

Transformation in the Architectural Identity of Palaces (Transformasi dalam Identiti Senibina bagi Istana)

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of the first National Palace in Malaya in 1957 reflects the transformation in the identity of palace architecture. Traditional palace architecture has developed from society's traditional way of life, as well as the materials and techniques of local construction. However, in the 1950s, significant changes could be seen in the lifestyle, politics, economics and many other areas in Malaya due to modernisation. The changes in the political system and people's values have influenced the traditional palace architecture during the 1950s. This research aims to highlight the palace's architecture transformation as direct consequences of changes in the identity of the state and nation. The research employs interpretive historical methodology, with the first National Palace as the case study. The study concluded that the architecture of the first National Palace reflects an image based on the contemporary values of the local community, which meet the political aspiration of a modern democratic government at that time. These findings will contribute to the understanding of the changes in the traditional social contract between the rulers and the people, and the selection of modern architecture as an identity of the country's current government.

Keywords: Transformation; Architecture; Identity; Traditional Palace; National Palace

ABSTRAK

Penubuhan Istana Negara yang pertama di Tanah Melayu pada tahun 1957 mencerminkan transformasi identiti senibina istana. Senibina istana tradisional telah dibangunkan berlandaskan kehidupan masyarakat tradisional serta penggunaan bahan dan teknik pembinaan tempatan. Walau bagaimanapun, pada tahun 1950-an, perubahan ketara dapat dilihat pada gaya hidup, politik, ekonomi dan pelbagai aspek lain di Tanah Melayu akibat daripada arus pemodenan. Perubahan dalam sistem politik dan nilai-nilai masyarakat telah mempengaruhi senibina istana tradisional pada tahun 1950-an. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menekankan transformasi senibina istana sebagai kesan langsung dari perubahan dalam identiti negara dan bangsa. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan metodologi sejarah interpretif dengan Istana Negara yang pertama sebagai kajian kes. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa senibina Istana Negara yang pertama mencerminkan imej nilai-nilai kontemporari masyarakat setempat yang memenuhi aspirasi politik pemerintahan demokratik moden pada masa tersebut. Penemuan ini akan menyumbang kepada pemahaman tentang perubahan dalam kontrak sosial tradisional antara pemerintah dan rakyat, dan pemilihan senibina moden sebagai identiti kerajaan semasa negara.

Kata kunci: Transformasi; Senibina; Identiti; Istana Tradisional; Istana Negara

INTRODUCTION

An official residence for the Federation of Malaya's first King, the late DYMM Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni Almarhum Tuanku Mohammad was established in 1957. The King, Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, is the Head of State in complying with the new conditions of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya; *Perlembagaan Persekutuan Tanah Melayu Merdeka* (part 32). His Majesty took his oath as the Supreme Leader of the newly independent nation, on 31 August 1957. On 2 September 1957, an installation ceremony was held at the newly refurbished National Palace and witnessed by six hundred guests from all parts of the world. Harry Miller

(1957) in an article for the Straits Times remarked that the ceremony as "simple, modern, gracious and dignified, however, memories of the splendors and ancient Malay courts was revived in the costumes of the regalia bearers and other courtiers." To him, "the Yang Di-pertuan Agong is a symbol of the new Malayan age" (Miller 1957). The ceremony highlighted a new form of the political system; independent through elected sovereign and took place in a new setting. The changing political and social-cultural circumstances led to the establishment of the National Palace. Both conditions demonstrated the new values and identity of the people, as well as the nation at that time. The palace identifies not only a new position of the King but also a new architectural

language befitting his contemporary status. This paper aims to highlight that the palace's architectural transformation as a direct consequence of the changes in the identity of the state and the nation.

THE CONCEPT OF ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

Architecture is a physical representation of architectural ideas that continually communicates with its observers. Architecture manifests specific values and meanings through its form and space (Hussain 2015; Torabi & Brahman 2013; Baper & Hassan 2010; Ismail 2007; Kosman 2005). Architectural identity is affected by the climatic condition, the culture of society, client requirements, convention and traditions, heritage, building regulations, and building technology (Hussain 2015; Baper & Hassan 2010; Kasturi 1983; Yeang 1981; Nik Daud 1987; Albakri 1979). Hijjas Kasturi (1983) believed that architectural identity reflects patriotism and nationalism. His opinion was supported by Fawizah Kamal (1981) who emphasized that the country's aspirations should be demonstrated on public architecture to strengthen aspiration for nation-building. Architecture has always been considered as the most appropriate means to reflect the identity of a nation due to its sheer size and lasting impression. Architecture is a powerful form of communication that expressed political ambitions of the ruling regime (Ismail & Zhaharin 2017).

