon Suggestion—Development of Mainland', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (23rd September, 1949), p. 8; 'H.K. Development: Expert's Proposals', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (24th September, 1949), p. 5; 'Building in Colonies: Colonial Office Expert Gives Talk to H.K. Rotarians—Visit to Squatter Area', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (26th March, 1952), p. 6.

25. Here, I acknowledge Florian Urban's examination of the history of mass housing in seven cities, including Mumbai and Shanghai, as important in already setting up the 'housing complex' as limited not only to form but also to social composition, location within the city, effective maintenance and various cultural, social and political factors: Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab*, *op. cit.*
26. The authors of most of the articles were unnamed, with the exception of texts by some invited writers who were recognised figures in the field. As with many of the news articles in the Hong Kong *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] and *The Straits Times* [ST] of Singapore, these were intended to be reports, presumably written by the writers and editors on the staff.
27. 'Report from Canton: By October, another 2,500 beds', 'Canton Begins to Relax', *Asian Hotels and Tourism*: (June, 1973), pp. 9–10. The international hotel chain entered China only in the mid-1970s and, from the outset, it was imbued with a political agency primarily in furthering the country's own modernising agenda. For a counterpoint to the development of the Asian hotel in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and the early part of the 1970s, see, Cole Roskam, 'Envisioning Reform: The International Hotel in Post-revolutionary China, 1974–1990', *Grey Room*, 58 (Winter, 2015), pp. 84–111.
28. 'The Asian Scene: Instant Asia', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (January, 1973), pp. 15–16.
29. 'Singapore, Showplace City', Special Issue, *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (November, 1973): see especially 'Report from Singapore', pp. 11–31.
30. 'Hotel Singapura ready for tourist flux', *The Hong Kong and Far East Builder*, vol. 17, no. 5 (1962), pp. 73–75. See also, Geoffrey Boland, 'Ready soon: Luxury Hotel Singapura', *The Straits Times* [ST] (18th January, 1963), p. 10.
31. 'The Hotel Malaysia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), p. 28. It was taken over by Marco Polo Developments and named the Marco Polo Hotel in 1986 and then the Omni Marco Polo in 1989.
32. 'Progress, but keep tradition, S'pore told', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th September, 1969), p. 9. At this time, the New York-based Lapidus had already built over forty hotels. By the time of his death, he had designed 250 hotels, but the work was typically characterised as 'kitsch' by the American architectural establishment.
33. 'Merlin hotels make it the Orient', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (January, 1973): advertisement insert. At the time of the advertisement, six Merlin hotels had opened, the first in Kuala Lumpur in 1959, with four more in progress.
34. A.G. Barnett, ed., 'New Hotels in Asia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), pp. 15–51 ; 'Asia's new hotels', *Far East Builder* (September, 1970), p. 11–40.
35. A.G. Barnett, ed., 'New Hotels in Asia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), pp. 15–17.
36. Sigfried Kraacauer, 'The Hotel Lobby', *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Thomas Levin, ed., trsl. (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 174.
37. 'Asian hotels' colorful interiors', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), p. 31.
38. 'The Sheraton Hotel', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), p. 19.
39. Internationally renowned interior designers, such as the Americans Dale and Patricia Keller and the Scottish Don Ashton, were so frequently featured in local and regional newspapers and journals that they were household names in the hotel industry and interior design profession. In contrast, their counterparts—the individual architects responsible for planning and designing the hotel buildings—received less attention in public media.

40. 'The Keller touch in hotel rooms worldwide', *The Straits Times* [ST] (11th October, 1984), p. 19. His most recent project in Singapore was the interior for the Pan Pacific Hotel designed by John Portman, which opened in 1985.
41. Keller founded Pacific House (Asia) Ltd in Tokyo with some associates in 1953.
42. 'Hilton Worldwide Opens 12th hotel in Japan with Opening of Hilton Tokyo Odaiba', *Asia Pacific News* (2nd October, 2015): <<http://news.hilton.com/index.cfm/news/hilton-worldwide-opens-12th-hotel-in-japan-with-opening-of-hilton-tokyo-odaiba?tl=de>>
43. 'The Hilton Hotels Organization', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (13th June, 1963), p. 28.
44. Asia's first Inter-Continental (co-run with Pan American World Airways) opened in Jakarta in 1962. The first Sheraton hotel in Asia opened in Manila in 1968 at the same time as the Hilton, and the region's first Hyatt hotel opened in Hong Kong in 1969. Sheraton Singapore and Hong Kong opened in 1973 and 1974 respectively. In 1999, Dale Keller and Associates won the lifetime achievement award as hotel designers.
45. 'Dale Keller's Contribution: His 'interiors' are status symbols among hoteliers in Asia', *Asian Hotels & Tourism* (June, 1972), pp. 23–25. By the end of the 1970s, Keller had designed the interiors for over fifty projects, many of which were hotels, in fifteen Asian countries. See also, 'Design for better living', *Asian Hotels & Tourism* (November, 1975), pp. 35–37.
46. 'Thai elegance captured in Bangkok Sheraton design', *Far East Builder* (March, 1971), pp. 11–13.
47. Although the history of Thailand reached back beyond the thirteenth century, presumably, and Bangkok was founded in 1767, this is a reference to the exuberant designs produced by Thai artists for the Thai royal family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including, not least, hand-painted enamel on glazed ceramics, patterns and motifs on textiles, lacquer-and-gold furniture, carved reliefs and coloured glass mosaics.
48. 'Design for Better Living', *op. cit.*
49. *Ibid.* For Hyatt Bali, he set up a bamboo furniture workshop on site to produce the furniture for the 400-room hotel. Keller stated: 'I think the interior must be extremely comfortable, practical and functional if it is going to be successful.'
50. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
51. See, for example, 'India and Southeast Asia must stand together, build new era', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th January, 1956), p. 10. Making a case for the need for cooperation between India and South-east Asia, the author of the article argued how the emphasis on an Indian culture did not suppress indigenous cultures, but instead infused 'new life into the native cultures of Burma, Malaya, Siam, Indo-China, Indonesia and other territories'. With the ongoing confrontations in the region with communism in China and Vietnam, the USA was most active in pushing for regionalisation in the Asia-Pacific region. By 1963, with much interest in joint research and collaboration with USA universities, a Centre for Southeast Asian Studies consisting of the departments of economics, geography, history, law, political science and social studies was set up in the University of Singapore to study regionalisation from multi-disciplinary perspectives. Following the Bangkok Declaration for ASEAN on 8th August, 1967, the ideological shift from an Afro-Asia to a Southeast Asian consolidation was in place. 'ASEAN is South-East Asia's first major attempt to apply to South-East Asia and its problems the more hopeful and fruitful idea of regionalism', stated the Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam in a parliamentary speech, September, 1967. 'ASEAN and

- the difficulties of ahead: Raja', *The Straits Times* [ST] (9th September, 1967), p. 5. From the early 1970s, the Southeast Asian city was presented as a destination of cultural and visual contrasts. *Asian-ness* was played up in journals' cover images and, in the section 'The Asian Scene', in *Asian Hotels and Tourism*, which featured the latest tourist news and attractions. There were images of a Chinese junk sailing along the beaches and fishing villages in Singapore or of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, or of Muslim *vintas* in Manila Bay. In 1973, Singapore its latest tourist attractions themes as 'Instant Asia', where places, festivals and old traditions were repackaged with ethnic emphasis and new traditions were invented. These included a Chinese junk and outdoor barbeques in a Hawaiian village, with the island's 'longest bar' intended to attract both tourists and locals. 'The Asian Scene: Instant Asia', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (January, 1973), pp. 15–16.
52. 'The Miracle that is Hong Kong—Perhaps most exciting city in world today', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (14th June, 1963), p. 6.
 53. *Ibid.*
 54. 'HK—a pre-eminent show window of the world—Dr Ram', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (17th February, 1970), p. 27. Cathay Pacific's other office was located at the Peninsula Hotel.
 55. 'Talk on Domestic Architecture', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (14th March, 1963), p. 7. Kinoshita subsequently directed the design of the Hyatt Bali (completed in 1976) with the architect Kerry Hill who, upon leaving Palmer and Turner (P&T), founded his own practice in 1979, specialising in the design of tropical resorts and flats in Southeast Asia. Hill worked for P&T from 1971, was the resident architect for the Hyatt Bali and later managed the Jakarta office of P&T.
 56. 'Australian room at the Hongkong Hilton', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (20th July, 1963), p. 7.
 57. 'New Zealand Room opens at Hongkong Hilton', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (2nd August, 1963); 'P.I. Room opens at the Hilton', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (8th August, 1963), p. 7.
 58. 'She's a career wife with two homes', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th October, 1970), p. 18.
 59. 'Design for Better Living', *op. cit.*, p. 36.
 60. 'Asian hotels' colourful interiors', *op. cit.*, pp. 31–38.
 61. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33. The featured lobby interiors include the Mandarin Chinese restaurant in the Sheraton Manila; the Orchid Bar, the Rajah Room for continental dining and the Coral Room in the Hotel Malaysia; the private dining room and the Coral Ballroom in the Manila Hilton.
 62. The seven-storey Hotel Singapura International was converted from a building erected by the Malayan Chinese Association, and taken over by the Intercontinental company.
 63. 'Another property company to offer shares to public', *The Straits Times* [ST] (17th September, 1963), p. 20; Geoffrey Boland, '\$12m building complex', *The Straits Times* [ST] (8th November, 1963), p. 12.
 64. 'Tenders called for Hotel Malaysia', *The Straits Times* [ST] (26th June, 1964), p. 13.
 65. 'New 300-room hotel', *The Straits Times* [ST] (30th November, 1967), p. 8.
 66. 'New hotel to be run by public company', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th November, 1967), p. 13.
 67. 'Fourteen storeys—and only the very best from top to bottom', *The Straits Times* [ST] (17th November, 1968), p. 9.
 68. 'Executives named by hotel chain', *The Straits Times* [ST] (18th August, 1967), p. 16.
 69. 'New 300-room hotel', *The Straits Times* [ST] (30th November, 1967), p. 8; 'World's biggest', *The Straits Times* [ST] (16th July, 1968), p. 5.

70. 'The Hotel Malaysia', *Far East Builder* (September, 1968), p. 28.
71. 'Hotel Malaysia opens doors', *The Straits Times* [ST] (12th April, 1968), p. 12.
72. 'Dr Goh will open the hotel ...', *The Straits Times* [ST] (17th November, 1968), p. 9.
73. 19 new hotels were built in Singapore between 1968 and 1971; 'Just add a dash of warmth', *The Straits Times* [ST] (17th November, 1968), p. 16.
74. The hotel was a counterpart to the National Theatre nearby, which was opened in August, 1963, in commemoration of self-government. Also designed by the Alfred Wong Partnership, the theatre hosted the University convocation and international events such as the Miss and Mr Universe contests. In 1960, shortly before winning the National Theatre design competition, the architect, Alfred Wong, made the case for a modern Malayan style that should be brought about by pooling the skills and knowledge of Singapore's architects. As the architect of both the national theatre and the hotel, Wong was an active participant of the nation-building *schema* in a period when tourism was a national enterprise and a key aspect of regionalisation centered on economic cooperation and cultural exchange.
75. 'Hotel may have landing strip', *The Straits Times* [ST] (15th November, 1962), p. 5. This early report on the project revealed that the hotel would have a landing strip if approved by the authorities: it was not built, however.
76. 'Fourteen storeys—and only the very best from top to bottom', *op. cit.*; '\$180,000 sound of music at new hotel', *The Straits Times* [ST] (18th October, 1967), p. 11.
77. 'New name and image for Hotel Malaysia', *The Straits Times* [ST] (30th July, 1983), p. 16; 'Change of name for Hotel Malaysia', *The Business Times* (30th July, 1983), p. 12.
78. The URD became an independent governmental entity named the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in 1974. Four hotels were developed from the first sales programme. These were the Apollo Hotel by Ho Kwong Yew and Sons Architects; the King's Hotel by Yang Tai Tye Architect and RSP Architects, Planners and Engineers; the Hotel Miramar by Ng Chee Sen Architect and Associated Civic-Akitek; the Plaza Hotel designed by Eric Taylor Associates and Regional Development Consortium. Urban Renewal Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology of the Sale of Sites Programme for Private Development* (Singapore, URA, 1983), p. 21.
79. Development charges were waived for good-class tourist hotels, and special procedures put in place to expedite the grant of planning approvals. See 'S'pore plans for a 4mil population', *The Straits Times* [ST] (16th May, 1968), p. 4.
80. 'S'pore Govt. goes into hotel trade', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th May, 1968), p. 11; 'Town and City the Main Feature', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th May, 1968), p. 17; 'Another new luxury hotel for Singapore', *The Straits Times* [ST] (8th September, 1968), p. 7.
81. 'Ming Court Hotel—A Design Landmark', *Far East Builder* (September, 1970), pp. 11–13.
82. 'Special concrete planks to speed building', *The Straits Times* [ST] (28th August, 1968), p. 12.
83. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, CT, Duke University Press, 1991), p. 40. He went on to state that: 'In this sense, then, ideally the minicity of Portman's Bonaventure ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it: for it does

not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute.'

84. Marina Centre, Portman's first developed and designed hotel, shopping and convention centre complex on fully reclaimed land, which was a joint venture between Portman Development and Singapore Land, was announced in 1979 and completed in phases between 1986 and 1997 by DP Architects: 'Portman Properties and the massive Marina Centre', *The Business Times* (10th September, 1979), p. 2.
85. 'The "Warrior" with a welcoming smile', *The Straits Times* [ST] (18th January, 1970), p. 8.
86. Soh Tiang Kenh, 'Minister to open \$20m luxury hotel', *The Straits Times* [ST] (27th June, 1970), p. 1.
87. 'Function rooms to cater for conventions, banquets', *The Straits Times* [ST] (27th June, 1970), p. 1.
88. Speech by Goh Keng Swee, Minister for Finance, at the Laying of Foundation Stone Ceremony of the Overseas Union Building and Mandarin Hotel on Monday, 23rd June, 1969 at 5.00pm. (National Archives of Singapore, PressR19690623, Microfilm No. NA1250.) See also, Malcolm Caldwell, 'Tourism: Part I', *New Nation* (17th February, 1971), p. 9; Tan Wee Lian, 'S'pore's hotel industry in full force by 1973', *The Straits Times* [ST] (26th September, 1971), p. 15.
89. To kick it off, the STPB held a two-week seminar for 500 people on hotel management, taught by four experts from Hawaii's East-West Centre Institute for technical exchange, in January, 1970. It reported that: 'Singapore steps in the 70s making sure that its tourist industry will record an all-time boom. The Republic expects to play host to 680,000 tourists by 1972—almost twice as many as last year's.' 'Making sure of the tourist boom', *The Straits Times* [ST] (13th January, 1970), p. 3; 'Hotelman tells of ways to attract more conventions', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th June, 1970), p. 7.
90. 'Conventions to the rescue', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (November, 1973), p. 19.
91. '6,000 too many—Special Report on Singapore II', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (August, 1972), p. 11.
92. See M. Caldwell, 'Tourism: Part I', *op. cit.*
93. 'Tourist hotels "over-projected" says US expert', *The Straits Times* [ST] (24th January, 1969), p. 8; 'Glut of hotel rooms unless more money is spent on tourist promotion', *The Straits Times* [ST] (24th September, 1969), p. 7. See also 'Speech by Goh Keng Swee, Minister for Finance, at the Laying of Foundation Stone Ceremony', *op. cit.*
94. Despite the warning of the 'glut in hotel rooms', when interviewed by the newspaper in April, 1970, a senior spokesman for the group insisted that plans for a second hotel in Bras Basah Road would continue. By December that year plans for the hotel had been cancelled and a twenty-two storey office block developed by Far Eastern Hotels Development Ltd. was intended to take its place. 'Hilton going ahead with second hotel here', *The Straits Times* [ST] (20th April, 1970) p. 6; 'Block of offices going up in place of Hilton', *The Straits Times* [ST] (11th December, 1970), p. 18.
95. Geoffrey Boland, 'Yet another luxury hotel to open in S'pore next year', *The Straits Times* [ST] 28th July, 1968), p. 7.
96. '\$6m hotel meets needs of tourists', *The Straits Times* [ST] (22nd December, 1969), p. 22.
97. 'Apartment block becomes 1st class hotel', *Far East Builder* (September, 1970), p. 33.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.
99. Tan Wee Lian, 'Practicality most vital in hotel furnishing', *The Straits Times* [ST] (26th September, 1971), p. 17; Mok Sin Pin, 'Local goods image must be

- boosted', *The Straits Times* [ST] (6th February, 1970), p. 12.
100. 'Two million tourists expected to visit H.K. in next decade', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (10th July, 1968), p. 12; 'Hotel rooms insufficient', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (23rd October, 1968), p. 1; 'Need for more hotels here', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (25th October, 1968), p. 14; 'Government urged to encourage hotel building', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (9th May, 1968), p. 8; 'Colony hotels', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (29th March, 1969), p. 28.
 101. The four companies were: The Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf Company; Hongkong Land Investment and Agency Company; the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels; Metropolitan Investors.
 102. '800-bed hotel completes Harbour Centre project', *Far East Builder* (November, 1969), pp. 13–20.
 103. 'Hsin Chong & Co. Ltd', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (28th February, 1967), p. 14; 'New Complex near Ocean Terminal', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (4th July, 1967), p. 12.
 104. '800-bed hotel completes Harbor Centre project', *Far East Builder* (November, 1969), pp. 13–15. Hong Kong Land purchased the Star House next door and joined the new consortium. It was the first time that the Hongkong Land Investment and Agency Company invested in commercial property. Hongkong Land was expanding its property projects, including a block of seventy-two flats built on military land, a block of sixty luxury flats and some terraced houses.
 105. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
 106. 'Harbour Centre is now complete', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (21st November, 1969), p. 1. The Bauhinia Room, the main dining room, opened on 8th August, 1969, and was a location in the film 'Girl from Peking'. The shopping arcade on the first four floors opened in September: 'New shopping centre opens today in Hong Kong Hotel', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (1st September, 1969), p. 25.
 107. 'Today's hotel with tomorrow's facilities', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (20th November, 1969), p. 35.
 108. 'A colourful retreat in the centre of town', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (20th November, 1969) p. 49.
 109. 'HK Hotels to buy stake in big new Marco Polo', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (5th May, 1972), p. 33; 'The Hongkong and Kowloon Wharf & Godown Company Limited. Extracts from Chairman statement', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (16th May, 1973), p. 40.
 110. Malcolm Surry, 'Building costs kill Marco Polo hotel', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (20th February, 1971), p. 1; M. Surry, 'Massive Marco Polo hotel project abandoned', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (20th February, 1974), p. 25; 'To build or not to build', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (21st February, 1974), p. 2.
 111. Cathay Pacific also acquired a twenty percent interest in Peninsula Overseas Management, including the Marco Polo in Singapore and the Peninsula in Manila: 'Strong tie with Hong Kong Hotel Group', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (24th September, 1976), p. 56.
 112. 'Kadoorie confident over hotel hitch', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (27th April, 1981), p. 19.
 113. Marco Polo International Hotels, a subsidiary of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf and Godown Company, was launched in 1986 to manage all four of the Wharf group's hotels in Hong Kong and Singapore. 'New Hotel network launched', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (23rd April, 1986), p. 35; 'Omni Hotels', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP] (23rd February, 1989), p. 12; 'Omni Hotels Asia-Pacific', *South China Morning Post* [SCMP]

- (1st March, 1989), p. 10. The other three were Omni Prince Hotel, Omni Marco Polo Hong Kong and Omni Marco Polo Singapore. In 2000, the Marco Polo Hotels Group unified the Marco Polo brand in Hong Kong and renamed the other three existing hotels again: The Marco Polo Hong Kong, The Marco Polo Gateway and The Marco Polo Prince. Wharf Holdings, 'Interim Report 2000'; http://www.wharfhholdings.com/download_eng/ir2000/interim3.htm [accessed 01/06/16].
114. 'Service apartments transformed for hotel extension', *Far East Builder* (June, 1971), pp. 13–17.
 115. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 116. 'Now \$25m luxury "mansions in the sky" for top executives', *The Straits Times* [ST] (23rd July, 1970), p. 19.
 117. '\$25m Plaza offers new concept in apartment life', *New Nation* (13th November, 1971), p. 12.
 118. On more rooms than tourists, see: Francis Boey, 'Around Hong Kong', *The Straits Times* [ST] (9th June, 1962), p. 5; 'How to fill those hotel rooms', *The Straits Times* [ST] (16th January, 1970), p. 13. On the shortage of rooms, see: Mok Sin Pin, 'Call for more hotels', *The Straits Times* [ST] (24th February, 1967), p. 10; 'Shortage of good hotel rooms, they say', *The Straits Times* [ST] (27th May, 1967), p. 12; Yeo Toon Joo, 'Lack of hotels drive tourists to Johore Bahru', *The Straits Times* [ST] (30th November, 1967), p. 7; 'S'pore is solving hotel shortage problem', *The Straits Times* [ST] (8th December, 1967), p. 8; 'Room for more hotels, says top executive', *The Straits Times* [ST] (18th September, 1968), p. 4; 'Singapore ready to reap harvest of tourist boom', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th December, 1968), p. 14; Stanley Karnow, 'Hong Kong rebounds into another boom', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th March, 1969), p. 12; Yeo Toon Joo, 'Working out hotel needs of tomorrow', *The Straits Times* [ST] (24th June, 1969), p. 8; 'Singapore's room boom', *The Straits Times* [ST] (29th October, 1969), p. 10.
 119. 'HK room shortage benefits S'pore', *The Straits Times* [ST] (27th March, 1970), p. 4. For budget tourists, the room rates in Singapore were lower than in Hong Kong.
 120. 'Hotels full? A plan to put up tourists in private homes', *The Straits Times* [ST] (13th December, 1967), p. 6.
 121. 'Tourists as house guests: Idea won't work, say experts', *The Straits Times* [ST] (15th December, 1967), p. 4.
 122. 'Holiday Inns enter the field', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (October, 1972), pp. 21–22.
 123. 'Hyatt: "the region is ready"', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (February, 1974), p. 34.
 124. 'The Marco Polo Club', *Asian Hotels and Tourism*, 2: 10 (October, 1973), pp. 3–4. The Mandarin Hotel, opened in 1963, broke away from the Intercontinental Corporation in 1973, and became solely owned and operated by Hongkong Land through its subsidiary City Hotels: 'Mandarin breakaway', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (December, 1973), p. 25.
 125. 'The Private Magic Circle', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (December, 1972), p. 14.
 126. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16.
 127. Linda Agerbak, 'Catching a Colony—Review of the Inside Guide to Hong Kong. Singapore APA Publications, 1981', *The Straits Times* [ST] (13th March, 1982), p. 22.
 128. This is akin to the rapid capital-driven gargantuan urbanism that Rahul Mehrota termed as the 'impatience of capital': Rahul Mehrota, 'Between Equity and Impatient Capital: Making Indian Cities', *Journal of International Affairs*, 'The Future of the City', 65:2 (Spring/Summer, 2012), pp. 133–137.
 129. 'No land lease for hotels this year', *The Straits Times* [ST] (28th February, 1998), p. 9; 'Hotels check out,

condos move in', *The Straits Times* [ST] (5th March, 1998), p. 8; 'Hotel owners put condo plans on hold', *The Business Times* (4th June, 1998), p. 6; 'Hotel Equatorial Sold for \$58m', *The Straits Times* [ST] (21st November, 1998), p. 88. Others, like the Hilton Hong Kong or the Furama Hotel Hong Kong (renamed Hotel Furama-Intercontinental in 1976 and Furama-Kempinski in 1990) were redeveloped in 2001 as commercial office blocks. The thirty-seven storey AIA Central (formerly AIG Tower) opened in 2006.

130. 'The Package is Viable', *Asian Hotels and Tourism* (December, 1972), pp. 26–27.
131. The next addition, the Garden Wing, was designed in 1978 by the Hawaiian architectural firm Wimberly, Whisenand, Allison, Tong & Goo Architects in part-

nership with the Singapore firm Archiplan Team. The third addition, the Valley Wing, was designed by the Singapore architectural firm Chao Tse Ann & Partners. The interior designs for both were by the Hong Kong-based hotel interior design specialist firm Leese Robertson Freeman Designers (LRF).

132. The design team comprised the Japanese firm Kanko Kikaku Sekkeisha with the Singapore firm Lee & Heah Architects, the Danish interior designer, Bent Severin, and the Hawaiian landscape designer, Raymond Cain.
133. For the designers and architects involved, it was an intensive period of expertise-creation: all built their portfolios of work based on the shared sensibilities of synthesising regional exoticism with an international minimalism.



Constructing a new domestic discourse: the modern home in architectural journals and mass-market texts in early twentieth-century China

Cecilia L. Chu

To cite this article: Cecilia L. Chu (2017) Constructing a new domestic discourse: the modern home in architectural journals and mass-market texts in early twentieth-century China, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 1066-1091, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1362025](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362025)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362025>



Published online: 18 Sep 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 695



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Constructing a new domestic discourse: the modern home in architectural journals and mass-market texts in early twentieth-century China

Cecilia L. Chu

*Division of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of
Architecture, The University of Hong Kong (Author's
e-mail address: clchu@hku.hk)*

This paper explores how changing ideals of the modern home were articulated in China's architectural journals and mass-market texts during the 1920s and 1930s, a period in which many Chinese cities experienced increasing housing shortages for the working poor along with changing expectations of 'contemporary' dwellings for middle-income urbanites.¹ More specifically, I examine how the design of residential houses and domestic arrangements became a subject of intellectual and political concern for architects and cultural intermediaries. By tracing the competing moral claims ascribed to the modern home through these writings, I illustrate their shifting assumptions about the 'social role' of architecture in the Chinese context. I argue that whilst these critiques were closely related to those in Europe and elsewhere, they were specific responses to accelerating capitalist urbanisation in China and were undergirded by a shared anxiety among Chinese elites and professional experts to institute an authentic modern design culture. Central to their efforts was the belief that well-designed dwellings would not only help to improve the lives of Chinese citizens, but also transform their everyday habits and develop China into a more 'civilised', healthy and productive nation. While modern architecture was promoted by architects as a key means to modernisation and social betterment, they debated the suitability and appropriateness of forms, aesthetics and domestic arrangements for the Chinese population, often selectively linking particular designs with (progressive) values that defined modernism in Western contexts as well as those associated with 'Chinese culture and tradition'. Meanwhile, these expressions were utilised by those in building trades to encourage consumption for the home by projecting imaginaries of modern domestic life that did not always correspond with those of intellectual elites.

These explorations, which build on expanding scholarship on modern architectural history in China, will contribute to a fuller understanding of the contradictory perspectives of architecture and domesticity in an unsettling period characterised by simmering social discontent and emerging nationalism. The attention to lesser-known, and arguably collectively important, figures in this study will elucidate the multifarious exchange of knowledge between different factions of architects and institutions beyond the familiar ones represented in existing historiography.² Finally, the illustration of concerted attention to the problem of the

home in this period will underscore the significance of domesticity in the construction of architectural discourse, which is an aspect that has been largely eschewed in the writings of modern architectural history.

Modern architecture and domesticity in comparative perspectives

In her discussion of modern architecture and domesticity, Hilda Heynen writes that the design of the modern home had been a focus of *avant-garde* architects in the West throughout the early twentieth century.³ Notwithstanding the anti-domestic rhetoric of modernism and its presumed association with high culture, prominent European architects experimented with new household arrangements in their works and many were involved with designing social housing aimed at transforming the 'whole environment for modern men'.⁴ Members of the *avant-garde* movement were also committed to abolishing the autonomy of art which was deemed to have 'no real impact on the social system'.⁵ Although their interest in integrating art with the daily life of the 'common person' might seem at odds with modernism's disdain for mass culture, they must be seen as responding specifically to the advent of industrial capitalism and rise of a consumerist economy in the European context. The goal was to develop a different relationship between art and everyday life for the masses that would be part and parcel of instilling a new dwelling culture for a progressive society.

These ideas, which were underpinned by a socialist critique of the bourgeois family values and commodity culture that emerged with industrial capitalism in Europe, were most forcefully advocated by the leftist group CIAM⁶ in the late 1920s and

1930s. In alignment with other political commentators at the time, these architects saw the 'petit-bourgeois home' and its overfull interiors to be thoroughly bound up with capitalist values of ostentation and property ownership.⁷ The setups of these environments were further critiqued as reinforcing a gendered division of labour that consigned women to the 'private sphere'. These concerns led CIAM and other architects to engage with designing proletarian housing and to advocate a new form of domesticity that would no longer be based on the nuclear family that defined the bourgeois household. This alternative was a new, 'minimum' type of dwelling centered on collective living, where women would be liberated from their domestic duties and every individual would be given equal opportunities to exploit his or her potential participation in public life.⁸

The work of CIAM and other architects of the modern movement did not escape the attention of their contemporaries in China, including especially those who received their training overseas.⁹ These architects were keen to adopt 'Western models' as a means to modernise China and to develop a modern design culture of their own. Like their European counterparts, they wanted to improve the lives of ordinary citizens, including the many urbanites who were compelled to live in undesirable conditions amidst escalating housing rents in large cities. Since the mid-1920s, a time that corresponded with the rapid expansion of the popular press in

Shanghai, they actively promoted emergent ideas of modern design and called for professionalisation of architectural practice by contributing articles and translated texts in mass-market journals and magazines.¹⁰ A closer examination of these texts, however, also suggests that despite their faith in the role of modern architecture in enabling social betterment, most writers did not fully align themselves with the positions of European modernists. Most notably, their shared desire to create an authentic 'Chinese design culture' led to deep reflections on the meanings of tradition, culture and the role of art in China's modernisation process. These debates, which became especially lively in the second half of the 1920s, encouraged many architects to project competing visions of the future that incorporated cultural expressions taken from China and the West. By the mid-1930s, the growing influence of the socialist *avant-garde* movement caused some younger architects to begin to turn to the Soviet Union for design inspiration. The resulting ideas, which were based on socialist ideology that supported collective living and integration of domestic and public life, gradually departed from the earlier attention to cultural particularities and artistic expression in the design of the home.

The other departure from European modernism was the rationale behind domestic reform. Up until the mid-1930s, there was almost no challenge to the authority of the nuclear family as the most appropriate unit for household organisation. Instead of associating it with Victorian conservatism and the *petit-bourgeois* that were denounced by European socialists, Chinese intellectuals saw it to be the foundation of the modern economy that

had helped to strengthen Western nations. To them, the nuclear family presented a superior alternative to the traditional Chinese joint family system that was deemed to be the root of despotism and a major obstacle that prevented China from becoming 'modern'.¹¹ That said, this perspective was increasingly questioned in the mid-1930s by young leftist intellectuals, who advocated the socialisation of domestic work and the provision of collective housing.¹² However, the latter's ideas never gained much traction among the larger network of architects and state administrators, who were unwilling to restructure the existing economic system in which they were imbricated. Proposals for collective living also ran up against the Kuomintang government's effort to contain the growing influence of communism by recasting Chinese tradition and 'Confucian family values' as essential components in China's modernisation.¹³

The ultimate failure to implement radical social reform in this period must also be explained by another important factor. As in the West, *avant-garde* architecture was conceived by elite intellectuals and was somewhat out of touch with the desires of the majority of ordinary citizens. In particular, the stripped-down aesthetics and standardised 'minimum dwelling' form did not resonate with the sphere of consumption which tended toward diversification and was more aligned with the 'bourgeois home' that was condemned by the socialists. This was especially descriptive of many urbanites in cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai, which had long been exposed to Western consumer culture and were considered to be more 'modern' than other parts of the nation.¹⁴ The fact that many archi-

tects relied on commissions to design family homes for the middle- and upper-income classes also made them more inclined to support the *status quo* even though many were adamant about their commitment to China's nation-building project. These complex dynamics, tensions and emerging aspirations, which will be discussed in the following sections, show that the conception of architectural modernism and discourse of domesticity were shaped as much by multiple social actors with divergent agendas as by specific historical trajectories and cultural practices.

