NATIVE REGIONALISM IN DEVELOPMENT OF RESORT IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Current growth in the tourism industry especially in the South East Asia region has sparked the emergence of various resort amenities to cater for the tourists’ needs. In vying for the influx of tourists, tourism spots and destinations such as Bali, Phuket and Langkawi and other resort locations in the region, strive to offer tourists a more culturally sensitive form of travel accommodation. These infamous tourism and resort destinations has distinctively portrayed the exquisiteness of the traditional regional architecture as its prime development concept and resort identity. This uniqueness interpreted an authentic aesthetical values and strong ethnic cultural influence which is often translated into a concept known as ‘authentic regionalism’. In other words, the industry strive to offer an environment as ‘local’ as possible without sacrificing creature comforts. This paper will cover element of regionalism, approach, issue and character in the tourism architecture in Malaysia.

Key-Words: Tourism, Culture, Architecture, Development, Aesthetical, Regionalism

1 Introduction
‘Regionalism’ means something that is native to a place and harmonized beautifully with the climate, topography, landscaping, indigenous building materials, local surroundings, local cultures and local values. In his essay entitled ‘The Concept of Regionalism’, Alan Colquhoun stated that:

The idea of regionalism is dedicated to the essence of place, being in a certain place with a special culture or tradition, being in one place with an understanding of the needs of that place - a special place with unique characteristics. Environment profoundly affects human development because daily life constantly responds to buildings, landscapes and other elements of the non-human universe as much as it does to social experience. Regionalism applies its sensitivity to the aesthetics of the past: an architectural evolution, which is responsive to the historical origin of the community, integrating with their contemporary culture and environment. It enhances the particular context of a region with such features as climate, technology, economics, and life style.

Whereas ‘authentic regionalism’ is an element in regionalism architecture which focuses on particular authentic values and cultural heritage of a nation. It faithfully represents the true ethnicity and conspicuous image while upholding cultural values and social norms. In Malaysia, the concept of ‘authentic regionalism’ in resorts’ developments is inspired mainly through its adaptation and enrichment of the Malay architectural concepts and designs, known as vernacular design. Traditional vernacular designs is the prime manifestation of authentic regionalism and analytically regionalism designs in tandem with local values are able to contribute towards the search for national identity.
Vernacular design in the development of resorts with traditional aspects has been successful in portraying an authentic spirit of regionalism resulting in a harmonious integration between the tourists, local surroundings and local people.

Authentic regionalism approach in Malaysia also illustrated by the ability of certain developments to defer to tropical architecture and to understand the demands of climatical impact. This is a key factor before adapting a distinctive design elements that accord to the tropical and regional needs. Natural resources of building materials and the traditional methodology of construction have demonstrated as a collective genuine interpretation of authentic regionalism.

2 Character of Malay Native Regionalism in Resort Design In Malaysia.
The incorporation of the Malay vernacular architecture as an native elements in the design and development begins with site planning, its connection with the surroundings, façade design, construction methodology and the astute application of indigenous building materials together with locally inspired interior design motifs and decorations. The articulation of this architectural symbiosis has won the commendation and specific acknowledgement in the vernacular architectural field which are relatively patterned from the Malays' creative attitudes together with their sensitivities and intimate relationships with their surroundings. Intellectual management of the traditional art of design together with shrewd adaptation of the design elements have successfully portrayed the Malays' universal civilized values thus establishing the nation's cultural identity which is renowned globally.

However, current demands towards modernism require that regionalism be tampered with modern developments and contemporary designs in line with the emergence of various concepts of resorts designs worldwide. In order to achieve a subtle approach of adaptation, The present and past must be compared for differences and similarities in both in material and spiritual sense. This is why the buildings of the past must be studied and vividly described so as to convey a clear grasp of the essentials. It is not merely a matter of taking their greatness and significance as an architectural criterion but also of realizing that they were bound to a particular non-recurrent historical situation and thus place us under a duty to aspire to our own creative achievements. Geoffrey Bawa, a pioneer in regionalism architecture stated that:

Regionalist architecture is judged largely in terms of how it manages to integrate remnants of the "traditional" into modern ways of life and modern environments. The revival and reinterpretation of vernacular building traditions and their synthesis with contemporary architectural forms is seen as an effective oppositional strategy, a means of resisting the universalizing tendencies of western modernity and constructing a self-reflective and critically engaged local identity.

3 Native Regionalism In Resort Development and Design In Malaysia.
In Malaysia, the excellence of native regionalism which stems from traditional Malay vernacular designs can be observed in the developments and designs of resorts such as Tanjung Jara and Aryani in Terengganu, The Datai and Langkawi Lagoon in Langkawi, Pangkor Laut in Perak, Impiana Resort and Club Med Cherating in Pahang, and many others. These resorts have successfully embraced the glory of native architecture and elevate the splendor and authenticity of the Malay culture on commercial scale thus attaining the desired aspiration which transcends the language barrier and traditional architectural synthesis from the design angle and the overall concept. Some have incorporated the traditional element by replicating directly while others have engaged in an intellectual interpretations of the design elements resulting in
an elegant and authentic manifestation. This is the prime effort taken by the resorts’ developer in presenting to the tourists unique local intrinsic values, accurately and exclusively. In addition to winning various international architectural awards, the developments of these resorts have placed Malaysia as a premier tourist destination especially in the South East Asia.

