UNDERSTANDING THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY: CASE STUDIES ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The crisis of Malaysian architectural identity is often the subject of discussion among local scholars in their writings and discourses. The highlighted architectural identities usually lack local authenticity and fail to represent Malaysia architecturally. Therefore, it is important to understand the ideology of the national identity of architecture and how to implement it in the local architectural scenario. This study compiles the ideologies and perspectives of scholars by conducting a literature review and direct observation of the roles, typologies, and themes associated with national architectural identity. It is then discussed further using a case study of local Malaysian architecture to see its clear relationship from the context of the national identity of architecture. An interpretive approach was employed to analyze various architectural elements linked to national identity, with a narrative method applied to convey the findings. Using local case studies enriches the understanding of Malaysia's architectural identity, further exploring the country's architectural heritage. This paper investigates national architectural identity from community and governmental viewpoints, focusing on project identity, sub-national, supra-national, and personal identities. It also explores typologies such as natural, artificial (manufactured), and forced identity, as well as themes like typology, memory (memorial), and geopolitics. The analysis reveals that the roles of architecture clarify its purpose, typologies categorise its forms, and the themes help uncover the deeper meanings embedded in architectural designs. The Malaysian architectural scenario is full of amazing ideas, and this paper helps develop some guidelines for understanding the national identity of Malaysia for reference not only for architects but also for all Malaysians.

Keywords: National identity, national architectural identity, roles, themes, typologies, Malaysian architecture

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's national identity is profoundly shaped by its geographical features. Most urban growth is centred in the western part of the Malay Peninsula, influenced by ancient maritime trade pathways and flat topography. At the same time, rugged mountains characterise the central region, and the eastern coastline features long stretches of sandy beaches (Yendra et al., 2017). Similarly, Sabah and Sarawak are known for their diverse terrain, including mountains and winding rivers that flow into the South China Sea dotted with islands. Besides the influence of natural landscapes, the nation's historical, political, and cultural developments have significantly contributed to its sense of place. Malaysia is home to diverse

ethnic groups, such as Malays, Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, and Dusuns, each contributing to the nation's rich cultural diversity. Ensuring sustained peace and harmony among these groups requires significant effort and compromise. The key challenge in building a cohesive Malaysian nation lies in integrating its varied socio-cultural communities—each with a strong sense of its unique identity—into a unified modern nation-state that embraces a collective Malaysian identity. This challenge is also reflected in Malaysia's built environment, where the quest for a distinct national architectural identity continues to evolve, with no definitive conclusion yet reached.

Local scholars often discuss the Malaysian national architectural identity crisis in their writing and discourse (Hussain, 2015; Ismail, 2018; Kosman & Nik Ibrahim, 2007; Mohamad Rasdi & Mursib, 2004; Mursib, 2008; Surat, 2012b, 2012a, 2020). They have listed out a few crises that evolved in the Malaysian national architectural identity, which are:

1. Crisis in determining the direction of the purpose of Malaysian architecture.
2. Crisis in the appearance of progressive Malaysian architecture.
3. Crisis in the cultural development of Malaysian architecture.
4. Crisis in the balance of nature with Malaysian architecture.
5. Crisis in humanitarian and community development by the Malaysian architecture.

The 1960s to the 1970s marked a significant shift in Malaysia towards establishing a national architectural identity. During this time, many developments began integrating elements symbolising a distinct national character, reflecting the country's effort to build a unified cultural and architectural presence. However, as time passed and no real implementation was forced, it returned to the 'mixed-up' architecture. There were no fixed guidelines on Malaysian national architectural identity for reference. At that time, many professional architects who had their education overseas returned to serve the country (Mohamad Rasdi & Mursib, 2004; Mursib, 2008). However, most of them were influenced by Western ideology and were carried away to produce the design by neglecting its suitability with the Malaysian context. They often glorify architecture from the outside and continue to be inspired to create such architectural value. Without realizing it, they ignored the importance of understanding regionalism in architecture, which carries important values to the national architectural identity of Malaysia.

