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ARCHITECTURE, MULTICULTURAL, INTERCULTURAL, AND GLOBALIZATION: SOME CASES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract
This is a reflection on recent political challenge on architecture. It scrutinizes the effects of globalization on local architectural expression while reviews the issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism in the public domain. It covers political impact on a once suppressed cultural group and the action this group takes after the release of pressure. It ends by questioning whether cultural expression of one group be advanced over others through attribute of buildings will overcome the global challenge or not.

Keywords: Architecture, Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, Globalization

‘Architecture can accomplish much by accepting and celebrating heterogeneity, but it is no substitute for a better politics, economic opportunities and community cohesion’ Charles Jencks

It is a challenge to write about multiculturalism and architecture in a rapidly globalizing era for a person whose background is primarily architecture. I take this challenging task and attempt to look at the recent phenomena of architecture in Indonesia. It is in this limited capacity that I address this paper to wider readers. The approach is more of a reflection one based on my own reading experience within my position as an educator, an observer, a researcher of social and cultural factors in architecture and urban design, and a reviewer of various mega scale projects submitting for building permit to the municipality of Jakarta. As such this work should be read as a position paper rather than a research one. In the following paragraphs, let me explain briefly my bias towards the understanding of various key words so the reader will learn the limitation and the weaknesses of this paper.

1 A draft of the Paper (please do not quote) prepared for presentation in the International Seminar on Multicultural and Globalization at Fakultas Ilmu KebudayaanUniversitas Indonesia, Depok, 12-13 December 2012.
Architecture is an art, knowledge, and practice. As the art and science of designing and constructing building, architecture does not appear.\(^3\) What appear is the work of architecture, which is often understood as building. Some good buildings are considered works of architecture by critics or historians\(^4\). In fact every built object has its own story and thus worth studying.\(^5\) In this regard there is no commonly agreed upon description on what object should be included when we discuss a work of architecture. Yet nobody can study everything. Only a very small amount of buildings will catch the attention of critics and historians to have significant influence to the practice for discussions. Hence scholars still need to select what can best be represented for them to make cases of their claims.

As a practice, architecture belongs to what the architects do to produce the works of architecture. Most architects are producing meaningful spaces through designing buildings and their environment. This involves the process of designing. In this regard, how the design process brings about becomes the focus. The architect may project his/her picture of the environment without considering the opinions of users. Thus discussing architecture needs to first understand the position of architecture. The term architecture is so popular that it often been used by other field of studies. Computer architecture has nothing to do with producing a building. Architecture of globalization has nothing to do with global architectural phenomena but the design or master mind of global political geographical condition which is to some extent spatially defined.\(^6\) In this paper the term architecture will be employed in the context of knowledge and art as well as practice. For the product of architectural practice the term work of architecture will be used.

What could architecture do to culture and globalization? First, let me set my point on culture, and then globalization.

As there are as many definitions as experts on culture, even dictionary cannot explain it satisfactorily. I prefer the explanation of Leslie A White in his contribution to Encyclopaedia Britannica on culture. White writes: “When things and events are considered in the context of their relation to the human organism, they constitute behavior; when they are considered not in terms of their relation to human organism but in their relationship to one another, they become culture by definition.” In this definition, relationship entails values embedded interactions. It is in this context that I employ the term culture. In this sense, culture encompasses architecture as a process of

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\(^3\) There are so many definitions of architecture by famous architects, architectural critics, and architectural theorists have circulated, therefore I use the most commonly understood one defined by most dictionaries, i.e. the 1981 version of *Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary* defines architecture as “The art and science of designing and erecting building.”


\(^6\) Computer architecture is now a common term in computer science. While architecture of globalization was employed by geographer to denote global condition planned by dominant political power. See (Allen, John (2008). “Powerful geographies: Spatial shift in the architecture of globalization.” In Clegg, Steward R. and Haugaard, Mark eds. *The SAGE handbook of Power*. UK: Sage, pp.157-174.)

producing spaces for the users to interact with each other and with the materials surround. Those who occupy and practice such spaces will construct meanings and derive them for their identity.

Globalization is, simply understood, the process of international incorporation resulting from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, movement of peoples, funds, trades, knowledge, and many other aspects of culture. Thus it is a process of the flows and exchanges of almost everything across geographical, political, and national boundary in order to advance quality of life, promote understanding and equal opportunity for every individual as a human being. Such understanding encompasses architectural ideas and also such recently arising concepts as multiculturalism and interculturalism.

