

ULTRA

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The Nusantara Architecture Design Competition: A 'Forced' Traditionalisation of Indonesia's Architectural Identity Translation?

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Keywords

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Abstract

The Indonesian government has recently adopted the term 'Nusantaran Architecture' as an alternative representation of Indonesia's architectural identity. This term is employed to capture the locality of the country, whose narration is developed around the idea of bringing back the indigenous culture as part of preserving the 'authentic' identity of the country. The term is incorporated in the national tourism plan, and is literally adopted in the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition, a platform from which the government obtains design translations of the perceived identity. However, this design competition leads to 'traditionalising' architecture, depicted in how the winning designs incorporate the traditional design elements to 'localise' the buildings. This design competition is problematic not only for its top-down Javacentric method employed, but also for its direction in appropriating traditionalism in contemporary built form based on the architects' and the juries' arbitrary approaches. Since economic motive through 'romantic tourist gaze' dominates the translation of identity, it portrays not only the hegemony of capitalism in the way the country imagines its own identity, but also the presence of an Orientalist view as a legacy of colonialism. This paper investigates the problematic implementation of the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition as an attempt to concretise the authorised version of the perceived identity. It also scrutinises the strong political influence that governs the whole identity construction process in adopting what is regarded as 'given' traditional architecture.

Introduction

1. The term Nusantara was coined in the era of the Majapahit Kingdom (1293-1520), when Prime Minister Gajah Mada swore to conquer the Southeast Asia archipelago, called Nusantara, and brought victory to the kingdom. Nusantara itself is literary translated as 'the archipelago' that was once united under the sovereignty of Majapahit, despite lack of proof and evidence of the validity of this story. In the era of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, the term Nusantara was re-imagined to be the alias of Indonesia, and this understanding persists until today. Therefore, Nusantaran Architecture is seen as equal to Indonesian Architecture in representing the country's architectural identity, despite different directions and emphasis given in their translation.

2. Johannes Adiyanto, "Mencari DNA Arsitektur di Nusantara," (paper presented at the Seminar dan Sarasehan Arsitektur Nusantara, Surabaya, March 2018), B015-22.

National identity has been an ongoing discussion in the Global South post-colonial countries, since there is an urge to represent themselves to the international world as new and free countries that have escaped from the hegemony of colonialism. In Indonesia, the discussion of architectural identity resurfaced in the 1980s when a group of architects questioned what Indonesian Architecture was. Its unclear and undefined meaning led to the emergence of the term Nusantaran Architecture, which referred to traditional architecture as the repertoire in developing the country's architectural identity.¹ The discussion stayed dormant for some decades until it reappeared in 2011 after the term Nusantaran Architecture was used quite extensively in the rhetoric of the Wae Rebo preservation project (Figure 1). This philanthropic project gained national and international attention, so did the term Nusantaran Architecture. The soaring popularity of this project brought the term back to the national discussion. Nusantaran Architecture was even promoted as the 'core', even the 'DNA', of the country's architectural identity.² The discussions that followed revolved around preserving the 'authentic' traditional architecture from which the country's architectural identity should be reclaimed.



Figure 1: The Mbaru Niang houses at Wae Rebo after reconstruction (Source: Untung Saroha Sihombing, 2015 - reprinted with permission)

The preservation project put Wae Rebo on the international tourism destination list and brought unprecedented tourism activities hence significant economic leverage to the place. Seeing this potential, the government started to adopt a similar method to other places in Indonesia, using cultural preservation as a catalyst for tourism, providing an exotic experience of living among the locals in remote villages. The government then incorporated the term Nusantaran Architecture in the Ten New Bali programme, which is the national tourism development blueprint to copy the success story of Bali, in terms of attracting tourists and contributing to the national income, in the ten different places in Indonesia. The term was then applied in a design competition entitled 'Nusantaran Architecture Design Competition', a platform in which architects competed to design various tourism amenities in the ten

dedicated places, using traditional architecture as the source of ideas to represent the culture and tradition of the place.

