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Metaphysical Approach for Design Functionality in Malay-Islamic Architecture

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a study on metaphysical approaches to building design. Three major Asian cultures, the Chinese-Buddhist, Indian-Hindu, and Malay-Islam, are reviewed. There are similarities found in principles towards achieving the occupants' well-being. Functionality became priority and rituals are performed at ensuring the well-being and prosperity of future occupants. Whereas, the Chinese-Buddhist practice is called Feng Shui, the Indian-Hindu tradition is based on Vastu-Vidya. The Malay-Islam is extractions from religious teachings written in a manuscript titled Tajul Muluk. The paper concludes that metaphysical approach could still play its roles in the design today.

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Keywords: Metaphysics; functional; geomancy; environment

1. Introduction

Contemporary building designs have been criticized for having little or no reference to the natural and spiritual context in which the building stands. Such neglect had probably contributed to failures of buildings to function as intended. We have some information about traditional approaches based on old practices that take care of every aspect but have not seemed to be considered, or just forgotten. In many instances, certain failures of are just

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unexplainable. Thus, it would be beneficial to rediscover the ancient systems that may be useful for consideration during the design process.

2. Literature review on functional design and traditional practices

Le Corbusier and Van Doesburg in 1924 had stressed the importance of functionality that shall be the ultimate goal of the design. Eventually, it became the philosophy of most architectural schools all over the world. 'Functionality' is a quality criterion of a building that makes it sustainable and serving the needs of people. Designing for the "well-being" became the end goal of any buildings that brings together a sense of dignity and pride within the design environment (Caan, 2011). Caan insists that the design is to create a comfort zone in satisfying human five senses, health, and harmonious feelings; thus, encouraging towards a sense of inspiration and motivation.

Such philosophy had already been practiced by a populace of the Malay ancient kingdom (Al-Ahmadi, 2006; Gibbs, 1987) and peoples in other Asian countries like China and India. These old practices had established systems that became guidelines in planning and designed for their buildings or settlements. It can argue that in the case of the Malay practices, the system had undergone various transformational changes; from Animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and then Islam, which still survives in the present form.

The metaphysical approach system is a guide to satisfy the human's enthusiasm for a more successful life; harmonious, healthy, upholding and advancement. It provides a set of followed rules to have the best alignment of the proposed building with the entire universe (Gibbs, 1987; Koh, 2003; Pegrum, 2000). This alignment was relating to the sciences of the cosmos or cosmology (Akkach, 2005) and is interrelated to the arts and science of Geomancy (MacLean, 1997). Today, the term 'environology' is commonly used to denote this practice (Malaysian Institute of Geomancy Sciences, 2014).

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that consists an abstract theory that beyond the reality (Oxford University Press, 2014). It relates to the unseen flow of energy forces that can felt through experiencing. The word 'energy' was identified as the ability to be active in terms of the physical or mental strength. It allows people to behave which relates to naturally enthusiasm and effort; usable power that comes from heat, electricity, etc. (Merriam Webster, 2014). The Metaphysical approach revolves around the Universe and the Earth. It was interconnecting to each other by an 'electromagnetic field' and other forces, such as gravity, uptake of earth forces, cosmic forces, etc. The same nature applies for buildings designed by humans, aiming to achieve sustainability.

2.1. Relevance of metaphysics consideration in the design of modern buildings

According to Dr. R. Tatang Santanu Adikara, the Head of Bioenergy Research Centre in Surabaya, human gets energy from two sources: inside the human body and outside the human body (Mustofa, 2011). The inside energy comes from chromosomes and genetic inheritance such as spirits (parents and ancestor), motivation (religion and culture), and belief (lifestyle and personal). Whereas, the outside energy comes from food, water, and interaction with the surrounding natural environment.

The cosmic energy consists visible (physical) and invisible (metaphysical) energy forces that can maintain the harmony of the universe by controlling it. It may also influence all events on earth, including a home, as a microcosmic level. The Chinese Feng-Shui regarded the energy forces as 'Qi' (Huang, 2012), and Indian Vāstu-Vidya considered it as 'Purusha' (Pegrum, 2000) Meanwhile, Malay Tajul Muluk called it 'Semangat' (Fee, 1998; Gibbs, 1987) and 'Rijalul Ghaib' (Al-Ahmadi, 2006). N. Annadale in 1903 wrote about the Patani's Malays in the 20th century regarding the Malay house and its 'semangat rumah' or 'house soul' (Fee, 1998). It was claim that the 'semangat' would automatically exist once the wall and the roof are fitting together. The vitality and the well-being of the house and its occupants are regarded as interdependent.

David Koh, an acclaimed environology master, has stated; 'When people built the house, the energy inside the house is static. Once the people live in, the energy inside the house is dynamic. People may affect the building, and the building may affect the people. And it's not positive thinking that the people need, but it's energy that makes people think positively'. Koh's statement echoes what Gibbs (1987 cited in Idrus, 1996) described; "The house is similar to human beings. It also requires 'semangat'. A house without 'semangat' looks empty and isolated". Today,

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