



Exploring the Architectural Excellence: Design Philosophy of Architect Razin Mahmood

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ABSTRACT

Architectural philosophy can be defined as a set of ideas, theories or concepts that governed the work of architecture with architects incessantly seek to create new concepts or thoughts in defining architecture. It is completely debatable to postulate that architectural excellence has indebted itself to architectural philosophy, but evidently, many eminent architects across the history and geography upheld philosophy as their main design apparatus. Contrastingly, there are problems recognized as in the bracket of architecture and philosophy where architects in Malaysia are treated as patrons' and decision makers' architectural 'prostitute'. On the other hand, there is a lack of publications and documentation done that encompasses Malaysia architectural scene. The main concern of this research is to review how local architects develop their philosophy since there are really no studies made by past scholars that systematically scrutinize, compile and document in depth the philosophy of Malaysian contemporary architects and the mechanism involved in developing architectural philosophy. With this in mind, Architect Razin Mahmood, an award-winning Johor Bahru-based architect has been selected as main case study, with interview and documentation as main research tactics. By extrapolating the variables found in eminent architect's philosophical development as a theoretical starting point, local architect is interviewed accordingly. Subsequently, the data gained is analyzed and reviewed as a model of architect philosophical development. At the end of this paper, we learned that architect develops philosophies progressively, with a typified matrix of personality and is inspired by their surroundings.

1. Introduction

Over the last century, the world has seen numerous architectural ideologies, theories and manifestoes being propagated by the modern movement in the search of an absolute architectural epitome, which turned out to be a paradox by it, and in succession sparked an eternal debate and surges of polemics and counteract ideologies. The Modern movement's central fixation towards rationalism and physical aesthetics had no room for humanistic approach within their frame of reference. Malaysia, being a third world and a post-second world war country has also been slightly affected by those movements and invasive architecture that have been descended from respective nation's colonizer, pre-dating independence, Endut (1993) suggested. Malaysia in the last half century have experienced and undergone significant amount of changes, as far as built environment and the search of national architectural identities are still ongoing. Buildings with multi-faceted images are erected almost every day, in the wake of the so-called 'Wawasan 2020', a dictum posited and vowed an optimistic imagery of a 'futuristic' developed nation, for a better living environment.

Globally since the late 70's and 80's, due to the growth of Post-Modernism, there has been a dynamic shift of designers towards symbolic aesthetics and social concerns (Costing, 2007; Lawson, 2005). This has subsequently led to new interests in paradigm of

designing with theories, a new way of response to the built environment. Peter Eisenman in late twentieth century has earned so much respect with formulating new theories in architecture – so much as his fellow architect Phillip Johnson (2012) said, "Peter Eisenman is an architect who needs theories just like Mies Van Der Rohe needed technology". Eisenman has also been persistently likened to that of Le Corbusier, in formulating avant-garde theories. Eisenman, with his 'Cardboard Architecture' of 1972 and his works, shows that theory can keep architecture honest as well as inventive – an antithesis to the idea of the modernists who succumbs to the comfort of the industry (Ansari, 2013; Jencks & Kropf, 2006). Elsewhere, Frank Gehry in the 90's has shook the world with his architectural-philosophical sensation deemed as 'The Bilbao Effect' (Frampton, 1985; Rauterberg, 2012), in relating to his Bilbao Guggenheim Museum widely acclaimed architectural icon that immediately elevated the economical, social and infrastructural quality of Bilbao city in dramatic contrast. Of course, it is totally nothing novel, recalling the 1977 Georges Pompidou Center in France by then the young Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers which exemplified similar radical approaches; as well as some notable buildings by the modernists not to say the least. But then, it was the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum that became the savior of architects as opined by Rauterberg (2012), reifying the status quo of that 1920's modernist's ideology of revolution – architecture that can save the world. From both game-changing occasions, a new design trait has been established – that Jencks & Kropf (2006) believed more academic

architects are produced than ever and more theory is manifested in architecture. The Post-Modern era offered designers with emancipation of thoughts and eclecticism as over layering of unrelated design paradigm were deemed permissible. With this kind of ideology, architects discovered a reinvigorated self-confidence and radical positions within the realm of architectonic. According to Rauterberg (2012) from then, numerous cities in collaboration with architects across the world attempted to produce the same effect, and demonstrated distinctive, idiosyncratic and social-centered approach in building thinking. Rauterberg (2012) again insisted that this, in return led the media to reminisce the portmanteau term 'starchitect', a special label for architect who is regarded as an acclaimed celebrity – which arises in 1980's.

The surge of new unorthodox architects across the globe since late modern became unrelenting, with the likes of Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid and Daniel Libeskind to name a few, whose ideas are dressed in the fashionable philosophies of the late twentieth century, with a bit of post-structuralism and *deconstructivism* here and there. Breitschmid (2010) and Rauterberg (2012) concurred that those eminent architects that when they build, they always build something within their philosophical apparatus. Rauterberg (2012) added that what equivalent among those architects is that they are all motivated by pleasure in risk, a delight in one-offs and otherness, even contradiction. It is the firm belief that kept them staying at their own ground, with a bit of optimism – that's a crucial capabilities if one's to belong to the architectural elite. Rauterberg (2012) posited that they just hope that as many people as possible will allow themselves to be captivated by the three dimensional experience it can produce, atmosphere, or even the aesthetics. They just have that urge to believe that their architecture can change the world – at least socially. Having said that, the idea of discourse here is not centric on the sought-after label 'starchitect' nor the architectural styles associated with architects, but more on the paradigm of architects venturing with their philosophies and theories. Jencks & Kropf (2006) believed that architecture is now an engine of change, a promise of good things to come – and architect is the mastermind through their respective philosophies.