This paper problematises the appropriation of the traditionalist view in designing the country's so-called 'architectural identity.' It also discusses the strong Javacentrism in the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition, as all things related to the competition were done and decided in Jakarta, implying a top-down method and showcasing the power assertion of the regime. It also problematises the intention to make the winning designs as template designs for the tourism amenities in the ten places, treating what is claimed to be cultural representations no different than industrial products that can be mass-produced. Further, this paper pinpoints the presence of Orientalism in the way the idea of identity is contested in the competition, with exoticised culture heavily embedded in the designs and its rhetoric. This paper also questions the constructed identity based on the notion of the tourist gaze, signalling the hegemony of capitalism in how the government chose the authorised version of the country's identity.

The Nusantara Architecture Design Competition

Since 2016, the Indonesian government introduced the Ten New Bali project that became the new tourism development blueprint, aiming to double the number of foreign visitors and raise the country's world tourism ranking as instructed by President Joko Widodo.³ Tourism was also projected to be one of "the core business[es] and the backbone of the economy of the country in the future."⁴ There are ten places that were projected to be the next Bali; they are Danau Toba (North Sumatra), Tanjung Kelayang (Bangka Belitung), Tanjung Lesung (Banten), Kepulauan Seribu (Jakarta), Borobudur (Central Java), Bromo Tengger (East Java), Mandalika (West Nusa Tenggara), Labuan Bajo (East Nusa Tenggara), Wakatobi (South East Sulawesi) and Morotai (Maluku).⁵ Aiming to copy the 'success story' of Bali, the government intended to develop similar cultural tourism, which was seen as a win-win solution in merging the economic benefit of tourism with what was claimed to be culture preservation. This Ten New Bali project is one of the implementations of the President's ambition to decentralise the dominance of Javacentric development, as mentioned in his *Nawa Cita* as his strategic plan.⁶ In this program, the government positions culture as a spectacle in the national identity-making policy. Culture, in this case, loosely refers to the form of culture that still maintains a traditional way of life and still possesses traditional artefacts. The propaganda of preserving the 'pristine' national culture is accentuated to nurture people's sense of belonging to the country. It also becomes an instrument with which the government positions itself as the 'saviour' of the local culture as part of its populist strategies.⁷ This reference to traditional culture is put under the spotlight since it carries the potential to be commoditised, bringing additional income for the country; although it means other 'unpristine' and 'unexotic' cultures might not get similar attention and even becomes subjects of dispute.

The re-emergence of the term Nusantara Architecture attracted a paint company, PT. Propan Raya, to incorporate the term into its existing annual design competition, previously named 'Green House Design

3. Diah Asih Purwaningrum and Athina Ardhyanto, "The Commodification of Nusantara Architecture in Indonesian Tourism: A Pathway to Culture Preservation or Universalism?" (paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Indonesian Architecture and Planning (ICIAP), Yogyakarta, 26-27 July 2018), 2.

4. Dwi Murdaningsih, "Menpar Paparkan Target Kunjungan Wisatawan kepada UNWTO," *Republika.co.id*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/kemenpar/berita-kemenpar/16/10/11/oev62h368-menpar-paparkan-target-kunjungan-wisatawan-kepada-unwto>.

5. Likupang (North Sulawesi) was added to the list in 2019 and made it 'the eleven super-priority destinations'. However, in this paper, I still refer to the Ten New Bali program in pinpointing the selected tourism destinations since it is the initial Ten New Bali program that was embedded in the early development of the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition.

6. *Nawa Cita* (the Nine Missions) is a political promise made by Joko Widodo in his electoral campaign in the 2014 presidential election. One of the missions is to 'build Indonesia from the periphery by strengthening regions and villages under the unity of the country.' See "Nawacita," *Simpul Perencana* 29 (2017): 2.

7. Diah Asih Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects and Being Indonesian: Contemporary Context of Nusantara Architecture in Architectural Design and Theory" (PhD dissertation, The University of Melbourne, 2021), 169-171, <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/277047>.

8. PT. Propan Raya changed the competition title after Kris Rianto Adidarma and Yuwono Imanto, consecutively the CEO and the Director of the company, visited Wae Rebo together with Prof. Josef Priyotomo who is the initiator of the term Nusantara Architecture. During their visit, the group discussed their concerns that architecture schools in Indonesia have been focusing too heavily on the modern development of architecture and have forgotten to look into the cultural history of Indonesian architecture. PT. Propan Raya then decided to bring this issue into their competition and changed the name and the theme of the competition. For further details, see Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 159-161.

