MALAYSIA ARCHITECTURE

The development of architecture in Malaysia as we know it today had emerged from varied background, underpinning Malaysia’s universality in the evolution of its society, culture and civilization.

The early part on the history of Malay Peninsula comprises of several Indianized kingdoms that rule over South East Asia which brought Hinduism and Buddhism (6th C. to 13th C.) to the region. Around 1400, a prince from Sumatra (of Indonesia), established the Malacca Sultanate that later expanded and epitomized the golden era of the Malay empire in the region. It was also the beginning of a multi-cultural coexistence of many ethnic groups from east and west in the Peninsula as well as internationally from the Spice trade. The Port of Malacca became a cosmopolitan city.

When the Portuguese conquered Malacca in 1511, new construction techniques and architectural forms were introduced with fortification and churches as dominant examples. In 1641 with the Dutch taking over Malacca from the Portuguese, the fortress destroyed and they built Stadhuys (1641). Dutch terraced houses, and churches. Although conforming to the Dutch standards of building sizes, materials and construction; these buildings were adapted to the Malaysian climate, emphasizing on natural ventilation, day lighting and local materials. During the prosperous Dutch and British presence in the region, Mosques and Temples were also built throughout the peninsula. The oldest mosque adopted the Javanese three tiered roof typology. Later, similar forms of mosque architecture were built in Malacca using brick instead of timber. In 1786, Penang was cunningly taken over by the British under the East Indian Company from Goa, India, marking the beginning of the British interference in the Malay Peninsular. Malayan bungalow architecture emerges with a mixture of European and local features to complement the already established Chinese shop-houses as the main architectural features of these earlier colonial cities. Malay architecture was further enhanced by the building of royal palaces, using various building materials and construction methods. Later in early 20th century, the 'Raj' or Mogul architecture was imported by the British to the country and made dominant, expressed a mixture of Mogul and Moorish architecture. Neo-classical style of buildings began to appear in the early 20th century appearing to signify either public buildings and / or corporate building of the colonial era.

Later on, in tandem with the modernist movement if Europe, buildings had become simpler and more functionalist in approach. Art Deco was popularized, seen as a break from the prevalent Classical style of architecture. Modernism and International Style had begun to influence architecture in Malaysia from 1950s, and Nationalism had become a main agenda in the politics, architecture, and urbanism.

Malaysia enjoyed further economic growth from the later part of 1980s, making way for the building of many corporate towers, following International Style of modern buildings. High-rise structures, including new building types such as condominiums, shopping complexes and resort hotels, shape the skylines and coastline. Mass residential developments in suburban areas transformed most cities, creating a new vernacular architecture. The traditional urban shop houses are gradually being sidelined with the emergence of shopping complexes. At the same time, there is a growing interest in the modern interpretation of local and regional architecture. Sustainability, energy efficiency and ecology had become primary drive towards new architecture in Malaysia.

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