The announcement of the Dasar Senibina Identiti Kebangsaan (DASIK) Draft in 2017 was a positive step forward (DASIK, 2017). It was an early framework to guide architects and local built environment industry players in embracing and promoting local architectural identity. However, to this day, the draft has not progressed beyond its initial stage, resulting in a lack of participation from stakeholders. Despite the passing of nearly a decade, DASIK has remained merely a "draft" when it should have already been implemented as a formal reference within the local architectural industry.

2.0 DEFINING NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

National identity is often defined as a deep connection or attachment to a particular country or nation (Canizaro, 2007; Ismail & Mohd. Rasdi, 2009b; Pipan, 2008; Vale, 2008). This connection includes recognising common traditions, cultural practices, language, and shared political ideologies within a nation (Vale, 2008). Therefore, national identity can be understood as individuals' collective sentiment toward their nation-state, cutting across various social statuses and backgrounds (Adam, 2012; Dittmer & Kim, 1993). Such a concept

emerges only within groups with mutual affiliations and a unified sense of belonging. Notably, the bonds underpinning national identity are not rooted in blood relations but are socially constructed, requiring ongoing nurturing to ensure continuity across generations (Adam, 2012; Kowert & Legro, 1996; Sokol, 2009; Vale, 2008).

The development of national identity involves a nuanced process that depends on two core aspects: the first is 'identifying with one's nation,' which refers to recognizing a community's existence and its role in shaping the state system; the second is 'commonalities,' which highlights the shared attributes among community members, such as ethnicity, cultural heritage, and shared objectives (Koening, 2006; Pipan, 2008; Vale, 2008). Furthermore, instilling a strong 'sense of belonging' or emotional attachment among community members is essential for sustaining a collective national identity (Fladmark, 2000; Rashidah, 2014).

Most discussions on national identity focus on its acceptance and appreciation within communities, emphasising the relationship between citizens and the state and exploring how patriotic sentiments can be cultivated between them (Liu & Turner, 2018). A strong appreciation of national identity enhances loyalty and unity between individuals and their country. Architecture, in particular, holds the potential to serve as a medium for reinforcing national identity. However, its significance as a symbol of national identity remains largely underrecognised by the general populace and is typically discussed only among architects and policymakers (Surat, 2016). This lack of awareness is unfortunate, given that architecture is a vital part of everyday life and can contribute to instilling a sense of national identity. By leveraging architectural design, a society can foster a deeper awareness of its cultural roots, cultivating a heightened sense of patriotism.

This study delves into the conceptual framework of national identity within architecture, focusing on its functions, underlying ideologies, and thematic elements. These aspects are the most commonly explored concepts surrounding national architectural identity.

2.1 Roles

National architectural identity can be understood through two primary levels: the first focuses on fulfilling societal needs, while the second addresses the demands of those in power (Zharani, 2019). For the community, there is a single category called 'project identity.' On the other hand, at the governmental level, architectural identity is categorised into three distinct types: 'sub-national identity architecture,' 'supra-national identity architecture,' and 'private identity architecture'(Adam, 2012; Levine, 2018; Pipan, 2008; Shear, 2018). These four classifications are based on architecture's specific role with the general public and the authorities (Vale, 1988).
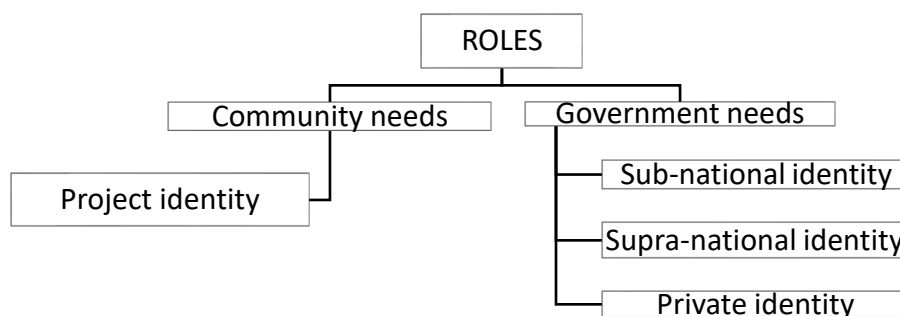

Fig. 1: The roles of architecture in national architectural identity

'Project identity' involves influential members of society using cultural, linguistic, and architectural resources to create a shared identity that can be embraced by diverse social groups, promoting acceptance and unity (Levine, 2018). In this framework, architecture symbolises inclusiveness and democratic principles, helping to bring together various segments of society (Hussain, 2015).