The progress of information and communication technology fosters globalization of architectural ideas. Even the government of China had attempted to build the image of new China by importing global architecture for Beijing Olympic as claimed by Ren Xuefei. The case of China to some extent echo Indonesia in the era of Soekarno when Jakarta became a show case of many modern buildings, some were designed by foreign architects, as expressions of Modern Indonesia half a century ago. In both cases local culture has no role to play. Does this mean global architecture left no room for local culture? If so, is it the global architecture ideas ignore the locals or merge multicultural ideas into one universal expression; or it is the global exchange that leads to intercultural synergy to yield the singular identity?

The tension between global and local architectural expression in the city and national level continues elsewhere. City by its nature is a place of multicultural interactions. The exchange of cultural expression increases in a city context. City is a place of power contest. Politic, since the rise of polis, plays dominant role in the decision of place making. The rumors of imposing Betawi architectural attribute by the new governor of Jakarta while he visited an engineered district of “native” compound Setu Babakan bursts a debate in Indonesian Institute of Architects Jakarta Chapter. At the national level it is a political game as to what expression will represent national image,

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12 See the coverage of Andi Muttiya Ketyeng in Liputan 6.com 2nd December coverage.

13 One can follow such debates through mailing list of Indonesian Institute of Architects, or the website of IAI>
especially for the relatively newly independent nations which experienced colonial rule. These nations seek to find their national identity and as architectural expressions stand at the forefront of national showcase, it then becomes the subject of manipulation, whether by inclusion or exclusion of the locals cultural interests.

Multiculturalism, according to Stanford Encyclopedia, “is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity.”\(^{14}\) As such it is not cultural diversity, but a particular way of dealing with problem arises from it, especially to protect the right of marginalized disadvantage groups within a country.\(^{15}\) Does multicultural promote interaction among diverse cultures will be another case.

Interculturalism refers to the thought which honors qualities of all diverse cultures within the agenda of universal human rights. As such it needs an intrinsic openness to be showing to the ‘other’ culture to ensue dialogue. It thus involves comparisons.\(^{16}\) Debates continue on whether multiculturalism or interculturalism is more suitable in the present day geopolitical context involving the nations which employ them. The insistence on a 'common civic culture' promoted by interculturalism may lead one to interpret it as allowing a limited degree of assimilation, and hence it is no different from assimilation while allowing minorities to be distinct privately. Interculuralists view multiculturalism as an ideology that leads to different individual right for those who are protected within the nation, depending on the origin of culture.

Indonesia does not embrace multiculturalism such as that in Canada or Australia. Indonesia is indisputably a multicultural nation. Its national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika which means unity in diversity clearly stated her position. Yet in practice there are dominant culture and minority cultures as well as isolated cultures practice by few peoples. Regarding such diversity and to avoid the domination of the culture of the majority, the first president of Indonesia, Soekarno attempted to create national images through built form not from any local cultural might of the past. Instead he intended to show to the world that this nation can also achieve what had been achieved by the West. The projects he created became the showcases of the new nation.\(^{17}\) Here buildings of geometrical abstraction, rather than the features of local architectural works were dominant. By making the local disappear, a new spirit could be born. It is not that he forgot about the past cultural heritage or meaning, but what the nation should have pursue is more important. The new face of Jakarta should leave no reminiscent of the past.

The condition changed as the New Order government of Soeharto in power. The new regime built Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Mini Beautiful Indonesia Park), TMII, as another showcase to represent Indonesia culture. In this park all cultures were represented through 27 provinces. Culture without province such as that of the Chinese Indonesian found no place in the park of that era. The TMII can be seen as a garden of

\(^{14}\) [plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/], access at 20/11/12 1:35 PM.

\(^{15}\) Cf. A. Heyward. “Multiculturalism, Identity, and Diversity.” [www.google.co.id/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=27&cad=rja&ved=0CF0QFjAGOGQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fandrewheywood.co.uk%2Fdocuments%2FMulticulturalism%2C%2520Identity%2520and%2520Diversity.doc&ei=8xfAUOiCPY-srAf7oDYZBqkug=AFQjCNHDMICb_H8hw0m6qMoqdepmpP2ewA] access at, 6/12/12, 11:21 AM.

\(^{16}\) [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interculturalism] access at 6/12/12, 12.17 PM.

\(^{17}\) For more detail discussion on Soekarno’s Jakarta, see Kusno, *ibid.*
collection filled with buildings of enlarged scale from those of the originals. The cultures were reduced into selected majority existed within the province. Aragon Lorraine commented on the park as: “The form of the park, however, implies not only national unity and cultural richness, but also a tight control by the nation's political center over the very cultural identity of outer island ethnic minorities.”