9. Yuwono Imanto (Director, Propan Raya Company), interviewed by the author, July 20, 2018.

10. Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 159-161.

11. Jeihan Kahfi Barlian, "Kemenpar Gelar ISTA dan Sayembara Pusat Cenderamata Pariwisata 2018," *Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding Forum*, December 3, 2018, <https://swa.co.id/wicf/news/kemenpar-gelar-ista-dan-sayembara-pusat-cinderamata-pariwisata-2018>.

12. Arimbi Ramadhiani, "Diikuti Peserta Terbanyak, Sayembara Homestay Raih Rekor Muri," *Kompas.com*, October 26, 2016, <https://properti.kompas.com/read/2016/10/26/122141121/diikuti.peserta.terbanyak.sayembara.homestay.raih.rekor.muri?nomgid=0>.

Competition' that was initiated in 2012. The name was then changed to 'Nusantaran Architecture Design Competition' in 2014.⁸ This literal use of the term Nusantara Architecture not only boosted the popularity of the competition, but also marked the company's rebranding strategy to show a benign intention to preserve the country's cultural heritage, despite the concealed profit-oriented objectives. The company then strategically used this competition to collaborate with the government, seen in how its director, Yuwono Imanto, actively offered the Minister of Tourism to incorporate both the term Nusantara Architecture and the design competition into the national tourism plan. This attempt was particularly successful as the competition finally received the Minister's support. With this alignment, the competition's themes were then curated to fit the development plan. In 2017, President Widodo openly supported this competition by choosing the theme and the title for its fifth cycle, the 'Nusantaran Restaurant'.⁹ With this full support from the government, the competition series was officially set to be part of national tourism planning, particularly within the Ten New Bali program, and it meant that the winning designs would be built and funded by the central government. This also highlighted that the government was not the sole actor in orchestrating and exercising the identity construction strategy.¹⁰

The competition aimed to obtain design proposals for different tourism amenities in the ten places (i.e. homestay (2016), restaurant (2017), souvenir centre (2018), tourism information centre (2019)), and the winning designs were planned to be the template designs for each facility at each place. The competition itself has become one of the biggest design competitions in the country, not only for its substantial prizes for the winners, but also for its promise of future development projects (Figure 2). Aside from the financial benefits offered to the winners, the competition has also been campaigned as a strategy to 'save' the country's threatened cultural heritage, hence any participation would be seen as a philanthropic effort to help the government save the country's culture and tradition. In this case, the Minister of Tourism emphasised that the role of the competition was to "introduce, keep, and preserve national culture", and it increased the popularity of the competition unprecedentedly in the country.¹¹ In its third cycle in 2016, 993 teams registered to join, and the competition received 728 design proposals. It was then recorded in the Indonesia World Records Museum (Museum Rekor Indonesia–MURI) as the design competition with the most participants.¹²



Figure 2: The publication posters of the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition on tourism information centre cycle mentioning the massive prize offered (Source: Propan Raya, 2019 - reprinted with permission)

13. Margus Vihalem, "Everyday aesthetics and Jacques Rancière: Reconfiguring the common field of aesthetics and politics," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10 (2018): 1-11.

14. PropanRaya, "Kerangka Acuan Kerja - Sayembara Desain Pusat Cenderamata Pariwisata," *Sayembara Desain Arsitektur Nusantara*, 2018, <https://arsitekturnusantara.propanraya.com/>.

15. Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008).

This competition has also become one of the prominent instruments that has carried the government's identity politics agenda. Architecture, in this case, has become a spectacle of political instruments to showcase the preferred image of the government, since "politics is not conceptualised; it is visualised; ... it must be showed-off and staged; it must be realised in the sensible."¹³ The government's involvement in the competition and the incorporation of the winning designs in the national tourism plan made the competition an official platform from which the government attained architectural representations it preferred as the face of Indonesia, both for domestic and international audiences. This is part of the national government constructing an idea of cultural identity, especially as the competition brief mentioned that the designs were expected to portray the country's cultural richness and to "accentuate the local identity and wisdom in the area".¹⁴ How culture and identity were understood in this competition might show how the government understands local identity and how, therefore, the winning designs can be seen as official translations of it. This also confirms that the image construction of national identity is orchestrated by the ruling elites, hence curated based on their tastes, preferences and agendas.¹⁵

Traditionalisation of architecture in the competition

16. PropanRaya, "Sayembara Desain Rumah Wisata (Homestay) Nusantara," *Sayembara Desain Arsitektur Nusantara*, 2016, <https://arsitekturnusantara.propanraya.com/>.

