Exploring Architecture in Islamic Cultures

Architecture and Identity

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture
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Exploring Architecture in Islamic Cultures
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Foreword

It has been a privilege to play a small part in bringing this discussion of Architectural Identity in South East Asia to a wider readership.

In editing the papers, discussion which seemed peripheral to the question of identity has been omitted but I have endeavoured to retain the spontaneity at the expense of precise grammar. This, I think is one of the joys of reading the papers — for they capture the passion and concern of the delegates.

One difficulty was that some papers clearly relied on coloured transparencies and it has not been possible to reproduce all the illustrations, where necessary the text has been expanded to overcome this.

I will not attempt a summary of the papers for this is admirably done by Charles Correa. Such is the reality of conferences that individual perceptions of Identity vary and the panel discussions reflect a wide and interesting spectrum of ideas.

Robert Powell
Editor
Opening Remarks

Parid Wardi Sudin

Yang Berhormat Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Encik Anwar Bin Ibrahim, Vice Chancellor Tan Sri Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dato Abdul Aziz bin Din, Dr. Suha Özkan, Deputy Assistant Secretary General, The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, distinguished delegates.

On behalf of the seminar organisation committee, I would like to extend my gratitude and good wishes to you all, in particular to those from overseas. I would like to extend also our gratitude to you all for making yourself free to attend the ceremony and eventually participate in the seminar. In particular I would like to thank the Minister for Youth and Culture Encik Ibrahim for his keenness and enthusiasm, and for having agreed to come and declare the seminar open. He was among the first to agree to be a participant, but that was before he became a Minister. As the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, what was once a matter of personal interest is now a matter of national responsibility. I hope this seminar can contribute to the efforts of his Ministry.

This three day seminar on the theme of ‘The Search for Identity in Architecture’ is a regional seminar which brings together 40 participants from 9 countries in the region. I have taken the liberty to extend the definition of this region to include Egypt, and Dr. Suha Özkan is from Turkey.

The first day of the seminar will focus on the experiences outside the immediate understood region of South East Asia and we will have three papers.

On the second day, we will focus on our experiences within the region. In conjunction with the seminar, we are arranging a visit to see a number of buildings. This will give the participants a view of the changing skyline of Kuala Lumpur.

On the final day we will have a discussion arising from ideas which will have been generated by the papers.

I will not say anything more about the seminar except that I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Award for giving the Universiti and myself the opportunity to host this seminar. In the course of my work in this direction I have been helped by many individuals and organisations both in Malaysia and outside. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the generous help, and for the time they have given for making this seminar a possibility. And with that I would just like to say, welcome to Kuala Lumpur and may this be a successful seminar.

Suha Özkan

Yang Berhormat Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Encik Anwar Ibrahim, Tan Sri Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid, Dato Dato and distinguished participants. On behalf of The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, I would like to take the opportunity to extend greetings and good wishes from His Highness The Aga Khan, members of the Steering Committee of The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, and the Secretary General of the Award Dr. Said Zulficar. Apart from myself, the Award will be represented by two distinguished members of the Steering Committee, Mr. Charles Correa and Mr. Hasan-Uddin Khan who, I believe, are not new to the Malaysian architectural profession.

Your Excellency, with your permission I would like to say a few words about the Award:

His Highness The Aga Khan established The Aga Khan Award to encourage exceptional achievements in the Arts and Sciences. Priority was given in 1976 to the fields of Architecture and Planning with the establishment of the AKAA (Aga Khan Award for Architecture), whose aims are to nurture within the architectural profession and related disciplines a heightened awareness of Islamic culture, and to encourage architecture appropriate to the 20th century. Through the Awards themselves, presented every three years, and through activities such as seminars and publications, the AKAA is committed
to a search for architectural excellence. The Awards are international in scope and may be given for any building or completed scheme, not only in the Muslim country, but throughout the world wherever there is a significant Muslim population or where the building is used substantially by Muslims themselves.

The Award in 1980 recognised the efforts of many individuals from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East in the search for an architecture appropriate to the culture and ecology of Muslim countries. The continuing aim of the Award is not to create a school of architecture, or an ideology, but to heighten awareness within the Islamic world of its own architectural heritage and potential for development. In 1980, fifteen projects were selected to receive the first AKAA. The presentation was made in the Shalamar Gardens of Lahore in the presence of His Excellency President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan in October.

In January 1983, a nine member international jury met for several days in Geneva to assess and shortlist nominated projects. I am happy to say that Prof. Parid Wardi Sudin, who is the coordinator of the present seminar was a member of the jury. The shortlisted projects were then reviewed on site by a technical review team. The reports were submitted to the jury which then proceeded to assess the projects. (NB. The recipients of the Award were announced in September 1983 in Istanbul, with a state ceremony at the Topkapi Palace. The Award was presented by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Turkey General Evran, and His Highness The Aga Khan.)

The AKAA has organised continuous activity in the form of international seminars where it aims to develop ideas and criteria for the Award and also endeavours to establish links with various countries. The subjects chosen for the seminars form appropriate intellectual platforms between the country and the Award. In Paris, for example, we discussed ‘transformation of architecture in Islamic countries’. In Istanbul ‘conservation and cultural survival’, in Jakarta ‘housing’, in Fez ‘symbolism in architecture’. In Beijing ‘the changing rural habitat’, in Dakar ‘the African city’, and finally two months ago in Sana’a ‘modernity and tradition’. As all the proceedings have been published in the past six years, the Award has made available a vast collection of ideas and surveys in architecture and urbanism in the Islamic world. This is for the benefit of all concerned, world wide.

It has always been on the Award’s agenda to organise certain activities at a regional level, so that architects who contribute to, and think of similar problems can be brought together to get to know each other, and to display their ideas and concerns. I am glad to see that this intention has been realised in the collaboration of the Award, the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and the Malaysian Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. This seminar in Kuala Lumpur marks a departure from our previous seminars which were more global in nature. It attempts, as its issue, a subject which constitutes an important aspect of the architectural thinking of South East Asia. In this respect, the Award hopes that this seminar will benefit all concerned individuals, architects, institutions and governments, and that the knowledge gained may be shared by others.

This is my first visit to Malaysia, and from the little I have seen, and the lot I have heard, I am happy and grateful to be here. In conclusion I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Malaysian government, the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports for their acceptance and willingness to host this seminar. In particular I would like to thank His Excellency the Minister for taking the time to be with us at this opening ceremony. I look forward to interesting discussions and fruitful deliberations.

Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid

Your Excellency Enck Anwar Ibrahim, Dr. Suha Özkan, ladies and gentlemen. First of all I would like to say thank you very much to the Minister for kindly attending the seminar and agreeing to declare it open. I am sure the subject of the seminar is very dear to his heart, and I sincerely hope that he will support us in our search for an identity in architecture in this country. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank The Aga Khan Award for Architecture for agreeing to work with us, and I would like to say welcome to all the delegates from overseas and also my friends from this country who have been kind enough to come today to this campus. I sincerely hope that all of you will find the provisions of this seminar sufficient. The Universiti feels privileged to have the honour of hosting this seminar in conjunction with such a distinguished organisation as the AKAA, and hopes that the seminar can provide the platform for dialogue which can promote national and international experiences on the important subject of the search for identity in architecture. We hope the wisdom of the seminar can lead to new ideas and ways to see a problem which particularly we in Malaysia are facing and trying to solve. We are trying to evolve a national cultural identity. A national cultural convention in 1971 has resolved that the national culture shall be based on the indigenous culture, that is, the Malay culture. The Universiti is only trying to play its role in this matter.

In many developing countries tremendous changes are taking place, not only in the fields of economics,
but also in the built environment of the country and the people’s way of life. Many capital cities are experiencing changes in their environment and structure. In short, it seems that the development of the city tends to make it look and feel very much like others the world over. In many cases it is difficult to make cultural references. The question is whether this should be so. One recognises and accepts that each nation and each culture is unique, and possess its own mode of expression. Should their buildings be so similar as to be practically identical? This is one of the questions that I hope the seminar will address itself to. In Malaysia no traditional architecture is particularly implemented, hence it is not particularly known. Because of that, many of us in this country feel that the national identity in architecture is not all that important. I hope this seminar will help us to identify our need in establishing the identity in architecture for Malaysia. The Universiti has undertaken the systematic documentation of buildings that in our opinion have architectural significance in this country, and we have so far completed the documentation of about 100 buildings, such as traditional houses, mosques, temples, palaces, places for public assembly, etc.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you all, once again, for your participation, and wish you all successful deliberations. Assalamualaikum.

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Anwar Bin Ibrahim  
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports  
Malaysia

Bismillah ir Rahman Nir Rahim. Assalamualaikum.  
Tan Sri Dato Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid, Dr. Suha Özkan, Professor Parid Wardi Sudin, and respected colleagues. I wish you all well.

I’d like to open by thanking the sponsor, The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Prof. Parid Wardi Sudin and finally the committee which contributed towards making this seminar a success. I look upon this seminar as significant and meaningful for a young country like Malaysia. This is because we know that not only the Ministry for Culture, Youth and Sports, but also the scholars, architects and the public at large want to see an environment more meaningful from the point of view of culture in this country, including the development of architecture.

The historical development of regional Malay and Islamic architecture is not a recent phenomena. It has developed in line with the progress of cultural and intellectual development. Architecture is also the result of the geographical and environmental make up of this region. It is present not only in the structural form, but also in respect of utilisation of local resources, but more important in assimilating concepts, ideas and philosophies pertaining to this region. If you look at the regional architecture in the Philippines, in Indonesia and Malaysia, and other areas of the Malay world, integration of the local traditions and Islam is very pronounced.

In developing countries, architecture is considered to be symbol of progress. As such, the aesthetic value of architecture is not the perogative of the architects alone, but of the people as well. Unless of course, the architects represent, and they hopefully should represent, the conscience and aspirations of the people. Therefore it is our belief that architects need to appreciate and understand the problems and aspirations of the people and create architectural forms that would fulfil this need. Following the great strides in developmental efforts in our societies and as a result of fast economic development and the change in lifestyle, new buildings and complexes, concrete jungles, as they are called, have been built. Unfortunately, the results of the building development for the past two decades in our society have been rather disappointing, and do not necessarily reflect the aspirations of the people. Buildings did not take into account the weather, the environmental requirements, and the needs of the consumers, not necessarily in every way, but in some ways at least. I am sorry to have to say this in front of the architects and experts, because I know they have done their jobs. I know that in many cases they are also conscious of the changes that are taking place. Consciousness is more widespread now. But this is an honest observation from a member of the general public, who is a consumer himself.

At one time, the city of Kuala Lumpur, although it consisted of colonial architecture, without a Malaysian character, had its own particular features. In its present urban form it is somewhat a replica of the cities in the West. Not that we have any hysterical reaction against the West, but certainly our cities should represent our thinking and our needs. And they should represent the wishes and aspirations of our own people. Traditional buildings in this region, like the architectural form of the mosque in Java, Kalimantan, the Philippines and Malaysia, or like the ones found in Malacca are examples of regional architecture, but manifest themselves as houses of worship in Islam, and their forms remain conducive to the regions and the environment. The same goes for the traditional houses and palaces. Although palaces do not represent the common needs or desires or aspirations of the general public, but at least they represent the unique architectural forms that came into existence and that could be observed in our various societies. The Sri Menanti Palace in Negeri Sembilan, the Balai Besar in Alor Star, not to forget...
the Minangkabau architecture. For a time there were efforts to plan the Minangkabau architecture so as to represent the national culture form. We have to correct that. I think the indigenous character is rich enough, and should not be confined to a limited experience in our society.

These were some of the regional cultural architectural characteristics closely linked with our socio-cultural background. But the architects and the experts will tell you that they are more expensive, and in this period of recession, we should be thinking in terms of better designs and better forms. I am sure some colleagues of mine including Tan Sri Ainuddin and probably William Lim of Singapore would disagree with that. They will support us and our contention that they need not necessarily be more expensive.

It is our hope that the deliberations of this seminar will further impress the policy makers and architects of the need to relate themselves to their own philosophy and environment. It is inadequate to merely introduce superficial designs imposed on Western type concrete structures which they claim represents the indigenous architecture. Indigenous architecture has a philosophy of its own, it has its own intellectual traditions, and is related to local needs. It is not our intention to ignore the progress made in technology from the West, but the ultimate direction of our developmental efforts should be in adopting modern technology and adapting it to our local environment, while retaining our own philosophies and values to ensure that it is relevant to our needs and environment.

I must take this opportunity again to express our appreciation to The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, to the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, overseas and local participants and the experts that have gathered today to contribute to this search for identity in architecture. I can assure you that the Ministry of Culture will listen seriously, and is committed to recommend and support the search for identity in architecture.

So, with this hope, and the utterance of Bismillah ir Rahman Nir Rahim, I formally and with pleasure declare this seminar open.
What is identity? Firstly, it is a process, and not a 'found' object. It may be likened to the trail left by civilisation as it moves through history. The trail is the culture, or identity, of that civilisation.

Secondly, being a process, identity cannot be fabricated. We develop our identity by tackling what we perceive to be our real problems. For instance, Europeans pioneered the industrial revolution, without worrying about their identity. They came out of it all the richer for their efforts, while remaining French, English or German.

Thirdly, identity is not a self-conscious thing. We may talk about French logic, but the French are not trying to be French-logical. They're simply trying to be logical; it's we who watch them and say "That's very French".

We find our identity by understanding ourselves, and our environment. Any attempt to short circuit this process of understanding, or to fabricate an identity, would be dangerous to us all. It would be manipulation, a kind of signalling. A signal is quite distinct from a symbol, for it implies a Pavlovian reaction, a manipulated response. In other words, one person waves a flag whereupon everyone else jumps up and salutes. If an architect, after travelling around the world, were to return to India, and attempt to reproduce there a glass building he saw in New York, he would simply be transmitting signals. But if, on the other hand, he were to take the principles of architecture, and apply them to a completely different set of materials, customs, climate and traditions, he might put up a contemporary building which isn't all glass but which is very relevant to its locale — and to identity.

Climate is a crucial determinant in this process. For instance, the question of whether a church should be an enclosed box, or a mosque have a courtyard, would depend on where they were being built. Places like India, Malaysia and Indonesia require through-ventilation, because of their hot humid climates. So how do we take the principles of Islam and Christian-
Living Patterns

In a warm climate, people have a very different relationship to built-form. One needs but a minimal amount of protection, such as a Chatri (i.e. an overhead canopy), during the day; in the early morning and at night, the best place to be of course, is outdoors, under the open sky.

Thus, in Asia, the symbol of enlightenment has never been the school building, but rather the guru sitting under a banyan tree; and the monumental temples of south India are experienced not just as gopurams and shrines, but as a movement through the great open-to-sky spaces that lie between them. This movement — which is unknown in a cold climate — has always been a decisive factor in the spatial and functional organisation in Indian architecture (from Fatehpur-Sikri to Shrirangam).

Energy-Passive Buildings

In a Third World country like India, we simply cannot afford to squander the kind of energy required to construct — and aircondition — a glass tower in a tropical climate. And this, of course, is an advantage; for it means that the building must itself, through its very form, create the “controls” which the user needs. Such a response necessitates more than just sun angles and louvres; its needs must involve the section, plan, shape, in short: the very heart of the building.
To cross a desert and enter a house around a courtyard is a pleasure beyond mere photogenic imagemaking: it is the quality of light, and the ambience of moving air, that forms the essence of our experience. Architecture as a mechanism for dealing with the elements (truly, a machine for living!), this is the great challenge of our Third World

Urbanisation

The rural migrants pour into our cities. They are looking not merely for houses, but for jobs, education, opportunity. Is the architect, with his highly specialised skills, of any relevance to them? This will remain the central issue of our profession for the next three decades. To find how, where, and when he can be useful is the only way the architect can stretch the boundaries of his vision beyond the succession of middle and upper income commissions that encapsulate the profession in Asia.

The Nature of Change

We live in countries of great cultural heritage. Countries which wear their past as easily as a woman drapes her sari. But in understanding and using this past, let us never forget the actual living conditions of many of the peoples of Asia, and their desperate struggle to shape a better future. Only a decadent architecture looks obsessively backward (“I have seen the past, and it works”) At its most vital, architecture is an agent of change; to invent tomorrow: that is its finest function.

I would like to end with this image of Bombay’s skyline — with the squatters in the foreground. Those buildings on the skyline although ugly represent to the squatters the dream world they will never enter, but which they struggle to attain. Can we ever really understand what people’s aspirations are?

You know, about 15 years ago, when hippies first started coming to Bombay, a lot of rich Indians objected violently to seeing these Europeans sitting begging on the pavements, with torn clothes, lice in their hair, etc. It was difficult to understand their reaction, because one sees a lot of Indians in those conditions, and no one seems to mind. But a friend of mine said: Don’t you realise, if you’re a rich Indian travelling in your Mercedes, and you see this hippie, he’s signalling to you, and he’s saying: “I’m coming from where you’re going! It’s not worth going there!” So it’s deeply disturbing to the rich Indian. But wait
Low-income housing, New Bombay.

A social occasion Squatters on the outskirts of Bombay living in pipes left behind by the municipal workers.

a minute; it should also work the other way round. If the hippie were sensitive enough, he'd look at this monster in his Mercedes and realise he's also sending the same signal. In other words, we are but ships that pass in the night. Perhaps I have no moral right to question these people's aspirations any more than they mine.

All photographs courtesy of Charles Correa
The intimate relationship of built form to both climatic conditions and socio-cultural patterns has always promoted a high degree of continuity in domestic architecture. Yet today we seem to face a sudden disintegration of building traditions, a relentless intrusion of alien elements, and a sustained assault by all kinds of disruptive forces. In the debate generated by this transformation, supporters and critics alike have blamed the design professions for deliberate obliteration of the past and insensitivity to user needs. The housing patterns in informal settlements offer an ideal opportunity to investigate the issue of identity, because these settlements have evolved spontaneously and organically, unfettered by regulatory controls or prototypical designs imposed from without.

The context

In the past-colonial period (starting in the mid 1950s), the Arab countries began to institute national planning. A succession of multi-sectoral plans, typically covering a five-year period, were formulated and implemented. After 1973, the oil-rich countries embarked on large scale development programmes, attracting professionals, technicians, skilled workers, and labourers — first from neighbouring countries and then from all over the world. The resulting vast and complex system of regional labour movements and economic interdependence affected both labour-importing and labour-exporting countries. A new group of middle class citizens emerged with money they wanted to invest in urban real estate, the ensuing massive infusion of capital drove up land values and construction costs to unprecedented levels in one of the worst inflation spirals ever experienced by urban real estate. Between 1975 and 1982, land values were multiplied by ten, and construction costs by five, while local incomes rose by a factor of only two or three. Development was for the most part speculative in nature, and unregulated in character.
The rate of expansion of urban areas has far outstripped the ability of municipalities to cope. Overwhelmed, they can only watch helplessly, reluctant to tax or release vacant, unserviced land, and unable to exercise any effective control over peripheral development. The unrestrained activities of small scale entrepreneurs and contractors catering to the housing needs of the newly affluent middle class have generated a real estate market whose dynamics simultaneously promote the proliferation of informal settlements through leapfrogging and fringe development, and promote accelerated densification of existing settlements by infill of vacant spaces, intensified ground coverage of plots, and indiscriminate heightening of structures.

Informal settlements have recently become a focus of attention for planners, engineers, and architects, for, despite their undesirable manifestations, informal settlements are undeniably intriguing, amazingly dynamic, and the structures in them are relatively sound (in sharp contrast to the makeshift shack of bidonvilles and other squatter zones). However, there is widespread ambivalence about the architectural quality of the buildings, and it deserves more attention than it has received. Given the magnitude of the phenomenon these buildings are rapidly becoming a dominant feature in the cities spatially and visually. It is important to examine the characteristics of this new popular architecture, to determine the sources of its vocabulary, and to identify the factors influencing its evolution.

The setting

Despite superficial similarities, the typical urban pattern in informal settlements does not recreate the historical fabric. The movement path consists of a dual grid which integrates vehicular and pedestrian circulation in a modified rectilinear layout. The basic structural framework provided by this hierarchical grid articulates the space into small identifiable groupings of streets and buildings, delineating the hierarchy of social spaces in the community. Alignment and access are related to site conditions and major elements, particularly local mosques and souks, for which vehicular access is nowadays mandatory. Open space reflects the contemporary concepts of private and social space. It emphasises the functional shift from courtyard to streets, and fosters community interaction by respecting the accepted definition of social space.

This urban pattern clearly anticipates vehicular traffic and infrastructure networks. Providing for them in an unplanned fashion cannot prevent bottle-necks and problem areas. The lack of utilities and community facilities is aggravated by rapidly mounting densities which reach saturation levels quite close to those of the overcrowded traditional quarters, in less than a decade densities in many informal settlements rose from less than 400 persons per hectare to 800 or 1,000 (the equivalent of 400 persons per acre).

The client

The typical client for a house in an informal settlement feels pride in and a desire to exhibit his newly acquired wealth (however relative), and hence has an irrepressive inclination towards the outward display of affluence. Constant exposure to cross-cultural influences through travel, mass media, and communication promotes a redefinition of basic necessities to encompass an expanding array of consumer items. Adherence to religious and socio-cultural traditions does not extend to the architectural heritage beyond the mosque. Considerations of economic rationality are predominant, hence the search for practical and expedient solutions, without any sentimental
emulation of past traditions which have lost both meaning and appeal. He has a positive attitude towards the new and a corresponding negative feeling about the old — whether local or imported — as in the case of vaults and domes. He is subject to an uncontrolled attraction to the material symbols of status and modernity. TV, electrical home appliances, kitchen and bathroom fixtures, and the automobile.

The models

The design professions have played more than a marginal role in shaping the new popular architecture, without directly participating in the process. Quite apart from their architectural merit, the design and aesthetics of new private construction and public housing projects express an image of modernity that is widely emulated.

Workers take greater pride in their ability to use new materials and to replicate novel decorations (motifs, textures, and colours) than they do in the quality of the product. Traditional skills have been lost in the process of learning the skills demanded by the new construction techniques. Innovations in design and decoration introduced by higher income groups in the country or abroad are reproduced in forms modified to fit the lifestyles of the client group. The constant interaction between user/client and builder/designer, freely blending and adapting styles and techniques, has shaped the new popular architecture.

The basic design requirements

The house must fulfill the following requirements: It must comply with economic constraints under drastically altered and shifting cost factors, in terms of land, labour, and materials. It must satisfy the owner's social aspirations by providing him with the ultimate symbol of affluence and modernity. It must accommodate the range of lifestyles of three generations within the extended family sharing the same premises, and of other family units renting space in the structure, allowing each occupant an acceptable expression of identity. Finally, it must provide for the desired level of contact with neighbours within the structure and along the street.

The architectural expression

Recognisable expressions of traditional building configurations have misled many professionals, particularly Westerners, to conclude that contemporary popular architecture is a revitalised version of traditional models. To my mind, nothing could be further
from the truth. There is an insurmountable distaste for the old fashioned, and an irresistible attraction to the new, irrespective of suitability and cost.

Popular expectations and lifestyles are no longer traditional in outlook. Given a choice, there is a marked preference for what is perceived as urban, functional, and modern. Any form (such as a court), any material (such as mud), or any appointment (such as a barn) associated with the rural habitat is forcefully rejected. Yet in many instances, particularly with respect to basic activities such as raising animals or baking, the function persists long after the encompassing element has been discarded: the oven is put on the terrace, the goat is kept in the grandmother’s room, poultry is penned on the balcony or in the bathroom. Some functionally obsolete elements are quietly discarded, while others undergo incongruous mutations to permit their retention in deference to the symbolic value attached to them.

**House exteriors**

The absence of front yards and the lack of free-standing structures, which typically make their appearance only when public buildings are introduced to a settlement, are much more a consequence of high land values than a revival of more traditional patterns of development. The marked preference for modern building materials such as fired brick, cement blocks, reinforced concrete frames, and slab roofs, is as much dictated by economy and practicality as it is by taste, particularly when vertical expansion is the norm.