Native regionalism also associates with the idea of primitivism. Primitivism means maintaining a delicate balance between the human needs to improve lifestyles and the feeling of well-being on one hand, with preserving the natural resources and ecosystems on which we and our future generations depend on. It leans towards sustainable developments with holistic approach. The application and integration of primitivism elements encompassed in building designs which complement the surroundings are characteristics of native regionalism. This results in elegant and genuine interpretation of the earlier period of Malay architecture. In addition to ingeniously applying traditional elements which are practical, efficient and harmonize beautifully with climatic requirements, the designs also depict clearly the way of life and the local activities of earlier civilization.

To achieve the desired effect this concept capitalizes back on the use of indigenous building materials such as timbers and other natural resources. This is a major interpretation of regionalism which ensures a mature and complementary effect especially when faced with climatic assault. This approach is in line with the concept of traditional revivalism as pioneered by Hassan Fathi, an architect who preserves the vernacular characteristics, native elements and local regional influence in his designs. He also expressed his ideas by assimilating historical designs with present-day requirements and demands.

Forward planning or the arrangement of building sites is crucial in primitive regionalism. Topography is an important factor which governs the development of a resort which gives an authentic impact such as a location by the river, by the sea, in the water, on an island even in the jungle. A scheme with this approach is normally scattered in village setting to emphasize on the idea of merging with nature and provided a free flow environment. It also translated the open concept for the purpose efficient ventilation in a tropical surroundings needing and allowing plants to be an essential part of the whole plan. The importance of soft landscaping and natural vegetation in between the buildings is conspicuous. Besides ventilation, the plants serve as gentle reminders of God’s gifts and our beginnings.

Tanjung Jara and Pangkor Laut resort featured an authentic regionalism ideas which has portrayed a maturity and complete elegance of Malay vernacular architecture.

4 Native Materials and Construction Technology in Resort Design in Malaysia.
In the design of all the abovementioned resort local hardwood such as cengal, kempas, merbau and
Keruing are utilized as an essential element in the basic structure. Other indigenous materials such as bamboo and rattan serve as authentic finishing and act as a continuity in the tradition of building Malay houses. The construction methodology is reminiscent of the concepts used in building traditional and smaller houses and buildings. Stilts construction and traditional structural elements such as the post and beam methodology and ‘alang-alang’ roofing frames system built similar to domestic features are the primary concepts towards approaching authentic regionalism. The interior roof and ceiling system which exposed the treatment of decorative timber roof frames and finishes, is elegantly finished with open concept to render the authenticity of its intrinsic values. The result is a cluster of domestic buildings of medium size built on several stilts with an overall sense rural township, all retaining the element of primitivism.

Roof formation such as traditional long pitched roof (bumbung panjang), gambrel roof (potong belanda) or hipped roof (limas) is another dominant element in the design of buildings with primitive regionalism’s characteristics. The differing shapes of roofs are part of the Malaysian’s architectural heritage and stem from the Malays’ ethnic values. Besides functioning as a protection against natural elements, the designs of roofs have evolved with such elegance and distinctiveness and therefore embraced when designing resorts. Roof finishing made from local made clay roof tiles, ‘rumbia’ thatched roof or wood pieces, a smart and practical adaptation illustrating an element of the regionalism concept.

As for the interior finishes, the adaptation of intrinsic decorative elements together with local design motif and ornamentations presented in a grandiose manner emerged as a befitting appendage to the overall traditional Malay design. Elegantly crafted woodworks, elaborate traditional details and domestically primitive decorative items enhanced the magnificence of these authentic resorts. Some of the distinguish resorts goes to a great length in adapting the image of revival Malay palace as their main theme. The role played by master craftsmen in producing authentic construction elements and handicrafts is part of the basic factors which contribute towards the magnificence of the traditional Malay architecture and this in turn is the essence of the authentic regionalism’s philosophy. These are the intrinsic elements which are flaunted by existing resorts adopting Malay architecture as their focal commercial value.

5 Conclusion
On the whole, besides a strong influence on aesthetical cultural values, authentic regionalism concept pays a prime concern on the integration of a building with its close relationship with surroundings. This is important to avoid ‘congestion’ in the overall development which coherent with the aspect of traditionalism and primitivism and spiritualism. Utilization of indigenous building materials and the construction of small scale buildings promote the continuation of local heritage and this incites a spirit of ownership. The importance of nature contemplation from religious and eastern cultural point of view dictates that the usage of materials such as stones and timber instead of manmade materials such as concrete and steel can provoke the eternal feeling in relation with thousands of years of primitive origins.

Resort designs in Malaysia which are firmly entrenched with the traditional Malay vernacular architectural values must be fine tuned and emphasized plus its ideas developed so as to cater for the current designs and resort typology. The designers must lay emphasis on presenting the true authentic image in a practical, efficient and intellectual ways in order to maintain the integrity of the excellence of traditional architecture. The results should depict the maturity and completeness of Malay vernacular architecture which can be appreciated by the tourists and renowned globally. This acknowledgement has great impact upon the development and admirable transformation of the Malay architecture within the commercial entities. In conclusion, authentic regionalism is a design philosophy which can support and influence
future designs. But, a word of caution; authenticity is frequently identified with the ideas of artistic autonomy and originality. The issue is not whether the structure conforms exactly to the criteria of the past, it clearly cannot do so and remain relevant to today’s concern, instead the issue is whether the designer has learnt the lessons of the past, internalized them, and used then as input, although partial, in defining the solution to a contemporary problem for contemporary clients.

References


