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Edge of Empire or Edge of Asia?: 'Placing' Australia in the Expanding Mid-twentieth Century Discourse on Modern Architecture

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Abstract

Efforts to define an Australian architectural identity have often been compromised by conflicting historical affinities and geographical realities. Under the certainties and assumptions vested in the British Empire, relationships with Asia in the Australian architectural imagination were typically ambivalent. History had extended Europe far beyond its shores. The far-flung geography of Australasia was to be ignored as best as possible, the distance overcome by ever-faster transport and communications.

With the formal end of empire in the mid-twentieth century, and the new geo-political and economic focus on the development of neighbouring nation states, the nature and dynamics of architectural encounter between Asia and Australasia ostensibly changed significantly. Yet, as this paper explores, modernity was in many respects just a new face to the former imperial order. In architecture as in other fields, the new institutional frameworks and agencies that emerged to aid the process of post-colonial modernisation and development still reflected the values and technocratic scaffolding of empire. Strategic new frameworks like the Colombo Plan scholarships programs brought future leaders among the first postcolonial generations of South and South-East Asian architects to study in Australian universities, but curricula throughout the ex-colonial Commonwealth remained tied to the old imperial core through the RIBA accreditation and examination system. Through the propagation of modern architecture strong neo-colonial North/South links were thereby developed between architectural educators and professionals in the emerging nations of postcolonial Asia and benchmark institutions in the UK and its former settler dominions, including Australia.

Engaging earlier insights on the evolving Australia-Asia dialogue in Australian architectural discourse over the first half of the twentieth century, the paper reconsiders the recurring question of region in a key mid-century discussion about an emerging modern Australian architecture, and how this may be better understood in the context of the increasingly complex and dialogical relationships between post-colonial Asia and Australasia in the transition from colonial-modernity to the cosmopolitan modernity idealised in contemporary architectural discourse.

Introduction

How Australians have viewed Asia over the past century or so has tended to be determined by how they have defined themselves. 'A divergence had emerged early and would persist' observes the cultural historian, Alison Broinowski, 'between those settler Australians for whom *geography* was dominant, who wanted to become Australasians, part of the Asia-Pacific hemisphere, and those for whom *history*, and their British identity dominated all else.'[1]

Of course, this divergence was far from balanced. The overriding majority view was confessed unequivocally by the painter, (Sir) Arthur Streeton in 1901 – the year Australia became a federated dominion and implemented, as one of its very first parliamentary acts, the exclusionary 'White Australia Policy' on citizenship and immigration. '[M]y instinct is English,' wrote Streeton, 'and if I have any political feeling – it is in favour of British supremacy.'[2] Significantly perhaps, one of the most earnest exponents of the minority 'Australasian' view was an architect, the consummate draughtsman and pioneering conservationist, William Hardy Wilson. For Wilson, the Australian people together with their architecture were a transplant from a declining Europe, now rooted felicitously in 'Oriental soil.' Contact with Asia, China in particular, through such colonial extension was the greatest hope, Wilson idealised, for the revitalisation and further development of modern civilisation.[3]

In the context of the emerging spatial and climatological concerns of the modern architectural discourses of the early twentieth century, it is tempting to imagine that 'architecture' offered a more enlightened view of the dawning reality of a global civilisation in which the antipodes would no longer be the periphery. Ignoring for the moment the political naivety and spurious but fashionable racial theories that

underpinned his idealism, Wilson's 'Orientalist' propositions of the 1920s and 30s could still be construed, in that late colonial context, as a progressive and even radical cosmopolitanism. Yet, as Broinowski observes in a wide-ranging survey of Asian impressions upon Australian art and culture, as late as the 1970s the historical and critical discourse on architecture in modern Australia associated with such seminal later writers as Robin Boyd was also one of the last bastions in which the problematic binaries and essentialisms inherited from the Orientalist thinking of the colonial era remained unquestioned.[4]

The recent publication of *Shifting Views*, Leach, Moulis and Sully's edited collection of selected essays on the architectural history of Australia and New Zealand offers timely insights, as its title suggests, into the significant changes in critical perspective that have directed the viewing and the writing of architecture over the short history of the present scholarly society (SAHANZ) since its establishment in the mid 1980s. Parallel to these historiographical developments, and reflected in our increasingly frequent borrowings of extra-disciplinary views and theories, was the development of a sophisticated discourse about the cultural pluralities and dialectics of the 'postcolonial' and 'global' worlds in which 'Australasia' was coming to identify and view itself in a very new light by the late twentieth century (at least in academic circles).

Heralding this abrupt turn in the very nature of what would subsequently be recognised as 'architectural criticism' was the 1985 essay, 'The "Sydney School"?', by a young and precocious new voice, Stanislaus Fung.[5] Far from offering any substantive new interpretation of 'difference' in the architectural design culture of the Sydney region, however, Fung's aim was to shift the view from the formal object of critical interest to focus the critical gaze upon the subjectivity of the critics themselves and what he charged was merely their discursive construction. The notion of a distinctive 'Sydney School' of rough-hewn, informal, site-responsive contemporary architecture in the bushy environs of Sydney was first mooted, as Fung notes, in a suggestive article of 1962 entitled 'The Growth of an Australian Architecture' by the Sydney based architect and academic, Milo Dunphy. But a chorus of subsequent assertions about the intentionality and cohesion of this putative 'school' published over the following two decades had amounted only to a lot of cant in Fung's view, conspicuously lacking in reflexivity, at least in any theoretically a-tuned sense, and bearing little consistent relationship to fact.

