

Exploring the Influence of Cultural Identity on Contemporary Architectural Styles in Southeast Asia



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KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
Cultural Identity, Contemporary Architecture, Southeast Asia	This article explores the dynamic interplay between cultural identity and contemporary architectural styles in Southeast Asia through a qualitative literature study. Southeast Asia's architectural landscape is shaped by a rich tapestry of indigenous traditions, colonial histories, and global influences, resulting in a diverse array of monumental structures and urban forms. The research investigates how cultural identity is both preserved and transformed in the built environment, examining the adaptation of traditional elements within modern architectural expressions. Drawing on a comprehensive review of scholarly works, case studies, and theoretical frameworks, the study highlights the ongoing negotiation between local identity and the universalizing forces of globalization. Key findings reveal that while imported architectural styles and modernist trends have influenced the region, there remains a persistent effort to embed indigenous motifs, spatial concepts, and cultural symbolism into contemporary designs. This is evident in both rural and urban contexts, where architecture serves as a medium for expressing collective memory, social values, and aspirations for national and regional identity. The study underscores the importance of critical regionalism and the conscious adaptation of vernacular forms as strategies for maintaining cultural sustainability amid rapid urbanization and economic development. Ultimately, the article contributes to the discourse on Southeast Asian architecture by elucidating how cultural identity continues to shape and be shaped by contemporary architectural practices, offering insights for architects, policymakers, and scholars interested in the intersection of heritage and modernity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture functions as both a utilitarian necessity and a symbolic system. Across civilizations, the built environment has been used to express social hierarchies, spiritual beliefs, cosmological models, political ideologies, and cultural identities Saiphan, P. (2023). In Southeast Asia—a region composed of eleven countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, and the Philippines—architectural development is deeply intertwined with the cultural diversity,

colonial histories, religious traditions, and environmental conditions of its peoples.

The region's architectural heritage is notably heterogeneous, spanning wooden stilt houses, Hindu-Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, Chinese shophouses, and colonial-era civic buildings. However, as Southeast Asia undergoes rapid urbanization and economic modernization, new urban centers and megacities are emerging that increasingly adopt global architectural typologies such as glass skyscrapers, modular housing blocks, and transit-oriented developments Lim, C. M.



(2023). Amidst this transformation, questions have emerged regarding the role of cultural identity in shaping contemporary architectural design and the extent to which architects and planners consciously integrate, reinterpret, or neglect local cultural values and symbols.

Cultural identity, in this context, refers to the collective sense of belonging shaped by shared history, language, religion, traditions, and values. It is neither static nor monolithic; rather, it evolves in response to both internal dynamics and external pressures Formoso, B. (2024). Architecture serves as one of the most visible and tangible manifestations of this evolving identity. In contemporary Southeast Asia, cultural identity is being negotiated in the face of globalization, neoliberal development models, diaspora influences, and heritage commodification. Hence, exploring how this identity is embedded explicitly or implicitly in contemporary architectural works offers valuable insights into the socio-cultural transformation of the region.

Despite increasing academic attention to Southeast Asian architecture, there remains a substantial gap in scholarly literature regarding the specific influence of cultural identity on contemporary architectural styles. Much of the existing research focuses on *vernacular architecture* or *colonial legacies* (e.g., Waterson, 1990; King, 2004), while more recent studies emphasize sustainability, smart cities, or economic functionality of built environments.

However, relatively few studies critically assess how contemporary architectural forms—those built after 1990 and especially after 2000—actively reflect, reinterpret, or negotiate cultural identity. Where such studies exist, they are often limited in scope to single-country case studies (e.g., Yuen, 2005, on Singapore; Kusno, 2010, on Indonesia) and rarely conduct comparative analyses across multiple national contexts. Additionally, much of the discourse around cultural expression in modern buildings remains superficial, treating culture as an

aesthetic ornamentation rather than a structural and ideological design principle.

