



The Contribution of Non-Malay Architects to the Development of National Architecture Identity in Malaysia

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Abstract. The idea of adapting Malay traditional architectural values has been gazetted as one of the resolutions for National Architecture Identity as presented in ‘*Seminar Ke Arah Identiti Kebangsaan Dalam Seni Bina*’ in 1981. The resolution heavily influenced the adaptation of traditional Malay architecture, motives, and artefact onto modern architecture as a form to inculcate a singular and united national identity. A lot of research and documentation on good and meaningful architecture embracing the ideals of National architecture identity through the worldview and perspectives of Malay scholars and architects have been documented through books, journals, magazines and extensively discussed during seminars, symposiums, and discourses. Ironically, the contributions of Non-Malay architects adapting Malay symbolism to enunciate or articulate national pride and identity, either due to policies or interest, are minimally discussed and highlighted. This publication attempted to document the contributions of non-Malay architects to the national architecture identity construct. It is crucial to shape future philosophies, theories, criticisms, and thoughts on the overall built environment in developing a comprehensive construct of national architectural identity that does not necessarily rely on ethnocentric criteria based on a single race dominance. The research allows us to expand and progress the local architecture narrative by including diverse voices and thoughts, especially of those who have contributed extensively in the eras of nation-building. This inclusive and diverse input will, in turn, inform and expand the discourse of national identity and unity.

Keywords: National architecture identity, non-Malay architects, development

1. Introduction

The story and the narrative of the Malays with Malaya and eventually Malaysia are heavily intertwined and reliant on the other. Neither is exclusive nor isolated and cannot be viewed in parts. Predating colonialism, the Malay state is dotted with Malay vernacular architecture by people native to the land. Each state is heavily distinguished with its particular approach to vernacularism, a direct response to its custom, context and climate. As a nation, Malaysia has gone through various phases in defining its identity and language in architecture. In the time span between 1955-1965, discussions on Malayan architecture is predominant in both Malaya and Singapore’s architecture publications [1]. The quest to establish Malayan Architecture was perpetrated by the British, pushed forward by Sir Gerald Templer, the British

high commissioner in Malaya between 1952 and 1954, who called for architects to design a “Malayan Architecture” before trickling down to the first batch of local architects.

When independence was proclaimed in 1957, several buildings were constructed by the government to herald the new nation and embody various aspirations of the new citizens. This included a Parliament House, National Mosque, National Museum and an Olympic size stadium where the colonial transfer was formally made. In the case of the National Museum, one of the earliest notable buildings that manifested the national architecture identity ideal, Mubin Sheppard worked closely with Gerald Templer to formulate cultural policies that rejected an earlier modernist design for the museum by Ivor Shipley. Instead, he appointed Ho Kok Hoe, a Chinese architect based in Singapore, as the official architect. Together, they travelled into the Malaya heartlands and, with the support and encouragement of Tunku Abdul Rahman, decided to incorporate architectural features from Balai Besar, Kedah as architectural features [2]. The National Museum exemplifies a conscious early attempt at adapting a singular ethnocentric approach in Malaysian architecture reflected the formulated cultural policies, albeit by non-Malay personnel like Ho Kok Hoe and Mubin Sheppard.

The National Culture Policy introduced in 1971 further emphasized an assimilation of the non-Malays into the Malay ethnic group. It defines three principles as guidelines for 'national culture':

- The National Culture must be based in the indigenous Malay culture.
- Suitable elements from other cultures maybe accepted as part of the National Culture.
- Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture.

The government policy was followed up with an architectural congress in 1981, “*Ke Arah Mewujudkan Seni Bina Nasional*” where the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad reiterated and reinforced his views on national identity. As a result, the congress concluded with a resolution to adapt and exemplify Malay crafts and customs in the built environment as a form to build national identity. Malaysia is continuously negotiating a stance to appease and unify an increasingly diverse and multicultural population.

The iteration of vernacular Malay architecture and heritage as a base for national architecture identity predates independence and was dictated by the British as the best way forward for a young nation. This opened the way for Modern Malay architecture narrative, synthesised by economics, flair and construction advancements and a marriage with vernacular Malay elements.

The attempt to apply and employ Modern Malay Architecture as the foundation to evoke national identity in the local context can be traced back to the early civic buildings built pre-independence and post-independence. Despite the glorification of these buildings’ heritage and the symbolism and cultural connotation that they carry to exemplify Modern Malay architecture, the early practitioners were largely non-Malays. Their contribution reverberated in both Malaysia and Singapore, published widely in architecture journals like ‘PETA’ and ‘RUMAH’ and forms the basis of architecture discourse and education in early days Malaysia and Singapore. In spite of that, there is a clear lack of documentation and credits attributed to the involvement and contribution of the non-Malay architects in developing the Modern Malay architecture narrative.

