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Modulations of Identities: A Regional Façade Design Resource from the Aristocratic Vernacular

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Article History

Received : 14-06-2019
Revised : 19-06-2019
Accepted : 27-06-2019

How to cite this article (MLA 8th)

Kassim, Puteri Shireen Jahn, et al. "Modulations of Identities: A Regional Façade Design Resource from the Classicalised (Aristocratic) Vernacular." *Cultural Syndrome*, Vol.1, No.1, 2019, pp. 34-52., doi.org/10.30998/cs.v1i1.21

The readers can link to article via <https://doi.org/10.30998/cs.v1i1.21>

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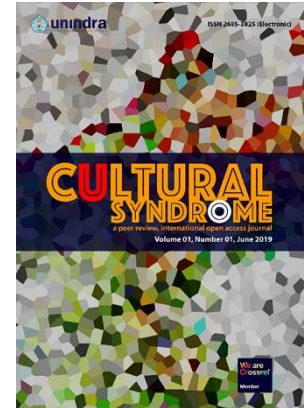
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Cultural Syndrome

a peer review, internasional open access journal
e-ISSN: 2685-3825
Editor: Agung Zainal M. Raden

Publication details, including author guidelines
<https://journal.unindra.ac.id/index.php/cusy/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>

Modulations of Identities: A Regional Façade Design Resource from the Aristocratic Vernacular

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Abstract. The paper discusses and describes a range of templates, models and variations of tropicalised modulation of facades and recesses from in the local vernacular which convey an aesthetic sense of the region, to counter the homogeneity of modern facades. These range of identified Malay-Nusantara are abstracted from elevations of mansions and palaces which convey a sense of the Classical and which were identified as a new identified substyle of the vernacular. Operationally categorised as a form of Classical vernacular, they represent a rich range of models and templates arising from the region's past ingenuities that can also transcend the present approach of merely adorning modern structures with Nusantara roofs into a more critical approach. The paper argues that these variations can constitute an untapped resource for creating the modulations of facades in any Nusantara-themed city of the future; without reverting to cosmetic application of motifs and cut-and-paste from the vernacular. This language includes key attributes such as proportioned and regular spaces of columns, recesses, projections, staircases and balustrades which are fused in various ways to present a more critical trope of local identity that can be combined and permuted into a tropical 'facadism' with a differentiated and distinctive identity for the south east Asia city in general and the Malay nusantara in particular.

Keywords: critical regionalism, tropical facades, Nusantara identity, Malay architectural language, tropicality

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Introduction

The rapid modernization that beset Asian and South East Asian cities, and its irrevocable decimation of heritage resources, require a fundamental change in the urban policy with regards to the streetscape and urban facades. The rise of the mute highrise with its flushed glass facades, are in contrast to the rich and rhizomic histories of South East Asia, especially the Nusantara. Additionally, the rise of multistory carparks and muted shopping centers in central business districts and peripheral suburban enclaves and centers, have all but erased the memories of geography, locality and ethnicity from the urban landscape and its constructions. Architectural identity design practices and its discourses in South East Asia often dichotomise into the 'binary' poles of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. In their 'Modernity, and Urban-Architectural form', [Jahn Kassim et al.](#) highlights the dual-expressions of modernity prevalent in many post-colonial nations - the Colonial language found in key public buildings both post and pre-independence and subsequently the International stylisations of key governmental structures post - independence. Both are essentially part of the same 'coin' of the cultural pressure of globalization. Hence regionalist critiques and discussions of architectural language are thus either evolvment of these 'modern' models or they revert to romanticist nostalgia in highlighting the loss of the 'native'. This paper highlights significant subtrends within a critically aesthetic positions of architecture, which neither occupy the simplistic 'modern' position, nor the nostalgic 'vernacular-native' position. These include the language of quasi-public buildings such as local palaces and mansions, which in the Malay world, constitute public face and which serve as public spaces, extending from their past role of communal and cultural prosceniums, porticos and 'promenades'.

