Abstract

The paper will attempt to give a broad overview of the urban environment in two of the most developed Asian Cities: Hong Kong and Tokyo. Both cities have come to be shaped and dominated by icons of modern cities. Although these icons are universal, their collective form, however, have produced some spatial qualities and physical conditions that are unique to these two Asian cities. The formal characteristics of their urban environment have an organic quality. They are the results of a natural growth process rather than one of pre-determined planned development.

The paper will attempt, with The Figure-Ground Theory as a device, to understand the built environment of Hong Kong and Tokyo. It will look at relationships between binary opposites such as interior/exterior spaces, private/public domain and solid/void. It will examine the new relationships between buildings and streets, between buildings, within the buildings’ interior and the city’s infrastructure. It will explore spatial qualities of ‘interiorized’ exterior and ‘exteriorized’ interior spaces, ‘private-managed’ public spaces and physical conditions such as the ‘hidden’ elevation, the ‘other’ elevation, the ‘elevated’ ground, the city’s pedestrian circulation system and ‘intertwining’ infrastructure. With the street and ground as the datum, it will further explore relationships between the city’s architecture and various datum, both above and below the ground.
These new sets of relationships are believed to be the result of a unique approach to city-planning: one where the autonomy of the ‘parts’ are preferred over the idea of a ‘Whole’. This approach to city-planning, adopted by Hong Kong and Tokyo, can be seen as one that has surpassed that of the Figure-Ground Theory. It has produced an urban environment where dichotomy cease to exist. All its ‘parts’ has overlapped and intertwined in a complex manner resulting in a constantly evolving ‘whole’. They are exemplify by the urban environment of the cities. Both cities have cease to be understood in a simple two-dimensional plan. It has shifted beyond the traditional street level or ground, into a three-dimensional structure.

It is for all the above reasons that Hong Kong and Tokyo have been made the subject of study. It is believed that these cities are spearheading and already giving hints on how one future of Asian cities might eventually be shaped into.