

MALAYSIAN ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHITECTURAL TRENDS 15TH – 21ST CENTURY: LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify the trends in the design of the highest administrative building in Malaysia by looking at the architectural style of major eras of the country that acts as future design precedent. Administrative architecture is seen not just as a place to administer the country, but also a place of identity, especially in the portrayal of a country's social, economic and political stature. Documentation of architecture styles were done by past scholars (Mohidin et al., 2012), however, none discussed on how the data could benefit future trends in the design of future administrative architecture of the country as building new administrative utopia is an unending phenomenon as the era evolves. As outlined by Yin (2014) the study uses multiple case studies as a method of data collection. As a result, the study aims to bridge the gap between the architectural style and the possible factors influencing the conception of the style. Through this, it is hoped that future administrative architecture style will reflect better design at the expense of true national identity.

Keyword: Architectural trends; architecture style; administrative architecture; Malaysian architecture; national identity.

INTRODUCTION

A government administrative architecture is a particular type of building that accommodates the work of administrators despite their levels, and houses the office of the government's lawmakers (Vale, 2014). There is a wide range of known administrative architecture that is available throughout the world. At the national level, an administrative architecture is purposely built to show its power and status in the society, apart from serving as a building to run the seat of the government (Markus, 2013). Like any other forms of architecture, the administrative building possesses a wide selection of vocabulary, especially in relation to styles and from where these styles are being adapted. This paper seeks to elucidate the different styles that were probably adopted for the design of the state administrative architecture in Malaysia in each of the main eras dating back from the 15th century up to the present. The study is important because present administrative architecture mainly focuses on eclectic styles such as traditional vernacular, colonial, Islamic revivalism, modern and postmodern styles, instead of referring to local identity and values as most administrative architecture in Malaysia today bears little to no value of national identity. The study is of importance so that practicing architects and designers can understand that the present and existing examples of administrative architecture may not necessarily be the best examples of administrative architecture to symbolize Malaysia as a multiracial society and a democratic country. Most of which are trying to portray style of image making. This has somehow jeopardized the true identity of the country and neglecting function have the building as well as maximum consideration of climatic conditions in Malaysia. It is important for architects as designers to understand that the administrative architecture is a crucial building typology as it does not only fulfill the administrative role, but also as a symbol of identity of the country being the most important building in the country.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHITECTURE IN MALAYSIA

Administrative architecture is defined as political symbol which demonstrate the authority of the governing body apart from serving as a building to run the seat of the government (Vale, 2014; Markus, 2013; De Rossi, 2011; Roberts, 2009). The administrative buildings are determined by its function and placement to mediate forms of political power in order to propagate political ideologies to the pluralist society (Vale, 2014). In this sense, it is often built in large scale to house the government lawmakers and to accommodate the work and activities of administrators despite of their levels (Mohidin, 2015). They are also designed in grandeur and monumental appearance in terms of its design style as well as physical appearance involving building spatial layout and built form (Mohidin, 2015). Furthermore, administrative building is usually situated at dominant locations like

at high places namely on top of a hill, in the middle of open lake or in the city centre or capital that holds a specific activity or industry (Mohidin, 2015). Scholars such as Sudjic (2011) and (Parkinson, 2009) mentioned that, this phenomenon often occurred in many modern states throughout the world due to the uprising of political regimes, since they greatly relied on symbols in the form of architecture, rituals, ceremonies and displays to project the idea of legitimization (Sudjic, 2011; Parkinson, 2009). By arousing nationalistic emotions of the masses and maneuvering the populace sentiments, they aim to maintain their status and position in society (Sudjic, 2011). The ruling regime's main political ambition in modern states, and particularly in newly independent countries, is to utilise architecture for the purpose of: i) unifying the masses; and ii) representing achievement and gaining acknowledgement (Vale, 2014; Sudjic, 2011).

To explain this matter in depth, the paper will elucidate on the administrative built form style as well as discussing on the probable factors that influence the appearance of state administrative building in Malaysia during the pre and post-independence period. This study is important because the present state administrative architecture portrays pastiche architectural style instead of referring to the country's national identity and regional values. This study is essential in two mean ways. First, practicing architects and designers will be able to understand that the present and existing examples of administrative architecture may not necessarily be the best example of administrative architecture to symbolize Malaysia as a multiracial society and a democratic country. Second this paper will provide a challenging perspective particularly for architects and designers to make a concerted effort to study the politics and the cultural context in which the built form is to be placed onsite before proceeding to the design stage. This includes the need to probe into the dynamics of the relationship between built form and its society. This act is important, as it will help to identify any biases brought to any new project by virtue of personal preferences as well as confronting any preferential treatment to the architectural design traditions of the most influential groups in society. Such appropriation will hopefully result in an architectural representation that responds to the traditions of the society and their culture rather than stress the presence of some dominant group.