Contrary to general belief, domestic architecture in the Arab world has always been characterised by verticality. The height of a building was as much a symbol of the status of its owner as was its expanse. Verses from the Holy Quran give evidence of this perception, and historians’ accounts fully support it. It is quite misleading to associate popular housing with small one-story structures. These are often rural-type dwellings built by recent migrants on the urban fringe, or the remnants of villages engulfed by urban expansion, and their occupants bitterly resent this environment and dream of the day when they can either move to an urban dwelling or transform their shack into one.

Despite regulations to the contrary, experience has repeatedly shown that courtyards are covered and extra storeys added at least until a height of three or four floors is reached, with one or more dwelling units per floor. This is, of course, in line with longstanding urban traditions of housing for middle income groups. Another cultural factor fostering verticality is the distaste for living quarters on the ground floor, which was and still is normally reserved for other uses (shops, storage, etc.) or rented out as soon as the owner can add an upper floor to his building. Carried too far by ignorance or greed, incremental heightening often leads to the collapse of structures, as foundations are unable to support the load.

A marked change in attitudes toward privacy is transforming the aspect of dwellings. There is a desire to be part of the exciting life of the city even in areas where, presumably, domestic architecture was traditionally introverted (as in the Maghreb). Windows and balconies now open up facades to the outside world and its activities. The transparency of claustra or fences, parapets, and screens is more symbolic than an effective protection of privacy. Bent entrances and opaque obstacles obstructing the street view from the living areas are omitted. Solid fences and even the front room in courtyard houses are sacrificed to avoid confining residents within the enclosure.

The treatment of the facade as an indicator of wealth and social prestige makes for a prominent display of finishing and ornamentation. It often exhibits an interesting blend of surviving influences, expressed...
through a new architectural vocabulary: windows, paints, and prefabricated, glazed, or perforated tiles. Decorative motifs around the openings are an absolute must, even when these openings are modern glass and aluminium frames. The special attention given to windows on the street, entrance doors, and threshold motifs is, of course, a longstanding tradition and a symbol of the owner’s status.

Colour is used lavishly to differentiate the architectural elements, as soon as plastering and painting become affordable. This technique has allowed the replication — in a modified expression and at a fraction of the cost — of expensive ornamentation which would rely on wood and skilled craftsmen, or other similarly expensive materials and facings.

In the first stages of house construction, when resources are needed to expand the living space, finishings are restricted to balconies, entrance doors, and a strip of tone highlighting the windows. This is in line with a long tradition of popular houses being left unplastered except for a coat of rough mud plaster; paint was limited to a strip around the openings.

House interiors

The apparent continuity of indigenous cultural traditions is reflected in the organisation of space within the house, and the way it is used should not be allowed to mask the evolutionary processes by which it is being adapted to new economic, social, and technological realities.

Functionally obsolete spaces disappear. Where land is at a premium, the value of the courtyard space rapidly exceeds its usefulness, although it is sometimes found as a luxury item where land value and living space permit. It is more often found when rural lifestyles still persist in the early stages of a settlement’s development. Its functional uses are shifted to alternative spaces (kitchen, bath, balcony, room, terrace), often spilling over into the street. Courtyards are then converted to rooms and built over. Light and ventilation are provided through alternatives such as windows and shafts. This is a perfectly normal evolution, keeping in mind that the courtyard in popular houses traditionally was a utility space and not a patio, garden, or recreation space.
Function specialisation of rooms increases. As soon as additional living space becomes available, the traditional multi-purpose room is quickly replaced by bedrooms, sitting room, and guest room. In the multipurpose rooms that remain, uses are much more clearly defined. The definition of the dwelling unit, however, remains today as it was in medieval times: one main room, and all its specialised dependencies, including bedrooms and dining area (if any).

Underlying the priority given to expansion over finishings and amenities, including kitchen and bath, is a logical economic rationale. Extra space is translated into shops, rooms and apartments are rented to generate income. Privacy is retained by renting rooms within the dwelling, mostly to extended-family members. A self-imposed set of social controls regulates the use of common space and manages to minimise, though not eliminate, friction. The growing integration of the public and private domain in the organisation of space increasingly confines the intrusive and little-used public domain to restricted formal guest reception areas (one room or a corner).

New spaces are created for new needs. Foremost among these is the modern kitchen, particularly appreciated by the working housewife. There is a marked dislike for open-type plans, a clear division of space into separate rooms opening onto a circulation space is the norm. There is usually only one door to each room and no other interconnection between rooms. This is again an extension of housing patterns that predate the Islamic period in the region.

Western-style furniture is supplanting traditional home furnishings. Ornate wooden furniture and carpets have replaced copper utensils and sheepskins as the showpieces of the wife’s dowry. They are obvious indicators of social standing and must be predominantly displayed. Such treasured appliances as refrigerators, ventilators, and washing machines, or the high-tech entertainment gadgets like TVs, cassette recorders, are the ultimate symbols of modernity and wealth, and are therefore proudly exhibited in the most conspicuous locations relative to the entrance and the guest area.

Yet the arrangement of this modern furniture remains highly traditional — that is, lined up against the walls. This pattern, which may be an extension of the medieval designs of recessed and built-in furniture, maximises the unencumbered space within a room. It is ideally suited to the social need of displaying an array of furniture and appliances in the smaller-sized rooms of the contemporary house.

**Conclusion**

The architect’s vision of housing for limited income groups — whether it be apartment units in super-blocks or modified, pseudo-Islamic courtyard houses — contrasts strikingly with what people want to have, which is clearly expressed in the housing they have built for themselves. The new popular architecture is a truly hybrid form which draws on imported models and adapts them to user needs, but never simply transplants them. To a lesser extent, it draws on traditional models, selectively, according to inclination, and constrained by considerations of image, cost, and craft. But it never copies blindly.

The new popular architecture is clearly “Islamic” in character, yet has discarded all links to traditional architecture which have lost their meaning in a constantly evolving future. It is clearly “contemporary,”
eagerly adopting the technology and symbols of the age in which it is created. It has managed to absorb and reinterpret the regional heritage — proportions, motifs, colours, and even elements — more successfully than the modern architecture which seeks to accomplish this through the superficial use of Islamic motifs.

Although, by professional standards, the contemporary popular architecture may lack certain aesthetic and artistic qualities, it is difficult to deny that, as an expression of authenticity, it rings true.

All photographs courtesy of the architect except those on pages 14 (top) by A Allam, 16 (top and centre) by A Khellal and N Zeglahe, 17 (left) and 18 by Ismail Serageldin and 19 (left) by Samir Abdulac.
William Lim

I would like to focus on six points:

The first point which has been mentioned by Charles Correa as well as Mona Serageldin is on urbanisation. Besides understanding statistics what may be useful for us to know is the rate of growth of the population in the urban areas and the economic changes arising therein, and what they mean. Obviously what happens in Bombay a city of five or six million people, with half of that in the informal sector will be very different from perhaps Penang, which is a smaller place. This interrelationship should be looked at a bit more carefully in order to be able to relate to what we are going to discuss.

The second point which has been talked about here, is the informal sector. It is important, and arising from this, the percentage of people who are affected by the informal sector, particularly in housing — but also most other urban activities. Although the figure of 50% has been mentioned, in the more affluent countries, like Malaysia and Singapore, the vast majority of the urban population in fact still cannot afford housing delivered by the private sector. You may really be talking about much higher numbers who are at the moment cramming in on the existing stocks of housing. As the urban explosion continues this impact will be felt even more seriously. Therefore the emphasis is really on the informal sector or the sectors that have been subsidised, or in one way or the other delivered with subsidised housing or shelter, or a self-help house.

This brings us to a very important point raised at the core of Mona’s paper, namely the people’s image in relation to housing, and their wants. We should discuss the importance of the examples indicated, whether built by architects or not and what is the impact on these people in the informal sector. The impact on the mass of people and how they are going to react must have a very important bearing on our own perception.

The third point is the value changes that are continuously taking place. Mona Serageldin has mentioned the perception people have of being urban, functional and modern and you can see the type of conflict that emerges here; on the other hand there is Charles Correa’s thesis on the open-to-sky theory — for whatever reasons, people are moving away from that. Not totally, but they have a different interpretation of his open-to-sky concept. All this to some of us may be a step backward, or is it? There are other examples, like the three generations family. Is this the type of lifestyle that people want?

The fourth point here is, that what people want is to express their own identity and then to actually be able to have some say on the limits of contact with their neighbours — this is very significant in this exercise of the search for identity. In the built environment, often designed by architects, how are we able to provide this opportunity for people to express their identity on this scale such that they can be involved internally and externally through their immediate territory. How are people able to have their say on the desired arrangements of buildings where the different levels of contact can perhaps be made as desirable for the people as it can be? How are we going to do this as designers?

The fifth point is that the search for identity is there not only in buildings by Graves in Portland and some of the other buildings of the so called post modern movement. That search is done within a box which as Charles Correa says we must discard in our search for identity as we are operating in the tropics and our conditions are different. Therefore our interpretations of the search it follows will be different. When one looks at Charles’ beautiful hotel in Goa I would consider that to be his post-modern. So perhaps we should be a bit more careful in using terminology.

Lastly, Charles Correa has quite correctly talked about the energy crisis and the need to look at buildings, in a certain way, keeping in mind climate, limit
of technology and so on. But the question is: when development takes place, when society gets more affluent, especially in many of the capital cities which have borrowed images of international styles because their economy is hooked up with international trades and commerce — how do we deal with this demand for air-conditioned buildings by a lot of people? Once we decide that air-conditioning is acceptable, that is a different ball game. Are we then, talking about going back to a box? If not can we get away from it? Do we need it? That ties in with a related question to tall buildings and density especially in the central area and the urban area. If we have both high intensity and tall buildings can you really design buildings which are not air-conditioned? What are the alternatives? Where do we start discussing these problems?

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**Eric Lye**

Perhaps to begin the discussion I could briefly suggest the fact that Charles Correa is looking to the sky and Mona Serageldin is deeply rooted on the ground.

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**Tay Kheng Soon**

Mona Serageldin’s paper has given us a very sobering view. However I don’t quite agree that collective neurosis is authenticity. When people choose to express what they are not, that is neurosis. When people want to have something that does not belong to them, that is neurosis. For example, many people in the middle class of the industrialised countries look towards the South Pacific, Asia, Thailand, Indonesia, as exotic places, and they try to get art and crafts from these areas to decorate their homes, in the same way people in South East Asia have pictures of the Swiss Alps hanging on their walls. People want to be something they are not and it is a natural thing, but it is also a neurotic thing.

During different phases of social development, especially during the rapid growth stage when people are moving away from traditional forms of existence to the new, especially through different forms of occupation through the urbanisation of their work then there is a transformation and uprooting of their cultural values and this is expressed most visably in their aesthetic choices — and so there is a rapid, a neurotic phase. I’m not so sure that it is necessarily a good thing. It is a phase which we have to pass through, but as designers the big issue is how do we respond to this? Do we say this is authentic, therefore good, or do we say that right this is a phenomenon, this happens. How do we deal with it? The question of how to deal with it is the beginning of the interaction between the phenomenon and the design process.

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**Mona Serageldin**

I agree very much with what you said, by saying it is authentic does not mean it is good. It is authentic in as much as these people, each and every individual, believes in this type of housing to be what he or she wants.

Now it does have if you take it and analyse it, elements of both the modern and the traditional. It’s the blend that they have developed for themselves. How you deal with it as an architect is another issue, because if you see, architects have not dealt with it. Planners have dealt with the planning problem, the lack of infrastructure, the roads and so on but they have not dealt with the houses, or the architecture and the architect has not dealt with it at all. So that is an entirely new field now, if the architect wants to deal with it. I have heard many architects comment that this is very bad taste and vulgar. It is possible to say that too, you see that is an aesthetic comment. But the other comment that you make, that it is not aesthetically pleasing, does not mean it is not authentic. Aesthetically pleasing in your or some other architect’s viewpoint does not necessarily mean it is not authentic for the person who has built it.

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**Hijjas Kasturi**

The question of the kind of identity that we want is whether it is going to be nationalism or something else. To me there are three groups. One is to be functional, that is Functionalism and that is with a capital ‘F’, it is a blend of many things — Rational thinking, good planning and a host of other problems, and the grammar of architecture that we learnt during our five years in school. That is part of it.

The second part is economic. Economics of construction, of technology, of availability of materials and of maintainability of the building.

It is the third one that really concerns us and that is aesthetic. It is here we must find the root towards identity in architecture. However, we are not being positive about it. We live in this world of closed communication, of the influence and onslaught of westernisation. It is at our door steps. How do we respond to this? With our multi-racial society and the host of problems that we have, ultimately how do we deal with it in a positive manner.

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**Haji Rahim**

At the moment it seems to me that we are talking a lot about what and how. But so far in our deliberations nothing has been said about the philosophy of archi-
tecture. Secondly, I have a question for Mona. Would you be able to clarify the influence of each age group in terms of development of styles or taste?

**Mona Serageldin**

Essentially, I was speaking about people who went to work as expatriate workers and who came back with a lot of money. So by and large the people who are buying are in their prime of working life. The workman will be a very young man, but the contractors not necessarily so at all. But you see the whole purpose of my presentation was simply to show a definition of identity as it is expressed in building by a very big component of the population that is not the architect or even defined by people related to the design profession, and to simply point out how they see and define their own identity. We cannot define for them.

**Charles Correa**

Talking about neurosis and what people want — the fact that people yearn, they strive and have aspirations is beautiful. It would be a deadly place if they didn't and there are societies where people don't have that kind of energy. However if these aspirations are ugly, it is because the people at the top lead ugly lives since all new lifestyles come in either from leaders or from designers and architects. That is our real responsibility. There is no way that people can see alternatives if they are not made palpable for them by example. So, I don't see the aspirations of these people as a neurosis. It is not neurosis at all. I thought neurosis was thinking someone else is something he isn't.

**Eric Lye**

Western culture and Christianity have always stressed individuality. I believe Islam and even Buddhism stress a kind of harmonious compatibility with much less stress on individualism. In fact they frown on individualism. And yet we are always questioned on why we don't have individualism. Is it that bad not having individualism?

**Wan Baharuddin**

In Malaysia we can see in the terraced houses or in the other public houses that have been built, that when the houses are complete, after a couple of months or so, the modifications begin to appear, arches, inverted arches, etc. where people wish to express their individuality in that situation. Therefore it reveals the fact that architects are not fulfilling the needs of the users or the users have themselves to identify with their own spaces. So as such there are no possibilities for architects to impose their views of the world on to people. I think that has to be accepted. But the question is, where does one draw the line between where architects should intervene and where they should impose their values on the users? I think that is where the search for identity comes in. I think the best contribution that an architect can make is to do what people cannot do. For instance people have been copying the modern movement simply because it is economically feasible (although not climatically so), and it is simple. And since people have copied that, what do architects have for people to copy next? That is what the role of architects today should be as innovators.

**Tao Ho**

There could be another way of solving the problem of the search of identity. Maybe we should not be looking for solutions. Maybe there isn't any solution. Maybe we should pose more questions and questions may help to find answers that will be closer to the real solution, instead of the solution you may derive by defining the answer. Our present approach to problem solving is to search for the tangible, whereas it may be that through a study of the intangible we can get closer, or have a different view point of the problem. For example, in the search for identity in architecture, there are two approaches to the problem. One is the local approach, and the other one is the bigger, universal approach, the big and the small picture. I think we spend too much time in looking at the small pictures, forgetting that there is a bigger picture somewhere. Architecture is but one of the manifestations of an artistic or cultural heritage. But it is destructable in time, that is, it is transitory. What is not transitory is the human spirit that keeps us going. When asked about Chinese culture, my mind immediately strings its 6000 years into one second. What is it? The Sung, Tung, or the Ching Dynasty? Is my identity what I am now, or what I was, or what I shall be? That is what we have to think about. Today there is a great problem in the search for identity because we are in a society that is so highly consumer oriented. Now, are we going to define identity in terms of the expression of the social economic phenomena which one finds in New York city, or even down town Kuala Lumpur, or do we look for identity in the invisible human spirit?
Kenneth Yeang

Actually we are talking about 'the search for identity in architecture', but so far the discussion seems to be 'the search for identity in the user of the architecture' and also 'the search for identity in architecture by the architects themselves'. So maybe we should concentrate on the title of the seminar rather than the user identification with his building, which is what I think Mona is talking about.

Mona Serageldin

Yes, you are right. But at the same time it is not user identification with the building, rather with the type of building that the user wants to fulfil his own aspirations.

Kenneth Yeang

Yes, that's exactly what I was talking about. In other words, to what extent does the architect control and shape the spaces for the users? Is there a system whereby the user can participate, although within limits? There is for example the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank which is a totally flexible system which the user can decorate and convert to whatever he likes. This question of flexibility has not been truly resolved. What exactly is the role of the architect? To what extent does he control the spaces for the people? And should he define, design and determine such spaces? We probably will have to meet somewhere in between, and the level of control of design structure can change when our society becomes more sophisticated and experienced, than at present, in the use of space. The word 'identity' has socio psychological implications, and implies a sense of being and personality. I don't think we can apply this to architecture. May be we should be talking about a critical vernacular, not in the sense of traditional architecture, but architecture that is particular to a region — in the same way that each country has its own language with different dialects for different regions. It is this sort of architecture that we are talking about where each region may be developing its own, and mixed style, and how to derive our own, rather than the social psychological aspects of architecture.

Eric Lye

Well we are talking about architecture, we are talking about especially countries that are not Western, that have gone through a degree of colonisation or late development. We are here because there is a crisis, otherwise there is no need for us to talk. In the West they meet not because they talk of crises, they only talk of improving the techniques, whether metamorphical, semantic or whatever. But here we are talking of a real social crisis of identity which is software not hardware.
The Question of Identity

I am glad this conference is focussing on the search for architectural identity rather than a search for National identity. Debates on nationalism recur continually on many subjects — dress, behaviour, art, dance, culture, etc. — and tend to be divisive rather than ‘adhesive’ or persuasive. My view has always been that culture has no boundaries. Despite bureaucratic desires, prescribed forms of constraints stultify rather than inspire.

The question of identity is really something you can rhapsodise over and turn inside out, but I think we should look at it with a different perspective — my paper is presented in three sections: International Buildings, Regional Projects, and the Tribal Habitat of South East Asia — followed by an epilogue, a tribute to the late Buckminster Fuller, who had a world-view of South East Asia.

International Architecture

The first of my slides is of Falling Water. Frank Lloyd Wright has written significantly on the search for style (his concept of identity) rather than for a style. He abhorred the plagiarists, whom he called the “stencil-lists”, and those who purvey fashion and stylisms.

The currency of “isms” — modernism, ultra-modernism, and now post-modernism, plagues us. In South East Asia, where often a feudal condition
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still prevails, the concept of modernity — and the relevant value system of the modern movement — have been insufficiently understood or appreciated.

Pop trends are by nature transient and flippant, and even if they have definable identity, they will become dated. If we prefer and look for more lasting (or even classical) qualities in architecture, then our concept of identity or style will need a firmer basis.

Most of you have your own perceptions of international buildings. Some perceptions will be amplified by what you read; often written by the authors of the buildings who will explain them and some of you have read second generation interpretations of the buildings, others will have heard these buildings talked about by teachers in schools. Every building, therefore, doesn’t exist only for its own physical identity, it becomes a vehicle for journalists and teachers which affects our perception.

Another of Wright’s buildings — the Johnson Wax Factory reminds me that one of the tasks assigned to us, by society and certainly by our parents was to go overseas and learn about the world. We come from different backgrounds, some more traditional than others and it was our job to go abroad, to know the world, to understand the world and to learn from it the good things. In the process of course many of us realised that we learned much about the Western world and so little of the rest including our own world.

Many of the important international buildings were built over two generations ago and I have visited and evaluated them. Direct experiences are essential and quite different from second-hand impressions from books or magazines; the latter could even be deleterious especially when inflamed by trendy critics, such is the power of the media in establishing in-groups and cults.

A building that is the subject of pilgrimages or certainly was in my time as a student and which we all tried to see first hand was Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp — a striking and romantic building — a great piece of sculpture (not to be copied). Corbusier wasn’t only a romantic artist, he thought of himself as a great social reformer, planning for people. This took the form of his Unité d’Habitation and later in India a building in Ahmedabad for the mill owners and his huge buildings for the Secretariat at Chandigarh. Le Corbusier was of course such a powerful artist that he influenced all schools and shoals of lesser architects who try to emulate him.

The Yoyogi stadium in Tokyo by Kenzo Tange excites me — a great work of architecture harnessing technical skills and the source of enormous national pride — a symbol for the Olympic Games held in Japan. His work is complimented with the Tokyo Festival Hall by Kunio Maekawa undoubtedly one of Japan’s great modern architects integrating Japanese characteristics.

The influence of buildings by Paul Rudolf who aspired to the mantle of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Moshe Safdie, I.M. Pei and John Portman can be seen all over the world sometimes in appreciation or flattery, sometimes in travesty. Their impact through glossy magazines are perhaps even greater than “in the flesh”. Architectural students in their adolescence naturally try on the new architectural “clothes” for size — and dream of greater virtuosity to rival and outdo acclaimed masterpieces with their every scheme and output. The mature architect has to sort all this out — from eclecticism to a personal integrity.

Equally so the Pompidou Centre in Paris which contrasts so sharply with the older buildings around and Norman Foster’s new masterpiece for the Hong-kong Shanghai Bank will influence many people who will try to do surrogate versions.

Regional Architecture

Turning to the work of our contemporaries in South
East Asia, Locsin’s monumental, expressionist building in Manila was for a client who wanted something in a new imperial style — who is to say that it hasn’t got identity? Similarly with Sumet Jumsai’s earlier brute concrete works in Bangkok and the work of Atelier-6 in Jakarta and Bali.

Some of the work of my own practice in Singapore and Malaysia, will lead me to my next point. The Singapore Conference Hall, Seremban State Mosque, Jurong Town Hall and KOMTAR in Penang illustrate an unself-conscious international design criteria which underlies the work of many Southeast Asian architects.

Their “tropicality” sometimes do not eschew air-conditioning. Frequently clients and suppliers are part of an internationally trading world. Their national importance lie in the fact that their architects are nationals in residence, serious about their
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Nusa Dua Hotel, Bali

urban responsibilities and are not transient foreigners. Generally, the major regional practitioners have come to terms with world building techniques, and by training and experience, have been ready to design more significant projects not only in their own cities but also in other parts of the world.

Upstaging this prospect, commercial and other interests have brought in the big “brand names” of architecture to achieve prestige faster than the region can originate. With the Peis and the Portmans, a new kind of competitiveness results. Perhaps by way of reaction, we can observe a swing towards facade pastiche, historicism, vernacularism or symbolic “nationalism”. With projects like the Tanjong Jara Hotel, we have folk building craft borrowed authentically and applied, with functional contradictions and conflicts. In the Nusa Dua Hotel, the designers have recreated a nouveau riche Balinese palace — far beyond traditional antecedents — and suitably opulent for touristic royalty, the result is fantastic, a tribute not only to Balinese craftsmanship but also to hotel showmanship.

Notwithstanding all this excitement, I feel we should not forget the relevant mainstream traditions and principles of the modern movement in architecture. Beyond stylistic identity, the real question is whether the design solutions are good or bad — in terms of these principles and in professional competence.

Tribal Traditions in South East Asia

As an abrupt change, I wish to illustrate indigenous tribal cultures still extant in the region, in some cases proudly primitive and others woefully battered by the impact of “modernisation”.

Currently, I am involved in collating photographic information on these cultures for an exhibition to be called Traditional Habitat in South East Asia (commissioned by the National Art Gallery, KL), which will help in presenting an overview of the tribal cultures which underlay and transcend latter-day national boundaries, and which circumscribes the region (which I call the Sunda Girdle).