Therefore, architecture expresses an identity through complete readings of its physical form concerning a context (Hussain 2015). The local conditions, which are the people and surrounding, determine the construction of architectural identity (Baper & Hassan 2010; Kasturi 1983; Yeang 1981; Sudin 1981; Lai 1981; Chin 1981; Cheow 1981; Albakri 1979).

BACKGROUND STUDY

TRANSFORMATION IN THE INSTITUTION OF THE MALAY SULTANATE: TRADITIONAL ERA

The institution of the Malay Sultanate is a vital identity of the Malay traditional community. They (the people) feel that their obedience due to the king is a natural expression and has come willingly without compulsion (Ahmad 2017). Those conditions were the outcome of a social contract, which was influenced by the socio-cultural and religious roles, that was practiced by the Malays. Hence "true obedience which complements the social contract process within Malay political culture that sustain the existence of the Rulers together with the obvious element of hegemony" (Ahmad 2017).

TRANSFORMATION IN THE INSTITUTION OF THE MALAY SULTANATE: COLONIAL ERA

This arrangement however disrupted by the colonial powers particularly during the period of British rule. By 1919, the

entire Malay Peninsula has been brought under the British-created political units; the Straits Settlements (1826), the Federated Malay States (1896) and the Un-federated Malay States (1919). The Malay political culture underwent a transformation of power. Gradually, the traditional Ruler's prestige was weakened due to colonializations. However, the people's loyalty towards the sultanate institution remained intact.

The Japanese occupation also contributed to the weakening of the traditional Ruler's prestige. The British seized the opportunity to force the Sultans to accept the Malayan Union idea once it took over from the Japanese in 1945. The Malayan Union proposal reduced the power of the Sultans by amalgamating all the states (Ismail 2017; Ali 2018). The Malayan Union came to effect on 22 January 1946, which established a nation of 'Tanah Melayu' that is not separated by the twelve territories. Consequently, the people of Malaya rejected the Malayan Union proposal. The people rose to fight for their rights and destiny of the nation when they realised that the Sultans had lost their power and authority (Ismail 2017).

"The traditional customs and religion are weathered by the modernization process along with the development of Malay political culture. Thus, the impact of colonial construction on the Malay political culture has impacted the transformation of the political culture system from the King to the British colonials and local Malay leaders" (Ahmad 2017).

TRANSFORMATION IN THE INSTITUTION OF THE MALAY SULTANATE: INDEPENDENCE ERA

Further discussions with the British led to the effort for independence. A conference of Rulers was established for all the Sultans to meet and prepare their states for a union towards independence under one King who was selected among them to rule. An agreement in 1948 between the Sultans and the British led to a significant change. The Sultans agreed to relinquish their position as the absolute monarch for the Constitutional Monarchy (Adam 2018).

The first Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, in numerous occasions, urged the people to accept changes and embrace the new way of life and values. The new way of life resulted from progress in science and technology (Rahman 1968). Changes were unavoidable as that was the only option for a better future (Rahman 1956).

It was necessary for the country to gain full support from its entire citizen in ensuring unity and peaceful condition. Sir Donald MacGillivray, the Federal High Commissioner warned that Malayan independence would disintegrate if the people did not give full allegiance (Hanum 1997).

DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL PALACE ARCHITECTURE IN MALAYA AND THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA: TRADITIONAL ERA

Traditionally, a Malay palace is a residence for a Sultan and his family within a defensive fort or 'Kota,' which is generally

surrounded by a moat, fenced and patrolled by armed sentries. Together with the palace complex are audience hall, main hall, assembly hall, prayer hall, courts, and armory, which constituted the administrative center for the Malay Kingdom. Villages, in which commoners lived under the protection of the Sultan and his army, are usually located outside the fort, together with a market area for trading activities and an open field for community gathering and political assembly. For security and surveillance purposes, many forts were built on hills. Some were built near rivers for transportation and water supply needs. Construction and design of the palace relied upon the availability of local materials and skills of local builders. Generally, a Malay palace is a low-rise timber structure of not more than two stories high, as they were replicas of the traditional Malay houses but on a bigger scale and size (Yaakub 1996; Zulayti 2009 as cited in Abidin et al. 2017).