'Sub-national identity' showcases a nation's economic, political, and social development (Bloom, 1993; Levine, 2018)achievements. Newly independent or developing nations, particularly those in the Global South, often utilize architectural expression to communicate their national aspirations and philosophies (Vale, 2008). This approach involves designing structures sensitive to the local context and community needs.

'Supranational identity' is similar to subnational identity but with an expanded scope, aiming for recognition beyond national borders. Unlike subnational identity, which is focused internally, supranational identity seeks to project influence and status on an international level (Adam, 2012; Levine, 2018; Shear, 2018). Achieving global recognition is often a goal for governments, as it enhances the nation's prestige and aligns it with more developed countries, reflecting power and progress.

'Private identity' is characterized by individuals or powerful patrons who dictate architectural styles based on their tastes or personal agendas rather than promoting a collective sense of national pride (Canizaro, 2007; Levine, 2018; Mohamad Rasdi, 2005; Vale, 2008).

2.2. Typologies

National architectural identity can be classified into three typologies: (a) natural identity, (b) artificial (manufactured) identity, and (c) forced identity (Surat, 2012a, 2020).
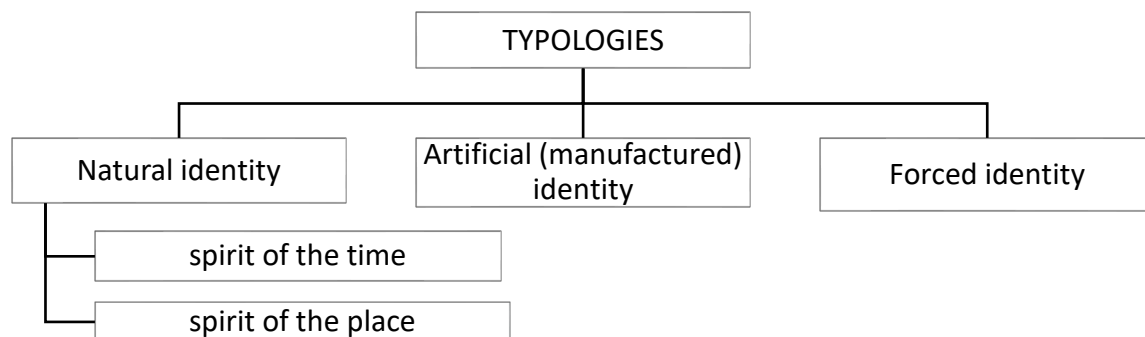

Fig. 2: The typologies of architecture in national architectural identity

Natural identity is grounded in the principles of the 'spirit of the time' and the 'spirit of the place' (Surat, 2012a, 2020). The 'spirit of the time' emphasises the importance of aligning architectural design with modern technological advancements and construction methods, ensuring its relevance while leveraging local expertise. Architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Charles Correa, and Geoffrey Bawa have consistently incorporated these principles in their work. Meanwhile, the 'spirit of the place' involves designing buildings that harmonise with their local environment, considering factors such as climate, traditions, the surrounding landscape, and the natural context, ensuring the architecture fits naturally within its site. Architects like Charles Jencks and Michael Graves have popularized this approach. In

Malaysia, Ken Yeang has been a key advocate for integrating environmental and climatic considerations into his designs. Scholars like Mohamad Tajuddin, Nangkula Utaberta, and Mastor Surat have emphasized integrating these concepts with Islamic values and a culturally human-centred perspective.

Artificial identity (or manufactured identity) arises in times of political instability and economic challenges when the need to address society's demands and aspirations leads to creating an architectural identity that strives for universal appeal and acceptance (Ismail & Mohd. Rasdi, 2009; Kosman & Nik Ibrahim, 2007; Vale, 1988). As noted by William J. Curtis, artificial identity seeks to create easily understandable and widely accepted architecture while still expressing the right values. Architectural styles such as functionalism, machine aesthetics, primitive regionalism, and revivalism are examples of this identity type (Surat, 2012a, 2020).

