Hong Kong and Macau Identity at a Crossroads in the Post-Colonial Era: Tracing the Dynamics through the Lens of Architecture

The Sovereignty of Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 after 150 years of ruling under the British.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the intertwining relationship between ethno-cultural identity and architecture, using Hong Kong and Macau as case studies. The analysis of such intertwining relationships is based on a theoretical framework that draws from theories of ethnic identity and architecture. The research focuses on the change of Hong Kong and Macau identities before and after the sovereignty of both cities returned to China. The paper documents how the relationship between the Hong Kong and Macau identities and architecture is manifested through the process of their own constructions, deconstructions, and reconstructions. This dynamic process is examined in the context of political, social, and economic changes.

However, this paper argues that the trajectories of change in identity and in architecture are not necessarily linear and parallel but convoluting. The paper concludes with three theoretical propositions. The convoluted change can be explored at the state level where construction of a state identity (sovereignty) coails with (re)construction of state architecture signifying the sovereign state. Such effort is conscious, explicit and top-down. Second, the identity of the cities as places, as different from the state, is manifested as the integral part of all architectural built forms that outline the skyline of Hong Kong and Macau. The formation of this skyline is subject to negotiation among the state, the people, and private property developers. Third, identity is a product of negotiation that takes place at both state and local levels. The meaning of architecture that signifies the identities of the cities occurs through negotiation, between government and citizens, of spaces and place uses.