The Sultan's palace represented the Sultan's power, wealth and influences over the people and the state. The palace design took consideration of many aspects such as the Malay culture, ideologies and beliefs, environmental factors, privacy, safety and religious requirements (Mohidin & Ismail 2014). The design would identify the prestige of the Sultan and royal families; "palaces represent the symbol of the Malay rulers because palaces act as buildings of residence, administration, and venue of royal functions (Abidin et al. 2017). "In brief, the palace reflects the strong influences of the Malay way of life and environment regarding the local climatic, topography, environment and adaptive towards the Malay socio-culture" (Mohidin & Ismail 2014).

DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL PALACE ARCHITECTURE IN MALAYA AND THE FEDERATION OF MALAYA: COLONIAL ERA

During the colonial period, many of the Malay traditional palaces were destroyed and replaced by new administrative structures. The Portuguese introduced a formal structure of political administration in Malacca that centered on defensive strategy and military ruling within a well-equipped fort. When the Dutch took over, they destroyed forts and buildings built by the Portuguese and built newer and larger forts. More administrative, commercial, warehouse and private residences were built in the city.

With the arrival of the British in 1884, influences of western architecture became more evident in many parts of the country due to their authority over larger areas in the Malay Peninsula. There were palaces built in traditional architecture such as the Istana Kota Setar in Alor Setar in 1735, the Istana Balai Besar in Kelantan in 1842, and the Istana Lama Seri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan in 1908. By early 1900, many new palaces built with apparent reference to the western architecture for example the Anak Bukit Palace in Alor Setar in 1927, the Arau Palace in Perlis in 1935, the Leban Tunggal Palace in Pahang in 1935, and the Bukit Serene Palace in Johor in 1937 (Abidin et al. 2017). The changes to the palace architecture were direct influences from the colonial masters. However, some instances have resulted

from the changing lifestyle of the owners themselves, which in this case were the Royals (Amoroso 2014). Most of the palaces were the Sultans' residences rather than administrative centers because the British ruled the country in British-built administrative buildings. In Kuala Lumpur, the Sultan Abdul Samad building was the British administrative center from 1896 onwards. The Sultan Abdul Samad building, inspired by the Moghul Architecture, has three copper onion domes and monumental in scale to radiate power and authority. Many Sultans' palaces were located away from the administrative centers and inaccessible to the public.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL PALACE

As the country prepared for independence, a new arrangement was made for the position of the King and his official residence for the Majesty to perform his duty effectively. The Federal Government acquired a property belonging to the Selangor Government in 1957 at the cost of \$1,408,000.00 (Hin 1964). Tunku Abdul Rahman personally supervised the alterations (Figure 1). He took it upon himself to ensure the design, furnishings, and fittings are "modern and comfortable," "dignified and yet regal" (Hin 1964). The building, built in 1928, was initially a mansion on a 28-acre land, belonged to a tin mine millionaire, Mr. Chan Wing. The famous Singaporean architecture firm, Swan & McLaren designed the mansion in an eclectic Palladian style. The building is of a symmetrical layout with two wings topped with cupolas on the left and right of the grand dining hall at the center. The mansion was called 'the Big House' (Figure 2) by the Chan Wing family (Chan 2010).

The Mansion was found to be the fittest and most suitable for the National Palace for its size and grandeur. The Public Works Department, PWD led by Mr. E.K. Dinsdale, an architect, and Mr. Cheah Tean Seok, a technical assistant, spent three weeks to measure the building and prepare new plan drawings (Kuala Lumpur Palace 1957). Tunku appointed Mrs. Ong Yoke Lin, Che Halimaton, Mrs. Peggy Taylor and



FIGURE 1. Tunku, checking the renovation work, 1950s
Source: Taylor's University (2015)



FIGURE 2. The Big House, the early 1940s.
Source: Chan (2010)

Mrs. I. Phillis as a team to advise on the color scheme. The Federal government allocated a budget of \$286,000.00 for redecorating, carpeting, providing new bathroom fixtures, lighting, fittings and furniture (Kuala Lumpur palace 1957). Believing the King requires regalia of his own, Tunku ordered for “long Keris, spears, war clubs, a pair of silver mace” from the best craftsmen in Kelantan and Terengganu (Sheppard 2007).