Among the more persuasive of this chorus was Robin Boyd, Fung concedes. Whilst this 'school' had clear affinities, to Boyd's eye, not only to British Brutalism but to its Pacific-rim counterparts in the Californian Bay Region style and, notably, Japanese architecture as well, he discerned that it also had 'subtle regional characteristics' of its own that were recognisable by any Australian 'who knows the style.'[6] The relative worldliness of Boyd's critique appears to have avoided the naive parochialism of which Fung accused some others. But, by re-presenting this putative contemporary 'Australian architecture' as just a local regionalist tendency, whose characteristics were most readily distinguished in contrast to his own 'Melbourne school' of universal functionalist rationalism, Boyd had only succeeded in foregrounding his own cultural cringe – an aversion at heart to the idiosyncratic 'featurisms' of local building cultures that, paradoxically, he had so brilliantly characterised in the case of Australian suburbia in his polemical earlier writing.[7] His brand of modernism was all about measuring up to international norms and standards. The culture of the place was to be transcended.

Boyd's critique thus articulated the continuity of a familiar schism between historical and geographical affinities in Australia's reception of the competing traditions within the expanding mid-twentieth century discourse on modern architecture. On the one hand were those whose notions of a rational and thus 'universal' modernism were underpinned by a sense of certainty inherent in their colonial historical contiguity with the Enlightenment histories of modern Europe and America. On the other hand were those inspired by the more intuitive and putatively 'organic' branch of modernism associated with Wright, and Griffin in the immediate Australian context, who sought to identify in a more responsive rather than resistive way with their Australasian geography and ethos on the edge of Asia and the Pacific.

Fung's emphatically postmodern critique of the 'Sydney School' discourse was primarily concerned with method and what he perceived to be a conspicuous lack of theoretical and even empirical rigour in mid-century modernist historiography in Australia. But beyond the inter-regional and local/global dialectics of identity formation within Australian modernism, there were intriguing cross-cultural and 'Asian' facets to this discourse vaguely alluded to by Fung, but the political dimensions of which neither he nor earlier writers were evidently aware of at the time.[8]

To anticipate the somewhat convoluted argument of this paper, we will return to these unexplored facets of the discourse closer to the end to consider the unexpected implication of Dunphy's original article – first published in *Hemisphere*, a government published general-interest magazine primarily targeted at Asian students in Australia – in a wider campaign of Cold War propaganda aimed at building new bridges of empathy and understanding between Asia and Australia. By thereby adjusting if not shifting our view of the defining discourse that article seeded, the aim of the paper is to begin to fill in the picture of the more complicated and anxious Australasian world-view in the middle decades of the twentieth century in which the notion of a contemporary Australian architecture and its discourse were taking shape. This Cold War world of simultaneous modernisation and decolonisation was more focused on the critical importance of Asia than ever before. In this new and already consciously 'global' international framework, Australia was no longer the errant colonial son who had returned to the world to do his duty and be redeemed in the 'Great (European) War' of 1914-18. Two world wars later it was a maturing nation in the exclusive club of industrialised countries that now found itself on the front line of yet another global war. But with the allure of revolutionary Communist ideology as the enemy, this war was not to be waged with bullets and bombs if the politicians could help it, but with the propagation of practical knowledge and seductive impressions about the 'good life' that might be aspired to under the free if imperfect dialectics of capitalist democracy. In this geo-political contest, even architecture had a role to play in the battle of 'the West' for the hearts and minds of Asia's new political and professional elites.

But to understand the relative placing of 'Australia' and 'Asia' in the evolving discourse on architectural modernism in Australia in the 1950s and 60s, we need to consider how the nature and contexts of such cross-cultural thinking had evolved in the preceding decades.

The Long Way 'Home'
In the nineteenth century, and through the first half of the twentieth, the long journey 'Home' to the UK was a rite of passage for many Australasian artists and architects seeking metropolitan experience and higher professional and academic qualifications. Most simply sailed past Asia on the fastest ships they could afford. Recipients in the 1920s and 30s of the travelling scholarship of the New South Wales Institute of Architects were typical. The P&O steamship line and the Suez Canal were their umbilicus to the architectural canon of historic Europe as well as direct exposure to the

debates and development of modern architecture in Europe and America – a modern-day 'grand tour' that remained almost unquestioned well into the post-WW2 era as well.[9] As Boyd described, the quasi autobiographical 'younger architect' of the 1950s, 'he absorbs the influences of Europe and America separately through the magazines and in travel taken as soon as possible after graduation. His first trip takes him to Europe, concentrating on Italy, Scandinavia and Great Britain. His second trip is to the U.S.A.'[10]

But there were always a few who opted to step ashore on the way there, or back. Arthur Streeton paused in Egypt to paint some 'Oriental' impressions that he could sell for quick cash once he reached London, and Hardy Wilson had his first fleeting but intoxicating encounter with his imagined 'East' as his ship called at the ports of Colombo and Port Said on his way north and west to Europe.[11] And for adventurers and opportunists alike, the institutional frameworks and privileges of the European colonial empires opened doors to knowledge of 'other' architectures, and even careers in colonial service.