[Fathi and Heidari](#) usefully highlights the significant role of facades in the development of cities and their identities. They laments the rising modernization of Iranian cities, which no longer evoke tradition, and turns it back of traditional patterns, forms and memories. While observing how the Iranian urban developments with the lack of comprehensive, endemic, and contextual plans and actions, increasingly decline the urban identity in any aspect and dimension, which have brought about the dryness and absence of local aesthetics, "... poor beauty, weak legibility, lack of unity, inappropriate physical integrity, etc., which eventually result in the non-identifiable and depersonalized urban .." realm. They analyse the administrative and socio-political factors that attribute the changes. In their city manifesto, JDP architects (2017) in their 'City manifesto, correctly highlights that 'a city is not only characterized by its density but it's "FACE AND FAÇADE" that builds on its. Architecture glance and urban identity.

The Nusantara region is characterized by rich diversity in architectural language. Yet the indigenous house and its variation in language cannot be a template or model for the city. The utilitarian and additive nature of its form does not allow a critical modulation of facades, hence any approach to imbue identity usually degenerates into kitsch including merely adorning structures with steep roofs or adorning roofs with semiotic elements such as finials and filigrees. To address the 'rupture' between 'past

and present' has permeated the design and building industry to the interlocution created by colonialism and its colonial urban landscape, a mapping of palaces reveal a language that can be categorized as 'early modern' vernacular or even 'the local Neo-Classical vernacular'. Thus it is important, that its vernacular heritage is temporally and geographically mapped, to sieve between the local innovation and investment and the 'cosmetic or colonial' implantation. It is not a simplistic process that all that is built with masonry and exhibit few masonry pillars and mouldings in Colonial. The seminal writings of [Semper and Mallgrave](#) argues that it is an intrinsic nature of any vernacular society to evolve and change its architectural language to suit its technology, resources and wealth. Hence the following attempts to summarise a study that maps such evolutions in certain regions of the Malay Nusantara, primarily Malaysia and Indonesia, and highlight how an architectural language for city identity, rooted in local ideas, and histories can be derived. Using modern building technology and materials, the Nusantara region is in need of 'templates of memory' in building frontages which evokes and reminds them of their roots and traditions, due to the rapid decimation of their fragile heritage structures. Hence the research then concludes with design templates, with the aim of initiating ideas rather than documenting heritage and as summarized by Clark and pause (2012) to present the past and bring into the present through tropes, precedents and partis.


METHOD

Methodology: definitions of facades and frontages

Using more the 50 palaces and aristocratic houses, the research maps the façade and frontage language of the cases, with the prime objective of the research is to classify the façades and frontages that allow clear semantic categories of typological form, tectonic hybrids, and aesthetic sub-styles. Some of these palaces are visited, redrawn and some which are extracted from existing measured drawings. The Table 1 summarises some of these exquisite and grammatically rich palaces across the selected regions of the Malay Nusantara from 1700s to the early 1930s. To start, the definition of façades and frontages in this local architecture slightly differ from the Western definition. By facades, one also means frontages i.e. facades that have recesses and projections which is a fundamental character and feature in tropical architecture.

Table 1 Case studies mapped in terms of elevational forms and façade language
Case studies studied and a chronological Mapping of regional Palaces and Aristocratic
Houses Of 1700s and Above.