Reforming nation and 'tradition'

Historians write that domestic reform in China began in the late nineteenth century as part of political debates concerning the need to overcome 'national weakness'. Up until the 1890s, China pursued a policy of developing Western technologies while retaining its own cultural traditions. After its devastating loss in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, some Qing reformers became convinced that China could not succeed in applying Western knowledge without also instituting some elements of cultural reform. A key focus was the education of women, who came to be seen as primary educators of children and as 'guardians' of a new China.¹⁵ The push for women's liberation accelerated during the New Culture Movement in the mid-1910s, when a new generation of intellectuals began to call for the abolition of the traditional joint family system, which was perceived as reinforcing gender hierarchy that was a root cause of despotism.¹⁶ Replacing the old system was the nuclear family, or *xiao jiating* (小家庭), a

Western model of the conjugal family that represented a more efficient economic unit based on free marriage choices and economic independence. However, as pointed out by Doris Croissant and others, promoters of the nuclear family concept were mostly male educated elites, who rarely discussed the liberation of women in terms of the power dynamics between men and women but rather in relation to education and literacy.¹⁷ Such discussions thus framed the issue of women's rights within national politics as part of China's modernisation effort, a phenomenon that continued into the later socialist era.

Up until the 1910s, discussions of domestic reform did not focus so much on specific designs of residential houses, but primarily on reframing the home as a moral space that broke away from the Confucian hierarchy. From the mid-1910s onward, the idea of the nuclear family was enthusiastically promoted by many writers in the popular press targeting both a general audience as well as female readers.¹⁸ An example is a 1915 article published in the progressive journal *Jinbu* (進步), which provided detailed accounts of the merits of *xiao jiating* and its adoption in different parts of the world.¹⁹ The key emphasis was how the system contributed to the economy and helped foster national strengths. In another piece that appeared in the same year in the women's magazine *Funv Zazhi* (婦女雜誌), the focus turned to expectations of 'modern women', particularly in their roles as wives and mothers, to become managers of all aspects of their households.²⁰ The same issue also included other articles that discussed the importance of hygiene and sanitation, offering advice on various domestic practices including cooking, cleaning,

washing clothes and the organisation of household items in order to ensure the wellbeing of the home. These discussions, which were supported by emerging scientific theories framed as 'domestic science', were further elaborated in subsequent issues of the magazine and many other texts that stressed the linkage between the management of domestic space and the fate of the Chinese nation.²¹

As pointed out by Helen M. Schneider, contributors to these journals were mostly men and members of a literate class who 'claimed authority with their overseas education and who mediated Western and Chinese knowledge in order to encourage social change'.²² Whilst they strongly supported learning from Western models, some were worried about potential 'Western infections', in particular unfettered individual freedom and materialism associated with capitalism that would lead to potential moral decline and loss of national culture. Amidst these growing anxieties, some looked to Japan as a relevant model because of its successful efforts to modernise its economy whilst affirming its own 'cultural tradition'. As Jordan Sand's study on domesticity in Japan illustrates, one striking feature of Japanese modernity was its powerful strain of 'national cultural reform', which aimed at elevating Japan to a modern industrial nation whilst retaining its own traditions.²³ This can be seen mostly clearly in the arena of domestic reform. While Meiji reformers promoted women's education and instituted domestic science as a modern discipline, they also supported the absolute gendered division of labour and argued that the 'separate spheres' of men and women in the West resonated well with traditional Japanese views of

society. Indeed, a persistent argument put forward by the reformers was that 'Western ideas' did not necessarily represent a break with tradition, but worked to reinforce existing traditions that the Japanese already possessed.²⁴

As in Japan, the push for modernisation and social change in China incited rigorous debates over the roles of culture and tradition, which acquired new significance and moral meanings in the early twentieth century. These debates, which were carried out mostly amongst educated elites, were not unidirectional but encompassed a range of positions that were shaped by ongoing political development.²⁵ Unlike the Japanese, who had never experienced the deep humiliation of military defeats by European powers, many Chinese intellectuals felt ashamed of China's national weakness and were critical of the Confucianist thinking that was deemed to have paralysed any incentives for innovation. These perspectives were strongly adopted by young intellectuals associated with the New Culture movement that reached its height between the late-1910s and mid-1920s. And it is within this context that the term 'development' became associated with the idea of *wenming* (civilisation), pointing to a pedagogical process in which the acquisition of Western scientific knowledge was key to the advancement of societies.²⁶ In this 'evolutionary narrative', the 'West' was being construed as an essential category to be used to expose China's backwardness. However, there were also others who used it to consider the potentials of Chinese traditions as a source for innovation that would enable the development of an authentic modern Chinese culture.²⁷

The call for a new domestic architecture

By the early 1920s, a growing number of articles in mass-market journals were linking discussions of domestic reform with the physical design of houses. These pieces typically began by criticising the traditional Chinese house as inefficient and unscientific. A favourite subject of attack was the Chinese courtyard dwelling (四合院) whose spatial organisation was said to represent all the negative trappings of 'Confucian tradition' centering on the joint family system.²⁸ Some writings also criticised such houses for their inappropriateness in serving the needs of modern cities with fast-expanding populations comprised of the lower- and middle-income classes. Although by the 1930s the courtyard house was no longer the predominant type of residence in many Chinese cities, it continued to be used heuristically as a convenient representation for exposing the regressive nature of Chinese domestic culture.²⁹ These writings supported the adoption of the 'Western-style' house, whose design was set up to encourage more intimate interactions between conjugal couples and with their children, as well as conforming with all the requirements of modern domestic management that ensured household organisations were efficient, hygienic and orderly: namely, the essential elements of a modern productive economy. However, most of these articles also accepted continual use of a female servant for middle-income households, seeing no contradiction between this long-standing practice and their conceptions of the modern home.

Many of these texts were written by recent graduates with training in architecture and applied arts from abroad. Dismayed by the lack of scientific

knowledge amongst Chinese builders and the growing dominance of foreign architects, who monopolised major architectural projects in Shanghai and other metropolises, they began to call for the institution of a modern design education that could equip Chinese students with knowledge in both the arts and the sciences—a connection that they felt was missing in the conventional training for builders and artisans.³⁰ One example of these was a lengthy four-part article published in 1921 in *Xueyi Zazhi* (學藝雜誌), a journal established by Chinese students in Japan for promoting intellectual thinking and new scientific knowledge.³¹ The article, entitled 'Zhuzhai Gailiang' (住宅改良; *Improvement for Domestic House Design*), was written by Sheng Chengyuan (盛承彥; 1892–1945), a young architect who graduated from the Tokyo Higher Technical School in 1919 and whose family owned a construction firm in Shanghai. Sheng had participated in China's New Culture Movement and was closely associated with other Chinese students who studied in Japan in the same period.³² Like his contemporaries, Sheng was adamant that China must modernise its built environment by adopting 'Western methods' in design education and practice. His article began with a detailed account of the evolution of built forms in Europe, which, after a long period of stagnation in the mediaeval period, finally broke free from religious and aristocratic conventions and made significant progress in addressing the needs of society. Sheng then reflected on the state of domestic houses in China:

It is also inevitable that residential dwellings in China have also evolved over time. But it is

indeed a great pity that, in the modern era of 1920s, our mentality is still equivalent to that in Europe in the 15th century, or maybe even earlier.³³

Sheng attributed the backwardness of Chinese dwellings to entrenched Confucianist thinking, which continued to reinforce gender hierarchy and a regressive political culture. This rigid social structure, coupled with a lack of modern scientific knowledge amongst Chinese builders and artisans, resulted not only in the creation of many extravagant and wasteful buildings inhabited by the very rich, but also an even greater number of poorly constructed houses that accommodated a majority of the population.³⁴ Sheng also stressed that to engage with meaningful changes, it was necessary to re-conceptualise household arrangements based on the needs of women and children rather than those of men. That said, it must also be noted that he did not challenge the continual employment of a female servant in such households, seemingly seeing this as a norm to be upheld. Sheng then went on to list thirty-six characteristics of a typical 'Chinese house' that were each tied to long-standing cultural conventions. These aspects, which ranged from the conceptions of room layouts to building systems to decorative elements, were all deemed to be either inefficient or unhealthy.³⁵

Whilst Sheng's statements resonated with other emergent writings on domestic science in the early 1920s, his article was one of the very few that offered a systematic analysis of the design of residential houses at that time.³⁶ It represents an early attempt by a professionally trained architect to construct a new discourse of domestic architecture and

to professionalise the discipline. This ambition was reflected in the last section of the article, in which Sheng included a proposal with comprehensive guidelines for redesigning the Chinese house (改良方案).³⁷ The proposal was divided into seven sections. The first five sections included suggestions for interior configurations, exterior design, construction methods and choice of decorations, all of which were predicated on a functionalist aesthetic with minimal ornaments that would suit the needs and aspirations of modern nuclear families. The last three sections of the article turned to larger issues beyond the scope of the house. Here, Sheng called on architects and builders to enrich their professional knowledge and specify the use of local materials rather than foreign ones to support local manufacturers. He also urged the government to take bold steps in urban planning, such as modernising the transport system, providing collective housing for the masses and tightening building regulations to ensure the health and safety of the population. The article ended with a passionate call for citizens to adapt to 'a modern way of living' and to learn to appreciate modern design whose aesthetics were predicated not on extravagance but simplicity and honesty.³⁸

In contrast to some critics who saw New Culture intellectuals as being overly eager to transplant 'Western ideas' to Chinese soil, Sheng's contribution shows that he was keenly interested in discerning the variations between different strands of 'Western architectural traditions' and the pros and cons of each in their development.³⁹ This was explained in a diagram that illustrated how the 'different architectural systems of the world' had

evolved over time and their ongoing interactions with each other. The diagram was not the work of Sheng, but a translation of a sketch drawn by the influential Japanese architectural historian Ito Chuta in 1909 (figs 1, 2).⁴⁰ The diagram was intended to challenge the hierarchical view of Western historians who viewed architecture in Asia to be at a lower level along the 'universal scale' of development. The diagram also presented an argument that 'Asian architecture' never developed in isolation but had interacted with the West at different times in history. Following Ito, Sheng further claimed that although the Japanese still lagged behind Europe in their architectural achievements, they were on the right path to modernisation by having already established a comprehensive design education. And it is for this reason that Japan, like America in the West, was ahead in its 'cultural development' compared to other nations.⁴¹

As Sheng himself acknowledged, it was through his own education in Japan and exposure to Ito and other prominent Japanese scholars that he became convinced of the importance of understanding the essence of one's own culture and translating this knowledge into designs that suit local contexts and modern needs.⁴² Here, Sheng was making a nationalistic statement predicated on cultural specificities. But it was also a statement that aligned with an emergent evolutionary narrative in which all cultures could be placed under a common analytical frame such that their levels of development could be assessed.⁴³ Thus huge challenge facing Sheng and other Chinese intellectuals was to find a way to catch up with Japan and the West from a position already placed at the very end on the 'scale of devel-

opment'. As the next section discusses, this agony was also widely felt by other architects committed to modernising China's domestic environment and design education. But their interpretation of the roles of cultures and aesthetic preferences were also specific to the contexts through which they gained exposures to the design knowledge of the West.

Contending the role of decorative art: *Meishu Jianzhu* and 'aesthetic education'

The 1920s was a period of political transition that coincided with the return of a growing number of Chinese graduates from abroad.⁴⁴ Although their number was relatively small, they were highly desirable to the newly established Kuomintang government who wanted to inject a fresh momentum of nation building by recruiting well-trained young professionals to the administration. Amongst other initiatives introduced in the period was a new administrative plan for university education that aimed to safeguard academic independence free from political control. The plan, which was set up by the influential Chinese educator Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) and was modelled on the French system, did not ultimately succeed.⁴⁵ But it helped to facilitate new discussions among young intellectuals who were eager to participate in developing a modern education for China. Cai's strong awareness of the importance of bridging different knowledge from the 'East' and 'West', including especially the humanities and fine art, led him in 1928 to establish the National Hangzhou School of Art, one of the first schools devoted to modern art education.⁴⁶ The school

Figure 1. 'The Tree of Architecture', by Bannister Fletcher, 1899. (Source: B. Fletcher, *The History of Architecture: Comparative Methods* (London, Batsford, 1905).)

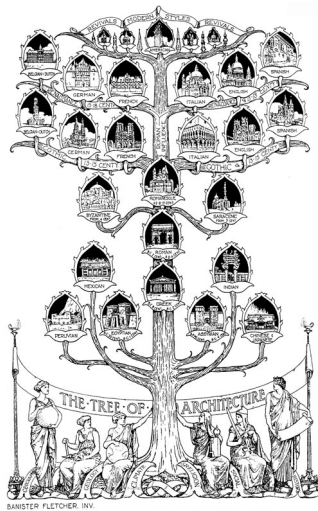
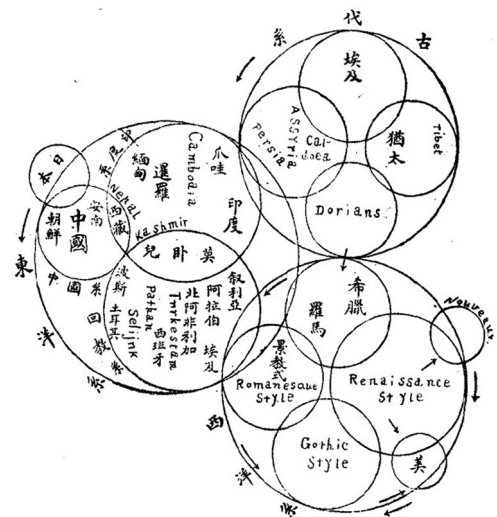


Figure 2. A diagram entitled 'Architectural systems of the world' by Ito Chuta. The diagram was drawn in 1909 and was translated into Chinese by Sheng Chengyan. (Source: Xueyi Zazhi, 1921).



soon attracted some of the best talents around the country with a large contingent of recent graduates who had completed their training in Europe.⁴⁷

One of these was a young architect named Liu Jipiao (劉既漂), who graduated from L'Ecole Nationale Des Beaux-Arts in Paris and later became the Director of the Design Programme (圖案科) at the National Hangzhou School of Art.⁴⁸ Liu had earlier participated in the design for the Chinese pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris. Like many of his fellow colleagues returning from France, Liu was strongly influenced by the emergent Art Deco movement (*Art Decoratif*, 裝飾藝術) in Europe and believed that decorative art could play a key role in transforming the everyday environment and uplifting the

'spirit of the nation'.⁴⁹ This belief was exemplified in the four overarching objectives of the School of Art itself, which included: introduction to Western art, reorganisation of Chinese art, harmonisation of Eastern and Western art, and creation of Modern Art.⁵⁰ Whilst the strong focus of the School was on fine art, Liu was committed to developing an applied arts programme aimed at strengthening student's scientific knowledge and aesthetic sensibility, seen as fundamental to modern living. Central to Liu's agenda was the avocation of a new kind of architecture, *meishu jianzhu* (美術建築; architecture as fine art), which emphasised the integration of fine art, decorative art and industrial technologies: connections that were lacking historically in the training of Chinese builders and artisans. As pointed out by Liu's compatriot Liu Kaiqu (劉開

渠), *meishu jianzhu* had the potential to help usher China into a modern, artistic era on a par with those of Western nations.⁵¹

Like many of his contemporaries, Liu's position strongly adhered to an evolutionary narrative that deemed the traditional Chinese house to be outmoded and unsuitable to modern life in the twentieth century. In an 1927 article entitled 'How to Organize Modern Architecture in China' published in the magazine *Gongxian* (貢獻), Liu argued that art and architecture were products of human evolution and that every culture had throughout history continued to 'revolutionise' its building techniques, materials usage and decorative styles to make them adapt to the requirements of its time.⁵² The problem with Chinese dwellings was that they had become completely divorced from this ongoing development since the nineteenth century, a condition that also led to backwardness amidst the accelerating processes of industrialisation.⁵³ To develop a modern design culture for China, Liu suggested modelling it on the French system which was predicated on three key criteria: the implementation of design programmes integrating fine art and decorative art, the establishment of research institutions dedicated to the study of historical and contemporary design, and the establishment of government units specialising in building construction, preservation, inspection and legislation.⁵⁴

Although Liu was critical of the backwardness of Chinese design, he was adamant that China must not blindly follow the aesthetics of foreigners but develop its own 'style' (作風) based on its culture and history. Like Sheng and others before him, Liu

also expended much effort on distinguishing between different artistic achievements in the West, especially on how particular decorative styles had been adapted to new technologies and the needs of the modern economy.⁵⁵ According to this logic, 'styles' were not merely the expressions of artists but representations of the overall advancement of cultures. Liu pointed out that modern architecture was inherently interdisciplinary and must be built upon a solid foundation of science and strong sensibility to art, which was essentially what *meishu jianzhu* aimed to achieve. To elaborate on the 'scientific' basis of the concept, Liu published numerous articles that delineated the nature and functions of different types of decorative art forms, such as murals, reliefs, sculptures and graphics, and how each could be used to accentuate the true character of specific spaces. To him, the French *art deco* style, whose forms were derived from a synthesis of nature and the machine, and had been adapted to industrial production, was a successful example that captured the 'spirit of the modern age'. Chinese architects and designers of the twentieth century should therefore also try to develop their own style by incorporating elements of modern industrial processes and of Chinese culture (Fig. 3).

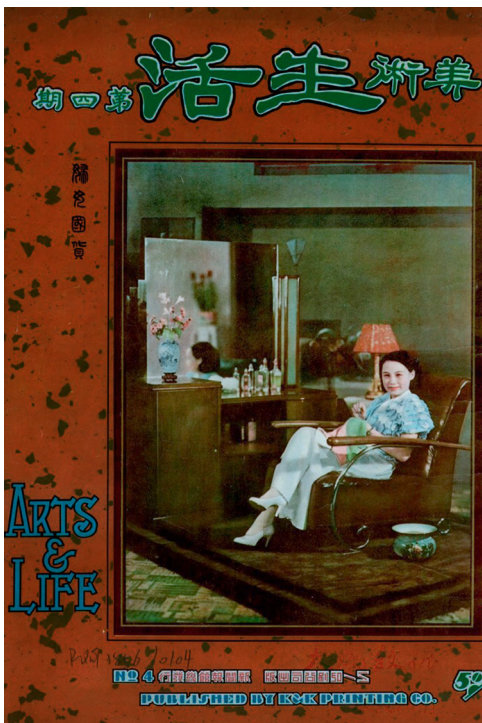
In the years following the opening of the National Hangzhou School of Art, Liu continued to promote his concept of *meishu jianzhu* through teaching, writing and practice. Most notable was his design for a series of *art deco*-style pavilions for the West Lake Exposition in Hangzhou in 1929.⁵⁶ Although the concept of *meishu jianzhu* did not become widely adopted by other Chinese architects (and

Figure 3. Liu Jipiao's design for the Chinese pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, 1925. (Source: Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, 1925.)



Liu himself seems to have lost momentum in advocating it after turning to private practice in the 1930s), Liu's interest in integrating fine art and decorative art in design—what he called 'aesthetic education'—was shared by many of his colleagues at the School of Art. This can be seen, for example, in numerous articles that appeared in the journals *Yifeng* (藝風) and *Meishu Shenghuo* (Arts & Everyday Life; 美術生活), with many contributing writers

affiliated with the School.⁵⁷ It is in this context that the design of the modern home became a key subject of enquiry in the School of Art's curriculum. This was exemplified in many issues of the *Meishu Shenghuo* with specific sections devoted to showcasing student projects that tackled 'the problem of the house' and every aspect of living, with a growing emphasis on the popularisation of art among ordinary Chinese citizens (Fig. 4).



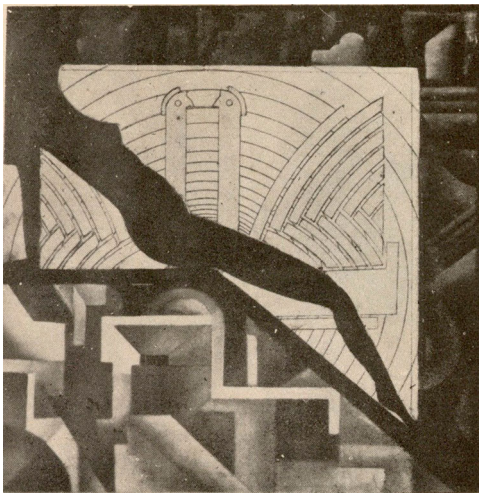
By the early 1930s, the idea of 'aesthetic education' began to take a firmer root at the national level with the strong support of the Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek, who wanted to see art education, along with other state initiatives, play a bigger role in 'civilising' the everyday habits of Chinese citizens. In contrast to the earlier attempts of New Culture intellectuals who focussed their critiques on 'Chinese tradition', the argument here was that in order to continue to modernise, China must not forget its 'traditional values', essen-

tial for resisting the negative potentials of Western materialism. These efforts, which would culminate in the conservative New Life Movement in the mid-1930s led by Chiang, were also aimed at countering the growing influence of communist thought that was attracting many young Chinese who were frustrated with exacerbating social inequality and widespread corruption across the country.⁵⁸ Amidst these ideological struggles, the School of Art redoubled its efforts in calling for mass education in art. In a 1934 issue of *Meishu Shenghuo*, the editor Tang Jun (唐雋) made a strong proclamation that the education of art must not be confined to the elites but be popularised amongst ordinary citizens (藝術大眾化, 及社會藝術化), for it was only through a full integration of art into everyday domestic life that the spirit of the nation as a whole could be elevated (figs 5, 6).⁵⁹

In hindsight, Tang's polemic statement was itself a reaction to an emerging ideological split amongst design professionals. Unlike earlier writings by Sheng and others that critiqued the inefficiency and wastefulness of Chinese dwellings, affiliates of the School of Art now warned against the 'blind adherence to functionalism' which would prevent any kind of 'spiritual nourishment' required for modern domestic life.⁶⁰ Such warnings were directed against the socialist *avant-garde* movement, which appealed to some younger Chinese architects concerned with worsening housing problems and the plight of the working class. To these young leftist-leaning architects, the ideas of integrating fine art and decorative art, and the 'aesthetisation of everyday life', appeared increasingly regressive in that not only were these ideas disen-

Figure 4. Cover page of the journal *Meishu Shenghuo*. (Source: *Meishu Shenghuo*, 1934.)

Figure 5, 6. Works by
design students of the
Hangzhou National
School of Art, featured
in *Meishu Shenghuo*.
(Source: *Meishu
Shenghuo*, 1934.)



gaged from 'real' social and economic issues, but they also helped to reinforce the *status quo*. Here, the problem of domestic design took a radical turn from the earlier focus on cultural synthesis and artistic expression to conceiving a fundamentally different system and housing design types that would move China toward a more progressive and egalitarian society. These convictions also suggest a growing alignment of political positions between these Chinese architects and members of the *avant-garde* in Europe, representing an extraordinary moment of transnational solidarity concerning modern architecture's revolutionary mission.⁶¹

A turn toward the social: a new discourse of home and housing in the 1930s

At the time when Liu was designing his *art deco* pavilions for the West Lake Expo in China in the



late 1920s, Europe saw the rise of a group of *avant-garde* architects advocating a 'new architecture' that turned away from the decorative style of the Art Deco movement. Although the modern movement has often been associated with a set of universal architectural aesthetics that were antipathetic to everyday domestic situations, recent scholarship has shown that a concern for reforming the contemporary dwelling in fact preoccupied major

protagonists of modern architecture.⁶² These include many key members of CIAM, such as Le Corbusier, Ernst May, Hannes Meyer, Gerrit Rietveld and others, who had all engaged with designing residential houses during the early decades of the twentieth century. As discussed earlier, the attempt to create artistic unity for the modern house had been a key concern in the early development of modern architecture.⁶³

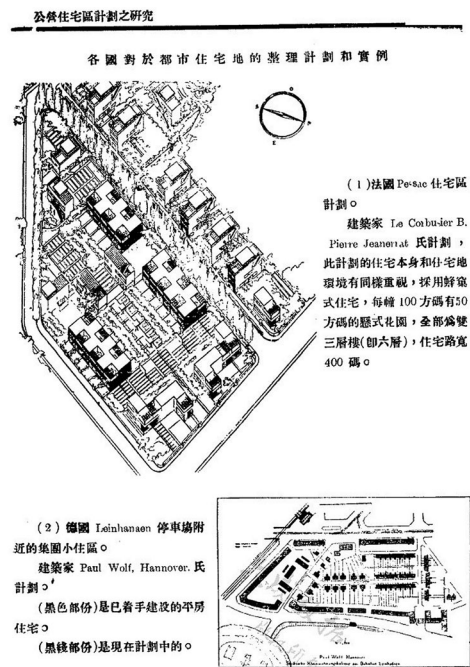
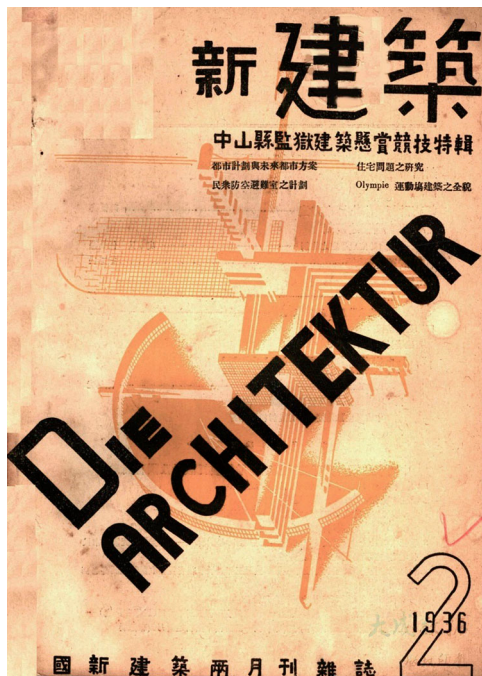
This concern would later be expanded to include large-scale housing projects aimed at transforming the 'whole environment of modern men'.⁶⁴ Whilst many of these proposals remained unbuilt, some members of the *avant-garde* were able to realise their ambitions in the Soviet Union, invited by the Soviet state to construct a series of large-scale proletarian housing projects. This 'new architecture' was expected to play an essential role in restructuring everyday domestic life that would no longer be based upon the nuclear family that served capitalism but upon an association of adults based upon communism.⁶⁵ The task for *avant-garde* architects thus was to conceive a radically new set of housing typologies that would support a new form of domesticity centering on collective living. This environment, which would take the form of 'minimum dwelling' in accordance with a pure functionalist aesthetic, would no longer recognize a gendered division of labour, and every man and woman would be given equal opportunities to participate in public life. To reduce costs and make housing available for all, building forms would be standardised for mass production. And these forms and processes would themselves become sources for the ongoing conception of art forms,

most notably represented by the Constructivist Movement.

The commitment of the *avant-garde* movement to addressing social inequality carried significant appeal for a new generation of Chinese architects, who were eager to create a new intellectual platform for promoting a new architectural culture aimed at addressing 'real' social issues. In 1936, a group of young architects founded the Zhongguo Xinjianzhushe (中國新建築社; *Chinese New Architecture Association*), which was associated with the newly instituted Architecture Department at Rongqin University (勤勤大學建築工程學系) in Guangzhou.⁶⁶ In the same year, the association published a new journal, *Xin Jianzhu* (*Die Architektur*; 新建築), with a mission to construct a new design discourse based on socialist principles. The journal, which consisted of an editorial team with graduates mostly affiliated with Rongqin University, made great efforts to disseminate the ideas of CIAM and to introduce new housing projects implemented in Europe and the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ Their position was deliberately articulated in their choice of the journal's modernist graphics and its German title, *Die Architektur*, which represented a forceful attempt to associate their convictions with those of the European *avant-garde* (Fig. 7).

From the very beginning, design for domestic architecture was a key topic for *Xin Jianzhu*. Between 1936 and 1939, almost every issue dedicated at least one article to introducing contemporary social housing projects to readers. These included works by Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Ernst May, Walter Gropius and other modernist architects whose projects

Figure 7, 8. Pages of the journal *Xinjianzhu* (*Die Architektur*), showcasing the latest socialist housing projects in Europe and the Soviet Union. (Source: *Xinjianzhu* (*Die Architektur*), 1936).



were hailed for providing radical solutions to the housing needs of the modern person (Fig. 8).⁶⁸ The journal also devoted a substantial space to analysing the principles of these designs and considering how new types of socialist housing could be implemented in China. An example of this was a 38-page article by Li Chubai (李楚白) in 1937 on the theme of collective living.⁶⁹ This began by tracing the evolution of living patterns around the world from antiquity to the present day and explained the emergence of nuclear family as an essential product of industrial capitalism. This was

followed by a detailed discussion of the contradictions within the capitalist system and how these led to intensifying social conflicts and worsening urban problems due to the uneven distribution of housing, infrastructure, health services and education. The article concluded that collective living instituted under a socialist system would be an 'inevitable next and final step in human evolution' and the only means to eradicate social ills. In the final section, Li outlined his vision of a 'new architecture' for a future China predicated on the provision of collective amenities including hospitals,

schools, nurseries, prisons, public parks and so on. In resonance with the utopian vision of European *avant-gardes*, Li wrote that domestic chores in this collective environment, including childcare, would be shared by everyone and parents would no longer need to live with their children. In this new and more perfect world, every individual would lead a life that would be more mobile and flexible.⁷⁰

In 1938, at the tenth anniversary of the first meeting of CIAM, *Xin Jianzhu's* editor Lin Keming (林克明) wrote an editorial exalting the achievements of the CIAM masters and reaffirming the journal's revolutionary mission.⁷¹ Li also used the occasion to criticise the backwardness of China's existing architectural practice and design culture. In particular, he mocked the recent initiative by the Kuomintang government to reintroduce 'traditional Chinese forms and aesthetics' in the design of the capital city, Nanjing, in the hope of enhancing China's national identity. Such a move, Lin lamented, was outdated and essentially ran diametrically opposite to the modern movement's progressive vision, which was to create a universally shared language of design that would no longer be predicated on cultural particularities.⁷² This position was further articulated in another article on the prospects of new architecture by Zheng Zuliang (鄭祖良), who argued that although the development of architecture first evolved from particular cultural traditions, the world had since progressed to a stage where national and cultural boundaries were no longer required. In the 'highest order of civilisation', architecture would take a radically new form that transcended cultural

differences and represented a collective interest shared by all people.⁷³

Although the polemical articles of *Xin Jianzhu* may have been confined to a limited readership, their critique of China's architectural culture was not isolated, but connected with other critics who were frustrated with the incapacity of professional elites to address social problems in what they saw to be a morally corrupt capitalist society.⁷⁴ This was evidenced in many writings that appeared in newspapers and general purpose magazines in the 1930s with pointed criticisms of the 'self-serving nature' of design practice in which architects, along with developers and property investors, were only interested in making profits at the expense of the overall welfare of the nation. The situation was seen to be at its worst in cosmopolitan Shanghai, which had the largest concentration of stylish homes and speculative townhouses for the middle- and upper-classes as well as shanty towns that accommodated one-tenth of the working population.⁷⁵ In a 1931 article, entitled 'Some advice for Shanghai Architects,' that appeared in the progressive weekly journal *Hongye Zhoukan* (紅葉週刊), the author asserted that despite their contribution to building many spectacular skyscrapers and commercial buildings that gave Shanghai a 'glamorous appearance', architects paid virtually no attention to the real needs of the majority of Chinese citizens, including the tens of thousands who were living on the margins.⁷⁶ The article went further to accuse architects of catering to 'imperial interests' through their ongoing cooption by foreign investors and businesses, making them largely responsible for perpetuating the poverty of the nation.

