DESIGN HISTORY IN GLOBALIZATION AND THE PLACE OF EAST ASIAN DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

To resolve East Asia's marginalisation in design history, this research investigates the design history in Taiwan as an example, argues for design history's reconception from deeper historical and globological perspectives, and also advocates the imperative adjustment of design history curriculum in the marginalized regions. The meta-discourses of Euro-American modernism and postmodernism constitute the roots of privileged and prejudicial knowledge in the history of design, establishing Western developments as the yardstick for the production of design history. Substantive frameworks for shaping design history are necessary; however, such frameworks are also subject to change as historical conditions alter. The recent rise of East Asian economies focuses attention on their culture, including their cultural heritage, which has had a world historical influence over fields as diverse as writing, printing and design. Acknowledging this historical influence is fundamental to the development of East Asian localities as distinctive design spheres, while opening up scope for culture-based knowledge and understanding to perhaps reorient aspects of homogenous Western design.

Taiwan's sense of cultural marginalization, for example, not only involves the power and influence of Euro-American design but also its relationship to the emergent economic giant of China, which has led to Taiwan's exclusion from the WTO and other international organizations. The cultural erasure and homogenisation brought about by processes of globalization is the present hot topic in cultural studies, causing considerable panic and anxiety. The health and development of Taiwanese design depends on identifying those design characteristics and capabilities that transcend the tangled influence of modernist design, global design, Chinese and Japanese cultural heritage.

1   DESIGN HISTORY IN GLOBALIZATION

From end of the 20th century, the circumstance of globalization requests us to emphasize on bewaring of the domination of capitalism and modernism that has gradually influenced research in different fields, leading to a clearer direction and adding support to areas of research often neglected. Many recent seminars held by the Design History Society Annual Conference indicate a will to expand the geographic horizons of design history, as did the 2002 International Conference on Design History and Design Studies entitled 'Mind the Map: Design History beyond Borders' while journals such as *Design Issues* and *Journal of Design History* have pointed out the urgency and importance of redrawing the map of world design and reconceiving design history. Jonathan M. Woodham and Wen-Huei Chou paved the way for future design history research by arguing it should be aimed at what was "missing" or "never been seen" in mainstream surveys of design. [1] [2] This has initiated much reflection and reorganization on design history research at the end of the 20th century. The history of design, however, is different, values in the present framing knowledge about the past and especially understandings about the facts. Researches on the "present" has also to include historical research at differing levels based on the past, whilst a correct understanding of design history is a basic and necessary knowledge for such a job. Current researches have indicated the tendency of developing the unique contribution other visions would bring, and which set of values they would foster. Especially for those regions which have bee marginalized for long.

Culture in late capitalism is tied to broad global forces, though, as Arjun Appadurai argues, the traffic is not all one way, with the central tension in the contemporary world being that between 'cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.' [3] Appadurai confirms that a great weight of empirical evidence can be marshalled for the influence of Euro-American, and especially American culture as the hegemonic force the 21st century through the influence of their economies, media and consumer culture. But external forces are rapidly localized in one or more dimensions and as Appadurai argues, Americanization is not always the most pressing hegemonic force.

In the case of Taiwan one only has to consider the power and influence of China, though its sense of marginalization from the world at large (and consequent interest in Euro-American cultures) is increased by its political exclusion from the WTO and other global organizations as a result of China problems. For the health and development of Taiwanese design it is critical that we rebuild our design characteristics and capabilities from scratch on the basis of solid historical research into what Taiwanese design has been. Taiwanese culture can no longer be seen through centre-periphery structures, Terry Eagleton proposing that 'global perspective' or 'global thinking' shouldn't necessarily mean the centralization of global power but rather the integration of domestic and indigenous criteria into global networks against a tide of irreversible loss. [4]

2   THE PAST AND PRESENT DESIGN HISTORY IN TAIWAN

According to Wendy Siuyi Wong, [5] the design history of China is hardly heard or seen, and it was not until 1979 that it began to take shape.   Matthew Turner, one of the few historians who paid attention to the design history of China, said that the design history of Hong Kong prior to 1960 'simply was believed not to exist'. [6] Wong thought that the reason the modern design history of China had not been noticed by the Western world prior to this was because before the "open gate" policy of China enforced in 1979, most design was in the form of propaganda of communism, whilst the design activity in Taiwan was considered as being inspired and influenced by Hong Kong, and the development was between Hong Kong and Mainland China. [7] If we trace back the design theory, design knowledge and design activity of Taiwan in the last thirty years, most are examples of "modernism design" which were eager to follow in the lifestyle of the capitalistic metropolis and European civilization. In addition, the design history of China and other Asian countries other than Japan is considered to imitate the consuming and cultural value systems from western industrialized and commercialized countries. This imitation consequentially caused western nations to neglect the development and value of design in these areas when those areas didn't have strong intention to convince the Western by their own value. [8] [9] What is perhaps far worse is that these superior industrialized countries considered the output of the developing and Asian nations as their own manufacture, duplicating and producing design for/from them.