No	Pictures	Palace/origins	Year
1		Istana Melaka (destroyed)	1443
2		Istana Bulungan, Kalimantan Timur	1731 (estimated)
3		Istana Balai Besar, Kedah	1735 (original) Present 1896
4		Istana Kadriah, Kalimantan	1771(original) 1923 (renovated and present)
5		Istana Malige, Sulawesi	1800 (estimated)
6		Istana Kuto Lamo, Palembang, Sumatera Selatan	1803 (earlier version is destroyed, present version)
7		Istana Aceh Tun Sri Lanang	(1600-1697)
8		Istana Pantai, Pekan	1826

9		Istana Balai Besar, Kota Bharu, Kelantan	1845
10		Istana Tengku Long, Terengganu	1850
11		Istana Tengku Kudin, Penang	1854
12		Istana Jahar, Kota Bharu, Kelantan	1855
13		Istana Damnah, Riau Lingga	1857
14		Istana Raja Rokan, Rokan Hulu	1770 (estimated)
15		Istana Raja Bilah, Perak	1860
16		Istana Cik Spacendra, Kedah	1882
17		Istana Bandar, Selangor	1905
18		Istana Sultan Jaafar, Bukit Senyum, Johor Bharu	1883
19		Istana Anjang, Terengganu	1885

20		Istana Yaring Pattani	1894
21		Istana Sri Akar, Kelantan	1886
22		Istana Inderagiri, Riau	1889
23		Istana Tambatan /Pantai, Johor	1889
24		Istana Hijau Terengganu	1865
25		Istana Darul Aman, Kota Lama, Tg Pura Langkat	1896
26		Istana Nagara, Kuala Kangsar, Perak	1897
27		Istana Mahkota Puri, Klang (Replace By Istana Bandar)	1899
28			
29		Istana Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan	1902
30		Istana Ulu, Kuala Kangsar, Perak	1903
31		Istana Seri Terentang, Pahang	1904

32		Istana Pipit Pakdee	1789
33		Baitul Rahmah, Kuala Kangsar, Perak	1911
34		Baitul Anwar, Kuala Kangsar, Perak	1912
35		Istana Lima Laras, Tanjung Tiram Batu Bara, Sumatera Utara	1912
36		Rumah Penghulu Ghani, Merlimau, Melaka	1914 (present version)
37		Rumah Dato Biji Sura, Terengganu	1919 (present time)
38		Istana Tanjung Pura, Langkat	1923
39		Istana Kenangan/ Istana Lembah, Perak	1800s 1926 renovated
40		Istana Kuning, Pahang	1927
41		Istana Kota Beram, Pahang	1929
42		Istana Woodneuk, Johor/Singapore	1930
43		Istana Leban Tunggal, Pekan, Pahang	1935

44		Istana Aceh Seri Iskandar/Pendopo Gabenur	1800s
45		Istana Pelalawan, Riau	1892 – 1930
46		Istana Gunong Sahilan	(1600-1700)
47		Istana Deli	1930s
48		Istana Ternate, Maluku	1810

Table 1 present most of the cases mapped including cases known as the colonial style. Malay elements are extracted and identified from a range of all timber to masonry cases and the mapping limits its scope to the region is what is known as the Malay world, which encompasses, Southern Thailand, Sumatera Malaysia and Borneo, cases of the Javanese region are not yet studied. The methodology limits itself to the aesthetic expression, elevation and projections of facades, which include the projections and shaded recesses in frontages. The time scope is linked to past literature and studies such as (Gullick), (Andaya), Diana and (Reid). The following are selected key palaces grouped according to construction and era, The early Classical, (all timber), Mature Classical (timber hybrid) and Late Classical (masonry hybrid)

Result and Discussion

Based on Table 1, the frontages and facades are studied and categories according to typology, tectonic character or hybridity and decorative strategy. The table 5 below demonstrated how both the typological and tectonic character are grouped in a matrix. These are then classified through two categories ie. The vertical and horizontal modulation; which do not include the roof forms of these buildings (such as in the figures and table 5 below.

The façade forms are later categorized based on their morphological (shape), tectonic (material) and typological (shape and frontage space) similarities and shared

traits. result found that all the façade can be typologically divided into five essential morphology in terms of overall shape. Then a longitudinal analysis looks into in evolution which changes in terms of construction technique and the evolution and combination of timber and brick. These construction mix and evolution had thus changed the overall tectonic character which essentially arises from its method of construction. Based on tectonics, the facades can generally be divided into six types of styles which generate six different stylization, the first being the full timber style.