Competing imaginaries: the modern home in divergent narratives

How did other Chinese architects respond to being accused of a lack of concern for society? As the preceding discussions suggest, despite their different approaches to design and preferences for aesthetic styles, most architects who received training from abroad were in fact eager to contribute to modernising the nation. While designers such as Liu Jipiao and affiliates of the National Hangzhou School of Art might be denounced by leftist critics for their obsessions with artistic pursuits that were esoteric and wasteful, they were committed to shaping a new design culture and professionalising the discipline that they hoped would help foster national pride. As with the New Culture intellectuals and the authors of *Xin Jianzhu*, they subscribed to an 'evolutionary narrative of development' and believed that art and architecture could help to usher in a new domestic culture and to 'civilise' the habits of Chinese citizens.

Although such convictions may not have been shared by all architects, the exacerbated housing problems in Shanghai and other metropolises did capture the attention of many architects and builders. An example was a new featured column entitled 'Juzhu Wenti' (居住問題; 'Housing Issues') started in 1932 in *The Builder* (建築月刊), a popular trade magazine distributed widely among architectural and building professionals (Fig. 9).⁷⁷ Like *Xin Jianzhu*, authors contributing to the column, who included many little-known writers involved in the building profession, called on architects and builders to help resolve the nation's housing crisis and take up the moral responsibility

for improving the life of the working class. But instead of looking to overturn the existing economic system, they focussed mostly on providing what they saw as 'pragmatic solutions', such as how architects could work more closely with state planners, investors and developers to open up suburban areas for building more private homes that were affordable for middle-class families. These articles also at times referred to more 'radical' solutions implemented elsewhere, such as cooperative housing and policies that aimed to restructure the land tenure system.⁷⁸ But when compared to *Xin Jianzhu*, it is clear that *The Builder* occupied a more ambivalent position towards the idea of 'socialist housing' and collective living. As a commercial magazine setting out to promote building trades and private businesses, it also regularly included many advertisements and articles that featured trendy homes and luxurious furnishings that contrasted sharply with other pieces in the same issues that called for a turn to functionalist designs and mass production. It is also obvious that all these writings were not prepared to challenge the normative conception of the nuclear family but continued to support conventional domestic arrangements such as the use of servants in middle- and upper-income families (figs 10, 11).

Although the kinds of houses featured in the advertisements of *The Builder* and other magazines might have been out of the reach of most readers, it must be noted that they helped introduce a new cultural vocabulary that allowed the expanding reading public to begin to imagine a future home for themselves that was a class above those of the majority of Chinese citizens.⁷⁹ It is also ironic that,

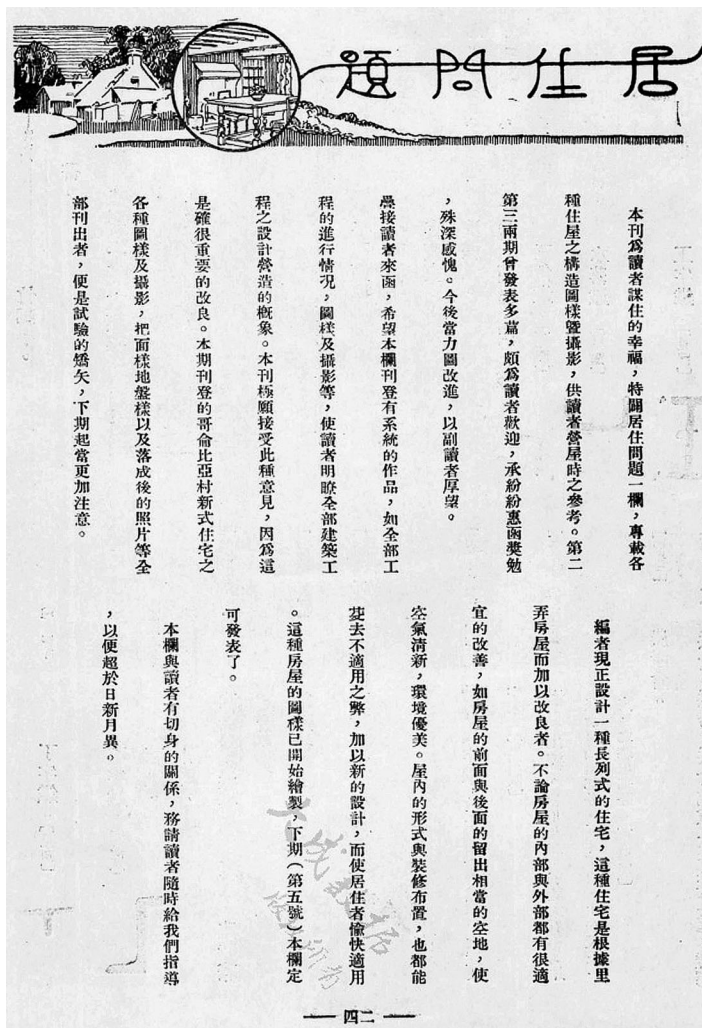


Figure 9. Pages of *The Builder* magazine with its featured column 'Juzhu Wenti' [Housing Issues]. (Source: *The Builder*, 1930).

經濟住宅之二

同一平面圖形成美國殖民地風格

英國式的隼味

一所美國式的鄉村屋舍只要稍加改動便是英國式的隼味這是經濟能事的建築設計

尺寸

大房子尺寸三十四尺寬三十二尺深色漆全窗尺寸三十二尺寬三十二尺深半頂高度八尺四寸地下室二尺共計面積一五八〇〇立方尺

堅固

同一平面圖形成美國殖民地風格

英國式樣

英國式住宅的外觀猶如古雅盎然蓋世界之偶味或映紙背平面圖示各室近代式佈置之特點

尺寸

大房子尺寸三十四尺寬三十二尺深色漆全窗尺寸三十二尺寬三十二尺深半頂高度八尺四寸地下室二尺共計面積一六〇〇〇立方尺

起居室隅之書架

上海市建築協會

劉家聲



Figure 11. An article that featured modern domestic interiors, published in an illustrated magazine, early 1930s. (Source: *Liangyou Huabao* ['The Young Companion']).

despite the growing calls by some architects to adopt a 'modernist functionalist aesthetics' that turned against traditional décor and ornaments, most readers continued to be attracted to homes that were modelled after the more conventional Western-style houses, which to them nevertheless represented a more hygienic, comfortable and modern domestic environment. Meanwhile, other general-purpose magazines began to include featured columns that showcased the homes of Chinese celebrities, politicians and other well-known persons, who were presented as tastemakers of the era. These columns carried tremendous appeal to readers, as they satisfied not only their desire for learning about new design trends, but also their curiosity about the private lives of the rich and famous. Furthermore, these images also helped to fuel a collective nationalistic sentiment by illustrating that modernity, as represented by life in the modern home, was not the exclusive domain of Westerners.

As Paul G. Pickowicz *et al.* point out in their study of modern print culture in China, although the ideals of modernity may have been defined by intellectual elites and professional experts, it was the presentation of kaleidoscopic images of modern life and consumer goods in the popular press that helped to expand the social imagination.⁸⁰ It was the non-ideological nature of the many texts and images, including particularly those in the advertisements of mass-market journals and magazines, that allowed people to imagine a different and better future on their own terms. Here, the moral role of the modern home became linked with new material goods in an expanding commercial culture. In the

process, the ideal of the nuclear family itself also became a marketable product that symbolised the good life and a way of being 'modern'.⁸¹ As a key site of collective social reform as well as consumption, the design of the modern home continued to be an intellectual and political concern for architects and social reformers as well a source for generating imaginaries amongst the wider public, who sought to participate in a 'Chinese modernity' on their own terms.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the editors of this special issue, Lillian Chee and Eunice Seng, for inviting me to contribute to the collection. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their critical comments and for Calvin Zhiyong Liang for his help with the initial research for this paper.

Notes and references

1. In the 1920s and 1930s major cities in China saw a dramatic increase in population and a concomitant severe scarcity of affordable housing. Between 1930 and 1934, the population of Nanjing increased by 80% and that of Shanghai by 40%. The number of households living in shanty towns was estimated to be 30,000, which accounted for one-tenth of the population. M. Yan 閻明, 'Yimen kexue yu yige shidai — shehuixue zai Zhongguo' 一門學科與一個時代——社會學在中國 ['One discipline and one time: sociology in China'] (Beijing, Tsinghua University Press, 2004), p. 73; X. Ye 葉新明, 'Dushi zhuzhai wenti' 都市住宅問題 ['Urban housing problems'], *Zhongguo Xinlun* 中國新論, 1: 7 (1935).
2. For example, see T. Yang 楊永生, L. Ming 明連生, Jianzhu Sijie 建築四傑 [Four Outstanding Architects]

- (Beijing, Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 1995), which focussed on the lives and works of four architects that have long been considered to be the most important figures in modern architectural history in China. For a more extensive list of Chinese architects, see D. Lai 賴德霖, H. Wang 王浩娛, *Jindai Zhejiang Lu: Zhongguo Jindai Zhongyao Jianzhushi, Jianzhu Shiwusuo Minglu* 近代哲匠錄:中國近代重要建築師, 建築事務所名錄 [Directory of Significant Chinese Architects and Architectural Offices in Modern China], (Beijing, Zhongguo Shui li Shuidian Chubanshe: Zhishi Chanquan Chubanshe, 2006).
3. H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', in H. Heynen, G. Baydar, eds, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London, New York, Routledge, 2005), pp. 1–29.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 4; A.T. Anderson, *The Problem of the House: French Domestic Life and the Rise of Modern Architecture* (Seattle, Washington University Press, 2006).
 5. H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5; P. Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
 6. CIAM stands for *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*, an organisation founded by European architects in 1928, remaining in operation until 1959.
 7. H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', *op. cit.*, p. 17.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 19. For a discussion of the ideas of collective living in the early twentieth century, see also D. Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1981).
 9. The number of Chinese architects with foreign training was relatively small (less than a hundred by 1938). Most of them returned to China in the 1920s with high hopes of participating in the state's ambitious nation-building project. See C. Lou 婁承浩, *Jindai Shanghai de jianzhuye he jianzhushi* 近代上海的建築業和建築師 [Building industry and architects in modern Shanghai], *Shanghai Dangan Gongzuo*, 2 (1992), pp. 49–52.
 10. For a discussion of the significance and impacts of these mass-market texts, see P.G. Pickowicz, K. Shen, Y. Zhang, *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926–1945* (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2013).
 11. These ideas could be seen in many newspapers and mass-market journals from the mid-1910s onwards. For a discussion of the ideal of nuclear family in China, see H.M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011); S. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915–1953* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003).
 12. A major site that disseminated these ideas was the architectural journal *Xinjianzhu* 新建築. See discussion of this journal and its writers in a later section of this paper.
 13. These efforts were most notable in the New Life Movement (新生活運動) initiated by the Kuomintang government in 1934. See Z. Guan, Z. Zhe, 'Shilun Xinshenghuo Yuandong zhi yuanki' 試論新生活運動之緣起 ['Origin of 'New Life Movement''], *Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao*, 11: 2 (1994), pp. 64–72. See note 58.
 14. For a discussion of modern life in Shanghai, see L. Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Press, 1999); W. Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China 1843–1949* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2007).
 15. These ideas were exemplified, for example, in the writings of Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). For a critical discussion of women's liberation in China, see, D. Croissant, C.V. Yeh, J.S. Mostow, eds, *Performing the 'Nation': Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880–1940* (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2008).

16. F. Fitzgerald, 'Equality, modernity, and gender in Chinese nationalism', in D. Croissant, C.V. Yeh, J.S. Mostow, eds., *Performing the 'Nation'*, op. cit., pp. 19–54.
17. *Ibid.*, D. Croissant et al., 'Introduction', pp. 1–13.
18. Although the literacy rate in China in the 1930s was only around 20%, the market for mass-market journals and magazines was expanding quickly. This was especially significant for those targeted at female readers, partly due to the fact that publishers recognised that these texts were generally presumed to be less 'political' and would augment their distribution. See 'Wushijiu guo zhi bushizi renshu' 五十九國之不識字人數 ['The illiterate population of fifty-nine countries'], *Jiaoyu Zhoukan*, 87 (1931), pp. 21–25; X. Tao 陶賢都, Y. Ai 艾焱龍, "'Funv Zazhi'" yu Zhongguo jindai de keji chuanbo' 《婦女雜誌》與中國近代的科技傳播 ['Women Magazine' and the dissemination of technologies in modern China], *Zhongguo Keji Qikan Yanjiu*, 24: 6 (2013), pp. 1227–1230.
19. Bihui Quanci 韻詮詮次, 'Shijie xiaojiating zhuyi zhi qushi' 世界小家庭主義之趨勢 ['The development of the concept of conjugal family around the world'], *Jinbu*, 7, 4 (1915), pp. 1–7.
20. P. Hu 胡品元, 'Zhijia siyao' 治家四要 ['Four key concepts of home management'], *Funv Zazhi*, 5: 9 (1919), pp. 4–8; C. Sheng, 'Zhuzhai gailiang' 住宅改良 ['Improvement of domestic house design'], *Xueyi Zazhi*, 3: 3, 4, 5, 7 (1921); Shuyuan 淑苑, 'Jiating weisheng zhi xinzhishi' 家庭衛生之新知識 ['New knowledge of family hygiene'], *Funv Zazhi*, 3: 7 (1915), pp. 20–29.
21. H. M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House*, op. cit., p. 24.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 21. That said, some magazines also included a growing number of female authors, including the women's magazine *Funv Zazhi*. See discussion in X. Tao and Y. Ai, "'Funv Zazhi'" yu Zhongguo, op. cit.-Bihui Quanci, 'Shijie xiaojiating zhuyi', op. cit., pp. 1–7.
23. J. Sand, *House and Homes in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space and Bourgeois Culture, 1880–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 17.
24. *Ibid.* It is worth noting that discussions related to domestic design often underscored the contrasts between 'native' and 'foreign' aesthetics, tastes and decorative styles, and the unique Japanese sensibility for absorbing new styles into modernist design and making them their own.
25. For a discussion about the ambivalent attitudes towards modernism, see S. Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2001).
26. A.F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Press, 2011).
27. William Schaefer explains that discussions of modernity in China in the 1920s and 30s were intertwined with a collective anxiety about making sense of local identities. W. Schaefer, 'Shadow photographs, ruins, and Shanghai's projected past', *PMLA*, 122 (2010), pp. 124–134.
28. P. Hu, 'Zhijia siyao', op. cit., pp. 4–8; C. Sheng, 'Zhuzhai gailiang', op. cit.
29. For example, the majority of housing in Shanghai in the 1930s was comprised of a new style of Chinese commercial townhouses, the *lilong*, which departed from the traditional courtyard dwelling. For a discussion of the distribution of housing types in Shanghai, see C. Lo 羅志如, *Tongji Biao Zhong Zhi Shanghai* 統計表中之上海 [*Shanghai As Shown In Statistical Tables*], (Nanjing, National Research Institute of Social Sciences Academia Sinica, 1932), p. 18.
30. In the 1920s and 1930s, architectural design was dominated by foreign design firms. In 1936, there

were 39 registered architectural firms in Shanghai and only 12 were run by Chinese architects. See C. Lou 婁承浩, 'Jindai Shanghai de jianzhuye he jianzhushi' 近代上海的建築業和建築師 ['Building industry and architects in modern Shanghai'], *Shanghai Dangan Gongzuo*, 2 (1992), pp. 49–52.

31. *Xueyi Zazhi* 學藝雜誌 was published by *Zhonghua Huishe* (中華會社), which was established by Chinese students who studied in Japan and served as a progressive platform for promoting intellectual thinking and new knowledge. For a discussion of the history of the magazine and the organisation, see F. Xu 徐鋒華, 'Zhongguo liu Ri xuesheng yu Zhonghua Xueyishe' 中國留日學生與中華學藝社 ['Chinese overseas students in Japan and the Zhonghua xueyishe'], *Zhongguoshi Yanjiu*, 98 (2015), pp. 269–287.
32. For another discussion of Sheng's ideas about the improvements in Chinese houses in early twentieth-century China, see W. Yan 顏文成, 'Chuantong minju de xiandaihua: cong minguo shiqi de chubaiwu kan dangshi de zhuzhai gailiang wenti' 傳統民居的現代化:從民國時期的出版物看當時的住宅改良問題 ['Modernization of the vernacular residences: researching the house modification from republican-era publications'], *South Architecture*, 1 (2014), pp. 11–17.
33. C. Sheng, 'Zhuzhai gailiang', *op. cit.*, p. 7.
34. Like many other texts, Sheng's article did not explicitly address the problem of urbanisation in Chinese cities but focussed on the design of dwellings. But this final section did offer an oblique critique of the exacerbating housing problem facing many cities with escalated cost of living amidst fervent property speculation.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–9.
36. It is important to note that this article was written before the existence of Yingzao Xueshe (營造學社), a well-known research institution established by Chinese architects in 1930.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–12.
38. *Ibid.*
39. For a discussion of the May Fourth intellectuals' conceptions of and admiration for the 'West', see S. Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, *op. cit.*
40. M. Bao 包慕萍, 'Yidongzhongtai de jianzhulun yu Zhongguo diaocha' 伊東忠太的建築論與中國調查 ['Ito Chuta's architectural theory and China investigation'], in F. Zhang, ed., *Zhongguo Jindai Jianzhu Yanjiu Yu Baohu*, 8 (Beijing, Tsinghua University Press, 2012), pp. 705–717.
41. C. Sheng, 'Zhuzhai Gailiang', *op. cit.*, p. 5.
42. *Ibid.*
43. For a discussion of such techniques of comparative cultural representations, see D. Preziosi, 'Art history: making the visible legible', in D. Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 5.
44. Although the total number of graduates who were educated overseas was relatively small, many of them were recruited by the Kuomintang government to participate in major state initiatives.
45. T.B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898–1929* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004).
46. *Ibid.* Cai's awareness was rooted in his own training as a classical scholar in Qing China and in art history and philosophy from Germany. For a discussion of the histories of the development of art education in Republican China, see J. Tian, 'Minguo gongyi meishu jiaoyu dashi nianbiao' 民國工藝美術教育大事年表 ['Chronology of major events of craftsmanship and art education in the republican era'], *Zhuangshi Zazhi*, 10 (2011).
47. S. Xu 徐蘇斌, 'Jindai Zhongguo jianzhu de yishu yundong—meishu jianzhu de sixiang he shijian' 近代中國建築的藝術運動—美術建築的思想和實踐 ['The

- art movement in modern china—ideas and practices of meishu jianzhu'], F. Zhang, ed., *Zhongguo Jindai Jianzhu Yanjiu yu Baohu*, 5 (Beijing, Tsinghua University Press, 2006), pp. 731–746.
48. K. Liu 劉開渠, 'Meishu Jianzhu' 美術建築 [Architecture as fine art], *Zhongyang Ribao Tekan*, 5, 8 (1928), pp. 1–4; S. Xu, 'Jindai Zhongguo jianzhu', *op. cit.*
 49. J. Liu 劉既漂, 'Jianzhu yuanli' 建築原理 [The fundamentals of architecture], *Gongxian*, 3: 6 (1925), pp. 27–35; 'Xihu Bolanhui yu meishu jianzhu' 西湖博覽會與美術建築 ['West Lake Expo and meishu jianzhu'], *Dongfang Zazhi*, 26: 10 (1929), pp. 87–90; 'Zhongguo meishu jianzhu zhi guoqu ji qi weilai' 中國美術建築之過去及其未來 [The past and future of china's meishu jianzhu], *Dongfang Zazhi*, 27: 2 (1930), pp. 133–140; J. Wong, 'The Chinese Art Deco architect of the 1925 Paris Expo'—my grandfather', *The Newsletter*, International Institute for Asian Studies, 65 (Autumn, 2013), pp. 6–7.
 50. J. Liu, 'Zhongguo xin jianzhu ying ruhe zuzhi' 中國新建築應如何組織 ['How should chinese new architecture be organized'], *Dongfang Zazhi*, 24 (1927), pp. 81–84.
 51. K. Liu, 'Meishu jianzhu', *op. cit.*, pp. 1–4.
 52. J. Liu, 'Zhongguo xin jianzhu', *op. cit.*
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
 54. *Ibid.*
 55. J. Liu, 'Jianzhu Yuanli', *op. cit.*, p. 35.
 56. J. Liu, 'Xihu yishuhua' 西湖藝術化 ['Aestheticization of the west lake'], *Lvxing Zazhi*, 3, 4 (1929); 'Xihu Bolanhui hao' 西湖博覽會號 ['Special issue on the west lake expo'], *Lvxing Zazhi*, 3: 7 (1929), pp. 1–25.
 57. For example, see J. Tang 唐寓, 'Women de luxian' 我們的路線 ['Our mission'], *Meishu Shenghuo*, 1 (1934), pp. 1; D. Zhang 張德榮, 'Gongyi meishu yu rensheng zhi guanxi' 工藝美術與人生之關係 [The relationship between arts and crafts and everyday life], *Meishu Shenghuo*, 1 (1934); K. Zheng 鄭可, 'Ruhe gajin gongyi meishu' 如何改進工藝美術 ['How to improve arts and crafts'], *Qingnian Yishu*, 4 (1937), p. 217.
 58. The New Life Movement (新生活運動) (1934–1937) was a cultural reform movement initiated by China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) in 1934. The goal was to reform the habits of Chinese citizens by relearning traditional Chinese moral values through mass education and everyday practice. For a critical discussion of the Movement, see A. Dirlik, 'The ideological foundations of the new life movement: a study in counterrevolution', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34, no.4 (August, 1975), pp. 945–980; Z. Song 宋振洲, 'Lun "zhongti xiyong" shi xinshenghuo yundong de neizai luoji' 論「中體西用」是新生活運動的內在邏輯 ['On westernized chinese style: the inner logic of the new life movement'], *Tangshan Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao*, 39: 1 (2016), pp. 99–101.
 59. J. Tang, 'Women de luxian', *op. cit.*
 60. J. Tang, 'Women de luxian', *op. cit.*; K. Zheng, 'Ruhe gajin gongyi meishu', *op. cit.*
 61. These ideas can be found in many issues of the journal *Xin Jianzhu* 新建築 (*Die Architektur*) as discussed in the next section of this paper.
 62. See A. T. Anderson, *The Problem of the House*, *op. cit.*; H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', *op. cit.* For a discussion of the antipathy of Modernism towards everyday domestic needs, see A.T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., Publishers, 2007).
 63. See A. T. Anderson, *The Problem of the House*, *op. cit.* One important exhibition centered on domestic design was 'The Dwelling', held in Stuttgart in 1927. See also C. Wilk, *Modernism: Design a New World, 1914–1939* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008).
 64. H. Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', *op. cit.*, p. 4.
 65. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
 66. C. Peng 彭長歆, X. Yang 楊曉川, 'Rangqin Daxue Jianzhu Gongcheng Xuexi yu Liangnan zaoqi xiandaizhuyi de chuanguo he yanjiu' 勤勤大學建築工程學系

與嶺南早期現代主義的傳播和研究 [‘Rangqin University’s Department of Architecture and the promotion and study of early modernist Lingnam architecture’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 5 (2002), pp. 54–56.

67. *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 1936, 1937, 1938. See M. Jiang 蔣妙菲, ‘Jianzhu zazhi zai Zhongguo’ 建築雜誌在中國 [‘Architectural magazines of China’], *Shidai Jianzhu*, 2 (2004), pp. 20–26.
68. For example, see X. Wei 魏信凌, ‘Dushijihua yu weilai lixiang dushi fangan’ 都市計畫與未來理想都市方案 [‘City planning and conceptions of the ideal city of the future’] *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 2 (1936), pp. 1–10; L. Li 黎掄傑, ‘Dushi zhi jinghua yu zhuzhai zhengce’ 都市之淨化與住宅政策 [‘Urban slum clearance and housing policy’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 5–6 (1937), pp. 1–22; J. Liang 梁渾目, ‘Zhuzhai wenti zhi yanjiu’ 住宅問題之研究 [‘Studies of the conditions of domestic houses’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 2 (1936), pp. 17–23; J. Long 龍京公 ‘Xin Shenghuo yu zhuzhai gailiang’ 新生活與住宅改良 [‘New Life and improvement of domestic houses’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 1 (1936), pp. 3–6.
69. C. Li 李楚白, ‘Gongying zhuzhaiqu jihua zhi yanjiu’ 公營住宅區計畫之研究 [‘Research on the planning of public housing’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 5–6 (1937), pp. 1–38.
70. *Ibid.*
71. K. Lin 林克明, ‘Guoji Xin Jianzhu shi zhounian ganyan’ 國際新建築十週年紀念感言 [‘10th anniversary of the first meeting of CIAM’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, no. 7 (1938), pp. 1–6.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
73. Z. Zheng 鄭祖良, ‘Wanjin xin jianzhu de dongxiang’ 輓近新建築的動向 [‘New trends of contemporary new architecture’], *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)*, 8 (1938), pp. 2–5.
74. These ideas were exemplified in many issues of *Xin Jianzhu (Die Architektur)* 新建築 (1936–1947). See discussion of the orientation of the journal, in M. Jiang, ‘Jianzhu zhazhi zai Zhongguo’; and Y. Liu 劉源, ‘Shixi jindai jianzhu zazhi de lishi gongneng’ 試析近代建築雜誌的歷史功能 [‘Historical functions of architectural periodicals in modern China’], *Nanfang Jianzhu*, 2 (2012), pp. 37–43.
75. See Note 1 above. In Shanghai, the number of households living in shanty towns in 1930 was estimated to be 30,000 which accounted for one tenth of the working population: M. Yan, ‘Yimen kexue yu yige shidai’, *op. cit.*
76. Xiaohu 小鶴, ‘Dui Shanghai jianzhujie ren shuo jijuhua’ 對上海建築界人說幾句話 [‘Shanghai architects’], *Hongye Zhoukan*, 69 (1931), p. 3.
77. ‘Juzhu Wenti’ 居住問題, *Jianzhu Yuekan*, 1: 3 (1932). For a discussion of the role of the magazines in disseminating these ideas, see Y. Liu, ‘Shixi jindai jianzhu zazhi de lishi gongneng,’ *South Architecture* (2012).
78. ‘Juzhu Wenti’, *Jianzhu Yuekan*, *op. cit.*
79. Although the literacy rate in China was still relatively low in the 1930s, at 20%, it was also a period that saw a rapid expansion of the inexpensive popular print media available to a fast-expanding reading See note 18. For a discussion of the distribution of one of the most popular illustrated magazines, *Liangyou Zazhi*, see, G. Pickowicz, et al., eds, *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926–1945* (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2013).
80. P. G. Pickowicz, et al., eds, *Liangyou*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–13. For a discussion about the significance of consumption culture and nation in China, see K. Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Asia Centre, 2003).
81. See E. La Couture, *Modern Homes for Modern Families in Tianjin, China, 1860–1949* (dissertation manuscript, Columbia University, 2010).



Keeping cats, hoarding things: domestic situations in the public spaces of the Singaporean housing block

Lilian Chee

To cite this article: Lilian Chee (2017) Keeping cats, hoarding things: domestic situations in the public spaces of the Singaporean housing block, The Journal of Architecture, 22:6, 1041-1065, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1362024](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362024)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362024>



Published online: 17 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 123



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Keeping cats, hoarding things: domestic situations in the public spaces of the Singaporean housing block

Lilian Chee 

Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore (Author's e-mail address: l.chee@nus.edu.sg)

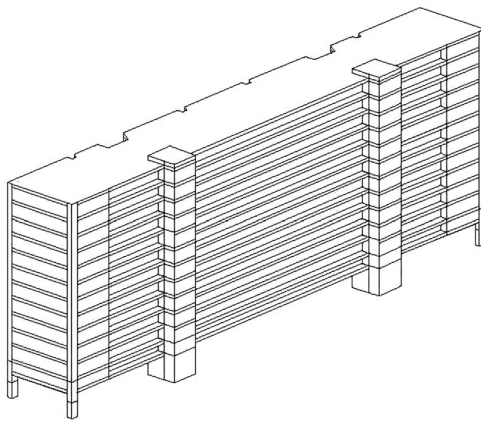
The architectural discourse of Singaporean public housing is focussed primarily on efficacy. Its performance has been substantiated heavily through statistics. Such a method not only presupposes implicit objectivity but ultimately also limits the kinds of perspectives and conclusions that can be drawn. This procedure has resulted in a more or less self-serving discourse wherein the aim of public housing has been principally framed as teleological, and subsequently traced and retraced through a progressive trajectory. However, in this paper, I argue that these standardised measures and methods fail when they are applied to two public spaces of the housing block—the void deck and the common corridor. These two spaces articulate the overlapping boundaries between two separate but often conflated categories: housing (embedding architectural type and state ideology) versus domesticity (embedding lived practice and spontaneous spatial production). I make the case that the discourse of efficacy ultimately represses the affective nature of these public spaces. The paper reappraises the void deck and the common corridor through the domestic situations of keeping cats and hoarding. I discuss how these situations can be adopted as critical spatial devices to allow a different entry into, and understanding of, the void deck and the common corridor. In conclusion, the paper posits that such spontaneous occupation of public space might offer a different frame for rethinking housing renewal and for understanding the changing role and use of housing's public space by its own multiple publics.

Introduction

In January, 2013, an elderly 'rag-and-bone' woman who collected discarded items for repurposing and resale was found sleeping rough on one of the staircases in Block 419, a public housing building located in the eastern Singaporean neighbourhood of Bedok North. More remarkably, when questioned Madam Ho, who was in her 60s, revealed that she owned a flat in the same block. She could no longer enter her unit because the items she had previously collected now obstructed access to her flat: 'I pick up things like cardboard, refrigerators and keep

them at home because I know I can sell them in the future. But around last year, some things fell and blocked my front door, that's why I can't go home ... I don't want to involve the police or SCDF to help me unlock my door and move things. I'm afraid of them.'¹ When volunteers offered to help clear the items and put them up for sale, Madam Ho declined, saying she preferred to be homeless rather than face the wrath of her immediate neighbours who had disputed her compulsive hoarding habits especially when items overflowed into the shared common corridor. The disputes ranged

Figure 1. The HDB's distinctive slab-block typology with void deck and common corridors, introduced in the early 1960s (drawing by Lin Derong).



from abusive threats to physical damage of her belongings. These included cigarette burns in her laundry and cups of 'yellow liquid' which turned out to be urine, placed outside her flat. Madam Ho's 'home' was subsequently reduced to a shopping trolley filled with her belongings. She lived off meal vouchers and sought assistance from the local community services. And despite Singapore's claimed efficient law enforcement, there has been no proper closure to this case.

I highlight this situation as a way of thinking through the litany of 'worry, ambiguity and concern'² which habitually pervades what this paper will call the 'public spaces' of public housing. By 'public spaces', I am referring to the shared spaces in the housing block, which do not have a specific domestic function yet are adjacent, or in close proximity, to the actual living quarters. I use the term 'public' intentionally to signal the tension between two entities: on the one hand,

what constitutes the private household realm of the flat where one has autonomy to act freely, and, on the other hand, what is *not* part of but is closely located to this private domestic environment. In this paper, I will look at two public spaces—the common corridor (a linear circulation space leading to the flats) and the void deck (an open public space on the ground level of the block), both of which featured in the 1970–1980s slab block public housing designs.