64 years’ post-independence, the national identity through built architecture is still discussed within a singular ethnic dialogue, dominated and represented by the Malays when the pioneers were largely non-Malays. The perspectives, thinking, theories and criticism of the non-Malays while working within the Modern Malay architecture narrative can provide valuable insights in paving the way forward as a nation.

2. Methodology

In general, the studies adapting the Interpretive-Historical Research framework developed by Groat & Wang [3] in justifying the contribution of non-Malay architects and practitioners in developing the national architecture identity in Malaysia. The studies focus on non-Malay architects and practitioners' involvement in the design of the notable buildings that reflected the national identity ideals and the publications that shaped the discourse and thoughts of national architecture identity.

By adapting the Interpretive-Historical Research framework, the studies were executed by following the 4 phases, including (i) Data/Evidence, (ii) Identification/Organization, (iii) Evaluation and (iv) Narration. In the first phase, the evidence or the data are mainly in the form of literature from the PETA, the Journal of the Federation of Malaya Society of Architects (FMSA) that currently known as Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) and RUMAH, the journal of the Society of Malayan Architects, later renamed the Singapore Institute of Architects. Follows by the second phase, the organization of studies, is classified in the timeline of Malaysian architecture development from the pre-independence period to the decades of post-independence (1957-1997). In the third phase, the evaluation is executed through the content analysis, where the non-Malay architects and practitioners' contribution in developing National architecture identity is interpreted based on the constructed buildings, PETA and RUMAH. In the final phase, the contribution of the architects and practitioners is classified according to the developed timeline.

3. Discussion

The discussion elaborated chronologically by following the timeline principles stated in the methodology section. It briefly discussed the initial emergence of the national architectural identity agenda pre-independence before elaborating

further with the study of the first generation of local architects operating in the immediate years post-independence, synonymously known as the 'Malayan Architecture' phase. This period was crucial in shaping the development of major cities in Malaysia with the development of civic and public buildings. Aside from the Public Works Department, it was predominantly shaped by non-Malay architects from the private sector. A comprehensive short list of non-Malay architects practising through the Malayan Architecture phase of 1967-1997, along with their significant built works, published writings and thoughts, will be discussed.

The implementation of the National Culture Policy, as discussed in "*Kongres Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*" in 1971, to design, formulate and sustain Malaysia's national image and identity was derived from regional socio-ethnic sensitivities, history and culture, leaning heavily towards the Malays and their Islamic values. The discussion is based on the recorded literature on the contributions and criticisms by non-Malay architects in relation to working alongside or against the national architectural identity that was legislated in the National Culture Policy.

3.1 Malayan Architecture (Pre-Independence)

The chronology of pre-Merdeka architecture in the Malay Peninsula, ran through starting from the first records of civilized structure in Lembah Bujang, dating back to the Indian Kingdoms between the 7th to 14th Century [4]. From 1511 onwards, big-scale buildings were attributed to colonizers starting from the Portuguese and the Dutch in Melaka. Later, the British entered the Malay Peninsula in the late 18th Century, establishing their trading and administrative posts in Penang and Singapore. Before the colonial intervention, the local architecture can be traced and attributed to the local vernacular architecture, mainly dependent on available materials and local skills.

The growth of Kuala Lumpur as a settlement was attributed to the same era, circa the 1860s, and the shift of the seat of power from Klang to Kuala Lumpur was made official in 1879 when the first British official was sent to live permanently. After the Great Fire ravaged Chinese tin miners' shophouses in Kuala Lumpur in 1881, Sir Frank Swettenham introduced the first Building Regulations that decreed the original attap hut settlements to be rebuilt in brick with tiled roofs and allowances to be provided for five-foot covered passageways. The earliest interventions in the local architecture are gestures made by non-Malays [4], [5].

Pre-Merdeka in Malaya, the architects and engineers who pioneered Malayan architecture were British expatriates. As in most British colonial countries, the Public Works Department was in charge of designing and constructing civic buildings such as administrative centres, schools, transportation hubs, and courthouses.