TMII is successful as a tourist destination. A collection of multicultural objects represent multicultural nation except that of the significant minority, the Chinese Indonesian. The Chinese Indonesians of that era were the subject of political pressure. The space for their cultural expression was so limited due to the political pressure was in favor of the idea of assimilation. Such condition, in the present context, can be a way of interpreting interculturalism. There was no official law to exclude the right of the Chinese Indonesians but in practice the space for them to exercise cultural expression had been limited.

The condition changes when the New Order regime was replace by that of the era of the presidency of Abdulrahman Wahid. Through the Presidential Decree no 6/2000, the Chinese Indonesians were freed from the political restriction and free to exercise cultural activities. The Chinese New Year has since then revived, and has become the subject of media coverage. Lion and dragon dance as the trademark of Chinese festivals have become annual attractions to fill the schedule of many big shopping malls.

The Chinese New Year often fills with festival in a major street. Such event becomes a spectacle that involves also other form of festivity. The parade type of festivity creates space of interaction among cultures. The lion and dragon dances, which once belongs to Chinese cultural expressions, are now not only belongs to the Chinese Indonesians, but also other ethnic group within the nation. Artistic performances, festivals, public spaces, cyber space, are among the agents of intercultural interactions.

The recognition of Chinese Indonesian as part of Indonesian nation with equal right had culminated by the opening of the Chinese Cultural Garden within the TMII. It was Mr. Soeharto himself who signed to authorize a piece of land under his control in 2006 to be used for Chinese Indonesian cultural activity. In the October of the same year, the construction of Chinese Cultural Park was officially opened with lion dance performance. By locating an official site, the Chinese culture will be again framed. Every building resembled that of the main land traditional building type. Cultural expressions, when they are framed, leave few rooms to flourish.

The official inclusion of Chinese culture into the Indonesian ‘main stream’ culture dominated by that of the Javanese, and the flourish of many types of public places pave the way for more interaction among cultures. Yet the creation of exclusive enclaves continues and this instance will further the cultural divide. For commercial reason by targeting on the exclusive groups which are on the rise as the income level increases since the new millennium, real estate developers promote exclusive clusters. The extreme ones are the promotion of religious compound which indirectly promote

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19 I was invited in the event.

segregation rather than integration. Ironically the target groups are the majority, the Moslem society. It is interestingly to learn that the expressions of housing compound echo that of the main stream architectural style rather than the idioms from the culture of the Middle East. This instance indicates that cross cultural mix of image is on the way of becoming. Here architecture plays certain role. The name is that which sellable, not the shape which can be freed from the name.

The main thoroughfares of big city such as Jakarta are the domain for the showcase of commercial buildings. Along them global architectural trend finds its place of exhibition. There one can find many box-like tall buildings enveloped in many styles including ‘classical’. Only the governmental building such as the 16 story office of the mayor of Southern Jakarta dresses Betawi attribute at the top and canopy. It is the effect of globalization that brings rapid exchange of architectural ideas whether a new one or an obsolete one. In this condition, the government controlled buildings have the power to resist the pressure and come out with architecturally weir result. On the other hand, in a smaller scale, Balinese architectural style is exported to many places around the world. Whether such instances are for better or worse in architectural practice and place making is debatable depending on which side the critics take.

The Betawi is considered the increasingly marginalized native Jakarta citizen. The former Governor of Jakarta had dedicated a district at SetuBabakan in the Southern Jakarta as Betawi cultural center. The present governor of Jakarta attempts to dress Jakarta or at least governmental buildings with Betawi attribute, which had inspired him during his visit to SetuBabakan in the 2nd of December 2012. Such statement, although it was not an official one, become a challenge for practicing architect. Imposing cultural identity and ignoring the fact that Jakarta is increasingly cosmopolitan will limit the creative force of multicultural citizen.

If one ethnic cultural expression through built form become a strong common values, then it can suppress innovation and changes. The condition may strengthen the established structures of power, and enhance distinction and the orders of differences. In this regard culture becomes a dividing force rather than integrating one. Thus process of innovation as an intercultural game will be weakened. The cost of such political game creates more unexpected side effect than a positive contribution of culture as agent of innovation and creativity.

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21 One can easily catch the appearance of Davinci head quarter in Jakarta’s main Thoroughfare Jalan Jenderal Soedirman.
22 Popo Danes, a Balinese architect becomes so famous for designing Balinese complexes elsewhere in the world. One of my colleague had also calimed to get commission to build Balinese styled resort complex in Malaysia.