ADMINISTRATIVE SCENARIO IN PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

A) PRE INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

i) TRADITIONAL ERA

During the traditional era, the country's administrative system was under monarchical ruling where Sultan held the highest ruling position in the Malay Kingdom. The Malay sultanate hence controlled the administration of the country from its palace located on higher ground and Islamic religion was used as political tool to unify the Malay populace. The most well known administrative center during this sultanate era is the Malaccan Sultanate's palace, which was built during the era of Sultan Mansur Syah, who ruled from 1458 to 1477. Besides functioning as a center for law making it also served as a place for conducting cultural and religious activities under the guidance of palace religious scholars (Shellabear, 2014; Chen et al., 2008).

The palace was built on the basis of power and to show excellence in administrative leadership of the sultan (Mohidin and Ismail, 2014) Located in the central part of Malacca during the golden age of the empire, this palace was constructed using wood from local area and was built to suit the regional climate and blends in with the surrounding context. In brief, the palace reflect the strong influences of the Malay way of life and environment with reference to the local climatic, topography, environment and adaptive towards the Malay socio-culture.

II) COLONIAL ERA

• EARLY COLONIAL ERA

The glorious reign of Malay Sultanate ended when the Portuguese invaded and conquered Malacca in 1511. The seat of administration hence was transferred from sultanate absolute monarch to the Portuguese Army Governor. The entry of Portuguese in Malacca introduced a formal structure of political administration in the country. The Portuguese administrative structure, however, centered on defensive strategy and military ruling since they were continuously threatened by other western rivalry that envied the wealth of Malaccan port. To gain maximum protection, the Portuguese built well- equipped forts as center of administration, which are located at strategic places facing the Strait of Malacca. Nevertheless, the Dutch destroyed these prominent forts and neighbouring buildings when they took over Malacca from Portuguese in 1641. This situation left no documented archival records on the building structure and its establishments. Similar like the Portuguese, the Dutch also improved and expanded the Portuguese Fortress as well as built walls to protect the harbour and expanded the city of Malacca. They built structures like administration, commercial, warehouses and private dwellings in the town area, including the Stadhuis or known as the city hall.

When the Portuguese and the Dutch took over Malacca, they brought in this influence and applied it on most buildings they erect during those times. This occurs because the early colonial powers deemed to utilize the building for the purpose of symbolizing stature and achievement besides, consolidating their authority over subjugated country and for mass control.

• BRITISH ERA

The administrative building during the British era reflects western designs and technology in construction with an assimilated outlook. These buildings had unique characteristics that were foreign to the local culture. British administrative had three phases of era. They are; Straits Settlement, the Federated Malay States and the Non Federated Malay States. The British began to settle in Malaya in year 1786 when the Sultan of Kedah agreed to allow the British East India Company to build a trading post and to operate in Kedah in favour of protecting the Kedah state from external threats. When British developed the Strait Settlements, they built necessary buildings such as administrative building, churches, schools, shops and other institutional buildings. The most dominant administrative building owned by the British Empire during this period was the Penang Municipal Building located in George Town, Penang.

British invasion continued and they conquered the Non Federated Malay States after signing the Pangkor Treaty in 1884. During the early 21st century, they managed to surmount The Federated Malay States. This era witnessed rapid development in the local built environment context. The previous main administrative building located in Penang was transferred to Kuala Lumpur. In the late era of their administrative period, the colonials built huge numbers of monumental structure across the country. This includes the Sultan Abdul Samad building which was the capital of British administrative center from 1896 onwards once Kuala Lumpur was declared as the capital town of Malaya. Nonetheless, the British left significant legacy that still prevails until the present context and this includes architecture, administrative system, lifestyle and culture in the local scene due to their long subjugation that lasted for 170 years.