Forced identity is the result of architecture being created to fulfil a particular purpose, often driven by the interests of a specific group or entity. This type of identity may prioritize economic or political goals over the needs or desires of the actual users. It typically adheres to government regulations and focuses on fulfilling basic requirements. Financial considerations, political structures, and government policies often influence forced identity creation (Kosman & Nik Ibrahim, 2007; Mohamad Rasdi & Kosman, 2005). Developers and governmental authorities are the main actors in shaping this identity. Developers are primarily motivated by financial interests, while governments aim to advance national aspirations, economic progress, and political stability through iconic architectural projects. Although not inherently negative, this approach may weaken national architectural identity if it disregards deeper architectural values, potentially resulting in a crisis in the country's architectural heritage (Mastor Surat, 2012a, 2020).

2.3. Themes

In his recent literature review on national architectural identity, published in the *Journal National Identities: Critical Inquiry into Nationhood, Politics & Culture*, Samir Pandya identifies three key themes in the development of national identity in architecture: typology, remembrance (memorial), and geopolitics (Pandya, 2020).
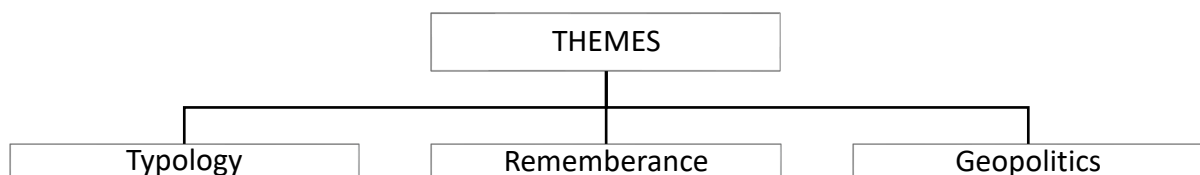

Fig. 3: The themes of architecture in national architectural identity

The typology theme in architecture goes beyond the typical analysis of form, function, and structure, particularly when applied to national identity. Here, it incorporates two essential aspects: the focus on local cultural context and the political environment, which play a pivotal role in shaping architectural design. This approach moves beyond traditional typologies, integrating them with local cultural values and political realities (Pandya, 2020). For example, Singapore's National Theatre (*Panggong Negara*) is a prime example of how architecture can reflect the nation's multiracial identity, promoting "identity as recognition rather than as suppression of difference" (Quek, 2012; Stoicheva, 2009). In addition, typologies related to

historic architecture, cultural significance, and political considerations provide vital guidance in the design process (Huang, 2012). Another significant aspect of typology in national architecture is its ability to adapt to modernity by combining traditional design elements with international and cross-national styles, resulting in an eclectic design approach that merges historical influences with contemporary architectural trends (Pandya, 2020).

Remembrance, the second theme, focuses on the role of architecture in commemorating significant historical events, figures, or movements that are integral to a nation's identity (Pandya, 2020). Buildings such as national monuments, government structures, and museums often symbolise the country's historical and socio-political milestones. These structures go beyond mere architectural form by conveying deeper national pride and unity meanings. For example, the National Monument (Tugu Negara) in Kuala Lumpur honours the sacrifices made by Malaysian soldiers during the Malayan Emergency and World War II, reflecting the nation's struggle for independence and the patriotism that binds its people (N. Ismail et al., 2017). Similarly, the Sultan Abdul Samad Building and Merdeka Square (Dataran Merdeka) stand as iconic representations of Malaysia's journey from colonisation to independence, with the square marking the moment when the country declared its sovereignty in 1957 (Mat Radzuan et al., 2020). These architectural landmarks, tied to remembrance, highlight the importance of historical narratives and post-colonial studies in shaping Malaysia's national identity, ensuring that architecture is functional and a source of cultural pride and unity. Such structures serve as tools for preserving history, fostering patriotism, and attracting local and international tourists eager to engage with these pivotal moments in Malaysia's past.