1.1 Concept of Philosophy

According to Merriam-Webster.com dictionary, philosophy can be defined as a set of ideas about how to do something or how to live. Oxforddictionaries.com defined philosophy as a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behavior. Deleuze et al. (1994) suggested philosophy as the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts. Deleuze et al. (1994) added that the nature of philosophy is creating a new concept. Philosophy is transcendental. It is beyond objects, and dwell on our thoughts. Philosophy is a reflection of how people understand the world, together with their beliefs, in addressing world problems. Without a true philosophy, there is no understanding of anything (Wright, 1957). Philosophy exists within the faculty of mind, and it is imperative to grasp the true meaning of any subject. Midgley (1996) suggested that philosophy is like a plumbing network inside the wall of a building. It is very intricate, complex networks of structures that require specific skills to handle. Midgley (1996) added that it is something that nobody notices until it goes wrong. Philosophy is constantly being updated, and repaired, similar to plumbing. In a more generic thinking, philosophy is essential in order to solve human problems, and is ever progressive.

1.2 Architectural Philosophy

Architectural Philosophy is a branch of philosophy of art, dealing with aesthetic value of architecture its semantics and relations with the development of culture (Harries, 1987). By expanding the definition of philosophy by previous scholars, architectural philosophy can be defined as a set of ideas, theories or concepts that governed the work of architecture. Similarly, architectural philosophy is progressive, as architects always seek to create new concepts or thoughts. Philosophy has long been associated with architecture since the epoch of Greek civilization with the likes of Plato and Pythagoras as main proponents. Harries (1987) suggested that philosophy of architecture emanates mainly form philosophy of art due to the nature of critics in art. In that sense, philosophy of architecture in the early stages mainly dealt with the notion of art, and aesthetics as main subject. Philosophy began to be included into books and architectural history since the volte face of Post-Modernism which saw Modern architectural paradigm that advocate objectivity and singularity of aesthetics being eschewed in favor of radical theories and thoughts (Harries K. & K., 1987). Architecture and philosophy at its rudimentary state are mutually exclusive but it defining each other. Not all architects are philosopher and not all philosophers are architects (Figure 1).

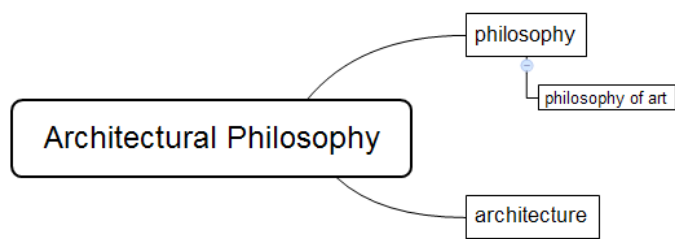


Figure 1: Architectural Philosophy, Philosophy and Architecture as syntax (source: author)

Breitschmid (2010) posited that architects are theoreticians who build. Rasdi (2010) stated that architect without philosophy and theory is merely a builder of forms. Essentially, almost everyone associated with architecture has at least attempted to define what architecture is (Mahmoodi, 2001). Mahmoodi (2001) added that most architects and professionals in architectural field have defined architecture at different stages of their career. Eisenman with his 'cardboard architecture' theory posits that architecture only exists in paper whilst building is the real object proceeding from 'architecture' (Jencks & Kropf, 2006). De Graaf (2012) suggested architecture as a form of thinking that goes beyond building and related to intent. Interestingly, Herzog de Meuron in their interview with Rauterberg (2012) similarly defines architecture as a form of thought, echoing that of Renier de Graaf. Ching (1996) in his book quoting different architects stating, John Ruskin defines architecture as an art for all to learn because all are concerned with it. Le Corbusier, whereas defines architecture as the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light. Taking into account each definition imposed, architecture is then is relative to the one who define it. This research however is more interested on the definition of architecture imposed by Renier de Graaf and Herzog de Meuron, architecture as a form of thought. Architecture ironically, is philosophical in its nature.

In the contemporary world, architects are known to engage directly or indirectly with philosopher in order to develop their thoughts in architectural work. One of the most popular names associated with this paradigm is Peter Eisenman’s philosophical partnership with French philosopher, Jacques Derrida in formulating the idea of ‘*Deconstructivism*’ architecture. This includes the case of Christian Norberg-Schulz’s indirect dialogue with the work of famous philosopher, Martin Heidegger. ‘Phenomenologists’ architects also are known to have interest in the work of Heidegger’s ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ such as Peter Zumthor, Steven Holl and Juhani Pallasmaa. Architects cooperation with philosophers further reinforces that architecture and philosophy is interconnected and complimentary in its nature.