The birth of a small and active private sector led by expatriates supported by local draughtsmen [4]. The community of early expatriate architects also led to the formation of the Institute of Architects Malaya in the 1930s up to 1941. The institute was revived in 1946 after the war and lasted up to 1949 before the formation of the Malaya Society of Architects (FMSA). In the early 1950s, the first architecture education institution in Malaysia, the Technical College at Gurney Road (Jalan Semarak), Kuala Lumpur, was led by more British personnel, including Julius Posener, C. W. Voltz, Gunter Naleppa, Norman Lehey and Vernon Z. Newcomb [6].

3.2 The First Decade Post Merdeka (1957-1967)

As stated by Yeang [4], this was the period when the Malayan architects were beginning to be given responsibilities for the major building projects in the country. The major architectural firms were still controlled by expatriates and received many commissions from foreign trading houses operating in Malaya. The first generation of local Malayan architects was dominated by non-Malay architects who graduated from the United Kingdom and Australia, like Kingston Loo, Ho Kok Hoe and Lim Chong Keat.

According to Yeang [4], important public sector and institutional buildings during this period were primarily focused on the construction and provision of infrastructure and educational facilities. The FMSA launched an architecture competition for the Great Hall, Theatre, and Administration Center in 1959, when the University of Malaya was established. Booty Edwards & Partners, the largest firm at the time, won this. Public landmarks and major civic institutions completed in the era were Parliament House (Fig. 1) by Malaysian Public Works Department (1963), Kuala Lumpur General Hospital by Wells & Joyce Architects (1966-74), Subang International Airport (Fig. 2) by BEP Akitek Sdn. Bhd. (1965) and the National Mosque by Malaysian Public Works Department (1965).

Other buildings that asserted national stance and status completed within the era by non-Malay architects were the Menara UMNO and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka by Lee Yoon Thim, and the highly acclaimed but polarising Muzium Negara by Ho Kok Hoe. The Muzium Negara was the first large public building to incorporate features of traditional Malay architecture in Malaysia (Fig. 3).

Malayan Architects Co-Partnership was established in 1960 by William Lim, Lim Chong Keat, and Chen Voon Fee and lasted until 1969. MAC's works and ideas are widely regarded as successful in their pursuit of a suitable architecture for Malaya (later Malaysia) that expresses the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of the rapidly developing nation at the time [7]-[9]. MAC is considered as successful in its endeavours to construct Malayan architectural identity through the application of modern architecture ideals within the local contextual conditions of the 1960s. Besides that, MAC was identified as the most successful firm in competing with other major firms such as Booty Edwards & Partners, Swan & Maclaren and Raglan Squire [7]. In summary, Table 1 listed the non-Malay architects' involvement in shaping

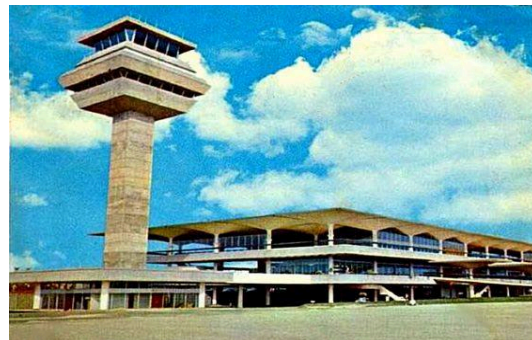
Malaysian Architecture by incorporating the ideals of national architecture identity in their respective projects according to the timeline from 1957 to 1967 (the first decade after Malaysia's independence).



Fig. 1 - Parliament House by The Malaysian Public Works Department, one of the earliest notable public institutional buildings that representing the ideals of National Architecture Identity [13]



(a)



(b)

Fig. 2 - (a) Dewan Tunku Canselor University Malaya, and; (b) early days of Subang International Airport, predominantly designed and supervised by Architect Kinton Loo from BEP Akitek



Fig. 3 - Muzium Negara is one of the earliest notable public buildings that incorporated the 'Malay Traditional Revivalism' approach, designed by architect Ho Kok Hoe [14]

Table 1 - The list of architects, firms and their respective projects in the first decade after Malaysia independence

