



Restored old city wall, a part of climbing road to Mt. Bukak, area of Seo Dae Mun. © Young Min-Koo-2013.

Post-Global? Fantasy and Crisis during the First Decade of the Global Era

BY YOUNG MIN KOO

"Post-global" is a coined word signifying a chaotic state or a transitional period after the violent gale of globalism that created a large gap between the new and the old. Reproving the global power game for having created evil paradises that repress individual evolutions and highest value of lives, the essay attempts to refute the historic and cultural agenda in global standard propagating them as a new paradigm that holds the key to accomplish the global mission, and to conjecture that small plans toward local community would offer guidelines to recur gradually to the state of "milieu", a collective balance.

A Decade after 21st Century

Cities in Asia have experienced enormous changes during the first decade after the 21st century. Controversy erupted over the "axis of evil" at the turn of the century, but in global political discourse which turned its direction toward the "axis of power" countries across the globe waged a war of words against the United States over the reconstruction of an international order.

China and India have emerged as the top two countries at the core of this axis and China eventually became the second largest economic powerhouse in the world in late 2007. The reason this "power" could gain universal consent was that there was no "axis of good" in opposition to an "axis of evil" and people expected that this new power as an independent and changeable force could serve as a driving engine leading to decentralization and novelty.

Post 9.11, Arab countries began to withdraw their money in the amount of billions of dollars from the United States to invest in the irrespective home countries. The huge amount of "fluid" capital immediately transformed into "massive concrete" as sets in the desert. With this change, the Middle East has become the second largest construction market in the world following China which was a gigantic consumer market of steel. The so-called "Dubai-effect" began to shine through. The fanatical "vision" of China which pledged to build 400 new towns by 2010 and Arab countries aiming to attract 15 million tourists annually by 2010 grabbed the attention of investors across the world. At that time, the architectural community was excited and thrilled in the face of this enormous power of globalization¹.

If the "subprime mortgage crisis" erupted in the United States did not trigger the global financial crisis, around that time when China settled as the second largest economic power, the "global" discourse would have created hundreds of ghost cities through the speculative relocation of urban spaces.

During this period, some cities were recreated as they were imagined and sometimes other awkward spaces that

were forced to have burdensome buildings are now barely surviving as global cities in the name of globalism. Now, architects have reached the conclusion that the number of urban dwellers accounting for 50% of the world population makes it difficult for them to settle the physical limit of urban spaces, and this very fact is preventing them from predicting the essential urban shapes that cover social, cultural and political factors. Also, they would finally realize it is impossible to create an urban scenario satisfying both fact and probability.

Axis of Power to Evil Paradise

Situated on the axis of Power, anyhow, Dubai and China which belong to the "axis of power" are not without sin with the "big plans" of modern architecture committed given that they are dismantling the human rights that should be protected under no circumstances, for the sake of money and vision. Realizing how absurd a so called "Global City" is, which seems to be built in a single day, Mike Daves & Daniel Bertrand Monk warn us of the city painting an isolated new terrain with landscapes of wealth, as did Dubai, will ultimately fall to "evil paradises". They seem to consider this as a matter depending on how significantly human rights are respected².

For this reason, the recent speculative relocation issue of urban spaces which has been pursued in global discourse seems to take many forms. It often implies an optimal environment under the theme of "ecology", "carbon", and "energy", or offers the illusion of a techno-utopia in the name of being "ubiquitous" or "smart". Moreover, the "historic environment" has been selected as the theme of the city. These were always propagated as a new paradigm but hold the old habits of modernism seeking fanatic functions, effectiveness and economic values.

Among above mentioned forms, it is needed to pay particular attention to the theme of historic and cultural environment. Because speeding global venture nearly misses



02 Restored Cheonggyecheon. Area of Gwanggyo. © Young Min Koo, 2006



03 Old city wall penetrating the present context; Naksan Changsin Dong Area © Young Min Koo, 2014.

out on regional culture, the global policymakers raises the issue of “history and culture” to the surface, seemingly, in order not to go the way of modern architects’ mistake. Obstinate accentuating history and culture as *conditio sine qua non*, however, entertains a doubt that history and culture are merely propagated for the entire the world as if they are critical factors to counterbalance the violent move of globalization. However, it must not be missed the fact that they are commodified to generate profit. Even though they seem to argue seriously on the persistence and permanence inherited in the city, whatever is called to be historic preservation or restoration operated under the guise of globalization in regards to cultural politics of space, foreshadows the political vision and money.