1.3 Interrelationship between Architectural Philosophy, Manifesto and Theory

In architectural realm, the words such as philosophy, manifesto, and theory are all prevalent whether in discussion, writings, or communication. But what those words really signify? Is there any relationship in between them? In this section, the idea is to address and entangle the inextricable connections between those terms. Groat & Wang (2013) describes design philosophy as a form of design-polemical theory. Groat & Wang (2013) further postulates that design-polemical theory fits their book definition of an abstractive-speculative thought. There are no rights and wrong in design philosophy due to its “polemical” nature, where architects posited adage, tenets, dictums and positions on a speculative manner. Lang (1987) and The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy described contemporary philosophy (designers) are guided by deontological positions which falls under the domain of moral theories, or “ought-to-do” disposition. Architects, as suggested by Johnson (1994), aimed at persuading others to particular beliefs and values. Architectural philosophy therefore, is a form of theory in its constituents and architects put an effort to disseminate their philosophy and theory in an attempt to extend their influence and tenets. This further justifies the notion that architectural philosophy is “deontological” or something architects are “ought-to-do”, in the sense that in it is a moral obligation for architects to develop philosophy to a stage that they don’t really emphasize on the consequence but more on the action as posited by Flew (1979). This explains why such philosophy or in architectural terms – manifesto like modernism for instance, is still debated by various practitioners and scholars due to its strict principles of rationalism and aestheticism that led to dehumanizing architectural solution from the scale of urban design to domestic spaces. But what is philosophy to manifesto? von Bertalanffy (1968) described theory as a set of interrelated concepts and principles applying to all systems. Theory whereby is a congealed manifesto (Jencks & Kropf, 2006). Manifesto in this context refers to the poetical manuscripts or writings

propagated by architects to disseminate their individual philosophy – or collectively, as a movement. To make it applicable to architecture domain, theory is then also a congealed philosophy. Within this concept, it can be divulged that philosophy is the governing pool of abstractive thoughts, and is reified through multiple methods of manifesto writing, thoughts, concepts, and et cetera as can be seen in figure 2. This however is not to delimit by positing that the relationship is linear in sequence. It is as interchangeable as it seems as not all practitioners had produced manifesto. In fact, their theory of design may emanate directly from their philosophical outlet. In nature, the relationship between philosophy, manifesto and theory towards architectural object is “as linear as interchangeable” but the core itself is philosophy.

Mahmoodi (2001) posits that it is imperative to understand philosophy in order to develop architectural theories. Theory, criticism and philosophy are terms that directly related to one another and sometimes interchangeable. Rasdi (2010) stated that one cannot speak about theory without engaging in a critical discourse. Theory is a crystallization of philosophy in a broader meaning.

1.4 Philosophical Progressiveness

As suggested by Deleuze et al. (1994), the nature of philosophy is creating a new concept. Hence, it can be put forth such statement that architecture philosophy is ever progressive, as architects strives to create new concept. Within this school of thought, it is imperative to scrutinize numerous philosophies that have been propagated across the history and philosophy as a basis of idea on philosophical progressiveness. Groat & Wang (2013) believed philosophy of an architect per se influenced larger communities of practitioners and is important in what constitutes architectural history, giving examples of Norman Foster and Frank Lloyd Wright cases. Rasdi (2010) proposed that it is important to learn about philosophy across the history as there is no shortcut to real knowledge. Curtis (1996) posited that architects are ought to refer to previous architectural theory and language in the crystallization of new language. Evidence can be seen as many building design nowadays are adaptations or reconstruction of previous architectural philosophies or theories. For an instance, Frampton (1985) suggested that *productivism*, or in other lexicon, High-Tech architectural precepts was derived from numerous earlier philosophies of Bürolandschaft ideals of a flexible planning, Cedric Price’s rhetorical concept of a well-serviced anonymity, and Louis I. Kahn’s renowned theory of ‘served and servant’ spaces manifested in his Richards Medical Research Laboratories design. The latter, was prevalently re-manifested by the proponents of High-Tech philosophy, Richard Rogers in almost every of his design. This validate the idea of Johnson (1994) successfully, as architects draw precedents from previous

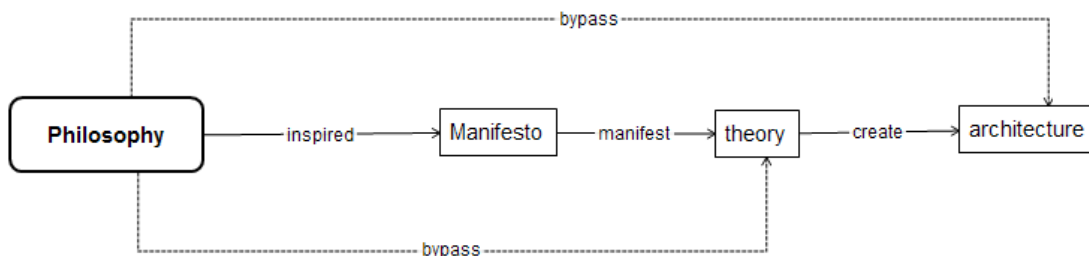


Figure 2: Relationship between Architectural Philosophy, Manifesto and Theory

architects philosophies. This implicitly, results in relativity between architectural philosophy and history – a progressive yet mutually distinctive entity. Philosophy and theory are developed through time as architects are constantly striving for new ideas, concepts and belief. Ingels (2009) illustrated in his own book entitled ‘Yes Is More’, of how he develop his philosophy from previous architects. In a more simplified manner, ‘Less is more’, a philosophy coined by Modernist devotee, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was reinterpreted and readapted by various architects across the epoch. His ideals pivoted around the concept of less ornaments, stripped-down bare design which he deemed as more valuable, honest and semantic.