The ground floor of the palace comprises of two large entrance halls, four large VIP receptions, and a royal banqueting hall. The first floor has a complete suite of bedrooms for their Majesties and family and private audience chamber for receiving ambassadors and distinguished visitors. All furniture, furnishings, and fittings are of contemporary design. A throne room (*Bilik Singgahsana*) on the first floor is one of the essential rooms in the palace for official ceremonies involving the King, such as the conferring of the Yang Dipertua Negeri and Malaysian Ambassadors and the post for the Lord President, the ministers and deputy ministers. An audience room (*Dewan Mengadap*) on the ground floor is to receive distinguished guests and a resting lounge for the Sultans and Rulers during the Conference of Ruler.

The renovation and additional work led to the National Palace to “become a bright, modern palace of unprecedented charm, with none of the gloom or museum-like atmosphere which pervade old western palace” (Hin 1964). The original exterior architectural design of the building was maintained with arched windows opening to verandas on the ground and

first floor. In 2011, it was replaced by a newly completed National Palace and turned into a Royal Museum.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed interpretive historical research methodology (Groat & Wang 2013; Walsham 2006) with the National Palace as a case study. Data gathering involved fieldwork and interview as well as a literature review of the National Archives’ newspaper clippings, speeches and writings of Tunku Abdul Rahman. Figure 3 explains the research design framework.

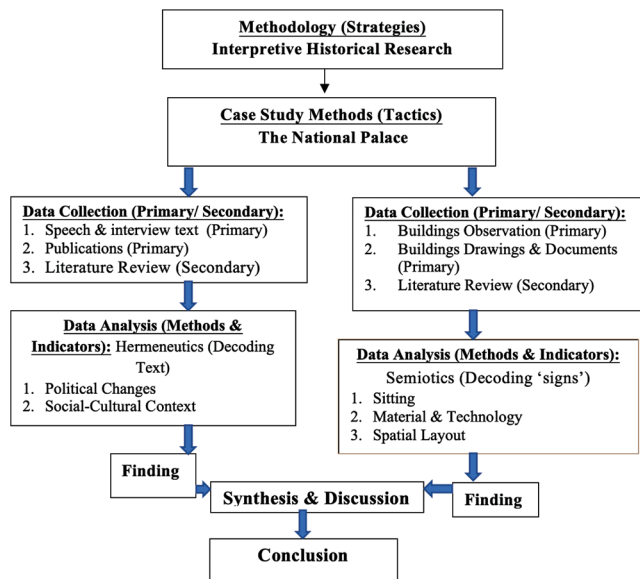


FIGURE 3. The research design framework

This study took on the work by Alice Sabrina Ismail and Erna Nuralia Zhaharin (2017) to emphasize the relationship between architecture and politic as well as social culture. An analysis framework established by Alice Sabrina Ismail (2007) was adapted to study the building based on three indicators; siting, material and construction, and spatial layout. The three indicators encompass local conditions that determine the construction of architectural identity as discussed earlier. The indicators support the reading of the case study as the building is treated as sign. Table 1 elaborates on the indicators and criteria for analysis.

TABLE 1. Indicators with details and criteria of analysis

Indicators	Details and criteria of analysis
Siting	To establish building location, scale and relation to site context – reflection of domination or submission, suggesting conflict/admission, welcoming/undesirable, visibility
Material and Construction	To investigate all 4 sides of the building for architectural language, façade treatments and detailing – impressive/unassertive, intricate/simple which indirectly portrays and signifies status – imposing/delicate. To examine structural arrangement for closure/opening of a space in determining relationship within internal spaces and between inside and outside spaces. It will suggest authority/subjection, governing/trivial arrangements.
Spatial Layout	To investigate overall building organization in comparison to its context (macro level) and between building elements (micro level) – suggesting conflict/admission

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL MALAY PALACE AND THE NATIONAL PALACE