Joseph Fearis Munnings, a partner in the successful Sydney firm of Power, Adam and Munnings in the 1920s and 30s, was one such opportunist. Originally a New Zealander, Munnings had travelled to England to sit the final examination for his Associate membership in the RIBA in London in 1910, where he was subsequently recruited to work his passage back in the service of the British Indian Public Works Department. To prepare for his exam Munnings had worked briefly in the office of the prominent London architect, Leonard Stokes. But he was soon catapulted into a position of comparatively extraordinary responsibility in India as the Consulting Architect to the Government of the newly created Province of Bihar and Orissa. Between 1912 and 1918, while Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were designing New Delhi, and Griffin and Mahoney were at work on Canberra, Munnings planned and almost single-handedly designed and oversaw the construction of all the architecture for the new provincial capital at Patna.[12]

Eschewing the oriental pastiche of the Indo-saracenic style featured in many late-Victorian public buildings in British India, Munnings' designs for New Patna were among the most complete and balanced realisations in India of what might be characterised as an imperial-cum-international style, grounded broadly in the European architectural canon, that found form in various corners of the British Empire

in the early years of the twentieth century.[13] Functionally rather than formally adapted to their Indian locality through a free-style emulation of appropriately sun-tempered Italianate precedents, they anticipated similar 'Mediterranean' solutions by others to the problem of designing fitting public buildings and houses for the comparable hot-dry climates of Perth and Adelaide in the following two decades.[14]

In an age of global European empires that, before 1914, seemed destined to prevail for generations still, in which Melbourne easily compared and even competed with Manchester, architects of Munnings' generation sided unquestioningly with history rather than geography.[15] But, eventually stripped of all stylistic cues to other histories or traditions, it was the same climate-centric notion of function that would guide later efforts to rationalise the design of the ostensibly a-political modern tropical architecture of the 1950s and 60s.[16] However, perceptions of the problem and prospects of a modern architecture that might serve both the practical and the political needs of empire were already evolving significantly by the early 1920s when Munnings chose to leave India to take up private practice in Australia. As Munnings' boss, John Begg, Consulting Architect to the Government of India, pronounced in a speech to the RIBA in 1921,

> East and West are meeting.… We may like it or not; …[b]ut we can't hold
> back the tide, and the tide of the world's history … is now turning towards
> all manner of unthinkable unifications, agreements and meetings ...
> certainly so far as the domain of architecture is concerned.[17]

Begg was mindful, in light of the Indian freedom movement and the recent Russian Revolution, of the potential struggle between the 'autocratic' and 'Bolshevik' extremes of contemporary politics that lay ahead for the colonial empires. But hopeful of recruiting new men for colonial service to replace departing colleagues like Munnings, Begg maintained the ideal that discerning design professionals had an instrumental role to play in this uncertain future by taking 'uncompromising middle-positions' between extremes, to build the actual fabric of this more cosmopolitan imperial commonwealth of the near future 'on the lines of a sane democracy.'[18]

Though grounded in twenty years of practical experience in colonial service, Begg's idealistic appeal for greater cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration in architecture was only slightly more realistic than Hardy Wilson's contemporary reveries about an

Austral-Sino fusion.[19] The same could be said about the analogous cross-cultural propositions that Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney had begun to explore in this same interwar period before Griffin's untimely death in India in 1937. Having failed to firmly root their transcendental vein of modern expressionism in Australian soil, the Griffins believed it had ultimately found its true home in consort with the spiritualism and creative traditions of India.[20] Despite assertions to the contrary, each of these visions depended still on the stability and assurances of the established colonial order in which western Orientalists and aesthetes presumed to speak for the 'other', whether or not they could ever came close to engaging in a genuinely equal cross-cultural dialogue.

Engaging 'Modern' Asia

With the formal dissolution of the European empires and the simultaneous arrival of the jet-age in the years following the Second World War, the dynamics of architectural encounter and exchange between Asia and Australasia had ostensibly changed significantly. Arriving 'home' from overseas as Boyd memorably evoked in the opening passage of his iconoclastic polemic, *The Australian Ugliness*, first published in 1960, the 'modern' traveller now had their first glimpse of Australia from the air. But this was not a resplendent Sydney emerging pristine and new from the abstract blue vastness of the Pacific. (The age of long-haul jet travel had another decade or so to make that view commonplace.) Rather, it was a rather shabby she'll-be-right Darwin, on the tropical backwater of the island continent, where most air-travellers first alighted. Ironically, with the demise of sail, and even the steamship-age with its relatively direct port-to-port connections between Europe and Australia, air-travellers were confronted with Australia's Asian geography as never before, as they were now compelled to leap-frog across the Middle East, South and South-East Asia, crossing the relatively nominal ditch of the Timor Sea that separated Australia from Asia in the final international leg of the journey.