Less is more – Less is a bore – I’m a whore – Yes is more

Robert Venturi, morphed it into ‘Less is a bore’ as he is against the ideology of simplicity, which is subsequently re-altered by Philip Johnson, with his ‘I’m a whore’ cynical tenet, an analogy of being an architect as a prostitute as he is paid exorbitantly for high rise building. In the 21st century, young Danish architect Bjarke Ingels reinterpreted the alliterative, progressive theory into his own ‘Yes is more’ to illustrate his idea of architectural optimism – everything is possible with the right approach. The same case can be observed – the evolution of the alliterative adage by famous mentor of that Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan. He addressed such theory that form should follow function of the building, a utilitarian approach that strives purely on functionalism and objectivity.

Form follows function – Form and function are one – Form follows anything

Frank Lloyd Wright in his time, reinterpreted the famous dictum to ‘Form and function are one’, asserting that nor form or function should be taken priority in the process of designing building – both are mutually inclusive and complimentary. In the contemporary era, Zumthor (2010) established his design-polemical theory that ‘Form follows anything’ – architectural form should not be delimited thus should emanate from any kind of inspiration – music, film, economy, et cetera. From all the aforementioned allegory, it is ostentatious that architecture philosophy and architectural history is interrelated with each other as philosophy is ever-progressive and is constantly rethink.

1.5 Philosophical Jumping Traditions

Jencks & Kropf (2006) believed in the theory of philosophical jump, as revealed in the taxonomy of architecture philosophy across the history and geography. This ‘jumping between traditions’ as both of them suggested, sometime after 1980, where the likes of Leon Krier, the advocate of Post-modern turned to Traditional philosophy, Kenneth Frampton, who they stated as the main antagonist of Post-Modernism, produced his highly influential essay embracing it in his ‘Critical Regionalism’ in 1983, before turning back to Late Modernism with his writings on tectonics in 1989. Jencks & Kropf (2006) also draw other examples from the 70’s to the 80’s where Robert Stern moved from Post-Modernism to Traditional, Christopher Alexander from Late to Post-Modernism, and so it goes. There are interesting reasons on why this phenomenon occurred which may indicate something about the period. In his interview with Herzoq de Meuron, Rauterberg (2012) highlighted the jumping tradition of the aforementioned architect’s philosophy from puritanical minimalism to a more fluid and sensual design.

Jencks & Kropf (2006) suggested that these phenomena are due to three factors. The first one is the capability of intelligence and creativity of the architect himself – drawing allegory of Michelangelo and how he went

through four periods from Early to High Renaissance and then from Mannerism to Baroque. This postulates that if an architect has an expansive intellectual and creative capability, he may jump between traditions. Secondly, as exemplified by Philip Johnson, may jump back and forth from Post-Modernism to New Formalism and so on just because he and his audience get bored. This factors can be associated with psychological factors, as a human can easily get bored doing the same thing over and over again. Third and most vital, a change connotes a paradigm shift in culture and development of an architect. This is due to psychological development factor. Architects may have different background and psychological attributes that may suggest their changing of behaviors. However, Jencks & Kropf (2006) concurs that most architect stayed loyal to one tradition. Jencks & Kropf (2006) also added that architects such as Frank Gehry and Eric Moss detached themselves from any tradition in order to invent sui generis label or the idea of being unique or distinctive.

2 Problems in Architecture and Philosophy in the Context of Malaysia

In a third-world country as Malaysia, architectural philosophy can be considered as relatively ‘new’ and oblivious as there is not much of an evident of a building design nor architect that design *auteristically* with philosophy other than the late modern architects of Ken Yeang and Hijjas Kasturi. There are problems identified concerning architectural philosophy that hinder the paradigm of ‘working with theories’ in architecture as suggested by Breitschmid (2010) to be executed fully.

2.1 Problems in the Lack of Architect’s Publication

Rasdi (2010) insisted that there is a lack of emphasize made on documentation, publication and appraisal of local architectural practice. The repercussions of this is that there will be no progressions made for Malaysia architectural scenario as no efforts are imposed in order to draw on previous experiences, adapt the information or extend the current knowledge (Rasdi, 2010). Documentation of architects works are nothing new in foreign countries. Books, journals, articles and magazines are all accessible virtually and physically, facilitating architectural students around the world to learn, thus subsequently emulate big names in architecture. From architects during medieval, to the modernist theory of Le Corbusier, radical theories of Peter Eisenman up till the avant-garde contemporaneity of Bjarke Ingels. In the context of Malaysia, only few architects are known to publish their works namely Hijjas Kasturi and Ken Yeang. “Dr. Ken Yeang have more time to write and publish his thoughts than other architects” (Rasdi, 2010). Malaysia architectural scene has currently in the state of oblivion and obscurity as no one really knows what happens to the architectural realm, or at least what are the efforts made by local architects in building the images of the nation. This postulates that Malaysia architectural scene will be in a state of stagnant technologically, practically as well as theoretically had no measures being taken.