A restoration of the Seoul city wall might exhibit the above fact well. Masquerading under the good name of preserving the six-hundred-years of the capital history, the government has been restoring the old wall around the city to its original shape. The problem is that bringing the six-hundred-years-ago back to the present at once has to have destroyed the all the other memories layered on the neighboring context. In other words, gaining the past has lost the present perfect progressive form in the city. These habits always appear to return to the starting point to pursue a new city. However, we should remember that they conflict with the reality of life and create another tragedy.

A State of Milieu

A city is, whether global or modern, the greatest invention of mankind. A city is not just a place where people live together. Rather, it is a stage where they promote individual evolutions and accomplish the highest value of lives. Thus, new plans should be able to offer patterns to which urban dwellers properly respond. This means the new

plans should recover and improve whole areas by adjusting certain areas and induce positive responses from people. It does not mean “we should never allow big plans”.

We should not rush to predict an urban shape only through perspective drawings produced by rule of thumb. Instead, we should build up a slow ignition to allow architecture and urban spaces to trigger chain reactions through human living. Namely, we should wait for a counteraction that creates an essential urban shape through a series of intervention among the local communities, the inducement of relationships between spaces and the establishment of cultural communities by people leading their lives in such areas. When injected with the possibility for creation and change through such transformation, cities will respond to changes to form specific shapes by themselves.

All we need to trigger the conduct of these changes is a small but firm ignition point. It can be likened to the nature of “acupuncture”. A skilled acupuncturist can identify a cause that influences the central nerve network and applies acupuncture to critical points to restore the balance of the human body. As such, like acupuncturists, architects and urban planners should be able to plan to enhance the living conditions of urban dwellers through the harmony and balance of human relationships.

In fact, the key to urban design is niche spaces created by confrontations between new towns controlled by mega structures and powerful management factors and local areas. Thus, the task of architects and planners in the near future lies in how they convert such niche space made of multiple conflicts into the city place.

Therefore, if we want to maximize the efficiency of global cities, we should not overlook such spaces. Furthermore, it is really unprofessional to exclude regional characteristics from a world of multinational population. Including leftover



04 The view of the Central Seoul from Nusang Dong. © Young Min Koo, 2013.

pieces of land or niche spaces as an option for future urban planning can serve as a unique shield to control the violence of “big plans”.

Niche as a Live Border Condition

One of the problems in the discourse over global cities is worshipping the system reverence led by the process and flow that transcends rootedness and places. Globalism in proportion to the growth speed of cities tends to force dwellers to experience the city in relation to flow, rather than objects. It considers humans as a factor of the entire system. In this sense, there is no room for emotional space or places left in cities. Architecture or cities void of emotions have no stories. Having no stories means there is no “memory” to deliver people. Here, the “stories” mean a similar way of an operation method that stimulates the circulation of blood through acupuncture.

So far, we have put the discourse on global cities at the center of our discussion under the cause of another development. However, downsizing gigantic plans that have been advocated to date and planning them as understandable standards are prerequisite before blindly jumping into planning for mega cities. Although small plans would have no magic in stirring up men’s blood and they might not be realized because they are neither elegant nor logical, they would be better than big plans. If we remember the “axis of evil” created by big plans, we might not as well plan anything as pointed out by Schumacher. Passed a decade after the 21st century, in fact, the key to urban design is niche spaces created by confrontations between new towns controlled by mega structures and powerful management factors and local areas. Thus, the task of architects and planners in the near future lies in how they convert such niche space produced by multi-layered conflict into urban place.

Conclusion

During last decades, many political leaders in Asia have made a great effort on putting global sizes clothes encompassing their vision and money, history and culture on their small countries and cities, driven by the propaganda of “global” discourse and equally sensational ideas. However, what has become clear today is that the intent and achievable goals should be absolutely regional. This is because a city is a place where an individual’s desire is to be satisfied, because local communities are the places where voters make their own decisions, and thus all plans should eventually fall in line with the scale of local society in order to establish democratic cities. ■

Notes

- 1 Amale Andraos, “Dubai’s Island Urbanism: An Archipelago of Difference for the 21st Century”, *Cities From Zero*, London, AA Press, 2007.
- 2 Shumon Basar, “Introduction”, *Cities From Zero*, London, AA Press, 2007.

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