The tropical outpost of Darwin, had long been regarded as a veritable colony of the Australian federation on its Asian shore, with much more in common with the colonial settlements of British Singapore and Malaya than metropolitan Australia.[21] But it was now the nation's unintended gateway to the world – a strange new world that would increasingly be explained in terms of geopolitical and economic issues in which Asia was central.

Yet the new institutional frameworks that had quickly emerged in the post-war years to aid the process of decolonisation, modernisation and development still reflected the technical scaffolding of empire, and its inherent conceptual biases for standardisation and control. Spearheaded by the airborne agency of a new technical vanguard of 'tarmac-consultants', a techno-scientific network of functionalist-modern building and planning knowledge had quickly ramified, in the case of the nascent British Commonwealth of former colonial territories and dominions, through the long-established system of colonial public works departments along with the rapidly growing number of new architecture and planning schools.[22]

Two of the key agents in building this new network were G. A. Atkinson, a former Colonial Liaison Officer and subsequent Head of the Tropical Department of the British Building Research Station (BRS), and Otto Koenigsberger, founding Head of the Tropical Architecture Program at the Architectural Association in London. From the late 1940s through the 1950s, Atkinson coordinated an extensive international program of research and development focused on rational climatic design that effectively re-branded the individual searches for progressive new architectures representative of the identities of ex-colonial nations as diverse as Australia, Malaya, Ghana and Jamaica as a common quest for a modern tropical architecture. By privileging climate as the essential criterion of place, design knowledge and action could remain distant and objective, and the messy subjectivities of culture and society could be overlooked.[23] Koenigsberger's pioneering graduate programs at the AA, and later at the Bartlett School of the University of London, went some way to address a more comprehensive spectrum of socio-cultural as well as technical issues. But, like Atkinson, Koenigsberger was also a product of colonial-modernity, as a German Jewish refugee who had played a leading role in India through the 1940s as an independent advisor in housing and town-planning during the transition from British to Indian rule. Drawing on that experience, Koenigsberger's London-based courses inevitably served to perpetuate the centrality of the old imperial metropole in this (post)colonial network of knowledge and practice.

Indeed, the curricula of the large majority of architecture schools throughout the ex-colonial Commonwealth were to remain tied to the norms and standards of the UK – in many cases still so today – through the accreditation and examination system of the RIBA. New architecture schools in the emerging nations of postcolonial Asia thereby developed strong North/South links with benchmark institutions in the UK as well as

established schools in former settler dominions such as Australia that were more immediate neighbours geographically. Sri Lanka's University of Moratuwa, for instance, maintained close links for many years with both the Architectural Association in London, and the University of Melbourne, narrowly focused in each case on research and practice in the area of tropical architecture.[24]

The establishment of a masters program in Tropical Architecture at the University of Melbourne was one of the clearest indications of a new orientation in Australian architectural education and research towards Asia in the post-war era. In 1960, when the Indian-born architect and planner Balwant Singh Saini began directing the course, it was the only other such program offered anywhere in the world after Koenigsberger's course at the AA, and as a full one-year masters degree (as distinguished from the AA's 6 month graduate certificate), was arguably 'the first course of its kind.' As one of its earliest Malaysian graduates was keen to proclaim, Melbourne was becoming 'the centre of architectural education in this part of the world.'[25]

In other more established post-graduate disciplines such as town-planning as well as undergraduate professional degree programs other Australian universities were also experiencing relatively dramatic rises in their international student enrolments in this period, primarily from Asia. A key factor behind this significant increase, not only in Asian student admissions but in the Asian targeting of curricula, was the so-called 'Colombo Plan'.

Established in 1950 at a meeting of the Commonwealth foreign ministers in Colombo, Ceylon, what subsequently became known as the Colombo Plan was a scheme under which bilateral aid, including a major scholarships program, could flow to developing countries in South and South-East Asia. By 1954, the seven founding nations of Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and the United Kingdom had been joined by Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, the Philippines, the United States, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaya (subsequently recognised as the enlarged Federation of Malaysia, and the autonomous state of Singapore, from 1963).[26]

As the only front-line state among the developed donor countries in the scheme, Australia took a lead in the implementation of the Colombo Plan from the start. Under the conservative Menzies Government of the 1950s, the Plan was promoted as a

prudent non-military response to national anxiety about the decolonisation of Asia, which became particularly acute after the fall of the French in Indochina in 1954 to the advancing threat of revolutionary communism in the region, and mounting Cold War tensions in general.[27] For its chief proponent at this juncture, the Australian Minister of External Affairs, R. G. Casey, the Colombo Plan was, above all, a potentially powerful tool of propaganda. Through the training and socialisation of the technical and professional elites of the 'new Asia' within the exemplary democratic milieu of Australia's university campuses – as much or even more so than the diffusion of technical knowledge and aid to her newly independent Asian neighbours – the Colombo Plan was part of the arsenal of carefully selected information and impressions, if not deception, with which this essentially ideological (cold) war would be waged in the realm of the collective imagination. Along with analogous (albeit much larger) programs such as the Marshall Plan for Europe, and the Fulbright scholarships scheme in the US, the Colombo Plan was Australia's bid to be a significant player in the struggle of the democratic 'West' for the hearts and minds of Asia.[28]