2.2 Declination in Nation’s Architectural Quality

Breitschmid (2010) posited that architects are theoreticians who build. Rasdi (2010) stated that architect without philosophy and theory is merely a builder of forms. De Graaf (2012) suggested architecture is a form of thinking. By taking into accounts arguments posited by Breitschmid (2010), De Graaf (2012) and Rasdi (2010), it can be

induced that architecture in the contemporary paradigm is a form of thoughts, transcending the fundamentals of a building. Contrastingly in the recent decade, the Malaysian architectural industry has dramatically in the state of declining in producing household name architects, with sound philosophical design endeavor, let alone the axiomatic term 'starchitect'. Rasdi (2010) has identified that crisis in Malaysian architecture are deemed insidious as not many architects and professionals are well aware of it. Surat et al., (2010) asserted that buildings are consistently delivered with quantity in mind, and quality aside. Mahmoodi (2001), Rasdi (2010) and Surat et al. (2010) all agreed that many young new generation architects continuously succumb to being servant of patrons and decision makers, making design philosophies a secondary objectives. Mahmoodi (2001) posited that architects during the Renaissance era are proficient in writings and a very educated man as an architect should be longed for education. Breitschmid (2010) posited that most of successful architects happen to be an educated man. Malaysian architect, Hajecdar, (2013) suggested that current local architectural practices has conceded its competition to foreign architects in local architectural industries, as the trend of hiring foreign architects or the 'Gucci' syndrome, term coined by his friend Ar. Dr. Ken Yeang becoming excruciatingly pervasive within the nation. The absence of theoretical and philosophical knowledge from Malaysian architects' repertoire makes them more susceptible to the absurd demands of the patrons and decision makers. These excruciating problems have led to convoluted, cacophony of architectural images – that ranges from middle-east, west and classical style without much insight of architectural transcendental aspects and values (Rasdi, 2005; Surat et al., 2010).

3 Methodology

A profound literature review of 8 architects around the world involving the likes of Gunter Behnisch, Peter Eisenman, Norman Foster, Cecil Balmond, Peter Zumthor, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid and Bjarke Ingels has been done as a theoretical point of departure of the research. It consist a range of architects' biography as in biological background, career background, philosophy, epiphanies, inspiration, design attributes, aspiration and so forth that is deemed instrumental in shaping their philosophy. A model of foreign architect's philosophical development model is then outlined as seen in figure 3 to illuminate the probable variables that may affect the philosophical development. This model is then used as framework to construct research questions.

Groat & Wang (2013) highlighted the importance of strategy in doing research, before imposing research tactics. Groat & Wang (2013) added that strategy refers to the overall research plan or structure whilst tactics is the deployment of specific techniques such as data collection devices, response formats as well as analytical procedures and et cetera. Yin (2009) suggested that case study method is suitable when the subject is focusing on contemporary phenomenon within real-life context. Groat & Wang (2013) redefined the concept of case study by changing the word contemporary to setting that could accommodate the inclusion of history and contemporary simultaneously. This research is mainly conducted focusing on four major phases of qualitative method which are: literature review, investigation on theoretical foundations, profound analysis in case studies and evaluating the findings. Preliminary literature review is imperative phases to generate presuppose theory and assumption. It also helps in determining the scope and research question for this research. Since the research foci is on interrogating Malaysian architect philosophy, case study research strategy is imposed as main research component to gain information a chosen contemporary architects within Malaysia. Architect considered to be at their 'peak'

with some reputation is interviewed to gain theoretical data on how they develop their philosophies. Supporting documents from articles, magazines or useful materials will also be part of multiple tactics used in order to support findings.

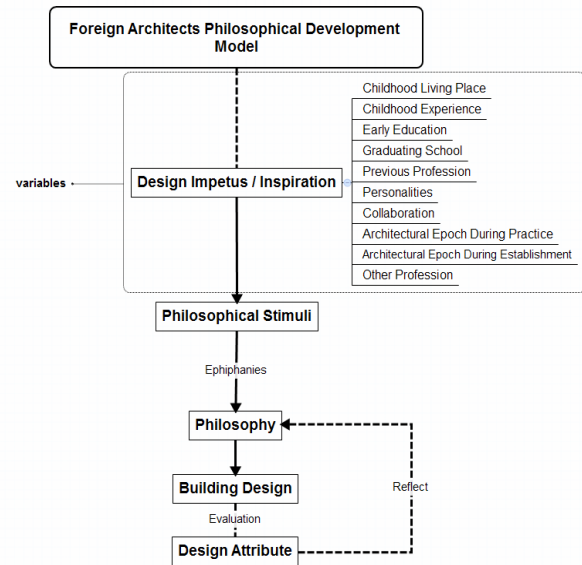


Figure 3: Foreign Architects Philosophical Development Model

3.1 Research Tactics

3.1.1. Interview

Interactive interview in the form of retrospective recall (open-ended) will be implemented as the main tactics of research in order to elicit important data from the respondent (architect). Questions ask will be generally outlined from the research scope, which covers; the philosophy of each respective architects; the period of time of their philosophical epiphany, stimulation and inspiration of their philosophical pursuit, the method used in persisting their philosophy.

3.1.2 Documentation

Documentation essentially includes written reports on events, administrative documents, internal records, formal studies, newspaper clippings (Yin, 2009). In order to support concealed data that is unable to be gained from interview such as instance biological background, data will be derived from substantial document. Data can be found through magazines, websites, books, journals, et cetera.