The transformation in the institution of the Malay Sultanate and the establishment of the National Palace and its repair works were consistent with the changes in the political and social development in the country. Table 2 summarizes the changes in the governing systems from the traditional, colonial and post-independence eras. Meanwhile, Table 3 shows comparative study between the traditional palace architecture and the National Palace. In the traditional political system, the role of the people in the political system was minimal


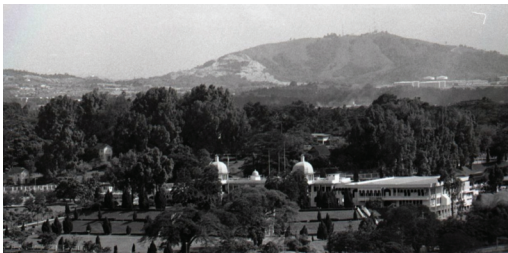
because the center of the traditional political system is in the palace. Only the religious leaders and merchants contributed to the palace and had roles in politics. During the colonial era, the advisers and British residents wielded political clout and took charge of the country while the role of traditional rulers was reduced. Independence changed the position of the Rulers drastically as it is the people who decided who the leader is, through democratic elections. The transformation in politics and culture mirrored the new identity of the people and the nation. It was an outcome of a political shift from traditional government to the new way of governing. Due to colonialism, the Sultan remained as a symbol of sovereignty while most matters of to the ruling the country was given to the Parliament.

TABLE 2. The governing structure of the traditional, colonial and post-independence eras

Pre-1511 Traditional Era	1511-1957 Colonial Era	Post-1957 Independence Era
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sultan • Officers/Dignitaries • Religious Leaders/Merchants • Ordinary Citizens • Slaves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sultan • Army Governor (Portuguese) Advisers/ British Residents • Merchants/Religious Leaders • Ordinary Citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King • Prime Minister/Ministers • Ordinary Citizens

Note: Bold text denotes the main political leader

TABLE 3. A comparative study between the traditional palace architecture and the National Palace

INDICATORS	TRADITIONAL PALACE ARCHITECTURE	THE NATIONAL PALACE
		
	<p>The Audience Hall, next to the Kota Setar Palace in Alor Setar in 1905, was a venue for meeting the Sultan, public gathering and celebrations. (Kedah Museum 2017)</p>	<p>The National Palace in 1957 was located within a lush private garden and secluded from public activities. (Ministry of Communication 2019)</p>
Siting	<p>Within town as an administrative center, surrounded by public and financial domains.</p> <p>Tropical architectural language expressed clearly in response to local climate, topography and social-cultural activities.</p>	<p>Within the capital city, however, no longer an administrative center and not surrounded by public and financial domains.</p> <p>Architecture inspired by foreign style with attempts made to address local climate, topography and social-cultural activities.</p>
Material & Construction	Of local materials, timber and stone, constructed based on local skill and builders/artisans.	Of masonry, constructions were imported from the West.
Spatial Layout	<p>Design of the palace was asymmetrical, either in plan and elevation.</p> <p>Customarily, wings are added on the left or right according to need and activities.</p> <p>Gender segregations of male and female members of the families – reflections of custom and religious practices.</p>	<p>Symmetrical on plan and elevations – proved the existence of Western influence on the spaces of the palace.</p> <p>No gender segregation as the palace is to suggest 'equality,' however, dedicated spaces are allocated for the King and Queen to meet guests.</p>

During the traditional era, the architecture of the palaces was free of external influences. The design followed the local users' requirements, values and meanings, with clear responses to its physical and spiritual context. During the colonial period, the form and spatial organization of the traditional architecture were revised to match a different way of life and values introduced by the colonial masters. The need for a revision in identifying one's identity to a new nation was necessary at the onset of independence. Not only through communications and activities by the people, but the need to unite also required acceptance of a new set of order and appearances of the surroundings where people live and work.