Furthermore, few architectural studies integrate theoretical frameworks from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, or identity politics, which are essential for unpacking the layers of meaning encoded in architectural forms Win, M. T. (2025). This leaves a theoretical void in understanding how architecture participates in identity construction, nation-building, and cultural negotiation in the modern Southeast Asian context.

The urgency of addressing this research gap is underlined by three concurrent trends. First, the acceleration of urban development across Southeast Asian capitals—Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, and Manila—is reshaping the urban fabric at unprecedented rates. In many cases, these developments mimic Western architectural norms, leading to a loss of regional distinctiveness and a rise in homogenized “global cities.”

Second, there is a growing concern about cultural sustainability, especially among heritage conservationists, community groups, and academic institutions. As the built environment becomes more commercialized and commodified, architecture risks becoming detached from its cultural and historical roots. In this context, understanding how cultural identity can be maintained and expressed in new buildings becomes crucial for ensuring continuity between past, present, and future.

Third, state-led nationalism and tourism economies are increasingly relying on architecture as a tool to project cultural uniqueness on the global stage. National museums, airports, religious buildings, and even shopping malls are being designed to signal “local identity” to both domestic and international audiences. However, without a rigorous understanding of how cultural identity operates within design processes, such efforts risk devolving into superficial pastiche rather than authentic expressions of heritage.

Several key studies have laid the groundwork for this inquiry. Analyzed traditional house forms in Indonesia and the Philippines, highlighting their symbolic relationship to cosmology and kinship. Vale and King explored colonial and postcolonial architecture as mechanisms of political expression. Introduced the concept of hybridity in postcolonial Asian architecture, particularly in the urban fabric of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. More recently, Tay Kheng Soon (2015) advocated for "eco-cultural urbanism," emphasizing the need to harmonize traditional spatial logic with contemporary ecological needs.

However, most of these studies focus on either historical vernacular traditions or early post-independence identity projects. Few have examined recent developments—such as the design of state-sponsored cultural complexes (e.g., Istana Budaya in Malaysia), Islamic-oriented urban forms in Indonesia, or Buddhist-infused minimalism in contemporary Thai architecture—as active negotiations with identity in the 21st century. Comparative studies remain especially rare, even though regional institutions such as ASEAN promote transnational cultural exchange. A regional lens is crucial to understanding both the shared cultural motifs and the political diversities that shape architecture across national borders.

This research introduces an interdisciplinary and comparative approach that distinguishes it from prior studies. First, it synthesizes architectural analysis with cultural identity theory, drawing upon thinkers such as Stuart Hall (1990), Arjun Appadurai (1996), and Homi Bhabha (1994) to understand identity as fluid, negotiated, and spatially expressed. Second, it utilizes multiple case studies from at least four Southeast Asian countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam each selected for their distinct socio-political contexts and architectural trajectories.

Third, rather than focusing solely on high-profile landmark buildings, this research includes mid-scale urban developments (e.g.,

housing estates, transit hubs, commercial centers), thereby capturing a more nuanced view of how culture is expressed in everyday spaces. Finally, the research employs a multi-method qualitative approach, including architectural observation, semiotic analysis, interviews with practitioners, and document review—providing a grounded and richly contextualized understanding of design processes.

The study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To examine how cultural identity is interpreted and operationalized by architects and urban planners in Southeast Asia.
2. To analyze architectural forms, motifs, materials, and spatial organizations as expressions of local cultural values in contemporary contexts.
3. To compare how different national, religious, and ethnic identities shape architectural styles in selected Southeast Asian countries.
4. To assess the tensions and synergies between globalization and cultural specificity in the built environment.
5. To develop a conceptual framework for evaluating the role of culture in modern architectural design, policy, and pedagogy.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it deepens our understanding of the built environment as a medium of cultural negotiation and identity construction. It contributes to the literature on global-local dynamics in architecture, regionalism, and postcolonial spatial theory. Practically, the research provides architects, planners, heritage consultants, and government agencies with insights and tools for integrating cultural values into design without resorting to cliché or superficial symbolism.