In some cases, even architects in the same area are unaware of the indigenous (or earlier migratory) tribal cultures. The attitude and policy of government towards these minority groups have often been ambivalent. In some cases, the indigenous forms (especially roofs and decorative features) are seen as appropriate national motifs for applied revivalism (usually out of context) or for touristic appeal — local flavour.

There is a commonality of tradition, throughout the region in a great belt that sweeps up to Japan with tribal differences as people relate to the environment. This can be illustrated with the longhouses of the Iban and Kayan and the now-vanished headhouses of the Bidayuh, Akha dwellings in North Thailand, the habitat of the Bontoc and Ifugao.

Akha dwellings in North Thailand.
tribes, and neolithic villages in Sumba-Indonesia. To me, the more important objective is to document and appreciate the cultures for their own sake. Before we can think of solutions in the modernising process, we must survey the residual condition and research the historical background of these truly indigenous regional cultures — to appraise and to help, rather than to derive from.

Buckminster Fuller

Bucky in his later years had an increasing fascination and love for South East Asia. He saw it as the "atoll" cradle for Early Man; and he symbolically linked the 3-way weave basketry found in the region to other conceptual strands in his world view.

Bucky reminds us of our comprehensive global design responsibilities, beyond national or regional divisiveness, and beyond conventional architecture to the inexorable integrity of human science and art.

I end by quoting him:

"Human Integrity is the uncompromising courage of self determining whether or not to take initiatives, support or cooperate with others in accord with 'all the truth and nothing but the truth' as it is conceived by the divine mind always available in each individual.

Whether humanity is to continue and comprehensively prosper on Spaceship Earth depends entirely on the integrity of the human individuals and not on the political and economic systems. The Cosmic question has been asked — 'Are humans a worthwhile-to-universe invention?'"
**Panel Discussion 2**

**Eric Lye**

I don’t know how others feel but I am suffering terribly from information overload. Perhaps then if there are any questions you may wish to direct them to Lim Chong Keat.

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**Tay Kheng Soon**

The less developed or indigenous areas you showed us, looking at these settlements, the pattern and house styles and ways in which houses are grouped together, do you find any trace of underlying themes that may be relevant to say housing areas today or city core areas or areas where community life can exist. Would you like to comment?

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**Lim Chong Keat**

Identity is a psychological problem which faces different people in different ways. For example, tribal groups like the Balinese have identity. It’s interesting to note that they have developed a very harmonious way of life and have become very confident people with certainly no identity crisis. They would know how to find their way into the modern era given their own terms. Now I mean by that, their own pace. It is a very important aspect which we should realise because right now, even in the cities of South East Asia specially the sea-open cities, we are being invaded by the whole multi-national money making business, the whole question of the importation of international architecture with all the problems that it brings, so that you are really not given a chance to progress at your own pace. In fact some of us are really trying to jump over and meet them on their own terms. Well, that is one kind of solution, but there should be a much more sensible slowing down, really the search for a different kind of optimum. At the moment, with the invasion of foreign initiatives and everything else, Singaporeans are supposed to learn overnight how to be better than the Americans. It may not work out.

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**William Lim**

It seems we are going right back to Western concepts of individualism and collectivism. Why should we need to say how much flexibility we must give to people? Maybe in some instances they need more and in some less. We don’t need to draw a line because there is a whole range of solutions. It is very dangerous if we start drawing lines even if we called it a compromise. Is it a compromise? Is it necessary to compromise? This comes back to a question raised earlier about philosophy. Perhaps we can come to some agreement that we belong to different regions and races and we do not have this approach, that we must find answers or solutions. If we accept this as a common philosophical approach, perhaps answers will slowly emerge which can over time become solutions or possible problem solving devices. We can then analyse them to derive a particular solution.

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**Sumet Jumsai**

I begin to think that when we start to talk about the quest for identity, perhaps we might very well be suppressing the existing identity itself. I suppose that we must nevertheless live with tags on our backs with identity so that we can all be identified with something else and I suppose that identity becomes a desperate issue when you don’t have it. And at this point in time I think the architect is the most desperate. He is so desperate that he is trying to short circuit the process of culture, something Charles Correa has done beautifully. In this respect I think he is a great architect because he can short circuit a process of culture most beautifully.
Charles Correa

Thank you for the compliment!

It seems to me that there are three main streams which go to recreate our environment and therefore define this identity research. One is the traditional way of building which exists in all the societies. Second is what you might call the popular way. From what Mona say there are two things about the popular way which are significant One is that it seems to reject tradition increasingly, for example the courtyard. Secondly it is very much influenced by example from the top, that means the lower income groups imitate the middle income groups, all the way up. This leaves us the third main stream which is what I call intervention. Now this intervention can be done by architects who show alternate models or by politicians. Politicians are tremendous planners and designers. Seriously they probably are more effective than most planners. Mao restructured China just before breakfast. There was Nyerere in Tanzania and Ataturk in Turkey. These are people who saw an alternative and started from zero. And this is what an architect can also do. But starting from zero does not mean that you don't understand the past, your environment, your materials, it is a synthesis which gives an alternative. I can see that the first two streams are very relevant to our identity.

Romi Khosla

Speaking as a practising architect, I don't think that all the issues that are affecting the whole world are necessarily affecting me, or that if a large volume of bad building is going up in an area in my country that necessarily bothers me: because in one's working life, one is trying to synthesise some values in one's work. And during that lifetime one has got time for very few of those values, and you do those in your work and you hope that you, as an architect, will make a building. You might do five buildings, in four of those you have not been able to express your turmoil, but it is in your mind. But the fifth building, which you regard as a good building of yours, is important because that building has summarised all the turmoil in your mind. The fact that a large volume of work is going on, which is expressing a certain value in society, doesn't mean that I as an architect am concerned with it. In my country there is a tremendous amount of corruption. Call it a neurosis, but then I can synthesise nothing out of it. I could not. But then, you see, as an architect one is on a different search altogether. One is not trying to say that "I have to change the destiny of my country or the destiny of the architecture of my country". One does not have the time for that or the infra-structure. One is not Gandhi.

An architect never shows all his buildings. He always chooses to show maybe two or even one building, and that is important. He is saying that "I have summarised all the problems that I feel of this age up there in that building". Similarly I think that our search for identity in architecture should be really a quest for the few buildings which we feel have really hit the nail on the head because the architect has anticipated and summarised a lot of problems in that building and has given it direction.

Kenneth Yeang

The way a person presents himself in every day life is a reflection of his identity. Someone said that he can describe a person's architecture by looking at his face. He said now if you look at someone like Philip Johnson, very smooth face — a lot of glass in his buildings. And if you look at Buckminster Fuller, he is bald and his head dome shaped. There is Hijjas in his seersucker suit and Charles Correa with his expensive Indian outfit. The identity of a person really comes in what he thinks, talks and dresses. So it is a wholistic concept of identity. Using this analogy maybe we can look at the way we do our buildings — our designed methodology. Some architects design in a very intuitive way. Others have a systematic approach. So I don't think all of us can even agree on how we are going to go about doing our design. So we are talking about a quality of architecture and how that quality is interpreted into the architecture itself. That is the angle we should conduct our search from.

Ruslan Khalid

Charles Correa hit the nail on the head when he said the people's aspirations really come from the top. So why can't we have a seminar where we can have politicians and rich people and so on, where we can discuss decisions. Where we can tell them what vulgar taste they have. But in Malaysia in particular, we now have different directives from different Ministries about how we should design our buildings. So perhaps legislation is the place to begin. Maybe we should become politicians. The second point as made by Baharuddin is that people are busy copying easy examples of the international style and that architects should be looking at what other contributions they could make in the society for them to copy.
Eric Lye

No concrete directions have been given to the discussion so far, and I don't think that should be. Please allow me at this time to quote Goethe, he said that “That which is practical the common man can make and the artist can learn; that which is art the artist must create and the common man can learn”.

Perhaps the identity we are talking about is how to resolve the contradiction between our history and our culture. Maybe our identity is such that we need to live with this contradiction rather than to resolve it into a narrow definition although that would be very convenient for designers. This kind of identity is very narrow minded especially in the case of South East Asia, and Malaysia and Singapore in particular. Whether we like it or not it is a multi-racial society, in a way a multi-lingual society and multi-religious society. It is a problem and a contradiction but we must live with it and try to resolve this thing. This is where our real identity lies. We must think of this identity as a dynamic thing. Sometimes it is to do with politics, sometimes with social conditions and sometimes with beliefs. For example one of the things that interested me as an observer in Bali were the gates they have there, which you see all over the place. The house may be very tattered but the gates are phenomenal, so spiritual. I didn’t know their meaning until I was told that they are actually temples split apart and the gates guard people who pass through. Now these are beliefs. Folklore, if you wish, but they are certainly important to them and meant something spiritual to me although I knew nothing about the background.

The Chinese have their kinds of beliefs. There is a thing called Geomancy. The Chinese used Geomancy, and developed in the Western eye, ridiculous corners and mirrors. Yet they are very Chinese, although they look funny if you are Western educated. But the bankers and shopkeepers believe in them and they give that unique character to the otherwise standard looks of the highrise. So this is just a little touch even in a crude way. I cannot say much about Malaysia, except that I am aware that the Sufi tradition has a lot of mysticism, yet you keep your mysticism in the kampong, it does not come out in the urban areas, perhaps it should. Even in a very naive way, try it, because I think the majority of the villagers believe in it. Islam aside, these are things that perhaps are not unimportant. We try to hide them away from our Western counterparts for fear that they may say that they are not terribly rational, but you know, neither are they themselves. It is inviting unnecessary criticism because we want our work measured by the Westerners. So what do you expect? Sure, you are measured according to their terms. I think it's about time we measure them by our terms, no matter how naive these may be. As a famous Danish philosopher said: “naive you are, if you think those who succeed are not naive”.

Now to get back to some of the important points made by Charles Correa. I think it was important when he said that a cultural process which gives identity in the end cannot be fabricated. This period of cultural gestation varies from nation to nation and society to society, it just takes time. Even in a country such as the U.S., it took them over two hundred years to get what we call ‘identity’. And their identity came actually from a very republican way of life, the vast country, the resources and everything that Europe was not. So the problem that confronts us is whether we wish to conceive of identity in a self-conscious way, as seminars of this type must do, or in an unself-conscious way, as a way of life.

The other question from Charles Correa’s talk is, which comes first: does environment influence man, or man influence environment?

I would imagine in the rural setting environment would influence man. In the urban setting perhaps it is man that influences environment.

Then there are problems of identity which are abstract and those which are real. Can we identify those in our own context within our own culture?

The “under the tree” concept which Charles Correa mentioned is important because it is a simple way of reminding us of our physical environment. The tree is a beautiful thing because it filters light through its leaves and allows air to flow through it like a stream. The trunk is a situational point that people gather under. So the tree is very appropriate to our climate, even to the way we perceive personal and interpersonal space relationship. The concept of the square table is western, because if you look at tribal relationships they sit around in a circle not a square. I do believe that in Asia our relationships are round not square, and yet we are getting squarer and squarer.

The other thing is the concept of a kind of nomadic space that you move from place to place according to climatic conditions, time of day and level of noise. The mosquito net is a wonderful definer of space which we have lost, which defines our sleeping space, not necessarily a bed. Then there was mentioned the machine for living. The phrase ‘machine for living’ must be taken more openly, in terms of the functional technological implications; but perhaps what is important regarding identity is, as far as architecture is concerned, that which is merely functional and that which is socially functional. For example in the West, they use instruments like knives and forks, and on the other hand the Chinese, use chopsticks. These things are not reasoned, they have cultural reasons. So when we are talking about identity, dynamic identity, we are talking about our cultural boundaries and perhaps
our new economic constraints, which go hand in hand. And this ought to remind us about the hippie and the Indian's Mercedes.

In our society with its colonial influences and religious influences from Buddhism to Islam to Christianity our identity is pluralistic. One or two elements may dominate but it is essentially pluralistic, and we are the losers if we categorise everything into a single identity.

We have to learn to accept and deal with contradictions. This is not unique to us. We must remember that our identity cannot be pure anymore because of global communications, that things come to us very quickly and are lost very quickly too. The days of a pure identity that we are talking about can no longer be.

In Mona Serageldin's paper, she talks about the user-client versus the builder-client, and how they identify their aspirations and what is the position of the architects in their dealings with the user-client and the builder-client. She seems to say that the kitchen is perhaps one unit of the habitat, which has positioned itself in such an important way because the chore of managing ones household has now become more efficient in terms of cooking, washing, drying and so on. I think this sort of thing itself does not have to do with identity, it is to do with just mere functions which are made more efficient. But the environment in which these functions situate themselves could have an identity. Perhaps I can pose a sort of Taoist question: do I sit near the pond and decide before I throw the stone how many ripples the stone will make, or do I throw the stone and then find out how many ripples it does make? Do we see ourselves as architects as geometric animators or as social animators? Perhaps we are geometric animators and no more.

Through our education, particularly our Western education and architectural education we are steeped in design using history and even social conditions, but we seem to shy away from designing using economics and politics. This is part of our handicap. We have something against economics as dirty and yet in actual practice we soon realise that we are absolutely naive about this. Perhaps I can end the summary by saying that I believe, that architecture is really about the art of building and building is merely the practice of architecture.

Ruslan Khalid

Identity in a country which has a monolithic culture is much easier to define than in a country like Malaysia which has a multi-racial society. A lot of architects in this country react very strongly against any discussion of national identity in architecture because it means a certain bias towards a particular racial group. So this topic has been suppressed from any sort of public discussion. Perhaps somebody could take that up.

Sumet Jumsai

You have an important point. We have been talking most of the time about identity on a very abstract level. But the reason why we are here I'm sure is because in Malaysia (and Singapore) there is a feeling of crisis of identity, if you like national identity, let's face it. This feeling interests me because I think (and I hope to point out later) that the crisis in the national identity as you feel it here, as the government feel it here, could be something terrible artificial. The so-called Malay identity could be defined, and I want to prove it, is regional, almost ASEAN, but much greater than that, a West Pacific identity. I can see it and I shall try to show in my paper that there is a common origin in this part of the world and at the end of that paper nobody will feel there is a crisis.

Tay Kheng Soon

It is a fact that the centre of economic gravity has shifted eastwards and we may very well be in the centre of it. Because of this, and as a result of the colonial experience and the protracted nature of the integration of the various cultures in Malaysia and Singapore (being multi-racial and multi-cultural societies) and feeling the impact of Western pop culture and seeing some of the deleterious effect of the erosion of ethics and moral values in the more developed countries, we are suddenly faced with this prospect. I think that is really the dimension of the identity. (I don't think I would use the word crisis). We need to define identity in very practical terms. We are pulled from pillar to post by the different kinds of fashionable ideas being portrayed in all the media which we are so completely exposed to. How do we therefore focus our energies? We have a general concept, but as the Minister said in his opening speech, now you tell us, in specific terms what it's all about, because if you don't tell us, we're going to tell you. This is what it boils down to. Some bureaucrats at some level is going to define it for us. So if this seminar is going to be useful we should come to some very clear, albeit tentative conclusions, so that they may be refined further and demonstrated in actual projects.

William Lim

Maybe we should first discuss whether we need and
Eric Lye

I think at this point it is apt reminding ourselves that the case study method has been proven to be a very poor substitute for natural development, because it encourages short term gains that look phenomenal. But in reality it destroys the social fabric. In fact it almost destroyed the American social fabric. And now the Americans are going to Japan because the Japanese management method, or the Samurai approach is to take a more social, collective, cooperative approach not just in money terms for short term national gain. So applying this to the question of identity, there are ways in which to achieve it very quickly; but are we prepared to pay the long term price, or do we do it more slowly?

Charles Correa

Identity is pluralistic even if you are going to try and define it. That’s the first message to get across to your tormentors, whoever they are, that there is no way you can define it as a simple static thing. First of all people change. That was the hopeful thing about Mona’s presentation, that I saw people trying to respond to images, and to the stimuli they see. This area has changed. You weren’t always Muslims, you must know that. In India there was a pre-Hindu, a pre-Dravidian past. There have been so many changes, specially in this part of the world, because they were intelligent, lively people, with an open sea. Ideas, people and religion went across. You are trying to suddenly define identity and say “that’s it”. That’s not it and regardless of how you define it, it is pluralistic and it is going to change.

I like Lim Chong Keat’s sentence when he say that “We are sent abroad by our parents to pick up the best, which we do”. We do that and then we bring them back the slides. Then we put up buildings derived from those images and that’s what is ruining the neighbourhood. So some interventions are bad. Even if you bring excellence and even if it is relevant on the face of it, it could be totally irrelevant. For example, the Indian railways Crazy idea. Today we’d never do it. We’d say we cannot afford it. Anyone who has been on an Indian railway would agree.

Japan took technology like cameras, transistors, now I suppose computers, but they are doing such an excellent job, beating everyone at it backwards. Would you say it’s relevant to them? They’ve made it their own. So if we don’t have an identity it’s not a problem to worry about when we get up in the morning. There are fifty other real problems on our plates. But if we are going to discuss it, make sure that the powers be understood that it’s pluralistic, and in a state of change. And the real criteria to judge new ideas when they are introduced is, are they done with the highest standard of excellence or are they actually degrading the society?

Hasan-Uddin Khan

May I ask you who creates those stories? It’s not the architects. Someone said, where the power lies, where the economic decisions are made, where the political decisions are made, is where our architecture in fact in the end is created.

Eric Lye

The stories were certainly not created by the architects, but the architects were responsible for synthesising the stories into architecture among the Greeks. I
think the stories were dealing with moral issues, sort of pre-religious; it's important since man had to behave in society in a manner that was cohesive.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

Yes, but then that means the architects must, if they are part of that state, toe the party line; which comes back to when the politician defines what is the Malay or Singapore identity. Within the situation, one does toe the line.

Eric Lye

I think this is always true, we just choose not to believe it. I mean if you take, for example, the Greek, Roman and French empires, architects always toed the line, and some of them rose to great heights of achievement.

Ruslan Khalid

Maybe it's to do with our education, through which we've been brought up to believe that modern architecture is about individual freedom to create things, that any kind of superimposed discipline is anathema to the creative act itself.

Charles Correa

It's not just that we aren't building on the local myths and stories, as Eric Lye said, but we are also responsible for importing outside myths, which we personify in our buildings, images, etc., and what is resented is when they are inappropriate. Ideas come from all over, but the main thing is, do they take root? A lot of Gandhi's ideas were from Emerson, Mao's ideas were from the German Karl Marx. But the genius of these people made them take root in their country, because they understood their own society. They weren't accused of bringing in outside ideas, of bringing in outside myths. Whereas we can justly be accused, as architects, all of us, myself certainly, of importing inappropriate myths, and that is what is resented.

I think with time identity grows — it happens. I don’t think it’s something you consciously search out, you just try and see the real problems and solve them. The Japanese architects seemed to many people to be creating a Japanese architecture, but they weren’t, of course. They were building Corbusier in Japan, and that is all, but with time that slowly became Japanese.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

Are you suggesting that the search for an identity within a region or a country is a legitimate search for contemporary architecture, or is it in fact a wrong question that we are asking?

Charles Correa

Sullivan said that whenever you build something, you are talking about yourself. One day he was walking along in Chicago with a student, there were some terrible buildings or at least he thought they were terrible. The student said “The architect ran away in Europe”, and Sullivan said “No! He is right there, he can never escape”. He is trapped, in effect. In that sense, if I think of all the terrible things in a city like Bombay, a hundred years from now historians will say “that is exactly what Bombay society was about” In that sense, believe me we are creating an identity, whether an ugly one or a good one, you don’t know. But to make it better is the question. Or to make all these identities better, that requires a better effort from the architects.

Tao Ho

We cannot define our own identity at present, except maybe by post mortem say 200 years from now Then we will see that although we are talking today about having no cultural identity, or no identity in architecture, the identity is being formed in the long run, but we could not see it ourselves in our time. I think we should forget about searching for identity in architecture, and should change the search for identity in humanity.

Charles Correa was talking about the sun and the earth and the wind in a particular location that shaped the original cultural identity of the place. If we take those natural forces which are the basic constant things on this planet, we will find that those will always be the influencing factor of the people in a given area, and their life patterns would be shaped by it. We should then not worry what kind of architecture style develops, whether a Pagoda roof, or some other funny shape.

Tay Kheng Soon

Whenever we try to define problems in a very specific way, we always run the risk of appearing to push for a monolithic point of view That is a very unfortunate way in which our liberal education has caused our minds to be structured. The search for identity is really
a calling for professionals like ourselves to help in the
process of creating national pride, national joy and
self respect. So what is the stance of the designer?
What position does he take in regard to his own
people? Does he deny that he is a part of his own
people? There was a time in the 50’s and 60’s when it
was very fashionable for newly returned graduates
especially from UK to the former colonies of India,
Malaysia and Singapore to adopt an internationalist
position, because they did not want to get involved in
the politics of their own country. And I think there is
a carry over of some of these kinds of ideas among
some of the intellectuals today.

Now Singapore’s population is about 2.4 million, and
Malaysia’s about 12 million. The leadership and the
professional leadership groups are very small.
Therefore the amount of interaction and the amount of
exchange of information and contact between and
within these groups is very great. This means that
there is no necessity to be isolated from the decision
making process. So what do we do? Since we have this
opportunity do we just sit back and say “you make
the decisions” or do we go in and establish a dynamic
relationship? I don’t accept that because those who
are in power define problems in a certain manner,
therefore we, as executors of the ideas, just carry them
out. We have a conscience and an intellect, and we can
relate to them. And I think they expect a relationship
of that sort from us. If they can just tell us what to do,
then we are not worth our salt.

Romi Khosla

The way this seminar is emerging, I see three very clear
aspects of the search for identity. First and uppermost
is non Westernisation, or non modernisation. I would
not define it as a rejection of Westernisation or a
rejection of modernisation. It’s just that we have di-
gested those, and they have not left a very nice flavour,
and that has caused us to do what I consider to be the
second thing, which is to take a major look at one’s
own history.

All of us in Asia have learnt a lot of our history from
other people who were non-Asians, who wrote it for
us. And I think the time has come when we are look-
ing at our history anew, and are discovering in our
history pockets of culture within our own countries,
which we didn’t even know existed. And this is coming
about because we have got over modernisation, we
have got over the charm of the square table.

The third thing is that we are moving away from a
material search, we are trying to rediscover something
spiritual. In terms of architecture I would say it’s the
desire to look into aspects of architecture which are
not purely functional. The West and modernisation
were so heavy on functionalism that we ourselves
began to think that good architecture was functional
architecture. But I think, today if we look at the
questions Asean architecture is asking, then we are
saying let us look at architecture which is not purely
functional. We are looking for elements of magic in
our buildings because we have looked back in history,
and we have seen that there were such elements. I
don’t think it means we are trying to copy the past
at all, it’s just that the search has taken on a new
dimension. Our own cultures and our own thinking
are getting much bigger, and modernisation can’t ac-
commodate them any more. It is very exciting, and I
don’t agree that we should not look at these things
consciously. I think we should be looking at them very
self consciously, because you know, it is only if we
search that we really make some kind of progress. I
don’t think progress descends on us from beyond. It
is a very man-made thing.

William Lim

What we are actually talking about at this seminar is,
if we are called upon as architects to advise the State,
or the patrons or the people on this question of iden-
ty, what are we going to tell them? Are we going to
have a single identity, or a plural identity? Or do we
advise them to just sit back, because history indicates,
as Charles Correa said, eventually we are all creating
our identity, whether self-consciously or unself-con-
sciously, and history will look back and say “here is
what was being expressed in that year”. This may not
be good enough, because we may now want there to
be a positive intervention, and how do we do it? I
think this is the question.