4 Case Study: Ar. Razin Mahmood

Md Razin bin Mahmood (Figure 4), the principles of Razin Architects based in Johor Bahru has been selected as a case study subject on a basis of his reputation and consistent architectural language which is viewed as 'philosophical'. Based from preliminary literature review, Razin's philosophy can be described as 'critical regionalism with a slight hint of phenomenology and primitive sustainability'.

4.1 Background

Razin is a 49 years old architect based in Johor Bahru. He was born in Pontian to a religious teacher father and housewife mother and had lived in a Kampung and orchard surrounding. He studied in STMI Pontian and Malay College Kuala Kangsar respectively before leaving for Louisiana State University, in architecture course. He describes one of his fondest memory during childhood was 'starving and surviving on my own at Pondok Durian during Durian season. He had done an internship in Austin, Texas and had previously worked as graphic designer and photographer as well. He stated that his childhood ambition is first to be a bus conductor, then a soldier, lecturer and finally when he was 12; a doctor. He didn't know what an architect does, but had claimed that he like to sketch.



Figure 1.4: Md Razin Mahmood (source: www.facebook.com/)

Razin Architects has since its inauguration delivered for 16 successful years and has won 9 PAM awards for various projects, and the most recent was Gold for Sustainability, Arcasia Awards for Architecture 2014, for his Surau Nusa Idaman. A former Guest Associate Professor at University Teknologi Malaysia, Razin had also given several talks at the scale of University and State Government dialogues. Razin upheld the notion of working with sustainable materials he described as 'Low-Tech' or primitive sustainability. He also admired the likes of Lake-Flato architects, Sean Godsell, Kevin Mark Low and Seksan Design, to name a few. Among his culminating design to date are his Denai House and Surau Nusa Idaman in which both have won positive review among local critics.

4.2 Interview Results

Interview Scheme (open-ended) Interactive questions. Retrieved as of 8th December 2014.

... First of all, congratulations on the recent accolade you've won in Istanbul. Mr. Razin, can you describe your journey through your career?

... Thank you. Journey through my career? That itself could be a half day talk.

... How do you see yourself as an architect and a person?

... I am just an ordinary person trying to make ends meet. But Alhamdulillah god has given me the task that I like as my career. When work is a hobby, it becomes less of a burden but more of something you look forward to do every day.

... What is the underlying philosophy and belief that governs your work?

... One has to be responsible. One is answerable to the Creator, family, society, client and ones neighbors. As an architect, achieving client's needs and goals will always be the main objective. However, we try our best to find the ultimate architectural solution that enriches life. Being responsible to the nature means achieving harmony to its site contacts and the environment. I believe as an architect, our fundamental responsibility is to seek problems and solve problems for the people, instead of chasing after trends.

... Does your childhood influence your philosophy and work?

... I am a kampong boy with no exposure whatsoever on the architectural field. My childhood ambition is first to be a bus conductor, then a soldier, lecturer and finally when I was 12; a doctor. I didn't know what an architect does, but one thing is for sure, I like to sketch. My first exposure to architectural drawings was when I was 14, I saw my roommate's parcel wrapped with recycled construction drawings. That was when I decided that I wanted to be an architect.

... From my point of view, your design insists on the philosophy of critical regionalism in the foci of phenomenology. When does the turning point or epiphanies in design philosophy happen? What were the beginnings of this pursuit?

... It has to be the Denai house. When we get the opportunity to design for ourselves, then we started thinking on what we really need. It's about making a statement or doing what you believe in without having to worry that the product may be rejected by the client. Denai house is about designing for the climate and being truthful to the functions and budget.

... From the talk you've given in recent years, it looks like your main design framework has been slightly shifted into passive environmental sustainability. Was that intentional or you are following the worldwide cause?

... It was unintentional in the first place. We were just doing what we feel right for that particular project.

... Your work reminds me of Peter Zumthor's ethos of materiality, stillness and seclusion. What do you make of it?

... (skipped)

... Do you admire any architect?

... Yes I do. Frank Lloyd Wright, Lake Flato, Sean Godsell, Glenn Murcutt, Kevin Low and Seksan Design.

... What is your design inspiration? Has your background inspires you?

... I get inspired by latest trend and design that is innovative and capable of changing and one's lifestyle and quality.

... Can you describe a specific project that clearly exemplified your philosophies and principles?

... Surau Nusa Idaman. The biggest constraints in designing the surau were time and budget. We only had 3 months to design and complete the construction of the

building. Sometimes when you are pushed to one corner, you will be then forced to think outside the box. We went for a down to earth and very basic approach. It was about doing just enough.

... Amid all the challenges of constraints and limitations, how do you persist and persevere on delivering your philosophies throughout every project?

... We do what we believe in and then work very hard in getting our client to agree and believe in us as well.

... How important is philosophy to architect; especially in Malaysia context?

... It will depend on type of projects.

... Where is Malaysia heading in the name of architecture?

... We are seeing very good and promising designs in Malaysia done by Malaysian architects. With the right promotion and recognitions we are sure Malaysian design will be on the world architecture map.

... Do you write? What is your take about architects who write like most of the world-recognized architects?

... I do write from time to time depending on my stand on certain issues. It is good to share your opinions.

... Have you ever collaborated with other architects? Do you think it's important to have such connection?

