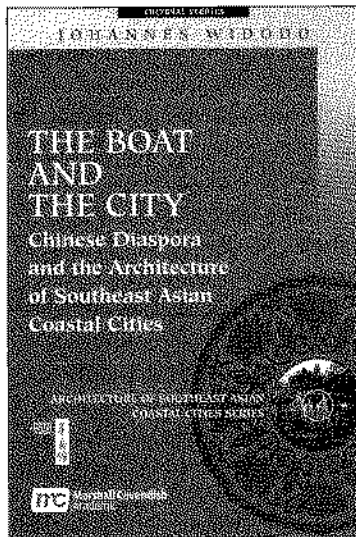


culture, but also yields new insights into religious cultures that have long dominated the U.S. built environment. This book, in tackling this diversity and complexity, is a welcome step in that direction. ■

Tania Martin

Université Laval, Québec

*The Boat and the City: Chinese Diaspora and the Architecture of Southeast Asian Coastal Cities.* By Johannes Widodo. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish and the Chinese Heritage Center, 2004. 246 pp., b&w illus.



*The Boat and the City* highlights the contributions of the Chinese diaspora to the formation of coastal cities in Southeast Asia. Johannes Widodo suggests that various forms of discrimination against the Chinese, including nationalist policies of assimilation and urban riots, demonstrate how this Chinese contribution has been forgotten. His book hopes to redress this neglect by studying the

history of these coastal cities, from their beginnings in villages to their development into trading posts, entrepôts and emporiums. Widodo's argument is that immigrant Chinese were key to the founding of these cities and the development of tolerant, multiethnic societies in them.

*The Boat and the City* covers a large geographical region through two millennia. It is planned as the first in a series on "Architecture of Southeast Asian Coastal Cities" sponsored by the Singapore Chinese Heritage Center and edited by Widodo. Grand narratives may be long out of fashion; nevertheless, the book describes the "Mediterranean of Asia" in bold brush strokes to provide a base from which other, presumably more localized, narratives will spring.

The book consists of five chapters, illustrated with more than one hundred neat diagrams, black-and-white photographs, and maps. The diagrams depict the layout of cities in relation to their socio-spatial makeup — i.e., the residential quarters occupied by different ethnic communities, their hierarchy of urban spaces, and topographical features.

Widodo makes extensive use of morphological analysis. Yet, in *The Boat and the City*, this methodology serves primarily to draw connections between different locations in the region,

and between different time periods.' Widodo writes that "the city is a product of collective memory and the materialization of the culture of its inhabitants along history." Indeed, he likens the urban fabric to a "pile of tissue," with the layers representing different historical periods. Those elements that persist "keep the memory and identity of places and events."

The author also suggests that morphological analysis alone is not enough to understand the development of cities. Such work needs to be enriched by sociological and philosophical "layers" to arrive at a "totality of architecture." In other words, morphology needs to be linked to cosmology, to places of origin, as well as to "mental blueprints."

The name of the book is drawn from one of these blueprints, the Chinese boat. Widodo explains there were both literal and metaphorical connections between the boat and the city. "The city is like a boat or a vessel, loaded by people, goods, activities, rituals, and symbolism — a vessel of civilization, sailing across history, from the past heading towards the future." He then makes the provocative argument that the spatial configuration of the Chinese immigrant ship, including its shrine to the Goddess Mazu, was transplanted into adopted lands.

The book's first chapter, "Southeast Asian Morphology," functions like an introduction, presenting methodological and theoretical concerns such as the links between history, culture and cosmology. It observes that the original morphologies of capital cities in the region were based on the Hindu cosmological order, with the palace occupying the highest point, the ordinary people dwelling on the slope, and the harbor and market set up by the waterside. But as maritime trade brought different temporary and permanent populations, including the Chinese, this original pattern became more complex.

The remaining four chapters of the book are organized chronologically. The first provides a historical overview of the trade links and the beginnings of coastal cities in the region from the first to the sixteenth centuries. It discusses the links with mainland China and the role of the Chinese Admiral Zheng He's voyages (1405–1433) in establishing trading posts in the region. Admiral Zheng, a Muslim, protected Muslim communities and helped spread Islam and cultivate tolerance between different religious and ethnic communities. Other early Chinese contributions to urban form included markets in front of temples and near the harbor, the shophouse architectural typology, and the introduction of permanent building materials.

