The (post)pandemic epistemology of Asian architecture and urbanism: A postcolonial heterotopia

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Architectural theory is, arguably, subordinate to pragmatism in current scholarship. However, the global atmosphere today might stimulate changes. The Coronavirus disease has caused a pandemic; and, even though the situation is gradually under control, the world has to face challenge. From a spatial perspective, the pandemic imposes the unusual social distancing and the intended social isolation which are characteristic against the existing civilisation that is geographically rooted in social and cultural development. This area intervention would shake the existing epistemology of architecture, and the phenomenon is possibly going to last out till the post-pandemic era. The epistemology of architecture today that suggests strong involvement of pragmatism and immediate contact capability would echo the way that the (post)pandemic geography goes. This study argues that this resonance in architectural knowledge will become more theoretical because of the spatiotemporal difference and deferral – the notion of discontinuity would reposition the dominance of historical continuity. The current end-of-theory atmosphere in architecture would hence be forced to reverse as the realistic and immediate restriction is against practice and physical materiality. As a consequence, Michel Foucault’s proposition on heterotopia that shows an antinomy of reality and unreality could develop further in actuality. This paper borrows
a postcolonial perspective to elaborate this argumentation through an analysis of contemporary Asia’s architecture and urbanism in general. A postcolonial attitude sees things from a nature of dynamic, i.e., the fluidity registered in the relationships of dominance allows Asian theorisations of architecture to rectify the stigmatised uncertain, underdeveloped and chaotic situations that have been unfittingly judged by a view of dualism. Contemporary Asia’s plural-built phenomena, in this sense, provide a potential that conflicts caused between conventional/Eurocentric knowledge of architecture and the (post)pandemic geography can be explained. As a strategic refinement, cases in Japan, Singapore and Malaysia are comparatively discussed as the representation.

- Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr Francis Chia-Hui Lin is an architectural historian and theoretician. He is currently an Assistant Professor at National Taiwan University. His areas of expertise lie in the critical discourse on architecture and urbanism within a wider context of history and theory. Amongst his interests, a particular focus is on a built context of the Asia Pacific region, which is resulted from an inescapable marriage with the prevailing Western epistemology, from both global and alternative perspectives of the Humanities to examine its immediate historicity of postcoloniality. He publishes and reviews academic works widely in the cross-national and transdisciplinary communities. He is the author of Heteroglossic Asia (Routledge, 2015) and Architectural Theorisations and Phenomena in Asia (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). His new book The Chosen Architectural Displayness in Asia which will be published by Lexington Books is forthcoming. Last, Francis won the Ta-You Wu Memorial Award based on the above experience.