The common corridors with raised parapets stretched over fifty metres in length and typically adjoined twelve to sixteen flats. The 'free plan' ground floor with its *piloti* circumscribed the 'void deck', an open covered space parsimoniously delineated by the same column grid that supported the architecture of the block above it. Such geometries were specific to the distinctive slab block typology of public housing, also known locally as Housing Development Board, or HDB flats (Fig. 1). This typology was introduced in the early 1960s, popularised in the 1970s and last erected in 1985. The slab block primarily contained two-bedroom flats of modest size. A first-generation design, the slab block took on various shapes (Fig. 2) conforming to the urban exigencies of different housing estates.

The corridor and the void deck were constant features in this typology: their overall design remained relatively unchanged throughout a period of twenty years, whose purpose was to enact specific ideological intentions, and to solve practical issues. They were employed as part of a scalar solution to integrate individual families into larger communities thus mediating the overwhelming scale of a housing precinct. They were also important devices for

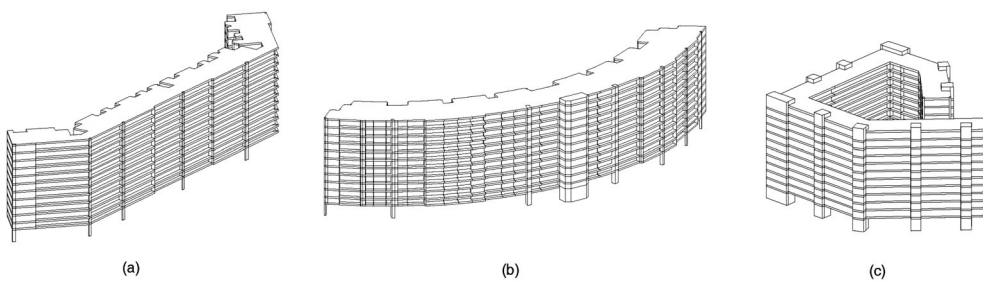


Figure 2. Iterations of the slab-block typology that conformed to the constraints of various housing estates included: (a) bent slab block (b) curved slab block (c) enclosing slab block (drawing by Lin Derong).

healthy and hygienic living since both spaces provided thorough ventilation and larger, open expanses for a densely packed population. As such, the void deck and the corridor are, at the same time, useful and ambiguous in nature. Yet, discourse on Singaporean public housing produced within the professional circles of architecture and urban planning in Singapore, including findings from research commissioned by the HDB, have only highlighted the utility and efficacy of this architecture. Are there other critical ways of perceiving and discussing these kinds of complex public spaces, which are also proximate and inseparable from the private? Can there be a more nuanced articulation of these spatial intersections between domesticity and housing, particularly pertaining to the interstitial public spaces wherein the void deck and the corridor are found?

In writing about the house as ‘equipment’ that is ultimately sustained by various institutions—‘ownership, sexuality, kinship, family, lineage, technics, servitude, repression, civilization, privacy, intimacy’—Georges Teyssot reminds us that a piece of equipment is first and foremost necessarily economic in

nature: it produces a ‘regime of normalization’ that ‘establishes limits (of property for example) and exclusions (between the forbidden and the permitted)’.³ Singaporean public housing architecture may be said to resemble such an instrument. It rehearses the pervasiveness of similar institutional limits and exclusions. It also exercises these norms by establishing what is ‘proper’, that is, by normalising what is in fact specific or even exceptional in its architectural design and intentions.

Domesticity is filled with both major and minor ‘disturbances’, which are, however, subsumed into the realm of ordinariness. These situations do not normally feature in architectural discourse. In using the domestic situation to re-encounter public housing, I am suggesting that such situations, which are the outcomes of occupancy and use, raise issues which would otherwise be ‘under the radar’ of normative architectural discourse, which is focussed exclusively on questions of design.

This paper intervenes in various discursive frames. First, it offers a social and ethnographical perspective for evaluating Singapore-based architectural discourse on public housing. Adding a new dimension

to critical architectural histories on Singaporean public housing—including, particularly, Eunice Seng's doctoral dissertation *Habitation and Invention of a Nation: Singapore, 1936–1979*,⁴ which approaches public housing history from official newspaper records and photographs, state policy and public speeches—this essay emphasises instead the importance of occupancy (human and non-human) to review the social and psychological impact of public housing architecture. It argues for an affective architectural discourse based upon occupancy-based evidence, and discusses the politics of including occupancy and affect in a critical evaluation of Singaporean public housing.

Secondly, the essay develops and reframes the architectural inquiry into public housing by situating architecture as critically co-produced or re-produced through domestic practice. Housing is categorically differentiated from domesticity. Domesticity is concerned with *minutiae*, and undergirded by agents and forces normally located outside architectural concerns, including occupancy, consumerist behaviours and cultural habits. Domestic situations move the study of architecture beyond its design stage. Many scholars have demonstrated that architecture is continually re-produced through occupancy.⁵ Nevertheless, the insertion of the occupant as an agent of architectural production in the context of public housing, particularly Singaporean public housing, is significant given that this typology is exclusively expressive of state identity and policy. Thus, the argument of public housing space as populist is not just new but critical of the normatively hierarchical conception of public housing whose knowledge conforms to pure design intentionality.

The essay challenges such conventional architectural conceptions of public housing in Singapore and elsewhere by reframing the architectural space through lived evidence and affective experiences. The ground floor open space or 'void deck' is examined through the traces of the housing block's cat population, whilst the common corridor space is approached through the hoarding of things. Anthropological, ethnographical and geographical studies of human-animal social/spatial relationships as well as material cultural studies on the affective/infrastuctural spaces of rubbish and waste are key to reinterpreting how occupancy engages and transforms architecture. Through this mode, architectural discourse acknowledges that the production of architecture through occupation is necessarily organic, open-ended and experiential in ways that conventional architectural evidence can neither sufficiently record nor express. In doing so, this essay also re-contextualises literature on the circulation of subjects (both human and nonhuman), practices, and ideas related to domestic environments derived from material culture, social history, as well as anthropological, geographical and ethnographical studies, within a new architectural discourse focussed on the affective realm of public housing.

Thirdly and finally, the essay contributes a non-Western case study, both adding to and re-envisioning late twentieth-century European and North American debates on public housing. These well-rehearsed debates revolved around public housing's socialist ideals, aimed at better living standards and new modes of living. Examples include the radical modernist architectural plans of the *Weissenhof Siedlung* (1927) in Stuttgart, comprising twenty-one

buildings for sixty working-class families designed by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Hans Scharoun amongst others; the Soviet experiment in low-cost, prefabricated industrialised housing (*Khrushchyovka*), beginning in the late 1950s under Nikita Khrushchev's *dictat* to stamp out all architectural excess and creating hundreds of suburbs or *mikrorayons*;⁶ and arguably the most famous high-rise public housing project of the last century, the architect Minoru Yamasaki's St Louis' Pruitt-Igoe (1954), which was originally developed for a middle-class community, but in under two decades became an architectural shorthand for dysfunctional mass housing riddled with social problems, racial violence, crime and urban decay.

These discussions persistently positioned public housing not only as a reluctant solution to an insurmountable social problem of urban congestion, but also decried the strategy of public housing as overtly hierarchical, a top-down approach which was often completely out of touch with the thousands who subsequently became its beneficiaries. In other words, public housing was a byword for architectural hegemony and its subsequent failure at a monumental scale. In her 1967 article in the *Chicago Tribune*, the architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who visited Moscow to examine its public housing on the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution, described as advanced the technological progress enabling the rapid roll out of standardised flats but lamented that 'it looks promising, measured at one inch to 100 feet, but becomes inhuman when measured out in footsteps'.⁷ As Huxtable observes, the optics of public housing is deeply entrenched at the urban scale whilst simultaneously

alienating and subjugating knowledges and experiences on the ground. If the architectural scale of public housing is emphasised, as in the *Weissenhof Siedlung* or Le Corbusier's still iconic *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles, the knowledge of architectural lineage and design are ultimately prioritised over the production of that architecture through occupancy.

As a corollary to extant debates on public housing, this paper offers a critical theoretical overview of the Singaporean case by what can be 'measured out in footsteps'. The early social housing experiments in Europe and the United States stood at the frontiers of architectural production but their socio-cultural conditions were hostile to the concept of mass housing. The Soviet example is resonant with Singaporean public housing given that the body politic of the Russian state was ideologically embedded in its rapidly disseminated industrialised blocks. However, with the shift of the urban economy from production to speculation, the Singaporean example may be differentiated from the Soviet *Khrushchyovka* because public housing continues to be built (while the Soviet experiment stopped in 1971), controlled and popularly supported whereby it is the housing choice of more than eighty-percent of Singapore's resident population. Thus, this paper offers a study not just of an exceptionally successful non-Western condition but more significantly, a ground-up perspective of an architectural typology which, in both Western and non-Western examples, has tended to be read through and expressed exclusively as normalised components of state ideologies and urban planning technologies.⁸

The first two sections of this paper reexamine the histories of, and motivations for, the void deck and the corridor. It discusses the construction of the proper and propriety in public housing, and argues how its discourse cultivates a normalisation of the HDB's design intentions. It also points out how the discourse's objective voice begins to break down when it is applied to the void deck and the corridor. The final section argues for an architectural reappraisal of the domestic situation in order to articulate a more nuanced reading of the public spaces in the housing block. Though the situations—cats in the void deck and clutter in the corridor—have been summarily dismissed as nuisance, they raise difficult questions about territoriality. They also highlight dissent between the idea of a shared national housing project and the liberties assumed of the domestic realm. What do these situations reveal about the architecture of public housing and its normalised discourse?

Just repeat it: drawing the normal in public housing

In 1960, the rise of public housing as a systematic political and social instrument in the newly independent nation state of Singapore combined pragmatic and ideological will. The initial impetus to solve a housing crisis in the late 1950s transformed into a convenient mechanism for citizen-making when, in 1964, the newly launched homeownership scheme soon co-opted every willing citizen and homeowner into a binding and contractual relationship with the state. The former were transformed into stakeholders.⁹ 'My primary preoccupation,' declared the first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, 'was to give

every citizen a stake in the country and its future. I wanted a home-owning society. I ... was convinced that if every family owned its home, the country would be more stable ...'.¹⁰ The state enabled such stake-holding¹¹ through generous housing grants, rebate schemes, family bonuses for generational proximity between households and heavily subsidised prices for newly built flats that appreciated quickly in value once the property entered the open market. On their part, the new homeowners could lay claim to the country's then fledgling economy, and they too rapidly evolved into a citizenry who understood the criticality of vigour and discipline in a thriving labour force.¹² HDB ownership facilitated 'the expansion of commitment to the prevalent social order by the development of personal stakes in its survival'.¹³

Thus, the home ownership ideology forged a more enduring if also complex relationship with the state wherein basic shelter was guaranteed only if proper occupancy requirements were met and maintained, including uninterrupted servicing of the monthly mortgage. However, home ownership involved more than financial stability on the part of the citizenry. Public housing was a tool for managing the population, and here, the national imperatives of birth control, family planning and racial quotas weighed heavily upon home ownership regulations.¹⁴ In 1973, for instance, in a bid to engineer smaller families amongst the less highly educated population, one of the spouses who included a female work permit holder married to a Singaporean had to agree to 'sterilization after birth of the second child or lose government housing subsidy and other concessions'.¹⁵ The

sociologist Chua Beng-Huat argues that public housing is framed within an 'explicit ideological language' intent on defining the proper Singaporean citizen.¹⁶

Thus, the achievement of Singaporean public housing is neither its historical eradication of squatter housing and disease-ridden environments nor the intensity of its architectural solutions. Public housing is omnipresent in the national psyche. With more than 82% of the population subscribing to this housing programme, it is almost impossible to remain outside this pervasive architectural milieu. Monopolising the Singaporean domestic environment and designed as a total environment covering a range of scales and spaces from the individual flat to the block, the larger neighbourhood and the greater precinct, it ultimately shapes the resident's worldview. Public housing in Singapore is all encompassing. In its capacity physically and psychically to hold a nation, the HDB flat thus cannot be compared to any other architecture either in Singapore or beyond its shores.

It is simultaneously the most common *and* the most aspirational of architectures. Unlike social housing elsewhere, which tends to be stigmatised, the HDB block houses a national microcosm: 'financially-challenged families, solid blue-collar families, and also the upper middle class and young upwardly-mobile professionals'.¹⁷ The citizen who qualifies for such housing is shaped by public campaigns and programmes targeted to alter their social behaviour and personal disposition with regard to productivity, public hygiene, neighbourliness, family planning, energy use, moral values and speaking Mandarin, amongst others.

From 1968 to 1982, 66 campaigns were launched, and many of these found their way into HDB conditions for grants, ownership policies and regulations: 'In the home, citizens are instructed on family size, the timing of household formation and child birth, the language they ought to speak, are compulsorily required to save a fifth of their income, and since 1996, to financially support their parents in old age'.¹⁸

Yet ironically, in responding to the nation's utopian dream of housing the 'good life', the architectural motivation is premised on efficacy. HDB's founding chief architect-planner Liu Thai Ker describes a 'single-minded pragmatic approach',¹⁹ which focussed on 'improved sanitation, improved floor space, improved floor plan and improved amenities rather than on an ideal approach or an ideal building plan based on sociological studies'.²⁰ This purposefully neutralised and function-driven approach differentiated the architectural outcomes of the Singaporean model from the idealisms embedded in Westernised conceptions of modernist housing projects. Le Corbusier declared that modern architecture's efficiency stood for a particular ethics and morality: '*Standardization, mass production, efficiency*: three connected phenomena that rule contemporary activity pitilessly, that are neither cruel nor atrocious, but on the contrary lead to order, to perfection, to purity, to liberty'.²¹ Thus, for modernism, the raised standards of living and their modes of efficiency were not ends in themselves. These were means to a better 'life', a quantum which Liu openly declared as too vague a goal for a performance-oriented organisation like the HDB.²² Indeed, Liu's pragmatism towards mod-

ernist architecture, with its focus on holding the family unit together and creating homes for a stable workforce, is not only productivist but might also be culturally and theoretically differentiated as an anti-Western approach to modernism.

The primacy of the collective workforce with the family as an economically and biologically productive unit steered the agenda of Singaporean public housing. In fact, the HDB's enduring architectural legacy of enforced neutrality and muteness permeates its design and programmatic approach. The HDB flats are, as the geographer Jane M. Jacobs observes, ironically distinguished by their perceived 'lack' of design and/or designer.²³ Compared to public housing's ideological ambitions and complicated ownership regulations, its architecture has seemingly evolved out of a mechanical and objective process.

Paradoxically, whilst the nation-building policies defining public housing were arguably utopian, ideological and sometimes even radical—with strategies including universal stake-holding, ownership regulations and grants premised on marriage, restrictions on non-familial ownership configurations, and regulated racial quotas—the architectural approach was conversely conservative. Functionality and efficiency were readily adopted as the architectural baseline. In Liu's early papers on public housing, these parameters formed the basis for a new architecture for the masses. Liu's arguments focussed on how variations in flat and block designs had 'functional objectives' determined by and affecting land use and its optimisation, planning controls, development processes and policies, facilities planning and distribution, new town plan-

ning, and the compelling need to standardise the land-use distribution, density and layout of the HDB estates across Singapore.²⁴ Such an instrumentalised architectural rhetoric and functional design approach have ultimately influenced a perception of public housing architecture as one driven completely by pragmatism.

Thus, juxtaposed against the radical social reforms and configurations articulated in Singaporean public housing policy, the architectures of block, precinct and neighbourhood appear conversely to be grounded in the quantifiable and the measurable. Yet, I suggest that the pragmatic character of public housing architecture had a performative role. This objective positioning became a mute foil for a series of contestable ideologies of nation, society and family. As the most visible physical expression of national policy, the architecture of the public housing block was purposely cast as neutral. Through its neutralised rhetoric and seemingly banal aesthetics, the standardised architecture of public housing achieved an almost *a priori* ontological status—one that was ultimately indisputable because it was seen as a mechanical and automatic response to function *per se*. Its reason for being was to enable positive living outcomes including better sanitation, hygiene, fresh air, bigger flats and better interior layouts. If the idiosyncratic policies provoked debate, the automated gesture of the architecture achieved the exact opposite: it normalised.

The architectural theorist Catherine Ingraham situates the 'normal' as entangled with 'propriety' and implicit in the concept of 'property'.²⁵ Delimiting the premises of modern space on 'proper-

ness, normativeness, cleanliness, comfort, the cogito,²⁶ Ingraham traces the word 'normal' first to its Latin root 'norma' that 'etymologically (refers to) a T-square, normal is that which bends neither to the right nor the left',²⁷ and then, through the historian of science Georges Canguilhem's definition, where the idea of the normal becomes much more ambiguous, since it has the joint status of imposed value and indisputable fact. 'Normal ... is that which is met in the majority of cases of a *determined* kind, or that which constitutes either the average or standard of a *measurable* characteristic.'²⁸ The normal is thus not a self-evident category but an artificially regulated one. It is necessarily bolstered by measurable quantities which redress the biases and exclusions which normalisation automatically installs.

In the architecture of Singaporean public housing, the 'etymological cohorts'²⁹ of property, propriety and the proper are productively developed. Personal stake-holding in such property is based on the prerequisite that a proper family unit is already in place, defined as 'one man, one woman, marrying, having children'³⁰ and further, that this basic unit will necessarily exercise appropriate kinship relationships between family, neighbour and citizenry, with the three categories being non-exclusive. These values are shored up by an architecture whose variations of flat size, interior layout and public spaces in the block have, over the years, shifted in tandem with national family-planning policies, community-centric campaigns and nation-building enterprises. Ingraham proposes that architecture's propriety is not, however, limited to 'typologically appropriate buildings' but that it fundamentally serves as a

'housing for the proper inside other disciplines and other discourses'.³¹ Similarly, I argue that the objectified and neutralised characteristics of HDB architecture both accommodate and normalise a value system founded on the hetero-normative and economically productive family unit. Further, if 'the architect is still understood to be a kind of physician for the (normative) body in space',³² then HDB architecture inevitably reinforces this body politic through its design and spatial logic.

'HDB existence is characterized', attests the Singaporean poet Alfian Sa'at, 'by aerial threats, where a mouth expels its contents, a hand dispatches its cargo, before withdrawing back into a planar anonymity (which one hides the culprit, one wonders, looking up), where a primary accomplice to misfortune is gravity.'³³ Sa'at's account delineates a deeply affective space populated by *sputum*, discarded sweet wrappers and dirt. It leads us directly to where these tensions brew: at the edges of two colliding territories, where the housing block's public space chafes against the flat's private domestic space. He reveals that the riskiest spaces are those just around the corner from his flat: on the common staircase and at the edges of the void deck (Fig. 3). At this public-private threshold, interdictions, breaches and situations spontaneously unfold as if to reinforce the tripartite relationship of property, propriety and the proper. Yet instead of fortifying the normative, domesticity's excesses thrive on impropriety, thwarting alignment with housing's proper intents. Approaching the architectural histories, motivations and spatial outcomes of two boundary conditions within a housing block—the void deck and the common corridor—the next

Figure 3. The insalubrious boundaries of the HDB void deck, 2016 (photograph by Tan Jing Min).



section offers a counter-narrative of the housing block from within its public spaces.

... what such open space might do: undermining efficacy

The rationale for open space in Singaporean public housing was historically driven by health. Miasmatic discourse was common in the British Empire and produced various models of 'hygienic' architecture, including the discipline of tropical architecture.³⁴ The problem of disease was a problem of space. Congestion and overcrowding in the city centre were endemic. In 1947, up to 100,000 people lived in slums.³⁵ The British colonial government perceived these slums as an uncontrollable rot that ate at the city. Occupants lacked legal rights, access to infrastructure and escaped municipal surveillance. Consequently, the 1955 Masterplan³⁶ sought to map and eradicate such squalor. By its final year of operation in 1959, the colonial administration's housing body—the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT)—managed to build only 23,000 homes.³⁷ In actuality, the rehousing of squatters required ten times as

many. Further, the housing crisis was explicitly presented as a problem of space: the slums provided a miserly 0.35 hectares of open space per person in comparison to the UK standard of 4.5 hectares per person. Thus, the 1955 Masterplan emphasised the necessity and urgency of open space as a baseline for hygiene and health. At the same time, it described the significance of open space's 'pleasantness' (an excessive if also unquantifiable value) because it was perceived that open spaces could enhance communal relationships.

Open space was thus conceptualised in public housing for hygiene and health.³⁸ Its pragmatism was also extended to forging communal ties. The naming of the two spaces—the ground-level open space called the 'void deck' (Fig. 4) and the multi-level open space called the 'access balcony' (Fig. 5)—offered little to imply communality and flexibility of use. This suggests that the motives for delineating the programmatic possibilities of such space were nascent and, perhaps, even ambiguous. Certainly, the question of control, use and maintenance of these open, loosely programmed, spaces would have posed issues for the HDB, although any anxieties were not documented.

The earliest void deck was reputedly constructed in 1963 at Block 26 Jalan Klinik, an estate located at the fringe of the city centre.³⁹ It was little publicised and appeared more like a residual space between facilities on the ground level, including the stair-core lobbies, a provisions shop and areas housing building services. There were no void decks in the first HDB township of Toa Payoh when that estate was established in 1964. This changed in the mid-1970s when almost every



Figure 4. The HDB void deck, 2017
(photograph by Lin Derong).

block contained one.⁴⁰ Similarly, the HDB annual reports did not refer to this space at all until as late as 1977–78.⁴¹ However, in 1968, a decade prior to the popularisation of the void deck as a vernacularised open space in public housing, its spatial potentials were highlighted in the *Singapore Institute of Architects Journal (SIAJ)*.⁴²

In this, the first significant mention of the HDB ‘void deck’ as a purposely designed open space was made in reference to the Park Road develop-

ment, a pilot project of the state-initiated, inner-city core Comprehensive Urban Renewal programme: this sought to intensify land use, modernise development and clear up the urban slums. The void deck described in the *SIAJ*’s article refers to an open-access roof-top space on the third level of a city podium block (Fig. 6). Here, the void deck had the function of separating the commercial podium below from the residential flats above. The void deck in Park Road ‘act(ed) as a buffer zone to

Figure 5. The 'access balcony' or common corridor, 2017 (photograph by Lin Derong).



promote cross-ventilation and lighten the appearance of the building' and 'serve(d) as play and recreational areas for residents'.⁴³ It housed a *crèche* with landscaping and a pool for children's play, a kindergarten, a reading corner and a recreational area for adults (Fig. 7). According to Alan Choe, then the HDB's chief architect, the city was an 'unhealthy environment' that bred 'delinquency, crime, prostitution, dope as well as neurotic diseases'.⁴⁴ Thus, at its earliest stages, the void deck was employed to separate the residential units from the supposedly corrupting influences of the urban milieu. It functioned in the same way as the

European urban planning concept of the *cordon sanitaire*, or a zone of exclusion, in and through which the damaging aspects of city life could be mediated or filtered out. Choe's understanding of the void deck as an urban zone of exclusion is significant in how the void deck is understood as untethered to the block but necessarily a part of the city. Its scale, anonymity, and ambiguous boundaries lead the void deck to being perceived and used in ways which are consistent with an urban space but simultaneously contentious in the context of a residential block.

However, when the HDB transferred this open space to the suburban housing estates in the 1970s, the same conditions of city-versus-flat no longer applied. The ambition shifted to understanding the void deck as part of a series of spatially defined and enclosed 'outdoor spaces'.⁴⁵ Yet, its morphology defied this simple re-categorisation. Defined by the extrusion of the structural grid of the flats above it, it repeated and reinforced their spatial rhythm. The void deck was porous to its surroundings but at the same time spatially independent of what was adjacent to it (Fig. 8). Surrounded by a raised apron that defined the block from the ground plane, the edges of the void deck were also marked by specific architectural points of exit for occupants and their waste: stair and lift cores opened to one side of the block mirrored by refuse chutes and waste water stacks at the other side. The open space of the void deck was, as such, a space suspended between these circulatory modes of people and their discards. It had a vague sense of both belonging to, and yet not of, the block of flats. The void deck's 'public' character

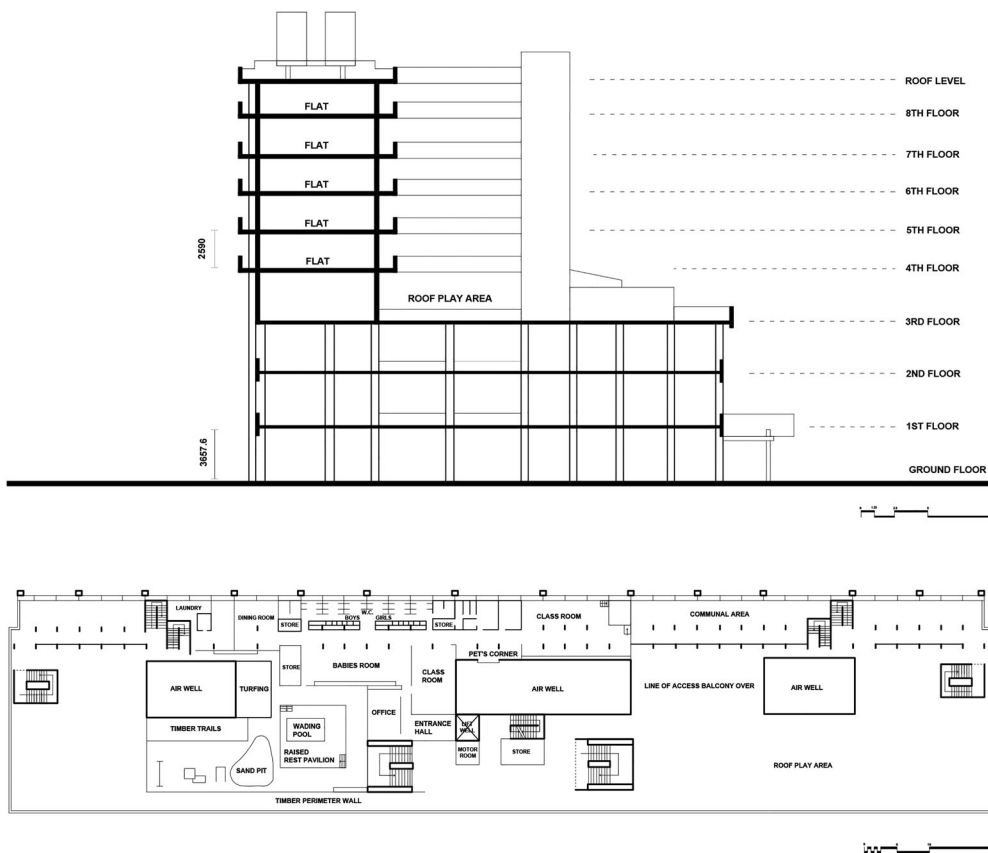


Figure 6. Typical Section of the Park Road development showing the open-access roof area and void deck, separating the commercial podium from the residential flats above (drawing by Lin Derong).

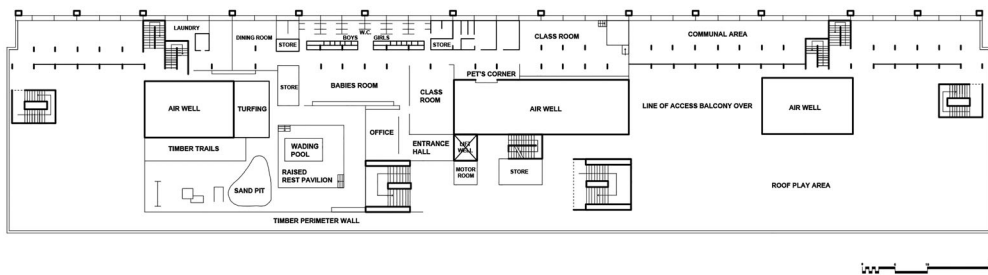


Figure 7. Typical third-floor plan of the Park Road development showing recreational areas for residents (drawing by Lin Derong).

was ambiguously 'domestic' and 'other' at the same time.

Consequently, its spatial and programmatic ambiguity was at odds with the rigidly circumscribed system of open space in public housing, which included spaces such as the playground, the town

square and the hawker centre. Defined by clear physical boundaries and use patterns, these spaces also reinforced the orthodoxies of efficiency and pragmatism prevalent in the architectures of public housing. Whilst the urban planning mechanisms invested heavily in a higher-order planning hierarchy

Figure 8. The spatially porous void deck, 2017 (photograph by Lin Derong).



in the town centre,⁴⁶ the proper usage of the void deck was subsequently left to interpretation and appropriation. Conspicuously populated during family gatherings including weddings and funerals, the void deck often emerges as a space rife with troublesome situations. These situations sometimes bordered on minor offences: 'people sleeping overnight, parking cars, littering, gambling, smoking, drug taking, and the presence—and occasional abuse©—of cats.'⁴⁷ In this casual list, the void deck appeared to accommodate both the excess relationships of a domestic space and an almost absurd catalogue of a-social behaviour that intrinsically represented the diversity of domestic life concealed within the tightly ordered and managed spaces of the HDB flats. Through these occurrences, the void deck shifted in its intended role from *cordon sanitaire* to being itself a salacious territory that needed to be kept in check, or sometimes avoided altogether.

A similar tension might be detected in another public space within the block. The common corridor

or 'access balcony' runs alongside the front façade of the housing block. Tectonically, the corridor was established as an important architectural element. In the early Singapore Improvement Trust flats,⁴⁸ including the nine-storey blocks in Upper Pickering Street (1952–53) and the fourteen-storey Forfar House (1955), the access balcony or corridor acted as a distinct 'form-giver'⁴⁹ by providing the characteristically clean, striated modernist façades. Installed initially as a circulation passage, the access balcony was further developed to enhance social interaction between neighbours on the same floor. Adjustments to the design of the corridor dealt primarily with altering sightlines from the corridor into the private flat, and experimenting with different dimensions to facilitate spontaneous socialisation. To address issues of privacy, the level of the corridor was lowered so it would eventually sit half-a-metre below the flats that adjoined it. Through the years, there have been several variations in the resizing of its width—ranging between 1.4 metres and 2.4 metres—such that the corridor became not just a site for moving to and from the flats but also a space in which to linger, encounter, engage and survey (Fig. 9).