Architect	Firm/Organization	Buildings/Projects
Goh Hock Guan	Goh Hock Guan & Associates (Founder of Akitek Jururancang)	National Palace (1959), Federal Hotel revolving restaurant (1960)
Lee Yoon Thim/T.Y Lee	Lee Yoon Thim	UMNO Building (1955), Federal Hotel (Fig. 5(b)) (1957), Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka (Fig. 5(a)) (1962), Tanjong Karang Hospital (1966)
Ho Kok Ho	Ho Kwong Yew & Sons	Muzium Negara (1963)
Kington Loo, Kam Pak Cheong	Booty Edward Partnership / BEP Akitek	Brunei House (1960), Zoo Negara, (1963), Sarawak State Secretariat (1964), Subang Airport (1965), Dewan Tunku Canselor (1966)
Lim Cheong Keat, William S.W Lim, Chen Voon Fee	Malayan Architects Co- Partnership (MAC)	Singapore Conference Hall (1965), Negeri Sembilan State Mosque (Fig. 4) (1967) , Perak Turf Club (1968)
Chen Voon Fee	Chen Voon Fee & Rakan Rakan	A&W Drive-In (1967)



Fig. 4 - Negeri Sembilan State Mosque [15]



(a)



(b)

Fig. 5 - (a) Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1962, and; (b) Federal Hotel, designed by architect Lee Yoon Thim



Fig. 6 - A&W Drive-In (1967), the first drive-in in Malaysia, designed by architect Chen Voon Fee

3.3 The Second Decade Post Merdeka (1967-1977)

The second decade after Independence was a period of rapid growth for Malaysia. Project commissions include large-scale commercial buildings like high-rise offices and malls, private mass housing developments, and hotels in Kuala Lumpur and other states. An influx of Malaysian architects returning from overseas concurrent with the rising demands helps to the formation of many new firms across the country [4]. The Architects Team 3 (Jurubena Bertiga), the successor Malayan Architects Co-partnership was compelled to design based on integrity and virtue to tropical design as it is relevant for the nation and guided by universal values, as opposed to derivative stylings [10]. In summary, Table 2 listed the non-Malay architects' involvement in shaping Malaysian Architecture by incorporating the ideals of national architecture identity in their respective projects according to the timeline from 1968 to 1977 (the second decade after Malaysia's Independence).

Table 2 - The list of architects, firms and their respective projects in the second decade after Malaysia independence

Architect	Firm/Organization	Buildings/Projects
Yoong & Associates	Yoong & Associates	Lim Kean Siew House Penang, (1968)
Tay Kheng Soon	Akitek Tenggara	Cheras Housing (1976), Plaza
Lim Cheong Keat, Lim Chin See	Architects Team 3 & Jurubena Bertiga, Jurubena Bertiga International	PJ Municipal Council (Fig. 7(a)) (1970), KOMTAR Penang (Fig. 7(b)) (1976)
Chen Voon Fee	Chen Voon Fee & Rakan Rakan	Treachers Methodist Girls Primary School, Taiping (1970)

3.4 The Third and Fourth Decade Post Merdeka (1978-1997)

In the third-decade post-Merdeka, the 4th and 5th Malaysia Plan was in place, with significant incentives being invested into the industry by both the public and private sectors. The number of practising architects doubled within the timeframe. In 1981, a second seminar was organised by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport titled Towards the National Identity in Architecture, years after the first seminar was held. The recommendations include [11], [12]:

- Malaysian architecture should have a certain identity which is recognisable by the public and this should be based on the Malay culture.
- In fostering the Malaysian architectural identity, the national philosophy (aspiration) that has been reflected in tradition, the national language, should be amalgamated.
- Education should include architecture as one of the subjects. The public should be exposed to architecture in terms of appreciation at an early stage.
- The government should sponsor all efforts in research and documentation on traditional architecture.

- A national body should be established to investigate buildings that have traditional architecture characteristics or that can be considered as having historical significance, for the purpose of conservation and preservation.