Traditionalisation appeared rather explicitly in this Nusantara Architecture Design Competition. Although the competition literally employed the term Nusantara Architecture in its title, the competition's brief barely explained its meaning. Instead, the brief relied on people's over-familiarity with the term 'Nusantara' due to a prolonged indoctrination and idealisation of this term in the era of Indonesia's first and second Presidents, Sukarno and Suharto. In most briefs for the competition, Nusantara Architecture was linked to 'locality' (kelokalan), yet what was meant by 'local' itself was not discussed. In 2016, which was the beginning of the competition being attached to the Ten New Bali plan, the brief started to delineate that the design submitted "must attain the inspiration from traditional architecture in the area" as part of the scope of the competition.¹⁶ This directed how the participant understood the design competition; therefore, it was expected that most design proposals, if not all, had a reference to the traditional architecture as a source of ideas for the design exercise.

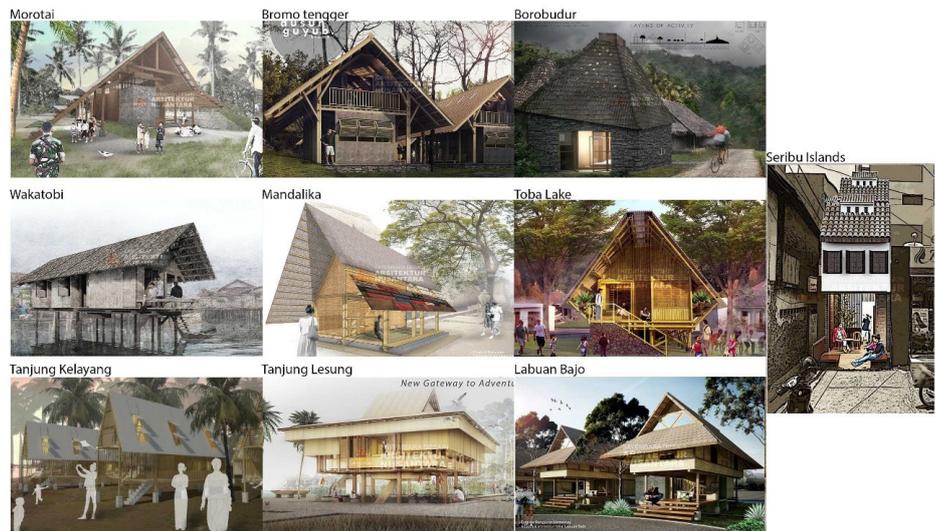


Figure 3: The winning designs of the Nusantaran Architecture Design Competition on homestay cycle 2016 (Source: Propan Raya, 2016 - reprinted with permission)

17. To see some examples of this translation, see Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 201-204.

18. For more explanation on the juries of the competition, see Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 189-191.

19. PropanRaya, "Sayembara Desain Restoran Nusantara," *Sayembara Desain Arsitektur Nusantara*, 2017, <https://arsitekturnusantara.propanraya.com>.

Referring to the traditional architecture of the ten places became a typical way to 'contextualise' the submitted designs. Many of them, if not all, referenced the traditional architecture in various ways, such as by adopting the form and shape; adapting the zoning and function; replicating the intended activities to happen; and employing more abstract and philosophical ideas as design justifications. However, with the architects' limited understanding of the local context and the local architecture, this reference might be translated rather arbitrarily.¹⁷ Resemblances with traditional architecture became common signifiers to anchor the design to the place. Although problematic, this approach was legitimated, at least by the juries, since designs employing such approaches were selected as winners hence incorporated in the national projects (Figure 3).¹⁸ It somehow informed how the juries, as the extension of the government, perceive locality in choosing the face of Indonesia's contemporary cultural representations. In this case, the appropriation of traditional culture in architecture was authorised by the state under the jargon of 'preserving local culture and tradition,' especially with specific instruction in the brief that the designs must refer to the design of the traditional house.¹⁹

20. Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 189.