B) POST INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

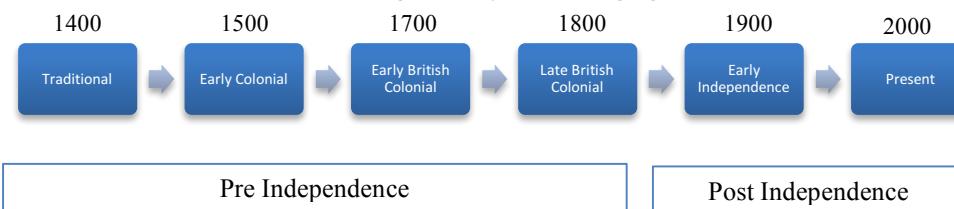
After achieving independence in 1957, the ruling of Malaysia is based on the federal representative democratic constitutional monarchy framework. The federal government has three main branches; the legislative, executive and judiciary. In Malaysian practice, more power is vested in the executive branch of government than in the legislative and judiciary. The early years after independence under the administration of Tunku, Razak and Onn portrayed political agenda that much focuses on nation building and national progress. During these periods, the leaders' main intention, strategies and actions were to unite all races and religion in the country while maintaining the importance of Malay culture and Islam as the main religion. For that reason, the country's building scene evokes nationalistic sentiments among the masses due to the representation of the national identity image. Such prominent example is the Parliament building designed by Sir Ivor Shipley in 1962. To project the Parliament building as structure that uphold the principles of democracy for both the newly independent state and the populace – its design thus displayed no allusion to any ethnicity or of dominant ethnic group. It exhibits modernistic and progressive expression, which referred to local climatic conditions and regional values as well as the exploitation of contemporary materials and the latest available technology (Lai, 2015; 2007).

The early era of 20th century Malaysia portrayed different political intentions and strategies unlike previous years. This is because the country's administration under Mahathir, Badawi and Najib much focused on the positioning of the Malay race and the Islamic religion as integral parts of the nation building process besides placing high interest on the aspect of economic and social development. This nation building programs does not only involve the erection of public but also government buildings throughout the nation. One of them is the Malaysia's new administrative capital; Putrajaya. It is clear that historical development fostered different types of administrative buildings and the four main types of administrative architecture in Malaysia each have its own unique characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The paper utilized multiple case study analysis to gain information for the study (Yin, 2014). The case studies were chosen based on prominent eras as segregated by changing regimes and political climate in Malaysia dating back from the 15th century till present era. In order to begin the project, it was necessary to gather information to identify the main administrative building of each prominent era as case studies, which were classified into six main eras. These eras are the Traditional era, Early Colonial era, British Colonial era that is broken into Early British Colonial era and Late British Colonial era and finally the Independent era, which is broken into Earlt Independent era and Present era. These eras are then classified into two bigger groups; pre independence era and post independence era.

Fig. 1 Malaysia main segregation of era



These case studies are then analyzed based on indicators that could determine the architectural style and its influence. For this study, the architectural elements of each case study were observed from the form of the building and its relationship with the era that it was built in. For this reason, semiotics was chosen as the suitable paradigm that could be the tool to analyze the historical

properties of an administrative architecture that links to the different identity being portrayed. Since this paper involves the investigation of interpreting on the building design to produce a specific understanding, interpretivism too is seen as an appropriate way for inquiring this study as the aim of the paper is to interpret the meaningful nature and concepts that are embodied in built form. This is vital in order to understand the building that is bound to a specific context and setting. This is because interpretivism accepts that the investigator and the investigated object are interactively dynamically linked (Denzin, 2001) In addition, —interpretivism also allows the researcher to make explicit her theoretical position by participating in the social world to understand more effectively the emergent properties and features (Chen et al., 2008). For this research, the investigations are conducted on two government buildings regarding them as ‘signs’, that can be read in a structured manner in order for it to symbolise various meanings to its receiver based on the elements within the building which include; **style of the government buildings and facades of the built form as indicators**. A comparative study of these indicators on each group of administrative eras will be discussed in order to find the most suitable style to be portrayed as the country’s best language of architecture for administrative building.

FINDINGS – ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHITECTURE IN PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

Data collections from 6 case studies were carefully analyzed through observation based on the indicators in sequence of administrative eras.

A) PRE INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

I) TRADITIONAL ERA

Fig. 2 Replica of Palace of Malay Sultanate



This palace is a product of human anthropological approach of 'Head-Body-Foot'. From the aspect of 'head' of this palace, it was said to have a roof that resembles a pyramid and has several layers of 'body' and 'foot' as the base of the building. The roof has seven layers of levels and has a tip at each edge. There was a screen (*tebar layar*) and covered pavements (*gajah menyusur*) at the palace. 'Body' creates façade of the building. In this palace, there are three fractions that appear dominating the walls; lining at the top of the window or door, the second is the window or door itself and the last part is the part below the window. The 'foot', which also forms the basis of this building, has itself lifted from the ground level, which also proves its regionalism influences (Kien, 2007; Rasdi, 2001). The column and beam system were more articulated and lavishly decorated than a commoner's dwelling. This palace however was ruined in a tragic battle between the princes as it was caught on fire.

