

Traditionality and Modernity: Post-Colonial Architecture in Indonesia

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Abstract. The paradigm of traditionality in Indonesian modern architecture becomes a polemical discourse especially in relation to the development of Indonesian architecture identity in the post-colonial era. The awareness and spirit of exploring identities give birth to new experiments and ideas, assuming traditionality as the anti-thesis of Indonesian International-Style modernism initiated during the Old Order. The focus of this research is to explore different operation and practice of the paradigm in Indonesian architecture discourse much or less alluded with power and politics during the Old and New Order. The aim of this research is to redefine the meaning of traditionality in Indonesian Modern Architecture. This research uses qualitative approach by using a discursive method to analyse the representation of traditionality in Indonesian post-colonial architecture. The author expects to elaborate the manifesto of traditionality through a categorization that is based on the implementation of values, forms, processes, and changes toward the condition of the current development.

1 Introduction

The paradigm of traditionality in Indonesian modern architecture had been initiated by Dutch East Indies modern architects during the colonial era. The ideas pertaining to the traditionality within that era developed from the adaptive endeavors with environment/climate/tradition up to the point where socio-political nuances took over. During the colonial era, architecture was used as a political means for development to display national identity [1]. Traditionality became a symbol in articulating powerful regimental desires according to varying interpretations. On the Old Order, V. R. Van Ramond (1954), in his speech entitled “Toward an Indonesian Architecture”, mentioned the development of traditionality in Indonesia. He observed that Indonesian tradition and culture had long been dormant but now manifested interest to the foreign culture to show its own progress [2]. During the New Order, traditionality resurfaced in Indonesian architecture to show the country’s image. The impact is quite significant on Indonesian modern architecture due to the obligation of representing tradition and regional aspects for projects of the government and private parties [3]. None the less, what happened was not that it showcased the diverse image of Indonesia; but rather, it represented the image of the

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dominant Javanese culture amongst other traditions and ethnicities.

In the middle of 1980s, indigenous architects tried to promote the “Indonesian Architecture” discourse as a critique for numerous government and private buildings that promote Javanese culture as the representative of Indonesian architecture [4]. They realized that, in the search of the supposedly-applied Indonesian architecture for development, it showed new ideas in understanding the role of traditionality. The main challenge is to respond to the development of the highly influential Western Architecture for Indonesian development. Equally challenging is how to switch from a modern architecture representing Western architecture to the traditional architecture representing Eastern architecture, or in this case, Indonesian architecture.

The focus of this research is to explore the paradigm development of traditionality in Indonesian modern architecture as one of the ways to find the ultimate identity of Indonesian architecture. Governmental power and politics in Old and New Order become a vital instrument to criticize the condition of Indonesian architecture, at that time based on socio-political aspects. Besides, the responses from indigenous architects in formulating the ultimate identity of Indonesian architecture will also be taken into account. This research has two specific objectives—that is, attempting to redefine the meaning of traditionality within the discourse of Indonesian modern architecture, and exploring traditionality as an effort to formulate “national” image within post-colonial architecture era.

2 Research method

This qualitative research uses a discursive method and analyses the development of traditionality of post-colonial Indonesian architecture and critical theories of indigenous architects in the search of the ultimate identity of Indonesian architecture. The sources in this research include evidence, analysis, and critiques regarding traditionality of Indonesian modern architecture on Old and New Order. The analysis and system of this research attempt to discuss the beginnings of traditionality and its dynamics within the stream of Indonesian modern architecture development from the perspectives of politics, identity, and architecture. The author attempts to reveal paradoxes relevant to the traditionality to be discussed at the end of this research. Further, it discusses the critiques of traditionality developed in Indonesia through the considerations of indigenous architects and relates them to traditionality in Indonesian architecture. Lastly, the author attempts to discuss and categorize traditionality in Indonesian modern architecture.

3 Politics, identity, and architecture

The development of architectural discourse as a representation of Indonesian identity is divided into three phases, namely the end of Dutch colonial era (1920 – 1940), early independence (1957 – 1965), and post-colonial Indonesia (1965 – 1998) [1]. The discussion of each period shows the position of traditionality within the stream of Indonesian architectural development. Below are the explanations based on those divisions:

3.1 End of dutch colonial period (1920 – 1940)

After the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina in 1901, the Netherlands employed ethical politics onto the colonized country—that is, having sensitivity and appreciation to the indigenous tradition and culture. One of the education development programs in Indonesia,

Bandoeng Technische Hoogeschool, was part of its objectives. Henri Maclaine Pont, an Indo-European architect, designed the east hall of Technische Hogeschool (see Fig. 1). The planning of this campus establishment started in 1918 and was inaugurated in 1920. In that building, a highly dominant traditional aspect was showcased as an architectural element, specifically on the roof part with experimental construction [2]. This shows that Ethical Politics became a turning point for the utilization of the Eurocentric-tending modern architecture to consider indigenous sides and locality on the colonized area. Such consideration to bring up indigenous architectural values and elements was merged with modernity as a way to explore the ultimate identity of modern Indies architecture.