... Yes we have. It is important to learn from others.

... My last question, what is your aspiration in the architectural world through your works? Can architecture save the world?

... If it is not nature it is architecture. Architects are given the trust to shape cities and dwellings that we live in. "With power comes great responsibility" We hope to design spaces for people to feel good.

4.3 Results Overview

An overview of the results from interview and documentation is stated as in Figure 3. The framework arrived at this stage has been derived from the literature review of the renowned architects. Figure 5 shows the philosophical development of Mr. Razin Mahmood.

4.4 Results Analysis

4.4.1 Journey through career

Razin seemed reluctant to talk about his journey through his career as he described it could be 'a half day talk'. He may have a lot of things to talk about that he feel he needed more time. This part however has been covered by the documentation.

4.4.2 Self-reflection as an architect and a person

Razin seemed to be very confident but humble at the same time. He is quite a religious person as he frequently praised his god in planning well

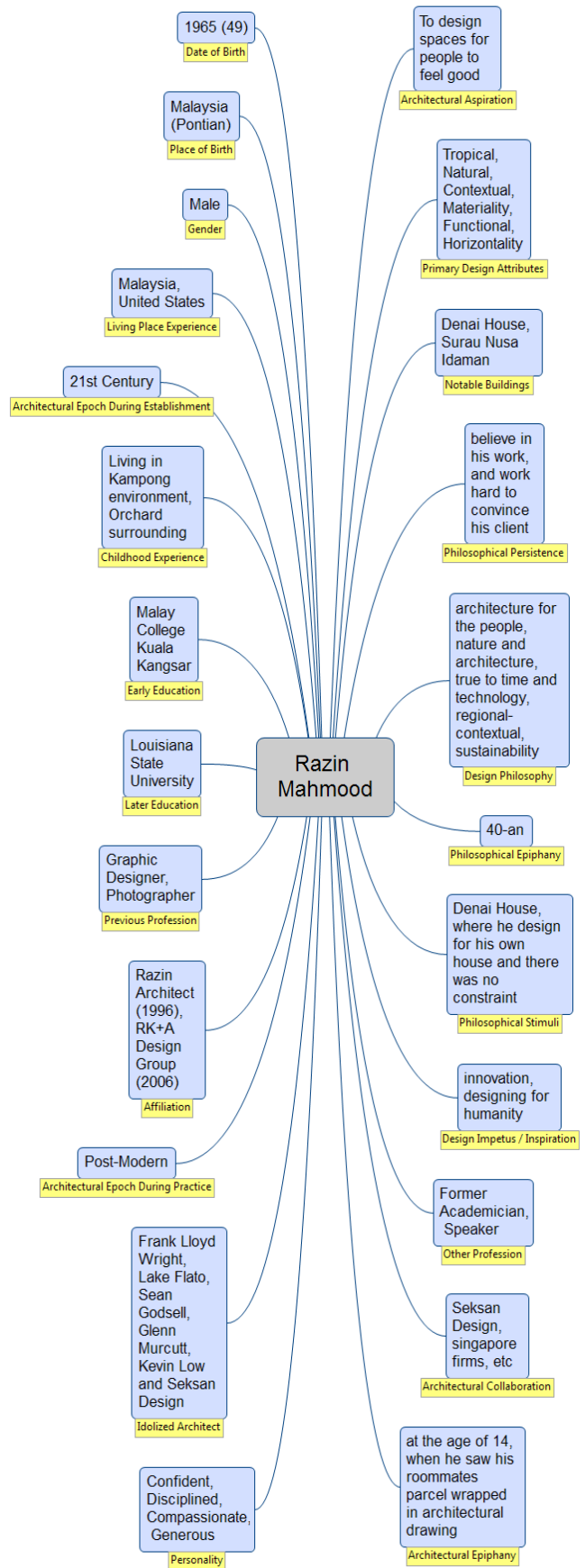


Figure 5: Razin Mahmood Philosophical Development

his career. He also stated that he considered his job as a hobby, something he revels each day.

4.4.3 Design philosophy

Razin arrived to this question in assert. Again, his answer is pivoted around the Islamic philosophy of being 'responsible'. He stated 'One has to be responsible. One is answerable to the Creator, family, society, client and one's neighbors.' In Islamic faith, it is obligatory for a preacher to be courteous and responsible to other being, as suggested in the holy concept of Khalifah or leader. Razin also insisted that his work does not deviate from addressing the needs of the client. He also believed in bridging the gap between nature, context and man-made building. This philosophy recalls the work of Frank Lloyd Wright of 'Organic Architecture' which is to blend in with nature, the concept of humility and responsible to the Mother Nature (Figure 6). Razin obviously upheld the thoughts of 'responsibility' to human and nature as it is self-evident in his contextual and tropical design. Architecturally, his work can be described as 'critical regionalism' with a slight hint of primitive sustainability.



Figure 6: *The Fallingwater by Frank Lloyd Wright*
(source: http://www.fallingwater.org/img/home_assets/)

4.4.4 Influence of childhood to philosophy and work

Razin stated that he is a *Kampung boy* with no exposure towards architecture. He initially wasn't sure of his ambition and surely one of it wasn't architect. He stated that he likes to sketch back then. His epiphany of architecture struck when he saw his roommate's parcel wrapped in recycled architecture drawings. Razin did not state whether his childhood influenced his philosophy. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that his background does not affect his work and philosophy. It may affect indirectly and unconsciously throughout his career. Razin obviously upheld the thoughts of 'responsibility' to human and nature which he may be influenced by his religious father, as well as the condition of living in *Kampung* surrounding that incites his affection towards nature.