Parid Wardi Sudin

Looking at identity within the Malaysian context, I
find that there are three points I’d like to introduce.
First of all, identity as a national aspiration. Normally
this is politically realised and politically aspired, and
we as a society within a political structure indirectly
or directly subscribe to that, otherwise you become an
outcast in that society. Architects are ordinary human
beings. We are voters, and some of us are also party
members. Besides, we are also members of a family.
In other words we should not forget the fact that we
play a multi-faceted role. So in discussing identity,
maybe we should begin to look at ourselves. Are we
talking about ourselves as the architect, that is
the person who makes decisions with respect to
design and therefore is responsible for the form
that design is going to take and hence directly
influences the character and possibly the iden-
tity of that building? Or are we talking about educators, who do not design but influence the thinking of people with respect to identity?

The second point is implementation. There are Malaysian families with children in the universities. At the moment that particular child graduates, the circumstances of that family change as dramatically as of the family with an earning member in the Gulf States. The graduate is now an officer with an income that is very high compared to his compatriots. That change in income means he aspires to the same things that Mona Serageldin was talking about, you know, the kitchen with its gas stove, use of tables and chairs etc. So these things begin to make their appearance. Now when you talk about that, nobody plans it and nobody can plan it, but it's going to happen, at different paces, different times, modulated by different things. Where we come in as architects, is, when we make a design decision for a house, how do we modulate that decision in order to arrive at an appropriate design for these people.

The third thing is that Malaysia has a layered historical background, with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam all layering themselves on the same area and people, creating an extremely multi-faceted society. Then of course there was the colonial period. So this is the scenario within which we have to operate. Therefore, if we are going to talk about identity from the point of view of man in the street, then I think we have to have a different mix of people.
South-East Asia is going through a rapid transformation of the built environment because of the rapid development, prosperity and stability of the region. As such, what should we, as architects, do, what kind of direction should we take in order to arrive at a formula whereby we could direct architecture in relation to architectural identity in South East Asia?

This question brings another one to mind, are we afraid of the rapid development of external influences, or of inter-connection within the South East Asia region? The answer ought to be that we should not be afraid of any kind of interaction or influences, or rapid development, come what may — be it the electronic, the agricultural, or economic revolutions.

We should approach them in the most logical manner, by arriving at unity of culture and knowledge as a basic and unifying force. Here I would like to define what I mean by culture and unity.

Culture is the activity, or manifestation of the mind. It is synonymous to life, so the more cultured we are, the more culture will be our manifestation of life. It could be in the form of literature, art or philosophy. It is a personal expression of the mind. So when you say a person is cultured, or a group of people has this culture, they would share a kind of common attitude and display it consciously or unconsciously. In Malaysia, there is the culture of the Chinese, the Malays, the Indians — it could be any race. Therefore the reference is not to refinement, because refinement is not culture. It's the polish, the veneer, it is external.

Unity should not be taken in the sense that you lump it all together. No, it is unity in the sense that it should consist of opposite ends that complement one another. There should be balance, there should be tolerance and freedom, there should be movement, and there should be change and dynamism. It is not unity in the sense that it is static. Take the analogy of the unity in nature — for instance, rain. Rain, where it falls on the earth brings to life the corn or the vegetables. The earth bears fruits. Then the cows feed off the crops, and produce milk, and so on. So you see the unity in creation. It is balance. Therefore unity is really the balance of opposite ends. In the Malaysian context of deciding whether to adopt certain shapes be it a Minangkabau roof or whatever other question that we face we should be careful of being too restricted. That would be a very stunted and un-Islamic kind of approach because it discourages the growth of any kind of manifestations on our part. Unity should grow, should change.

How then do we arrive at a kind of unity of knowledge, of culture, of all the manifestations that we have into one unity of design so that we could arrive at the unity of mankind, unity of many things? Unity is the growth of many combinations of design which cannot be identified as Indian, Malay, Chinese or Colonial. For instance what we would say is a colonial house, is actually a Malay kampong house translated into bricks and mortar by the British who really understood the essence of the indigenous dwelling place.

To illustrate a combination of design, which would make up unity, we must take factors that comprise the essence, or deeper structure, of unity — for instance balance. Jot these factors down from one to ten and taking the analogy of numbers pick a combination of numbers and you have a quantity. In the same way, the elements or the essence of unity: balance, harmony, culture, and design combine together to give a solution — an identity, and just as there are lots of combinations of numbers there could be variety within identity. Then, this unity framework should have a set of rules: that there should be no suppression, there should be tolerance. There should be balance in the total system, like, when the rain comes down in the river it would not be flooded, it would just go to the sea. This is the balance of nature.

So when we have established all these, balance and unity, knowledge, culture, all within this framework then given the threat of the economic revolution or the space age or whatever it is, we could relate to and design within that framework.
Discussions concerning the identity of Indonesian culture have often been held. But more often than not these discussions merely end in the general hope or wish to be able to discriminate as to whether a given work has an Indonesian identity, and sometimes end up agonising over whether or not a given person's work has an Indonesian identity.

Until now, the question of identity of particular cultural areas, such as Bali, Solo, Toraja, Batak and so forth, met with deceptively clear answers. But for larger cultural areas for example Java (which consists of various sub-cultures such as Madura, East Java, Solo, Yogya, Pasundan, Betawi, Bantan and others) it is more confusing. Solo could represent Java, but perhaps Bantan or Madura could not. This situation arises because identity is considered to be a mere product of creativity and is not seen in the light of the total process.

This paper does not attempt to explain the theory of identity, but the concept of identity as it will be dealt with in this paper must be defined within its limitations — that is identity as a set of values and knowledge which concerns the understanding of.

a. Unity in plurality and appellation.
b. Uniformity in the process of change and development.
c. Self-integrity within uniformity and collectively as such requires codification in the process of social interaction. Furthermore identity serves as a guideline for the allocation of the use of resources within a certain environment.

This paper is an attempt to describe the identity of a traditional culture (Bali) and is not intended to point out an Indonesian identity, particularly in architecture. Rather it is only an effort to analyse the identity of a nation that is pluralistic and complex, that contains various different sub-cultures, levels of civilisation, religious and historical backgrounds.
A set of identities within traditional societies

A group of people within a traditional society normally possess a basic philosophy of life which is affirmed by a set of village laws. These laws outline the general pattern of the people's life, especially in defining the relationship between human beings and God, between human beings and nature, and between human beings and their fellow human beings.

These specifications require a set of attributes which help to create identities within society, identities that are formed and accepted by the people themselves. A definite set of identities will help to form a well-knit community. A well-knit community serves as the basis of great vitality which is required to give birth to the creativity of its people, which in turn throws light upon all aspects of life.

I. Ketut Loji is a cheerful farmer from a small village in Southern Bali. He is the fourth child of his parent, he has no caste and possibly has a guest room for visiting friends.

All these one learns from his name whence a part of his identity is understood, as well as the categorial system within the social and family structure. Even I Ketut Loji's simple dwelling has a set of identities. The proportions of a house are founded upon the basic measurements of its owner with three elements within these measurements: The physical borderly measurements, the social standing, and the life aspiration of its owner. Thus also proportion, location, and the type of front entrance, ornamentation, display characteristics which state the inhabitant's attitude and aspiration in life to the community, to the environment and to God whom they worship.

Thus also the layout of the dwelling, the organisation of space, the construction details, the building materials, point to an identity which is basic to social interaction with nature, and “interaction” with God.

In traditional architecture, a house is not merely a shelter, but a womb in which human beings grow and are educated. Thus in Balinese traditional architecture, a house should fulfil certain conditions, amongst others. It should represent a microcosm harmonious with the macrocosm, its orientation should be distinct — the hierarchy of its measurement exact, the use of its material appropriate, its correct ritual cycle observed and ultimately the dwelling should be declared to be a living being which must be respected and regularly maintained.

In order to understand the background of traditional Balinese architecture which possess the above mentioned set of created identities, we can, provisionally, analyse it along the following lines.

Divine model of space

The ultimate aim in life in Hindu Bali religion is to reach Moksha, man as the micro cosmos blends into the macro cosmos in its ultimate perfection. For that aim the harmony of micro and macro cosmos has to be maintained at any time, place or condition. A house, a village, is an extension and a model of a human being, a divine model of macro.

Through tradition and religion, a set of teachings become precise manuals, guiding mankind into the right orientation.

Orientation

Orientation holds an important place in life. All things in life should have a distinct orientation, in direction as well as time. Letters, numbers, colours, objects, etc., all have distinct orientations.
Hierarchy of spaces

Humans, just like nature, consists of three divine parts, each following its own nature and characteristics such as the head, the body and the feet. Accordingly all things in nature can be distinguished abstractly as consisting of a head, body and feet. Environment, village, house, structure, pillar, all details consist of the three divine division and each bearing their own characteristics. Thus too, space structure in Bali is symbolically divided into three. The mountain as the head, the primary part which is holiest and where places of worship are built. The plains area is the body and indicates the middle world where old life activities occur. This is the place of dwelling area. And the sea is symbolised as the feet, the impure area. Graves are usually pointed towards the sea.

Aside from the mountain sea orientation, spatial hierarchy is also determined by the direction of the sunrise and sunset. Sunrise is supposed to be sacred, while sunset is supposed to be impure. When we look at the island of Bali with its mountain in the centre of the island dividing the island into north and south region, and consider also the direction of the sun cycle, it will be noted that the Balinese spatial hierarchy of space is indicated as a fold diagram. The hierarchy of space is valid for all scales, rooms, houses, villages, environments, regions.

Proportion

The various methods of measurement in traditional architecture not only serve to produce pleasing dimensions and harmony, strength and beauty, a proportionate environment and structure, but it also serves as an educational tool and social process. The proportions of dwellings are determined by at least three aspects of the owner, his physical measurement, his caste and his personal aspirations.

Space structure of a village

The village is also divided into three. The temple as
head, the dwelling area as body and the graveyard as feet. The community space is stretched in the centre of the village. Even though there are a variety of village plans, yet in principle, a village is symbolised by a human figure with a head, body, and feet, albeit in different postures.

Maintenance of cycles by rituals

There are several degrees of the hierarchy of values and spaces. Each degree has its certain structure and cycles to be maintained through a set of rituals.

One hundred year cycle Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih Temple, Bali

Offering symbols — Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih, Bali

Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih Temple, Bali.
From the above examples of traditional architecture one can conclude that identity is a means to avoid disrupting the existing harmony. And it is also a means to create a harmonious dialogue with God, nature, and fellow humans.

This set of means is an appropriate value system as well as knowledge which is formed and accepted communally. Identity as a means creates a well-knit community which exudes vitality, and as such possesses a creativity which can transform all aspects of life with its particular characteristics. Besides being a means to dialogue and interaction, identity comes into being as a creative statement of cultural life.

What happens if such a society comes under the pressure of fundamental, constant, and large scale of change?

Identity within a pluralistic sub-culture

Identity in traditional culture is actually more important in the light of the creative ability of a people to manifest their culture, rather than as the mere characteristics of cultural products which remain identical throughout the ages. In Bali cultural manifestations differ and vary from region to region, from period to period. There is a variety that is highly visible built on a common foundation. That variety is born as an expression of life which can be digested and absorbed creatively in order to remain part of itself.

It is interesting to see that there is a common thread that binds the region of Nusa Tenggara together, a region which consists of a chain of islands to the East of Java. Despite the fact that various different influences have come to divide the region, a certain cultural unity can still be felt. In its manifestations the region’s architecture displays many different themes, but its unity is underlined by concepts held in common such as similar ‘divine models’, orientation, hierarchy of space, etc.

In Sumbanese architecture we can see a simplicity in the expression of hierarchy of spaces. The ancestral home consists of three levels, the highest being for worship, the middle for dwelling, the lowest for safeguarding livestock. Thus buildings whose sole purpose is as a place of worship consist only of the higher level, and for those houses which do not contain a place of worship, (e.g. temporary dwellings) no higher level is built. In other houses the forms of the divine model undergo various modifications. The village central court can be oval, square, or rectangular. The similarities of such patterns are still clearly to be seen from island to island, or from area to area. This is true despite the fact that the manifestation of building forms vary from island to island.

Before the onslaught of ‘modern progress’, the influences of foreign religions and colonial government still allowed for a measured process of absorption. But with the acceleration of progress there no longer exists the means, the time, nor the ability to
digest it. The population explosion brought with it a more dynamic pattern of migration. At the same time resources and employment are becoming limited. Another aspect of the situation is the fact that the rapid and vast development of knowledge has in fact left the majority of the population far behind in its wake, and with a completely uneven distribution of knowledge. These conditions make possible various forms of manipulation which becomes less and less clear despite the fact that more and more is at stake.

The world is becoming confused and ill to such an extent that the identities of people in their own social groups are transformed into empty forms which they attempt to maintain. Identity changes from being a means to being a goal of dreams. It drifts but does not make its position clear, it speaks but does not act. It is more personal, individual, there is no longer any dialogue.

Territorial boundaries become unclear, the microcosm is broken up and becomes smaller and more densely packed. This is caused by the overlapping of traditional territorial boundaries with administrative borders, road patterns which divide traditional sacred space (instead of encircling it), economic traffic patterns which become more dominant, pluralistic structures within societies consisting of numerous differing sets of identities.

Orientation also becomes less distinct in terms of direction, time and procedure. Thus too the hierarchy of spaces which formerly was based upon spiritual values shifts to a hierarchy based upon materialistic values (wealth and power). The sense of community which exists under these conditions comes under the added pressure of a population increase further complicated by greater unemployment and backwardness — along with the tendency to social inequity leading to the establishment of a small elite whose knowledge and material means far exceeds that of the masses, and whose presence amongst the ever-poorer majority becomes more and more mysterious.

Such a situation makes it impossible for the people to remain sensitive to the fundamental elements of identity. The individual aspect becomes more dominant along with the idea of identity as a label or a slogan. That is why what is considered to be the symbols of identity in architecture are merely roof forms and details of ornamentation which create a sensation of nostalgia.

Identity in diversity within unity

The Indonesian archipelago consists of thirteen thousand islands and around three hundred distinct
Case Study 2

As is the case with the Nusa Tenggara chain of islands, Indonesia, which is an archipelago between two continents and between two oceans, has a "uniformity" and unity of culture despite the varying characteristics of its many parts. Within its diversity its many parts are tied together. Understandably enough, these ties point to the uniformity of these diverse sub-cultures. But on the other hand if this current of uniformity becomes too strong, it is only natural that a counter-current appears moving in the direction of diversity. It is because of this that the foundation of the unity of Indonesia is Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the unified diversity and the diversified unity.

Interaction among these ethnic groups of sub-cultures, with their separate identities formed a national identity. It is clear that the cultural identity of the Indonesian people consists of the values and creative knowledge born of the interaction of its sub-cultures, and not merely the separate identities of each of its sub-cultures. This also is the case with the identity of Indonesian architecture.

During the colonial period this interaction of sub-cultures was cut short. On a regional scale the sub-cultural interaction was broken and replaced by the centralisation of kraton (palace) culture which was closely guarded by the colonial government. Architecture during this period was influenced by various things:

- Colonial fortresses (Jakarta old town, Ujung Pandang).
- The central setting of a city and its social-psychological influence. A manipulation of traditional pattern adapted without demur by all cities.
- Colonial house which was gradually changed to "landhuis".
- Large scale buildings designed by Dutch architects who were actually trying to show a European architecture, but some were trying to adapt traditional forms of local architecture.
- Churches, a completely alien structure.

During these times the colonial influence on local architecture was easily distinguished by the people as distinct from purely local architecture. It was not yet so complex and its intention were clear (power, intrigue, and adaption).

In the era of independence the patterns which were localised in the kratons under extraordinary control were suddenly unravelled, the ties were undone and at the same time outside influence in the form of foreign cultures and modernisation poured in with full force. During that period 'National Culture' as the polar opposite of foreign culture became an issue, whilst the local sub-cultures were hemmed in by the currents of an incomprehensible rush of modernisation.

The attempt to create a unity of culture in Indonesia can be gauged from the Youth Vow of Allegiance (Sumpah Pemuda) 1928 which claims as its ideal "One Land, One People, One Language". This vow gives a frame of unity to diversity. The birth of PANCASILA, the five philosophical basis of the state, as the basis of the nation have created a solid and complete foundation for national identity. It goes without saying that time is needed in order to make PANCASILA grow into the vitalised spirit which can give birth to creations commonly accepted as the new identity of Indonesia. A creation that might be new, yet possessed of the full and determined force of a unified culture. It is more than the fruit of interaction, among the identities of sub-cultures. It is both a dialogue of the heterogeneous development of the living world, and the tangible expression of love that Man bears for his Creator, nature and all fellow beings. And the identity of Indonesian architecture should be based on these same values.

Footnotes

1 PANCASILA is the philosophical basis of the Indonesian State meaning five principles. It consists of five inseparable and mutually qualifying principles which are:

1st Sila : belief in the one supreme God
2nd Sila : just and civilised humanity
3rd Sila : the unity of Indonesia
4th Sila : democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations among representatives
5th Sila : social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia

All photographs courtesy of Robi Sularto Sastrowardoyo
Why is there a Singapore viewpoint?

Modern Singapore was founded as a trading entrepot, and grew rapidly through the infusion of migrant populations from China, India and South East Asia. It maintained contacts with the surrounding countries and the rest of the world who were her trading clients. Out of necessity, because of scant natural resources, the evolving culture focussed on the productive aspects. Underlying this necessary preoccupation is a seething cauldron of unfulfilled cultural aspirations seeking expression.

In more recent times Singapore has become the beach head of modern science, technology and industry. The principal dimension in the Singapore cultural dilemma is, therefore the contradiction between tradition/history and science/technology. Singapore seeks the integration of the best principles of both. It is in a situation such as this that the utmost creativity is called for to generate ideas and forms of living which synthesise the conflict into a new whole.

In terms of architectural design and the creative arts, this situation poses unique opportunities for resolution, and artists and architects should celebrate the arrival of the present impasse.

Why is this problem of identity important today?

The worldwide return to religion, conservatism and the search for lasting values reflects a profound dissatisfaction with the fruits of modernity. The simplistic expectations of science and technology have not been fully achieved. Mass media and universal education cast a patina over the world’s cultures, and they are now reacting. Everywhere in developed cities, people are decrying the loss of identity and the effects of alienation. The arts are now being prevailed upon to be less mysterious, and to encourage greater accessibility to and participation in the processes which create the arts. Temporarily, modern man has, in reaction, sought refuge in tradition, but it will not be long before doctrinaire traditionalism will be seen as also not being able to satisfy the conditions of living in a modern world. And because of this, he will in time question and reject obscurantism.

The process of seeking identity is no less than the process by which man understands his position historically, and defines its processes and its products which keep his spiritual and material needs in balance. A redefinition of identity is therefore of the greatest importance today, as through this, man is able to focus his attention with assurance on his historical position and have a sense of clarity as to his direction. Architecture therefore has arrived at a nexus where it is no longer just “commodity, firmness and delight” that is important. Architecture has become instrumental again and has now a clear cultural purpose.

Is there a special significance in the problem of cultural identity in the New States?

The New States are beginning to recover from the colonial interlude when they were exposed to a new language, culture and values at the expense of their own. The post-colonial period saw the continuation of many of the colonial values among the elite of the New States, whereby two cultures existed, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Often, in the New States technological inferiority was equated with cultural inferiority. This syndrome enabled technologically superior cultures to wield undue influence over everything, even the most trivial matters such as dress and cosmetics. Clearly, it is essential that a new attitude be engendered in order to disassociate technological inferiority which is a fact, and cultural inferiority which is an opinion, so that these countries may make their contribution to world culture.
The problem of cultural identity in architectural design in South East Asia.

Understandably, South East Asian countries require to promote nationalism as part of their national development policies At the same time, the emergence of ASEAN collectively in world politics and in regional cooperation requires the promotion of South East Asian consciousness. Thus national consciousness has to be seen in relation to regional consciousness.

The role of architectural design therefore can assist in the heightening of national consciousness as well as draw attention to South East Asia cultural heritage. South East Asia was not an empty vessel, but interacted with incoming cultures to produce many common features of the present day South East Asia culture. Whilst there will be local differences in style and expression, there is an underlying layer located in the sub-conscious of the peoples of this region, which was acquired in ancient times which influences our sense of rhythm, proportions, colour and preferences. The evidence of the existence of this underlying layer is in the rhythm of speech of South East Asians, where there is an unmistakable lilt and rhythm which can only be found in this region.

Certain themes in the folk arts, such as the repetitive versions of the star pattern and scroll forms, reminiscent of vegetable forms are also widespread, and continue to be used to this date. The heritage of naturalism contained in much of the traditional cultures of South East Asia have survived the overlaying of more recent Islamic or modern themes.

I suppose that the cornerstone in the agenda for the invention of South East Asian architecture is the recovery of this heritage and a connection between it and modern science and technology. There are no ready made solutions, and no mental images are adequate to encompass the scope of this task which requires the utmost artistic exertion

The simple reproduction of traditional forms in the buildings of today have a make-believe theatrical air about it. The reproduction of traditional architecture when applied to houses or to small buildings is more successful, but when applied to large modern buildings, rings hollow. The faith that was promoted through modern architecture that truth to functionalism will produce lasting values is too simplistic. Modern architecture evolved as a denial of tradition, it started as a revolutionary movement to anticipate the arrival of a new society, founded on rationality and science. It has produced some fine buildings, but the majority have been bland. So there is a growing dissatisfaction with simple functionalism in modern architecture, together with worldwide trends in the search of roots to look for a new architecture. Instead of looking deeper, the dissatisfaction with modern architecture is expressed in two distinctly different directions today One alludes cynically to historical precedent, whilst the other strives for more extreme technological feats.

In Singapore, the main thrust is in the direction of better finished buildings, using the most up to date construction techniques stressing precision and clarity in design expression. The underlying ethos is technological and practical. Whilst this strategy will produce a new generation of well finished and competently executed buildings, they will not satisfy the psycho-geographical needs of South East Asians living in a resurgent and culturally emerging area. Singaporeans will need to identify not only with technological progress, but with deeper cultural roots which can be identified as emanating from and connecting to the cultural heritage of Asia, and of South East Asia in particular. Evidence of this desire can now already be seen in the highly enthusiastic response of Singaporeans to the grand axial approach to the new Changi International Airport and the grandeur of the arrival hall. Analysis of this response is crucial to our understanding of the psychology of Singaporeans in particular and South East Asians in general, for without a doubt, the Changi International Airport has brought forth an unequivocal response, unparalleled by any other building.
It seems that the crowds come to fulfil a sense of grandeur which reinforces their self image of progress and achievement, and satisfies some dimly remembered sense of majesty. Without possessing the unsmiling monumentality of the Versailles palace, the Changi Airport is a friendly giant. The fountains, indoor plants and aquariums give it a festive and sociable air which strikes a sympathetic chord in the South East Asian consciousness. The other project which has brought out enthusiastic response (in Singapore) is the Benjamin Sheares Viaduct at Marina City. The bridge evokes technological prowess, power and progress. It is a source of pride to the extent that newly married couples will risk heavy traffic fines to have their photographs taken from it with city skyline in the background.

An explanation of the public enthusiasm for these structures may be that they touch sympathetic chords in the following areas of the sub-conscious:
- The friendly giant concept.
- Axiality and centrality.

So it can be said that Singapore’s experience in building has revealed these three criteria as important bases for public architectural enterprises.

Typology of different approaches in addressing the identity problem in architectural design

The historically derivative approach

In this approach there are two sub approaches:
- Reproduction of historically relevant forms.
- Adaptation of historically relevant forms.

These two approaches have been successfully carried out in smaller projects where their scales can be encompassed within the traditional scale without severe distortion and especially when the materials used are also traditional materials such as stone and timber. There have also been less successful attempts using this approach when applied to large modern buildings. When this happens, the scale is usually stretched to the point where the building tends to look awkward and unconvincing. When it comes to high rise buildings, there are few traditional forms which can be adopted. As such, the historical derivative approach for high rise buildings is not applicable.

From an artistic point of view, it is not very satisfying to merely reproduce a traditional form for the sake of identity. And a poorly executed traditionally styled building insults tradition and our senses.