Fig. 1. East Hall Building of Bandoeng Technische Hogeschool. Source A. Armand et. Al., 2014.

When it comes to defining the modern Indies Architecture, the endeavor to synthesize Western and Eastern traditions and cultures can be seen in the architectural works of Herman Thomas Karsten, Teater Sobokarti (1926), devoutly reflecting Javanese architecture [4]. However, the Dutch architects interpreted it differently as in to which extent the cultural domination is considered in architecture. For instance, Wolff Schoemaker, in the establishment of Isola Villa, promoted European modern ideas despite the existent values of Hindu-Javanese traditional architecture [4].

The domination of Dutch architects led Indonesian traditional architects into the experiment with Western architecture to find a new one. Traditionality was represented variously, from concept, material, craftsmanship, and other architectural aspects. Such variety was affected by different understandings of Dutch architects regarding Indonesian traditional architecture. Traditionality in architecture was then developed and adapted from the perspective of Western architecture. The challenge in this process is how to manifest traditionality in Western-typology buildings. As a result, indigenous architecture simply became an object, washing away its fundamental values and, with it, the exotic impression. In other words, traditionality was treated as an ancillary element or, simply, a decoration..

3.2 Early independence period (1957 – 1965)

“Build up Djakarta as beautiful as possible, build it as spectacularly as possible, so that this city, which has become the center of the struggle of the Indonesia people, will be an inspiration and beacon to the whole of struggling mankind and to all the emerging force... Djakarta as the portal of the country” (Soekarno, 1962) [1]

After the independence, Indonesia was under the hands of Soekarno, a Bandoeng Technische Hogeschool graduate. Part of his speech above reflects the spirit of his vision to build Indonesia and make Jakarta as the center and the threshold of Indonesia. Implementing guided democracy, Soekarno attempted to elevate Indonesia from the dark shades of colonialism by modernizing the icon of Jakarta city. He created a new baseline by

building monuments as a symbol of nationalism on the ex-field of Koeningsplein colonial era. Its establishment was followed by building an axis to a new main road, Thamrin-Sudirman, bridging it to Senayan Sports Centre and Kebayoran Baru Satellite city. Such center-tipping establishment, Eriyanto (2000) claims, shows the idea of power and might within Javanese culture—that is, a centralized power or centralization [5].

President Soekarno paradoxically used modern architecture style, specifically International Style, as a reflection of his nationalism [6]. The use of this style was meant to cut off or wash away the memories of colonial architecture, by creating a newer Indonesian condition. His visions were based on the present and the future. In addition, it is a step to pursue the nation's independence by expressing that Indonesia is equal to other developed countries.

The delicate traditional values were out of sight in buildings during this period. However, the development concept of National Monument (see Fig. 2), the artist Soedarsono managed to fascinate Soekarno due to its predominant Hindu-Javanese traditional values from the Majapahit Kingdom as the inspiration. Then, Soekarno developed aesthetic values symbolizing a combination with a lotus or Padma (Buddha) featuring lingam-yoni as a symbol of “source of life.” Besides, it looks similar to *lesung-alu*, a paddy-processing equipment [6]. The National Identity to showcase, through this architecture, that Indonesia is a strong country equal to the Western developed countries.



Fig. 2. National Monument. Source author, 2018.

Although traditionality during this regime was not quite dominant, it did not mean that it cut off the discourse of traditionality just like that. V. R. van Ramond, the last professor to be promoted in BTH (1954), in his speech “Toward an Indonesian Architecture,” mentioned the development of traditionality in Indonesian architecture in the last few years [2]. He observed that Indonesian tradition and culture had long been dormant but now shown its interest in foreign culture just to better the country’s image. A traditional and cultural polemic occurs to what should Indonesia promote during this post-independence period. This encouraged upcoming generations to redefine Indonesian architecture.

