ABSTRACT

Colonial cities are often regarded as alien creations as they were not designed for the local communities. In the post-colonial era, many Southeast Asian cities, including cities in Malaysia, are still planned based on western prototypes. Such continual unquestioned dependence on western models is feared to result in Southeast Asian cities that are void of their own characteristics.

However, Abidin Kusno mentioned that the same urban planning will bear different significance if it is implemented in different periods, places and culture. This gives a base for the dissertation to analyze the point-in-case – Putrajaya – the new administrative city of Malaysia that is often criticized for its resemblance to European cities due to its strong axial layout and a grand boulevard punctuated with symbolic government buildings and huge squares.

Through literature research, field studies and a personal interview with the Director of Putrajaya Development Unit, it is noticed that the design of Putrajaya, which shows the influence of the City Beautiful Movement (the Grand Manner concept) and the Garden City concept, is also strongly guided by three design philosophies – man and man, man and nature, and man and his Creator. As such, this dissertation is to carry out a contextual study to identify the pros and cons of adopting western models, and to analyze the extent to which they were modified to suit the local context.

Through understanding the intentions of the western urban design and the rationales behind creating Putrajaya, it is concluded that Putrajaya is not an unquestioned direct copy of the western models. The choice of the two western “precedents”, though unconsciously, is a result of similar intentions shared by the western models and Putrajaya – the need to create a grand city to portray the power of the government, the need to respond to nature, etc.; and similar conditions that allow the design to be manifested. Some drawbacks were identified in adopting the Grand Manner concept and the Garden City concept, but the urban design concepts were also sufficiently
modified by redefining or extending the definitions of some urban elements so as to take advantage of the local context.

It must be addressed here that the construction of the city is still in progress while this research is carried out. The success and failure of the urban design are accessed by studying how well the design philosophies are transformed into physically settings, with or without adopting western urban design concepts. In order to judge whether Putrajaya could live up to the standard it claims to be, a further empirical study will be necessary when the city is fully inhabited and in operation.

Dissertation Supervisor: A/P Foo Ah Fong
Title: Associate Professor Fellow

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Heng Chye Kiang
Title: Deputy Head, School of Architecture