Penny wise, pound foolish?

Pink Musings 004 / Yasotha Chetty · 01 December 2019

Why investing in good engineering can achieve better design, coordination, cost and value.



We were asked at a tender interview sometime this year if we were only hired on jobs with "fancy architecture". Was this our unique selling point (enabling "fancy architecture"). We said, no, it is good engineering, we get hired when one wants good engineering.

There is this misconception here in Malaysia that it is only worth forking out the fees for good engineering if the structure is "fancy". Our everyday condominiums and townships can be done by any old engineer. Why pay more for good engineering, it is the same old building, what difference could it possibly make? This mindset, as the saying goes, is being penny wise and pound foolish.

Good structural engineering does not just enable architectural intents and aesthetics, resulting in well-coordinated, beautiful buildings that enhance user experience. It fundamentally and importantly ensures optimal costs - a key driver for most projects and the very reason why jobs are given to 'any old engineer' - to save costs through reduced

consulting fees. This is something all projects could benefit from, small residences, social housing (PPR) right through to "fancy architectures".

With structural works costing 40-50% of the total construction cost, saving in materials through efficient design is one of the key gains of investing in good engineering. And the cost saved through this definitely significantly outweighs any savings made through skimping on consulting fees.

Image: Residential Tower X

Structural and geotechnical assessment of alleged overstressed columns on behalf of a contractor for a 39-storey residential tower. The approach adopted by us for the assessment found the columns not to be overstressed, resulting in not having to strengthen them

Client testimony: They have a very good understanding of structural design, which saved us large sums of money from having not to strengthen columns on a high rise.

Lim Tee Keng, Managing Director, Mentari Berseri

Location: Penang

Client: Mentari Berseri

Services: Remedial

Status: Completed

Year: 2016

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