By 1966 the Australian Prime Minister could boast of well over 12,000 Asian students currently pursuing education in Australia.[29] And by the time the scholarships program had effectively come to an end in the mid-1980s, as many as 40,000 Asian students had come to study in Australian institutions under the Colombo Plan alone.[30]

Whilst the numbers of architectural students among these legions of new Asian students on campus were never proportionately great, these included a number of future leaders among the first postcolonial generations of South and South-East Asian architects. Prominent graduates from the University of Melbourne, for example, included C. P. Kukreja (1963) who went on to establish one of the largest corporate architectural firms in India as well as its premier architectural magazine; Alfred Wong (1953), the designer of Singapore's iconic National Theatre (1959) as well as a founder and four-term president of the Singapore Institute of Architects;[31] and Kington Loo (1953), the first non-Caucasian to be elected as president of the Malaysian Society of Architects (FMSA). Loo's architectural designs include buildings for the new University of Malaya, the Subang International Airport, and the first high-rise office building in Kuala Lumpur.[32] Another prominent KL high-rise designer, Hijjas Kasturi (Melbourne, 1963), began his architectural studies as a Colombo scholar at the University of Adelaide where his fellow students in the new school of architecture (opened in 1958) included Ong Teng Cheong and his wife, Ling Siew May, who

subsequently progressed from a successful architecture and planning partnership to politics, ultimately becoming the first democratically elected President and First Lady of Singapore (from 1993-99).[33] Francis Wong, another Colombo Plan student at the University Adelaide in this period (BArch 1967), returned to the new Malaysia to become the chief architect in the Public Works Department of Sabah whilst his daughter, Penny Wong, was raised and schooled in Australia and went on to become the first Chinese-Australian woman to be elected a Labour MP and now a prominent cabinet minister (Water and Climate Change) in the current Rudd Labour government.[34]

Though further research is needed, this anecdotal evidence suggests that the organizational skills and technocratic agency, and even the potential political vision of architecturally trained graduates, as well as the propensity of architectural knowledge as such to shape the imagination of future Asian nation builders were recognised if not actively cultivated by the strategists of the Colombo Plan.

Together with scholarships for architectural studies, part of the tactical apparatus conceived to support the cross-cultural knowledge-building aims of the program was the Asian/Australian student magazine, *Hemisphere*, in which articles on architecture were regularly featured among other arts and cultural topics. Published monthly by the Commonwealth Office of Education between 1957 and 1984, the stated aim of *Hemisphere* was to be 'informative rather than polemical … in telling Australians about Asia, and Asians about Australia, … free from national bias.'[35] Although the overt objective was to foster friendship between Asian students and Australians through better reciprocal understanding of their respective cultures and histories, the publication was ultimately aimed at a wider readership of government officials, diplomats, interested laypersons and 'educated English-speaking Asians in general',[36] with additional less transparent agendas in mind. As recently de-classified government papers relating to the Cold War era have clearly revealed, these ulterior aims included the transmission of selective cultural and political values to these tertiary-educated elites of Asia, and the potential to use the magazine as a medium to recruit and communicate with covert agents from among the magazine's regular student and academic readership.[37]

While we have no evidence of the latter (though the proposition was not as farfetched as its seems, in light of later revelations about Cold War espionage by the respected

British art historian, Anthony Blunt, among other presumably autonomous intellectuals of the day) the partial and selective nature of the content published in the magazine was clearly calculated to promote Australian values and interests. In an article on contemporary Malayan architecture for example, the author Goh Hock Guan – a recent graduate who had subsequently stayed on at the University Melbourne as a junior lecturer in architecture – was unsparingly frank in his critical appraisal of the 'weaknesses' inherent in the contemporary scene back home in Asia, whilst his brief text was peppered with comparatively undiscriminating praise for the value of overseas training, not least Melbourne's 'pioneering' graduate course on tropical architecture.[38]

Reprinted in juxtaposition with Goh Hock Guan's article on Malayan architecture, and a further short piece on the historical development of Islamic architecture within the geographic bounds of the postcolonial Islamic republic of Pakistan, in a volume of selected articles from *Hemisphere* published in 1964,[39] it is equally apparent how Milo Dunphy's article on 'The Growth of an Australian Architecture' was engaged by the magazine in a selectively constructed representation of issues and values associated with the development of national cultures and identities within the context of prevailing notions of universal modernity. In the light of the magazine's editorial objectives (as distinguished from Dunphy's authorial intentions) it is evident that the article was expected to be read on at least two levels. Over and above the discipline specific concerns of architects with stylistic pedigrees and technique, contemporary domestic architecture was the sort of content that was accessible to a more general lay readership at home and abroad, and through which a distinctly liberal contemporary Australian lifestyle could be directly illustrated in the case of the current Sydney architecture scene. Gaining 'spin' from Dunphy's engaging evocation of both the distinctive forms and the debates that made these architect-designed houses interesting, the article illustrated the cultural production and values of a genuinely free democracy. The very lack of a slavish, lock-step coherence to any narrowly defined stylistic formula – i.e. what Fung later criticised as the baseless-ness of the claims for a so-called 'Sydney School' – was precisely the school of informal, straight-talking, rugged and even sometimes ragged and contrary individualism among Australia's contemporary artists and designers that the editors of *Hemisphere* were mandated to illustrate and expound.