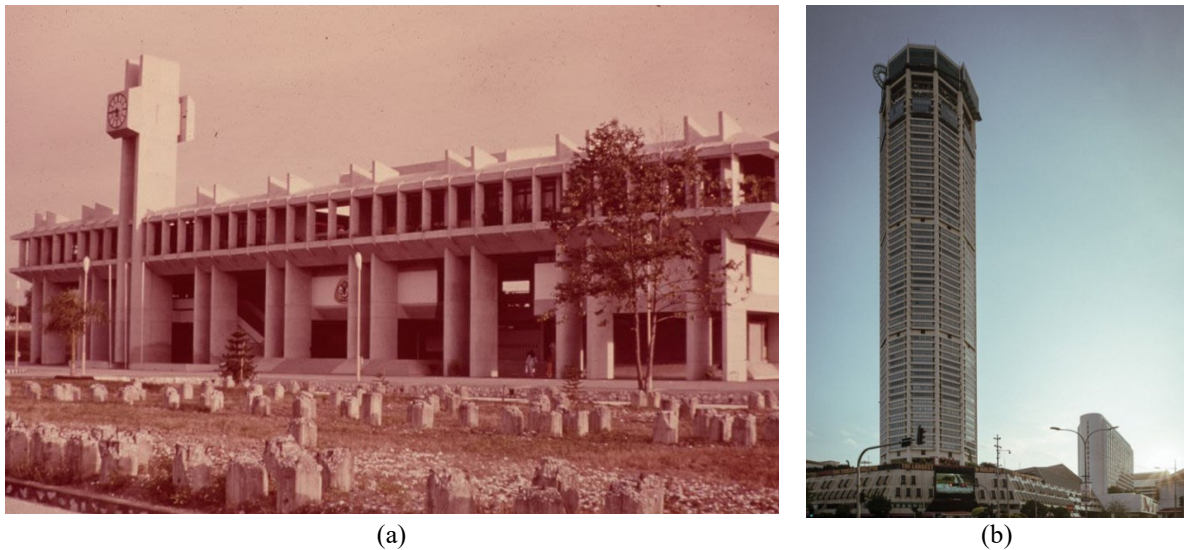


Fig. 7 - (a) PJ Municipal Council, and; (b) KOMTAR Pulau Pinang, designed by Architect Team 3 [16]

Among the immediate results from the recommendations was the dominant approach of Malay traditional architecture revivalism in most of the public building design in the third and fourth decades post-independence. On the other side, the output recommendations of the seminar led to the formation of the conservation institute, Badan Warisan Malaysia, in 1982. On the other side, the leading architecture schools of the period, University Teknologi Malaysia and Institut Teknologi Malaysia increased efforts to document surveys and reports of old Malaysian buildings. At the same time, students were made aware of national identity issues. The government also initiated financial support to encourage more research on traditional Malaysian architecture.

The decade also saw significant conservation works on national importance monuments like the Sultan Abdul Samad Building by BEP Akitek, Kuala Lumpur Railway Station by Perunding Alam Bina, and the Central Market refurbishment project by Chen Voon Fee, William Lim and Carl Larson in 1986. Table 3 listed the non-Malay architects' involvement in shaping Malaysian Architecture by incorporating the ideals of national architecture identity in their respective projects according to the timeline from 1977 to 1997 (the third and fourth decade after Malaysia's independence).

Table 3 - The list of architects, firms and their respective projects in the third decade after Malaysia independence

Architect	Firm/Organization	Buildings/Projects
Victor Chew, Wee Chwee Heng (SG), Hisham Albakri	Kumpulan Akitek	Hyatt Kuantan (1978), Bank Bumiputra (Fig. 8(a)) (1980), Wisma Lee Rubber (1980), Putra World Trade Centre (Fig. 8(b)) (1985), Pan Pacific Hotel (1985), National Library (1992)
Kington Loo, Kam Pak Cheong	Booty Edward Partnership / BEP Akitek	Link House Damansara Heights (1983), Desa Kudalari (1983)
Chen Voon Fee, William Lim and Carl Larson	Architectural Consulting Services/William Lim Associates	Central Market Upgrading (1986)
Bernard Au, Ng Tian Ming, Kenneth Chia	MAA (Malaysian Associates Architects)	Pejabat Pos Besar (1984), Dayabumi Complex (1984), Kelantan State Secretariat (1986)
Tay Kheng Soon	Akitek Tenggara	Cheras Housing (1976), Plaza Ampang City - GCB Plaza (1987)

Jimmy Lim	Jimmy Lim Design/ CSL Associates	House of T Y Chiew (1980), Modular House (1984), House for Madam Quek (1984), Walian House (1984), ASPA Mosque (1985), Impiana Hotel (1993), Wisma Genting (1993), Salinger House (Fig. (9)) (1994)
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(a)



(b)

Fig. 8 - (a) Putra World Trade Centre and; (b) Bank Bumiputra, designed by Kumpulan Akitek [14]



Fig. 9 - Salinger House, designed by architect Jimmy Lim [14]

4. Conclusion

Non-Malay architects' interpretation of National architecture identity is underdeveloped and poorly documented, although they practice under a policy that alludes to it. It is essential to highlight and credit their significant contributions in developing the narrative of national architecture identity and their thoughts on it. As Malaysia moves forward and more foreign investors and architects move into practice within this realm, there is an urgent need to document those who have and are still working within the national identity narrative before this is phased out. As our nation progresses to further embrace diversity, the national identity narrative should be discussed beyond the ethnocentrism boundary. This publication hopes to document those who have diligently contributed to it.

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