Table 2 Identifications of façade and frontages typologies and its modulation and hybridity terms of materials.

<input type="checkbox"/> Timber <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick					
Axial Form	Istana Melaka	Panglima Ghani House, Melaka	Dato Biji Sura House Terengganu	Bytul Anwar, Perak	Istana Bandar, Selangor
Bio-Nuclear Form	Istana Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan	Istana Lima Laras, Batu Bara	Istana Darul Aman, Langkat	Baitul Rahmah, Perak	Istana Hulu, Perak
Perabung Lima	Istana Kenangan, Perak	Istana Jahar, Kelantan	Istana Ternate, Maluku	Istana Sulawesi	Istana Leban Tunggai, Pahang
Peristyle Form	Masjid Kampung Laut, Kelantan	Istana Inderagiri, Renggas	Istana Balai Besar, Kedah	Istana Damnah, Riau	Istana Sultan Abu Bakar, Johor
Asymmetrical	Istana Tengku Long, Terengganu	Kutai House, Perak	Aristocrat House, Penang	Aristocrat House, Kelantan	Villa Tengku Kudin, Penang

Table 2 above represents a classification of all forms into typologies or types of façade and its variants represent design resources in terms of their modulations in façade variations and forms, and they are semantically defined as an architectural language or sub-styles; can then be fused with any of the constructional or ornamental variation. For example, these hybrids are terms, axial or peristyle form can be varied based on construction or tectonic variations etc (half plinth, half tectonic-stereotomic, peristyle core stereotomic etc). Hence they can be expressed in modern materials such as steel structural systems and concrete. Any variation must follow the different combinations of the compositional sub-style; which can be styles such as:

1. The axial –half tectonic style : this means the style consists of masonry form in the ground floor and slender light structure on first floor .
2. The peristyle half stereotomic style: this means the style consists of masonry form in the middle surrounded by slender columns and light structure

3. The half column style – this means the form has a terraces effect half column high followed by light structure .
4. The full stereotomic style – this is a full masonry style but the elements of style, such as columns, windows, recesses proportions must follow the proportional character of Malay architecture, if not the style will be conceived as colonial.

While the above relate to the different formal configurations which critical include the Nature of their construction, further characterization can then insert ornamental and subtle decorative motifs to result in a variation or spectrum of façade identities. [Kadir and Kassim](#) identified decorative-wise 9 regions of variations which are the expressions as a result of five centers of influences in the Nusantara region, which had combine local influences across time. By defining this stylistic decoration, a regional identity can be built based on a combination of the formal and the ornamental. The following represent few topographical alternatives which could be further defined, developed and refined by the designer or architect. However in articulating certain features such as columns, window to wall ratio, extent of ornamentation, height of ground floor to body, certain rules of proportion and ratio must apply.

The language of Vertical modulation of façade identity (with roof): two to three storeys

For standalone structures, and continuous two to three storey facades or developments, these can include rooflines, these modu which can be extracted from the following range of façade and roofs. The multitier rooftos and caps can be put atop airwells and internal courtyards. They also can double up as loft spaces which is increasingly popular in Asia and South East Asia recently.

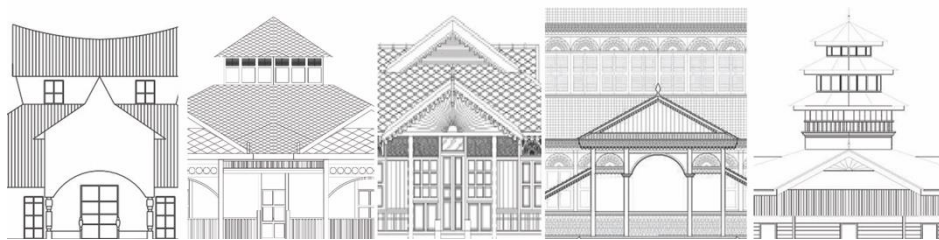


Fig. 2 Modulation and variations of rooflines of the Nusantara - one-half layered, double layered and triple layered modulation of Nusantara forms