Liu wrote of how the raised units overlooking the corridor would 'give the impression of houses along a street'.⁵⁰ Indeed, the corridor was instrumentalised as a social condenser. It was constructed with an explicit aim of creating a community of neighbours who lived side-by-side but whose increasingly atomised existence rendered them strangers to each other. Yet, the provision of the corridor catered to more than space for the exchange of pleasantries. It had the double-edged function of interaction

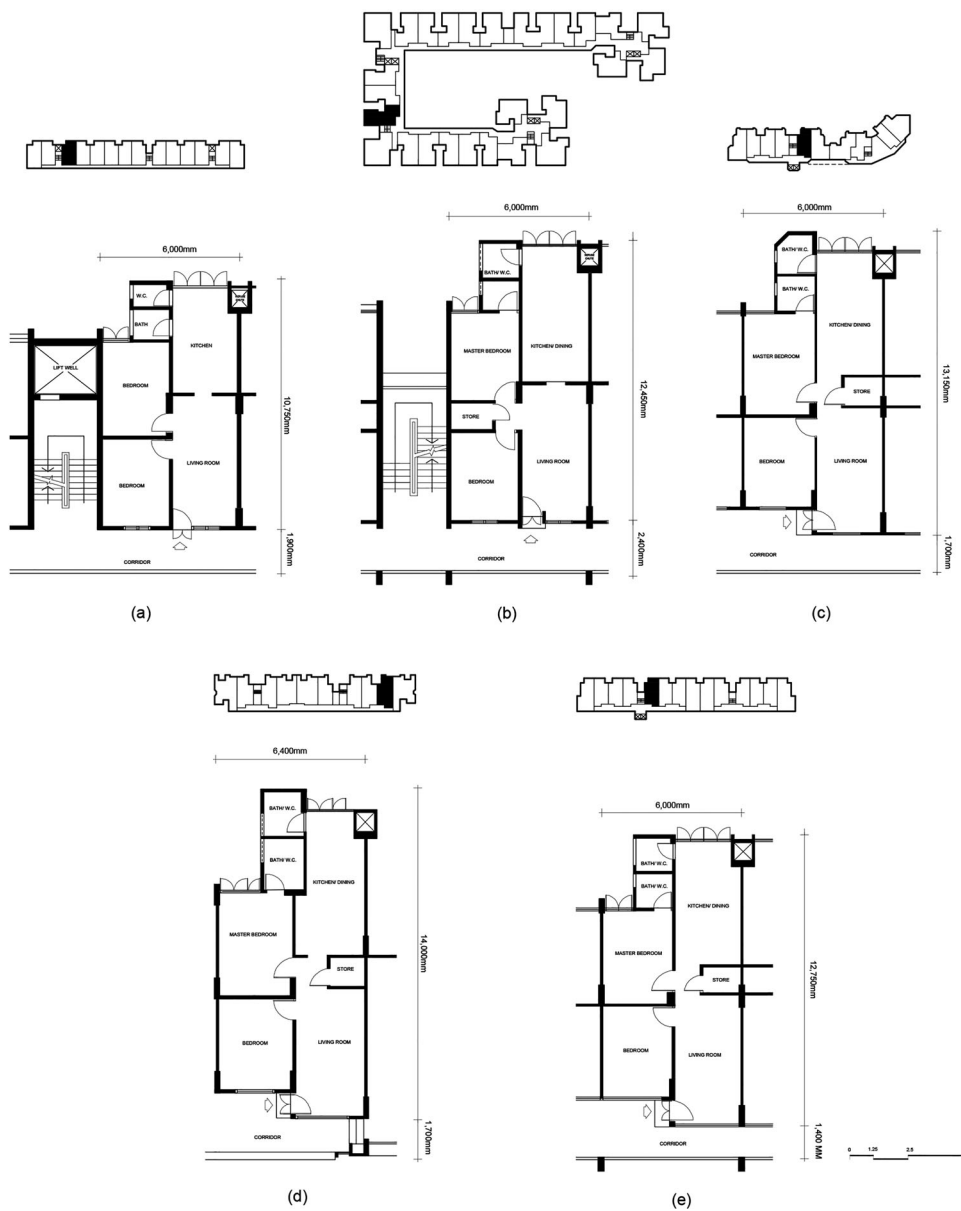


Figure 9. Iterations of 3-room HDB units: (a) Improved flat 1975-76; (b) New flat 1975-76; (c) New flat 1979-80; (d) Model A 1981-82; (e) New flat 1981-82 (drawings by Lin Derong).

and surveillance: its visibility meant that comings and goings could be monitored by the 'houses along a street'. Whether or not such acts of surveillance happened, the corridor became a panoptic and self-regulating space where irregularities were quickly exposed: 'the extroverted corridor was a corroborator in the celebration of publicness and the suppression of privacy'.⁵¹ As Eunice Seng suggests, the corridor, in such an architectural configuration and context, repositioned publicness as demonstrative of that which was desired in the proper citizen-worker-homeowner-family member. The visibility of the corridor generated expectations of openness but at the same time reinforced specific standards undergirding the institutions of family and nation. At stake in this narrow space were complex issues of security, ownership and territory.

Architecture can produce certain kinds of bodies just as different kinds of bodies co-produce particular kinds of architecture. Henri Lefebvre argues that spaces emanate particular 'energies' which are then played out through the users' relationships to those spaces: 'A body so conceived, as produced and as the production of a space, is immediately subject to the determinants of that space. ... the spatial body's material character derives from space, from the energy that is deployed and put to use there.'⁵² Lefebvre's provocation about space's energetic impulse begins to describe the ambiguous condition in the void deck and the corridor. The body, he tells us, reacts not merely to geometry and form but is galvanised by almost every quality coincident with that space, including interactions, oppositions, centres and edges. In Lefebvre's statement, space is produced through and by these

aspects, both what is quantifiable and what is not. Amidst the network of over-determined public housing spaces with their pre-programmed national and familial expectations, the void deck and the corridor stand out in their spatial and programmatic ambiguity. They constituted public space in public housing but their proximate relationship through geometry, distance and overlapping boundaries with the private flat gave way to dissonance. Certainly, if the tightly regulated dwelling and civic spaces of public housing were intent on producing a disciplined citizen-homeowner-worker, then the loosely regulated transition public spaces of the void deck and the corridor were appealing in their unintended liberalism. It is significant that these two spaces were inadequately described, catalogued and understood through HDB's characteristic statistical enumerations. Through this mode, they appeared feeble and excessive. Viewed through the categories of efficiency and use, they were perceived as defiant and bothersome.

Rather, these spaces seemed pragmatic only when they were beset by some troubling situation: the corridor's parapet wall was raised to a one-metre height when it was suggested that some had found it convenient to leap to their deaths from there;⁵³ the void deck was slowly filled up with more useful communal spaces such as a crèche, a kindergarten, shared meeting rooms or an old persons' corner to minimise unauthorised usage as harmless as playing football and washing one's motorbike, or more risqué gambling and spontaneous gatherings of non-Singaporean residents.⁵⁴ Articulated in these ways, the void deck and corridor's effectiveness could not be gauged through

functionality. Instead these problematic situations highlighted what was spatially different about these spaces—that they were always encountered as contradictory: efficient and inefficient; clean and dirty; outside and inside. Such situations also suggest that here architecture, as the efficient machine which this public housing programme promoted, ultimately breaks down. It can no longer control the body, which ‘is not only prone to but thrives on the tensions between propriety and impropriety’.⁵⁵

This article’s final section concludes by looking more closely at two recent domestic situations which have pathologised the void deck and the corridor. Through the instances of hoarding in the corridor and keeping cats in the void deck, I discuss how these domestic situations highlight spatial particularities especially where these two public spaces intersect domestic territories and practices. These spaces are eventually defined by the ambiguity of their boundaries, and are remarkable in how they prompt action and emotion. I draw from ethnographic evidence and engage theories on waste, excess and animal-human relationships, bringing these areas in proximity to the discourse of public housing and its architectural design. How is this architecture—built on a certainty of numbers, perfected through utilitarian calculus, conceived and constructed with the utmost respect for lineaments and intentions—unravelling at these points?

Of clutter and cats: domesticating housing

In August, 2012, neighbours in a Singaporean public housing block at Bedok Reservoir complained of a stench permeating their corridor.⁵⁶ The remains of

a 76-year-old Singaporean man were subsequently found in a two-bedroom flat along the corridor. Rubbish collected over the past decade by the man was piled floor to ceiling and obstructed the search for his body, which took at least an hour. In several cases, such as Madam Ho’s highlighted at the beginning of this essay, the hoarder was driven out of his/her flat because it became inaccessible. Hazards posed to neighbours were just as disconcerting. In May, 2015, workers from the Singapore National Environment Agency sprayed insecticide in a block at Eunos Crescent to destroy an active dengue cluster in the estate.⁵⁷ Subsequently, hundreds of cockroaches from a hoarder’s two-bedroom flat invaded the corridor. A neighbour who posted a video of the cockroach-infested corridor on social media described how other flats along the same corridor were made vicariously to experience the perils of hoarding when swarms of insects and cockroaches turned up in their flats. Here, the corridor was transformed into an undesirable conduit for infestation and disease. It becomes a threat to property, which together with propriety and the proper, constitute the architectural norm.⁵⁸

Neil Maycroft and Sylvia Lavin⁵⁹ discuss hoarding as involving ultimately improper matter placed improperly in space; that is, the hoard becomes an architectural situation only when it fails to ‘move along’ to more ‘marginal’ areas of storage. It is the non-proper positioning of questionable things in non-marginal, visible domestic space that creates trouble. ‘Sorting and classification have a spatial dimension: this goes here, that goes there. *Nontrash* belongs in the house; trash goes outside. Marginal categories get sorted in marginal places (attics, base-

ments, and outbuildings) eventually to be used, sold or given away ...'.⁶⁰

There is an alternate order to the hoard, which has as its primary aim continuous accumulation in order to fill up space: 'usually working from periphery to centre, sometimes carving out elaborate pathways or structures in order to enable functional day to day living, and often, more hoarding'.⁶¹ Maycroft argues that hoarding breaks with storage conventions and challenges 'values' attributed not only to commodities but also towards space. In architectural terms, hoarding has a devastating impact on domestic space. It not only paralyses commonsensical spatial use but completely undermines its order and propriety. Hoarding violates the "'visible" space of the everyday' by desecrating the "'proper" ordering of objects in space'.⁶² The hoard is precisely an architectural situation because it questions and breaks down accepted spatial boundaries and conventions: 'Hoarding might just as well be described as a critical resistance to the regimes of propriety enforced by architecture or as a means of understanding space that is not just resistant to standard measures of use, but ignores them altogether'.⁶³

In the Singaporean context, the problem of hoarding is compounded by the close proximity between individual flats, and specifically worsened by the territorial ambiguity inherent in the long, linear and uninterrupted corridors abutting the fronts of these flats. Indeed, the spatial logic of hoarding thrives on ambiguity in organisation, with the hoarder actively transforming the constituency of space in his/her turning of void (useable rooms) into solid forms (walls of rubbish). The fact that hoarding has become something of a situation in the context of

public housing ironically rehearses the question of open space. Here, open space is no longer marked by its habitual use or by its efficacy. The open space of the corridor motivates hoarding; it encourages and is sympathetic to a spillover from the flat into its outside (figs 10, 11).

It should be reiterated that the spillover corridor space is not just a lure for hoarders. It is habitually treated as a surplus space adjoining the private flat. At this private-public threshold, occupants store an assortment of objects—including plants, footwear, religious paraphernalia and altars, bicycles, scooters, laundry—and use the corridor for temporary religious practices, such as the Indian population's drawing of the *mandala* on the floor or the setting up of small tables for offerings and prayers during key Chinese festivals. What is left in the corridor and the manner by which these objects are found reveal a lot for their disposition, whether maintaining a precarious equilibrium of 'acceptable' storage, or veering towards disorder and decay.

If unwanted objects are routinely placed in unprogrammed spaces which are also typically obscured from public view—such as the attic, the storeroom or the bottom of the garden—the positioning of the loosely programmed common corridor in relation to the flat defies this convention. Whilst it affords a certain laxity of use and remains vague in terms of its spatial affiliation to the flat, the corridor is at the same time prominently positioned at the front of the block. It is simultaneously and conflictingly, a loose and a self-regulating space. Its patent visibility automatically presupposes a certain norm of propriety. It demands an order that



Figure 10. The common corridor and its spillover capacity, 2017 (photograph by Lin Derong).



Figure 11. Permanent 'hoarding' of domestic objects in the common corridor, 2017 (photograph by Lin Derong).

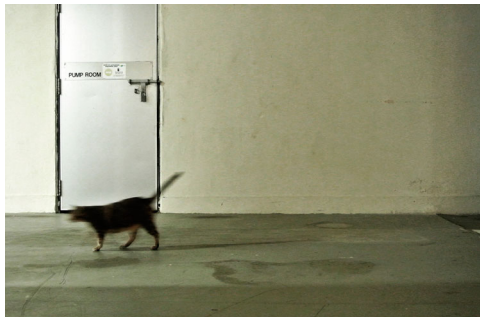
preserves this space as a 'front' and its visibility entails proper use of it. When such propriety is violated by the hoarder and hoarding, the corridor shifts from an efficient façade into an affective space, punctuated by an overtly corporeal existence that cannot be contained. Putrid smells, the organic growth of fungi and mould, infestations of cockroaches, insects and rats, peculiar deposits and stains, and the slow degeneration of harmless consumables, such as newspapers, books, clothes, rags, empty plastic containers and broken electrical goods, into something more sinister and obscure, beckon at every turn. In the wrong place, what

was once prosaic and domestic becomes abject, threatening and repulsive.

Similarly at the ground-level void deck, the nightly prowling of illegally kept street or community cats confound the differentiated boundaries between inside and outside, clean and dirty, private and public, legal and illicit. There are, officially, sixty thousand street cats in Singapore.⁶⁴ In 2013, the HDB received 260 pet-related complaints, of which 150 were cat related. Since September, 1978, HDB regulates what it calls 'HDB-approved' pets, which include smaller dog breeds, birds, hamsters and rabbits.⁶⁵ Cats have been excluded from the approved list because they are deemed ungovernable: 'It does not follow the grid system of the city. It does not walk on a leash and cannot be trained. It is unpredictable, nocturnal, transgressive.'⁶⁶

Pets are supposed to be contained within a household, where they have a proper place. The dog, which is allowed in the HDB flat, is always accompanied and restrained when it moves

Figure 12. An illegal cat roaming a HDB void deck, 2016 (photograph by Tan Jing Min).



outside the flat. Conversely, it is difficult to keep cats indoors. The cat disobeys any kind of spatial demarcation. The HDB website states: 'when allowed to roam indiscriminately, they tend to shed fur and defecate or urinate in public areas, and also make caterwauling sounds, which can inconvenience your neighbours'.⁶⁷ As such, cats are banned as pets in public housing. Yet, in any block, illegally kept cats can be found resting around staircase landings, or strolling nonchalantly along the corridors and void decks (Fig. 12).

Like the hoard, the cat not only transgresses spatial limits, it is also regarded as a risk, a vector of contagion that may pollute the environment in its ability to carry something improper into the flat:

... 'putting the cat out at night' signals incomplete containment in the home, only a partial domestication, even though cats may be cosmetically modified to fit conceptions of the homely and domestic. Similarly, the cat-flap is a breach in the domestic boundary, and cats bringing mice or birds into the home may still be seen as pollu-

ters of domestic space. In this respect, pet cats are transgressive, breaking the boundary between nature and culture.⁶⁸

Considering that the void deck historically was installed to minimise contagion by the city's negative aspects, the perennial presence of cats in this space appears to be a mildly annoying breach. However, this annoyance reveals something particular about the spatiality of the void deck. The situation of cats loitering in the void deck—cats whose owners cannot be identified—exemplifies the ambiguous private-public boundaries that occupants regard and behave within on the void deck. The void deck's completely porous and open edges are contradictorily matched by its exact mapping of the residential units' structural grid: one gesturing to unregulated access; the other a physical reminder of every unit's fiercely guarded privacy. It is a space that feels familiar and alienating at the same time. This spatial ambiguity gives anonymity to the stealthy cat owners, who are also assuaged that their cats are roaming not far from home.

At night, cats congregate in numbers at the edges of the void deck, meowing until their feeder arrives with their food. On reaching maturity at five months, if not sterilised, a cat is liable to mate and produce offspring. But, perhaps more alarmingly, the cat 'has sex very loudly and uses its sexuality "irresponsibly", reproducing out of control'.⁶⁹ Often, these comings-and-goings happen within direct view of, or at, the void deck. The street cat produces an affective space of smells and sounds, which, like the animal, cannot be properly contained within or covered up, particularly in the open configuration of the void deck. As a space that is contig-

uous with the exterior environment surrounding the block, the void deck attracts because it is unrestricted yet provides shelter and also, in the cats' case, food.

Yet, not surprisingly, the cat appeals to those sympathetic to its 'streetwise and sensuous liberty'.⁷⁰ The free-ranging cat colony in the void deck is inevitably linked to the presence of a volunteer feeder who comes nightly to feed the cats. Drawing from conversations and her own relationship with the Singaporean feline network, the artist, critic and street-cat enthusiast Lucy Davis argues that there is an obvious gender bias pervading volunteer cat-feeders. Many of these 'nocturnal cat-feeders' are women who are usually 'single, divorced, gay, childless, or with children moved away',⁷¹ thus departing from the normative mother/wife profile indicated for public housing tenancy. These 'cat-women' are not necessarily residents of the same block. Some drive to the cat-feeding spot nightly with a bag of cat food in their car boot. Others come from neighbouring blocks. There are also cats belonging to residents who similarly roam the corridors and void decks. Although there is a high degree of tolerance for street cats congregating at the edges of the housing block for their nightly feed, there are invariably complaints regarding threats to hygiene. There have also been several recurrent cases of cats thrown from a height and subsequently found dead at the fringes of the void deck which have also caused much distress.⁷² These occurrences may be attributed to the ban on cats in flats and animal abusers taking advantage of this rule.

The cat (alive or dead) at the void deck is a situation that evokes sympathy, affection, love, disgust, loathing or anguish. These different affects correlate to equally different perceptions of the void deck as public, collective, private or domestic space, as well as what should or should not happen there, and who has rights to such an open and undefined space. The cat's affective and embodied environment overlays and disrupts the void deck's anonymity. The presence of the cats causes residents to notice, and, for some, to worry about the limits of their property.

The cat's body, not unlike other bodies prohibited in the void deck—gamblers, smokers and lovers—upsets the order and propriety of this open space. It provokes petty offences by unlikely groups of people: the nocturnal cat-women who provide food, the young family with a sterilised but unsanctioned pet cat, the eccentric woman who harbours stray cats in her flat. It sometimes also incites tragic and abusive acts of violence such as the spate of cats found dead on the apron of the void deck, seemingly thrown from the upper floor. Through the cat situation, the void deck might be seen as a corrupting site, but at the same time, the void deck also operates like a public space in its fullest sense: exposed to risk, chance, accident and event. The cat situation returns something primal, affective and visceral to the open space of the void deck.

Conclusion

I have used the two situations of cats and hoarding to argue for a different kind of perception and discourse—one that is affective rather than objective

—to reimagine and discuss the public spaces of the public housing block. I suggested that public housing's normative architectural discourse has sought to confine the potentialities of these two spaces when in fact their formal geometries, locational circumstances and proximities to the domestic units raise other kinds of possibilities and agencies. The paper reappraised the architectural histories of the void deck and the corridor in order to reveal slip-pages in the ways these two spaces have operated as compared to how they have been planned and discussed. It concluded with a more detailed examination of the two domestic situations, specifically in terms of their spatial relationships with the void deck and the corridor.

Ultimately, consideration of these marginalised yet critical domestic situations does not purport to give agency or make claims for planned resistance on the part of its subjects. Instead the aim of this paper is to use an affective situation to reimagine the shape of discourse on public space in public housing. In time, such discourse may perhaps influence the rethinking of public space's roles and usages in public housing's ongoing renewal programmes. The paper has attempted to shift the architectural discourse of such spaces from that of overwhelmingly one-sided state-controlled narratives and evidence to encompass more agents and protagonists, more complexities and situations, all of which are entangled within and with domesticity's excess. Through the void deck and the common corridor it suggests that public housing's public spaces can, despite strict building and social regulations, remain fluid and myriad in their spontaneous constituencies and constructions.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their incisive and constructive comments.

ORCID

Lilian Chee  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1738-1941>

Notes and references

1. 'Plight of "homeless" woman in Bedok captures netizens' attention', 8th January, 2013: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/plight-of--homeless--woman-in-bedok-captures-attention-of-netizens-153857867.html> [accessed 10/02/16].
2. Stephen Cairns, et al., 'Singapore's Void Decks', in *Public Space in Urban Asia*, William S.W. Lim, ed. (Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2014), pp. 80–89.
3. Georges Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2013), pp. 5–6.
4. Eunice Seng, 'Habitation and the Invention of a Nation, Singapore 1936–1979' (PhD in Architecture, Columbia University, 2015).
5. *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, Jonathan Hill, ed. (Abingdon, Routledge, 1998); Karen Burns, 'The Architect and the User properties', *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary*, Katerina Ruedi, Sarah Wigglesworth, Duncan McCorquodale, eds (London, Black Dog Publishing, 1996), p. 73; *Architecture and Authorship*, Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner, Rolf Hughes (London, Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2007).
6. Kimberly E. Zarecor, 'Architecture in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union', in *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture, 1960–2010*, Elie G. Haddad, David Rifkind, eds (Farnham, Ashgate/Gower, 2014), pp. 255–74.

7. Ada Louise Huxtable, 'Russian Engineers Take on Problem of Mass Housing', *Chicago Tribune* (19th October, 1967): <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1967/10/19/page/10/article/russian-engineers-take-on-problem-of-mass-housing> [accessed 30/03/17].
8. Miles Glendinning, 'From European Welfare State to Asian Capitalism: The Transformation of "British Public Housing" in Hong Kong and Singapore', in *Architecture and the Welfare State*, Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, Dirk van den Heuvel, eds (London, Routledge, 2015), pp. 299–320.
9. Beng Huat Chua, 'Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 15, no. 1 (1st March, 1991), pp. 24–41; doi:10.1111/j.1468-2427.1991.tb00681.x.
10. Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965–2000* (Singapore, Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), p. 117.
11. Chua argues that stake-holding in housing is a two-way situation which gives the state political legitimacy and the citizen a stake in the nation: see Beng Huat Chua, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (London, New York, Routledge, 1997).
12. Christopher Tremewan, 'Public Housing: The Working Class Barracks', in *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (London, St Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 45–73.
13. Beng Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London, New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 136.
14. Housing and Development Board, 'Eligibility to Buy New HDB Flat', *HDB InfoWEB*, (15th September, 2015): <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/residential/buying-a-flat/new/hdb-flat> [accessed 20/02/16].
15. C.L. Tai, *Housing and High-Rise Living: A Study of Singapore's Public Housing* (Singapore, Chopmen, 1988), p. 114: cited in *Singapore: A Developmental City State*, Martin Perry, Lily Kong, Brenda S. A. Yeoh (Chichester, New York, Wiley, 1997), p. 246.
16. . B. H. Chua, *Communitarian Ideology*, op. cit., p. 129.
17. Robbie B H Goh, 'Things to a Void: Utopian Discourse, Communitarity and Constructed Interstices in Singapore Public Housing', in *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text*, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, Robbie B. H. Goh, eds (Singapore, World Scientific, 2003), p. 64.
18. M. Perry, L. Kong, B. Yeoh, *Singapore*, op. cit., p. 6.
19. Thai Ker Liu, 'Design for Better Living Conditions', in *Public Housing in Singapore—A Multi-Disciplinary Study*, S.H.K. Yeh, ed. (Singapore, Singapore University Press and HDB, 1975), p. 118.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
21. Le Corbusier, *Precisions. On the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1991), p. 36 (emphasis in the original text).
22. T. K. Liu, 'Design for Better Living Conditions', op. cit., p. 117.
23. Jane M. Jacobs, 'Panel Discussion "The Only Way Is Up"' (National Library Singapore, 6th November, 2015).
24. T. K. Liu, 'Design for Better Living Conditions', op. cit. and 'Overview', in *Housing a Nation: Twenty-Five Years of Public Housing in Singapore*, A.K. Wong, S.H.K. Yeh, eds (Singapore, Maruzen Asia, 1985), pp. 1–29.
25. Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), p. 30.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
28. *Ibid.* (emphasis mine).
29. C. Ingraham, *Architecture*, op. cit., p. 30.
30. Hsien Loong Lee, Speech to Parliament on Reading of Penal Code (Amendment) Bill; 22nd October, 2007.
31. C. Ingraham, *Architecture*, op. cit., p. 42.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

33. From the Singaporean award-winning poet and author Alfian Sa'at's personal blog, which is no longer open to public viewing.
34. For the discourse on miasma and tropical architecture, see Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience*, 1st edition (London, Routledge, 2016).
35. SIT 1947 census cited in *50,000 Up: Homes for the People*, HDB (Singapore, Housing Development Board, 1966), p. 20.
36. Report of Survey: Colony of Singapore Masterplan (Singapore, Government Print Office, 1958; 1955).
37. *50,000 Up*, HDB, *op. cit.*, p. 24. All statistics for this period were obtained from here.
38. For an argument on the politicised nature of open space in public housing, see Kin-Kit Loh, 'Domestic (ated) Landscapes: Contesting the Open Spaces of Public Housing in Singapore' (Master of Architecture Dissertation, National University of Singapore, 2014).
39. Alvin Tan, 'Community Heritage Series III: Void Decks', ebook (Singapore, National Heritage Board and National Archives of Singapore, 2013), p. 3.
40. Giok Ling Ooi, Thomas T.W. Tan, 'The Social Significance of Public Spaces in *Public Housing Estates*', in *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, Beng Huat Chua, Norman Edwards, eds (Singapore, NUS Press, 1992), p. 73.
41. Annual Report (Singapore, Housing and Development Board, 1977), p. 24.
42. 'Park Road Redevelopment', *SIA Journal*, no. 28–29 (October, 1968), pp. 9–19.
43. 'Multi-Use Buildings: First Goes up in Chinatown', *The Straits Times* (21st April, 1967): <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19670421-1.2.24.aspx>.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Thai Ker Liu, 'Void Decks', in *Housing a Nation*, *op. cit.*, cited by Stephen Cairns, *et al.*, 'Singapore's Void Decks', *Public Space in Urban Asia*, William Lim, ed. (Singapore, Hackensack NJ, New York, World Scientific, 2014), p. 84.
46. G. L. Ooi, T. T. W. Tan, 'The Social Significance of Public Spaces', *op. cit.*, p. 80.
47. S. Cairns, *et al.*, 'Singapore's Void Decks', *op. cit.*, p. 82.
48. The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) (1927–59) was the British Government's colonial housing agency, and a precursor to the Housing Development Board. It built the Tiong Bahru housing estate which is now being conserved. It constructed 23,000 flats during its tenure, and initiated the first HDB satellite town, Queenstown, which was eventually completed by the HDB.
49. E. Seng, 'Habitation and the Invention of a Nation', *op. cit.*, pp. 223–24.
50. T. K. Liu, 'Design for Better Living Conditions', *op. cit.*, p. 137.
51. E. Seng, 'Habitation and the Invention of a Nation', *op. cit.*, p. 227.
52. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trsl. (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), p. 195.
53. Rizal Hassan, 'Some Sociological Implications of Public Housing in Singapore', *South-East Asian Journal of Sociology*, 2 (1969), pp. 23–26; 'Social and Psychological Implications of High Population Density', *University of Singapore, Department of Sociology Working Paper*, no. 47 (1975).
54. Foreign workers using the Little India void decks caused concern by littering and fighting after being drunk. Eventually, gates were installed to privatise the void deck in this area. See 'Little India Residents' Woes', *Asia One* [accessed 10/04/16]: <http://news.asiaone.com/print/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110620-285089.html>. Recent issues include allegations of possible ghettoism at the void deck

- when non-Singaporean residents posted notices for gatherings. This eventually led to an enforced quota of non-Singaporean residents in HDB blocks. See 'Quota for HDB Subletting to Foreigners: 8% Cent for Neighbourhoods, 11% for Blocks, Singapore News & Top Stories - *The Straits Times*'; *The Straits Times* [accessed 10/04/16]: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/quota-for-hdb-subletting-to-foreigners-8-cent-for-neighbourhoods-11-for-blocks>.
55. C. Ingraham, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
 56. 'Man, 76, Found Dead in Trash-Filled Flat', *Asia One* [accessed 22/03/16]; <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120815-365468.html>.
 57. 'Woman's 20-Year Hoarding Habit Irritates Neighbours', *Asia One* [accessed 22/03/16]; <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/womans-20-year-hoarding-habit-irritates-neighbours-0>.
 58. C. Ingraham, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
 59. Sylvia Lavin, 'Architecture in Extremis', *Log The Absurd*, no. 22 (Spring/Summer, 2011), pp. 51–61.
 60. Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 1999), p. 6; cited by Neil Maycroft, 'Not Moving Things along: Hoarding, Clutter and Other Ambiguous Matter', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 8, no. 6 (November, 2009), p. 363; doi:10.1002/cb.298.
 61. N. Maycroft, 'Not Moving Things along', *op. cit.*, p. 358.
 62. *Ibid.*
 63. S. Lavin, 'Architecture in Extremis', *op. cit.*, p. 59.
 64. 'Frequently Asked Questions I Cat Welfare Society' [accessed 23/03/16]; <http://www.catwelfare.org/faq>.
 65. 'Keeping Pets I HDB InfoWEB' [accessed 22/03/16]; <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/community/neighbourliness/being-a-good-neighbour/keeping-pets>.
 66. Lucy Davis, 'Zones of Contagion: The Singapore Body Politic and the Body of the Street-Cat', in *Considering Animals: Contemporary Studies in Human-Animal Relations*, Carol Freeman, Elizabeth Leane, Yvette Watt, eds (Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), p. 194.
 67. 'Keeping Pets I HDB InfoWEB', *op. cit.*
 68. Huw Griffiths, Ingrid Poulter, David Sibley, 'Feral Cats in the City', in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 61.
 69. L. Davis, 'Zones of Contagion', *op. cit.*, p. 194.
 70. Paul Rae, 'Cat's Entertainment: Feline Performance in the Lion City', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 51, no. 1 (2007), p. 129.
 71. L. Davis, 'Zones of Contagion', *op. cit.*, p. 189.
 72. hermesauto, 'Another cat found dead at foot of Yishun block; eighth cat death in six weeks', *The Straits Times* (30th October, 2015) [accessed 15/02/16]; <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/another-cat-found-dead-at-foot-of-yishun-block-eighth-cat-death-in-six-weeks>.



The paradox of excess: Kim Swoo-geun's *Môt* and his economical architecture

Melany Sun-Min Park

To cite this article: Melany Sun-Min Park (2017) The paradox of excess: Kim Swoo-geun's *Môt* and his economical architecture, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 1021-1040, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1362661](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362661)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362661>



Published online: 21 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 408



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The paradox of excess: Kim Swoo-geun's *Môt* and his economical architecture

Melany Sun-Min Park

Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, USA
(Author's e-mail address: sunminmelanypark@g.harvard.edu)

The South Korean architect Kim Swoo-geun (1931–1986) was patronised by *chaebol* (family-run conglomerates) and other enterprises that defined the ways in which the post-war nation's cultural and political scene operated. Yet Kim's private commissions for his distinguished clientele have not been studied in any detail, especially their relationship to state-level politics. How did Kim's domestic projects such as Ch'angamjang (1974) wrestle with the mandate of President Park Chung-hee's Fourth Republic that attempted to bridle the expression of familial wealth, down to their housing? In legally identifying a 'luxury house' category, this sumptuary provision failed to capture what were, in effect, Kim's economical approaches towards building. In tethering the qualitative term 'luxury' to a quantitative operation, the mensuration of the floor area, the bureaucratic procedure problematically foresaw domestic architecture—and the profession responsible for its construction—as calculable and regimented. Kim's improvisation of economical architecture revealed how the Korean notion of *môt*, considered here as 'contained excess', ultimately reproduced its own paradox. The culturally acceptable nuance of excess was made manifest precisely at the moment when architecture confronted the mechanisms of state control sustaining its profession.