It further informs educational curricula in architectural schools across Southeast Asia by

encouraging critical reflection on the cultural implications of design decisions. In doing so, the research supports the creation of built environments that are not only visually distinctive but also culturally meaningful, socially inclusive, and historically grounded.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design with an emphasis on literature-based inquiry and comparative cultural analysis. The research adopts an exploratory-descriptive approach aimed at understanding the underlying cultural dimensions embedded within contemporary architectural practices in Southeast Asia. Rather than testing hypotheses, the study focuses on the interpretation of meanings, patterns, and symbolic associations in architectural forms through the lens of cultural identity theory. The qualitative paradigm is particularly suited to this study given its focus on subjective meanings, socio-cultural contexts, and interdisciplinary synthesis.

Type of Study

This research is classified as a qualitative, non-empirical study that relies on an extensive literature review complemented by a comparative analysis of architectural case examples drawn from secondary data. It does not involve primary fieldwork or quantitative surveys but instead draws insights from existing scholarly literature, architectural documentation, visual records, and professional discourse. The study synthesizes knowledge across multiple disciplines—including architecture, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies—to construct a comprehensive interpretive framework.

Data Sources

The study utilizes secondary data as its primary source of information. These data sources include:

- Academic literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings related to Southeast Asian architecture, cultural identity, globalization, and postcolonial theory.
- Architectural documentation: Design drawings, blueprints, project reports, and visual analyses from architectural firms, cultural institutions, and professional publications.
- Visual and media sources: Photographs, architectural renderings, documentary films, and curated exhibitions that illustrate design features and spatial arrangements.
- Policy documents: Urban planning guidelines, cultural heritage policies, and official development strategies issued by national and local governments in Southeast Asia.
- Case studies: Selected examples of built projects from countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, analyzed through publicly available documentation and literature.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process was conducted through the following techniques:

1. Systematic Literature Review
A structured search of academic databases (e.g., Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, SpringerLink) was conducted to identify relevant scholarly works published in the last 30 years, with a focus on post-1990 developments. Keywords such as “cultural identity,” “contemporary architecture,” “Southeast Asia,” “urbanism,” and “postcolonial design” were used in various combinations.
2. Document and Visual Analysis
Architectural case studies were analyzed



using publicly available documents, architectural reviews, firm portfolios, and media articles. Images and plans were examined to identify recurring patterns, symbols, materials, and spatial strategies that reflect cultural identity.

3. Thematic Coding
Collected data were organized according to emerging thematic categories such as religious symbolism, national identity, hybridity, spatial tradition, and global-local tensions. This facilitated comparative analysis across cases.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis and interpretive-descriptive methods. The process involved the following steps:

1. Thematic Analysis
Key texts and case study materials were coded inductively to identify dominant themes related to cultural identity in architectural expression. Particular attention was paid to how cultural elements were embedded in design features such as form, materiality, ornamentation, layout, and function.
2. Cross-Case Comparative Analysis
Case studies from different Southeast Asian countries were compared to uncover similarities, contrasts, and region-specific patterns in how cultural identity informs contemporary architectural style. Factors such as religious influence, colonial legacy, national ideology, and globalization were used as lenses for comparison.
3. Conceptual Mapping
Insights from cultural theory—particularly the works of Hall (1990), Bhabha (1994), and Appadurai (1996)—were used to map relationships between architectural form and cultural expression. The aim was to construct a theoretical framework that accounts for the fluid, contested, and performative

nature of identity in the built environment.