Beside this, design history research in Taiwan has another problem. Though the first design association organized in 1962, and there are a few relevant design associations such as Packaging Design Association, Graphic Design Association, and Designers Association, Poster Design Association, and Chinese Institute of Design, the foundation of design history research in Taiwan has lacked sufficient peer cooperation and resources. On the one hand, current design history research in Taiwan has been vaguely intertwined with that of architectural history and fine art history. It was roughly seen and talked of as one minor section in architectural or art history, or migrated into the cultural and social research approaches. Much research into architectural/industrial design /art/craft history has in the past arrogantly made statements on behalf of design history. Design history in Taiwan actually doesn't build up its own specialized profession as graphic design in practice does. On the other hand, in existing Taiwanese design history related research, first of all, it is short of communities to share and discuss the information. Very few researchers and educators who have dug out rare sources of information and completed study projects, have made their resources and contributions available to the public; secondly, the research itself has directed design history towards capitalism or that of the fine art style research due to a lack of accurate knowledge of design history research.   In fact, the current research goes against some of the main principles of modern design history that researchers desperately wanted to establish; also, the efforts to establish a professional and precise field on design history research in Taiwan have so far not been profitable.

Something tacit and important here is that we do not only need to switch the focus of design study/ design history research in marginalization, we also need to conceive the true value of design, not the fragrance of art pieces, nor the

splendor of new technology, but bring the quality of design principles into full view. Although design history research have believed that the bias and focus adjustment on the past were necessary, under the premise of design history research, we must recognize that design activity and behaviour are inevitable products of commercialized and industrialized society. Therefore their development was hard to detach from that of the commercialized and industrialized cultures and political colonization, as we have all appealed that design activity is integrated with its social context. Furthermore, after such long debates, fighting the conventional research of design history, we also have to admit that it is impossible to investigate the development of existing design history by completely excluding or making a denial of the great impact of modernization, industrialization and capitalism and their consequences. Yet, after being blinded by the aforementioned for such a long period, we finally have the chance and capability to reveal this conscious/unconscious hegemony which has immersed our legitimacy. Also, for marginalized areas such as Taiwan, facing the force of colonial/postcolonial influence, whilst also investigating the acculturation in modern time and seeking the multiple approaches of history interpretation, in order to get the base to construct in future.

Going back to the Taiwanese native literature debate in the seventies, the argument of this controversial movement has caused extensive impact in many areas, such as literature, fine art, music, and contemporary dance. It helped loosen the autocratic authority of the imported regime, enriched and hastened the hybrid culture in Taiwan. This is clear evidence of Pieterse's interpretation of 'postcoloniality', [10] in which we endeavor to recognize the inevitable hegemony and absolute essentiality of primordial ties, both endogenous and exogenous, whilst rebuilding the energy and character of current culture, and set up an environment of design discourse. [11]

3 THE FURTHER PERSPECTIVES IN THE GROUND OF DESIGN HISTORY IN TAIWAN

As the above discussion illustrates, design is originally the product of modernism and industrialized society, and when undergoing objective design history research, it is undeniable that the repeat indications of this thesis regarding European hegemony, capitalism, industrialization, commercialized or aesthetic design history perspectives and methodologies have long been planted. On the other hand, for a long time, the emerging and weaker nations have been involved in an endeavour to pursue and imitate the advanced western countries, hoping to get a chance for presentation, expression and recognition.

To study the design history and design education here in Taiwan, we of course must understand the history of the early migrants from the south mainland, the living conditions and utensils used by aborigines, the fine art design and industrial revolution during the Japanese ruling period, the influences from the coastal cities and the design of Hong Kong, to take race, colonialism, manufacturing and production practices, as well as multiple levels of political environment into consideration. At the same time, we must further coordinate with the current industrial structure, economical development and the present cultural status of Taiwan. Only when this has been completed can the design history research of Taiwan possibly get away from the currently mistaken view of "mass production" and "style analysis" as well as the "canon admiration" of modernism. And therefore get into the deep rooted design history; find out the typical historical/culture heritage, indigenous material, particular lifestyle, and the circumstance of social and political changes viewpoint for Taiwan's design. This is vital, especially as it is now profitable to produce work on design history from within the marginalized areas, that this history not be produced based on a historical viewpoint of the past and that it should encapsulate a new and conclusive viewpoint and research method.

Take Turkey, Mexico, India, Brazil and Cuba for example, these countries have been actively re-interpreting their local design culture and history, [12] and emphasizing that after understanding the research approach of Western hegemony, the association between design development itself and those viewpoints, One must then return to the native cultural specialty significant to that nation in order to write its design history. [13] Design itself will then make more practical and local sense, and design history will achieve a breakthrough in viewpoint. This will enable design history research to be undertaken with complete self-determination according to the character of the design activity and the actual socio-cultural factors; not to be influenced by the value system of historical research that allowed design history to jump out the subordinate status in cultural research to struggle between colonialism and marginalized power, or even being at the present hot topic- panic and anxiety caused by globalization.

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