

“Toilectecture” – Innovative Approaches to Public Toilet Design

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I. Preface

In the old times, the Chinese call “toilet” the “maofung”, literally “a straw roofing house” in Chinese. It was a building covered with straw or thatch that could accommodate simple function for human egestion. Since there was no scientific way of sewerage treatment system in the past, toilets were unsanitary. The word for “toilet” even became a pronoun for “stench” and dirty. There is a saying in China, “if you want to look for a toilet, you don’t need to use your eyes, just use your nose and follow the smell and you will locate the toilet.”



Toilet house in farm community,
Taichung, Taiwan

In Chinese tradition, toilets could not be placed in the main rooms or front area of a U-shaped house. It had to be located separately and in a more hideaway area in order to avoid the bad smell and ugly scene. This kind of toilet culture has been deep-rooted in common Chinese mind. As a result, even today, architects always ignore the importance of the toilets. When architects design a building, they rarely pay much attention to the toilets. That’s why public toilets in schools, department stores, train stations, highway rest areas or comfort stations in scenic areas are either not cleanly maintained, or poorly designed with bad physical quality. These are places that most people in our society have complained about and I think this situation is due to our cultural and educational upbringing. Recently, a principal of a local elementary school requested that I not put toilet within 50m of the school kitchen since the school site is small. I have a very difficult time to meet those criteria. I almost cannot put any toilet in the campus. I was surprised to learn that even the principal of the school who is guiding the children’s education program today still considered the toilet as a “dirty place”, and that it should be kept away. He doesn’t care to educate the children how to use the modern toilet facilities correctly, and keep it clean. A couple of weeks ago when the



Photo from Xinhua News

Taiwan Toilet Association held its annual conference in Taipei, Mr. Hirata, the invited speaker from Japan told us that in Japan people are used to seeing the Chinese character of “廁所” or “便所”. But it is not considered proper and polite to speak it out. That is why “toilet” has been adopted as a normal term of “chesoh”(廁所) in Japan.

I think there is almost the same attitude in Taiwan. When we established “Taiwan Toilet Association” five years ago, we choose “Sanitary Culture Association” instead of “chesoh” (toilet) as our official name.

II. Changing Attitude Toward Toilets

Since the Taiwan Toilet Association (TTA) was established six years ago, our main goals are:

1. To promote the public awareness of the importance of the toilet in our daily lives;
2. To provide technique assistance to public agencies on how to clean and keep a toilet well maintained;
3. To reeducate architects to design a more humanized and better quality of toilet environment.

When I was asked to talk about toilet design in this forum a few weeks ago, I thought about the toilet and architecture. I then made up a new word “toiletecture”. It means the architecture of toilets.

As an architect and member of TTA, I would like to talk a little bit about how an architect can improve his design on toilets. Also, I would like to show you some examples of toilets design in Taiwan in recent years.

Because the public is becoming more and more concerned about the toilet, it is a benchmark of civilization, a part of our culture. There are some new terminologies about the toilet that we often see in newspapers, magazines or television.

1. Environment Conservation Toilet –

Use of natural and environmental conservation materials or techniques to build a toilet. It usually takes natural ventilation, lighting, energy saving, and ways of greenification to improve the quality of toiletecture.



Taii Ecological Farm, Taiwan

2. Ecological Toilet –

Utilization of bio-reactor of high-technology to resolve solid human wastes and the water reclaimed from the treatment of liquid wastes that can be reused for irrigation purposes.



Amoy Train Station Plaza