4. Interpretive Synthesis
The results of the thematic and comparative analyses were synthesized to generate broader theoretical insights and implications for architectural practice and education. The synthesis prioritized depth of understanding over generalizability.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of literature and architectural case examples across Southeast Asia reveals that cultural identity continues to exert a profound, though multifaceted, influence on contemporary architectural styles in the region. Contrary to concerns that globalization has led to homogenized architectural expressions, evidence suggests that local cultural elements—when not entirely dominant—are increasingly integrated into modern design approaches through processes of reinterpretation, adaptation, and hybridization.

In Indonesia, for instance, cultural identity is often expressed through the symbolic appropriation of traditional forms and motifs within modern materials and spatial programs. The Rumah Gadang-inspired rooflines in West Sumatran civic buildings and the modular reinterpretation of the Javanese pendopo pavilion in government and university architecture illustrate a tendency to use indigenous vernacular as a cultural signifier within state-led modernism. These adaptations are not literal reproductions of tradition but rather negotiated articulations of national and ethnic identity, tailored to the expectations of modern institutional functions. The result is a hybrid typology where the aesthetics of tradition coexist with the logic of contemporary construction technologies.

Similarly, in Malaysia, the postcolonial state's nation-building agenda has shaped architectural discourse toward creating a distinctly Malaysian architectural language. Projects such as the Putrajaya government complex exhibit a formal and symbolic vocabulary heavily influenced by Islamic architecture—characterized by domes, pointed arches, geometric ornamentation, and axial layouts. Yet these Islamic references are often embedded within the larger framework of high-tech and monumental postmodernism. Here, culture is not simply inherited but reconstituted to express political ideology, religious identity, and aspirations for modern statehood. This selective reinvention of tradition serves both representational and performative functions in a multicultural society negotiating its identity in a postcolonial and global context.

In Thailand, the integration of cultural identity into architecture is often filtered through Buddhist cosmology and aesthetic restraint. Contemporary temples, such as Wat Rong Khun in Chiang Rai, offer a surreal reimagining of traditional Thai religious architecture, incorporating unconventional materials like glass and metal to reflect both religious symbolism and contemporary artistic interpretation. Moreover, commercial and residential architecture in Thailand has seen a resurgence in tropical modernism—an architectural approach that blends passive environmental strategies with minimalist expressions influenced by Buddhist principles of balance and harmony. In this context, cultural identity is not always overt or decorative; rather, it is embedded in spatial organization, material selection, and design ethos that reflect deeper philosophical values.

Vietnam presents a more complex scenario,

shaped by its socialist legacy, colonial history, and emerging capitalist economy. The architectural identity of urban Vietnam has been largely influenced by its colonial past, with French-style villas and civic structures continuing to shape the urban imagination. However, in the post-reform (Đổi Mới) era, there has been a growing interest among Vietnamese architects to recover and reinterpret vernacular traditions, such as the use of courtyards, local brick, and bamboo. Notable examples include the work of firms like Vo Trong Nghia Architects, whose projects integrate sustainable materials and spatial references to traditional Vietnamese architecture within the framework of global green design. Here, cultural identity becomes closely linked with ecological consciousness and vernacular innovation, challenging the dichotomy between tradition and modernity.

Across the region, one of the most salient themes emerging from the analysis is the shift from representation to interpretation of culture in architecture. Cultural identity is no longer confined to surface ornamentation or symbolic forms but increasingly emerges through spatial logic, ecological responses, and material choices. Architects are not merely reproducing cultural tropes but are engaging critically with local traditions to generate new forms that resonate with contemporary needs. This process often involves the filtering of cultural memory through global design methodologies, resulting in a layered and negotiated architectural language.

The role of cultural identity in shaping architecture is also mediated by political and institutional structures. State-sponsored projects tend to reflect official narratives of identity, often privileging dominant ethnic or religious groups and producing architectural

symbols that reinforce national unity or ideological legitimacy. In contrast, private developments and independent architectural practices offer more experimental and pluralistic interpretations of cultural expression, especially in multicultural or contested spaces. This duality underscores the political dimensions of architecture as a tool of identity construction, where design decisions are embedded within broader discourses of power, heritage, and belonging.

