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*“Modern Asian Architecture Network as a Vehicle for  
the Conservation-Revitalization of Built Twentieth Century Heritage in Asia:  
A Case of the Cultural Public Sphere” \*1*

20世紀都市遺産の保存・再生を目指すアジア近代建築ネットワーク：  
文化的公共圏の事例として

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*Abstract:*

21世紀初頭、アジアの諸都市は大きな転換期にある。中国の国際貿易機構（WTO）の参入により国際経済市場は革命の変遷を遂げつつある。台風の目はアジア中心に定着し、アジアには都市開発の嵐が吹き始めている。一方で、20世紀社会の繁栄を支えた近代都市遺産は老朽化の名の下で、目先重視、利益志向の資本主義経済によりその存在の危機を迎えている。文化は絶えずメタモルフォーゼを繰り返すが、社会においてのその変様の速度を考慮すると人間の記憶としての原風景を保存、再生する重要性は益々高まりつつある。アジア近代建築ネットワーク（mAAN）はその名のとおり、アジアの近代都市遺産の記録、保存、再生と次世代の教育を目的として21世紀を目前とした2000年に中国・広州にて設立された。ネットワーク組織の形態は中心を強調せず、民主的な国際組織としてその目的を達成すべく各地域にて活発な活動を展開してきた。まさにハーバーマスが指摘したカフェソサエティの21世紀版ともいえよう。本論文はmAANの組織と活動形態に着目し、アジアにおける文化的公共圏の事例としてその意義を論じる。建築はそれ自体、公共性を孕む行為である。その文化遺産としての建築の再生を掲げるmAANはさらに建築文化圏におけるディスカールを展開する「カフェソサエティ」であるといえよう。

*Keywords: architecture, modern, cultural heritage, Asia, network, revitalization*

キーワード：建築、モダン、文化遺産、アジア、ネットワーク、再生

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Asian cities, both large and small, are experiencing the tide of urban development at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul, Hong Kong and Singapore have already experienced, Beijing and Shanghai are in the midst of it. Other cities, like Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta have experienced the ups and downs of building rush. In these cities, the architectural vocabulary of progress does not necessarily fit the contextual image of Asian Cities. There exist numerous buildings and urban landscape unique to Asia which are very much part of the context. The Twentieth Century cultural heritage, which are the priceless heritage of our societies, are being demolished for scrap-and-built development of the capitalistic endeavor. The shortsightedness of the general public and the short term goals of the business leadership threaten the future relic and the carrier of precious memories of our times.

This paper examines a non-governmental group whose informal approach to the organizational structure generates a public sphere in the area of conservation and revitalization of modern Asian heritage. The case study shows the evidence of cultural public sphere in the discourse related to modern heritage in Asia.

## 2. History of mAAN and Its Organization

Out of a deep concern over lack of knowledge, lack of appreciation, denial of colonial heritage in Asia, and the need for a cooperative body linking concerned parties in various Asian countries on the issue of modernity and modernism in Architecture, a network among academicians and professionals with similar concern and idealism was formed in Guangzhou, China in 2000.

This network was named "mAAN" or "modern Asian Architecture Network" with small "m" – to represent the recognition and conflicting perspectives on the issue of modernity and modernism in Asia, and their willingness to keep the discourse open.

The network was set up with the spirit of equality, friendship, freedom, and openness, much like the café society described by Jurgen Habermas. The organizers of mAAN, called the "Core", reflecting back at the founding year, describe the concept of the network as the "Chinese dining table or an Asian food court", where "people with similar intentions come together to exchange ideas and to enjoy a wide range of offers and possibilities. In Guangzhou, the Core established that "open and loosely knitted network" is the best way to ensure sustainability and versatility of mAAN's operation within the complex and diverse context of Asia recognizing the potential difficulty of operating and maintaining the structured organization in the complex international boundaries.