Nowadays, a person who lives in a big house is dubbed a renegade.¹

Kim Swoo-geun

Introduction

In the 1984 cultural magazine, *Munhwa-wa Konggan*, Kim Swoo-geun reflected on the Korean concept of *môt* that characterised his post-war projects as much as it characterised commentary on the architect's *persona*. Kim wrote: 'Môt is the extra cloth in a dress that makes it rustle on the ground without dragging, the surplus of rice in the bowl intended to honor a guest, or the open and enclosed

area of *maru* in domestic Korean architecture'.² At times associated with the word *yôyu*, meaning 'white margin, ease of surplus, or possible reserve', this aesthetic sensibility was underscored by a disclaimer that excess was acceptable so long as this accumulation was shared with others rather than hoarded for individual use.³ *Môt* ultimately presented an enlightened alternative to the notion of *t'arak* or excess: meaning decadence, while evoking self-indulgence and decay. Kim's observation of this knotty concept followed his encounter with Choi Sun-u, the Director of the Central National Museum, who impressed upon Kim that *môt* did not

necessarily fall under the purview of formal or institutionalised art practices. Instead, lacking an adequate translation in Japanese or any Western language, the modern inflection of *môt* considered it an everyday practice of dignity, grace and refinement that could be cultivated and mastered yet was inherent to 'the spirit of Kim's race—the Koreans'.⁴

Aligned with the nationalistic faith in the Korean capacity to exercise aesthetic restraint and material modesty, on 5th January, 1970, President Park Chung-hee ordered the demolition of *hohwajut'aek*, luxury houses belonging to and associated with upper-tier public servants, state-owned enterprises and ruling party officials.⁵ This mandate for clamping down on the country's growing collection of *hohwajut'aek*, numbering over 300 according to official accounts, bore upon architects and their private clients, who struggled to escape the state's strategy for controlling their excessive consumption. Park set out this nationwide instruction against the backdrop of the global oil crisis of 1973 brought on by the strained relations between the Arab members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the United States. This worrying event, which placed restrictions on luxury consumption across the globe, prompted a parsimonious reaction that was not new within the national context. Park's hostile attitude to excessive expenditure and the corresponding judicial limitations reflected the sense of distaste that his predecessor, the Harvard- and Princeton-educated Americanophile Syngman Rhee, exhibited towards conspicuous spending habits.

In 1957, Rhee's office had passed the velvet limitation law (*pelbet otgam chehan nyŏng*), a doctrine

that restricted how much of this sumptuous material could be acquired and worn: one velvet outfit, per person, per year. This pre-emptive restriction was an attempt to guard against the 'moral danger' that could surface 'in the gap between the extravagance of velvet clothing and the devastating scarcity that characterized the immediate postwar years'.⁶ The view that the moral values of an individual could be calibrated against her or his private expenditure reflected how ethics, law and material accumulation were brought together in the developmental climate of a recently established Republic.⁷ An individual who managed to control their spending in the face of goods newly introduced from the West—that is, American, European, or Japanese, or some combination of the three—was thought to constitute a moral citizen who demonstrably abided by the laws of the state.⁸

If Rhee had thus attempted to fix a quantifiable benchmark for limiting public access to readily available merchandise, Park faced a considerably more complex quandary when attempting a similar restriction on a category of housing, thus tampering with the admissible bounds of material ownership. His initial attempt, the 'one-generation, one-residence' rule, known as '*il-sedae il-chut'aek*', exempted a household with one family living in a single house from the capital gains tax associated with this asset.⁹ This statute encouraged each nuclear family to maintain and invest in only one domicile, restricting its residence to a single site. Extending such guidelines for curbing excessive lifestyles, when it came to assigning and enforcing the category of a 'luxury house', Park's government envisaged that the qualitative concept of luxury could be made

quantifiable in the guise of dimensionality: the total floor area of the house. Yet, as this paper will reveal, the category of 'luxury dwellings' did not neatly conform to the quantitative or qualitative indices intended to define them: the fixed size of the plan or the assumed cachet of the house and its authorship. In other words, the very possibility of *contained* excess that a 'luxury house' encountered legally and ran up against practically, produced its own paradox. Moreover, if we consider *môt* as a self-reflexive attitude geared toward making excess innocuous, how do we calibrate the concept against Kim's designs and practice principles?

This paper examines Kim's model of practice—from the scale of an individual house design to his professional operations—for a different language of economic value, what I define as an emotional economy complicated by trust, friendship and his enterprising spirit. Kim's judicious use of materials and labour, combined with his relational skills, characterised the shrewd level of interpersonal politics post-war Korean architects had to leverage in order to endorse or subvert parsimonious practices, wittingly or otherwise. As was the case when subversion proved successful, 'luxury houses' could not be developed in accordance with the qualifiers referred to above, as demonstrated by Ch'angamjang, Kim's multi-storey dwelling noted for its unique location on top of a striking boulder on Mount Bukhan in Seoul (Fig. 1). The rocky site on which this house sits has inevitably contributed to a reductionist reading by architectural historians and in popular discourse: that its design was possibly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water. I shall not pursue this point here,¹⁰ but it nonetheless reflects

what the architectural historian Alain Delissen has indicated: a tendency to popularise his thoughts 'stamped Kim's own texts, making his intellectual genealogy uncertain to draw', a *carte blanche* for making loose assumptions about Korean modern architecture and its one-way influence from the West or Japan.¹¹ More commonly, scholarship with a nationalistic bent has generalised Kim's *oeuvre* within debates surrounding national identity, patri-mony and 'Korean-ness'.¹²

Architectural scholars have failed to consider Kim and his work alongside the reputable wealthy patrons who provided the context for his creativity. *Hohwajut'aek* indeed helped embed the image of the architect in this period, since these commissions typically were given to a few established individuals, including Kim's contemporaries Ahn Yeong-bae and the husband-and-wife duo Won Chung-soo and Chi Soon. Yet, leaving 'prestige' aside, hagiographic historical narratives have idolised Kim as the pioneer of Korea's post-war architecture.¹³ As the architectural historian Pai Hyung-min put it: 'It would not be an overstatement to say that even up to the late 1990s, Kim Swoo-geun was the only architect in Korea to have a public face. Unlike poets and artists, whose portraits were often part of the public imagination, he was alone as an architect with a public persona' (Fig. 2). This was in part, generated by Kim himself, who encouraged the public to celebrate his reputation alongside the monumental architecture he constructed.¹⁴ Central to the dissemination of Kim's public profile, I argue, is the role his luxury-house commissions played in both promoting and unsettling the image of prestige he assumed.

Figure 1. Ch'angamjang
 (1974),
 P'yŏngch'angdong,
 Seoul (source: Kim Swoo
 Geun Foundation).



At the margins

The Korea Institute of Architects points out that the 1970s was marked by the proliferation of properties whose floor areas measured beyond seventy *pyong* (roughly 2,490 square feet).¹⁵ It was precisely

properties of this size, defined by the state as 'luxury housing', that dominated the pages of South Korea's authoritative architectural publications at the time: *Konggan* [SPACE] and *Kŏnch'ukka* [The Architect].¹⁶ In circumscribing the

area of the floor plan within the legal limit, the sumptuary law tried to constrain further development of this kind of housing which had mushroomed during the period—the designs of which, ironically, served as aspirational models of dwelling for *sōmin*, the rank and file.

The image of such residential architecture as the product of excessive personal spending was amplified by its typological lineage that harked back to, and provided an ongoing reference point for, the public imaginary that put wealthy citizens into a separate category. Nearly two decades later, these free-standing houses had evolved into multi-family types known as *hohwabilla*, luxury villas, whose *hohwasach'isōng* or extravagance, was manifested in furnishings such as 'imported bathtubs, 10,000USD chandeliers, 10,000USD sinks, Italian marble flooring that cost 500USD per *pyong*': these household goods represented a kind of opulence which the '*sōmin* cannot possibly imagine'.¹⁷ Consisting of three to twenty households, the multi-dwelling iteration of luxury houses, each measuring 80 to 100 *pyong* in floor area, sprouted up in Seoul's affluent neighbourhoods located both North and South of the Hangang River: P'yōngch'angdong, Ch'ōngdamdong, Pangbaedong, Yangjaedong, Karaktong, Kodōktong, Sangiltong—addresses which the capital city's well-heeled inhabitants continue to call home.¹⁸

Meanwhile, ordinary Korean citizens during this period were inundated by President Park's New Village Movement or *Saemaul Undong*, a government campaign that emblematically removed the thatched straw roofs common in South Korea's countryside and replaced them with slate tiles



Figure 2. Portrait of Kim Swoo-geun (source: Kim Swoo Geun Foundation).

painted in striking red or blue, symbols of progress that were often too structurally heavy for the mud walls supporting them. The weight of modernity, in some cases, was too heavy to bear. In a rather droll narrative, Kim recorded another packaged token of progress, an egregious practice of excess far removed from the gracious principles of *môt*, when he bemoaned the quality of tissue paper in 1970s Korea:

Today, in our country, good quality tissue is produced and it can be seen in the markets. The kind of packaging that we get is adequate and the different colours give us pleasure. But from that pretty tissue-box, tissue that should be

pulled out one piece at a time comes out connected, making us use much more than is needed on multiple occasions. Whether this occurs due to the manufacturer's desires to increase our usage, or results from our inadequate production techniques, this [tissue manufacture] should constitute one of our standards [for measuring the stage of our civilisation]. Would it be too much to ask then that 'our modernizing work should begin in the bathroom'?¹⁹

The two ends of the spectrum, being too wealthy (well-presented externally) or too poor (inadequately manufactured), bookended the uneven development—between *dodukchon*, 'robber's towns', brimming with luxury houses and *binmingul*, 'ghettos', filled with the unsavoury addresses of the working class—that the Park government was eager to reduce (Fig. 3).

This top-down approach, to titrate the balance between excess and scarcity, came just as the state had begun to grapple with the wealth it had accumulated. By 1977, South Korea's export industry, driven primarily by *chaebol* or family-owned corporations, was valued at 10 billion USD.²⁰ President Park's fervent support of *chaebol* was central to achieving the state's goal of commanding and controlling national prosperity. The Housing Construction Act [*Jutaek Geonseol Chokin Beop*], passed in 1977, 'sought to regulate all matters concerning fund-raising and the use of funds, as well as the production and supply of materials for the housing industry'.²¹ This micro-management style that the state exercised over the building industry was inevitable in a political climate that sought to link the public sector with private businesses, predominantly

with the mega-corporations, with which Park, during his initial entry into power in the 1960s, resisted colluding, in the light of their 'rent-seeking' manoeuvres. This schematising tactic was marked by the *chaebol*'s desires to grow their wealth exponentially at the cost of the rest of the country.²² Park's change of mind came about following a realisation that to achieve the kinds of 'economies of scale' he envisioned for the new authoritarian regime created in 1972, he could no longer rely on the small- and medium-sized enterprises. To this end, the mega-conglomerates Park had previously tried to stand up against were 'the only actors capable of participating in large-scale infrastructure projects and mass-producing manufactured goods for export'.²³

The proliferation of domestic commissions with informal attributions such as 'CEO XX's Residence' or 'Executive XX's Residence' signalled the ever-expanding private wealth of corporate individuals guaranteed heavily, in part, by state sponsorship. Yet in an ironic pairing of circumstances, it was the owners of these companies who had, beginning in the 1960s, commissioned and could continue to afford the so-called luxury houses whose development the state was trying to restrain.²⁴ If South Korea witnessed the burgeoning growth of corporate power in the mid-1960s, it also saw the parallel emergence of luxury houses (still so described) funded by their executives, a symbiosis Kim's growing number of residential projects for his distinguished clientele documented.²⁵ Notably, Gu In-hoe, the founder of the LG Group, commissioned Kim to work on the 'Residence for President K', a project completed in 1966 when LG was well



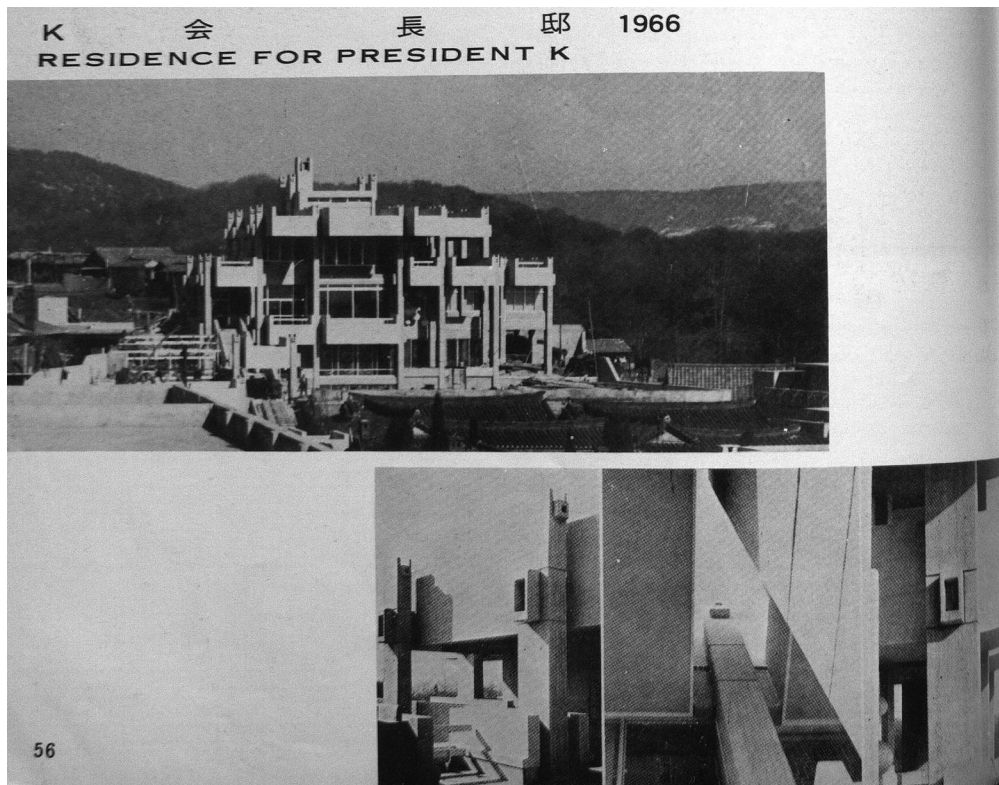
Figure 3. *Dodukchon* ('Robbers' Towns') lined with *Hohwajut'aek* (luxury houses), 1977 (source: National Archives of Korea).

underway to establishing Korea's first privatised oil company (Fig. 4).

In the following years, Kim's insertion into this state-corporate matrix unfolded in multifaceted ways. In 1966, the forerunner of SPACE Group, the Kim Swoo-Geun Architectural Design Office, merged with the Korea Engineering Consultant Corporation (KECC), a state-run consultancy in which

the young architect had been elected as Vice-President the prior year, somewhat early, at the age of 37. The architect's role was no longer limited exclusively to designing for the corporate sponsors of the statist machine, but became the direct interlocutor of the state economy. As the established academican-architect Chung In-guk observed in 1970, to be involved in the political sphere was a sure

Figure 4. 'Residence for President K' (source: *SPACE*, April, 1968).



means for Korean architects to overcome what he saw as their technical competence and thus 'tradesmen' status. His advice paralleled architecture's recently minted professional systems and the expectations attending them: if the Korea Institute of Architects' inaugural licensing examinations of 1965 required architects fully to be in command of technical skills, there was also an implicit acknowl-

edgement that artistic prowess, in one form or another, would follow suit.

Urgent to elevating their social status was the need for architects to gain discursive agency within government institutions or social organisations, making it, in Chung's words, 'necessary to learn the talents of politicians'.²⁶ It was as if assimilating fluid political language emerged as equally vital as

clothing the technical with a less didactic—yet no less proficient—kind of creative flair of an artistic nature. That political parlance could be appropriated by its non-specialists, architects, resonated with the sensibilities of *môt* that could also be accomplished by laymen. This displayed *môt*'s darker side that was at odds with its more noble associations. Architecture's complicity with state politics evidenced this when the 'Residence for Mr. S' featured in the February, 1969, issue of Kim's magazine, *SPACE*, as a design attributed to KECC rather than to Kim as an individual (Fig. 5). If the state now encroached on the authorship of Kim's residential commission, its simultaneous patronage of the architect and the corporation, in the double guise of designer and political advocate, at once affirmed and elided the prestige associated with the architect and his prosperous sponsor.

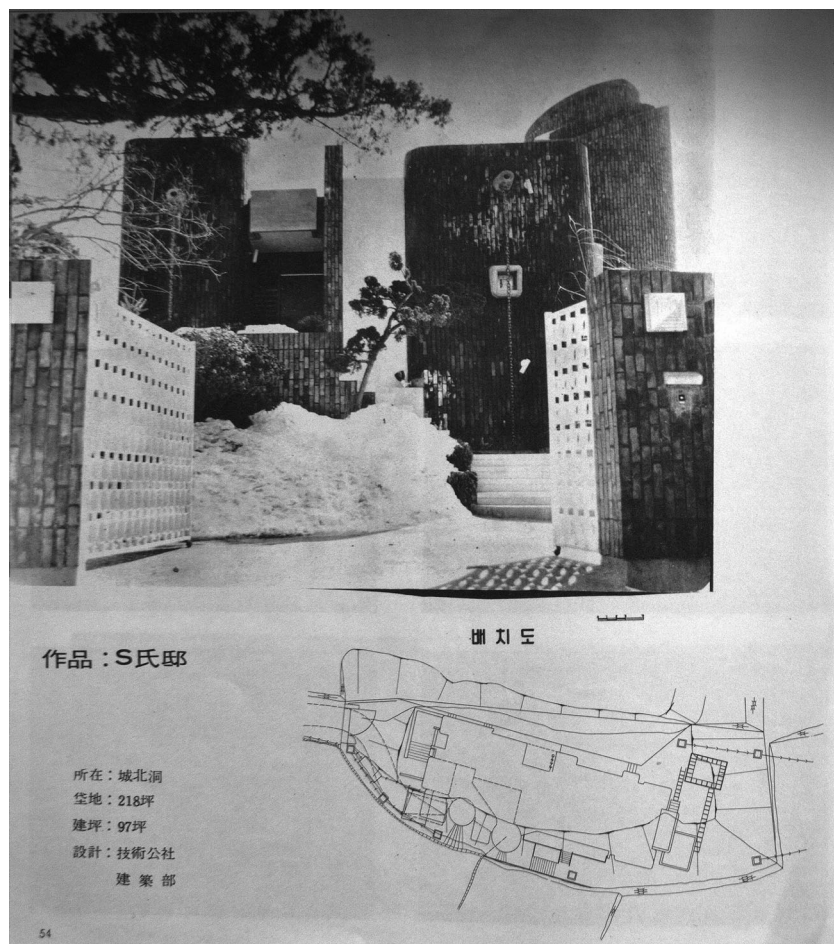
Benefitting from excess

Central to Kim's image-making project was the financial support which enabled his professional practice to be promoted in print and with built projects—that is, architecture's emergence as image and as practice. Kim's *SPACE* was published under the aegis of Seuk Jeong-sun, the director of Korea's Central Intelligence Agency and a board member of Hyundai Corporation, who established the 'A' Production Company in 1966, the year the first issue was circulated and the year his firm merged with the gargantuan state-run KECC. By the time Kim left the high-profile and civic position he held at KECC to set up his own practice, he was no stranger to the world of business

transactions with which architecture offices had to engage in order to maintain their livelihood.²⁷

The trajectory of Kim's office that followed highlighted the complications involved in exercising an economical approach to building in a political climate that expected architecture, like the other industries, to develop its activities beyond national boundaries. The Korea Institute of Architects observed that, starting in the mid-1970s, overseas architectural commissions and national investments in the building industry increased dramatically.²⁸ As part of the *SPACE* Group's expansion plan into the next decade, its eponymous magazine arm was sustained by a proportion of the initial fees from a project in Tehran for complexes of flats housing 6,000 households on desolate land near Mehrabad International Airport. Stretching for 1.2 miles if completed,²⁹ the Ekbatan Project would constitute Korea's first overseas commission on such a titanic scale. During the first meeting with the Tehran Redevelopment Company, Kim and his staff were asked to come up with a few ideas in just three days. After four all-night sessions in their makeshift studio (an hotel room), thirteen medium-sized panels were filled: the following night the contract was awarded. This commission in Iran precipitated the piecemeal construction of the *SPACE* Group building, with four floors above an underground level. Spanning three phases of construction, Kim witnessed the completion of his office building in April, 1977, six years after its foundations were laid (Fig. 6).³⁰ Using the word 'home' for it, the *SPACE* Group building is often romanticised in the accounts of some of its employees who witnessed its construction. In a meeting between Oh Ki-soo

Figure 5. 'Residence for Mr. S', designed by the Korea Engineering Consultant Corporation (source: *SPACE*, February, 1969).



(the project architect for Ch'angamjang) and his colleagues in 1979, Oh reminisced: 'Our minds vacillated on a daily basis... We would be laying

the brick one morning and then our ideas would change a moment after ... We mulled over how to create the desired kind of ambience (*punwigi*),



Figure 6. SPACE Group headquarters, Seoul (source: Kim Swoo Geun Foundation).



Figure 7. Interior of SPACE Group headquarters (source: Kim Swoo Geun Foundation).

how to make the ceiling lower ... It was as if every employee who was exposed to the work poured their heart into the project, and when this did not suffice, we took to it again.³¹

In the summer of 1972, however, as recalled by a long-serving employee, U Si-yong, the company's funds had been decimated and it could not even afford to install the front doors to the new office extension. In parallel, the Iranian project fell through and there had been a growing number of unnecessary managerial positions.³² The office's expansion was halted, and staff moved back to their old atelier space located in the Dongshin Building in An'guk-dong, with a few staff

taking turns to man the temporary plywood entrance of the SPACE headquarters at night. Contributing to this *ad hoc* approach to the building, each architect-employee was responsible for plastering *pabyeokdol* (recycled red brick) with white cement mortar in the areas directly above their drawing boards (Fig. 7).³³ In becoming increasingly identified with a growing national economy, Kim's SPACE Group had thus, paradoxically, aligned itself with the expressions of parsimony that the state promoted.³⁴ And, if Kim had repeatedly pronounced that cultural abundance and economic expansion might not necessarily prove a fruitful union, he became the victim of his own critique

when his practice faced the forces of the global marketplace.³⁵

***Môt* of Ch'angamjang**

It was in this climate of worldwide austerity that Kim, in mid-career, was introduced by the advertising mogul Kim Seok-nyeon to General Yoon Eung-ryeol, a former *kamikaze* pilot and a commander in the Korean Air Force, who commissioned Kim to design his family's residence in 1973.³⁶ Located in P'yŏngch'angdong, a neighbourhood that South Korea's wealthy families continue to call home today, the surrounding site of Ch'angamjang was considered an outlaw area at that time and had witnessed the attack of North Korean insurgents only a few years earlier.³⁷ In 1968, a guerilla group with thirty-one members had attempted to kidnap President Park from his residence, the 'Blue House', located nearby on the foot of Mount Bukhan. This caused the Park government to sell the land at a modest price. General Yoon, confident that no enemy would revisit a scene of failure (a piece of wisdom reflecting his previous military experience), thus forged ahead with his bid to build the first house on the mountainous terrain.³⁸

To be sure, Ch'angamjang, by definition, was in the *hohwajut'aek* category. Its floor area of 98 *pyong* exceeded what the Korea Institute of Architects, following state regulations, identified as the standard for a luxury house at the time. Divided into multiple storeys, the floor layout conformed to the client's request to locate the master-bedroom wing at basement level, 'as far away as possible from the rest of his home'.³⁹ This parceling out of living areas and their circulatory

spaces, reminiscent of narrow Korean alleyways, reflects Kim's insistence that a visitor's spatial experience had to be guided, since 'experience in space without a sequence ... creates blurred memories. A drama seems only possible where there is a proper plot.'⁴⁰

The idea of surplus as controlled outcome is manifest spatially in the courtyard area fronting a house, known as *madang*: an empty outdoor area filling the void of the programmatic structures that make up Ch'angamjang. Borrowing from Korean traditional residences, this unique conception of exterior space 'does not represent the leftover space created by a building and its fence. Rather, the building and fence were the structural elements that brought forth *madang*. The *madang* exchanges open and closed spaces over and over, continuing endlessly.'⁴¹ *Madang* connotes a conscious making of space, as reflected in Kim's remark that spatial experience must be purposefully guided rather than left to occur by chance. Kim termed this principle 'negativism', an active design intervention required on the part of the architect, only to the point of understanding his limitations in curating and fully mastering the spaces.⁴² Like the coil of cavity left inside a labyrinth, that Kim's apprentice Tcho Yeong-mou drew to illustrate this principle (Fig. 8), Kim's design ethos called for a level of intervention that was equally as conscious of the capacity to control as of the ability to let go—a synchronised accomplishment. If *môt* could not find its correlation with a reasoned, and Western, aesthetic principle, the concept of 'negative space' was also resistant to rational planning methods and mechanisms of complete control. Instead, Kim's design philosophy

evoked a modulated level of interference that was concordant with the self-censoring attributes of *môt*, a rich and dense abstraction grappling with the material reality and the practices of design appropriate to it.

General Yoon recollected that when municipal authorities came to inspect the house, they quickly became tired of measuring the winding and scattered spaces, and eventually abandoned the task. In circumventing the rational calculation methods that the political regime wished to exercise, the authorities' failed direct attempt to measure the floor area was significant for the way space functions off a plan. Indeed, Kim expressed disdain at the state's inclination to downgrade architecture by such computable means. Kim was reacting against the state's authorised size for housing, whose numerical definition 'fluctuated day in, day out', an arbitrary figure which had reached forty *pyong* (1420 square feet) by 1978.⁴³ On July 22nd that year, Kim wrote in the newspaper *Donga ilbo* that the effort of the state to define and delimit the size of a house was the equivalent of 'defining a uniform size of clothing'.⁴⁴ He complained that, 'For a professor with a family of five and a collection of twenty to thirty thousand books ... a twenty- to thirty-*pyong* house will most definitely be inadequate', and that 'the house of an artist who is creating a large piece of artwork must differ in size from an ordinary dwelling. Hence, it would make sense if regulations or taxation were purely based on the living area, but to base them on the overall plan of the house is hugely flawed'.⁴⁵ Arguing for a more sensible approach to mensuration, Kim referred to the French law of 1969 or to

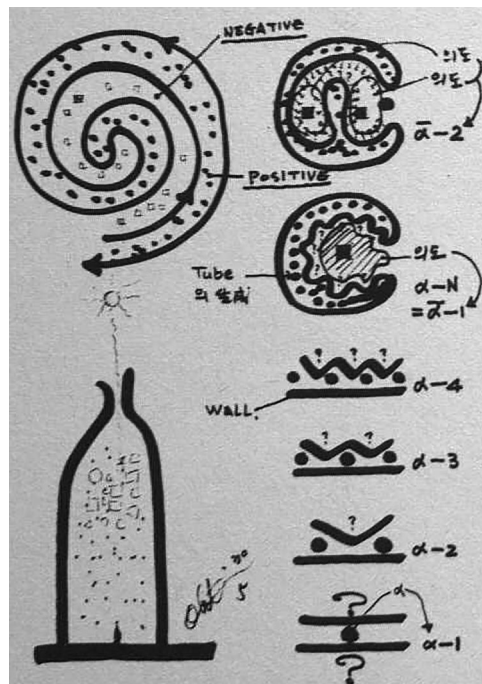
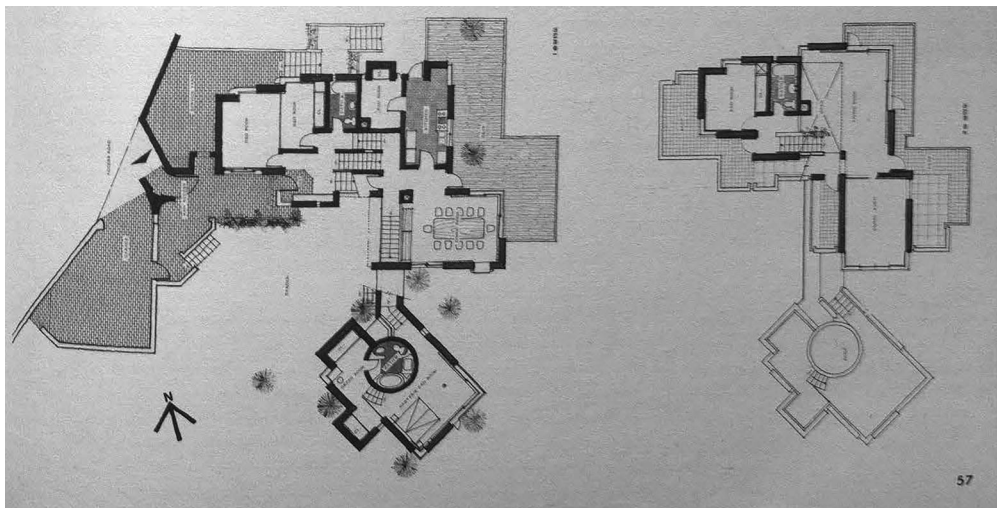


Figure 8. Tcho Yeong-mou's diagrams of 'Positive and Negative Space', top left (source: *SPACE*, June, 1975).

the *Union Internationale des Organismes Familiaux* (International Union of Family Organisations), which excluded from its measurements of 'living space' the depth of the wall, stairs, service ducts, storage areas, garage for a car, balcony, laundry area, and corridor—the non-livable spaces that the Korean way of measurement problematically included.⁴⁶

That the physical planning of Ch'angamjang did not easily accommodate the state's attempt to calculate wealth is revealing, only if indirectly, of Kim's own approach to economy (Fig. 9). He was highly

Figure 9. Plans, first and second floors, Ch'angamjang (source: *SPACE*, June, 1975).



pragmatic when it came to matters concerning cost, undoubtedly motivated by the level of responsibility (along with the 13,600 USD design fee) his clients entrusted to him.⁴⁷ Thus the project's most difficult—and enthralling—aspect was that 'the client left nearly everything about the construction of his home in our hands, and that included the purchasing of the building site'.⁴⁸ The site for Ch'angamjang was eventually selected 'for all its benefits', which included 'great rocks, pine trees, a crystal-clear stream flowing through it—and for the *reasonable price of the land*'.⁴⁹ The lowest, fifth-grade land on which Ch'angamjang was sited cost half the price of first-class land which, in 1970s South Korea, was priced at 45 USD per *pyong*. (And Kim apparently commended his clients for their discerning taste in making this low-grade choice.)⁵⁰

Kim's budget-conscious efforts are further illustrated in the materials that he procured. *Sammok* or cedar from Taiwan was used for the decked areas of the house. If Japanese was of the best quality, when compared to Canadian, Taiwanese or American timber, Taiwanese timber was used on the exterior, conceivably due to its lower price (Fig. 10).⁵¹ If 1970s South Korea was when, as General Yoon recollects, 'labour was inexpensive, whereas material was costly',⁵² the architect's thrifty outlook would have surely yielded 'the kind of complete trust' extended to Kim by his client, who was himself appreciative of frugal judgements in personal expenditure.⁵³

It is in line with this 'cost efficient' bent that, for the house's interior, Kim resorted to using recycled red brick, a material acquired at a cheaper rate



Figure 10. Cedar timber framework on the exterior of Ch'angamjang (source: the Author).

than its newly fabricated counterpart. The red brick, as Yoon and his wife recall, was sourced from the demolition of a Japanese colonial building near Hwashin Department Store, where they were able to purchase each piece at seven cents rather than at the market rate of thirty to fifty cents for a new brick.⁵⁴ In the same vein, Kim lined the inside of his SPACE Group building with recycled brick. His yet-to-be-completed headquarters featured immediately prior to Ch'angamjang and Seijang in the June, 1975, issue of *SPACE*, as if to record what the practice members would refer to as 'our home—the home of SPACE' alongside his contemporaneous residential works. It is in this provident spirit—expressed, this time, as a design rationale—that

Kim deployed *jeondol* (grey brick) for the façade of the office building: 'excessive decoration was avoided so that the building materials could reveal their own colour and texture', an aesthetic outcome that was as equally premeditated as the economic justification that underscored his choice of material.⁵⁵ If *môt* begs a self-censoring of excess, it is at this precise moment that we see the guiding principle for material judgement complementing a modernist aesthetic that strips, abstracts and reduces.

