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Cultural Determinants in the Design of Bugis Houses

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Abstract

As elaborated by scholars, the built environment is influenced by culture, belief and past experiences. The paper intends to elaborate on the cultural determinants in the design of the Bugis traditional houses found in Johor, Malaysia. The methodology involved two main instruments, namely literature review and field observation. The studies suggest that even though the houses were built away from their homeland in Sulawesi, Indonesia, the culture of the Bugis descendants remains intact. This was revealed in their behaviour and the forms of the plans and elevations of their traditional houses.

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Keywords: Culture; traditional houses; Bugis; design

1. Introduction

The built environment is influenced by culture, belief and past experiences of its inhabitants, as elaborated by scholars such as Rapoport (1977, 2004), Gustafson (2001), etc. Apart from beliefs, Altman and Low (1992) also relate culture to perception, values and norms, customs and mode of appropriate behaviour that constitute a cluster of characteristics. The suggestion is supported by Gustafson (2001) who argues that the cultural aspects of place involve meanings related to the environment. This can be linked to their opinion that place attachment involves culturally shared affective meanings and activities associated with place that derived from socio-political, historical and cultural sources. The complexity of the culture that distinguishes one group from the others can be reflected through the variation of the

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environment (Rapoport, 1977, 2004). In Malaysia for instance, the cultural principles play an important role in defining the identity of different ethnic groups that influence the character of the places they inhabited.

In Malaysia the cultural influences seem to be more evident in the design of traditional houses rather than contemporary mass housing. This is basically due to the fact that the traditional houses were individually designed according to the desire of the perspective owners. The mass housing on the other hand, are designed by architectural teams and using typical design for particular housing estates to save building cost. The residents in this case have to tailor suit themselves to the house forms.

The paper intends to elaborate on the cultural determinants in the design of one of the traditional houses found Malaysia that is the Bugis traditional houses in Johor. The objectives were to clarify the details of the cultural influences that determine the formation of the Bugis traditional houses in Malaysia.

2. Methodology

The methodology involved two main instruments namely literature review and field observation. The main concern in the literature review was the cultural background of the Bugis and the connection to their house forms. The Bugis houses were initially visited to get the first hand experience. The documentation in terms of measured drawing was done by Pusat Kajian Alam Bina Dunia Melayu (KALAM), the Architecture Department of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Altogether 30 Bugis houses were documented; 21 in Benut and Pontian, Johor, Malaysia and 9 in Makasar, Bone and Wajo in South Sulawesi (Celebes), Indonesia. The houses were further analysed focusing on the cultural determinants in the formation of building form, plan and elevation of the Bugis houses in Johor. The Bugis houses in Makasar, Indonesia were used as comparison. Only then the deductions and conclusion were made.

3. History of the migration of Bugis

The people of Bugis were originally the residents of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Leirissa (1996) posits that after the kingdoms of Makasar and Bone united, it became the biggest kingdom in Indonesia in the 17th century. The turmoil started after the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C) in expeditions with the goal of trading for pepper and spices (Blusse, 1996). In their attempt to monopolise the spice trade, the V.O.C allied with the resentful Bugis of the Bone kingdom to destroy Makasar in 1669. This resulted in two consequences. First, Bone became the most important kingdom and second, it led to the migration of the Bugis of Makasar. This situation became worse with the wars between the Bugis and the Dutch between 1825 and 1905 that ended the power of the Bugis ruling dynasties. It was during this period that more Bugis migrated to the other parts of Indonesia or other countries including Malaysia (Fig.1).



Fig.1.Areas of Bugis trade and settlement; Source: Leirissa (1996)

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