Dualism — the big and the small

In facing the problem of large buildings, such as office buildings and other public commercial buildings, some designers have chosen not to compromise the
highrise component of the project with traditional forms. They have accepted a modern highrise building juxtaposed against a traditionally styled component of the project. Whilst this satisfies short term political objectives, it is doubtful as a long term artistic proposition. Artistically it is too convenient, allowing the intolerable contradiction between traditional forms and modern requirements to exist in limbo. It is a transitional approach as it were, awaiting a synthesis yet to come.

Featurism

In the face of the demand for national identity in architectural design, many designers have opted to use traditional decorative motifs applied to the facade of their modern buildings. This approach is even less convincing than the previous one. It shows that the designer is uncomfortable with the thought of mixing traditional and modern architecture as he does not want to compromise the functionality of his building.

The historically transformative approach

Many modern buildings have requirements that cannot be fulfilled within traditional forms, such as intensive multi-use highrise developments. Then there is no choice but to invent an architectural form and language that is grammatically consistent and which can appeal to the user of the building at his many levels of conscious and sub-conscious. The invention of such an architecture requires a total grasp of the science and technology of building, including the economics and functions. The designer must be fully informed of his own architectural and artistic heritage and have a feel for his own people and culture. Besides, he must have attitudes and mental skills capable of raising him above the mundane and the fashionable.

Architectural design must always deal with basic human factors within the continuity of human time. This approach prescribes that basic human perceptions are the foundations of the way we should shape our environment and our buildings. History and modern technology are but an unfolding of human potential and therefore are the ingredients which produce a contemporary architecture that is truly relevant. There are two basic attitudes involved. The first demands to resolve the contradictions of tradition and modernity and refuses to merely reproduce (inadequately) traditional forms out of context. The second is an equally powerful drive to understand the basic issues that underlie the way we relate to nature, people, place and time.

Today, with the dominance of Western mass media, it is very easy to be misled by the kinds of concerns which are portrayed in the architectural press. Many of the ideas may have been universal validity, but the way in which they are portrayed, and the hidden priorities within, limit or bias the approach in many imperceptible or irrelevant ways. The significance of developmental issues of the Third World, which forms the inevitable backdrop of ideas and proposals remain ungrasped.

Virtually all western liberal intellectuals cultivate a distaste for and therefore an ignorance of the dimensions of power and politics, and yet power and politics are the principle elements in the shaping of Third World societies and cultures. Architects of the Third World must develop a thorough understanding of the nature of power and the political process, for only then can their proposals be deeply relevant and historically significant. Also, power as an aesthetic value in architectural design strikes a sympathetic chord in our consciousness.

Mental skills

One of the most significant contributions in preparation for the emergence of a modern Asian architecture was made by two Japanese architects, Kurokawa and Fumihiko Maki. They have prepared the intellectual foundations for us. Kurokawa’s main thrust is that we need to rediscover our intellectual traditions in order to see the limitations in the Western rational system of thought. His insistence that there is an intermediate zone in our thinking which is also reflected in the physical environments of Asian cities is an important contribution. This view derives from the Buddhist concept of a neutral zone which exists between two polar opposites. This neutral zone is far from being a zone of inactivity, which is how it has been characterised in the Western intellectual tradition. In the Eastern intellectual tradition,
however, this zone is a zone of intense concentration. It is a zone in which pulls in opposite directions temporarily cancel each other out with only an appearance of calm. This calm requires the most dynamic processes to hold in balance. In the city the intermediate zone is the area in which life takes place, where transient usage, marginal economies and human interaction can manifest in a complex ever unfolding drama which characterises all Asian cities and which is in danger of disappearing.

Maki's contribution is in the conception of the Asian city as a polycentric and layered spatial system. That there are hidden cores layered over, which have to be discovered, introduces an anticipatory element in city planning which is totally absent in the Western town planning tradition.

These two have pointed the way If we are to develop our own thinking we must as they suggest challenge the very foundations of our schooling and reexamine all the fundamental assumptions therein. Only when we can free ourselves to look at these assumptions in relation to our traditional and contemporary experience can we be prepared to invent our own architecture

More mental skills

The handling of contradictions has ancient roots in traditional Asian culture. The characterisation of opposites as elements to be conquered or eliminated is contrary to the Oriental philosophies. It is not compromise that is sought but the dynamic resolution of opposites into a new whole. This requires thorough knowledge of all contradicting elements with an emotional preparedness to entertain all of them without bias.

The meditative mode

Highly developed in all the oriental cultures, in this mode the mind and the senses are freed to range over all the facts and factors related to the design problem so that all of the consciousness and the subconsciousness can merge and influence the design outcome. In this way, the awkwardness of a heavy handed conscious application of historical or traditional design elements can be avoided.

The Holistic world view

The automisation of the world for analytical purposes has left behind a fractured view in which elements are seen separately. The recovery of the traditional oriental world view is essential to restore a sense of comprehensiveness since the dichotomy between nature and artificiality does not exist. In such a view cities and buildings will be very different from the way they are. Water, landscape and buildings will interlace. People will stroll through landscapes before they reach their buildings. Once in the building travelling vertically they will be able to view unfolding vistas. Places of work and residence will have nature close at hand so that you can reach out and touch trees and leaves. Residential areas will be communities with open spaces outside the homes. The cities will have quiet areas for contemplation, other areas will bustle with many activities, each benefiting the other. Transportation needs will be reduced because living and working will be closely interwoven.

Agenda for a modern South East Asian architecture

In conclusion, I would like to list a number of key issues which I propose should form the agenda for a continued discussion towards evolving a more relevant architecture in Asia and in South East Asia in particular

Geometric principles

Of special interest in Asian architecture are the complex interlocking geometries of cluster human settlements in the form of court houses, urban kampongs and barrios which result in a high degree of social interaction. There should be studies on the variations of social interaction in relation to income classes and the use of social space in order to derive specific design recommendations. We should also explore the possibilities of three dimensional connective space. New forms and geometries will result to solve the need for the complex interlocking of residential and commercial space users within climatically adapted architectural design concepts.

Of special interest in Asian architecture are the complex inter-locking geometries of cluster human settlements. Potong Pasir —— Singapore (circa 1974)
Space use combinations

Land use, planning policies and related concepts are part of an outmoded colonial framework which view the world as separate compartments. Chief problems arising from this view are the sterile single use areas of the city which are dead at night, and housing areas with insufficient facilities. We need a fresh look in order to achieve activity combinations which will revitalise city centres and housing areas. Sensitivity to the special quality of active areas in Asian cities will give clues to the quantity and type of activities which make these areas in Asian cities lively. We should be able to recreate and enhance these qualities through conscious planning.

Nature

The fabric of the city itself should form a hierarchy of interlinked green areas both horizontally and vertically so that nature is always close at hand.

Centrality and grandeur

To engender pride in the city and the nation there must be places which are so dominant in form that they become centres of public focus. These centres should be reinforced by the correct combination of activities which appeal to a broad cross section of the population so that they habituate these centres out of need and for enjoyment. These centres should therefore be grand so as to uplift the spirits of these people.

Speed and visible change

The very essence of development in developing countries is speed. Visible changes must be seen to be taking place in order to convince people that progress and change is inevitable, for without such a change in perception the process of development is a great deal more difficult. The problem is how to use speed creatively without letting quality suffer. We need methods of building, detailing and implementation which are capable of rapid production.

Geo-psychology and decorations

We have had attempts to reproduce modern buildings in the New York and Japanese style but the creative stance is not to give way to this impulse uncritically. The combination of climatic and geographical factors with the heritage of cultural forms pulls against the simple transplantation of alien forms. Some detailed matters relate to this subject giving scope for decorative response such as: the problem of silhouette and outline of buildings against a hazy sky which is prevalent in tropical South East Asia is one. As buildings in this region should be shaded to produce more comfortable conditions, how do we design buildings which are in shadow to be legible architecturally? Can we use rain and the discharge of rainwater from buildings in a decorative manner rather than hide it with pipes within an architectural framework that denies the existence of heavy downpour.

The use of foreign talents

Skilled personnel from developed countries should be integrated into the professional environment to contribute their technical abilities and experience in construction management and detailing. However, their role can become more useful to us when we have clear ideas of our own. We must insist that the basic direction of the search for a South East Asian architecture must come from those committed to the internal dynamics involved.

All photographs courtesy of Tay Kheng Soon
Panel Discussion 3

William Lim

I would like to refer to Tay Kheng Soon’s statement earlier on in his paper, about the dichotomy between economic development and modernisation on the one hand, and culture and history on the other. I think if you look at it as hardware and software, then yes, this is dichotic. But if you think in terms of culture and lifestyle, I don’t think there is necessarily a dichotomy, because culture is not stagnant and your lifestyle is not stagnant. In other words, it’s not really possible for any society to reach a certain level of economic and technical development without changing its lifestyle. It’s not a stagnant situation. So it’s not backwards and forwards, but the parallel position of interaction, and I think that point may be important.

Eric Lye

Naive we may be, as architects are supposed to be, but at least we are talking about this issue and worrying about it. Planners never talk at this level about identity. They just get some formula, some space, and that’s it. And then we are supposed to add the architecture and supply the character. So perhaps one of our roles is to ensure that they do talk about identity, because we will be unable to do the kind of things we want if they remain so insensitive about the environment.

Tay Kheng Soon

There are certain skills and certain meditative moods we have to discover for ourselves. I think the Western logic, the Western rational system of defining problems and testing hypothesis and so on is okay. But when it comes to dealing with software, that’s where the system goes to pieces because it cannot handle it. And that is why we have no answers to our problems. The only way we can have answers is to use our own sense, intuition and emotional responses, with the rational process on top of that to make sense out of that.

We need to go very deep into the principles of what a concept involves. Although we can’t become geomancers or economists, we must understand enough about economics, politics, etc. to be able to relate to politicians, and to define problems in a language which they can understand. What we need is confidence, to know that we know enough, so that we can interact with others.

Eric Lye

Rather than expanding our energies on what is good or bad by Western norms, we should concern ourselves always with the whats, whys and hows of our own environments. The danger is that some times we are not discussing things on our own terms, and this is a fundamental issue with the question of identity. As architects, we have to deal with the speculative aspect as well as the performance aspect. It is not simply an either or question. If we think it is, we will be at the mercy of other disciplines. The ambiguous and unattractive facts that confront architects must be dealt with honestly, because this is what gives coherence and integrity to our designs. We are also confronted, especially the practitioners, with the frustration of abstract pre-conceived ideas. I think we are all guilty of those, partly because of our education. We should begin to take a fresh look at architecture, and delight in a new reality. Let us open our eyes to our environment with the help of this reality. This will be our reality, rather than the reality of magazines. It is the reality that is all around us, yet we ignore it, because it is so easy for architects to abstract pre-conceived ideas. We are doers. We must test our thoughts, even if we fail. If we are wrong, we must do better. We must not wait for legislation or technology. If we wait for others, we will never achieve anything ourselves.
It is also fundamental in the creation of identity that we architects have a role to play, to prepare the eyes of the public, officials and consumers to see the things that we truly believe are important about our environment.

The other aspect of identity which could have backlash is the imposition of one culture or value or foreign value on another, which could create strain, especially when big doses come in a short time. How do you graft progress or new identity into any society which when threatened rejects the new and reverts to the old? That, I suppose, is the danger with many of the societies we come from. History has shown that when modern ideas go too far there’s a complete reversion. So, the question of identity has to be looked at delicately, for although we are all trained in making choices very rapidly, and are progressive, there are many people in our society who will find choices very frightening. The timing is important. We should be self-conscious in creation and in criticism. Architecture is not an unself-conscious act. It is design, and design is a self-conscious act. We must not be guided by habit alone.

Perhaps what is even more important is that architecture alone, as an object has no identity. Its identity comes out of the timeless qualities of a society, whether they be religious, economic, ethnic or something else. Architecture per se has no identity. So in the creation of identity we must bring in those timeless qualities from culture and the other things that give identity to architecture.

There are inherent limitations in the practice of architecture. We all know that. But we must still deal with the different particulars in order to gain credibility in the eyes of our society. Among ourselves we may generalise. In front of the public we must deal in particular details. Or difficult particulars. Abstractions do not bring us credibility, and after all we are talking about making the public aware of our problems.

Lastly, my observation is that architecture as a performing art belongs to the practical, not the speculative. This is not to say that we should not speculate to develop our ideals. But as a performing art it is a practical art and there is no surrogate for being on the job. As an architect you have to build, because fundamentally the public judges us by our performance.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

A number of quite important things have been discussed in this seminar, and a number of points and themes are arising which we seem to be beginning to agree upon. Although we have approached the subject of identity from a great many view points, we have as yet not quite defined whether we should look at identity or not, which would probably be a good thing to do. But we have come up with a consensus on one specific point, that culture cannot be fabricated, that there is a plurality, a multiplicity of directions that identity can take. I get the feeling that people here do feel that an identity cannot be frozen in time, and if we feel that an identity cannot be frozen in time, it must be a dynamic evolving process.

One of the interesting things that came up was Robi Sularto Sastrowardoyo’s paper, where he talks of Bali, where there was a prescribed set of rules which governs people’s lives and their architecture. Now that is a static situation, where a culture is static. He seems to indicate that when everyone knows what their micro and macro relationship with the cosmos is, you can almost begin to know how to design, where to place your things, which way to face. In contemporary Islam, it appears to me, that within a very dynamic situation, where there is this plurality of directions, even if you think of just South East Asia, we are in fact trying to create a Utopian vision, rather like Bali, which is a Utopian vision, if I may read it that way. We are trying to freeze this process of change, by trying to provide, again, an architectural direction.

Another thing, which really struck me is, that when we talk about identity in architecture, or cultural identity or identification, or pride in one’s identity, or pride in one’s own manifestation of culture, we are able, in South East Asia to do that, because there is a degree of sufficiency. There is a degree of almost having achieved all the basics. We are no longer struggling for survival totally. So, it is a luxury when you begin to think about these things. In some countries like Bali, and Pakistan, and maybe Egypt, you get the feeling that we almost cannot afford the time to worry about a thing like identity, because we are too busy building, or too busy creating. There’s a whole process of urbanisation going on. In this rapid transformation, the feeling is that, as Eric Lye said, if a building in architecture does not have an identity, or meaning, it gets charged with meaning by the culture that it comes into contact with. We’re actually playing around with the physical form, and the physical fabrics, but I think the meaning and the identity comes with its relationship with that particular physical fabric.

Charles Correa and Mona Serageldin and various other people have given the view that our culture, architecture and identity come from an urban architecture. However, it was interesting to see that when Fawizah Kamal and others presented their papers, they always talked of traditional models which were rural, and our cities are seen as a sort of an aberration, or transformation of that rural model into an urban
model, and unsuccessfully so. I think that will always be, that the moment we start applying a traditional urban situation into a new, urban, rapidly changing situation, we are inevitably going to get either horrible slums, or this fantastic transformation of the rural to become meaningless. It hasn’t learnt how to react with what urban life’s about. I would bear in mind the importance of creating urban models, identities which are really very different, and cannot be based totally on this import of the rural, of a nice Minangkabau house, or a traditional Balinese house.

The last point that I would like to talk about is the importance of politics and economics. We should accept the importance of the decision making process in our societies, and architects should not cop out in this political process. The effect of the media, and especially the effect of the global media, the media that is not controlled by ourselves within our own countries has been devastating in our efforts to express our own identity.

Finally, one last little footnote, we have come here together as practitioners and thinkers about architecture and about our environment. It is the first time that I have attended a meeting which is almost purely made up of Asians from within their own region, and within their own cultures or people working, or committed to this region. And one of the exciting things about this seminar is the beginning of a network, and the first bits of contact that we are coming into without having ourselves defined by people from the outside. And I think that this is an important thing — defining ourselves.
The entire region of West Pacific's "water front", that is to say Southeast and East Asia, as well as parts of South Asia, has, underneath the stylistic variations, definite cultural common denominators which point to common identity and origins in a not so distant past

In this paper I shall discuss one of the several common phenomena, namely the house on stilts, using case studies in Siam to compare parallels on a regional scale, meaning, through this discussion, to uncover the common origins of South East Asians and people of the West Pacific as a whole.

Houses on stilts are found in an arc of more than six thousand kilometres across the Equator, from Melanesia and Indonesia to Japan. On the Asian continent the same house type covers an area starting from the foot of the Himalayas in Nepal and the Naga hills in north east India to South East Asia and South China. The Canton museum in South China contains models of houses on stilts amongst those of typically Chinese ones resting squarely on the ground excavated from ancient tombs. From Kumming down to Sumao on either side of the railways there are still numerous settlements consisting of thousands of pilotied houses.

Attempts have been made to explain the raised dwelling and the space underneath: security, protection from wild animals and seasonal floods, good ventilation and a useful place to work and to store implements. The reasons forwarded are true enough for many cases, but not all. They do not, for example, explain why in Burma exactly the same wooden house is sometimes raised and sometimes completely down on the ground in the same locale, and why a tropical house on stilts should find itself in latitude 35 degrees and become an essential part of Japanese architecture to the misery of its occupants winter after winter. The real reason behind all this of course lies in the amphibious and equatorial origin of the house.

When Austronesians implanted their first houses in Japan, the stilts were as long as any standing in water on the shores or in the lagoons of South East Asia. The long intervening centuries and the strong cultural influence of the pre-dominantly land-based Han people progressively shortened the Japanese stilts until the floor is only about two feet above the ground. Comparing a typical Thai house to that of the Japanese and then the Chinese is to see clearly an interesting sequence of architectural transformation.
Besides the above differences in the region, the raised dwelling also reflects the varied beliefs and environments within Siam itself so that not only do styles and plans change from one part of the country to another, but stilts also decrease in length from those of the migratory villages (recently extinct) to their average dimensions in the Central Plain and the relatively shorter ones on higher grounds and in the North. However, in spite of the variations, the houses have a number of features in common.

**Common features**

- The avoidance of static perpendiculars in the structure is one. Whether it is the 'truncated' A-frame of the Central Plan dwelling or the inverted A- or V-profile of the northern house, the structure is visually and physically dynamic. This is further enhanced by the fact that the building is based on a system of pre-fabrication with wooden joinery or flexible tie jointed wicker lathes holding structural frames and panels.

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Takayuka house of Japan
Dating back to more than 2000 years, many early Japanese houses had very tall stilts reflecting their Austronesian origin.

Northern Thai house
Kamthieng House at Siam Society, Bangkok

House at Tomak, Toba Lake, Sumatra
Outwardly inclined walls illustrate the V-structural principle.
The panels themselves are like diaphragms set in innumerable framed sub-divisions, thus further demonstrating a strong tradition in component design.

The pre-fabricated technique referred to is common to both the northern and central house type. In fact, the word traditionally used for house building is "prung", meaning "assemble". It follows that the house that can thus be quickly assembled or dismantled and transported to another site for re-assembly.

There are interesting parallels between Thai and Japanese houses. To some extent, dwellings in Japan are structurally flexible (although this is more related to earthquakes), and the fact that they are partly modular with demountable wall panels strikes a familiar note. But perhaps nearest in structural concept to the Thai house is the Javanese dwelling which seems to be completely demountable.

Chief characteristics of the Thai house

Concerning ourselves now with the architecture of the Thai house, here are its chief characteristics:

- Stilts and the typical space underneath the house for domestic activities as well as for storage, and during the flood season for mooring boats.
- Extendable bay units from one to six bays or more, and then doubling-up on the end elevation.
- High gable ends to provide room height for heat convection and long projecting eaves to protect the house from heavy tropical downpours.
- Diaphragm walls which slope inwards on all sides along with the structural members. Permeable walls and floors for ventilation, especially in the kitchen.
- Large verandah, parts of which are under cover, averaging 60 percent of the total floor area.

The above also apply to the monks’ cells which are often houses presented to the monastery by well-to-do families to become the monks’ living quarters. Being on stilts, of course, the building can be as conveniently located on land as on water. In either case the method of ascending it is the same, which is as if it were always in the water. Typically the front consists of one or two platform levels for high and low floods. These are often pavilioned so that they can also be used for receptions or long social chats. Even on high ground, the same arrangement is kept. Naturally, in poorer homes, a simple flight of steps is all that is needed.

The verandah is similar to a huge raft elevated on stilts. In larger homes the number of bedrooms merely multiply without the addition of any other type of rooms, except for perhaps a separate altar cubicle where Buddha images are kept. Besides cooking and sleeping which require walled areas, the rest of the daily activities take place out in the open in the verandah. Its covered parts are used for eating, entertaining guests and sometimes for keeping an aviary, while the remaining open space is used for ceremonies, feasting, drying food, gardening in pots and in the evening, in a discreet corner for taking showers.

"Diaphragm" prefabricated walls of the monks' living quarters at Wat Amphawan

House of Thong Kerthong, Ratchburi, southeast of Bangkok (After Ruethai)
It illustrates the Thai longhouse with a large and long verandah in the middle. See also photograph at left.
The whole process of house building from ground breaking to its assembly and moving-in by the owner is a complex and lengthy ritual involving "naga", the water symbol which permeates the entire West Pacific region and South Asia. (What Naga is to the Indianised part of Asia, so is the Dragon to the Sinocised regions) This water symbolism is indispensable in the architecture of the region.

Attention has so far been focussed on the house on stilts as a single unit. Now perhaps something should be said about its collective character.

In the traditional extended family system in Siam, one basic house unit can be added to another as the family size increases and the children grow and need their own living cells. The architectural system allows for growth with an extendable platform. Thus many houses have become noticeably longer as more and more living units are added on. An example is the house of a man with five daughters and three sons. As each girl married, one more living unit complete with kitchen would be added to the platform, so that eventually there would be six family units accommodating the five married daughters and the parents. The three married would likewise move to their in-laws. If one daughter dies the son-in-law would remove his rooms to another place if he remarries.

The above, no less a description of a long house, was formally a normal sight in both old Siam and Laos. Nowadays it is almost a rarity. Looking for parallels outside Siam, in Japan such group living must have existed in the old baronial mansions where several living units were arranged on single raft-like platforms, a tradition which has continued albeit for a different purpose, in the monasteries. In Siam the best existing examples of communal housing on platforms are the monk cells where religion prescribes group existence. A typical monk's living quarters layout consists of two long lines of cells flanking a central open or semi-open area. In a big monastery where the number of monks can be considerable these living quarters can be a very long structure.

Another interesting comparison is the congregation hall in Thai, Lao and Cambodian monasteries. Although it is not a dwelling and contains no internal subdivisions, it nevertheless, frequently holds the entire community on its single "raft" platform. Besides sermons and ceremonies it is used for classes, village meetings, festivals and feastings. In the flood season its value is unmistakeable since it is the largest single wooden structure on stilts in the countryside.

The Dayak longhouse is of course truly a whole village congregated permanently on a huge raft-
platform. If compared to the Thai monk cells it is the equivalent of half a section in that it lines up all the cell units in a row on one side and the verandah on the other. Another interesting example is that of the longhouse belonging to yet another Asiatic group living several thousand miles apart across the Pacific — the Iroquois Indians’ traditional dwelling. Constructed of bent poles and completely covered with tree bark for protection against the bitter cold winters, theirs was the shape of a long boat turned upside down. It had two rows of living units and a central passage running its entire length which is said to range from twelve to over a hundred metres.

In both the Dayak and the Iroquois longhouses, families have little privacy. Whereas in the Japanese and the Thai arrangement, because of their complex social system, each room is quite separate from the next and sometimes occupies slightly different levels on the wooden platform. This permits breezes from underneath the house up through the floor levels. The greatest longhouses I have ever come across are at the town called Bang Li, seventy-five kilometres northwest of Bangkok. The town is a complex of longhouses on two levels, all interconnected. Both levels are utilised in a unique way. During the dry season, cars roam about the streets on the ground level and the scene is like any other town in the province with the beehive activities of shoppers and shopkeepers.