Allied to Kim's economical spirit, when choosing the kind of brick that was to be used alongside glazed quarry tiles in constructing the tiered terraces of the Daewoo Arcade project (completed in the

same year as *Konggansaok*), Kim indicated his partiality for the slightly flawed version of the masonry product. This preference was, on first consideration, aesthetically driven: 'a well-fired brick is too lackluster so that it doesn't have any quality to it. If we create deeper joints with the faulty brick, it will look much better', argued Kim.⁵⁶ His aesthetic impulse notwithstanding, Kim's decision nevertheless chimed with a pragmatic impetus, when he dispatched one of his protégés, Kim Chin-hwan, to a brick factory in Byeokje located North of Seoul. The management of the brick factory willingly sold the bricks to Kim's employee at a reduced price, as batches that did not meet quality standards and had attracted no other buyers. In addition, the architecture practice in the centre of Seoul later ordered more faulty bricks from this factory in mass quantities, which pleased both the manufacturer of the masonry and the building contractors. Thus Kim's desire to purchase and use such flawed (rather than new) bricks for the Arcade project reflected his foresight that 'there will come a day when the cost of labour will be so high that it will be difficult to build in brick', a *sui generis* material, which 'one can hold with one hand and is therefore of a human scale'.⁵⁷

Kim's friend, Lee Jong-bok, remarked, 'whether or not Kim Swoo-geun had money, he was always a romantic'.⁵⁸ The Chairman of the Kim Swoo-geun Foundation, Lee Kyung-sung, described him as a 'businessman who knew about money', a figure who could 'coax the tycoons of the time'—a pointed characterisation of Kim given his reputation of associating with the movers and shakers of the political and cultural scene in Korea.⁵⁹ Yet Kim's

tactful approach to his work was not driven exclusively by his diplomatic skills, but by the way that he managed to (and was sometimes forced to) be economical in his architectural production, a telltale indication that the SPACE Group remained tied to the flux of national and global circulation of capital.⁶⁰ Paradoxically, the state had tried to curtail visible demonstrations of private wealth when it emerged materially and especially when manifested at the scale of a house. In improvising an economical architecture, Kim's practice reflected how acceptable nuances of excess—the cultural trope of *môt*—were made manifest precisely at the moment of confrontation with the enforced control of excess, a manifestation of the very state mechanism that supported the nascent profession. If *môt* perpetuated the myth that excess could be contained voluntarily, it was indicative of how rights to aesthetic decisions were not made available to all: politics was the management of aesthetics—and its selective accessibility—in post-war South Korea.

Conclusion

Within the broad framework of South Korea's expanding economy, notable for the linkage between the state and corporations, the role of major patron of post-war architecture moved from the state in the 1960s to the *chaebol* and smaller corporations in the 1970s. The small number of private patrons who commissioned domestic architecture in the 1970s were often owners of companies that contributed to the nation's economic expansion on both domestic and international fronts. As the major benefactor of the growing cor-

porations, the state indirectly stewarded architectural commissions throughout the two decades which supposedly witnessed a change of hands in architectural patronage. It was the private commissions that most strikingly attested to the state's management and scaling of its economy, along with the family and the house, seen as the key indices for measuring capital accumulation nationally.

Kim's domestic commissions often balanced the state's demand for austerity with a patron's taste. Likewise, the term '*hohwajut'aek*' can be viewed as citing that moment of misalignment between the substantive costs involved in realising a project and the prestige assigned to it after the fact. The definitive category of 'luxury' dwellings, as designated by the state, was as equally contestable as the indices that qualified this category. As Georges Bataille proposes in his key work *The Accursed Share*, the consumerist behaviour of a society is best understood by examining the way that excess—rather than shortage—is produced and managed.⁶¹ Yet the state of excess, what characterises luxury and luxury housing, cannot always be accessed and calibrated in quantifiable terms. Architecture is a composite of material elements whose unit of measure might be scalable (from the size of the site it occupies to the size of a building element), but not always immediately calculable (for example, material that misleadingly appears as expensive). The term 'luxury' therefore emerges as being arbitrary, when pondering its specific definition in the context of the multiplicity of contingent operations and agents (government, architect, supplier, client) responsible for its delivery.

The determination with which the South Korean government highlighted 'luxury houses' was a telling feature of its increasing control over professions transitioning out of trade-based industries into state-regulated vocations. In February, 1957, the Korea Institute of Architects was set up as *Han'g-ukköñch'ukchakkahyöp'oe*, the term *chakka* ('author') suggesting that architects were correlated with writers and artists in the 1950s. Architectural firms were described as *köñch'ukyön'guso* or research institutes in the 1960s, and as professional entities a few years later, the last stage coinciding with South Korea's first architectural licensing examination inaugurated in 1965. The label 'luxury' as a kind of aesthetic judgement—like the artistic dimension accorded the practice of architects in the late 1950s—could not be fully grasped within the terms familiar to and expected of a specialised profession. In short, the character of 'luxury' assigned to individual houses was neither a kind of quality assurance nor an industry standard that could be easily sanctioned—or met, for that matter.

Interestingly, the vexed situation of classifying luxury houses mirrors the difficulties of 'labelling' Kim Swoo-geun. That it troubled Kim's contemporaries to definitively cast him on binary terms—either as a pragmatist or as a romanticist—reveals the irreducible nature of a *persona*, an identity attached to a building or to its architect. Kim continues to be referred to as one of the founding figures of Korea's post-war architecture and modernism. Yet in seducing tycoons with his charisma and business acumen, his fame ultimately featured in the media as a representative of the successful architect-entrepreneur, irrespective of the difficult

economic conditions within which his practice survived. The most potent message concerning this misalignment is an allegorical one. The state of restrained excess that his 'luxury house' both represented and belied was representative of the way *môt* perpetuated its own fiction. One had to acquire more than enough, but present it as being just enough—the kind of fine-tuned calibration that characterised Kim as a man of '*môt*.' Kim's public reputation as a prized architect was contradicted by his reputation amongst his confidants as a thrifty and economical man who practised parsimony, when and as needed. Oddly enough, his 'luxury' houses were also marked by a frugal sensibility endorsed by only a select number of his clients.

Notes and references

Unless otherwise noted, the translations are by the Author.

1. Swoo-geun Kim, *Donga ilbo* (22nd July, 1978), in, Swoo-geun Kim, *Chobŭn Kirŭn Chobŭlsurok Chok'o Nappŭn Kirŭn Nŏlbŭlsurok Chot'a*, rev. ed. (Seoul, Konggansa, 2006), p. 104.
2. Alain Delissen, 'The Aesthetic Pasts of Space (1960–1990)', *Korean Studies*, 25, no. 2 (2001), p. 256.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Kyung Sung Lee, 'To Kim Swoo Geun', in *Kim Swoo Geun*, Exhibition Catalogue, Gallery Ma, ed. (Tokyo, Gallery Ma, 1993), p. 3.
5. Cited in the 'Presidential Schedule' section in the Presidential Archives, available online: <http://pa.go.kr/portal/contents/stroll/schedule/scheduleIndex.do>. *Hohwajut'aek* is also known as *kogŭpchut'aek* in legal terms.
6. Steven Chung, *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 62.
7. South Korea became an independent nation-state only in 1948, with Rhee as its first President.
8. S. Chung, *Split Screen Korea*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
9. Another name for the 'one-generation, one-residence' rule is '*il-gagu il-chut'aek*'.
10. See, for example, Ch'ang-bok Im, *Han'guk ūi chut'aek, kŭ yuhyŏng kwa pyŏnch'ŏnsa* (Kyŏnggi-do P'aju-si, Tolbegae, 2011), p. 442.
11. A. Delissen, 'The Aesthetic Pasts of Space', *op. cit.*, p. 247. Jung In-ha cites the critique that Delissen put forward: 'Inspired by Kenzo Tange, Swoo-Geun Kim completed influential works that embodied the modernist legacy'. See In-ha Jung, *Architecture and Urbanism in Modern Korea* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), p. 82; *ibid.*, p. 84: 'Kim's design for the Freedom Center was influenced by Le Corbusier's Parliament building in Chandigarh, whose monumentality had a great impact on many East Asian architects.'
12. 'Korean-ness' features in Sung Soo Lee, 'A Study on the Koreaness of Kim Swoo Geun's Architectural Philosophy', *Chohyŏngmidoŭhak*, 11, no. 3 (2008), pp. 107–116; S. Chang, 'I remember Kim Swoo-Geun', *Koreana*, 3 (1989), p. 24. See also In-ha Jung, *Architecture and Urbanism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–83.
13. See Jung In Kim, 'Constructing a "Miracle", Architecture, National Identity and Development of the Han River, A Critical Exploration of Architecture and Urbanism: Seoul, 1961–1988' (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2008).
14. Hyungmin Pai, *Sensuous Plan: The Architecture of Seung, H-Sang* (Pajusi, Dongnyok, 2007), p. 43. In 1959, Kim (then 28 years old) had won the Competition for the National Parliament Building in South Korea. Yet his reputation did not always secure a positive reception: notably, the Buyeo National Museum

design (1967) sparked national controversy over the shape of its main entrance, thought to have resonated with that of a Japanese Shinto shrine.

15. One *pyong* is equivalent to 36 square feet.
16. Korea Institute of Architects, *Modern Architectures and Architects in Korea*, vol. 2 (Seoul, Korea Institute of Architects, 2000), p. 321. It also features in the life-style magazine, *Kkumim*.
17. Il-su Lee, 'Sōurūi Hohwajut'aektūl', *Wōlganmal*, 50 (August, 1990), p. 101. These figures are based on today's conversion rates from the Korean currency, *won*, to American dollars.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Swoo-geun Kim, 'Kyōngjeryōge Apsōsō Munhwajōk Kaeon', *SPACE* (January, 1978); in Swoo-geun Kim, *Chobūn Kirūn*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
21. In-ha Jung, *Architecture and Urbanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
22. Eun Mee Kim, Gil-Sung Park, 'The *Chaebol*', in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, Pyōng-guk Kim, Ezra F. Vogel, eds (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 271.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Lee Byung-chul, the founder-chairman of the electronics multinational company Samsung requested Kim Swoo-geun to design his house. According to official accounts, Kim courteously declined the magnate's offer. See Eung-ryeol Yoon, *Sangch'ōt'usōngiūi Yōnggwang* (Seoul, Hwanggūmal, 2010), p. 498.
25. The author was able to locate 22 single-family residential projects that Kim Swoo-geun executed between 1961 and 1969.
26. Chung In-guk, *Hyōndaegōnch'ungnon* (Seoul, Yajōng Munhwasa, 1970), p. 331.
27. Jong-bok Lee, 'Kū Chingu, Kimsugūn', in *Tangshini Yumyōnghān Kōnch'ukka Kimsugūn Imnikka*, rev. ed., Kim Swoo Geun Foundation, ed. (Seoul, Konggansa, 2006), p. 114.
28. Korea Institute of Architects, *Modern Architecture in Korea 1876–1990*, vol. 1 (Seoul, Korea Institute of Architects, 1994), p. 421.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–93.
30. Konggansa, *Kōnch'ukka Kim Su-gūn* (Seoul, Konggansa, 1980), p. 111.
31. *Ibid.*, 'Tradition, Circumstances and Ideal of Architecture', p. 57.
32. Kim, 'Ekpat'an P'ūrojekt'ū Shijage Ōkhin Iyagi', pp. 92–93.
33. Si-yong U, 'Kimsugūn Sōnsaenggwauī Ch'uōktam', in *Tangshini Yumyōnghān Kōnch'ukka Kimsugūn Imnikka*, *op. cit.*, p. 82. *Pabyeokdol* is the name for the recycled bricks typically procured from the demolition projects of colonial buildings.
34. The SPACE Group was preceded by Kim's eponymous practice, Kim Swoo Geun Planning and Design, set up in 1961.
35. Swoo-geun Kim, 'Kyōngjeryōge Apsōsō Munhwajōk Kaeon', *SPACE* (January, 1978), in Swoo-geun Kim, *Chobūn Kirūn*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
36. See Eung-ryeol Yoon, *Sangch'ōt'usōngiūi Yōnggwang*, *op. cit.*, p. 498.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. Kajima Shuppankai, *Kin Jukon*, p. 104.
40. Swoo Geun Kim, 'Masan Cathedral—Encounter with God', in *Kin Jukon*, ed., Kajima Shuppankai (Tokyo, Kajima Shuppankai, 1979), p. 11.
41. 'Kangwon Children's Center', in *Kim Swoo Geun*, Exhibition Catalogue, Gallery Ma, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 21.
42. In a more direct gesture of subversion, the basement level construction in the northwest direction was, for some time, 'covered up with earth'. If we follow Yoon's account, this suggests that the family anti-ci-

- pated that the authorities would make more than one visit to the property.
43. Swoo-geun Kim, *Donga ilbo* (22nd July, 1978), *op. cit.*, pp. 104–105.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. Kajima Shuppankai, *Kin Jukon*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. *Ibid.* (Emphasis by the Author.)
 50. Eung-ryeol Yoon, *Sangch'ôt'usöngiüi Yönggwang*, *op. cit.*, p. 498.
 51. Eung-ryeol Yoon, in discussion with the Author, 27th July, 2014.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. Kajima Shuppankai, *Kin Jukon*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
 54. Eung-ryeol Yoon, *Sangch'ôt'usöngiüi Yönggwang*, *op. cit.*, p. 498. Two primary modes of building houses in 1970s South Korea were in brick and in reinforced concrete. See Korea Institute of Architects, *Modern Architectures and Architects in Korea*, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
 55. Konggansa, *Köñch'ukka Kim Su-gün*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
 56. Chin-hwan Kim, 'Köñch'ugi Mwörago Saenggak'ae?', in *Tangshini Yumyöngghan Köñch'ukka Kimsugün Imnikka*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. *Ibid.*, Jong-bok Lee, 'Kü Chingu, Kimsugün', p. 115.
 59. *Ibid.*, Kyung-sung, Lee, 'Kimsugüne Taehan Ch'uök', p. 173.
 60. In a strange twist of fate, in January, 2013, with news that the architecture firm had become bankrupt, rumours began to spread that the SPACE Group building would be put up for sale. Following the failed efforts of the Kim Swoo Geun Foundation to have the *Konggansaok* mandated as a national heritage site in a timely fashion (which, had it been successful, would have placed it under public management), the building, priced at 14.1 million USD, was put up for auction. (Its list of potential buyers included conglomerates such as Hyundai Heavy Industries.) The headquarters of SPACE Group was eventually sold to Kim Chang-il, an art collector and owner of the Arario Gallery, in November, 2013. Renamed the 'Arario Museum in Space', the former architecture office has now been turned into a gallery-cum-museum that showcases one of South Korea's most famed gallery owner's private collection of modern art. See Jeyup S. Kwaak, 'Uncertain Future for Historic Seoul Building', *Wall Street Journal* (November 21, 2013); accessed 05/12/14: <http://blogs.wsj.com/scene/2013/11/21/uncertain-future-for-historical-seoul-building/?mod=WSJBlog&mod=LifeCulture>.
 61. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, vol. 1, Consumption, Robert Hurley, trsl. (New York, Zone Books, 1988).



Dwelling in ruins: affective materialities of the Sri Lankan civil war

Anoma Pieris

To cite this article: Anoma Pieris (2017) Dwelling in ruins: affective materialities of the Sri Lankan civil war, *The Journal of Architecture*, 22:6, 1001-1020, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265>



Published online: 16 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 556



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

Dwelling in ruins: affective materialities of the Sri Lankan civil war

Anoma Pieris

*Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning,
University of Melbourne, Australia
(Author's e-mail address: apieris@unimelb.edu.au)*

This paper examines the condition of exile as experienced by displaced suburban Tamil residents forced to abandon their natal or primary homes during heightened civil war in Sri Lanka. Using the theme of 'Dwelling in Ruins', it looks at three material strategies for navigating dispossession, borrowing methods from geography and anthropology. Scenarios studied include the burning of homes during the 1983 pogrom, and the dereliction of properties due to protracted military occupation. Both scenarios are provocations for mobilities and displacements that test the resilience of minority subjects. The terms of these displacements are additionally anchored in a multi-nodal and urbane culture in which circulation reinforces emplacement. The socio-spatial ethnographies of private properties built and owned by women become the means for uncovering their stories. The aesthetic of the idealised dwelling is challenged by the affective materiality of ruins.

Introduction

For decades after the anti-Tamil pogrom of July, 1983, the charred skeletons of the Tamil minority's homes remained as 'phantomic' reminders of former ethnic cohabitation in the Sri Lankan coastal capital, Colombo, and in its outlying suburbs. The violence of the pogrom similarly could be spatialised through these residual materialities following the rapid spread of violence from Colombo to towns in the central highlands where conflagrations caused by wandering mobs produced gaps like broken teeth in the island's streetscapes. 'Phantom', is a term applied by Yael Navaro-Yashin to describe how the ghostly presence of non-human materialities in post-war environments invokes past histories of violence long after human victims have fled.¹ The things that could not be carried, the memories and the absences, produce, in her interpretation, a peculiar kind of haunting:

of 'affective transmissions', which she broadens to a discussion of 'affective geography'.² Navaro-Yashin also describes how these unsettling signifiers are glossed over by 'phantasms': illusory political endeavours to re-territorialise and homogenise this cultural terrain—which she describes as 'the make-believe space'.³ Phantasms or phantasmatic spaces are thus connected, in her interpretation, to fantasies of power.

Navaro-Yashin's study of the partition of northern Cyprus resonates with the struggles for sovereignty between competing (majority) Sinhala and (minority) Tamil communities in Sri Lanka, which arguably produced two phantasms—of a harmoniously united Sri Lankan polity ruled by the Sinhala majority and of a dissident separatist state called Tamil Eelam. Each of these scenarios glossed over the phantoms of centuries of multi-ethnic cohabitation that were eradicated through wartime violence. This paper asks

how minority Tamil women—arguably amongst the most vulnerable among the many victims of this conflict—negotiated this turbulent space. It does so by referring to the combination of social constructionist and new materialist methodologies applied by Navaro-Yashin: and by examining the layers of architectural residue. However, rather than deploy concepts derived from western experiences, this paper interprets spectral unsettlement as an exilic landscape conceived by Lankan Tamil artists and scholars to describe conditions of ontological insecurity. The ruination of home and its residual materialities signify a state of exile—of a community alienated through violent dispossession from spaces in which they have deep ontological roots.

The title of this paper, 'Dwelling in Ruins', which describes the physical dereliction of the wartime nation whilst simultaneously invoking its moral decline, posits the home as the site of phantomic residue and competing ontological claims. The paper is based on interviews and visual material gathered after 2011 about the experiences of two generations of female, middle-class property owners. The respondents lived in the kinds of spaces that were targeted during the July, 1983, pogrom because, for their Sinhala attackers, they represented Tamil affluence and agency. But they also symbolised the class-based aspirations for social mobility and ethnic cohabitation that were destroyed by the war. Although the complex details of the pogrom or the ensuing conflict are too extensive to discuss in this paper, I hope to offer some understanding of their material affects, using some of the approaches tested in recent scholarship.⁴ My approach differentiates this study from

the expansive field of humanitarian, and relief and resettlement, studies on shelter for the dispossessed and related philosophies.⁵ Although its focus is narrow when compared with those more pressing existential questions, the intimate individual experiences of these few respondents expose some aspects of the Tamil minority's struggles for forms of material security and land tenure. The paper begins by introducing the broader socio-political context of the war, representations of ruins and gendered ontological understanding of the home, before examining three case studies.

Violence and displacement during the civil war

July, 1983, was not the first such pogrom in Sri Lanka. Since the political curtailment of minority opportunities during the 1950s, Tamil communities had dwelt in uneasy cohabitation with the Sinhalese, and anti-Tamil violence broke out in 1958, 1977 and 1981.⁶ Majoritarian entitlements incorporated in the constitution, in education and language policies and in protections for Buddhism, narrowed the opportunities available for minorities. We might argue that the structural erasure of minority entitlements preceded the attacks on their physical assets: on their homes, businesses, factories and their lives.

Properties destroyed in July, 1983, remained vacant for years because their Tamil occupants had fled, either to Jaffna or to India, emigrated further overseas or lacked the economic or social security to rebuild. More than 100,000 persons were displaced.⁷ In the decade that followed, the violence shifted north and east to villages and towns in the war zone in protracted battles to secure or destroy Tamil Eelam, a space conceived, imagined and admi-

nistered as a *de facto* state. Eelam operated as a sovereign territory partitioned as a warzone and controlled by the LTTE, with its physical boundaries shifting during phases of the war. This imaginative construct was opposed by the political phantasm of the Sri Lanka state: a multi-ethnic post-colonial polity unified by colonial violence and ruled by Sinhala-majority governments since independence. Eelam formed a crescent-shaped slice that potentially extended to include all majority Tamil areas in the larger territory of Sri Lanka, including the north-western coastal areas and the central hills. The corporeal violence meted out to populations by aerial bombing in the warzone and suicide attacks in the south appeared as physical scars across this terrain. The perpetrating belligerents included the Sri Lankan security forces, the Tamil separatist groups dwarfed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which eventually took leadership of the Eelam struggle, and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) which intervened in the conflict in 1987–1990.

The sheer scale of human displacement, dislocation and dispossession radically transformed Sri Lanka's minority Tamil and Muslim communities, uprooting, mobilising and reshaping their geo-cultural composition, and, as argued in this essay, unmoored the meaning of dwelling. Figures between 1983 and 2009 enumerate some 130,000 persons displaced due to Security Zones; 90,000 internally displaced; 146,098 Sri Lankans registered as refugees in 64 countries.⁸ As offensives and expulsions extracted residential populations, numerous perpetrators of violence took lodging in their midst. They appropriated domestic buildings,

barricading towns and villages with cantonments and defences. By the end of the war in 2009, some 300,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) were forcibly detained in camps.⁹

For most Sri Lankans, the discourse on ruins invokes a grandiose narrative of Buddhist civilisation in the island's dry-zone areas, in a tradition that borrows heavily from Orientalist archaeology, but has been revised to project national interests since independence from British colonialism in 1948.¹⁰ The narrative has been magnified through UNESCO nominations striving to promote authentic Sinhala-Buddhist cultural spaces against those of Tamil or Indian 'invaders'.¹¹ Representations such as these feed a fantasy of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony politicised by numerous governments since the 1950s. They have cultivated and built on the 'imperial debris' of colonial divide and rule policies, that incited ethnic competition in the past, for use in post-colonial abuses of power.¹² As observed in critiques by Pradeep Jeganathan and Tariq Jazeel, the historical ruins papered over critical epistemic gaps of minority symbolisms.¹³ However, monuments in Sri Lanka are not perceived as static. They form part of a living tradition of continuous worship and pilgrimage to Buddhist sites across the island and are consequently restored with revisionist architectural techniques. Subaltern sensibilities towards the sacredness of these spaces, their political signification of former Buddhist political hegemony and their value for tourism revenue modify their performance in ways distinct from those of European antiquities.

There are other reasons why ruins lack romantic appeal. The everyday detritus of urban living con-

tains levels of dereliction that confound progressive modernity with other less commoditised ways of being. These reconstructed edifices are over-determined and highly politicised phantoms of an ancient era which validate Sinhala settlement and alienate minorities. Tariq Jazeel argues that this sensibility extends to contemporary architectural practices by Sri Lanka's pioneering architects who call on Buddhist cultural motifs, spatial formations and landscape sensibilities to differentiate their tropical modern architectural idioms from colonial models.¹⁴ Their reference to ruins—learned through measured drawings, photographs and replication of building elements—spans a broad range of buildings from historical archaeology to village vernacular, with specific attention to the homes of Sinhala-Buddhist elites. The normalisation of these past aesthetics to produce a Sri Lankan style conflates sacred (ethno-religious) with secular representations, in Jazeel's view.

Consequently, Walter Benjamin's destructive interpretation of modernity which has given rise to numerous interrogations of nostalgic and sublime representations of the affective materialities of ruins are not necessarily applicable to Sri Lanka.¹⁵ On the surface, ruination is typically attributed to political violence, environmental disasters, material erosion and impoverishment, more than to the forces of modernity. In the history of the civil war, attacks on urban properties, institutions and infrastructure by various groups of belligerents converts ruination to a violent material practice within the field of sovereignty where modern technologies of war are used for territorial containment or defence.¹⁶ Ethnic spaces and buildings are reduced

to 'rubble'—the material detritus of that violence—caused in this case by *domicide*: by the deliberate destruction of homes.¹⁷ Modern architectural practice enters this field through varied agendas that may be interrogative, representational or reparative,¹⁸ or may indeed, as cautioned by Gastón Gordillo, fetishise ruins as heritage.¹⁹ Architecture equally has the capacity to shape and deliver ontologically secure material environments that bear functional and sentimental value. These values are deeply subjective and specific to the social and cultural experiences of groups and individuals and, in the case of Tamil Sri Lankans, are inherently complex.

Tamil ontologies of dwelling

Individualised examples of *domicide*, however fragmentary, show us how minorities build collective ontological security through acts of dwelling and how, in the Sri Lankan case, this is destroyed by the numerous belligerents identified previously.²⁰ The flight of urban Tamil populations during the July, 1983, pogrom, Sinhalese border villagers (from 1984) and northern Muslims evicted by the LTTE (1990), together with the dispersal of Tamils from homes on the Jaffna peninsula by the creation of Israeli-style High Security Zones (1980s onwards), are just a few examples of mass mobilisations related to this period. Wars, particularly civil wars which alienate large groups of citizens, heighten internal 'ontological insecurity'. A term originating in the psycho-analytical research of R.D. Laing, ontological security has been reinterpreted by the sociologist Anthony Giddens to encompass routine-bound activities and interactions by which individuals

construct situated self-narratives.²¹ These are supported, Giddens argues, by biographical continuities, their ability to maintain inter-subjective social relationships and secure, socially-constructed frameworks of reality. One of the most striking transformations in this ontological field of practice has been of gender roles amongst the Sri Lankan Tamil minority. Whereas customs such as presenting the dowry-house to the eldest daughter in caste-families and the constraints of caste, dowry, chastity and property have defined gender roles in the past, the displacement of women from natal homes, atypical in a traditional Tamil society, causes extreme ontological insecurity.²²

This is evident in ethnographic studies featuring female respondents, the most significant amongst which is Sharika Thirangama's *In My Mother's House*.²³ Thirangama wrote a social history of the war, using her mother's house as a metaphor for a personalised interview-based narrative. Through it we come to understand the ontological significance of natal village homes for those who have been dispossessed by violence, particularly those of a generation who grew up in a divided Sri Lanka. Broader geo-political interpretations of ontological security—on neo-liberalism, sovereignty and securitisation during the so-called 'global war on terror'—have involved the study of inter-scalar co-relationships between the security and perceived safety of individuals or social groups, and the policies and ideologies of the state.²⁴ As discussed in examples from post-industrial nations, the fragility of diasporic ontic security is exposed during national crises.²⁵ The ontological *insecurity* of post-colonial minorities is compounded by their structural identification as

invaders, immigrants and late-comers in the national story. The wartime disruption experienced by minority respondents reveals high levels of ontological insecurity. In a patriarchal society adhering strictly to cultural taboos, such experiences are often gendered. The destruction of the home violates a gendered cultural preserve of traditional place-associations shaped by natal and kinship networks.²⁶

We do need to be wary of accepting these representations too readily, however. War draws women out of the home-space and into the public sphere. For example, the LTTE's ban on dowry practice and hard line on domestic violence was accompanied by a masculine culture of militancy which converted women into fighters and controlled their sexuality.²⁷ LTTE women ran orphanages, and cared for and armed young girls. The dominant cultural ideology of woman as passive home-maker was forcefully transformed. The repressive military presence of both the Sri Lankan military and the IPKF produced high incidents of sexual violence against and increased disempowerment of civilian women; but at the same time women stepped into social roles typically reserved for men. With 80,000 war widows at the end of the conflict in 2009, the numbers of female householders increased exponentially, and while this reinforced the gendered embodiment of the home, women's heightened commitment to reclaiming and rebuilding familial security reflected new economic responsibilities.²⁸

The discussion so far has examined the social subjectivity of Tamil spatial ontologies, but has contained little of the non-human agencies in which they are contextualised. The Tamil experience of

the Sri Lankan civil war has produced its own imaginative methodology for capturing and representing collective traumas. Where western scholars have favoured 'ruins' calling upon aesthetic traditions used to measure the rise and fall of civilisations, Lankan Tamil scholars have turned to the poetic tradition of India's second-century BC Sangam period. This is where Navaro-Yashin's method becomes most useful. She argues that we need to move beyond the binary of interior subjectivity and exterior nature, in the humanist philosophical tradition, and instead see the 'merging of the forces, energies and affective potentialities of human beings, with their natural built, and material environment'.²⁹ It is from this idea that she derives the concept of 'affective geography'.

The Tamil environmental tradition explored in Sangam-period poetry draws on the 'co-inhabitation' of nature and human proposed by Navaro-Yashin. Five experiential landscapes (*ainthinal*) representing the five physiographic regions of mountains, forests, agricultural land, desert and coastal land are used to invoke the emotions associated with particular expressions of love.³⁰ The metaphorical inner-genre (*aham*) reserved for private life is differentiated from the outer genre (*puram*) of the public and political: a similar split to that of the emotional world of the subject and the outer politicised world of moral, discursive and cultural references, discussed in political studies of subjectivity but translated in this case through an agrarian culture intimately linked to and dependent on the land.³¹ Each landscape is spatialised through regional characteristics such as climate, flora and fauna; humanised by reference to the mood and type of

relationship represented; sacralised through customary norms and associated deities.³² The extension of the genre by the sociologist R. Cheran to include a sixth 'Landscape of Exile' expands it to encompass the affective materialities of Sri Lanka's devastated northern geography, and the wartime experience of displacement.³³

Two works by the artist and art historian T. Shanaathanan exemplify this approach. In an exhibition 'borderzones' at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, objects brought over to Canada by the Tamil diaspora fleeing the Sri Lankan conflict were inserted into glass bottles forming a display described by Cheran as representing 'Tortured Landscapes'.³⁴ Similarly, Shanaathanan's *The Incomplete Thombu*, a compilation of architectural drawings based on sketches by minority residents of homes lost during the war simulates a Portuguese-colonial period land register by which land was legalised in the past.³⁵ In these projects, memories inscribed in objects, texts, drawings and photographs evoke the intimate materialities of family life that were forcibly abandoned or irrevocably transformed. The exhibits use a new poetics of space to reassemble these fragments imaginatively thus reclaiming lost geo-cultural territory.

The non-human objects of this sixth exilic landscape are imbued with material associations and memories interpreted by the artists through an aesthetic genre capable of expressing deep social traumas independent of their human subjects. Such projects, although appearing nostalgically anchored in place, also speak to the complexity of a multi-nodal Tamil cultural geography with alternative centres in Madras, Colombo or Kuala Lumpur.