3.3 Indonesian postcolonial contemporary period (1965 – 1998)

“As a nation with an extremely diverse society, we must indeed promote a national culture that harmoniously combines the diversity of regional arts without abandoning its respective identity. We also subscribing faithfully to our culture as symbolized by the country’s coat arms: ‘Binneka Tunggal Ika’ (Unity in Diversity).”(Suharto, 1997)[6]

The regime of President Suharto displayed a total opposite of the notion from the previous regime, the Old Order, regarding a worldwide image of Indonesia. The New Order government re-elevated Indonesian tradition and culture as a national identity [6]. Suharto’s

notion was to restore Indonesian architecture to its “originality,” having diverse local traditions and cultures, strengthened by the “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” slogan, meaning “Unity in Diversity”. Despite his dissimilar ruling style from that of the previous regime, Suharto maintained similar principles as Sukarno—that is, Javanese leadership ideals. President Suharto was obvious in showing monopolistic power in Javanese culture during his regime. One of his political agendas was to separate the Old Order and the New [7]. The understanding of the harmony of the power of Javanese values through concentration, integration, and absorption is implemented into Indonesian development [5]. The concept of power absorption, namely the power that takes over another surrounding power, highly visible to developmental ideas by using a more dominant Javanese architecture rather than those of other regions.

The New Order wanted to bring out the essence and continuity of Indonesian tradition and culture during the pre-colonial era [8]. Traditionality in architecture during the regime of President Suharto, therefore, became a propaganda to strengthen his tenure. Such as the establishment of Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park (TMII), initiated by Mrs. Tien Suharto, its architecture was used as a political means to circulate the government’s propaganda. TMII was established outside Jakarta City, far from any of the previous government’s buildings or monuments. This indicates that one of the government’s propaganda strategies was to cast aside old memories by giving some space for new ones [7].



Fig. 3. Collage of Pavillions in TMII. Source author, 2018.

The pavilions inside TMII are a symbol of the diversity of tradition and culture united in one place (see Fig. 3). The symbol of unity may imply Javanese monopolistic power—that is, power absorption being represented as a collection of smaller powers in one place. The domination of Javanese mighty power belief was written on the planning of TMII footprints that tend to use the Mandala concept [6], by centralizing pavilions at the center and modern buildings at the most outer parts. The National Identity initiated to showcase in this establishment is a Javanese culture-based power.

Indonesian Architecture discourse was dominated by diverse ethnicities throughout Indonesia. There exist unwritten norms often found in public place establishments particularly in a large or monumental scale [3]. This impact is quite significant on both government and private projects; therefore, a huge number of different roofs came to surface representing every region above office and private buildings. Even the local government instructs each government building to raise traditional elements.

Another program by the Old Order government using traditional aspect in its buildings was the establishment of the mosque by Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila (YAMP) chaired by Soeharto alone since 1982 [9] (see Fig. 4). This program was aimed at building 999 “Friday” mosques in Indonesia. This establishment put the practice on standardization of mosque buildings using roof referring to Demak Mosque as the oldest mosque in Java Island. The purpose of this program is to make this mosque an idea to

provide religious facilities for Moslems in Indonesia; meanwhile, the understanding of the model of the idea used must consider local values and public aspiration [10]. Apart from the issue to secure its position in the public eye, the majority of which is Moslems, we may see the domination of one culture to another, giving an impression that Islam is part of Javanese culture. This policy has become a paradox towards Indonesian identity that wants to be appointed as a country that has cultural diversity.



Fig. 4. At-Taubah Mosque as one of the YAMP mosques. Source author, 2018.

4 Traditionality in Indonesian architecture

In the middle of 1980s, indigenous architects started to re-elevate “Indonesian Architecture” as a critique amidst the government’s politics promoting Javanese culture [4]. Javanese culture became the basis of Indonesian development during the New Order. The awareness of indigenous architects in the search of Indonesian architecture allows new ideas to come in understanding the role of traditionality. The main challenge is how to respond to the development of Western Architecture highly impactful to that of Indonesia. Some architects looking for Indonesian architecture are Atelier 6, Romo Mangun, the Architect Team of Rectorate Building of UI, and Josef Prijotomo.

Atelier 6 is a bureau established by six of van Ramondt’s students. This bureau applies volkgeist architectural exploration or soul through root searching with places [2]. During the planning process, traditionality was searched by and promoted through observation and responses through environment or locality. One of the famous works acclaimed Aga Khan Award, which is Mosque Said Naum (1976) located in Central Jakarta. This mosque was located based on competency results that oblige traditional architectural aspects. The Islamic concept that does not bring cultural aspect or particularities in architecture. Therefore, it is a concept of understanding that God is omnipresent that the highest “manifestation” of this concept is father-mother as one of God’s traits [2].

The architect Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya, colloquially known as Romo "Mangun", looks for Indonesian architecture through locality promotion and humans who live where the work belongs [2]. His unique concept, or known as “wastu” idea, leads it to get Aga Khan Award through his work Kali Code in 1992.