Finally, the theme of geopolitics examines the interaction between political power and geographical space, highlighting how political and strategic factors influence the development of national architecture (Huzen, 2019). Geopolitical considerations involve understanding the nation's relationships with neighboring countries and its internal political and social dynamics. Pandya (2020) argues that national architecture must account for the local and international geopolitical context to stay relevant and reflect the current political climate. A notable example in Malaysia is the Istana Negara (National Palace) in Kuala Lumpur, reflecting Malaysia's monarchy system and political structure. As the official residence of the King (Yang di-Pertuan Agong), the palace symbolises the nation's unique constitutional monarchy. It represents Malaysia's commitment to maintaining its cultural heritage and political stability (Ahamad et al., 2018). Similarly, the KLCC Towers (Petronas Twin Towers) embody Malaysia's economic rise and technological prowess, with the towers symbolising the nation's ambition to be recognised as a global economic player(Ismaeel Otuoze Audu, 2012). The connection between geopolitics and architecture in Malaysia reinforces national identity. It influences domestic loyalty and international recognition, positioning the country as a prominent force in Southeast Asia and the wider world.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate the complexities of national architectural identity in Malaysia. It addresses the ongoing scholarly discourse concerning the perceived lack of local authenticity and representativeness in the nation's architecture. The methodology synthesises scholarly perspectives through a literature review and direct observation of relevant architectural examples. The literature review facilitated the compilation of ideologies and viewpoints about the roles, typologies, and themes of national architectural identity. Subsequently, case studies of Malaysian architecture were analyzed to examine the practical application of these theoretical constructs and their relationship to the

broader context of national architectural identity. An interpretive approach was employed throughout the analysis to explore the various architectural elements that contribute to national identity, and the findings are presented in a narrative format (Moen, 2006; Mohidin & Ismail, 2018). This methodological framework enables a nuanced investigation of how architectural roles, typologies, and themes shape and define Malaysia's architectural identity.

4.0   CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS IN MALAYSIA

Table 1: An analysis of case studies focusing on the roles, typologies, and themes of national identity in Malaysian architecture

Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
ROLES (Zharani, 2019) **To meet the needs of the community:** **1. Project identity** **To meet the needs of the government's:** **1. Sub-national identity** **2. Supra-national identity** **3. Private identity**	**Project Identity** - Creating a shared identity that everyone can embrace, fostering acceptance and unity across different communities. - Utilizing architecture as a symbol of community solidarity and democratic ideals, bridging the diverse fabric of society.	 **Fig. 4**: Malaysian Parliament Building (Teh, 2018)	• The Malaysian Parliament Building exemplifies project identity (Ismail & Mohd Rasdi, 2008). Its design emphasizes a representative approach, deliberately avoiding any association with a specific ethnicity or the dominant ethnic group. Additionally, it features a modern and forward-looking style, influenced by local climate factors and regional traditions, while integrating contemporary materials and the latest technological advancements. • The Parliament building was designed with the purpose of serving as a symbol of national unity for all Malaysians (Kosman & Nik Ibrahim, 2007). Tunku Abdul Rahman commissioned Sir Ivor Shipley, who was working with the Public Works Department (JKR) at the time, to create a design that would embody the national image. The final design successfully achieved this goal, becoming a powerful national symbol for the country.
	Sub-national identity - Architecture functions as a means of representing the values and principles behind a nation's emblem. In this sense, buildings are designed to benefit the public while also reflecting the local community's context. Moreover, they	 **Fig. 5:** Melaka City Council building – 'Graha Makmur' (Sharif, 2010)	• The Melaka City Council building, known as 'Graha Makmur', serves as an example of sub-national identity architecture. Its design incorporates aspects of Malay architectural revival, most notably reflected in the style of its roof (Mohd Nor, 2018; Mursib, 2008). • The primary function of Graha Makmur is to serve as the local city council for Melaka. As a central landmark for the community, the

Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
	symbolize the nation's achievements in economic, political, and social progress.		building stands as a testament to the region's Malay architectural heritage, recalling Malacca's historical prominence as an internationally renowned trading hub. Constructed in the modern era, Graha Makmur reflects the success of the Melaka government in advancing the state economically, socially, and politically.
	Supra-national identity - Closely aligns with sub-national identity. - Architecture acts as a powerful symbol at both national and international levels, with global recognition enhancing the nation's standing and elevating its dignity on the world stage.	 **Fig. 6:** Petronas Twin Tour which is popularly known as KLCC (Robins, 2019)	• The Petronas Twin Towers, commonly known as KLCC (Kuala Lumpur City Centre), were constructed to attract global attention and position Malaysia as a developed region. In addition to serving as a shopping mall, performance venue, and office space during the day, the towers also stand as a symbol of the country's modernity and progress (Ismaeel Otouze Audu, 2012). • KLCC was a key component of Vision 2020, an ambitious plan introduced by former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, aiming to transform Malaysia from a developing nation into a fully developed one. The construction industry was chosen as a focal point to showcase Malaysia's economic potential, positioning it to rival established global powers. More than just a national icon and a symbol of pride, KLCC represents a modern regional identity. It serves as a prime example of how cultural symbols can thrive in a globalized world, influencing not only local but also global urban landscapes. Through the development of KLCC, Malaysia was able to craft a contemporary regional identity that both embraced globalization and reflected its unique cultural values.
	Private identity - The design of the architecture is influenced by a person or a key figure within		• Perdana Putra in Putrajaya reflects this identity, as the overall development of the area was primarily influenced by the vision of the nation's leadership during

Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
	the community, reflecting their own tastes and goals.	**Fig. 7:** Perdana Putra in Putrajaya (Rudolphson, 2018)	that period (A. S. Ismail & Rasdi, 2010). • Putrajaya is one of several large-scale projects designed to draw foreign investment and showcase Malaysia as a stable, prosperous, progressive, and technologically advanced Muslim nation. It aims to highlight the country's strong cultural and religious traditions while positioning Malaysia on the global stage (Moser, 2010). These ambitious initiatives, led by former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, have been successfully realized and continue to stand as a testament to his vision.
TYPOLOGIES **(Mastor Surat, 2020)** **1. Natural identity** **2. Artificial (manufactured) identity** **3. Force identity**	**Natural identity** - Influenced by the 'spirit of the time' and the 'spirit of the place' - 'Spirit of the time': The architecture developed aligns with contemporary technological progress, ensuring it remains forward-thinking and not constrained by outdated methods. - 'Spirit of the place': New designs must be tailored to the specific characteristics of the location, blending seamlessly with its environment while taking into account factors like climate, context, and cultural traditions.	**Fig. 8:** Malay Traditional House (Ghazali, 2020)	• The Malay Traditional House exemplifies Natural Identity, with its architecture carefully shaped by the local environment, climate, and topography. This design not only shows how buildings can blend with their surroundings but also promotes sustainable architectural practices(M Surat et al., 2010). • The design of the Malay traditional house was shaped by cultural, religious, and social principles, as well as the region's climate(Hosseini et al., 2012; Utaberta et al., 2015). The house was oriented towards the Qiblah (the direction of Mecca), and the interior spaces were arranged to maintain separation between men and women. Elevated on pillars, the house was built above the ground to protect against dampness, flooding, and wild animal threats. The raised structure also allowed for the area underneath to be utilized for farming and growing crops, contributing to its sustainability.
	Artificial (manufactured) identity - An identity developed during a time of political turbulence and	**Fig. 9:** Putra World	• An example of artificial identity can be observed in the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur (Mastor Surat, 2020). The design incorporates a large-scale interpretation of the roof from the Malay Traditional House, which

