

Eastbound: Vietnamese Design through the lens of Decoloniality

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Eastbound: Vietnamese Design through the Lens of Decoloniality explores the manifestations of coloniality of knowledge in design throughout the nation's history of building, defence and formation. Even though Vietnam has a history of cultural richness and diversity that spans over 4,000 years, little has been written about Vietnamese design and its cultural ways of making. Within a global design discourse, it is effectively non-existent. Locally, Vietnamese design is known to have emerged as recent as the implementation of Đổi Mới, the country's economic and political reform in 1986. This does not seem like a coincidence but rather as a feature of the 'subjugated knowledge'-one that has characterised the condition of Vietnamese design better than the canon of design history and values dubbed as 'universal' and governed by the Western world. The history of Vietnamese design has been an untold story. Like many other kinds of knowledge(s) produced in the Far East or the Global South, it is often ruled out, deemed less significant. Decoloniality, however, has proven otherwise.

By looking at the intersection between the two discourses of de/postcolonial theory and design history, this research set out to explore how the coloniality of knowledge has influenced the way in which design manifested. This means to investigate the history of design in relation to the colonial matrix of power given the cultural, socioeconomic, political context and the multilayered history of Vietnam. From a decolonial perspective, the research employs a combination of research methods including literature review, content analysis, and empirical studies such as digital survey and expert interviews. Firstly, to (re)locate Vietnamese design within a global context, then to reveal the impacts of globalisation as a neocolonial force upon Vietnamese design perception, practices and education. In doing so, it hopes to provide an alternative way of comprehending the current state of Vietnamese design, as well as to examine the condition in which the question of decolonising Vietnamese design can be made possible.

Inasmuch as coloniality of knowledge exerts its power in different ways, decoloniality entails certain implications. As such, Eastbound has served as a positionality that enables the decolonial thought(s) and doing(s) appropriate to the context of Vietnam. In other words, it requires the acknowledgement of one's cultural background and civilisation history, the ability to discern between certain historical narratives, and the opportunity to participate in the process of knowledge production for the facilitation of decoloniality.

Keywords: Vietnamese design history; decoloniality; coloniality of knowledge