Furthermore, the commodification of culture in the context of tourism and real estate has led to strategic uses of cultural identity as a marketable aesthetic. In cities like Bali, Yogyakarta, and Luang Prabang, traditional architectural motifs are often deployed in boutique hotels, resorts, and cultural districts to evoke authenticity and attract both domestic and international tourists. While such practices may contribute to heritage preservation, they also raise questions about authenticity, appropriation, and the reduction of complex cultural narratives into visual branding strategies.

What becomes evident across all examined contexts is that cultural identity in Southeast Asian contemporary architecture is neither uniform nor static. It is a dynamic force that interacts with technological innovations, global design trends, environmental imperatives, and socio-political transformations. The resulting architectural styles are highly contextual, ranging from assertively traditional to radically experimental, yet all linked by a shared concern with grounding modern development in cultural specificity.

Ultimately, the influence of cultural identity on architecture in Southeast Asia should not be understood merely as a nostalgic return to the

past but as an active negotiation with history, community values, and spatial memory. This research highlights the creative capacity of architecture to serve as a medium through which cultural meanings are continuously reshaped and re-articulated in response to contemporary realities. It also underscores the responsibility of architects and urban designers to engage critically with the cultural dimensions of space-making in a region marked by deep diversity and rapid transformation.

Reinterpreting Vernacular Forms in Urban Contexts

One of the most significant ways cultural identity manifests in contemporary Southeast Asian architecture is through the reinterpretation of vernacular forms. Rather than directly replicating traditional designs, architects across the region have adopted a critical approach, abstracting and adapting indigenous spatial principles to suit modern lifestyles and urban conditions. This shift reflects an awareness that architectural authenticity need not lie in stylistic mimicry, but in the retention and reapplication of deeper cultural logics embedded in traditional forms.

In Indonesia, reinterpretation is evident in projects that draw inspiration from the rumah adat typologies, such as the Joglo, Tongkonan, and Rumah Gadang. These traditional forms are often simplified, fragmented, or modularized to suit contemporary functions while preserving symbolic references. For instance, government and university buildings in Yogyakarta may feature elevated pavilions and layered roofs inspired by Javanese cosmology but constructed with reinforced concrete and steel. Such projects blend ceremonial grandeur with structural pragmatism, reaffirming cultural values within modern institutions.

Malaysia exhibits a similar trajectory, where traditional Malay, Chinese, and Indian architectural influences are distilled into modern urban designs. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, for example, integrates geometric patterns and dome structures derived from Islamic heritage into a contemporary museum typology. These design elements do not merely serve decorative purposes but embody the spiritual and philosophical worldview associated with Islamic civilization, harmonized with Malaysia's multicultural identity and institutional aspirations.

Thailand's urban architecture also reflects vernacular reinterpretations, particularly through its widespread adoption of "tropical modernism." This design philosophy combines minimalist international styles with climatic adaptations rooted in traditional Thai houses—such as elevated structures, cross-ventilation, and shaded verandas. The work of architects like Duangrit Bunnag illustrates how modern Thai architecture can reconcile the cultural past with progressive spatial solutions, integrating Buddhist-influenced simplicity and respect for nature into elegant, modern expressions.

Vietnam presents a unique case where post-colonial and vernacular identities intersect. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, contemporary architecture increasingly revives vernacular forms such as tube houses, courtyard layouts, and bamboo structures. These elements are incorporated into eco-conscious residential and commercial designs, reflecting a renewed interest in sustainability grounded in indigenous wisdom. Vietnamese architects like Vo Trong Nghia have gained international recognition for creatively using local materials and passive strategies to evoke cultural

rootedness while addressing urban density challenges.