II) COLONIAL ERA

• EARLY COLONIAL ERA

To symbolize the reign of Dutch authority and as visible sign of their progress as well as supremacy, the Dutch erect the Stadhuis in monumental scale with Renaissance architectural style. The external façade is covered using whitewash plaster made from limestone to keep the building cool and dry without being porous.

Fig. 3 Stadhuis, Malacca



The Stadhuis was built vertically and horizontally massive compared to human proportions and other surroundings. This building has a dramatic sculptural effect since it is located at the opposite of the northern gateway into the fortified town, across the river within the vicinity of the St Paul area. The Stadhuis is also strategically placed facing the open Dutch square. The building's interior has three floors and it is 30 metres wide (Vis, 2001). The Stadhuis façade much employs panelling and projecting surface decoration, with arched window and door-heads ornamented with tracery. It has a very modest outlook with limited decoration on it but nonetheless, it is still very impressive in appearance. The most prominent feature of the building is the roof, which is gabled and parapeted with pediments at the edge of the roof and fitted with red Dutch roof tiles. The building has roof eaves protruding about 1 meter beyond the walls. This overhang feature keeps the second floor windows shaded, a common way of dealing with the harsh climate in this region. Another outstanding feature of Stadhuis is the two grand staircases that lead to a verandah on the first floor.

• BRITISH ERA

Fig. 4 Penang Municipal Council, Penang



This white painted building portrays Neo Baroque architectural style that presents extensive rustication, usually heavier at ground level, often running into and exaggerating the voissours of arched openings. In addition, exaggerated keystones, segmental arched pediments, columns with engaged blocks, attached block-like rustication to window surrounds; as well as colonnades of (sometimes paired) columns in the Ionic and Corinthian order are also visible. The entrance of the building has a verandah on top of the ground floor arched opening derives from the Edwardian baroque style. The windows are all topped with either arched block of stones or having engaged pediments. Most of the windows on the first floor are in pairs and are multi-panned. The building was strategically placed in a large area in the middle of Penang city facing an open square.

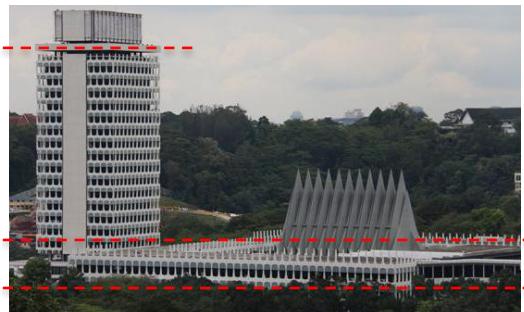
Fig. 5 Sultan Abdul Samad Building, KL



The Sultan Abdul Samad building has three copper onion domes that marked the Moghul style of architecture. The built form is monumental in scale, vertical in height or horizontally massive compared to human proportions and other surroundings. The façade comprised of arches of different patterns such as the pointed arch, ogre arch, horseshoe arch, multi-foiled arch and four-centered arch punching through a red-bricked wall. It is richly decorated with floral finials, embellishments and sculptural elements arranged in hierarchical organisation at the roof, body and base section. The façade also has distinct focal point that ideally projects a strong central focus decorated with the center tower equipped with a tower clock and the other two side towers are decorated with arches in a spiral motion, enhancing the overall perceptual stability. This arrangement provides symmetrical axis and order while adding an element of interest to the bland monotonous façade. The placement of the building is strategically placed in an open ground facing a large square intending it to be noticeable and recognized to signify importance.

B) POST INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA

Fig. 6 Malaysia Houses of Parliament, KL



The Parliament House of Malaysia bears a modernistic expressionist style ready to be translated by the society (Rasdi, 2001). The Parliament House has two parts; the main building and the tower building. The main building has a Malaccan traditional Malay roof style that definitely defined the Malay architecture. The tower emphasized more on the adaptation of the building towards the surrounding where there façade is being set back to shade the interior from direct sunlight. The Parliament building blends in with the surrounding context and not arranged in a hierarchical manner with wide scale base or high scale tapered roof (Ismail, 2008). The Parliament Complex has flat roofs on both the tower building as well as the podium building, however, the building can be seen to have a variation of being flat at the tower building while the other is peaked and highly sloped on the podium building. The roof of this building is made of concrete and stucco which are not reflective in manner and does not cause thermal conductivity. Even so, the roof of Parliament Complex has no overhangs or shading properties that could function as sun and rain shading device.