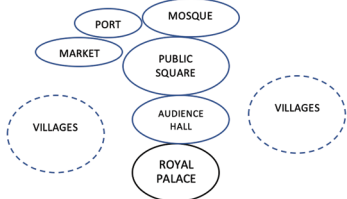
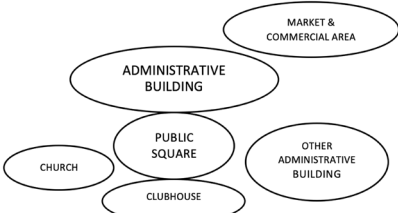
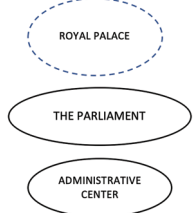



The Federation of Malaya in 1957 was a newly independent nation. The ruling of the Federation of Malaya was based on the federal representative democratic constitutional monarchy framework, a political system that will elect a king among the sultans who would be the object

of loyalty of the population of a multiracial nation. The federal government has three main branches; the legislative, executive and judiciary in which more power is vested in the executive branch of government than in the legislative and the judiciary. With the new arrangement, the role of traditional rulers diminished, the constitutional monarch reigns but does not rule, and is mostly a ceremonial Head of State. The people embraced democracy in choosing who would govern the country. It was a political system for a modern nation.

Tunku Abdul Rahman played a vital role in directing the country towards independence and the new government system. Tunku's political agenda concentrated on nation-building and national progress. Tunku was the shaper of the nation from the beginning (Isa 2009).

Table 4 identifies the political ruler and the administrative center for each era. It also highlights factors that influenced architecture and identity of palace architecture. There has been a clear break between the traditional palace

TABLE 4. A comparative study between the three eras focusing on the ruler, administrative center, factors, which influenced architecture, and identity of palace

	PRE-1511 TRADITIONAL ERA	1511-1957 COLONIAL ERA	POST-1957 INDEPENDENCE ERA
Ruler	Institution of Malay Sultanate	Colonial leaders	Representative of the people
Administrative center	<p>The traditional Malay palace</p>  <p>The palace sits near to the town center where a public square and a mosque are usually located. There will be an audience hall for the people to meet the Sultan for important affairs and royal celebrations. Since the river is the main transportation mean, a port is linked to a market which trading activities frequently spilled over to the main square as what had happened in the Royal Town of Alor Setar, Kedah.</p>	<p>Colonial administrative buildings</p>  <p>The main administrative building is noticeably located at the most prominent area of the town fronting a public square for public events and surrounded by a religious building; a church, a recreational and other administrative building. Market and commercial area are slightly away to cater to trading activities. Villages are located away from the city and the Royal Palace, which is further away.</p>	<p>The Parliament</p>  <p>The parliament sits away from the administrative center and the royal palace. There are no villages nearby the parliament.</p>
Factors influencing architecture	Power, status, wealth, traditional society lifestyle and beliefs, climate, topography, local architectural language, skills & materials.	Power, climate, topography, foreign lifestyle and beliefs, foreign architectural language, skills with mixed materials.	Nationalism, modern lifestyle and beliefs, climate, topography, modern architectural language, skills & materials.
	 <p>(National Archive 2017)</p>	 <p>(Skyscrapercity 2019)</p>	 <p>(Hussain, N.H. 2018)</p>
Identity of palace	Visible, protective, submission, native, accessible, welcoming, delicate, heritage	Restricted, foreign, domination, inaccessible.	Distant, new, unapproachable, exclusive.

architecture and the national palace architecture except for some indications of responses to climatic elements. The King accepted the new conditions and role in governing the country as determined by the people who had worked hard for independence. Nevertheless, the identity of the sultanate institution remained in a new form as portrayed by the new image of the building the King now called home.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the architecture of the first National Palace was examined to find the relationship between architectural identity and politic as well as people's values. There was a distinct break away from the traditional way of life and town planning that is consistent with the contemporary values of the local community and political aspiration of a new democratic government at that time. The palace's architecture transformation was a direct consequence of changes in the identity of the state and nation.

In summary, identity has been defined differently over time according to its meaning and values as interpreted by the people of those times. The traditional identity was transformed to modern identity due to changes in political and socio-cultural contexts. What was considered permanent and rooted based on tradition is no longer viable as contemporary people have accepted the fact that their own identity has changed and they are no longer subscribed fully to what was then. In general, the concept of architectural identity varies in accordance to what is viewed as most significant to the people and associated places. The current conditions shape the construction of architectural identity. Today, different factors modulated identity, and the main thing is the close connection to the way of life of the people and setting. These findings support the understanding of the changes in the traditional social contract between the rulers and the people and the selection of modern architecture as an identity of the country's current government.

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