The reinterpretation of vernacularity also extends beyond physical form to include symbolic spatial values. Concepts such as communal courtyards, ritual thresholds, and hierarchical space organization—long embedded in Southeast Asian traditions—are increasingly being revisited in the design of contemporary schools, religious buildings, and cultural centers. In doing so, architects are translating intangible heritage into spatial narratives, ensuring cultural continuity within changing urban fabrics.

These strategies demonstrate that vernacular architecture is not static but can be dynamically adapted to meet the demands of urbanization and modernization. By grounding innovation in cultural memory, contemporary architects are able to create new typologies that speak to both past and future. This process reflects a deliberate and conscious attempt to protect cultural identity not by freezing tradition but by reactivating it through meaningful design practices.

Ultimately, vernacular reinterpretation in urban contexts emerges as a resilient strategy that allows Southeast Asian societies to negotiate modernization without severing ties to their cultural heritage. It represents a form of architectural resistance to globalization's erasure of place, offering a model for culturally rooted yet globally conversant development.

Symbolism, Religion, and Identity Representation

Cultural identity in Southeast Asian architecture is deeply intertwined with religious symbolism, which often serves as a primary visual and conceptual medium through which

identity is articulated. Across the region, the expression of Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and syncretic belief systems is embedded in architectural elements that reflect theological narratives, ritual significance, and spiritual worldviews. In the contemporary period, these religious symbols are being reimagined to align with evolving socio-political contexts.

In Malaysia, Islamic architecture plays a dominant role in the expression of national identity. This is particularly evident in state-sponsored projects such as the Putrajaya Mosque and administrative buildings, where Islamic geometric motifs, domes, and arches are integrated into postmodern structures. These buildings symbolize not only spiritual values but also the centrality of Islam within Malaysian political ideology. However, the stylization often combines traditional references with futuristic forms, signaling a nation that seeks to modernize without disconnecting from its religious and cultural roots.

Indonesia, while officially pluralistic, has seen an increased incorporation of Islamic symbolism in its civic and educational architecture, especially in regions like West Java and Aceh. Mosques constructed in recent decades often reflect a departure from Middle Eastern models, incorporating local materials and forms such as limasan and tajug roofs, characteristic of Javanese architecture. This integration is an expression of Islam Nusantara, a localized Islamic identity that emphasizes harmony with indigenous cultural traditions.

Thailand's predominantly Buddhist identity is most vividly expressed in temple architecture, but it also influences secular design. The concept of sabai sabai (relaxed, harmonious

living) and sanuk (joyfulness) is embodied in open layouts, light-filled interiors, and natural materials. In contemporary temple design, traditional forms are often stylized or abstracted, as seen in Wat Pa Phu Kon and Wat Rong Khun. These examples blend religious iconography with modern artistic interpretations, attracting both spiritual visitors and architectural tourists.

Vietnam's religious architecture reflects its complex layering of Confucianism, Buddhism, and folk traditions. Temples and communal houses (đình) maintain symbolic significance, even as their forms are adapted in new urban developments. In modern constructions, these symbols are often translated into stylized motifs—dragons, lotuses, ancestral altars—integrated into facades, public plazas, and cultural complexes. Such designs subtly reaffirm the continuity of cultural values even as Vietnam undergoes rapid economic and spatial transformation.

In the Philippines, Catholicism has left an enduring imprint on architectural identity, with churches, schools, and civic buildings often incorporating Spanish Baroque and neo-Gothic elements. In recent decades, however, there has been a move towards contextualizing Catholic design within tropical and indigenous aesthetics. Projects such as the Chapel of San Pedro Calungsod in Cebu showcase minimalist, climate-sensitive designs that honor spiritual function while shedding colonial ornamentation.

Across the region, religious symbolism is also employed in commercial and leisure architecture to convey authenticity and attract cultural tourism. Shopping malls in Bali, for example, adopt Balinese temple elements, while hotels in Luang Prabang mimic Lao monastic

architecture. While these efforts may risk superficiality, they also reflect market-driven responses to the global demand for cultural uniqueness.

