

Relevance of Hong Kong & Shenzhen Themes

Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture, since its inauguration in 2007, has been envisioned as correlated and complimentary to each other. For 2011, Mr. Terence Riley, chief curator for Shenzhen event, has proposed the theme as “ARCHITECTURE CREATES CITIES. CITIES CREATE ARCHITECTURE” (城市創造). The theme sheds light on reciprocal relationship among architecture and urbanism in the context of time and place that supports environmental sustainability and generates cultural vitality.

Hong Kong’s theme, “TRI-CIPROCAL CITIES: THE TIME, THE PLACE, THE PEOPLE” (三相城市：時間·空間·人間), is a variation, or extension of the theme. As the former deals with the most critical issues of current Shenzhen, the latter acknowledges specific issues of Hong Kong. Shenzhen, with a fast growing economy, vast supply of land, and explosive growth, is distinctive in its architectural and urban identity. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has witnessed several rounds of economic booms and recessions, possesses a very limited land supply, can only have implosive growth through regeneration, and its urban space and architecture have become one indistinguishable entity.

“Tri-ciprocal” and “Jian”

Hong Kong’s theme addresses the tangible as well as the intangible aspects of the city and its architecture, global trends as well as specificity of the time, the place, and the people.

“Tri-ciprocal” is a word we derive from “reciprocal”, which emphasizes the interplay of time, place, and people, each being significant dimensions that shape the essence and quality of a city. They represent peoples’ attitudes towards the passage of time as the most dictating element for the management of environment. Urban features derived from specific ways of living, and the integrated cultural ambiance sensed and generated by the people, including permanent or transient residents, are evidence of space and events that are marked by people through time.

Although commercial buildings in Ginza, Tokyo exist only 10 years in average, most buildings outlast the life span of people, and cities generally outlast buildings. We believe that three elements aforementioned are the most decisive factors that provide the long-lasting character and vitality of a city, and hopefully direct our eyes beyond current fashionable vocabularies and arguments.

The Chinese theme, if translated directly, means “Three-phased Cities: the time, the place, the people”. However, behind “time, space, people”, there follows the word “間” (Jian) behind. This word means “realm or dimension”, but may also mean “in-between”. Therefore the sub-title also refers to “in-between times, spaces, and peoples”, and indicates an abstract and intangible relationship.

Analogy of City’s Biological Time

The Biennale draws an analogy between the development of a city and the biological time of a person, and wishes to render comparative representation of cities at their different biological times, in order to provide valuable mutual references.

If Shenzhen is like a teenager with boundless energy (constructive and destructive) and infinite possibilities, Hong Kong is like a middle-aged person who focus the challenge of mid-life with “ups and downs” “success and failures”. Although with different issues, Taipei and Singapore belong to the same “age group”.

Tokyo, on the other end, overbuilt with shrinking economic power and population, is like an old person who needs to consolidate life.

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Sendai, severely damaged by 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, needs to get back on its feet, like a person hit hard by a life-threatening accident.

New York City, arguably between middle-aged and old, is similar to HK in density and vertical development.

While most Chinese cities carry long historical lines, they are also being transformed at lightning speed, and voices of managing both the old and the new are on the rise.

The Public Realm and The City

The Curatorial Team would like to further question how the public realm reacts to this evolving biological stages of cities, and how it problematizes the term “Public Space.” The public realm, including public space, public art, public infrastructure etc, reacts to development of cities differently depending on history and culture, phase and rate of development. For young cities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, like Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Guangzhou etc, the definition and formation of the public realm takes on a path of the least resistant, mostly because of the top down policy driven by the young cities government authorities as well as their lack of historical baggage. For “mid-life crisis cities” like Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore, the emergence of the public realm takes on a more complicated dimension since its colonial history, existing fabrics formations, and social or economic development have to be confronted and resolved. The mature cities, like NYC, Paris, or Vienna, responded to the formation and definition of public realm in a more delicate balance between the public and private interests.

Through these exhibits, we wish to survey how to integrate history and historical elements while allowing for adjustment and development, how physical forms and aspirations of cities change through the course of time, how the vitality of the citizens flow and transform urbanity and architecture accordingly, if there are any past ideas and visions that are still valid today, and how to develop culturally, economically, and environmentally sustainable places. We wish to survey characters, strength, and contradictions of architecture and cities through these relevant issues.

We wish to show a dream city, no matter of what age, is like a person who has compassion and wisdom of the old, sophistication and practicality of the middle-aged, and purity and vitality of the young.

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