In the operation of mAAN, having virtually no funds, mAAN must rely on volunteer spirit of the members and thrifty operation, especially in many of the workshops it organizes. The Network gives much autonomous power to the "grassroots" groups. The result was recent formation of national sections in Indonesia, Turkey and Japan. Dynamic and informal structure encourages self-initiated activities in various localities throughout Asia. Any group in the mAAN network can freely initiate activities in their region. They can announce the events on various mailing lists or any media to disseminate information to the public.



Photo 1  
mAAN Inaugural Conference 2001, Macau  
Photo courtesy of Macau SAR

### 3. mAAN Agenda and Goals

mAAN website states that its goals are "to create a worldwide awareness of the value of Asian modernity" and to promote the "significance of Asia's modern built heritage in each local context". The organization sees its mission as effective dissemination of Asian values related to "heritage" and "modernity" in local and global contexts.

The Core believes that only through creative thinking and practice can they achieve the goals. mAAN employs such means as research, networking, documentation, publication, conference and workshop to create the environment for discourse and public activism. Balance between theory and practice is an important factor in maintaining effectiveness in the urban context of Asia. Economic environment, not-so-sympathetic to the mAAN spirit, can be analyzed by the theoretical modeling and the organization can make a strong case of advocacy through comprehensive practical proposals to the stakeholders.

### 4. mAAN Network Structure

The organizational chart indicates the multi-sphere structure. Within the outer sphere are various regions of Asia with network connections indicated in lines which are free-form in nature. On this network are various projects, workshops, conferences and events initiated by mAAN which are represented by the small squares. Symbolic meaning of these lines and the squares is that these projects and events can be generated at any space-time within Asia if it is consistent with the goals and objectives of mAAN. At the edge of the outer sphere are several organizations affiliated with mAAN. The affiliation is defined by the organizations whose principals are members of the "Core" and whose philosophy is compatible with that of mAAN. Further out on the field on the chart are other organizations which have working relationships with mAAN.



Figure 1.  
mAAN network and conferences

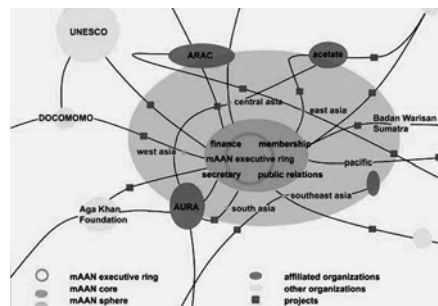


Figure 2.  
mAAN organizational chart

There are several mechanisms in the structure of mAAN to engage the members to the network. Conferences held annually in cities around Asia, workshops organized around "heritage survey" and "revitalization design" and the internet mailing list are the primary ways for participation in the Network.

While mAAN pursues its mission to address the issue of modern heritage in Asia, the Network is also active in establishing working relationship with other organizations concerned with modern heritage. In November 2003, mAAN was invited to participate in the international conference organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Center in Chandigarh, India. The conference was also attended by the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and DoCoMoMo (Documentation and

Conservation of buildings and sites of the Modern Movement) International. Participation resulted in the recognition of mAAN as an international body with shared goals of heritage conservation and revitalization.

Such collaboration ideology is reflected in the verse from the mAAN pamphlet: “...(mAAN) dares to dream and will always strive to turn the dreams into reality through reflection, innovation, and cooperation.”

## 5. International Conference

Annual international conference provides a forum for reporting of activities throughout Asia and to encourage debates regarding issues relating to the host city or the topics relevant to the time and occasion. Government representatives, local politicians and the members of the local business community, such as the real estate developers are often invited to participate in the discussions during the conferences and workshops. The subjects, heritage conservation and revitalization, are critical issues of public interest in many of the cities in Asia. It is a civic issue, since cultural sustainability is being threatened.

