

ABSTRACT

Is there a modern colonial architecture in Macao?

Colonial architecture has been generally described and identified as in import of eclectic and neo-classical forms from the motherlands and cores of Empires to their respective peripheries. This notion based mainly on a formal approach to this issue does not seem to provide a satisfactory answer for this question.

This thesis is a research into what might be the relations between colonialism and architecture, namely modern architecture.

The first suggestion of the research is that architecture and building form have to be understood on a global scale, in relation with regional and international political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the world economic system.

the proposed hypothesis is that modern colonial architecture has, in many respects, continued a tradition of the relations between the developments at the core and their reproduction and representation as a clear sign of either social, economic, political or cultural control through the development of new forms of consciousness that are then transported and implanted at the periphery.

The second hypothesis is that if there is such a thing as this continuity in the tradition of colonial architecture, that it should be better understood if addressed in relation to the changes in the social, political, economic and cultural realms and their interdependence with the international modes of production in the capitalist world-economic system.

The first proposition is that the difference of modern colonial architecture seem to reside in the hypothesis that there was a shift from romantic symbolism to technological rationalism in the reproduction and representation of metropolitan forms.

INTRODUCTION

"A Portuguese who fallen asleep in Lisbon and, by magic, woke up in Hong Kong, wouldn't be able to know where he was, but he surely would know that it was not a Portuguese city. If the same Portuguese woke up near the Nine Islands and, further on, he could see the, from the ship, the Chapel of our Lady of Guia, then the Hospital of S. Januário, further along the S. Francisco Barracks with a row of houses along the Praia Grande (Nam Van - Long Beach), beyond, those of the Chunambeiro and then, on the top of the hill, the Chapel of our Lady of Penha, he would say to himself, I don't know what city it is, but I am looking at a Portuguese city by the Sea. After entering the Inner Port (Porto Interior), the same Portuguese would feel lost again: What is this? What sort of boats are these? What sort of strange people are they? What sort of house is that one that I have never seen one like that before? Am I dreaming or am I awake? After this, still under the same impression, he would then go to the Leal Senado (Senate) Square. After rubbing his eyes, as to wake up from a surreal dream, he would then look at the Leal Senado (Senate house) and the Prison granite building and feel reassured that all that was surrounding him was indeed Portuguese. After strolling around the Praia Grande, he would want to see the Chunambeiro, then to visit the several churches, all undoubtedly Portuguese.

Today, in spite of all this, this is not so. The city, for the last thirty years, has sadly lost most of its Portugueseness. The government and the locals have been, without almost no hesitation or interference, spending millions of Patacas (the local currency), to replace the good by the worst one can possibly imagine, ruining and denationalising the city. What existed and has been destroyed was either typically Portuguese or typically Chinese. We had a city like no-one had in the Far East, a city worth of being visited. Today we have a shapeless and uncharacteristic city of which almost every attraction and picturesqueness have been removed without a trace. I still remember, when I arrived to Macao, listening to foreigners admiring and contemplating the city". Silva Mendes (1929)

Is there a modern colonial architecture in Macao?

Is it a Portuguese colonial architecture?

Was there ever an exclusive Portuguese, as Silva Mendes claims, colonial architecture in Macao?

What are the counter-colonial influences in the developments of colonial architecture?

Colonial architecture has been generally described and identified as an import of eclectic and neo-classical forms from the motherlands and cores of Empires to their respective peripheries. This notion based mainly on a formal approach to this issue does not seem to provide a satisfactory answer for some of these questions.

In researching this subject, I realised that the development of Macao as a port city, had much in common with other Portuguese colonial port cities and also with other port cities that are related through the development of the world-economic system.

Even considering that the forms and architectural languages of most colonial buildings are sometimes a direct import from either metropolitan, imperial or other peripheral forms and norms, the modes of production and the technological means had always to adapt somehow to local, either climatic, social, political or other, conditions. A good example of this was the fact that the church of S. Pauls was built in the coast of China mainly with Japanese workers that, as it seems, were not experienced to carry out the stone work, or at least, the church was built with construction techniques that were completely unknown in this part of the world.

In trying to perceive what the relations might be between colonialism and architecture, namely modern architecture, I felt that, as Anthony King suggested, architecture and building have to be understood on a global scale, in relation with regional and international political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the world economic system. Modern colonial architecture has, in many respects, continued a tradition of the relations between the developments at the core and their reproduction and representation as a clear sign of either social, economic, political or cultural control

through the development of new forms of consciousness that are then transported and implanted at the periphery.

The reason that the island of Taipa and Coloane are only very superficially mentioned is, for obvious reasons, that, on one hand those island were only occupied in the middle of the 19th century, and that they were mostly a somewhat remote leisure and holiday resort of the colony up to the time when the bridge was built in 1974, which changed the way the territory developed.

The thesis has three chapters. The first chapter deals with the precondition that brought the Portuguese to establish a entrepôt city at what was to become the Gates of China. A brief account is given to the first developments in the Portuguese colonial expansion towards the Far East so that one could put into perspective what might have been the multiple reasons for such a colonial expansion. The second chapter is an attempt to deal with the history of Macao, from its foundation in the 16th century as an international entrepôt that turned the city into a metropolitan core within the periphery, to the end of the 19th century, after the foundation of Hong Kong in the middle of the 19th century and the almost consequent loss of the privileges brought by the trade monopoly, that turned the colony into a periphery within the periphery. The third chapter tries to address what relations were there between architecture, modernism and colonialism that informed the developments in architecture, the build form and the city. The periodisation of this chapter concentrates on the 20th century, in a time that most of the production of imported metropolitan forms and modes of production was carried out mostly by locals, mostly non- architects that carried out up to the beginning of the 1960's when the movement of Portuguese colonial architects started. As Macao does not have a school of architecture, its government always recruited them at what used to be the metropolitan core of the Portuguese empire.

Though the 'key institutions of colonialism' (King, 1990:51) that better represent these relation are mainly public buildings, I have chosen also illustrations of private buildings and of urban aspects of the city and of the colony that I felt were extremely good examples of a colonial presence and sovereignty over an alien territory.

To conclude I would like to put forward the hypothesis that there is a strong continuity in the tradition of colonial architecture, that is better understood if it is addressed in relation to the changes in the social, political, economic and cultural realms and their interdependence with the international modes of production in the capitalist world-economic system (King, 1990: 135). The differences of modern colonial architecture seem to me to reside in the hypothesis that there was a shift from romantic symbolism to technological rationalism in the reproduction and representation of metropolitan forms.

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