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- 1 If the grand hotel attracts the interest of architects as much as it does geographers, whose collaboration in this work is shown yet again to be complementary, it is doubtless because these buildings involve such an unusually broad range of scale, from the cell to the cityscape. Another reason for the “Asian” grand hotel causing so much excitement among experts on China, Korea and Japan, is because for over a century it has played a significant part in the transformation of the major cities in the region. While this dual feature is not presented in any linear fashion, it is clearly conveyed through the case studies brought together in this collective work the diversity of which, both geographic (Tokyo, Shanghai, Seoul, Hong Kong, etc.) and thematic (history, aesthetic and sociology), intersects in a way that reveals many similarities. Yet, is this enough to enable us to talk of an Asian model of the grand hotel?
- 2 We need to make the point at the outset, as the writers do in their collective introduction, that the adjective “grand” does not necessarily characterise the subject of this study in relation to any criterion of size, but especially concerns the category “luxury”, designed principally for the benefit of an urban elite. If the stereotypical image of the grand hotel still persists today—the tower dedicated to business tourism—there nonetheless exists in Asia other forms of building and practices that are related to this definition. One of Japan’s paradoxes, for instance, is to have been able to

perpetuate the historical model of the *ryokan*¹. The geographer and Japan scholar Sylvie Guichard-Anguis minutely decodes the new hidden functions of such luxury accommodation, namely the conservation of traditions that are both material (architectural heritage) and immaterial (traditional lifestyles). However, the writers are in agreement in suggesting that in Asia, much more than in Europe, the grand hotels are also places of sociability in the sense that they “are not part of the day-to-day family or work spaces, but offer the possibility of an encounter that must be an exceptional time enhancing the value of the people concerned”².

- 3 The grand hotel was imported into Asia from the West in the late nineteenth century. From the outset it incarnated much more than a simple image of architectural and urban modernity. The first Imperial Hotel was built in Tokyo in 1890 on a seemingly modest scale compared to its equivalents in the West that masked its ambitious targets, particularly its political and economic ones. This is brought out by the architect Nicolas Fiévé, a Japan scholar, in his very detailed reconstruction of the project’s history and description of its architecture designed to appeal to a foreign clientele. In the altogether different context of Hong Kong and its subsequent handover to China, the architectural historian Jeffrey W. Cody decodes the signs of identity conveyed by the successive alterations to the two most famous grand hotels in the former British colony, the Mandarin Oriental and the Peninsula.
- 4 The China specialists, Françoise Ged and Thierry Sanjuan, an architect and a geographer respectively, concentrate on the social and spatial permeability of the grand metropolitan hotels of mainland China at certain key moments of the twentieth century, when they served as images and tools of the social opening up of the country. By taking us through an architectural history of the grand Shanghai hotels, the first-named points out the “public” dimension of the lobby space, that gradually internalised the typical forms of the European open space (street, square, patio, etc.) to the point of mimicry. The second lays out the grand hotel’s role as precursor and then relay, even tending towards its own trivialisation, through the periods of restructuring of the major Chinese cities. Today, in China more than elsewhere, tourism is a factor of modernisation of these metropolises.
- 5 The grand hotel provides the local or international elite with a certain form of extra-territoriality in a changing political and social context³. Its strategic location and visibility, its top quality appointments and services, its security and its porosity all mean that it today serves many other purposes than that of mere accommodation⁴, ranging from the very serious to the very festive (professional meetings, promotional shows, shopping, weddings, etc.). Above all, however, the grand hotel has over time acquired the status of an emblematic building for the major cities of Asia, one that is both a link in the chain of the globalised economy, a key element in the renewal of the urban landscape and a true-false “no-place”⁵ where local citizens come to cultivate their new lifestyle.
- 6 The example of Seoul, divided into three parts by the geographer Valérie Gelézeau, is particularly interesting in this regard. The first part gives a history of the luxury hotel business running parallel to the history of urban development in the Korean capital from the 1880s to the present day, and formulates a typology of the grand hotel that is determined by its various roles in the projects of urban transformation. The second part shows, by zooming in on contemporary time and space, that the grand hotel is not a mere place of transit, but a real economic and cultural point within the global

economic network to the extent that it provides a function of transmission⁶ of appropriate values. One may ponder whether it has always been thus in other forms, particularly after the start of the colonial period. Finally, the third part relates to the social dimension of the grand hotel in Seoul through an analysis of the local practices and post-modern spaces that it generates (from the traditional Korean restaurant to the “Egyptian-style” discotheque, or the English pub, where the Hilton Hotel appears as a veritable luxury theme park. Supported by a wealth of data and a relevant iconography, this triple contribution constitutes in itself a book within the book at the same time as making up for the general lack of French-language publications devoted to the Korean city⁷.

- 7 The grand hotel, a “glocal” object *par excellence*, is a reflection of the metropolis from which it springs, just as the railway station was in its day or the airport is today, crystallising the complexity of contemporary urban societies. It constitutes a new and profoundly hybrid form of urban facility in Asia, that is to say one that is in step with the times.

NOTES

1. “Inn”, but the writer states p. 178: “made up of a first Chinese character designating travel and a second signifying ‘manor’ or ‘elegant town house’”. This definition resonates with the historical tradition of pilgrimage in Japan and the domestic dimension of the place.

2. Introduction, p. 5.

3. In Asia, as in Europe, in times of conflict, the grand hotel often becomes the temporary seat of government, or the base for the pool of foreign journalists.

4. Thierry Sanjuan states that in Chongqing, the People’s Hotel (*Renmin binguan*) houses the hall of the Municipal People’s Assembly (p. 91).

5. Françoise Ged rightly refers to the neologism invented by the anthropologist Marc Augé in the early 1990s regarding places without identity generated by the post-industrial city (airports, shopping centres, theme parks, etc.). The movie *Lost in Translation* (2003) by Sofia Coppola, which takes place in a grand hotel in Tokyo, shows us that it can nonetheless be a meeting-place.

6. In the sense in which the geographer Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier defined it in her work *Géographie urbaine* [Urban Geography] (Paris, Armand Colin, 1st edition 1980), according to the writer, p. 102.

7. We should, however, point out the simultaneous publication of Valérie Gelézeau’s work: *Séoul, ville géante, cités radieuses*, [Seoul. Megalopolis, radiating housing estates], Paris, CNRS, 2003.