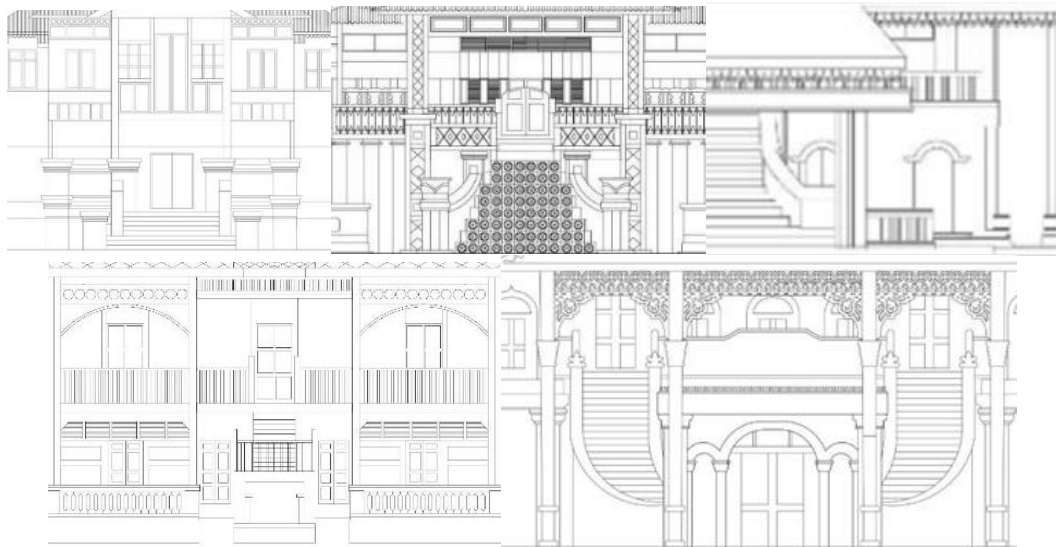


Fig. 3 Horizontal modulation of façade identity (without roof): three to six storeys

Figure 3. Modulation of facades of the hybrid Malay style, consisting of rhythmic, columns, staircases, and architrave panels arrange in typological style as a range of resources from the classical traditional architecture in the region. Although colonial elements are included, the style is categorized as Malay following dominant attributes. Figure 3. The elevations represents selected modulations of facades for cases more than three stories high but not higher than six storeys, identity can be imbued through typological (axial, peristyle, binuclear, perabung style) and tectonic/material hybrids. Other than the above there can also be, Wall identity type of modulations. Such as

1. Essentially the punched wall type façade (Figure 4 and Figure 5) can also be found in the Malay world and can be described as a wall with punched windows with localized proportions decorated with decorative transoms or fanlights. The type can range from the tectonic to the stereotomic style