The body, on the other hand, comes in a uniformity where the overall façade is consistently overlaid with an adaptive design feature which dominates the overall view of the building. The base runs continuously above ground level below this said design feature. The façade of the complex can hardly be ignored. This is because the design of the façade of the Parliament Complex is one of its kind especially during the time it was built. The building, be it the tower building or the podium building, is covered thoroughly with this design feature. This feature acts as an envelope to the building as it covers and protects the building while being one meter away from the main glass walls creating a double facade treatment/double skin facade that allows the building to ‘breath’ through the cavity. The design is carried through consistently in size and regularity. The dominance of the façade may be seen on its body where it brings out the character of the building sustainable feature. Apart from that, the facade is also painted in white-washed color which cools the building.

The façade layering which can be seen recessing from the windows making the building very shady. Most of the windows are full height to allow natural sunlight to lit the office building having no direct sunlight nor glare into the building. There are also at a certain part of the building designed with double volumes to encourage better air flow as well as minimizing mechanical ventilation.

Fig. 7 Perdana Putra, Putrajaya



The scale of the Putrajaya project was grandiose and the most prominent building located at the Putrajaya Government Precinct (Precinct 1) is the Perdana Putra that houses the prime minister's office. Completed in year 1997, the architectural style of this building reflects the Indo Saracenic design approach. Perdana Putra is built on stone cladding walls that goes up to about 50 meters in height and had a mix of architectural language where the pitch roof and the domes are being used to give the strongest character to the building (Putrajaya Holdings, 2003). Nevertheless, the more appealing feature is the large green onion dome and also smaller domes that gives a reflection of Arabic and Islamic character on its surface. The building also has smaller domes surrounding the building.

Since roof is the main sheltering element of a building, its primary function is to shade the building as a whole. Perdana Putra uses two types of roof. These roofs are pitched on both ends while domed at the center of the façade. The pitched roof selected for the left and right wing of the building symbolizes the Malay architecture feature where the roof is designed to have a certain length of overhang to shade the immediate wall from solar radiation and rain as well as water runoff. As pitched roof is made of metal roofing that is a non-reflective material and has a greater height in the middle, it is logically more effective in creating less hot air pocket under the ceiling as the height has been increased. The same idea was adapted on the Indo-Saracenic and Moguls influenced green domed roofing and this ensures better indoor air quality. However, the material used for the domed roof; green stone is rather reflective and can easily ignite thermal conductivity. The light green color roofing reduces heat gain as well as reducing glare.

The façade of the building is classically designed with the use of columns and arches and topped with the classical ornamented cornice slightly below the roofline imitating the Roman temples. This is to signify that the government is symbolically as glorious as past eras and to show the advancement of the administrative system as well as its social and economic status of the country. The large opening of Perdana Putra are full in height and are embellished with wrought iron grill detailing that originates from a combination of Islamic arts and art nouveau architecture style. These styles are clearly seen on the large center arch that is heavily emphasized. The recessed double glazed windows reduce solar radiation while allowing natural daylighting as well as air to enter the inside spaces of the building.

DISCUSSION – THE BEST LANGUAGE OF ARCHITECTURE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING IN MALAYSIA AS AN EMERGING TREND

It is evident that administrative buildings are seen to undergo major changes in language of architecture following its major period shifts. During pre independence era, the architectural style changed from being regional (traditional era) to adopting foreign architecture style inherent from the colonial influences. This is due to the administrative shift after the invasion of foreign powers. After achieving independence, Malaysia was developed based on national agenda as a new and developing country. As the country progresses, Malaysia as a growing country found itself challenged by the landscape of its politic, economic and social diversion.

Here, it is evident that in each administrative era, the architectural identity followed the current political background. Time and place are the subject of influence where it is important for buildings to relate to time (era) and location. Therefore, the slogan “spirit of time and spirit of place” as coined by Rasdi (2005) has to be understood. Time and place are the two determinant that act as reference points to which design decision should be rooted from. All of the above administrative buildings in each era reflected the needs of the time and place. For example, the Houses of Parliament in Malaysia bears a universalist approach and was designed with no reference to any particular ethnic as at that time, the leaders’ main intention, strategies and actions were to unite all races and religion in the country while maintaining a good grasp of the spirit of the place where it responded very well towards climatic conditions, geography and culture.

Therefore, evidently the spirit of time and place should be of top priority when trying to achieve the best language of architecture for the purpose of building new administrative building fit for the country.

CONCLUSION

What will be the future of Malaysian administrative architecture? There is no single image or identity that could reflect how a true national building should look like. Due to the nature of the country, it is understood that the spirit of time and place play a major role in designing the best possible administrative architecture to reflect the true meaning of national identity. In conclusion, future architects, designers, planners, policy makers and parties involve in the provision of new administrative building of the country should carefully consider the spirit of time and place before progressing much further into design, so as to avoid portraying delusional and borrowed language of architecture instead of showcasing true Malaysian identity to the world.

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