As the flood season approaches, by some incredible instinct, the inhabitants all move their belongings and goods onto the second level, and surely enough, the flood arrives soon afterwards. Cars disappear discreetly, overnight, giving way to a tumultuous boat traffic the following day as business continues as usual. It is most memorable to watch entire markets, barber shops, drug stores, restaurants and even the town’s petrol station suddenly appearing on the upper level, the latter continuing to discharge petrol, not into automobiles, but to a waiting queue of water buses and long-tail boats. This brings to mind towns and settlements standing on stilts permanently in water which are still to be found in South East Asia: Kampong Ayer, Brunei; Panyi in South Siam; Port Morseby in Papua New Guinea; and Cholburi, a city south-east of Bangkok.

It is probably not a coincidence that cultural historians of South East Asia (Solheim, Soedes, Ph. Groslier) agree on the fact that humans first settled along sea shores and only later moved inland. Some original oceanic migrations are evident there so that Heyerdahl in turn can say with confidence (Early Man and the Ocean) that the first man-made vehicle was the boat, or the raft. At the risk of jumping to conclusions, I will state that the first man-made habitat was the house on a raft, in the sense that includes its metamorphosis into the house on stilts.
In more recent times the metamorphosis or transformation sequence of the house on raft to one on stilts is well documented. Of the numerous settlements on stilts in Siam, several were actually floating villages until the advent of motor launches. To escape the noise and turbulence which also damages the rafts, floating houses were moved bodily onto the banks where they were simply raised and re-equipped with stilts.

The above illustrates a particular circumstance which forces the transformation of aquatic to semi-aquatic or amphibious architecture. What was probably originally was that the raft houses were simply anchored to the banks, sometimes afloat and sometimes resting on the mud flats without any effort to stand up on stilts.

There is a village in the Malay peninsular called Tha Khanon in Surathani province. It is located on a low-lying strip of land stretched along a river which overflows its banks every monsoon, flooding the village to depths of ten to twenty metres. The floods come as suddenly as they recede. The cycle can occur several times during the season, and each flood can last a few days or a few weeks. Confronted by this, the inhabitants have devised an ingenious solution to residential design: their wooden houses are built on stilts which rest on, but without being fixed to the ground. Underneath the house are stacked horizontally, hundreds of bamboos. In addition, each house has four or more wooden poles about twenty metres high driven into the ground at the four corners. Ropes attached to the house are latched onto these poles, which, taken together, present a strange silhouette when the village is viewed from a distance. When the flood comes, the entire community, with its houses, shops, a public pavilion and dog kennels, is automatically afloat, to the complete indifference of its inhabitants.

Not so very long ago, that is, until the turn of the century, Bangkok used to consist mainly of floating houses. The population in mid-19th century was approximately 400,000 and of these some 350,000 lived in floating raft homes along the rivers and canals. The rest lived in houses on stilts on the banks of flooded terrains. Naturally there were masonry buildings sitting firmly on the ground such as palaces and temples, but they were in the main ceremonial and symbolic structures, and not for habitation. It is difficult to think of any other city in the world where pretty well an entire city floated. Bangkok was unique in this sense.

Typically, the floating house is three bays deep. The front, facing the river has removable panels, and is left open during the day for the breeze. The verandah in front, railed to prevent small children from falling overboard, is a bathing area in the morning and evening, and a shop during the day. The middle bay is for sleeping, while the one facing the embankment is for cooking and eating.

Being afloat, of course, made the habitat highly mobile. Indeed from time to time the houses were removed, and it was a curious sight to witness these...
Kampong Ayer, capital of Brunei
This is the most extensive settlement built on stilts standing in water today

Locomotive abodes, sometimes consisting of many apartments, loosened from the cables which had attached them to a particular spot, going forth on their travels to fresh destinations .. without any inconvenience, and at the will of the owners.

Nowadays floating settlements have dwindled to a small number. The Sea Gypsies’ village in Mindanao, some raft communities scattered in central and southern Siam, and the floating houses (and floating gardens) of Inle Lake, North Burma are all that come to mind.

Their days are indeed numbered. Soon they will join those that have already run aground and re-equipped themselves with pilotis to face conditions on terra-firma. But on land, the aquatic instinct remains, so that numerous great stone monuments are adorned with nautical and water symbols.

In West Pacific, particularly in South East Asia, we are linked by this instinct, which transcends the later religious and cultural cross-currents, an instinct which originates from that point in time when our habitats were water-bound.

Footnote
People belonging to a cultural area encompassing Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia Island, South East Asia

All photographs and illustrations courtesy of Sumet Jumsai except those on pages 58 by Kambhu and 59 (centre) by Saeng-Arun.
Case Study 5 — India
The Indian Experience and the Search for
Some Light at the Other End

Romi Khosla

The background seems so complicated

As a nation India is passing through a crisis, not of identity but of faith. It is a crisis that has permeated the political, social and most significantly of all the cultural life of Indians. Contemporary economic and scientific phenomena whizzing by at such a bewildering speed have broken down the absolute values that the feudal age had comforted India with before colonisation. Even as architects we seem in the midst of the realm of chance, disorder, drift, idleness on the one hand and scientific deduction, new orders, dynamism and change on the other. Today the contradictions of architecture stand between the disciplines of science and art because all our buildings should

The building industry in India is still a craft. Much of the built form of contemporary architecture is therefore unwillingly tied to the past

Emperor Humayun’s Tomb, New Delhi, 1565 A.D The historical (vertical) plane of cognizable architectural influence across which the architect looks includes the glories of the past which include Moghul architecture.
Case Study 5

Bhutan Embassy Built in New Delhi within the last decade A search for identity and identification with the past gives no clues as to how the search should be carried out in the future

be creative and also be capable of scientifically creating a physical environment. The scientific part of the discipline is not so bothersome or insurmountable, nor does it demand such a profound search. Here the value systems are pretty well understood and the applications neatly allocated to contractors, i.e., the environmental services. The crisis in Indian architecture is in the art part of it, the form, so to speak. It may seem brutal and simplistic to talk of such divisions as science and art in architecture, but let us say that this is a convenient analytical device which I would like to use to try and get to the issue of our search for identity in architecture.

The ancient culture of the Indian subcontinent confuses the Indian's choice today because there are people living in India who are still in the stone age and also others who are making silicon semiconductor devices. Indians live simultaneously with their beggars, their own satellites, and Indian cosmonauts. It is as if these five thousand years were all around them. Then, India is a secular state with tribal beliefs mixed with Hindu, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and Sikh faiths. So there is no single state religion, no dominant religious community, and so the rulers cannot use the weapon of fundamentalism or religion to arrest the crisis of faith.

The architect in search of identity

In architecture, as in all visual arts, there is a search for identity. As individuals, as social beings we are being affected by the crisis of faith, but as architects the search is for a sense of identity in built form. This search is simultaneously being carried out on two planes the "vertical" or historical plane and the...
Public Housing, Delhi Development Authority, 1982
On the contemporary horizontal plane the architect works on problems which in the past were left to people to do spontaneously

Hyatt Regency Hotel, New Delhi, designed by Jasbir Sawhney
Another contemporary problem, unknown in the past where the search for identity becomes confined to facia elements
Case Study 5

Walker's Plaza, Colombo, Ceylon This inevitable proposed multistorey towerblock designed by The GRUP in 1980 identified firmly with modernism

“horizontal” or contemporary plane. In simple terms the ruling cultural landmarks of the historical plane are: a Hindu culture from the thirteenth century B.C. till today, a Buddhist culture from the fifth century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D., and Islamic culture from the twelfth century A.D. to the eighteenth century A.D., a colonial culture from the eighteenth century A.D. to the mid-twentieth century and then independence for thirty six years. This is the Indian heritage.

On the contemporary plane, as architects, we are working for homeless, landless, farm labourers and attempting to find solutions in mud that cost less than a hundred dollars a dwelling. We are working simultaneously on construction costs of three dollars a square foot and fifty dollars a square foot. But we are also designing and supervising silicon chip factories filled with computers. This is the plane across which the architect works.

The search for identity in our architecture lies in creating the buildings of the horizontal (contemporary) plane which will recognise and develop out of the historical (vertical) plane and not purely out of modernism.

The colonial process in India squeezed out the ethnic creativeness, force fed European culture and hypnotised the middle-class to identify with metropolitan London. Left Poster in Amsterdam Right Statue of hypnotist at Goa house, New Delhi
Modernism

Modern architecture (or all that went on under the name of CIAM and the International style) turned its back on cultural continuity in building style. This was nothing unusual. Modern medicine turned its back on traditional medicinal practice, modern science turned its back on phenomena which were not verifiable by empirical experiments, modern painting turned its back on figurative art. All these events took

India gave Edwin Lutyens the opportunity to make a grand historical gesture. The presence of such magnificent colonial architecture in the midst of Delhi transforms the consciousness of Indian architects who are searching for identity. Lutyens himself gave a unique identity to his buildings by stewing together Italian, Greek, Indian and English architectural elements. Top, left Entry to north block Secretariat Complex, New Delhi. Top, right Greek authoritarian columns of south block Secretariat Complex, New Delhi. Above Guard room Presidential Palace.
place within a very short span of time and it was necessary for modernism to do this so that it could consolidate its identity and beliefs without being diluted by historical incumbrances. All the fundamental beliefs in modernism were primarily based on the rejection of the old in every form. But today, gradually this same puritanical modernism is widening its ground to take in post modernism in architecture, acupuncture and herbal treatments in medicine, extra sensory perception in science and super realism in painting.

In architecture therefore there is a growing search for cultural continuity. There are searches for images which evoke familiar feelings. There is a conscious effort to re-establish the broken links between the conscious and the unconscious which modernism had damaged. In the case of India, no cultural invasion had buried our own traditions so suddenly as the British colonial presence. The Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic traditions had taken centuries to grow into the fabric of India, but the colonial experience was different. Unlike in many other Asian and Middle Eastern countries, the colonial process in India killed and buried the ethnic creativeness by the introduction of the English language, which had to be spoken by the native intelligentsia to advance itself. By switching to English they had to abandon their cultural roots and adopt instead the metropolitan culture of London, with its trousers and braces and laces and shoes and chairs and knives and forks and bacon and eggs. Just as the Indian miniature and mural painting was replaced by the easel and canvas and oil paint and wood frame, so too in architecture, there was a radical shift in the aesthetic position to adopt the goodies that modernism offered in steel, glass and concrete on the one hand and avenue, roundabouts and bungalows on the other. The spearhead of the colonial inroad was a superior technology, the weapon of conquest that the Industrial Revolution had produced. The traditional towns of India were viewed with mistrust, the mistrust of settlements living close to each other, depending on each other, of intimate market squares and narrow streets. All these were native ghettos, and to be avoided. Instead, sewerage, and transportation and law and order took precedence. And so were born in India the cantonment, the civil lines and eventually a new capital city, the city of New Delhi.

However, even after 1947, when the British had left

Capital Complex, Chandigarh by Le Corbusier from where, like in colonial times justice descends upon the people from above.
India, the same ideology permeates its sense of town and city. There were three significant occasions on which master architects were imported into India to reinforce, with architectural images, the authority of the state. First came Lutyens, then came Le Corbusier and last of all, Louis Kahn. Each architect was given the opportunity and took upon himself the role of making a grand historical gesture that would awe the people with the power of the state. Each time the architect was transformed from his earlier career, each time he was staggered by the actual size of his commission. Each time the buildings were carried to poetical heights and removed from the people. Government was seen to descend from above as it had done in colonial times. In Delhi the capital complex was placed on Raisana Hill, in Chandigarh it was removed to the northern foothills and in Dhaka it was isolated from surrounding buildings. And so the Indian understood that the West considers itself superior, and so, like any colonial subject he wanted above all to prove to the West at all cost the richness of his thought and equal value of the intellect. It is this thought that primarily dominates the course of Indian architecture even today.

Which tunnel will lead to the light?

However the second and third generation of post colonial architects seem to be more relaxed, and a rather awkward and restless search for identity has already produced different kinds of buildings. They are no doubt most of them awkward, eclectic and even down right bad, but what is significant is that all this is the beginning of the search into one’s own identity.

Unfortunately, however, the problem of identifying Indian roots is not easy at all. Let us look at one of the earliest temples on the Indian sub-continent — the Jandial temple at Taxila, in modern-day Pakistan, built in the second century B.C. along the lines of a Greek temple. Or take a look at the architecture of Angkor in Kampuchea — is it Kampuchean or Indian? Or for that matter take a look at a Lutyens building — is it English, Italian or Indian?

Travel and media have already demolished traditional cultural enclosures. It is also beginning to become clear that we should not be caught up in the false problem of trying to discover ancient Indian aesthetics as a direction for the future. In architecture, and perhaps in other arts too, the innovations in form will be brought about by an orchestration of worldwide symbols and visual signs. The future innovations in architectural form will be able to use the entire worldwide vocabulary of visual effects and at the same time reach backwards and forwards through history to draw upon inspiration. I think that it is
Middle class houses in Delhi built in this decade. Architects search for regional identity in their efforts to try and combine architectural elements drawn from the past. Above, left, Brick house, Delhi, Architect Sareen. Above, right, Chakravarty House, Delhi, 1976. Chimney of the past exaggerated as humourous building element designed by The GRUP.
Case Study 5

Museum Trivandrum, Kerala. Use of domestic thatch and style projected to a public building which was once a palace. Identity can be added by locating identifiable building elements to a neutral form, but is this the real way to search for an identity?

Belgian Embassy, New Delhi, 1984. A building conceived by sculptor Satish Gujral, consciously avoiding the modern vocabulary of architecture and looking for identity in a totally different direction.
important for us to remember that the intuitive aspect of architecture is conditioned in part by historical links because it dips into that vast pool of the historical subconscious, of the sense of beauty. This subconscious is very deep, and formulated by a process beginning at birth. It is also something that cannot be arbitrarily cut off and replaced by a fresh subconscious overnight. Modernism certainly succeeded in doing this in Europe, but then Europe as an industrialised continent had barely emerged from a barbaric culture a thousand years ago. It is significant that the urbanisation process in Asia has barely begun and the volume of building being carried out in this part of the world is so enormous that the new directions in architecture will emerge here. The urban saturation of the first world has virtually halted the building process and converted it instead to renovation. Can we therefore not be confident that the new directions in architecture are going to emerge here amongst us? Have we not already started opening the pages of MIMAR before those of "Progressive Architecture"?

All photographs courtesy of Romi Khosla
This presentation is to introduce to you a proposal for the development of Sulaiman Court opposite Pertama Complex. In line with the objectives of Dewan Bandaraya, the redevelopment will basically be concerned with the creation of a complex that will bear a two-fold purpose: aesthetic and functional. However, the overall structural design will incorporate and portray a concept which encompasses the social, cultural and aesthetic qualities of Malaysia, a rich indigenous background. To this end there will be amenities of recreational space for active sports and musical activities, facilities for cultural shows, exhibitions and expositions as well as commercial and retail areas. This will be the centre to promote social, cultural and aesthetic awareness. There are various deficiencies already apparent in the structure of Kuala Lumpur. Significantly, in the city, there is a dire need for places to visit. There is no one common place where the masses from all walks of life can congregate. One notices the absence of any centre that provides good all round recreation. Places like BB Park, and Lucky World had provided easily available and cheap entertainment but long after they have been demolished, there has never been any replacement.
In their places shopping complexes have sprung up and nowadays the public turns to seek amusement by frequenting Sungei Wang or Pertama without any constructive purpose. The lack of attractive cultural or social constructive activities in these places merely result, unfortunately, in encouraging loitering or loafing. Entertainment and recreation are not readily obtainable for the man in the street simply because there are not enough places for these activities, or because of exorbitant prices. Neither is there focus for the development of aesthetic pursuits, arts or indigenous skills. Another problem is racial segmentation. Presently nearly all public places are racially segregated, for example Petaling Street for the Chinese, or Kampung Baru for the Malays. There must be a place that can draw all Malaysians together to encourage racial integration. Because of the encroachment of rapid development, pasar malam (night markets) sites and shop houses have gradually made way for commercial buildings which are impersonal and isolated in character. The Kuala Lumpur scenery is becoming a concrete jungle, cold monolithic buildings interspersed occasionally by the obligatory dashes of greenery. There is a desperate need to provide places for small traders and to improve the dreary landscape of the city itself.

The redevelopment of Sulaiman Court will offer several solutions to the city’s problems by providing a suitable venue for people to indulge in social, cultural and recreational activities, thereby fulfilling an important cultural objective. To provide an alternative to endless wanderings in shopping complexes, the new Sulaiman Court will serve as a useful channel for creative and constructive recreation. A visit to Sulaiman Court would produce a sense of occasion and a feeling of purpose and excitement. Besides accommodating the ever popular attractions of pasar malam and hawkers’ stalls, Sulaiman Court will create for them a lively, central location. It will be the place in Kuala Lumpur to visit not only for local visitors but foreign tourists too will be able to see at first hand the richness and variety of Malaysian life, be it a wayang kulit show, dondang sayang concert or displays of local skills. The centre will encourage aesthetic pursuit, a flourishing of arts and crafts and allow the display of indigenous works. The public will be enticed to this place to partake of social, cultural, and racial integration which will represent a conscious effort at creating a common focus for the interaction of all races, Malay, Chinese, Indian, indeed everyone — propitiating national unity through a national culture.
At the same time in line with the new economic policy, Sulaiman Court will seek to help rectify the existing economic imbalances by securing a more equatable share in terms of Bumiputra participations. Within such conducive conditions, the centre will help foster growth of the economic interests of the Bumiputra community. The emphasis is as much on restructuring as redevelopment. Sulaiman Court as a landmark will commemorate the concern of the government for the welfare of the rakyat. Until now, Sulaiman Court has always represented a dedicated effort on the part of the authorities to provide mass housing and urban amenities. Its development will reinforce this concern in the eyes of the public and enhance the image of the government in caring for society at large. This helps fulfil the city’s moral obligation to the rakyat.

Sulaiman Court will be a public place where we can all congregate and to which we can all relate. It will be the first of its kind in this part of the world. A lively city square for creative recreation for everyone. The primary objective is to create a public attraction on a scale that had never been known before in Malaysia. The impact on the city will mark real achievement in social and cultural terms. At the same time it will enable the development of a unique Malaysian architectural style that draws inspiration from old traditions.

Redevelopment will concentrate on creating space in a public plaza of the largest proportions. This will be architecturally accentuated by an open amphitheatre, a spherical planetarium, and an impressive gateway. By despatching the traffic underground, and covering it with a terrace, a pedestrian area of unmatched proportions will be created. This design concept draws its special character from the old Moorish architecture of Kuala Lumpur that has long been the hallmark of the city. Our historic buildings that give the city its unique image such as the railway station, the old JKR headquarters, the secretariat, the old City Hall and Masjid Jamaq, all display characteristic colouring and treatment that have provided inspiration and guidance for Sulaiman Court. The horizontal banding and domes of the complex itself are an extension of this theme.

The stripes comprising of reflective glass and anodised aluminium will create a vibrant visual and psychological link with the image of the city we wish to preserve, yet portraying a contemporary effect. All in all the design ensures that the complex will not be prey to the kind of anonymity that befalls other modern building and neutralises the individuality of cities. Pink and white stripes are a strong factor in the image of the older buildings of Kuala Lumpur and it will again recur in a modern context creating a con-
tinuing link with the past, a harmonious culmination to our historic buildings which are monuments to their times and emphasise the beauty of traditional Islamic architecture. Sulaiman Court will be a symbol of our time and our vision. A curvilinear motif for the architecture is used to offset the predominance of angularity in the city's modern highrise buildings, complementing the voluptuous lines of the Mogul style and the elaborate decorations of our old shop houses and terrace houses. The curvilinear form ensures not only continuity between old and new, but strong visual impact as well.

Two towers will rise to the height of 53 storeys geometrically angled towards each other. The twin towers are identical in dimension. One of them and most of the other will be for office space, while 25 storeys of the second will accommodate a hotel whose facilities such as conference rooms, ballrooms, and restaurants, will be located on the third, fourth and fifth floors.

A helipad is provided on one of the towers. Sulaiman Court will house a centralised terminus for public and private transport comprising bus stations, taxi stands, the aerobus, the light rail transit (LRT) system and a large car park. Adjacent to the complex, traffic along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Dang Wangi will pass through an underground carriageway. From Jalan Raja Laut motorists will have access to both ends of the river car park. The basement car park is accessible from Jalan Dang Wangi and Jalan Hang Jebat. The LRT and its station are actually within the car park over the river. The curvilinear carpark has six levels of parking and ramps at both ends which are marked by domes giving the building visual character. It is linked to the complex by a bridge over Jalan Raja Laut. This three level bridge accommodates shops and stalls as well as the aerobus and its station. The hotel lobby will open directly onto taxi and bus terminals with its lifts linking it to the hotel floors at higher levels. As well as the transport terminals on this level are large areas for hawkers' stall, a bowling alley, a gymnasium and six squash courts.

The ground floor is the main feature of the whole development because of its large, open and sheltered plazas which safely leads pedestrians across to Pertama Complex, the Odeon Cinema and the terraced shops on the other side of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. The main feature of the plaza will be the sunken agora, the focal point of all the activities in the complex. It will provide an unsurpassed venue for a wide range of activities, such as expositions, displays and cultural happenings. On the first and second floors, there will be more shops overlooking the plaza and the entrance to the planetarium. Natural sunlight streams through the domes' sky light and illuminates these floors and down through the void to the hotel reception level on the ground floor.

The space frame construction for the covered plaza and the geodesic dome of the planetarium are revolutionary construction techniques. The interlacing of metal structural material breaks up the large size of modern buildings to a more acceptable scale, while simultaneously creating a visual interest that constantly changes as the pedestrians move through the complex. The geodesic dome will be the first in Malaysia. Its impressive sphere is the culmination of all the visual images that the architect has produced and an exciting climax to the public plaza.

In changing the skylines of Kuala Lumpur, the architects are intensely aware of the impact their work will have on the environment for generations to come and the firm is confident that this proposal for the redevelopment of Sulaiman Court could mean much to Kuala Lumpur.

All photographs courtesy of Hijjas Bin Kasturi
Designing the Istana Negara required some one and a half years of research into the various fundamentals existing in Malaysia, with respect to the culture, religion, and architectural forms, right down to the standard Malay house. The results of this research are presented here in this review of the planning concept of the Istana Negara, the national palace of Malaysia.

**Design Objectives**

In the planning approach to the Istana Negara, the main objectives have been:

- to endeavour to incorporate the Malaysian identity within the structure
- to maintain the principle of not mutilating the environment, but rather to harmonise the total architecture as far as the environment as a whole is concerned

**Locality**

The access to the palace is from the existing Jalan Duta. The development along the west of the site is all residential, and to the north of that area, more development is commercial. On the south is Jalan Semantan.

**Land Use**

The national palace is a monumental structure, located on high ground, about 150 metres above sea level. The original topography is very interesting, since it is undulating, it encourages the creation of artificial lakes. There is a lot of scope, and a lot of possibilities to build in and around that area.

The Istana is designed keeping the public in mind, since it is not meant only for the king. The southern side with its lake is meant for their use and this has facilities for the people and the tourists.

**Features**

The building itself is a typical Malay house on stilts, simple, but built with very advanced technology, and with the few elements which are traditional and reflect an understanding of culture and religion — in this case Islam.

Water not only represents the beginning of the evolution of human beings, but according to the research also plays an important part in Islamic architecture. Therefore it is an important feature throughout the planning concept; water is everywhere — in cascades and fountains, as you enter, in the atrium, and in the residential quarters.

**Basic Floor Layout**

There is a grand central, formal approach to the Istana, and the alignment of the buildings is along the qibla line, facing Mecca.

Since it was felt that the residential and official areas must be linked rather than knit together, the palace is divided into the following sections: the front part of the palace consists of the administrative and official areas, whereas the back is residential. Between the two is an atrium. The highest part of the Istana roof is elevated about 22 metres (the present Istana is 6 metres) and this incorporates in its height the skyward thrust of Islamic architecture.

The administrative and official area is technically a two floor building. The floor above is meant for His and Her Royal Highnesses. This is where important ceremonies and events will take place, such as the presentation of credentials by ambassadors, and Rulers’ conferences. The King and Queen’s offices will be within that area and the operational room will be in close proximity. Then there is a banquet hall, with a capacity of 1000 persons.

