

Structure as Symbolism: Pylons as Tools for Cultural Expression in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Abstract

In supporting both the deck and cable weight within suspension and cable-stayed bridges, the essential function of pylons provides architectural opportunity. Dissing+Weitling presents three case studies from China, the Philippines, and Australia to demonstrate how pylons can be transformed into design drivers of a bridge's aesthetic symbolism.

Recognizing the role infrastructure can play in engaging with local and indigenous user groups, this paper examines how design choices regarding colour, negative space, lighting design, and the physicality of pylons can reinforce cultural identity. In recognizing the symbolic potential of pylons – a structural necessity – mobility architecture can provide iconic, culturally responsive, and locally meaningful infrastructure.

Keywords: pylon; cable-stayed; suspension; illumination; cultural heritage; cultural expression; indigenous stakeholders; social cohesion; placemaking

1 Introduction

Infrastructure is an investment in community. At its most reductive, a bridge is a safe crossing – and yet the potential for each individual infrastructure development to reflect and reinforce cultural values cannot be understated. Mobility architecture provides an opportunity to infuse infrastructure development with cultural iconography. Across scales and geographies, a bridge design can provide a physical and metaphorical platform of expression.

The common thread within the wide variance of motivations for infrastructure developments is a specific, functional need. Key to understanding a project's intended function is engagement with users – the local stakeholders who will be crossing over, building around, and living alongside a new structural intervention. While the level of stakeholder engagement and local user

involvement may vary depending on the scale of a new development – it is the responsibility of the mobility architect to ensure these perspectives are considered and to the greatest extent possible incorporated into the aesthetic expression of the project together with the structural need.

Key to achieving this is consideration of how structural necessities can expand in scope. This paper considers the role pylons can play in maximizing cultural responsiveness in infrastructure. In recognizing the architectural potential of pylons to broaden a bridge's visual impact – a project's overall aesthetic expression can directly engage with cultural iconography speaking to its community and most frequent users.

1.1 Pylons As Design Driver

Pylons are incredible tools for mobility architects to design culturally responsive infrastructure. They