21. Amanda Achmadi, "After Jakarta: Imagining a New Capital," *Indonesia at Melbourne*, June 25, 2019, <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/after-jakarta-imagining-a-new-capital/>.

22. Anneke Prasyanti (the Team Leader for the Homestay Development Acceleration Task Force), interviewed by the author, September 24, 2018.

As an official instrument for the national agenda, the centralised Nusantaran Architecture Design Competition fortifies a Javacentrism, if not Jakarta-centrism, in how decisions are made, despite the President's mission to decentralise the decision-making process in the nationhood. The competition was held in Java, participated in by designers who mostly live in Java, and the winners were selected by the juries who also mostly live in Java.²⁰ Since this process did not have any participatory engagements with the local people, the competition became a platform that facilitated only the government's perspective. It aligns with Amanda Achmadi's assertion that in Indonesia, "... [the] elites consider the preferred image of the nation ... [by] relying purely on planning and design professionals' utopian ideals ... [and] imposing a singular idealised version [on the people]."²¹ In this case, the voice of the locals has been put aside for the sake of a fast implementation process and for facilitating the elites' ideal imagining of the country.²² Whose interest is being served here is highly questionable, especially with the underlying business interests at play.

23. Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner, "Forget about Utopia," in *Now Urbanism: The Future City is Here*, ed. J. Hou, B. Spencer, T. Way and K. Yocum (London: Routledge, 2014), 195-205.

24. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Book, 1979), 205.

25. For more elaboration on how Orientalism has been widely accepted and rigorously used by the Orientals in imagining their own identity, see Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 27-29.

26. John Urry, "The Tourist Gaze and the Environment," *Theory, Culture & Society* 9 (1992): 9.

27. There are many discussions on what is deemed authentic and inauthentic in terms of culture for tourists' consumption. Many researchers, such as Michael Pretes (1995), Dean MacCannell (1989) and Erik Cohen (1988), highlight the complexity in understanding what is 'authentic' in the cultural tourism industry, as they argue that performative culture and cultural commodification might still remain genuine or can become genuine over time within the host culture. Umberto Eco (1986) and Daniel Boorstin (1992) assert that in post-modern tourism, although some tourists are aware that the culture they see is a reproduced object that is exaggerated and romanticised versions of reality, yet they still see it as 'better' than the original culture and are less interested in experiencing the original.

In dealing with cultural issues, the elites sometimes lean on pre-held assumptions, which are often inaccurate. Their distant position from the grassroots culture leads them to have a particular perspective in which the local people are not considered independent agents. This creates the so-called 'forest-and-tree' perspective, that the elites, with their distance, can only see the forest as a whole and fail to see the trees as the individuals that occupy the space.²³ Exoticising culture happens this way, as the elites observe the traditional living tradition and reflect it to their daily modern city living; hence the idea of locating an 'authentic culture' in places far from the city becomes very engaging. With romanticism maintained, traditional culture is then idealised and seen as 'fragile' under the threat of modernism. This perpetuates the urge to preserve and reproduce this 'authentic' way of life, although, most of the time, the implementations disregard the socio-economic challenges faced by the locals.

Exoticising culture is inherently problematic, as it is a paradoxical concept as a legacy of colonialism. In the colonial period, colonisers emphasised this exoticism to distinguish the East and the West. It is a form of Orientalism, a perspective that sees the Orient (the East) as the 'Other', deemed as different, marginal, illiterate, and even savage compared to the modern Occident (the West).²⁴ Orientalism once became a tool to justify Western colonialism in Asia, as the Western imperialists claimed the importance to salvage the Orient from its backwardness. Although colonialism has long gone now, the Orientalism perspective is still maintained and reproduced differently. Interestingly, from the eyes of the Orient, contemporary Orientalism is now seen as empowering instead of marginalising them. Most post-colonial Asian countries, if not all, are proud of being exotic and having exotic culture as their perceived identity.²⁵ This exoticism is then developed for the culture-selling business, mainly serving the expectation of the Western audience as the consumers. With the recent tourism boom, exotic culture is treated as a spectacle, an object of consumption, a commodity. In this case, any appropriation and 'gimmickisation' of the traditional culture are anticipated as part of the tourism effects. This reveals that the imagining process of identity has been driven by the 'romantic tourist gaze', something that pushes forward a visual consumption and an aesthetic judgment rather than one based on reasons and discourses.²⁶ This drive will create a 'phony' culture that potentially 'contaminates,' and further alter, the 'authentic' local culture that grows naturally among local people.²⁷ Further, the merge of identity imagining with tourism industry marks the hegemony of capitalism in how a country perceives itself. This also reflects how Orientalism persists today, that post-colonial countries still gain their significance from comparing themselves to the West.