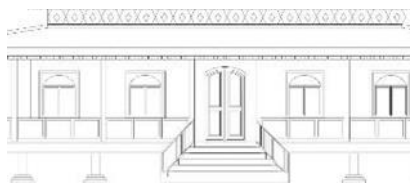


Fig. 4 punch windows wall
Source: Pelalawan palace

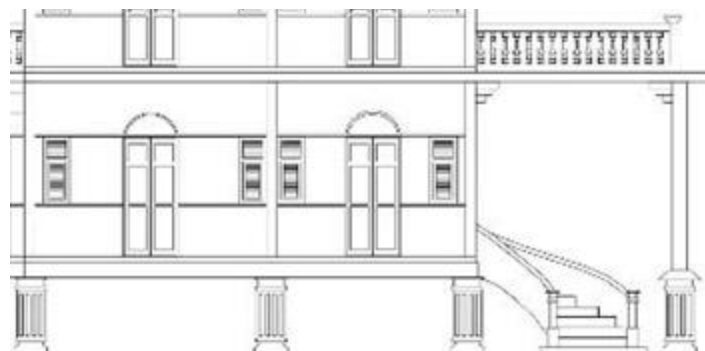


Fig. 5 Punch windows with decorative transoms
Source : Pipit Pahdee palace

2. The peristyle style (Figure 4 below) is essentially a façade with a rown of continuous columns and is also the continuous façade but interjecting by columns and projections is the 'peristyle' style which range from timber (tectonic) to masonry

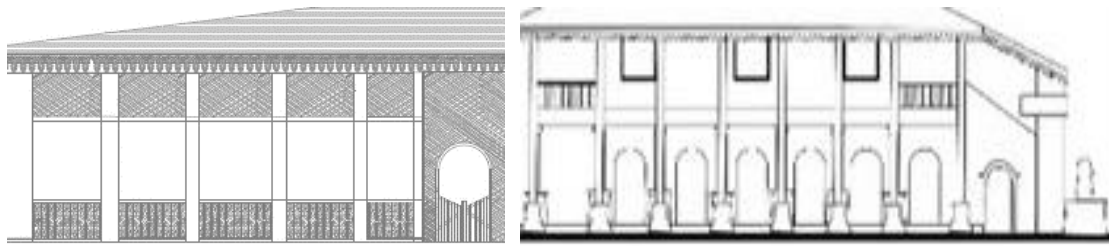


Fig. 6a Range of recessed but columnar facades under the peristyle typology : The reconstructed Damnah façade showing plaster like columns with wall panels inserted or the peristyle forms of Inderagiri Palace façade with walls recessed from the column line

3. Variations in staircases

The above cases also depict variations in staircases, from the axial to the double staircases (as below 6a) , either normal or curved forms, with extensions towards the street .

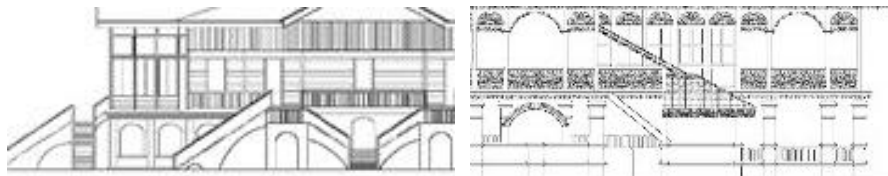


Fig. 6b Modulations of staircases- front and back projection

4. Variations of the axial and perabung façade forms (Figure 6c below) from the Kalimantan and Aceh palatial façade forms which are axial and their half column plinth style depicting decorative brackets and elliptical type arches in between columns which is a characteristic of the Malay Nusantara style



Fig. 6c Modulation of the axial form and the terraced styled (half column plinth aesthetics with columns

5. Variations of the perabung façade form : Figure 7 Below show its variations, Figure 7a(left) the masonry appear distinctive in the middle , highlighting the portico, while in 7B (right) it appears fused with entire ground floor. In both cases the window to wall ratio is similar yet (b) is a modernized version of (a).

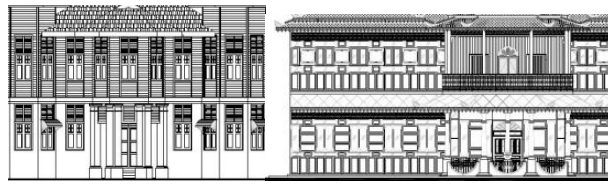


Fig. 7 Modulations and variations of the 'perabung' façade style showing the variations of windows and geometric paneling. (the Jahar and Leban Tunggal Palace)

The highrise (higher than 6 stories) : Critical regionalist approach in facades and climatic modulation