Above the atrium is the Singahsana, which means the coronation or investiture area, and this has a
seating capacity of 2000. In between is a multi purpose common space, which looks into the atrium as well as outside.

Within the complex there is no visual contact with cars. Cars are parked within the basement area, and like the typical Malay house, activities of preparation, cooking, storage facilities, etc, are all within the lower level.

The residential quarters have three levels. The lower level is an open space, with multi-purpose usage.

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The Roof

The form of the roof is derived after analysing and synthesising various existing structures that are prevalent in Malaysia. One of the typical features among the palaces in this region is the use of the Pancasur. It is a symbolic form, and will be at the apex of the palace roof.

Each state palace has its own interpretation of the Pancasur. Now how do you manage, when you want to design the national palace, not to favour any of the states within Peninsular Malaysia in the design of the Pancasur? It is clearly a very sensitive issue, because one state may think you favour another if you are not careful. So, a compromise has to be developed, which is what was done in this case.
A quest for identity implies that discernible characteristics have not emerged; yet such a search has to be defined. The definition may take into account a preference for an identity for the region as a whole, or for each South East Asian nation to have its own identity. If it is to be the former, from the outset, it should be emphasised that the search should be based on a common denominator or a set of such denominators. Do such common factors already exist, if so, what are they? Likewise, if these denominators do not already exist, would all South East Asian nations agree to compromise in formulating "a manual". On the other hand, if each South East Asian nation is to define its own national expression, a homogeneity is unlikely to emerge. Having put forth succinctly the nature of the problem, I shall outline earlier South East Asian architectural types as a historical framework to the proposed search. An examination of factors contributing to foreign influences in the region's architecture would indicate why and how some of its architectural styles came into being. Hopefully such an overview would help give direction to the identity or identities searched for.

While it may appear too simplistic to categorise the built form into religious and ethnic, it is in fact this very categorisation which immediately provides that set of discernible, or even obvious, characteristics known as identity. With this classification as a methodology, the delineation to follow attempts to show that identities evolve along religious and/or ethnic lines. In the ultimate "full evolution" so to say, one category, religious or ethnic, would efface the other. This happens when religion cuts across ethnic identity or when an ethnic form is used to represent a religious building. A third, but rare case is when a former religious form persists in structures of a later religion.

The sophisticated systems of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were introduced into South East Asia more or less in that order. The actual process of assimilation, or "acculturation" as some would have it, is usually appropriation of the new forms as a new and/or additional identity to the basic ethnic one. Within the process of appropriation, indigenous animism coexists with the new religions. Such a process of assimilation implies a willing participation on the part of the recipient of the new religion. Sometimes, the introduction of new forms is a straightforward imposition, especially of military conquests. One of the architectural traditions of South East Asia, therefore, is religious structures of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Examples of the Hindu-Buddhist era are Buddhist Borobudur (Central Java, early 9th century), Hindu Lara Jonggrang/Prambanan (Central Java, end 10th century), Buddhist Pagan (Upper Burma, 11th century), Buddhist Angkor (Cambodia 12th century), Buddhist Sukhothai (Central Thailand 13th century), Buddhist Ayudhya (South Central Thailand 14th century) and Hinduistic-Buddhist Majapahit (East Java 14th century). Tiered-roof mosques of Indonesia, the Malay Peninsular and Peninsular Thailand ranging roughly from 16th to early 19th century, are an earlier Islamic architectural tradition in insular South East Asia. Catholic churches of northern Philippines are yet another identity of that part of the region. (See appendix for further synoptic tabulation of the

Loro Jonggrang, Prambanan, Central Java, end 10th century, architecture depicted on bas-relief of Brahmâ temple of the Hindu temple complex
regions’s cultural history.) All these religious buildings were “national expressions” in that they were implemented by the State. Whether the intention was to give each of the respective states its identity is debatable.

The cultural heritage of South East Asia, therefore, includes an era of Hindu-Buddhist movement around 7th to 14th century for the whole region. This period gave way to Islam from the 15th century in the insular portion, while mainland South East Asia has continued building Buddhist edifices till today. An exception to this broad outline is the Christian identity in northern Philippines. The religious buildings of ancient cities were erected by kings, princes and religious leaders, that is, the ruling elite of the time. How far these implementations permeated down to the village level is beyond the scope of this paper.

What came from India was temple architecture and in all that vast literature by the Dutch and French are meticulous studies of how “local genius” transformed Hindu and Buddhist architecture from India into Burmese, Thai, Cambodian, Malaysian, Cam², Sumatran, Javanese and Balinese styles. The Islamic influence in insular South East Asia in historical times is the rare case referred to earlier. This consists of the tiered roofed mosques and other early Islamic antiquities of Indonesia, especially along the north coast of Central and East Java where previous apparently Hindu-Buddhist type of religious towers persisted in the form of these mosques. For a mosque form it is unique in that it does not have a minaret, while each mosque has a surambi (audience hall) and hence has a distinctive identity.

The Hindu-Buddhist temples and mosques of earlier South East Asia, on the whole can be considered as South East Asian innovations. They do not really resemble temples and mosques in South Asia (India) and West Asia. Chinese temples, churches, contemporary mosques of insular South East Asia including South Philippines and Indian temples are not different from their counterparts in China, Europe, West and South Asia. With this observation, one can even assert that South East Asians seemed to be more creative in earlier times.

Two main factors of foreign influences in South East Asia are universal ones, viz., commercial interests and missionary activities. On the whole, the latter cause in historical times appears to be an offshoot of the former until 18th/19th century organised Christian missions per se beginning with the Jesuits. These Christian missionaries, however, did not penetrate the court level and so have not reached state level in present times. The exception again is Northern Philippines where it was not a case of missionary activities per se but a straightforward conquest even though in the ultimate analysis the imposition was because of trade. While Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam did not reach state stature in historical times and were manifested in built forms, there were no organised religious missions comparable to the Christian ones. The initial influx of Indians, Chinese and Arabs (and Persians) was because of trade and accompanying religious buildings developed from the sojourners and settlers, some of whom influenced the court, while others the mercantile class.

The chronology of Indian, Chinese and Arabic influences in South East Asia are logical historical events in view of proximity and mode of travel in earlier times. While commercial interest was, and is still the main impetus of the activities of people who disseminate their ideas and values, other less obvious reasons are also incentives for these movements: Political, economic and social situations in countries of origin of influences are more elusive than the presence of influences themselves in South East Asia. For example, it could very well be that the Buddhist movement into South East Asia was a reaction to the caste system in India. It was mostly the ‘Vaishyas’ (the mercantile class) who embraced the Buddhist religion, and seeking their fortunes abroad, brought the religion to South East Asia. Hinduism did not come into South East Asia as an organised force; there is not really a Hindu clergy as such, and each Hindu household is his own priest. State Hindu temples were the personal expressions of the particular rulers who claimed certain deities as their being incarnations of, and hence have a different tenor from the Buddhist or Islamic monuments built by the state and “given” to the populace. Similarly, the movement of Chinese into South East Asia is more than the usual commercial activities. Imperial China of warlords, not unlike the Kshatriyas of India, did not on the whole tolerate “competition” from the mercantile entrepreneurs who then sought their fortunes abroad. One may ask, if those warlords of China caused movements, why did not Japanese warlords also cause such emigrations? Japan’s isolation in historical times was further state-sanctioned by the Tokugawa’s policy of deliberate total isolation (Tokugawa Shogunate A.D 1603-1968). Later influxes of Indians and Chinese into especially Malaysia were British colonial policies.

The trade sought after by Western nations in historical times was the “exotic” produce of South East Asia. The region began to participate actively in the international trade of the time after the overland caravan route (the Silk Route) was disturbed around the 3rd century A.D. South East Asian and Chinese goods were then channelled via the sea route with India as the sojourning sector. Of the exotic products supplied by South East Asia, spices played an important role. It was in the quest for spices that navigators like Vasco de Gama, Prince Henry the Navigator and Sir Francis Drake sailed across unknown seas. It was
mainly for this lucrative Spice Trade that Portuguese, Dutch, French and British East India Companies based in India, looked East. The “East Indies” became the focus, especially after the 16th century discovery of the Cape route to India.

It may well be that substantial Islamic influences stemmed from insular South East Asia being drawn into the Spice Trade using maritime routes which did not include mainland South East Asia. Earlier pre 16th century Islamic influences were isolated pockets in the region which incidentally have not left us their architecture. The earliest existing mosque in insular South East Asia is that of Demak (north coast Central Java), although Islam was in existence earlier in Sumatra than Java. This situation may be either because before the 16th century, Arab influence was from visitors and sojourners, not settlers, or because early mosques were constructed of perishable materials. Judging from the thatched tiered-roofs of later 17th/18th century ones in Indonesia, the latter reason seems more probable because 18th/19th century ones retain the form in tiled roofs.

It may not be too obvious to remind ourselves of the diversity of South East Asia. This wide spectrum, as already shown in religion, is also in ethnicity. It would seem that to cut across the various religions to achieve an identity, that is a homogeneity, is indeed a formidable task. The alternative is to tackle the ethnic factor which may be equally difficult. Yet, I believe that, in spite of the many varied cultures, there is an underlying “South East Asianness” which could be defined as a common denominator for the region. This “South East Asianness”, however, is inevitably and logically, at the peasant level.

Demak mosque, north coast of Central Java, east of Semarang.
In front of the tiered thatched roof mosque is a surambi (audience hall) which is traditionally believed to have been (dismantled and) carried from Majapahit, the last Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom. The metal minaret is a later addition while the mosque itself is probably 17th century.

Malacca, Tranquerah mosque with tiled tiered pyramid roofs following earlier thatched ones.

Besakih, Bali.
In this mountain sanctuary complex, the main one on the island, are various forms of tiered and tiered-roof religious towers. The number of tiers seem to be governed by sumptuary rules according to the status of gods and humans who occupy the structures.
Pura Taman Ayun, Mengwi, Bali

In the temple complex is this thatched two-tier roof cock-pit, cockfighting, which may still be a religious ceremony in some places, is now reduced to a mundane sport.

Bali, shrines in house compound

Thatched (tiered) roofs crown wooden structures on stilts, the whole shrine is further raised on a high masonry base.
The Shwe Nan Daw monastery, entirely of timber, dating to around mid-19th century

Amarapura, Burma
This historical and archaeological site was a capital of Burma in the late 18th early 19th century

Taunggyi, Burma
Timber building in Taunggyi, a hill resort
Search for Identity

Thai timber structure supported by massive masonry pillars

Ancient City, Bangkok.

"Telescopic" roof form in Thailand

Ancient City, Bangkok.

Northern Thai style displayed in The Ancient City,

Bangkok.
In the category of ethnic houses, factors influencing their designs are obviously climatic and animistic beliefs. The one all pervading feature of peasant or tribal houseform in South East Asia is the stilts on which the house stands. This characteristic would seem to be due to climatic constraints; even earlier religious structures which appear to be built directly on the ground are almost always with a base, and some of these are quite high. It is not being suggested that the whole region should build pile houses even in its cities to obtain that identity searched for. It is not inconceivable, however, to apply the idea of living quarters being above the ground to urban areas to echo the village. On the whole, South East Asian feudal level houses, even in the cities, do retain this pile house characteristic.

In concluding this discussion of architectural types which I have categorised into religious and ethnic as a methodology for their delineation, a final observation is that an ultimate evolution appears when the two categories merge. This is when an ethnic form becomes a religious form, and vice versa. The former merger is more usual. An example is the fully evolved Chinese aristocratic, if not imperial house form of a roof with extended upturned eaves as being also the form of the Chinese temple. The factor governing such a merger is a universal one, especially in historical times. This is the “god-king” concept, and South East Asia is no exception. A survey of palaces would show that most of them are reminiscent of religious buildings and vice versa.
Towards an identity suggests the building up of a tradition, and the concept of tradition implies a substantial time span. Take for example the inevitable high-rise of intensive urbanisation. These sky scrapers can be directed to purposefully developing an identity by, say, a recurring theme or design. Alternatively, if free enterprise is encouraged so that no apparent common theme occurs, one can in fact simply resort to an “instant identity” of the Statue of Liberty type — and even for the region, choose a “pan-South East Asian” symbol to pronounce an identity analogous to a logo — such a short-cut is not inconceivable; but is it desirable? This short-cut, on the other hand, need not be viewed as an unaesthetic feature of incongruity. Positively, it leaves the way open for totally new directions, be they to include international styles. However that may be, if the desire is to form a link with past traditions, then a historical framework is necessary. Practitioners of the built environment may wish to draw from the past as a guide. Yet, a call to look back at the past need not be misconstrued as hampering individual creativity. A living tradition is often manifested in new forms of old concepts.

Notes

1 Treatises on architecture do exist, viz. for India and China, while sets of building “rules” can be culled from South East Asian literary sources and other forms of visual art.

2 Buddhism appropriated many elements from Hinduism, even before being exported to South East Asia where the “synthesism” of the two systems is even more apparent.

3. That is, of Campa, which roughly corresponds with present day central Vietnam and which existed as a South East Asian state till around the 14th century, when it was assimilated into present Vietnam.

Appendix

A synopsis of South East Asian cultural history

c. 500 B.C. — DONGSON bronze-iron age characterised by bronze drums some of which have illustrations of houses

c. 2nd-5th C — Hinduistic states of FU-NAN in lower Mekhong and LIN-YI around Huế

c 1st-10th C.— N Vietnam controlled by China.

c 6th-7th C — Fu-nan fell to KHMERS/KAMBUJAS
— Buddhist MONS in Menam and Lower Burma

c. 8th-9th C — foundation Pagan by Burmese and Angkor by Khmers.
— Hinduistic West Java (DIENG Plateau).
— Buddhist SAILENDRA of Central Java.
— Buddhist maritime centres at PALEMBANG, BANGKA (west Borneo), Nakhon Sri Thammarat (Kra Isthmus) = the so-called Srivijaya.

c. 10th C. — Hindu-Buddhist MATARAM of East Java
— N. Vietnam press south against CAMPA (Lin-yi).

c 11th C. — PAGAN at height, into Irrawaddy delta and overcame Mons
— Consolidated East Java by Air-langga

c. 12th C. — ANGKOR
— Srivijaya superseded by MALAYU kingdom @ JAMBI

13th C. — MONGOL conquers whole of Asia
— SUKHOTHAI central Thailand.
— Islam in north Sumatra.

14th C — MAJAPAHIT, east Java and AYUDHYA central-south Thailand
— VIETNAMESE assimilate Cams.

15th C — MALACCA
— Vietnamese and Thai extended south.

16th C — Spaniards in Philippines, 1511 Malacca fell to Portuguese; Bangkok 1540.

17th C — Dutch in Java; 1641 Dutch took Malacca.

18th C. — French in “Indochina”.

19th C — British in Burma and Malaya.

All photographs courtesy of Khoo Joo Ee
Panel Discussion 4

Haji Rahim

Among the Malays open planning as we understand it especially in terms of open platforms is more to do with the inviting look. There is a saying among us that the worst thing that could ever happen to the Malay is to be declared a social outcast. Because of this, normally the houses are open in front so as to give the impression that visitors are always welcome; and there is always a plate of rice in the kitchen. I think this kind of philosophy and concept needs looking into when we talk about identity in architecture.

Sumet Jumsai

This outlook is actually just not restricted to the Malays, but is found in the whole of the West Pacific region. It indicates a nautical background and has to do with when you are in the same raft or ship and you drift or travel from one place to another. To be a social outcast is to be cast into the sea, when you are really finished. So that is the nautical instinct.

Hijjas Kasturi

The basis for identity is not derived from just superficial things. It can come from philosophies, culture and so on. For example the Malay adat. Whether we use it or not I don’t know yet, but it exists, it has relevance and it can be used wherever it is required. According to the Malay adat an entrance is never at the back, the bottom, or the side, which contemporary architecture permits, or your house below a building, or below the ground — never, never for a Malay house. These are the fundamental things. There are many other things, as well, for example the gable is a reflection of your status in the community. It can go on and on. This to me is very important. We can use it when it is adaptable.

Lim Chong Keat

The basis of design is not just knowing what to put in, but really what to leave out. If you try to throw everything into your building, hopefully you get a high stomach ache and we are living in a huge stomach ache of our urban civilisations today. Next, referring to Hijjas Kasturi’s contribution, I congratulate him for being a brave man to show us the realism where he is at. We are all on the fringe of, and some of us are in the milieu of urban commercialism. And we know that it is very difficult for an architect to resist a huge commission. However, I would like to comment not on what he is doing by way of buildings, but to the advertising gloss that goes around it. The kind of words that are being used by his agents to justify what he is doing — really, it is a very dangerous thing.
(Note. I felt justified in not including this ‘gloss’ in the edited version of the conference papers — Editor)

Tay Kheng Soon

I don’t quite take Lim Chong Keat’s view. I think the fact of living in today’s world is that we have to be able to switch mode from low cost primitive housing to high cost five star hotels in terms of physical dimensions. We also have to switch gears and switch positions from points of philosophical, historical and archaeological interest to tackling the planners at the planning level. And similarly we have to switch between our real hardcore professional concerns and commercial concerns.

Secondly, I very much appreciate Sumet Jumsai’s outlining of the scholarly background behind the common denominators in our South East Asian identity. As we are more and more exposed to this kind of research we begin to understand that we are not national entities as such, but are a common people in South East Asia; we have a certain distinct tradition with a distinct underlined area of subconscious. And we talk to each other through con-
ferences like these we begin to sense this, and I think this has a profound effect on our thinking.

Lastly, let me just add that the quest for identity is not a luxury. The quest for identity is a necessity. It is so because it is part of the social and cultural technology that we should harness because it is through the process of harnessing such a difficult technology, such a cultural technology that we can take the next step.

Charles Correa

I quite agree with Mona Serageldin that in a country like Egypt perhaps the other problems are so large that the search for identity is not one of the key problems. Or maybe they are more confident, they don’t even question the identity they have, it’s so much part of them. But to repeat what I’d said earlier you get your identity by going about everyday life in your own way.

Another thing which disturbed me is that it seems we look at a building as a box, a coded box And it is crazy to think we’ll find our identity by changing the code, the tattooing It’s the open spaces (I’m sorry to keep returning to it) and it’s not just open-to-sky, there are so many different transitions. In this part of the world more than in India, I would think that it’s those areas where life really occurs.

Eric Lye

To me what Sumet Jumsai presented is really what I will regard as our conscious and what Hijjas Kasturi presented as our reality. I think we need both. Hijjas Kasturi has also taken away the concept of the tradition role of the individual single architect because in some way perhaps he is not even an architect now, he is a director the producer is someone else, providing the money and the means, he has a script writer, technician and actors. He is not the first to do it although the first one in this part of the world. His films (that perhaps upset some people) are part of this impresario film making which we have to face. It’s a starting point.

Ruslan Khalid

I think what Sumet Jumsai has done is to really open my eyes to the problem of identity. Previously one laboured under the impression that when we talked about identity in architecture, particularly in Malaysia, we were talking about our own localised problems. He has opened up the whole global issue about how the indigenous architecture of this part of the world is linked and related on a very pragmatic basis. I think it’s a very important contribution. Perhaps now we can view our problem of identity in a much more outward looking way. The cross fertilisation of culture that must have existed must have had a tremendous influence on everybody. It’s amazing to realise how isolated Malaysia was during the last maybe hundred years from Thailand for instance, because of the colonial government. How Indonesia was in fact isolated from Malaysian culture and so on. I hope that now with the lingua franca we can begin to communicate with each other again towards a fruitful development.

Next, I want to talk about David Wee. He represents the kind of phenomenon we all have to face in this part of the world. When you come up with the client who has a definite idea about what he wants, invariably the architect designing for them will have to find some kind of rationale for what he does. In David Wee’s case he finds rationale for establishing some kind of identity in his work in this instance the Islamic dogma. This is a very convenient kind of rationale to use, because it cannot be challenged by anybody. If you say your building faces Ka’aba and it’s holy, you can’t challenge that notion whether it’s a house or a mosque. Then he uses the symbolism which to me has a certain sense of spiritual reality but which has no validity in terms of the functions of the Palace. That palace doesn’t have many religious functions or ceremonies. Whatever ceremony goes on is more of the traditional or ritual kind than of the religious. Therefore to base all the architectural rationale on the religious kind of reason or symbolism is to me quite missing the point. But he cannot be challenged by his own clients because he is so emotional, so loaded that people would just have to accept his presentation, and this is the dilemma.

Tao Ho

The interesting thing about this meeting is that I see a lot of disagreement, and at the same time I agree with a lot of people on certain points. I think we have to recognise this contradiction, because we are dealing with different aspects of the same problem, on different scales; national scale, regional scale, socio-economic scale or even philosophical scale. Amongst architects, even if we come from the same culture, live in the same town and have a similar educational background, given the same problem, we can scratch each others eyes out disagreeing on the same basic principles I think we have to realise that.

Similarly, this problem of identity has a hierarchy of meanings and hierarchy of realities that we have to
deal with. A test of being an architect is whether we are able to solve this problem and face up to it honestly. So that when we are asked to design for a difficult client, we can honestly do our best, even if we are to design a slum.

**Eugene J. Seow**

It occurs to me that there is no mention of religion here, although it is a very powerful motive in all architecture. It forms a very important part of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist design. I feel that’s a very strong motive force in the identity we are talking about.

**Lim Chong Keat**

When you use the phrase ‘search for identity’ it is of course a good platform, but there is an over emphasis on the word ‘search’, because it seems to imply that you are on some kind of road or you are not on it at all, and eventually you are going to shout “eureka!” Now we are already concerned about processes and the history of mankind is not going to stop anywhere until maybe at another big bang.

**Sumet Jumsai**

This question of architectural commercialism really reminds me of a very bad television programme I saw recently. It was about a couple of singers, they go up to an agent who is trying to sell them and they are straightaway offered a contract to sign. The boy refuses to sign but as the girl starts to sign, the agent presses a button which opens up half the wall revealing on the other side, the press. They start to interview the girl straightaway and she says, “I have not done anything yet, how can I give a press conference?” And they reply “never mind, give a press conference and then tomorrow is a tour of Atlanta, then a concert somewhere and the next day we are going to sell your records.” And she says “But I have not made any records yet” “Never mind, we'll sell you first and make the record afterwards.” And I think we're really moving into that. I'm not referring to anyone in particular but let us face the truth, that is what a lot of us are doing already. Why are we getting into that I don’t know. Perhaps it is our fault or perhaps society's. Maybe we ought to blame society.

**Norman Edwards**

In South East Asia the architects are not involved in the kind of cultural and social mobility that Mona Serageldin was referring to. This is as opposed to the West where they are coming close to the grass roots, coming closer to a more actively involved relationship with the user. In some way architects are not down there where they should be and this is where as you say, the high percentage of the urbanites exist in society. It seems to me the quest for identity has a lot to do with the conscience that underlines the whole concern with this thing. There is a need to move into those areas.

**Sumet Jumsai**

The question is can architects play their role with the urban poor? The answer is yes and no. Yes, if you are in an academic like Eric Lye you can write books, or if you are part of the government services you may feel that you are paid to do it. But if you are in the private sector like myself and you go down to the slums, you are an outcast. Firstly you won't get all the fat commissions and so forth. Secondly you become a trouble maker. I'm speaking from experience, since I'm dealing at present with the biggest slum in Bangkok. I have been fighting against the evictions, but there is no role for me there as an architect. I would just like to mention this experience in terms of identity, because the solution I put forward for the national housing authority is not to use all this technology that is imported into the country via ADB and World Bank. But really to go back to the house on stilts. That is how those people live and that is their way of life and they can do it themselves. Now the terrain is almost completely flooded, and so I put forward this idea that where the terrain is flooded very deep they should not even bother to build stilts. Just have floating rafts. We have a lot of floating villages still left in the countryside and these are country people who have moved in from that kind of habitat into the city. But no, the government wouldn’t have anything like that and because of the ADB and World Bank loans we have to start filling in the Terrain at great cost. This is the sort of thing that we are doing. First of all bulldozing down identity and then getting into the economics of upgrading those particular slums.