Characterising Sidney Ancher's conscious attempt to produce a 'distinctively "Australian" architecture' in his seminal house designs of the 1950s, for instance,

Dunphy emphasises 'a consistent lack of formality, an openness of interiors and a refusal to create studied effects'. These qualities, he argued, were 'consistent with the democratic theme of Australian literature … constitut[ing] the best traditions of Australian culture.'[40] Indeed, Dunphy even praises a later house by Ancher's partner, Bryce Mortlock, for its 'subversive' undermining of 'the smug preconceptions of the dreary bulk of Australian housing.'[41]

Whilst Dunphy's authorial autonomy was almost certainly respected as further evidence of the freedom of expression that his article exemplified in its subject matter, he was clearly conscious of and empathetic with the Asia-centric readership to whom the article was directed, devoting several paragraphs of his concisely crafted text to the rapidly growing influence and relevance of Asia for his own generation of younger Australian architectural practitioners and academics, and their students. As a part-time lecturer in architecture at UNSW in the early 1960s, Dunphy was eager to report that he had, for several years running, 'set design problems in the East' in senior design studios he taught with other Asia focused colleagues.[42] At the same time, we know, his own architectural practice was employing some of the growing number of Asian students that he and his colleagues were encountering in their studio teaching.[43] Indirectly, through their admiration and emulation of the Asian influenced works of Wright and Le Corbusier, through travel, and through the passionate and committed study of Asian religions and philosophies by two of his colleagues in particular, Peter Kollar and Adrian Snodgrass, Dunphy asserts that his students and contemporaries had all 'benefited to some degree from the East.'[44] Praising Wilson's unrequited cross-cultural yearnings earlier in the century, Dunphy offered this prevalent 'Eastern' turn on the Sydney scene of the early 1960s as encouraging evidence that 'the great cultural conversation to which Hardy Wilson had pointed [was] under way.'[45]

Conclusion

How, then, does the longer view this paper has attempted to sketch of this putative Asian/Australian conversation in Australian architectural history shift our understanding of these mid-century developments?

Whilst the schism between historical determinism (imperial destiny, rationalist modernism, etc.) and geographical determinism (regionalism, etc.) has hardly been resolved by this account, we can at least be more discerning about the different nuances of regionalism this discourse invoked. For the rationalist modernist camp in

mid-century, the 'regionalism' of the 'Sydney school' was still a 'backward-looking' tendency, as Boyd expressed it, allusive to 'times and places unspecifically remote.'[46] On the edge of the global empire of universal-modernity – before the legitimacy of a 'critical regionalism' within modernism had yet been theorised[47] – it represented an atavistic reaction to history, a retreat from the present.

On the other hand, what the notion of an Australasian region offered idealists like Wilson (and we should probably include Dunphy in that category as well) was not a unique geography or atavistic place of difference. On the contrary it represented a common ground (arguable, at least, where the Northern and Eastern coasts of Australia interfaced with tropical South-East Asia and the Pacific Rim), between profoundly different cultural worlds. As Dunphy (who was better recognised in subsequent years as a passionate activist for natural conservation)[48] seemed to imply, a good way to initiate the long anticipated cross-cultural 'conversation with Asia' could be an understated regionalism receptive to what it could understand of the principles and forms of various Asian architectural traditions (those of Japan, in particular, in the case of the contemporary Sydney scene), but mediating these notions through a more intuitive but sensitive response to this shared ground where the edges of Asia and the neo-European antipodes overlapped.

However, the idyllic if not patently naïve prospect of a contemporary regionalism open to cultural dialogue and exchange was inevitably mediated by a third dimension of regional awareness and debate in the 1950s and 60s which was the geopolitical geography of the Cold War. Whilst South-East Asia was now the hot-spot, and Australia the front-line, this was perhaps the first-ever truly global conflict, in which all cultural and regional positions were potentially at stake. Dunphy's recently arrived Hungarian colleague, Peter Kollar, for example, was an émigré from the other 'East' of the mid twentieth century: Communist East Bloc Europe. To what extent the passionate 'Traditional' understanding of Asian architectures and religious philosophies that informed Kollar's design teaching were reactions to the prospect of cultural erasure under the technocratic yokes of the competing socialist and capitalist variants of universal modernism in the Cold War years, we do not know. But how such teaching, in the context of the anxious modernism of the 50s and 60s, may have shaped the questions of cultural identity that Colombo Plan students were encouraged or discouraged to explore in their Australian architectural studies, would be well worth examining.[49]

This preliminary paper has sought to illustrate some of the issues and multiple potential valences of a proposed larger study. From the cursory re-examination offered here of some previously overlooked 'Asian' dimensions to a defining mid-twentieth century discourse about modern Australian identity and its architecture, it is apparent that further inquiry into the broader ideological and institutional contexts in which that discourse arose would be potentially fruitful. Broadly stated, this projected research would examine the role of architectural knowledge and production in the competing projects of 'nation-building' and 'empire-building' that continued to be played out, well into the second half of the twentieth century, on the ostensibly level field of technocratic and institutional agency through which the self-consciously 'modern' Australia of the post-WW2 era was cautiously forming new relationships with its de-colonising Asian neighbours.