Some of the early trading posts established by the Chinese developed into entrepôts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Widodo's third chapter uses the examples of Tuban, Gresik, Surabaya, Semerang, Demak, Pattani, Palembang, Singga-pura, and early Melaka to discuss this trend. The Chinese typically lived in a fortified area close to the water in these settlements, alongside relatively less dense indigenous settlements. Even though fortifications were

later removed, the distinct characteristics of each part persisted. Some of these entrepôts later started exchanging their own commodities and developed into emporiums.

The book's fourth chapter examines the cases of Ayutthaya on the mainland and Banten and Sunda Kelapa on the island of Java in the archipelago. Emporiums eventually built fortifications to protect the native royal core from European naval attack in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The city continued outside the fortifications in the form of urban villages. The foreigners, forbidden to dwell in the core, established their own settlements next to the Chinese and royal quarters. In addition to this separation based on race, quarters were segregated within themselves according to religion.

The fifth chapter covers the period of European colonization. Widodo observes that the colonial "layering" resulted, in historical order, in trading posts, castle towns, fortified cities, racially segregated cities, and the prewar modern city. He traces the individual developments of Melaka, Penang and Singapore under British rule, and Batavia and Semarang under Dutch rule.

Despite being nearly half the book, this chapter is its least satisfactory, primarily because of its emphasis on European impact rather than on the "production of space" — for instance, indigenous processes that contested the spatial politics of colonization. This privileging of the European perspective undermines the book's main goal, which is to highlight the role of one ethnic community in the building of a multicultural society. In this chapter, the Chinese seem to be consigned to a role as intermediaries between the colonizers and the colonized.

Another troubling aspect is Widodo's argument that these cities were "cosmopolitan." To back up this assertion, he points to aspects of architectural form and ritual practice as evidence that different groups were influenced by each other. But his examples remain anecdotal. For instance, he writes that pork was forbidden in a Mazu temple in Palembang "as an expression of respect to the Chinese Muslim Navigator who was buried behind the main altar." Because of its tombs, the whole temple was oriented similarly toward the *qibla*. In this example, the architecture becomes a representation of peaceful "cohabitation" that is then generalized to the region.

He also explains that people of different religions, ethnicities and races came together in marketplaces fostered by the Chinese. Yet one can't help wonder about this. If there were such a dialogue, why did residential boundaries remain in place even after the dissolution of walls? How and why did different groups preserve their unique identities and restricted quarters? What did "unity in diversity" mean in the pre-modern era? And how was it reinterpreted in modern times?

Widodo frequently characterizes Southeast Asian coastal cities loosely as "multicultural" and "cosmopolitan." The concept of cosmopolitanism has been in vogue in the description

of early modern cities for some time now. One attitude has been to locate cosmopolitanism in (elite) individuals who can make themselves comfortable in different cultural settings. Another is to extend it to places, endowing them with characteristics that nurture cosmopolitan types. Yet different groups who did not mingle existed in every ancient city, and the copresence of different groups is not in itself satisfactory as an account of multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism.

By using these concepts without problematizing them, authors run the risk of pasting contemporary concerns with cultural homogeneity onto the past. It verges on nostalgia to say, as Widodo does, that until the arrival of European colonialists, all sorts of differences were positively received and absorbed. And by privileging the Chinese community — and to some extent that of the European colonizers — he inevitably downplays the contributions of "indigenous" as well as other, non-Chinese communities (such as Arabs, Indians and Persians) in the rise of these cities.

For the uninitiated reader, the broad approach employed in the book is very useful in understanding the general organization of cities and the links between them. The author brings together a great collection of evidence and makes it accessible to a general audience. This book would be a good addition to courses on Southeast Asia if complemented by other sources that portray the finer grain of social life and social change. Upon completing the book, however, this reader wished this impressive work could have been complicated by other types of primary research to examine inter- and intra-community negotiations and the way space activates social formations and relations between them. One hopes this will be included in subsequent volumes in the series. ■

1. Typological and morphological research proved immensely popular throughout Europe in the 1960s and 70s as a form of resistance to what was then seen as the homogenizing tendencies of Modernism. Such studies emphasized continuity in urban forms and the role of architecture in shaping collective memory in hopes that the recovery of typologies could restore an authentic public realm. Later, this approach lost its critical edge, subsumed in the U.K. and U.S. within the rubric of commercial postmodernism.

*Ipek Türeli*

*University of California at Berkeley*