At most of the annual conferences, mAAN Declaration is issued to the public. For example, at the First mAAN International Conference, held in 2001, a “Macau Declaration” proclaimed the founding of the network and set the direction for mAAN. It stated that “...Modern Asia did not develop in isolated condition, but has evolved through sustained interactions with the West, which has had a constant presence in the collective consciousness of Asia.” The Declaration recognized the colonial influence as a valued memory of how Asians dealt with the West, with the neighbors and with themselves. mAAN put forth architecture, as a medium, which recorded the history of Asia becoming “modern.” Footprints of such journey are manifested in various forms of architecture existing throughout Asia.

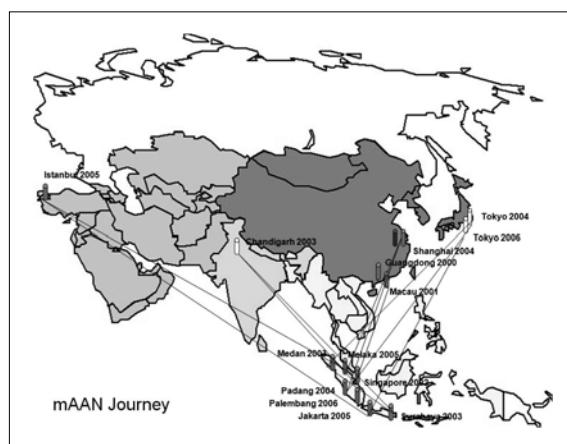


Figure 3.  
mAAN conferences

## 6. Workshop

For mAAN, organizing workshops is one of the most effective means to physically bring the members in one location to engage the organization with the local activities. Since the structure of mAAN is most informal, mAAN-sponsored workshop can easily be organized. Notice by the organizers is circulated via “Core-maan” mailing list to those in the ranks of the core membership. The workshop activities can be publicized when there are no objections by the “Core”. Public announcement for such workshops are made openly using the available media. The workshops engage participants onto local issues and to the community. Typical heritage surveys last one to two weeks, during which time as many as twenty members, spread into wide areas of the target district record inventories and make contacts with the stakeholders through interviews and community meetings. Design workshops, on the other

hand, bring together students and young architects to revitalization projects. Ideas are generated in these creative workshop environment and the results are displayed and presented to the public.

### **7. The "mailing list"**

In the network without defined hierarchical structure, the only indication of hierarchy is the multi-level mailing list, where the designated "Core", numbering around thirty members, forms the inner-most mailing list. These members make up the loosely organized decision making body of mAAN. They are connected to each other by the [core@m-aan.org](mailto:core@m-aan.org) mailing list, and meet annually at the international conference. General group mailing list is [maan\\_hall@yahoogroups.com](mailto:maan_hall@yahoogroups.com), a larger ring with more than one hundred members who had participated in the past conferences or anyone interested in mAAN. There are other mailing list set up for specific programs such as the mAAN conference, workshop, publication, etc. Regionally, there is [maan-Indonesia@yahoogroups.com](mailto:maan-Indonesia@yahoogroups.com) for mAAN Indonesia regional network with membership of around 50. Such structure is similar to the café environment where an individual can enter the public domain in discourse by either passive or active mode of participation. Typically, the level of participation is high prior to the international conference and the number of entries falls dramatically after the event. It seems that the multi foci structure creates organic activity within the network.

### **8. The Great Shanghai Industrial Heritage Revitalization Workshop**

At the planning stage of the 4<sup>th</sup> mAAN Conference in Shanghai, the need to practically appeal to the public regarding the shortsightedness of the authority and the business community in conserving an important modern heritage in the City became the theme. In April 2004, founder and the Chairman of mAAN, Dr. Shin Muramatsu proposed to organize a workshop dealing with industrial heritage to Teng Kunyen, a Taiwanese architect and a long time colleague residing in Shanghai, working alone to conserve and revitalize factories and warehouses in the City. Teng, for fourteen years, advocated historic preservation and revitalization of industrial heritage along the Suzhou and Huangpu Rivers. Already a noticeable presence in the Chinese architectural scene, with his unique and independent practice as architect/developer of the industrial heritage, Teng sought and won the leasing rights to a large complex of factories along the Huangpu River the previous year. The two agreed to a jointly-produced workshop featuring his factory complex. Thus, the "Great Shanghai Industrial Revitalization Workshop" was organized.