Gunawan Tjahjono is a member of the architects of the team of UI rectorate building, who is a professor in UI. Tjahjono’s idea (2002) is that tradition is deemed as something undecided in a long time or unstoppable and considered as adaption and continually process [4]. Tradition is an adaption so that it will always grow and change, therefore it is implied that this understanding is not so different from the modern. However, when we try to understand the modern tradition to become a cultural product, we will see the difference. The concept of traditionality in one of his works, along with his team is the Rectorate Building of UI. The concept of Javanese architecture deconstructed to be Indonesian

architecture, although in meta-level, is to position Senate on the highest floor above rectorate. This concept was meant to look for Indonesian architecture rather than representing a forum-oriented Indonesian culture than representing one of the Indonesian cultures.

Josef Prijotomo (2008) in the search of Indonesian architecture reveals that “archipelago architecture” with “traditional architecture” is two different sides [4]. In essence, both architectural terms discuss similar objects but different in the knowledge construction. Traditional Architecture is established by anthropology, while archipelago architecture is the branch of architecture. Furthermore, archipelago architecture was also known by the idea of “other” architecture or Liyan. This “other” was used by Prijotomo to separate archipelago architecture with Western architecture.

5 The meaning of traditionality in post-modern architecture

Within the modern architecture period in Indonesia, it is essentially affected by the search of the post-colonial identity. This triggered the polemic of tradition and culture that were supposed to be the Indonesian identity. Traditionality in architecture becomes one of the response indicators of that polemic. Along with that, the development of traditionality in architecture may be understood differently. Traditionality in architecture was manifested to be various and multi-layered. Its variety could be categorized based on the implementation of values, forms, processes, and changes toward the current development. Based on the analysis result of some discourses on traditionality and architecture. During this period, traditionality in Indonesia modern architecture can be categorized as follows:

5.1 The dialectics of traditional-modern

The meaning of dialectics indicates a contemporariness because traditional and modern developed along with the current development. Traditionality became part of modernization that is a manifestation of adaptation, as explained by Tjahjono, the concept of tradition is not something isolated within a certain period. In architecture, there will emerge traditionality and modernity aspect as a manifestation of development of architecture field of study. In other words, it does not deny colonial architecture development but becomes part of the local architecture. It was also described as a gradually growing stack of layers because architecture came from a cultural tradition. For example, the designing of rectorate building UI.

In this period, traditionality is also part of the response of local wisdom to be preserved and promoted. It brings harmony to the environment and becomes part of the architectural beauty. Basically, this idea restores architecture in an adapting traditional concept. It is applied in a design by Atelier 6 in a few of his works, one of which is Said Naum Mosque as well as some of the thoughts of the architect Mangunwijaya.

5.2 Traditionality as indigenous representation

The definition of indigenouness, according to George Dei, is part of local knowledge different from conventional knowledge referring to norms, values, and traditional mental constructs [8]. The architecture was built through a body of views of local people and how they understand their own world. It becomes an ideology unaffected by colonial ideology, like the idea of the “Other” architecture coined by Prijotomo.

I understand that there is a realized architecture in archipelago before colonialization era. The architecture was built based on the understanding of local people. Surely this

architecture has its own field of a subject or built by an understanding of local people of their own world. This architectural knowledge could be constructed from the cosmic understanding of the people or local wisdom values. It becomes an ideology unaffected by architectural knowledge during the colonial era.

5.3 Traditionality as a homogeneity

Homogeneity means understanding Indonesian architecture consisting of various traditions and cultures but ultimately forms a unity by looking for similarities and the process of reducing diversity. This category of architecture apparently occurs during the New Order period. With the view of realizing national identity by avoiding changes, the government at this period elevate *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. However, such variety changes in homogeneity and unification based on similarities [8]. This causes cultural polemic—that is, domination of a culture, which at the moment is very Javanised. For example, the YAMP mosques program, using roof representing Demak mosque which is from Java.

5.4 Traditionality as the excess of modernity

This category rises as a cause of modern architecture development in Indonesia. Traditionality was positioned as an impact of development being outside the modern period and moving to the next. The awareness of technological advancement and responses on locality. This architecture allows traditionality aspects to be part of a rational subject that responds to environment and not become a cultural symbol anymore. This category is exempt from the representation of the government's politics. Traditional manifests to be the principle of environmental architecture. The beginning of architecture of this category started at the end of this period.

6 Conclusion

During the post-colonial modern architecture period, the development of traditionality in architecture becomes part of the exploration of a national identity. The traditional dynamics of Indonesian development is highly affected by the politics and the government at that time. Traditionality became part of cultural polemic. Its manifestation in the architecture at this period had a variety that could be categorized based on the implementation of values, forms, processes, and changes toward the current development. Therefore, traditional architecture could be categorized as traditional-modern dialectic, indigenous representation, homogeneity, and excess of modernity.

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