THE (UN)WALLED CITY:
The (De)Construction of High-Density Urban Landscape
in HDB New Town, Singapore
and the Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong

by

TEO HUEY LIN, JULIANA
HD972043L

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ABSTRACT:

The Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong was a densely populated (35 000 people at its peak), 10-14 storey high mega-structure of 200x150 metres, that grew through a continual process of demolition and rebuilding, without any architects, planning regulations or building standards. It was a self-regulating and self-sufficient city that was claimed by both the Chinese and the British but properly administered by neither. It was an undesirable and appalling place to live in with no proper sanitary system, water supply or refuse collection and many apartments received no natural daylight. It was a labyrinth, a city of darkness, which was home and refuge to many.

In Singapore, the Housing Development Board (HDB) has successfully housed over 80% of its population. Conceived from a pragmatic viewpoint of providing public housing, it is carefully planned, from its spatial demarcations for social amenities to the compartmentalization of individual housing units. The home unit is perceived as a basic component in nation building, hence besides providing accommodation for its people, its master-planning embodied the planning philosophies and ideology of the government. Both the Kowloon Walled City and HDB go beyond fulfilling the basic need for shelter; their manifestations are resultant of/influence the social outlook of its inhabitants that also affect the urban landscape.

This dissertation attempts to 'unwall' the prototype of these two mass housings by (de)constructing its physical environment, planning mechanisms and its underlying power-relations (using Foucault's theory of power relations as a theoretical framework), to analyse strategies imminent for its survival or demolition (as in the case of the Kowloon Walled City). Hence, the city and its physical landscape are the result of the constant negotiation of the power relations and the contestation of space between its different users with diverse socio-cultural, political and economic agenda. This dissertation aims to comprehend the cultural, economic and political influences on the physical urban landscape and its social relations in high dense cities of Hong Kong and Singapore through the analysis of the dynamic and interdependent relationship between the built environment, culture and social behaviour/action.

Dissertation Supervisor: Low Boon Liang
Title: Assistant Professor

Dissertation Supervisor: Hee Limin
Title: Assistant Professor