Immediately, the word was out on the mAAN mailing list, announcing that the workshop would be held in August. The workshop attracted nearly 70 students from thirteen countries in Asia, Europe and South America. It was lead by architect/unit masters from China, Singapore and Japan with guest lecturers from Thailand and Japan.

Commencement of the workshop coincided with official ceremony to lease the property to Teng by the municipal authority. The impact of this educational event, coinciding with the heritage revitalization project, felt by the guest of the ceremony was significant. Teng also was awarded the UNESCO Asian Heritage Award in the same year. Students with the unit masters were asked to produce theoretical proposals relevant to the property, while the architect/developer Teng and his staff were designing and building their own solution on the property.

Collaboration with Teng presented an ideal opportunity for mAAN to operate both an educational and political workshop in Shanghai. Upcoming mAAN Conference as the platform for public presentation brought the cooperation of Tongji University. Along with the quiet undercurrent to support the heritage conservation by the municipal authority, mAAN and the local interest groups came together

for a productive workshop.

The two-week session produced eight proposals which were diverse in their concept and direction. A group, taking their ideas from Lilong, the Shanghai multi-family housing prototype from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, inserted live-work environment in the factory complex. Another unit took the idea of the “banal”, to celebrate the ordinary daily spaces of the factory buildings. Landscape architecture approach was also presented. Analyzing the exterior spaces, one group manipulated landscape vocabulary to organize animated public spaces on the site. Historical approach was lead by a Japanese architect/professor whose specialization is in historical engineering. His team took “takuhon”, or rubbing imprint of historical manhole covers and street pavement patterns to expuress the elapse of time and wear and tear of the buildings and landscape. A group lead by an Osaka architect, took the main axis of the site and rotated it to create odd space configurations, based on the “urban noise” theory he has put forth.



Photo 2  
Shanghai Factory



Photo 3  
Session at the Shanghai workshop

Diversity of approaches and a variety of solutions generated much discourse during the design review. Teng, planning to develop what he calls “Creative Shanghai”, a design center containing international design school, fashion design studios, restaurants, a boutique hotel and architectural design studios was presented with alternative ideas. The exercise of the workshop is, in many ways, a form of cultural public sphere. It is a forum for public expression of ideas and ideals of visionary students and their unit masters. At the design review, critics freely voiced their views in public to present their visions of the heritage revitalization.

The results of the workshop was edited and published by the mAAN Press with the support of, among others, Asia Japan Center of Kokushikan University. The publication furthers the efforts of the workshop in disseminating information regarding the revitalization of industrial heritage in Asia.

## 9. Conclusion

mAAN is an organizational phenomenon. It has no concrete organizational structure, in the orthodox sense. It is alive and functioning in the internet environment with multi-layer communication arena of the mailing list. The members create their own projects in various parts of Asia, bringing in local and international experts to generate projects and workshops. Spontaneous formation of projects within the Network establishes the public sphere. The projects create publicity and the dynamic nature of mAAN becomes visible at annual international conference. mAAN network is a unique one with ambiguous core, or a sort of the internet central committee, but relatively loose field which the “Core” does not intervene. As the mAAN continues to grow, the level of complexity in the issues it challenges



will also evolve to higher level of discourse. We must still wait to see if the present structure can withstand the challenge to reorganize the Network into more conventional organization.

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### **Endnote**

- \*1 1. The author is the "Core member" and the vice chairman of modern Asian Architecture Network and had been involved in the organization of activities of mAAN including the annual conferences since 2001. The paper is based on the personal experiences of the author.

### **Reference Cited:**

Modern Asian Architecture Website : <http://www.m-aan.org/>