

# Nurturing Nature for Man

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Mazlina Mansor  
Ismawi Hj Zen  
Jamilah Othman  
Nor Zalina Harun

IIUM PRESS  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA



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MAZLINA MANSOR  
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## CHAPTER 5

### THE EVOLUTION AND MORPHOLOGY OF KUALA LUMPUR: A CASE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF A COLONIAL URBAN FORM

Ismawi Zen

Department of Landscape Architecture, Kulliyah of Architecture and Environmental Design  
International Islamic University Malaysia

#### ABSTRACT

The development of urban centres in Malaysia was largely the result of a colonial legacy. Since Independence in 1957, there has been much debate about the country's urban image and morphology derived from this era; should it be conserved as a relevant relic of the past, or should it be expunged to satisfy the so-called Malaysianization agenda. The city centre owes much of its present characters partly to its colonial past and partly to the immigration policy of that past. The paper tries to answer a curious irony as to why the Chinese immigrants seemed to have contributed more to the morphology of the capital city, Kuala Lumpur than the native Malays themselves. It explores the character of this morphology and discusses its value as a cultural resource in the future planning of the city as an argument for its conservation.

*Keywords: Conservation, Shophouse, Urban Morphology*

“..... There exists at the back of our minds a feeling that could we only start again we could be rid of this hotchpotch and make all new and fine and perfect. We could create an orderly scene with straight roads and with buildings that conformed in height and style. Given a free hand that we might ..... create symmetry, balance, perfection and conformity. After all, this is the popular conception of the purpose of town planning” [1]

(Gordon Cullen, 1971)

#### INTRODUCTION

Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia has inherited a colonial urban form common in countries that have been under British rule. In the pre-colonial times, there were urban centres spread along the Peninsula Malaysian coast, but these were semi-autonomous if not independent, and did not provide the kind of hierarchy which could have sustained a large city. Except for a brief period between the fifteenth and sixteenth century when it was ruled by the Malacca Empire, Peninsula Malaysia never had any form of central rule. Regional pre-colonial imperial powers like the Sumatra-based Sri Vijaya Empire, the Java-based Majapahit Empire, and the Siam-based Sukhotai Empire ruled only parts of the country. The