4.4.5 Philosophical epiphany

Razin was very confident and bold in answering this one. He suggested that the Denai House project lavished him an opportunity to make a statement, as he is not constrained to any client but himself. He insisted that the project is all about true to the context, functions and budget. It is overt that the Denai House was his seminal work and it defines his career (Figure 7). Razin had gone through the practicality only to

discover his philosophy, unlike Peter Eisenman, whose work departed from philosophy.



Figure 7: *Denai House*
(Source: <http://archinhome.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/>)

4.4.6 Philosophical jumping traditions

When asked about his growing affection towards 'primitive sustainability architecture' in the recent years, Razin stated that he was doing what he considered right. This answer validated the theory of philosophical progressiveness and architects jumping through philosophy. Architects constantly seeking for new philosophy and doing what they think proper.

4.4.7 Of his works' relation to Peter Zumthor

Razin skipped this question. It may suggest that he did not know of Peter Zumthor.

4.4.8 Admiration of architects

Razin stated that he admired the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Lake Flato, Sean Godsell, Glenn Murcutt, Kevin Low and Seksan Design (Figure 8). Upon scrutiny, the architects he mentioned bears similarity of design and philosophy with Razin. Their work revolves on the idea of raw materials, frugal, discreet, contextual, and integrating architecture with nature (Figure 9).



Figure 8: *Brown Residence by Lake-Flato Architects*
(Source: <http://www.lakeflato.com/projects/brown-residence/>)



Figure 9: Safari Roof House by Kevin Mark Low
(Source: <https://nacio.files.wordpress.com/2008/08/>)

4.4.9 Design inspiration

Razin is adamant that he is inspired by the latest trends and life-changing innovative design. From observation, his design is fashioned with a bit of sleek-modern look, as can be seen with his kitchen top design of his Denai House.

4.4.10 Project that exemplifies philosophy

When asked about any of his projects that manifest his philosophy, Razin directly uttered Surau Nusa Idaman (Figure 10). The biggest constraints were time of 3 months and a very limited budget. He insisted that those limitations encouraged him to deliver better. The design approach was very basic and down to earth and is about doing sufficiently. It's all about his philosophy, doing what is right, contextually and socially.



Figure 10: Surau Nusa Idaman
(Source: <http://www.razinarchitect.com/imageproject/>)

4.4.11 On how he persevere on delivering philosophies

Razin stated that he do what he believe and work hard in getting his client convinced. This validate statement suggested by Johnson (1994), an architect may persuade others to a particular belief. Philosophy after all, is about belief and reflection of it.

4.4.12 The importance of philosophy to architect

On this question, Razin answered 'depends on type of projects' which can be demystified as – different projects may have tied to a strict regulations and different objectives and needs – a social housing may

strive for efficiency whilst a museum for sensuous experience. However, this is not the case for eminent architects as they have no problem integrating philosophies with any type of projects.

4.4.13 The future of Malaysian architecture

Razin confidently and optimistically heralded that Malaysia will be on the world of architecture map with the right promotions and recognitions. He stated that he has seen good and promising design by emerging Malaysian architects. Razin is optimistic about the prospect of Malaysian architecture. Therefore, he is not afraid about challenges he might faced that he is confident with what he is doing.

4.4.14 On writing as an architect

Razin stated he does write from time to time on certain issues and that it is good to share opinion to others. Philosophical architects do write in order to extend their knowledge and vocabulary of design.

4.4.15 On collaboration with other architect

Razin did collaborate and believe on the notion of learning from others.

4.4.16 Architectural aspiration

Razin did have an aspiration which is to design spaces for people to 'feel good'. He is an optimistic architect.

5 Conclusions

Architecture and philosophy are complimentary in its nature and the field of architecture is defined by progressive and fresh thoughts, abstractive and speculative notion rather than just an object-oriented approach. Architectural philosophy, theory and thought have been progressed historically and sporadically but are still unknown in the Malaysian context and the processes involved in architect's philosophical pursuit are still oblivious.

The data collected has shed some light on how Malaysian architect develop their philosophy. Md Razin Mahmood, Johor Bahru based architect has proven that architect develops philosophies progressively and is inspired by their surroundings. Surprisingly, personality also attributed by the architect interviewed. The architect typified a matrix that combined confidence, responsibility, optimism, and passion. A philosophy is ever progressive and takes time and space to be developed. It can emanate from a person's cognitive memory – childhood memory – and how things are shaped around him. Arising from data collection also is that philosophical epiphany do transpires and is vital as a point of departure in developing philosophy and theory. Architects also may be influenced by other architects across the history and geography. They are driven by their inspiration, and work on convincing their belief – through persuasion. They wrote from time to time and do collaboration with other architects or profession. They also have a particular intention or aspiration – that is the purpose of philosophy – a constant rethink of thoughts to solve world problem.

This study however is not a microcosm or an overall representation of how Malaysian architects develop their philosophies. However, we can still learn and be inspired on how an architect develops their philosophies.

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