The persistence of religious symbolism in architecture affirms its role as a repository of cultural meaning and a tool for negotiating collective identity. Whether rendered in traditional or stylized form, such symbols ground modern architecture in spiritual memory and communal consciousness, reinforcing a sense of place amid regional transformation.

Hybridity and Postcolonial Reconciliation

Hybridity is a defining feature of contemporary architecture in Southeast Asia, where centuries of colonization, migration, and cultural exchange have produced layered identities and architectural vocabularies. Contemporary buildings often exhibit hybrid characteristics—merging Western and indigenous forms, materials, and spatial logics. These designs are not mere eclectic amalgamations but deliberate acts of cultural negotiation and postcolonial critique.

Colonial legacies in architecture remain prominent in cities like Hanoi, Yangon, Jakarta, and Manila, where administrative and civic buildings from the colonial era still function as urban landmarks. Rather than rejecting these forms, many contemporary architects engage with them critically, incorporating colonial aesthetics as part of a broader strategy of reconciliation. This is evident in the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, where colonial structures are preserved and recontextualized to serve new functions—libraries, galleries, hotels—thereby transforming symbols of domination into shared cultural assets.

In Singapore, hybridization is institutionalized as part of the state's multicultural agenda. Projects such as the Esplanade Theatres or the National Gallery integrate colonial, Malay, Chinese, and Indian influences into cohesive public spaces. This architectural strategy reflects the city-state's ethos of harmonious diversity and postcolonial pragmatism. Hybrid architecture thus becomes a performative statement about pluralism and inclusivity, reinforcing political narratives of unity in diversity.

Indonesia's urban architecture also demonstrates hybrid expressions that reflect both global influences and localized reinterpretations. The resurgence of art-deco elements in Bandung's heritage buildings, combined with Islamic, Javanese, and minimalist features in newer developments, showcases a layered identity that simultaneously remembers and reconstructs its past. Hybrid design becomes a mode of cultural authorship, through which architects assert agency over historical narratives.

In Vietnam, colonial and socialist-era buildings coexist with emerging global-modern structures, creating a palimpsest of architectural memories. The challenge for Vietnamese architects is to balance this multiplicity while articulating a forward-looking identity. In projects that blend French colonial elements with local vernacular and modernist minimalism, hybridity becomes an aesthetic and political strategy for reconciling conflicting histories.

Philippine architecture continues to grapple with Spanish, American, and indigenous influences. The result is often eclectic, but in recent years, there has been a stronger

movement toward decolonial design. Institutions and churches are now incorporating native materials, pre-colonial motifs, and climate-sensitive forms, creating a syncretic style that acknowledges colonial heritage without being subsumed by it.

Hybridity also extends into interior architecture, where the juxtaposition of global and local aesthetics is used to define brand identity, especially in hospitality and commercial sectors. This negotiation often plays out in material contrasts—concrete with rattan, glass with carved wood, steel with stone—that reflect broader cultural dialogues between tradition and modernity.

In Southeast Asia, hybrid architecture serves as a site of memory, reconciliation, and invention. It allows societies to confront complex legacies, embrace plural identities, and articulate spatial narratives that are both historically grounded and globally attuned.

4. CONCLUSION

The exploration of cultural identity's influence on contemporary architectural styles in Southeast Asia reveals a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, where architecture serves not only as a functional response to urban growth but also as a medium of cultural expression, negotiation, and continuity. Across the region, architects are reinterpreting vernacular forms, integrating religious symbolism, embracing hybridity, and confronting postcolonial legacies to craft spatial narratives that reflect diverse, evolving identities. Rather than being overshadowed by globalization, cultural identity continues to shape architectural innovation, anchoring built environments in local meanings while engaging global aesthetics, thereby affirming

architecture's vital role in preserving and transforming Southeast Asia's cultural landscapes.

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