As argued by Sidharthan Maunaguru, there is an equivalent case for a mobile urbane and diasporic ontology.³⁶ He asserts that the 'multiple homes' and 'mobile families' produced through displacement exacerbated a culture of circulation already in place. This would partly explain the successful transmission of the Tamil Homeland Ideology across multiple overseas networks alongside the post-July, 1983, Tamil exodus; but also the idealisation of northern Lankan cultural roots and heightened place-attachment. It also identifies how Tamil families resident in Sri Lanka are anchored by social ties to the vast diaspora displaced by the pogrom and the war. As captured in Cheran's landscapes of exile, violent mobilisations of educated, professional or trading Sri Lankan-Tamils converted familiar circulation routes to 'desperate passages' away from their homelands.³⁷ Border controls and restrictive citizenship practices fixed Tamil subjectivity, making it contingent on external factors determined by agents unsympathetic to these complex ontologies. Mnemonic fragments—objects, letters, photographs and a plethora of diasporic websites documenting the histories, politics and everyday lives of the diaspora—circulated across this shifting terrain. They are the 'rubble' of ruins which are carried along those de-familiarised circulation routes.³⁸ As with the examples of homes discussed in this paper, their ontologies are retrieved against imminent erasure.

In selecting and representing how female Tamil respondents have grappled with their rising ontological insecurity I have tried to convey the material sensibilities of this exilic landscape. I have related their stories as separate experiential episodes in

that broader landscape genre, keeping as close as possible to the accounts that they gave me, and used names—not their own but of the deities associated with characteristic landscapes—that accord with how each representative landscape is sacralised.³⁹ However, it is important to note that my own identity as a Sinhalese-Sri Lankan prompts empathetic gaps and silences in the ethnographic encounter, due to latent tensions in our inter-subjectivity, constraining interpretations of these oral accounts.

Three stories of exile

1. *Urban fortress*

For many years following July, 1983, after her four siblings migrated and her parents passed way, Karthika, a single professional woman, maintained her family home in Colombo against pressures to sell. The colonial bungalow built by her accountant grandfather in 1935 was located in Wellawatte (Colombo 6) along a strip of slightly inclined lanes between the main road, railway line and beach. The sensorial quality of this environment, the sea breezes, day-time luminescence of the ocean and periodic clatter of passing trains is typical of coastal suburbs.

A former enclave for Colombo's Burgher residents (Anglophone descendants of the Portuguese and Dutch colonists), the ethnic demographic of the suburb altered during the mid- to late-twentieth century due to those residents' emigration, following the exclusionary national-language policy that gave preference to Sinhalese.⁴⁰ After this time, increasing numbers of Tamil families moved to the Wellawatte area and many of their religious insti-

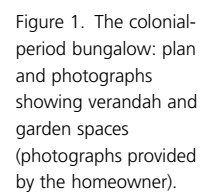
tutions were built in the vicinity. The predominantly Tamil-Hindu identity earned the suburb the nickname *Punchi Yapanaya* ('Little Jaffna'), referring to the ethnically Tamil city, Jaffna, in the North.

The 1930s bungalow was typical of a period when middle-class professionalisation adapted domestic spaces to accommodate an office at the front of the house. Protruding from under a hipped roof with terracotta Calicut tiles (in the French interlocking pattern) this additional space was further articulated by a three-sided bay window with views up and down the street (Fig. 1). The colonial-style homes of the early twentieth century were typically single-storey brick and mortar constructions raised on stub foundations to preserve the floor plane from insects, reptiles and rising damp. These were architectural hybrids where enclosed verandahs incorporated into the building envelope (rather than being attachments to it) provided spaces of transition between exterior and interior, and domestic and service spaces. The hallway in the house built by Karthika's grandfather was placed at an angle to the orthogonal plan to maximise these connections. The drawing and dining rooms, each flanked by a bedroom and located in the main body of the house, were linked by means of a back verandah to the kitchen and service quarters, evidence of a period when services were not integrated, and class differences between homeowners and domestic staff divided homes.

However, the colonial house plan equally embodied the pursuit of upward mobility through education and professionalisation in the colonial capital and in the case of the northern Tamil population of educated middle-class aspirants who

migrated to Colombo in search of advantageous government employment.⁴¹ The colonial home was a step beyond caste markers towards new inter-ethnic signs of distinction. Colonial-period pattern books, such as *Modern Eastern Bungalows and How to Build Them* by Samuel Douglas Meadows, documented the many variants of these prototypes adapted for the 'tropics' with recognisable features such as breeze blocks and perforated concrete balustrades.⁴² The distinct physical difference between these models and the traditional courtyard homes of indigenous elites included their generous volumes and multiplication of windows. The conservatism and patriarchy that created introverted social spaces was being turned inside out.

During the pogrom, news of arson travelled through multiple telephone calls northward along the coast from Dehiwala Bridge to Colombo's southern suburbs, already enveloped by smoke. Karthika's family learned of houses built adjacent to Hindu organisations being destroyed and anxiously awaited their fate. However, the rioters stopped in the laneway immediately to the south, due to the imposition of a curfew. Although her three brothers were away at work at that time, the two girls, one studying for her university entrance exams and Karthika, awaiting her results, had remained at home. They were speedily evacuated to Madras, India, with relatives who had lost their home, where a senior civil servant had turned his house into a camp. The Indian government had opened up channels to enable refugee movement and whole families migrated together. Properties were either sold or abandoned.



After the July, 1983, pogrom, vacant building plots, razed by arson, were largely bought by Muslim trading families of the Tamil-speaking and ethnically Tamil or Moorish minority.⁴³ As the war escalated in the north and east of the country, the suburb became congested with new arrivals, desperate refugees from a war zone depleted by government embargoes and LTTE taxation. Whereas before the pogrom, Colombo had been the destination for middle-class Tamils seeking education and job opportunities, these wartime arrivals were from diverse, including impoverished, social backgrounds. The shifts in Tamil caste and class identities that occurred in the 1990s and the 2000s were evident in the resultant demographic changes in Colombo.⁴⁴ Newcomers occupied transient housing in established Tamil areas.

Karthika returned to Sri Lanka to conditions of heightened security and a neighbourhood night watch. But as the war escalated, her home was often raided by special task force operatives searching for members of terror cells. The suburb responded through fortification; the multi-storey blocks of flats proliferating to meet the refugee influx, securing them from everyday violence and rising above the city like a defensive outcrop. Karthika describes its transformation into a portal out of the country, of temporary accommodation, wedding halls and ubiquitous shrines, and the outpouring every evening from congested living facilities to the relief of the beach. Marriage to diasporic Tamils and the rise of new religious organisations and shrines became the new foci of ontological security. Property was increasingly commoditised, as a means to secure pathways to a better future

overseas. Properties in Wellawatte increased in value and rental prices were among the highest in the city: there were tales of rapacious developers hounding property owners to sell and move out.

Karthika initially resisted pressures to develop the property, fending off estate agents, and stoically occupying and renovating the bungalow as a home-office. Finally she gave in to sibling pressure from her family overseas and sought out a developer willing to purchase land. A design for a multi-storey complex of flats was a critical part of this negotiation, and the return on the development was conditional on the pre-sale of units.

The low-ceilinged slices of faceless neighbourhood flats embody the pressures of wartime migration into and out of the area, and the resultant constriction of spaces and activities. These spaces have imploded with the desperate passage of countless numbers of Lankan Tamils. The demolition of buildings, due to development, suggests a different form of violence linked to changing economic forces and escalating prices artificially boosted by high demand for property. Those in detached private homes found themselves 'afforested' by high-rise dwellings. This is evident in my second example.

2. *Forest retreat*

The childhood home of the Tirumal family, also in Wellawatte, was occupied by tenants during the riots. Remnants of its burned-out shell still stand on a part of the land. The family spent the early war years in Jaffna, in a home later occupied by the police, and also lived abroad for a short period, in the USA (figs 2, 3). An erudite family with strong social ideals, their house was a place of con-



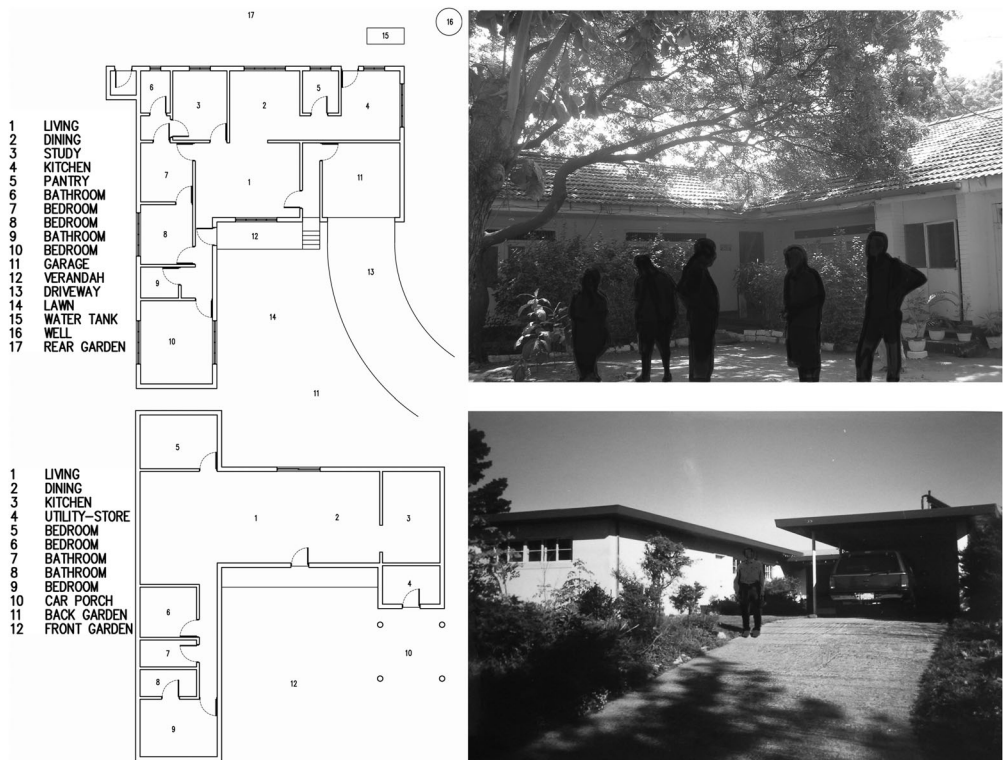
Figure 2. Conjectured plan drawing of a house in Wellawatte that was destroyed, alongside photographs of the original house (bottom right) and of the burned-out verandah (bottom left) (photographs provided by the homeowners).

versation and debate; the portico sheltered evening conversations on topical issues. After July, 1983, these dialogues would be resumed in the remains of the Colombo house.

The houses occupied by the family are variations on the modern California houses adopted by Asian middle-class suburban residents after the Second World War. A response to pressures on urban property, these L-Shaped, single-storey constructions maximised views of a shrinking plot size by rearranging living and sleeping wings. The verandah in these

examples was integrated into the building envelope with a portico or a car shelter, a symbol of social mobility. Their streamlined appearance and expanse of French windows, embodiments of uninhibited modernity, clearly expressed post-colonial subjectivity. The Sri Lankan examples have many elements such as rustic finishes, pointed brick columns or single-pitched roofs related to the California house typology. Other features are distinctively tropical and culturally distinctive, such as red cement floors.

Figure 3. House in Jaffna (top) and house in the USA (bottom), showing conjectured drawings of L-shaped plan and exterior views (photographs provided by the homeowners and former residents).



The four-bedroom house on twenty-five perches of land was originally bought in 1952 when Mrs Tirumal's parents moved from Vavuniya to Colombo. As they were used to spacious government bungalows, the constriction of space and the transformation to urban living was gradual: they kept chickens in their backyard. The garage was converted into an annexe and the car was parked in the portico. In July, 1983, the house was occupied

by tenants. The Tirumal's were elsewhere in Colombo in their parents' home.

They describe the violence as unexpected: mobs armed with sticks, metal rods and petrol cans arrived by train at Wellawatte and used electoral lists to pick out Tamil homes. Individuals from the mob piled up the furniture in the middle of the house, added petrol siphoned from a motorcycle and ignited a gas cylinder. Looters who followed once the flames

subsided sifted through the debris for valuables. Meanwhile the Tamil residents of the area fled to the Hindu College refugee camp. They would be transported to Jaffna by ship. The Tirumal's sought refuge in India, and six months later returned to Jaffna.

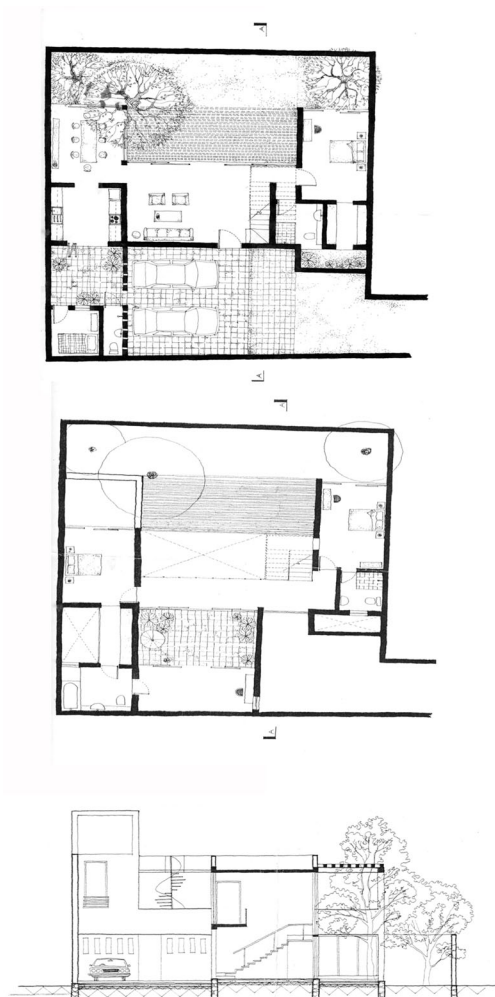
Some years after July, 1983, when their home was still in ruins, the mother and daughter consulted an architect about the redevelopment of the site. He recommended dedicating the skeletal fabric as a commemorative 'verandah-piece', traditionally an urban space for socialisation at the public edge of the private domain. The verandah had many colonial associations as a space where men of status might meet their subordinates, or as a space of leisure shaded from the tropical heat, but its derivation was from traditional elite courtyard houses. Internal verandahs often flanked the private courtyards where women would gather, in a gendered spatial typology. The spatial type saw a revival in the 1980s due to a highly successful tropical aesthetic pioneered by Sri Lanka's modernist architects and linked to the nascent resort hotel industry, where the nostalgic affects of its picturesque posturing alluded to elite and colonial comfort or unspoiled nature. It was a space from which to gaze at the tropical landscape. Drawing on this environmental theme, the architect proposed that the remaining pillars of the ruined home would be overtaken by vegetation as a sublime memorial to July, 1983. This deliberately dystopian and idiosyncratic proposal was rejected by the family: decades later they selected a different practitioner.

Now, the contemporary structure is at the rear of the former site, where the relic of the former verandah still stands. It was designed after the manner of

the 'stealth homes' in Los Angeles, described by Mike Davis in his *City of Quartz*.⁴⁵ Externally, the blank façade gives away nothing. The boundary wall, a three-storey fortification, wraps around the perimeter and folds into the structural walls of the house: a column-and-beam construction with three habitable floors, the major spaces oriented towards a courtyard space with a lone tree (Fig. 4). Finishes are sparse: bare concrete floors and cement rendering with a simple stairway leading to a roof terrace. In 2012, a bedroom was added on the terrace providing panoptic oversight of the street. The multi-storey buildings of Wellawatte cast long shadows over it.

The 'stealth house' in Wellawatte reflects a design trend that was introduced during the 1970s following a Marxist-Maoist insurrection in the country's south. An attack on the urban values of the 'wealthy classes' by landless rural youth of the Peoples Liberation Front, this insurrection, and another during the 1980s, signalled growing social disparities among the Sinhalese.⁴⁶ The extroversion of the colonial bungalow with its low perimeter walls was abandoned for a new ethos of fortification against the public street and its hostile social agents. This act of sealing off the home from urban poverty and turning away from the public street accompanied the growing affluence and social disparities caused by economic liberalisation.⁴⁷ The result was an introverted courtyard architecture reintroduced to the former colonial capital and made famous by Geoffrey Bawa's Osmund and Ena de Silva House (built 1960–62). From then on, blank façades and colourfully articulated interiors around planted courtyard spaces marked the signature style of Sri Lankan architects. The courtyard with its

Figure 4. House in Wellawatte, showing plans, section and views of entrance (top right), interior (middle right) and courtyard/rear garden with tree (bottom right) (photographs by Eresh Weerasuriya provided by the architect).



pools and planting effectively simulated the tropical environment in microcosm. The house in Wellawatte, in contrast, has no such pretensions. It is a refuge from external threat. The house reflects defensive attributes found in the surrounding multi-storey complexes at a more intimate and nuclear-family scale.

The exilic materialities in these two stories suggest how affective traces of prior emplacement linger, and yet this evidence is hard to preserve. Buildings are demolished, properties are sold and new structures take their place. They become immaterial witnesses to conflict. The detritus of contemporary battles for political sovereignty is swept away by market-led development as new forms of imperialism replace the old. Furthermore, in post-war environments such as Sri Lanka's, where protracted hostilities have weakened minority cultural agency, obsolescence or permanence is always political. Ancient Buddhist ruins on the Jaffna peninsula have been used by the government to substantiate Sinhala place-claims, while reconstruction and resettlement bury fragments of Tamil culture. The victor's military memorials have replaced LTTE graveyards. The lost homes of minority citizens who have survived serial displacements are unacknowledged spectres of this long history of spatial violence that gives rise to new phantoms and phantasms. The process of total erasure without material remnants, related in the final example, raises a different prospect altogether of material absence and loss.

3. Coastal refuge

Varuni's natal home in a coastal village on Jaffna peninsula passed through multiple occupancies.⁴⁸

It was built by her maternal grandfather who worked as a surveyor in Malaysia until he was forced to take early retirement for slapping his British supervisor. He retired to Jaffna, but having converted to Christianity was ostracised by his family, which held a mock funeral ceremony to symbolise the resultant rupture. Cast out of his village, he opted for a 4-5 acre plot on the northern coast of the peninsula. The beach was a peripheral space beyond the boundaries of natal villages, typically inhabited by low-caste, fishing communities, but once his son became a successful doctor 'tolerance' of him by the family increased and several relatives moved to their vicinity. An ordinary modern house with a large habitable verandah it was surrounded by fruit trees, coconut trees, mango, pomegranates, sapodilla, tamarind, Jak and even grape vines for which his son won agricultural prizes. A *thotil* (summer house) of wattle and daub stood in the garden. Once the grandchildren married and moved to Colombo, the house became a nostalgic place for school holidays, being identified as the natal family home.

Visits ceased with the escalation of conflict as road and rail routes became impassable and the house was occupied by the Sea Tigers (the LTTE's naval unit), the IPKF and the Sri Lanka army. When the army occupied the surrounding village, that too was vacated and the house and its surroundings were progressively vandalised. Each successive occupant removed part of the building for use in fortifying military quarters elsewhere. The violence of war at the hands of its various agents was being exacted on domestic architectures, dispersing their elements throughout the landscape. Finally, towards the end

of the war, the villagers stripped the foundations to repair their own shattered homes. All traces of prior habitation were lost. Varuni continued to visit her home between offensives or during ceasefires, witnessing its gradual dereliction. After the war, she fenced off the land and replanted fruit trees. In an effort to dissuade squatters she appointed a church organisation as caretaker of twenty perches near the main road, but they used the land to build a church and so assert their claim to it.

The absence of remains provides a *tabula rasa* environment for competing efforts at re-territorialising lands released by the military. In some cases government and military stay in place. As the war recedes new developments by southern investors or the diaspora enter the scene. The dereliction of Varuni's property through serial military occupations and with the involvement of impoverished villagers suggests a different mobilisation of varied agents of violence across a static space. The proliferation of spaces, evident in the earlier examples, contrasts with the multiplication of actors in relation to a single property.

Varuni is confronted by the slow dissolution and painful erasure of her family's beloved home. It resembles an artefact scatter, discovered after the raiders have left. Its materiality is inadvertently museumised through reinsertion into numerous unidentified and spatially dispersed buildings, although there are no physical traces on the site.

Dwelling on ruins

In this paper, homes are interpreted as artefacts that are affectively and performatively emplaced. Away from the phantasms of competing sovereignties

they prepare the private social ground for post-traumatic recovery. In such scenarios, affective materialities re-territorialise knowledge by imbuing material residue with constructive power. They offer some measure of ethical resilience by deferring social amnesias and recording wanton destruction. Whereas many minority subjects were hapless victims of conflict, increasingly dependent on humanitarian patronage after the war, these stories describe private resilience. But as explored in the above examples their affective materialities are being reconstituted by other spaces of post-war recovery. These are shaped by marketisation and the new political challenges facing minorities after the war. Both government and donor agencies are re-housing returning IDPs, private developers are developing unoccupied land and very little low-rise fabric is retained in the suburb of Wellawatte. These various interventions subvert and alter prior place claims.

The affective geography of ruins and their impending disappearance challenge architecture's measure of dwelling. Minority occupations test the presumption of stable architectural typologies. Where there are no tangible remains to draw upon, the spatial imagination of individualised experiences fills the gaps. Social subjectivities, mnemonic practices and affective materialities interlace. But underneath these poetic projections, the trauma of domicile lingers deep in the social body as a trans-generational anterior landscape of exile.

The condition of exile in diasporic experience is distinct from exile within Sri Lanka after the war. For the respondents in these three examples it involves adjustment and compromise to new de-

familiarised ways of living, and the acceptance of loss. Karthika has to give up the property that she long defended and give in to developer pressures. She will reluctantly join other residents who made way for the high-rise suburb. But whereas the July, 1983, pogrom once dispersed Tamil residents, these towers collect and concentrate them in what has fast become an ethno-cultural enclave. Against this congregation of buildings around them, the Tirumal family retreats into an introverted enclosure at the rear of their site, safe from public view. From their roof terrace shaded by high-rise towers they overlook the ruins of their former house. The verandah space has been internalised and elevated reflecting the wartime withdrawal of discursive space. The façade is blank and non-descript, an affective defence. In contrast, Varuni's property is a *tabula rasa* site inhabited by displaced memories. These are invoked at family gatherings in Colombo and in Jaffna; nostalgically spoken of and spatialised around the memory of the lost natal home. Nothing remains of the house, not even photographs.

The absence of male householders or their under-representation in all three examples characterises war-time realities whereby women and children may be sole survivors of an extended family unit. Similarly, the violent transformation of hitherto gendered and ethnically inscribed familial spaces suggests the alteration of societal norms. The female respondents in this research struggled to regain their social agency despite these transformations by renewing their sense of propriety and ownership. Gendered and situated attributes of dwelling that once shaped pre-war cultural sensibilities are

critical tools for this process, alongside war-related adaptations and compromises made by these women. By continuing to dwell in exilic landscapes with past traumas and present uncertainties they activate new layers of affective materialities.

Notes and references

1. Y. Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 2012), p. 13.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
4. Important sources for both the idea of haunting and ruins are, *ibid.*, Y. Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 2013); Gastón Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 2014); E. A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment; Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 2011).
5. S. Sassen, *Expulsions: brutality and complexity in the global economy* (Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); J. Butler, A. Athanassiou, *Dispossession: the performative in the political* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, Mass., USA, Polity Press, 2013); M. Agier, *Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology Of The Cosmopolitan Condition* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, Mass., USA, Polity Press, 2016).
6. The civil war in Sri Lanka (1983–2009) evolved as a secessionist struggle by the minority Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against the armed forces of the Government of Sri Lanka which, since independence in 1948, had advanced a series of majoritarian Sinhala–Buddhist policies. An era of socialist policies insulated the nation and strengthened Sinhala ideological positions

- (1956–1965; 1970–1977) including the 1972 republican constitution, which was overtly biased towards Buddhism and rejected federalism. Economic deregulation and marketisation followed a change of government in 1977. Tamil resistance and desire for federalism escalated into militant separatism during this period, marked by a series of violent episodes, including ethnic pogroms and militant attacks, which preceded a protracted military struggle over the territory of Tamil Eelam in the predominantly Tamil and Muslim northern and eastern parts of the island, until 2009.
7. S. Sharvananda, S.S. Sahabandu, M.M. Zuhair, Report of The Presidential Truth Commission on the July Riots (Colombo, Department of Government Printing, 2002), p. 36.
 8. Figures as reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), analysis as of May, 2014: available online at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/sri-lanka/figures-analysis> [accessed 01/06/14].
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. There are numerous books on Buddhist architecture ranging from monumental to vernacular structures. See Roland de Silva, *Religious Architecture in Early and Medieval Sri Lanka* (Druk, Krips Repro Meppel, Netherlands, 1988); N. de Silva, D.P. Chandrasekara, *Heritage Buildings of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, National Trust Sri Lanka, 2009).
 11. L. Prematilake, *The Cultural Triangle of Sri Lanka, International Campaign* (Colombo, Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka, 1994).
 12. A.L. Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2013).
 13. P. Jeganathan, 'Authorising History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura', in P. Jeganathan, Q. Ismail, eds, *Unmaking the nation: the politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka* (New York, South Focus Press, first ed., 1995; Colombo, Social Scientists Association, 2009), pp. 108–136; T. Jazeel, *Sacred Modernity: nature, environment and the post-colonial geographies of Sri Lankan nationhood* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, co-published by Social Scientists Association, 2013), pp. 48–53.
 14. T. Jazeel, *Sacred Modernity, op. cit.*, pp. 106–110.
 15. Scholars writing on ruins frequently refer to Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History', where he describes a painting by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, as showing the destruction wrought by the progressive moral project of the Enlightenment: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, Knopf, 1969), pp. 257–8.
 16. Y. Navaro Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space, op. cit.*, p. 43.
 17. G. Gordillo, *Rubble, op. cit.*, p. 27; J. Porteous, S. Smith, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).
 18. See 'Case: Living Death Camps', pp. 189–233, in *Forensis: Forensis, The Architecture of Public Truth* (Sternberg Press and Forensic Architecture, Goldsmith College, London, 2015). See also A. Herscher, 'Warchitectural Theory', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 61: 3 (2008), pp. 35–43 and *Violence Taking Place: the architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010); A. Huyssen, 'Monuments and Holocaust memory in a media age', in M.L. Morgan, ed., *A Holocaust reader. Responses to the Nazi extermination* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 362; J. Giblin, 'Finding Local Expertise in the Post-Conflict Heritage Package', Association of Critical Heritage Studies Conference, Canberra 2nd–4th December, 2014.
 19. G. Gordillo, *Rubble, op. cit.*, p. 9.
 20. J. Porteous, S. Smith, *Domicide, op. cit.*, pp. 64–77.
 21. R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London, Penguin, [1960], 1990); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge, Polity, 1991), chap. 2.

22. See R. Coomaraswamy, 'A question of honour: women, ethnicity and armed conflict', in Wenona Giles, Malathi de Alwis, Edith Klein, Neluka Silver (co-editors), with Maja Korac, Djurdja Knezevic, Zarana Papic (advisory editors), *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones* (Toronto, Canada, Between the Lines, 2003), pp. 91–102.
23. S. Thirangama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
24. B. Rumelili, ed., *Conflict resolution and ontological security: peace anxieties* (Abingdon, New York, Routledge, 2015).
25. S. Croft, 'Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritisation of Britain's Muslims', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 33:2 (2012), pp. 219–235.
26. S. Maunaguru, 'Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness', in R. Cheran, ed., *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, SAGE Publications, 2009), p. 59. Indeed, the establishment of diasporic village organisations in Canada by Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants support this claim of homeland ontologies.
27. N. de Mel, *Women and the nation's narrative: Gender and nationalism in twentieth century Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, Kali for women, 2001; Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); M. de Alwis, 'The changing role of women in Sri Lankan society', *Social Research*, 69:3 (2002), pp. 675–91; D. Hoole, 'Suppression of Tamil women's narratives in Sri Lanka', *Critical Half*, 5:2(2007), pp. 26–31; S. Sivamohan, 'The rise of militant Tamil nationalism, its assumptions and the cultural production of Tamil women'. In S.H. Hasbullah. B. Morrison, eds, *Sri Lankan society in an era of globalization* (Colombo, Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2004), pp. 126–52.
28. S. Somachandran, 'Sri Lanka: War widows left in poverty', World Socialist Website, 27th October, 2010, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2010/10/sriwo27.html> [accessed 05/01/13]. He quotes the Deputy Minister for Womens' Affairs and Child Development.
29. Y. Navaro Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*, op. cit., p. 27.
30. 3rd century BC to 6th century AD, recorded in around 8 AD, the Sangam is an assembly of literati and the main poetic texts: 'The literary tradition of Tamil', S. Sundarabalu, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, <http://www.slideshare.net/sundarabalu/dr-ssundarabalutamil-ettuthokai>; [accessed 09/04/15].
31. Y. Navaro Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*, op. cit., p. 25.
32. K. Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan. On Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1973).
33. R. Cheran, *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History, and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination*, Vol 7, in *A History of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Marga Institute, 2001).
34. R. Cheran, 'Tortured Landscapes: Tamil Belonging and Displacement', 'Border zones.ca, The ideas behind the exhibit', UBC Museum of Anthropology website, 23rd January–12th September, 2010: available at http://moa.ubc.ca/borderzones/features_ts.html [accessed 20/05/15].
35. T. Shanaathanan, *The Incomplete Thombu* (Sri Lanka, Raking Leaves, 2011).
36. S. Maunaguru, 'Brides as Bridges?', op. cit., pp. 55–80; 59.
37. In reference to C. Martin, 'Desperate Passage: Violent Mobilities and the Politics of Discomfort', *Journal of Transport Geography*, 19 (2011), pp. 1046–52.
38. G. Gordillo, *Rubble*, op. cit.
39. Tamil, particularly Hindu Tamil names, are usually variations on the names of deities.
40. Sri Lanka, Official Language Act no. 33 of 1956.
41. S. Thirangama, *In My Mother's House*, op. cit., pp. 236, 238.

42. S.D. Meadows, *Modern Eastern Bungalows and How to Build Them* (Calcutta, Thacker's Press and Directories Ltd., 1931).
43. The spatial transformations described in this section have been discussed in greater detail in Anoma Pieris, 'Encampments: spatial taxonomies of Sri Lanka's civil war', *Architectural Theory Review*, 19:3(2014) pp. 393–413; p. 400.
44. S. Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
45. M. Davis, 'Frank Gehry as Dirty Harry', in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London/ New York, Verso, 1990), pp. 236–240. See also A. Pieris, 'Stealth Housing in Asia', *Singapore Architect*, vol. 223 (2004), pp. 38–44, for an early use of the term, and Varuna de Silva, 'Stealth House in Wellawatte, 42nd Lane, Colombo 6', *The Architect*, 115 (April–June, 2014), pp. 39–42, for a description of the project.
46. C.A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror, the JVP insurrection 1987–1989* (Colombo, Lake House, 1991).
47. S. Perera, 'Gated communities as packaged fantasies: a meeting of the local and the global and the standardisation of taste in urban Sri Lanka', in, Jonathan Anjaria, Colin McFarlane, eds, *Urban Navigations: politics, space and the city in South Asia* (New Delhi, Routledge, 2011), pp. 239–64.
48. This account was provided orally by Varuni's daughter and is based on e-mail correspondence initiated through her with her mother in 2014.