Specific aspects of such institutional agency that remain to be examined thoroughly and methodically include the international scaffolding of expert networks, standards and curricula that emerged to frame and support the propagation of modern architectural education across the intersecting geographies of postcolonial Asia and Australasia. A further key question to be examined is how such 'scaffolding' enabled but also inevitably constrained the further development of architectural imagination and production by architects trained in this educational system, both 'Asian' and 'Australian', and their subsequent agency in constructing and shaping the transition from colonial-modern pasts to more cosmopolitan-modern presents and futures. Of course this would be far from the compilation of a common story but, rather, a deconstruction of the monolithic notion of 'Asia' that continued to pervade the modern Australian imagination, discerning multiple distinct national and individual case histories. It follows, furthermore, that the diverse yet limited and highly selective framings of 'Asia' within Australian architectural discourse, some of which this paper has illustrated, require much further critical analysis and reflection.

Endnotes

[1] Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne and London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

[2] Quoted in Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, 4.

[3] Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, 4-5; For Wilson, see 'Hardy Wilson (1881-1935), Extracts from *Grecian and Chinese Architecture*, 1937', in Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara and Philip Goad (eds.), *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), 343-47.

[4] Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, 5.

[5] Stanislaus Fung, 'The "Sydney School"?', in A. Leach, A. Moulis, and N. Sully (eds.), *Shifting Views: Selected Essays on the Architectural History of Australia and New Zealand* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2008), 32-47.

[6] Robin Boyd, 'Architecture in Australia', *RIBA Journal* 78 (January 1971): 12-20. As cited in Fung, 'The "Sydney School"?', 35.

[7] In particular: R. Boyd, *Australia's Home* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1952); and R. Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1960).

[8] Though unexplored in this controversial early paper, Fung notes the passionate and learned interest in Asian architecture and philosophies of the putative 'Sydney School' architect, Peter Muller, and the influential architectural educator, Peter Kollar. Fung, 'The "Sydney School"?', n. 12, 191-92. Cross-cultural aspects of architectural and landscape theory and design philosophy would be an important focus of Fung's mature work. See for example S. Fung, 'Longing and Belonging in Chinese Garden History', in Michel Conan (ed.), *Perspectives on Garden Histories* [electronic resource] (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999); S. Akkach, S. Fung and P. Scriver (eds.), *Self, Place and Imagination: Cross-Cultural Thinking in Architecture* (Adelaide: CAMEA, 1999).

[9] 'Arthur E. Barnard, "The Lesson of Travel", 1932', in Stephen, McNamara and Goad, *Modernism and Australia*, 279-287; and Robin Skinner, 'Larrikins Abroad: International Account of the New Zealand Architects in the 1970s and 1980s', in Leach, Moulis, and Sully, *Shifting Views*, 103-11.

[10] R. Boyd, 'Australia', in J. M. Richards (ed.), *New Buildings in the Commonwealth* (London: The Architectural Press, 1960), 17-19.

[11] Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, 4

[12] P. Scriver, 'Complicity and Contradiction in the Office of the Consulting Architect to the Government of India, 1903-1921', in *Loyalty and Disloyalty in the Architecture of the British Empire and Commonwealth*. Selected papers from the refereed proceedings of the annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ), Auckland, October 2-6, 1996 (Melbourne: SAHANZ, 1997), 93-101.

[13] For cogent discussions of the indo-saracenic style and related debates in Victorian and Edwardian India, see T. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and G. H. R. Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale U. Press, 1989).

[14] Duncan Richards, 'The Spanish Scene: Some Houses of the Thirties by Marshall Clifton (1902-75)', in Leach, Moulis, and Sully, *Shifting Views*, 61-69.

[15] Miles Lewis, 'The imperial Technology Cringe', in Leach, Moulis, and Sully, *Shifting Views*, 81-94.

[16] The problematic of such colonial-modern discourses about climatically and/or contextually appropriate design and their putative autonomy from 'political' agendas was hardly exclusive to British India, of course. See for example Abidin Kusno's critique of the rationalisation of indigenous building types in Dutch colonial Java. Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 25-48.

[17] J. Begg, 'Architecture in India', *JRIBA*, 27 (29 May 1920): 333-49.

[18] Begg, 'Architecture in India'.

[19] Wilson's controversial ideal about a creative fusion of civilisations was stimulated by a profoundly affecting 3-month journey to China, in 1921, though he didn't publish his principal tract on his notion of an Austral-Sino style for another 16 years. See 'Hardy Wilson (1881-1955), Extracts from *Grecian and Chinese Architecture,* 1937', in Stephen, McNamara and Goad, *Modernism and Australia,* 343-47.

[20] For Griffin's work in India, see: Jeff Turnbull and Peter Y. Navaretti (eds), *The Griffins in Australia and India: the complete works and projects of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1998).

[21] David Bridgman, 'The Anglo-Asian Bungalow in Australia's Northern Territory', in Leach, Moulis, and Sully, *Shifting Views,* 167-77.