Culture and the (A)Political Stance

With stereotypical romanticised ideas at play, the widely critiqued visual judgment was fortified in the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition, as if dealing with culture was merely about physical artefacts and visual engagements. The intertwined social-political contestation that is entrenched in the culture-making process was left untouched, probably intentionally, for its severe complexities that

28. It started with the brief of the competition that was very generic and broad, focusing on creating representations of national culture as tourism spectacles instead of understanding, nurturing, and developing the local culture. The initial purpose to 'contemporise Nusantara Architecture,' as mentioned in the 2013 brief, was shifted toward tourism purposes, especially after the 2016 cycle. Since 2019, serving the tourism industry has become the only competition's objective mentioned in the brief. In this case, the intricate local socio-political contestation became less important to discuss in the competition. See Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 185-187.

29. Aditya Wiratama (the 2016 Nusantara Architecture Design Competition winner), interviewed by the author, October 18, 2019.

30. Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 139.

31. Abidin Kusno, *After the New Order* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 85.

hurdled, hence slowed down, the design process.²⁸ Some architects might consider this competition as a pure design attempt at culture preservation project, therefore they might fail to see, or refuse to see, beyond the layer of architecture as a built form. They tend to overlook the severe social and cultural implications of their designs that potentially impact the place and its people. This is often seen in architectural practices in Indonesia, as architects tend to stay, mostly deliberately, in their comfort zone and treat architecture as only being about design exercise. Aditya Wirata, one of the competition winners, clearly mentioned that architects' scope of work was mainly about design and construction.²⁹ The broader socio-political aspects of the place, despite being recognised, were deemed to be outside the responsibility of the architects. Wirata even added that for the architect, being critical to the area of economy, society and politics could be a sign of a 'professional ego' since it showed that architects have stepped outside their professional expertise and boundaries.

Wirata's statement can be considered an attempt to sterilise his professional conduct from the discussion of politics. This apolitical position is common in the profession, something that is even maintained, including through the development of the term Nusantara Architecture which limits its scope on cultural issues and avoids discussing politics.³⁰ This resentment toward politics is a legacy of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, who detached politics from almost everything, including arts and architecture, to maintain his power.³¹ As a remnant of his prolonged imposition, some Indonesians still see politics as wicked and malignant, hence it needs to be avoided, as it is closely associated with high-level dirty politics instead of something embedded in the day-to-day people's life. With this strong apolitical standpoint, some architects use a positivist perspective towards government agendas, including the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition, hence failing to see beyond the propaganda of an alleged attempt at culture preservation.



Figure 4: The Office of Attorney General of West Sumatra
(Source: Dini Fitriyani, 2020 - reprinted with permission)

32. Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 246.

33. Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 72-76.

34. Johannes Widodo, "Modern Indonesian Architecture: Transplantation, Adaptation, Accommodation, and Hybridization," in *The Past in the Present: Architecture in Indonesia*, ed. Peter J. M. Nas (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 23.

35. Diah A. Purwaningrum, "Long Road to Identity: Critical Study of Contemporary Nusantara Architecture," *Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture* 12 (2019): 12-20.