Past attempts of interjecting classically and critically in buildings and structures above six storeys have seen a compromise of the aesthetic and regional integrity and viewed as kitsch. Allison and Peter Smithson (1928-1993) was known for their low rise positions as forwarded At the 10th and final CIAM Congress in 1956, the Smithsons and their allies (known as Team 10), broke with CIAM for good. Their alternative to Athens was the 'Golden Lane' project, first mooted in 1952. This was a low-rise snake of housing, with wide, 'streets in the sky' - an attempt to humanise Modernist urban theory. But the houses were all on the one side of the street, therefore losing the enclosed element which preserved community on the ground, and even the Smithsons noted that once you get above six storeys, the sense of being on a street had disappeared anyway. Franpton (2000) has often touted a position in which the critical tectonic does not exist after six storeys. The Japanese master designer Tadao Andao, was known for his works which rarely go beyond six stories and he would often highlight how there is 'no architecture above six stories' as the building and its spaces loses touch with the ground.

Hence modulations as characterized above are part of a classical repertoire that only have critical, meaning and integrity in six storeys and above it, another form of language must be used. The language modulates 'climate' such as heat and light, rather than a physical and tectonic modulation. Below are critical regionalist façade pattern which are essentially elements of climatic modulation as designed by renowned international - local architects in Malaysia such as Ken yeang and Hijjas Kasturi.



Fig. 8 Modulations of facades in buildings and façade of steels and glass above six storeys. – the 4g11 tower by Hijjas Kasturi and 2c5 complex by Ken Yeang

A cultural 'patterns' approach can be read in the approach taken by Hijias Kasturi Associates for their 4G11 tower in Putrajaya. It modulates the use of patterns or iconography from Malay traditional artefacts such as textiles to act as the basis of inspiration for façade articulation and differentiation.


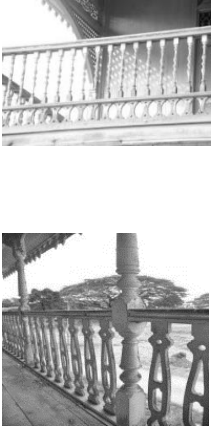
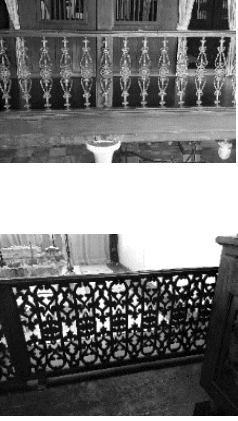
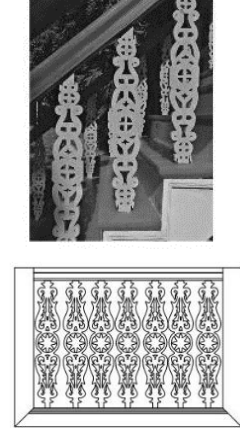
Similarly Ken Yeang similarly interprets Malay identity by using the latest prevailing technology and construction methods, and the need to respond and create a neutral appeal to all cultures and races within a nation is increasingly acute towards the urban core. Both Hijias and Yeang represent the critical regional Current approaches which is always exploring on creating innovative form rather than merely surmounting a modern structure with a Malay roof or attaching a Malay traditional structure. These are part of the different approaches in terms 'positions' undertaken to 'inflect' or differentiate the global typeform and localize its form to the prevailing context, If highrises are global typeforms and their localization is a struggle to assert regional and national identity amidst overwhelming globalization in the city.