[22] Jiat-Hwee Chang, 'Building a (post)colonial Technoscientific Network: Tropical Architecture, Building Science and the Politics of Decolonization', in P. Scriver (ed.), *The Scaffolding of Empire* (Adelaide: Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture, 2007), 127-52. See also Shanti Jayawardene, 'Reflections on Design in the Context of Development', *Mimar*, 27 (1988): 70-75; and Hanna Le Roux, 'The Networks of Tropical Architecture', *The Journal of Architecture*, 8 (2003): 337-54.

[23] For Atkinson see Chang, 'Building a (post)colonial Technoscientific Network'. For Koenisgberger, see Rodhri Windsor Liscombe, 'In-dependence: Otto Koenigsberger and Modernist Urban Resettlement in India', *Planning Perspectives*, 21 (April 2006): 157-78.

[24] The author is grateful to Anoma Pieris for sharing her insights as an alumnus of the University of Moratuwa.

[25] Goh Hock Guan, 'Towards a Malayan Architecture', in R. J. Maguire (ed.), *Hemisphere: Asian–Australian Viewpoints and Ideas* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1964), 51-55. For a number of years Saini served as the RIBA's external examiner for the Moratuwa University school on periodic visits back to India via Colombo. Saini later moved to the University of Queensland where he furthered his research on Architecture in tropical Australia, establishing significant empirical and typological affinities between the vernacular 'bungalow' house forms of colonial South Asia and of Queensland, respectively. Balwant Singh Saini, *Architecture in Tropical Australia* (University of Melbourne Press, 1970), 4. See also Balwant Saini and Ray Joyce, *The Australian House: Homes of the Tropical North* (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1982); and http://www.ecosustainable.com.au/associates.htm, (accessed 20/01/09).

[26] Government of Australia Department of External Affairs, 'Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957', overview accessed 22/02/09 at
http://www.dfat.gov.au/PUBLICATIONS/colombo_plan/index.html

[27] Christopher Waters, 'A Failure of Imagination: Australian Plans for Counter-subversion in Asia 1954-1956', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 45, 3 (1999): 347-61.

[28] David Oakman, 'The Seed of Freedom: Regional Security and the Colombo Plan', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 46, 1 (2000): 67-85.

[29] David Oakman, '"Young Asians in our Homes": Colombo Plan Students and White Australia', in Gabriella Espak, Scott Fatnowna and Denise Woods (eds.), *New Talents, Jumping the Queue* (St Lucia: API Network and UQP, 2002) / *Journal of Australian Studies*, 72 (2002): 98.

[30] The Hon. Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia, 'Launch of "Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957"'. Speech delivered in Canberra, 23 May 2005. Accessed 23/03/09 at http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2005/050523_colombo_plan.html

[31] Accessed 20/03/09 at http://wwww.singapedia.com.sg/entries/w/wong_alfred.html

[32] Accessed 20/03/09 at http://www.viweb.freehosting.net/kington-loo.htm

[33] 'About the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong (1936-2002)', accessed 20/03/09 at http://www.ongtengcheong.com/mr_otc.htm

[34] 'Australian Experience Builds Global Perspective', *Lumen, The University of Adelaide Magazine* (Summer 2005).

[35] R.J. Maguire, Preface, in Maguire, *Hemisphere*.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Although the use of the magazine as a medium for recruitment and communication in espionage matters was clearly proposed in Cold War Planning Committee proceedings within the Menzies cabinet and the Department of External Affairs, there is no publicly accessible evidence that it ever fulfilled that purpose. Waters, 'A Failure of Imagination', 353-4.

[38] Goh Hock Guan, 'Towards a Malayan Architecture'.

[39] Maguire, *Hemisphere*.

[40] Dunphy, 'Growth of an Australian Architecture', 69.

[41] Dunphy, 'Growth of an Australian Architecture', 70.

[42] Dunphy, 'Growth of an Australian Architecture', 67.

[43] UNSW graduate Liu Thai Ker (1962), for instance, worked for Dunphy from 1960-63, and eventually returned to Singapore, becoming CEO of Singapore's powerful Housing Development Board from 1979 – 1989. accessed 20/03009 at http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_584_2005-01-22.html

[44] Fung also notes the common Asian affinities of Peter Kollar and celebrated Sydney architect, Peter Muller, both of whom shared a deep intellectual interest in the 'Traditional' (or 'Perennial') philosophy of the scholars, Rene Guenon and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Fung, 'The "Sydney School"?', n. 12, 191-192 . Adrian Snodgrass along with Alan Gilbert and Bert Read, were further close associates and philosophical fellow traveller of Muller in this period. E-mail correspondence with A. Snodgrass, received 4/01/2009.

[45] Dunphy, 'Growth of an Australian Architecture', 67, 70.

[46] Robin Boyd, 'The State of Australian Architecture', *Architecture in Australia*, 56 (June 1967): 459. As cited in Fung, 'The "Sydney School"?', 35.

[47] See Paul Walker, 'Kenneth Frampton and the Fiction of Place', in Leach, Moulis and Sully, *Shifting Views*, 70-80.

[48] 'Milo Dunphy', obituary, *Green Left On-line*, (May 1, 1996). accessed 30/04/09 at http://www.greenleft.org.au/1996/229/14490

[49] One of the otherwise most valuable collections of current scholarship available on this key post-war moment in modern architecture has, for instance, almost no non-western content. See Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (eds.), *Anxious Modernism: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).