

*Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia.* By Abidin Kusno. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 250 pp.

Indonesia is a large country, one that when its map is laid over that of Europe stretches from England to the Urals, covering the entire continent. It comprises thousands of islands and a multitude of peoples. Not surprisingly, it also has a great variety of architectural styles, of which the traditional Javanese, Minangkabau, and Toraja houses have acquired some measure of fame. Different types of traditional styles abound and are complemented by Chinese, Hindu, colonial, modernist, and post-modernist architectural influences.

Notwithstanding this overwhelming richness and pluriformity of architectural expressions, during the post-colonial Old Order of Soekarno and the New Order of Soeharto a drive to promote the formation of an "Indonesian Architecture" has unmistakably taken hold. This has its roots in colonial experiments in the fields of architectural and urban design, like MacLaine Pont's buildings for the Bandoeng Technische Hoogeschool (now ITB) and Karsten's urban planning and *kampung* improvement projects. Soekarno, who was an architect by training, strengthened his efforts in nation-building by modernizing Jakarta. The leading role of the capital city in the nation was supported by great works and towering statues, like the National Monument, the Istiqlal Mosque, and statues like Selamat Datang in front of Hotel Indonesia and Hanuman (Dirgantara). These works and also, for example, such grandiose occasions as the Asian Games, reflected the important place Indonesia had assumed in the world and at the same time referred to traditional Javanese motifs, such as the *linggam-yoni*, the mortar and the pestle. However, no references to traditional architectural expressions of the other ethnic groups were incorporated into Soekarno's repertoire.

Again in the second phase of the post-colonial period, the New Order under Soeharto, this field was characterized by the search for "the Indonesian Architecture". An example is the Rectorate Tower, the so-called "water bottle", on the campus of Universitas Indonesia, Depok. This is a real piece of modern Indonesian architecture based on a new

creative configuration of traditional elements. The Taman Mini Open Air Museum, in which the house forms of the different Indonesian provinces are displayed, however, has traditional architectural expressions as its point of reference. In stylized and bridled ways, in order not to endanger nation-building, examples have been collected in the capital city to strengthen central authority. This fundamental ambivalence of Indonesian architecture between the traditional motifs of the different local styles, the modern influences from the Netherlands, the West in general, and more recent processes of globalization, and the aspirations of the leading élites to constitute one nation is the topic of the book of Abidin Kusno.

The main focus of the book is the reworking of the colonial trauma. The colonial experience was consciously rejected, but this negation remained the basis of the post-colonial order. The burden of the colonial trauma was heightened by the post-colonial shock of 1965, the bloody way in which the New Order forged its way to power. Only at present, thirty-five years later, are the colonial and post-colonial influences fading away under the new generations of Indonesians who did not experience colonization, and who are not united by vivid memories of the struggle against the Dutch. Now that the colonial foundations have almost completely vanished, the problems of Indonesia as a unitary nation/state and of “the Indonesian architecture” have bestowed a new dimension to the old adage of “Unity in Diversity”. In three parts — architecture, urban space, and (trans)national images — Abidin Kusno elaborates extensively on the problem of post-colonialism. He has included interesting descriptions of certain architectural and urban projects. As he mainly looks at his subject from the angle of political culture, the interaction between the post-colonial ideological conditions and architectural thinking remains the focus. No overview of pre-colonial, present-day, traditional, and other architectonic styles is included. Nor will one find an appreciation of the variety of colonial architecture, such as mansions, hotels, bank buildings, which was an expression of the Indies culture and is nowadays sometimes considered to be Mutual (Indonesian-Dutch) Architectural Heritage, but which is completely unique and exists only in Indonesia.

Perhaps Abidin Kusno could only write such a nice evaluative work about the colonial and post-colonial architectural and political periods because these are in a state of being rounded off. The future, however, does not look overly bright. Kusno introduces the concept of “Culture of Fear” in relation to the use of urban space. A nice photograph (on page 161) of a modern, casually dressed Chinese man of intellectual appearance, who is looking outside through the iron gates he is apparently closing for his protection, is revealing.

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