36. Purwaningrum, "Indonesian Architects," 88-89.

Another legacy of Suharto is that cultural imposition is authorised through official regulations. In his time, the term 'culture' was generally associated with traditional culture in such a way that the two became interchangeable.³² He showed an excessive adoration to traditionalism, inserted in how the country was managed and presented, mostly to justify his concealed political agenda. He extensively promoted Indonesia's traditional culture as authentic, pristine and existing, which needed to be preserved and kept 'pure'. It is particularly apparent in the infamous Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, a Disneyfied theme park that showcases miniature versions of the country's traditional architecture narrated as 'the peak of local culture' (puncak kebudayaan daerah).³³ With his way of understanding culture, traditionalising architecture became a common practice in his era.³⁴ It was authorised in some building regulations that required public and governmental buildings to employ traditional roofing and decorations.³⁵ This practice was widely accepted in the community and has been passed to contemporary times. Today, some regional governments still impose Suharto's traditionalist lens in their local regulations, sometimes with coercion.³⁶ It is, for instance, shown when the current Governor of West Sumatra, Irwan Prayitno, criticised the new Regional Police Headquarters Building that did not incorporate gojong, a Minangkabau traditional roof with saddle-like shape and pointy horn-like ends. Prayitno stated that "the building is magnificent ... too bad that it does not have gonjong [that] carries the characteristic of West Sumatra ... [and] indicates the region's

37. Angga Indrawan, "Gubernur Kritik Gedung Polda Sumbar tak Bergonjong," *Republika.co.id*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/daerah/17/02/12/ol9h83365-gubernur-kritik-gedung-polda-sumbar-tak-bergonjong>.

38. Peter J. M. Nas, "Introduction," in *The Past in the Present: Architecture in Indonesia*, ed. Peter J. M. Nas (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 9-13.

39. Roxana Waterson, *The Living House, an Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12-26.

40. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17-20; Nigel Cross, "Designerly Ways of Knowing," *Design Studies* 3, no. 4 (1982): 221-227.

41. Bryan Lawson, "Cognitive Strategies in Architectural Design," *Ergonomics* 22, no. 1 (1979): 59-68.

42. Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009); Alan Berman, "Opinion: Why Starchitecture Fails Society," *Architects' Journal*, December 14, 2015, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/culture/opinion-why-starchitecture-fails-society/8692723.article>; Witold Rybczynski, "The Franchising of Architecture," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/t-magazine/gehry-norman-foster-moshe-safdie-starchitects-locate-franchising-of-architecture.html?_php=true&type=blogs&_r=0.

identity."³⁷ For this reason, and because it has become a requirement in the building code, Prayitno suggested adding gonjong to the building, just as he had done to the Office of Attorney General of West Sumatra that led to the adding of gonjong on top of the modern building (Figure 4).

This traditionalist perspective persists because the bias that sees indigeneity as equal to precolonial 'exotic' culture is maintained and reproduced in the contemporary context. This bias refers to what is claimed to be 'authentic' traditional culture as the source of the country's identity while demonising the modern 'westernised' culture that is blamed for contaminating the local culture. This reference is problematic since culture constantly evolves and is always in the state of becoming. One culture merges with another culture to make a hybrid that responds to the potential and challenges in one particular time. This hybridisation gets even faster with people's movements within or outside the county, creating a fusion that might possess a new identity that does not belong to either preceding culture. It is a constant process that cannot be paused, let alone stopped. Moreover, it is also crucial to acknowledge that traditional architecture that we see today, despite having been passed down for generations, is not a pre-existing and authentic culture of the island of Indonesia. Instead, it is an accumulation of influences from many foreign countries, like China, Japan, India, Persia and Europe; while its architecture is a mixture of traditional, vernacular, Islamic, Chinese, Hindu, and colonial architecture.³⁸ It is thus easy to find commonalities between culture in Indonesia and the neighbouring countries, especially within the Austronesian world.³⁹ With this mixture and with the complexity that underlays the long cultural process itself, claiming one culture as authentic is, therefore, problematic, especially because it signals that some other cultures can be deemed as inauthentic. With no boundaries in a cultural space, there are many shared cultures among neighbouring countries; therefore, the ownership of cultural practices cannot be secured and exclusively owned. Pragmatism in the architectural profession makes it worse when dealing with the complexity of cultural issues. Referring to British philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Nigel Cross mentions that in Design as a discipline, 'knowing how' is more important than 'knowing that', implying that Design is a skill-rather than knowledge-focused.⁴⁰ In this sense, architects might focus on developing how to design and build things rather than exercising what to build amidst the contexts and circumstances that precede and follow the design. By employing 'solution focusing strategy' instead of 'problem focusing strategy', as asserted by Bryan Lawson, it is common for architects to do research no further than to get ideas to start and justify the design process.⁴¹ Some architects do not intend to dig deeper to comprehensively understand the existing conditions of the place and the people, especially with the time and budget constrains; thus, any complexities found are very likely to be disregarded. With this approach, the offered solutions can be very simplistic and superficial. This is a challenge that has been highlighted by many design critics, like Jeremy Till, Alan Berman, and Witold Rybczynski.⁴²