Modulations of decorative elements of classical language

1. Staircase modulation
2. Finial modulation
3. Balustrade modulation

Balustrade modulation includes the variations of the bracket or *sesiku* which is a type of ornamental wood carving also known ornamental bracket or bracing supporting the roof. Structurally it is to strengthen the join and make it rigid, and usually made in a pair. Hence its essentially triangular shape usually stiffens the joints and in Malay that is usually placed or installed in various positions: 1) between column or post to beam, 2) between column (i.e. *tiang seri*) to *alang*, 3) between door frame to lintel (doorway), and 4) wall or column to ceiling with 90 degrees position. In many cases, *sesiku* is handsomely fitted between column and post to beam. In many cases the bracket becomes carved ornamental component which essentially elevates the aesthetic identity of the timber frame. At times, the roofs are decorated by gables in the shape of the blazing sun or ornamented with a carved pattern (*tebuk timbul*) and end in finials in the form of *silang gunting* or crossed scissors. Capitals of the columns on the upper floor are decorated with the local sailor *paku* motif consisting of a single motif shoot of fern. Modulations of columns can include modulations of capital such as the eight pieces of the fern motif carved from wood are secured to the columns.

Table 3. Variations of Malay Nusantara Balustrades/Railings (*Kekisi*)

Baitul Anwar, Kuala Kangsar	Baitul Rahmah, Kuala Kangsar	Istana Jahar, Kelantan	Balai Besar, Alor Setar	Istana Lima Liras< Batu Bara Sumatera
				

Conclusions

Pevsner in his book "pioneers of modern design (1971) keenly “observes how the evolution of neo-classical architecture was a gradual process to modernist architecture and that at the end of an era there were cases which constituted the last branch of a classical root’ Similarly there is an evolution of the MalayNusatara which include a Malayisation of modern classical style, This itself refers to a process of assimilation and acculturation, that involves acquisition (Malay: Masuk Melayu,literally "embracing Malayness") or imposition (Malay: Pemelayuan or Melayuisasi) of elements of Malay culture, in particular, Islam and Malay language, as experienced by non-Malay populations of territories controlled or substantially influenced by historical Malay sultanates and modern Malay-speaking countries. It is often described as a process of civilizational expansion, drawing a wide range of indigenous peoples into the Muslim,

Malay-speaking polities of Maritime Southeast Asia. Malay-Muslim sultanates that emerged in Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo. In linguistics, the term Malayisation may refer to the adaptation of oral or written elements of any other language into a form that is more comprehensible to a speaker of Malay; or in general, of altering something so that it becomes Malay in form or character. Malayisation in architecture is how the colonials themselves adaptive the reigning local style to colonial technology and materials, it could either be voluntary or forced and is most visible in the case of territories where the Malay language or culture were dominant or where their adoption could result in increased prestige or social status.These cases are essentially

branches and variants represent a heightened level of architecture that reflect a certain degree of civilized life, prosperity, and cosmopolitanism which the local populations achieved .

Aristocratic architecture is a reflection of its indigenous roots. To counter the imported styles which are dominating the multi-storey facades of buildings of the present cities and buildings and its “sealed” forms, one must no longer “copy” external forms or merely “simulate” timber artisanship, but rather than evoke such cultural values through local resources including the new hybrids and materials. To fully appreciate the evolvement of hybrid Nusantara architectural language, one must analyses its evolution from the earliest era to the last and final phase, and this includes a period when it was able to innovate yet withstand the tumultuous changes in the context of a global force. The remnant of such a defense must be studied, appreciated and thus be retracted to its roots, which range from a pole representing a ‘point of origins’ to another pole which constitute an external imposition yet struggling to root itself to a basis of identity .

The Classical local language, as inherent in its aristocratic forms, therefore constitutes a style of its own, and hence a resource of principles and language that affects a set of rules that can define the essential language of Malay identity. Such rules are embodied in archetypes [Kadir and Kassim](#) which reflect recurring forms that represent a common thread underlying the core cultural institutions of the Malay region that played both a spiritual role and a cultural one. In the case studies mentioned, physical alterations were done by the ruling monarch, but they were always principled alterations. This overall resources of style, grammar, and structure must be differentiated from “imitative” stylistic language which are exerted externally by external forces.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank and acknowledge the Transdisciplinary Research fund (TRGS16-03-001-0001- Characterization of Rules of Malay Architectural Language and Its Environmental Performance) from Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE) for the support of this research.

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