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Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
	economic challenges. - Create architecture that is universally relatable, simple to grasp, and effectively communicates the intended message. - Combining functionalism, regionalist roots, and architectural revivalism in design concepts.	Trade Centre (PWTC) (Govindarajoo, 2020)	has been adapted and placed on the structure. However, the sustainable architectural features present in the original Malay Traditional House, such as climate-responsive design elements, are not reflected in this modern adaptation. The roof was merely an oversized version of the traditional Malay house roof, primarily for aesthetic purposes. It symbolized the Malay community, as the building serves as the headquarters for UMNO, the largest Malay political party in the country.
	Forced identity - An identity established with the primary goal of fulfilling a specific need. - It may seem to benefit one group over others, though this doesn't automatically mean there are negative implications or bad intentions. - Often, the preferences and needs of the people using the space are disregarded, with the focus being strictly on the orders of those in charge. - The factors driving the formation of these identities often include economic considerations, political systems, and the strategies of those in power.	 **Fig. 10:** Kelantan State Education Department building (JPN Kelantan - State Education Department of Kelantan, 2014)	• The Kelantan State Education Department is one of the examples of forced identity (Surat, 2020). The façade which was incorporated with domes that have become the main image of the building did not able to speak on the relationship with the local context. As much as its purpose is to support the local educational system, its translation into the architecture of the building is totally out of context. From the looks itself, the building is more like a castle which is very dominant and powerful. Even though this might become a strong landmark to the locals, the language portrayed by the building is still like it is being forced as there is no assimilation between the context and the purpose of the building.
THEMES **(Pandya, 2020)** **1. Typology** **2. Remembrance**	**Typology** - This is linked to the emphasis on the relationship between local cultural elements and the political context.	 **Fig. 11:** Sarawak	• The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly (Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak) building in Kuching exemplifies the fusion of local cultural elements and political significance in its architectural design (Zaini et al.,

Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
(memorial) **3. Geopolitics**		State Legislative Assembly Building (Aranas, 2017)	2018). The structure features a nine-pointed star floor plan, symbolizing the unity of Sarawak's nine divisions, and incorporates a traditional *'Payung'* (umbrella) roof, which draws inspiration from indigenous Sarawakian symbols. The design reflects a blend of modern materials such as glass and steel with traditional motifs, representing both Sarawak's heritage and its aspirations for a contemporary future. • In addition to its symbolic design, the building's central atrium with clear glass walls allows natural light to flood the space, symbolizing transparency in governance (Aki Media, 2025). These architectural elements not only highlight the cultural identity of Sarawak but also emphasize the building's role as a significant political landmark. The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly building serves as a visual representation of the state's unity, governance, and cultural pride.
	Remembrance (memorial) - The focus is on identifying the individuals or events that should be commemorated. - This often involves the design of palaces, national theatres, museums, parliaments, and government buildings, where the architectural process is shaped by historical context or socio-political influences that reflect the country's national identity. - The design of such structures also conveys a sense of patriotism, either subtly or explicitly, through the architectural form and	 **Fig. 12:** Istana Budaya (Istana Budaya, 2021a)	• The architectural design of Istana Budaya embodies the theme of remembrance, drawing inspiration from Malay cultural traditions (Istana Budaya, 2021b). The structure blends the spatial configurations of the Malay Traditional House and Royal Palace, alongside symbolic motifs like the 'sireh' leaves, which hold significance in Malay customs, especially during the proposal and wedding ceremonies. The interior layout of the building reflects influences from these traditional spaces, while the roof design takes cues from the arrangement of 'sireh' leaves in a 'Sireh Junjung,' a customary Malay offering.

Elements	Types	Local case studies	Analyses & discussions
	symbolism.		
	Geopolitics - Geopolitics illustrates the connection between political authority and geographical space. It typically includes interactions between regions and nations at both the domestic and international levels. This involves identifying guiding principles that shape a country's growth and development. A comprehensive understanding of geopolitics can provide valuable insights into a nation's strategic planning for development and defense.	 **Fig. 13:** National Mosque, Kuala Lumpur (National Mosque, Kuala Lumpur, 2021) **Fig. 14:** Putra Mosque, Putrajaya (Erin, 2019)	• The influence of geopolitics on architectural design can be observed in several state mosques in Malaysia, such as the National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur and the Putra Mosque in Putrajaya (A. S. Ismail & Mohd Rasdi, 2010). The National Mosque, built during the era of Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957-1970), was designed to combine elements of national identity, traditional Malay house architecture, and Islamic design principles.This design reflected Tunku's vision of Islam as a unifying force among the people. A key feature of the mosque is its unique roof, redesigned to resemble the traditional parasol, a symbol of Malay royalty, making it a significant architectural element that represents national pride. • The Putra Mosque, constructed under Tun Mahathir Mohamad's tenure (1981-2003), reflects the era's growing influence of Islam in Malaysia. The mosque's design symbolizes the modernization and expansion of Islamic practice during Tun Mahathir's leadership, aligning with his broader vision of national development and the role of Islam in contemporary Malaysia. • Consequently, his vision for Islam not only redefined the country's social framework and reorganized the political system but also solidified the link between UMNO, Islam, and the majority ethnic group. His political agenda aimed to position Malaysia as the heart of Islamic civilization, highlighting progress in various developmental sectors while maintaining a balance between religious and worldly concerns. Additionally, he sought to portray Malay Muslim society, under UMNO's leadership, as a progressive and competitive community capable of standing alongside other ethnic groups.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The examination of selected Malaysian architectural case studies provides valuable insights for shaping future architectural practices and policymaking. These insights are categorized based on the roles, typologies, and themes of national architectural identity, and are translated into the following key recommendations:

a) Clarifying the Roles of National Architectural Identity
Designers should begin by clearly understanding the purpose behind each architectural project, whether it serves a national, sub-national, supra-national, or private role. This understanding informs the selection of appropriate design elements and determinants, allowing for a more focused conceptual approach. When the architectural intent is aligned with the identity it represents, the outcome is more meaningful and contextually relevant.

b) Applying Typological Awareness in Design Strategy
Recognizing the typologies of national identity—natural, artificial (manufactured), and forced—provides designers with a framework for categorizing and strategizing their design approach. For instance, the Malay Traditional House exemplifies a "natural identity" rooted in cultural and environmental context. Understanding the typological origins help architects plan not only the visual language (such as form and façade) but also the incorporation of sustainable design principles that align with the identity's essence.

c) Interpreting Themes to Enrich Design Narratives
Themes of national architectural identity—such as typology, remembrance, and geopolitics—often carry abstract or symbolic meanings tied to culture, history, and political ideology. These themes should be carefully analyzed and interpreted, as they enrich the architectural narrative and invite deeper engagement. A critical and reflective design process that draws from these themes can produce architecture that resonates emotionally and intellectually with its users.

d) Avoiding the Pitfalls of Superficial Representation
Case studies like the Kelantan State Education Department building highlight the risks of applying identity superficially or inappropriately. Forced identities that are disconnected from cultural or functional contexts tend to lack authenticity and user resonance. Designers must therefore avoid tokenistic approaches and instead prioritize authenticity, relevance, and contextual fit in representing identity.

e) Embracing Geopolitical and Cultural Dynamics
Architecture, as seen in projects like the Putra Mosque, can serve as a statement of national and geopolitical positioning. Understanding how cultural diplomacy and political narratives influence design can guide architects in aligning their work with national aspirations. This geopolitical awareness enables architecture to act not only as a functional space but also as a strategic cultural and political instrument.

By incorporating these recommendations, future architectural endeavors in Malaysia can better address community needs, respect cultural narratives, and contribute to the construction of a progressive and inclusive national architectural identity.

6.0   CONCLUSION

This study has systematically examined the key elements that define Malaysia's national architectural identity, specifically focusing on its roles, typologies, and themes. Through a synthesis of literature review and case study analysis, the research demonstrates that these elements are instrumental in shaping the evolution of architecture within Malaysia. The findings underscore that the roles of architecture, encompassing project, sub-national, supra-national, and private identities, are fundamentally driven by the objectives and intentions behind architectural projects, whether to serve community needs or governmental ambitions. These roles provide a conceptual framework that guides the incorporation of appropriate elements and determinants into architectural design to effectively convey national architectural identity.Furthermore, the typological analysis, which includes natural, artificial (manufactured), and forced identities, elucidates the origins and characteristics of different architectural forms. This classification aids architects and related professionals in the design and construction processes, ensuring a clearer understanding of how architectural typologies contribute to Malaysia's national architectural identity. Finally, the study reveals that the themes of national architectural identity—typology, remembrance, and geopolitics— are intrinsically linked to the underlying narratives and contexts that inform architectural design. These themes, encompassing cultural, historical, political, and geographical considerations, necessitate rigorous analysis and interpretation to produce architecture that effectively articulates a meaningful national architectural identity. In conclusion, while the conceptual understanding of national architectural identity is crucial, its successful realization requires sustained effort and investment. Overcoming the challenges posed by the economic imperatives of the architectural industry necessitates a collective commitment from architects, developers, and the broader Malaysian society to prioritize and cultivate a distinct and authentic national architectural identity.

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