In the Nusantaran Architecture Design Competition, this pragmatism was shown not only in the design approaches employed by the architects, but also in the way the brief was compiled by the stakeholders. Using one brief for ten places, without any additional

43. Brian Christens and Paul W. Speer, "Tyranny/Transformation: Power and Paradox in Participatory Development," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 7, no. 2 (2006).

explanation for each place, showed that the government did not intend to comprehend the cultural condition of each place with its visible and concealed intricacies. Instead, the ten places were pragmatically approached using a one-size-fits-all framework, and even assumed that there was a 'unity' among people living in each place. With no specific sites proposed where the design would be specifically located in each place, the winning designs were expected to be generic enough to fit anyone in any place in the area. In this case, the government treated people in one area as one single institution and eliminated the possibility of cultural and political variations and diversities among them. It is a problematic view, since even within a small group of local people, there are still local power differentials caused by never-ending political and social contestation among different agencies in the community.⁴³ Therefore, imposing one single 'ideal' face for a dynamic society is dangerous, as it risks leading to another form of dictatorship, despite subtly. It might end up suppress the minorities, especially if the plan comes with coercion.

44. Purwaningrum and Ardhyanto, "The Commodification", 4.

With the attachment of the competition to the national tourism industry, there is a high demand for fast-produced architecture. The intention to make the winning designs a template for tourism amenities shows that what is deemed as cultural representations are no different from industrial products. With its potential to be mass-produced, it promises a fast and standardised result in the application, especially that the tourism industry has a certain hospitality standard, particularly on hygiene and sanitation.⁴⁴ This rapid top-down method, however, is opposite to the bottom-up culture-making approach. With this forced assertion of the design, local people might develop different meanings toward it, both positive and negative, and this might turn into cultural imposition if the people unwillingly adopt it. In this case, the design becomes a ready-made cultural artefact injected into the local culture, making the local people passive receivers, instead of active players, in the process of making their own culture. This might create social and cultural problems if people cannot develop a sense of ownership of the inserted architecture.

Closing Remarks

This paper has scrutinised the current development of the Indonesian government's identity politics and how it is translated into architecture. Incorporating the term Nusantara Architecture in the national tourism plan marks the merging of the national identity imagining with capitalistic business. The constructed architectural identity exercised through the Nusantara Architecture Design Competition signals the traditionalisation of the country's perceived identity. This paper has also discussed some problematic approaches shown in the competition, including the generic compilation of the brief, the direction toward exoticising culture and traditionalising architecture, the strong Javacentrism in the decision-making process, and the problematic top-down implementation plan using a one-size-fits-all framework. The appropriation of traditional perspective in imagining Indonesia's architectural identity becomes the main scrutiny in this paper, showing the bias in understanding culture. By referring back to traditional culture and artefacts in the identity translation, it means that the complexity of

contemporary real-life struggle has to be pushed aside, if not eliminated, to make way for a utopian ideal that is far from the urban and vernacular reality. When the state single-handedly reproduces this view on a national scale, this can be seen as a forced traditionalisation of the architectural identity, especially when the traditional life is no longer a common practice in largely urbanised Indonesia. The romanticism that is maintained in this agenda can potentially be a cultural imposition since there is a chance that not all local people can relate to such culture and its architecture. Problems and conflicts might entail this imposition if the local people cannot develop a sense of belonging and ownership to the inserted architecture, especially if the presence of this architecture only adds the burden of maintenance for the people.

Therefore, the government and other stakeholders must shift the perspective in seeing culture, from focusing on the exotic part of the country, to paying more attention to people's actual socio-political contestation in their everyday lives. Instead of maintaining the utopian image of Indonesia, one of which by employing the term Nusantara Architecture, the government should start digging into what presents in the society. The factual condition of largely urbanised Indonesia, such as the sprawl of urban kampong, the mushroomed informality in public spaces, and even the recurrent problem of floods, haze and mountain eruption, needs to be considered, as these conditions what constitute the contemporary culture of Indonesia.