**Eric Lye**

This question of the urban poor is a real dilemma. The bureaucrats and the planners feel that if the architect intervenes, then it is his doom. And the architect is of the view that he has no credibility if he goes in there
The French, however, have been doing some work on this and they don't call themselves architects, just animators. In that role, perhaps that is what architects are — animators.

Charles Correa

I think the intervention we can make, and it is very important that we make it, is in the new structuring of the city. That is one. Each of us can do it in his own area, his own city. Then we can perhaps use these advertising techniques to project it. In short everything you can do to put your point across to the planners for example.

When you see the really poor people you realise that they have wonderful solutions of how to build. That exists but what doesn't exist is the land where these solutions are viable and that is what we should try to provide for them. If there is a famine in India can you imagine us running around asking housewives to write recipe books so people can cook? It would be really insulting. We want to believe people don't have houses because they don't know how to build and we are going to teach them. We don't want to accept why they really don't have the houses, why they don't have the food.

Tao Ho

I belong to a voluntary organisation called 'Helping Hand'. We deal with the urban poor, people sixty years old, eighty years old who have been thrown out on the streets. People with absolutely no identity, whether architectural, spatial, or human. So what do I do? As an architect, I don't make buildings with stilts or talk about whether they should be Islamic or Chinese. What we have done is that there is a huge block of housing supported by stilts and those spaces are empty and not much used. So we talked to the housing people and said "Nobody is going to rent a shop down there. Nobody will use it. Can we have it?". We managed to have a few bays, between the columns, and we turned that into housing units packing in more people than the maximum allowed for the people living above. But we also leave out some space to give a little bit of social gathering area for the old people. There are four people living in a small room. But they live in a place where they find a little bit of identity because they have a little bed space and also they have a space to get together in a night time, but as far as architectural design is concerned, nothing. You will never be able to tell that it is done by an architect. Identity, it has none, but it serves a purpose. As architects I think we should look into this problem as well.

Tay Kheng Soon

I think architects need not feel guilty about this problem. There is a destitute problem and of course it has to be handled, through some sort of welfare organisation. Housing for the urban poor, at least those who can afford to build a shack or a shelter is not an architectural problem. It is primarily an economic, a job problem. In this the Housing Development Board in Singapore has proven very successful in what they did: it was a very basic political decision that the lowest twenty-five percent of the income group should continue to live in their present cubicles and slums; the main effort of the government and the economy drive is to create jobs so that these people, through the job creation process, can earn money to upgrade themselves. If you try to provide housing to these without upgrading their jobs, it's a bottomless pit. I think where the architectural problem begins is once people have earned enough money to pay for a house. Then their question is what kind of a house, then it becomes an architectural problem. At that point of time, in that time scale the question of density, house types, linkage to the ground, mixture and form comes in. I think a lot of work can be done and should be done by architects in that.

William Lim

I think we must call this to a close. We are drifting into another conference on the urban poor and not identity. It's a very important subject but I don't think we should be dealing with it at this seminar.

Norman Edwards

I didn't mean to suggest that in the argument for the architect moving back to a more participatory scale, that we were merely moving into the area of helping the urban poor, but rather perhaps to a position that the architects and some designers in the West have moved to, in the context of the economic downturn. In the context of the social and cultural revolution of the sixties they have moved towards the position of looking inwards, consolidating cultural and economic resources, questioning, looking back at history and so on. Most of the architects in the urban centres are inevitably at one level where all the money is and where the economic action is. At the other end of the scale there is the political reality of the opportunities that exist for the architect, where most of the needs of Asia exist, in the urban fringes and the urban areas. And that end of the scale, may represent more the setting for the real quest for identity with which we are concerned.
Mona Serageldin

I see identity as a dynamic motion evolving in time and place in response to outside forces, which we all seem to recognise, as well as to changes from within, which are more difficult to discern, maybe because we are constantly living with and looking at them. As Romi Khosla has said I also see identity as having two dimensions. The first, (unlike him I don't think of them as vertical and horizontal) I think of as inbred, derived from our ethnic, religious, cultural background and it is the one that gives the underlying layer of stability to the experience of change.

The second I see as acquired, shaped by challenges flexible? Islamic? symbolic? Do we adapt the past or technological innovations. And this gives the flexibility necessary to a society to adapt and develop if we are at a loss right now, it's because the rate of change we are experiencing has created a sense of disequilibrium between these two dimensions. However, to my mind, the imbalance is more superficial than it seems. We can all deplore consumerism, but we cannot deny the legitimacy or the quest for a better standard of living. We can deplore the negative feeling about our architectural heritage, but we should not interpret it to imply “that people are turning their backs on the past”. Deep rooted popular attachment to religion and socio-cultural traditions negates this interpretation. Selective adaptation of traditional elements and their reinterpretation in terms of modern needs, whether real or perceived, is a sound and positive attitude. It is misleading to label any manifestations that we find difficult to accept as intellectuals, professionals or artists as a loss of identity. This would imply that there is a fundamental incompatibility between retaining identity and socio-cultural change that is necessary for all societies in the Third World, and elsewhere, to continuously develop. Cast in those terms, safeguarding our identity would become at best a half-hearted battle, and a losing one; at worst it would call for consistent looking backwards. This is a negative and self defeating exercise.

The two tendencies are prevalent today not only here, and they generate similar frustrations. I find it more constructive to concentrate on defining the direction in which the whole society and its identity is evolving at this particular time and place, and to react to the parts of this movement.

Lastly, I do not see why the privilege of the reformulation of traditional settlement patterns in modern terms should be the unique reserve of the design professionals, particularly when such few architects and planners take the time to seriously study their history and cultural heritage. I question this attitude without denying the validity of any individual interpretation.

William Lim

It is clearly understood that any intervention, especially on a major scale, whether local or foreign, will have an impact on the public. However, there is a distinct difference between foreign and local intervention, whether or not they are of a good quality. The reason is this: if it is local intervention, there is already a filtering process by the person who is carrying out the intervention, whether we agree with the intervention or not. But the foreign intervention will quite often, even if it is in good faith, bring in with itself foreign values, life styles and an implied system of how things should work, which is an even more messy business. We have to be very careful and determine what level of foreign intervention we can absorb. If the quantum exceeds certain norms, a disequilibrium can take place. You effect the value system of the built environment as perceived by the public. Singapore has taken so much foreign intervention, all at one go, that it will be very interesting to see what is its impact when all the buildings are completed.

The second point I'd like to make is on the question of integrity, the architect's integrity. Is there a critical point where we feel “this is my limit, I am not prepared to go across this line”. As responsible professionals we have to draw a line. Unfortunately this line cannot be drawn by someone else. It has to be drawn by ourselves. It is terribly important to be clear at what point of time to say no, because what we are going to produce will have identity, and it will have an impact, of whatever sort.

Lim Chong Keat

Looking at the Indian case, (although it was somewhat different, because it was a colonial situation) it must be asked that when Corbusier and Kahn were brought in, surely there were already capable Indian architects who were not even given the opportunity, I think Charles Correa was already born then.

Charles Correa

Let us not belittle people like Corbusier and Kahn. I always think that we were lucky to get Corbusier because he asked real questions. When I look at the British influence on India, I find there are lots of Indians who speak with a very nice English accent, and this and that, but there are also lots of Indians who have learnt about English law or about medicine. The transfer is a reflection on both sides, what people have to offer, and what people can absorb. In that sense I think India was lucky to get Corbusier, and vice versa, because they believed in architecture.
**Lim Chong Keat**

When I gave the Indian example, it was a value free comment. What I was trying to indicate was that the bureaucracy was tuned to that intervention whilst being deaf to the local factor. I am not afraid of any foreign intervention. We have a right to learn of the world, the world participates, and the ability to know what is relevant and what is not is of course the point. However, neither should we underestimate the problem of carpetbagging, because this is a real problem and it has an effect on the bureaucracy.

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**Ruslan Khalid**

When Corbusier and Kahn went to India, they were doing public buildings. They did, as Charles Correa indicates some very valid research, and made some contribution to the development of modern architecture in India. Whereas in this part of the world there is a distinct difference — most of the intervention by foreign architects is in commercial areas. They have done no public building. Most of the foreign intervention here is concerned with commercial development like hotels and offices. So this distinction must be made and I want to repeat that we are not worried about the invasion in itself. We are worried about the kind of unthinking values that they bring, transferring complete Houston Technology or Houston lifestyle into Malaysia.

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**Hisham Al-Bakri**

When I came to this seminar, I came with confidence, I thought I knew my identity. I thought I knew where I was going. But I think after three days of it, I am losing my identity. I don't know who I am, where I am going to be, what I'm going to do. Earlier on somebody asked, should architects be commercial minded, bureaucratic or urban poor architects. And then, should they be Islamic, national or regional. This is very interesting, but I am lost for direction. And then to make matters worse, we get foreign intervention.

When you lose your direction, you start to ask why? where? what? Why are we searching for identity? Have we lost it? Have we got one? I can't understand why we are searching for an identity when the developed countries are not. My own analysis is that we have been under the influence of colonisation and foreign culture. We now want to get out of that entanglement, so we are looking for identity, and we look to the past. In the past probably we had identity. We analyse the Bali temple, and everything that we can think of in the past. Why is it that they had identity and we don't?

We analyse it, and that's good. We can learn a lot from what has been studied and what is being presented today. But still, are we going to have a direction so that we can work as practising architects, not just talk about it?

We know that we have to have clients. Even the architects and builders in the past had clients. But our clients are changing. A few years ago our clients were different from the clients now. And the projects are different too. But two things don't change. One is our climate and the other is the size of the country. The other thing that doesn't change is the past. We can learn a lot from the past, but what direction are we going to take in the future? Other things change: Technology, and functional requirements, laws, regulations, construction techniques, materials, and with all these changes, our identity will go on changing. If we are going to get identity, it's not the elements of architecture that are concerned. We should narrow it down to the process. Should we build open-to-the-sky? Be flexible? Islamic? Symbolic? Do we adapt the past or do we start another movement of style? Or do we go our own individual way? These are the options that are open to us.

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**Kenneth Yeang**

I would just like to contribute some posers. The first one is, what is the definition of 'identity in architecture'? We should define what we mean by identity and by identity in architecture, and by architecture. And also what we understand by the role of the architect. Some definition or some collective definition is very important. Identity can be at the conceptual level or at the interpretive level. To what extent are we talking about identity? Identity to the architect, to the user, building owner or the nation?

The second poser is that the delineation of your sphere of influence is very important. In the search for identity in architecture, what is the boundary that we are studying? Are we studying at the regional level, or are we talking about identity in South East Asia? National level? Sub-regional level? Our own religious grounds, of Islamic architecture? We might be talking at cross purposes now. Sumet Jumsai might be talking about identity in South East Asia, while Hijjas Kasturi about identity in Ampang.

The third poser is that we all have very different approaches to architecture. Architects won't agree on the same solution or the same methodology. There is nothing wrong with that. We work in different ways, but it is important that we are talking about architecture which implies design, and some time should be spent on how architects design, as that affects the way we bring our own influences to bear on identity.
In the subject matter there are two polarities. One is from the general to the particular, and the other is from the particular to the general. If two approaches correlate, you have a wholistic theory to what you are trying to do. When you look at things from the general level, you are talking about culture, the socioeconomic influences, the arts and crafts and your region. From these you can pick up things which could be useful to you when you design, that give something unique or endemic to your architecture. From the particular level, you may find out what are the existing things in our architecture that you could use. For instance, in the Malaysian environment, the verandah ways of the shophouses are terrific spaces. We could articulate them. The 'surambi' of the Malay house, the pilloti, the porches of the colonial house, the pitched roofs. These are the particular elements. But we must be very permissive about this. If somebody wants to design a building for its symbolism, there's nothing wrong with that. Provided our experiments don't hurt too many people, it's O.K. We can try again. But what is important is that we are running out of time. The economic run that we have in Malaysia now may not last that long. Within that period we must make sure that we act fast. We must think, and more important, architects must interact, so that whatever we learn we share with each other, and cover as much ground as possible, in as short a time as we can.

Eric Lye

I think that some of us are getting frightened that we are not going to come to any conclusion, and that is a problem for architects, they are expected to always produce something.

Well, we seem to agree more or less on what identity is about, although we can't get too particular, because in a gathering of this kind we should deal with the forest rather than the trees. The trees ought to be dealt with from within, not without, and we are really a without group because we consist of so many cultures while within the same region.

On the point of the urban poor, helping the urban poor, I think I'd use the word 'help' rather than 'intervention'. I don't think the poor want you to intervene, they want you to help, and the sooner we get rid of the word 'intervene' the better.

About colonisation, it is one of those things we have nothing to apologise about. At the time we were just about growing up as a modern state, we had colonisation. It affected us not only materially, it also affected our way of thinking. There are good attributes to that as well as negative attributes. It taught us a few things that have been very useful in communicating with the rest of the world. It is something we accept that while we were growing up, we were disrupted, and therefore now we are looking for our identity.

Perhaps to summarise the question of identity, I'd like to relate a little anecdote. I lived in Canada for nine years, and my children were born there. But the reason I came back to Hong Kong was that one day the two boys came crying, saying that they say that we are not Canadians. That gave me the idea of coming back, and after we came back, I took them to the local films; here was their culture, their identity. But my little boy was very bored. I said, "What is the matter with you? Look at these Cantonese films. These are your roots." And he replied "Dad, these local films are so boring. The western films are such fun." So perhaps the little boy had observed something; why are we so sad all the time?

Mubin Sheppard

I wonder whether it is possible for architects to give a little attention to the question of conservation? In this country, and perhaps in other countries of Asia, the conservation of buildings of traditional style of architecture is something which is very important, and within a relatively short time, if something isn't positively done about them, many of these will have disappeared.

Lim Chong Keat

Maybe E.J. Seow would like to comment on this, as a member of the National Monuments board of Singapore.

Eugene J. Seow

You are out of time. I am no more. I am part of the conservation. But, in reply to your question about conservation, I think even conservation is part of our identity. We are here because of the past. And I think Encik Mubin and most of us here are very much aware that there is so much wealth in this particular area of our past. I heartily support conservation. It is up to the young people here to think about this very important aspect that will perhaps give us all identity.

Parid Wardi Sudin

Major projects, major temples, mosques and commercial centres serve a fundamental purpose towards the education of the public. Architects, big or small, in what they do, have a fundamental purpose for
doing it, and I think what they do is incredibly impor-
tant. In Malaysia, after the National Mosque was
built, there followed a whole decade of mosques with
folded roof forms. I believe that David Wee’s Na-
tional Palace is going to have tremendous repercus-
sions on the local architecture for the next two
decades. So, the ‘big boys’ have a very important role
to play in the search for identity

Tao Ho

To go back to the beginning, I always feel that cultural
identity started in isolation, and that is why there is
something very distinct in different parts of the world,
in Bali, in China, or in India. Then the interaction
started, and now we are going to be part of a global-
ised world in one way or another. It is a matter of time.
We have been talking about to what degree we should
allow intervention, to what degree to allow things to
disappear without losing our identity. I think this is
not a quantitative problem. It is more a qualitative pro-
blem. To look at it quantitatively is like to define which
is the last straw that causes the collapse of the camel.
I don’t think that will happen; the camel will still walk,
and keep on walking. You may keep on adding straws
to it, but he may become something else.
The whole world is losing identity in two ways. One
is that we are being recolonised by a super culture that
has a complete lack of identity. The other is that we
are being colonised by what I call the ‘siliconised peo-
ple’. The people who want to systemise the whole
world, to make glass boxes and have the multi-
national approach. That is a dehumanisation of our
culture, and so what we have to search for is a new
identity of humanity.

Lim Chong Keat

Tao Ho comes from Hong Kong which is a kind of
camel, and I am not sure whether the next straw is
going to be put on by Beijing or by the next developer.

Parid Wardi Sudin

In general there is a very real lack of information
about the various buildings or history of architecture
of this region as a whole. For instance if I go down
to a good bookshop in Kuala Lumpur, it is most un-
likely that I will find books on the traditional archi-
tecture of Thailand, Indonesia or the Philippines.
That is because not many are written, and those that
are written, for example by Sumet Jumsai, is written
in Thai which I can’t read. In Malaysia itself Nakula,
a non-architect, tried to write a book. It is the first ever
written about Malaysian architecture. We have three
schools of architecture, sharing one little book, writ-
ten by a non-architect, and we want to talk about
identity?

Student

When I first came to this seminar, I expected some
answers to the problem of identity. But now I know
that there is no hard and fast rule as to what identity
should be like, and so I can rest assure that when my
lecturers question me about identity, I can always ask
them “do you really know yourselves?”.

Another point I would like to make is that it is actually
due to patrons or clients that our architecture or
designs stand as they do. So perhaps these seminars
should also be open to other learned people, people
who are interested in architecture and could be our
clients. The Sultans, for instance are the ones who say
what identity should be. For example, you see the so
called archway to Kuala Lumpur, it has been called
a white elephant but like it or not, it is there, and who
decided that it should be there?

Ezrin Arbi

I came here with high hopes that I would learn some-
thing concrete from you giant practitioners. But after
three days here, I doubt if that hope will be fulfilled.
You must have something about the “Search for
Identity in Architecture” at the back of your minds.
Maybe the objective is to identify the factors that
would contribute towards the making of that identity,
but of all the papers, I think Robi Sularto’s paper was
the only one which tried to define the word ‘identity’,
and then Mona Serageldin made a few suggestions
regarding it, and later on Kenneth Yeang. Maybe it
is not too late for me to quote the definition of the
word identity from two dictionaries.

“The quality or condition of being the same; absolute
or essential sameness or oneness; individuality or
personality; the condition of being identified in
feeling, interest, etc.”

That is what the Oxford dictionary says. And Webster
says that identity is:

“The condition or fact of being the same in all quali-
ties under consideration, sameness, oneness; The
condition or fact of being some specific person or
thing, individuality; the condition or fact of being the
same as something or someone assumed, described or
claimed.”

I hope that we all, to a certain extent, subscribe to this
definition. Otherwise we will be talking about an iden-
The second key word is architecture. As students of architecture we may not have to define that, but if we agree that architecture is but one manifestation of culture, we should be talking about the relationship between identity and culture. Maybe one of the reasons there was such a negative reaction to the title of this seminar on the first day was that people were afraid that we would come up with something absolute. Well maybe we should not try to define what identity in architecture is, but we should at least try to find factors that will contribute towards identity in architecture. I think Japanese architecture has its own identity. Can you help us identify the things that give Japanese architecture that identity? In our own context, maybe because we have been developing so fast, and most of our architects are educated abroad, what they reproduce here is what they see in London or Melbourne, and soon our cities will be full of this undesirable architecture. However talking about bad architecture, please do not confine it to foreign produced or foreign designed architecture. There are many, maybe more pieces of bad architecture produced by local architects.

Abdullah Mohammad (Nakula)

I find the best approach to the search for identity in South East Asia is to seek the common thoughts or common faith in the religions of the South East Asian people as their philosophical motif. Based on one common faith and one common design we can build a modern identity for South East Asian architecture, conforming to modern economic and social needs.

Tao Ho

There is a danger in defining something, because once you give something a definition, it always disappears, and becomes something else. Lao Tse said that the name that can be named is not the true name. So I think the search for identity is a continuous process.

If I may give my own tangible approach to the problem, as I go about the search for identity in Chinese architecture. In this search, I separate the timeless elements from the transitory elements of architecture. Timeless elements are those coming from nature, from the people, and the things that do not change and become a symbol of their culture. The transitory elements are the use of materials, and the particular forms of buildings. It is the direct expression of the time in which the building was built. So let us forget about the transitory element, because that is the kind of material we are dealing with today — concrete, glass, steel, aluminium, etc. In the search for identity, can we reintroduce some of the timeless elements of our own heritage? For example, in Chinese architecture, there are several timeless elements that make it so distinctive. One is the roof. As a unifying factor or as a symbolic form of the building it is a very strong element in Chinese architecture. The second thing is the duality of meanings in the building architectural elements. In Chinese architecture, every single element, whether a column of a beam, carries a symbolic and functional meaning. And out of the interaction of the symbolic and functional meanings it also becomes a part of the decoration. All the brackets on Chinese roofs and all the columns and beams, they are in fact part of the interior design of the buildings as well. Apart from that they give a sense of scale to the building and I find this to be a very important timeless element in Chinese architecture. The third timeless element is the hierarchy and the sequence of space. You go through one type of space into another and experience a variety and hierarchy of spaces, both interior and exterior. The fourth element is the interplay of formality and informality. Sometimes open spaces become very informal whereas the architecture itself remains formal in the extreme. This has a lot to do with two basic Chinese philosophies: the Confucian formality and the informality of Taoism. The interplay of these two becomes a very strong shaping force in our cultural and architectural heritage. Another element is the harmony with nature. Harmony doesn't mean that you design a building and it harmonises with nature because of its similarity to it. It can be part of this harmony even in contrast. Contrast means the appropriate relationship with nature whether you go against it or with it, but always taking the surrounding nature and environment into the design. Lastly, there is the importance of recognition of an architecture built out of a modular system. The detail is very flamboyant in its motif but the underlying factor is that it is all modular. In Chinese architecture that is even taken down into the scale of designing a whole city on a modular system.

Fawizah Kamal

If we are expecting to come up with a specific form as the answer to identity we are making a mistake, because forms change and their meanings change with time. Say a hundred years ago it was an accepted thing to have long hair. Now we have short hair and it is only hippies who wear their hair long. So meanings change with time and maybe the answers might come in other ways. Obviously there is such a thing as identity, or we could not be identified. But what is it? Perhaps it is the structure of the form i.e. the princi-
Sumet Jumsai

I have already proven that there is an existing identity, a set of common denominators in the region. So if we are here to talk about regional identity, South East Asian identity in particular there is no need to go on about national identity in architecture. As a matter of fact, I would like to give an example of just such a mistake that we made in Thailand Thirty years ago, our government gave out a set of formulae for a national identity. There was a series of stylistic formulae in architecture, that showed the traditional Thai roofs, etc. As a result of this, traditional Thai architecture was killed and it is only now that we are beginning to go back to the essence of traditional architecture. Once you start talking about national identity you bring in forces of divisiveness, and this creates other kinds of cultural and political back-eddies, which are inherent even in religions. Once you start talking about Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist points of view of architecture, you are bringing in layers and layers of back-eddies. And these back-eddies tend to blur the original instinct of people; if you like, the common denominator of humans.

Romi Khosla

As I see it there are two aspects to architecture: the technical aspect and the ideological aspect. The technical architect is a specialist worker. Anybody who considers himself to be a purely technical worker and refuses to accept any responsibility for the fundamental choices, which he says he leaves to the developer is certainly betraying his social position. If he simply accepts fundamental decisions, then he may be a technical architect, but he is not a whole person. The real struggle is to search for alternatives. There is no rule which says that an architect should stay with buildings only and he has a right and the intelligence to question the fundamental issues of society, town planning and the way cities are brought about. In a talk about identity it is necessary to take a very large overview of social values. You cannot advocate a certain kind of building because it is in a context it also belongs to a certain ideology. A building in Houston comes out of a certain ideology. You cannot transplant it into a different social context without agreeing that ideology from where it comes is good. So it is extremely important to seek out those architects who have an ideological position or who are searching for one viz-a-viz their role in society as a whole, apart from their professional roles. It is in the works of those architects that we will find identity. Our societies in Asia are going through tremendous turmoil in which people are beginning to take sides; and I think it is very important for the architect to decide on which side he is because it is going to influence his work. And if he doesn’t think about it I don’t think his work is important.

Eric Lye

It is not true to say that westerners never talk about identity. I remember Tay Kheng Soon and I were at the Architectural Association twenty years ago when the GLC was talking about aesthetics, regulations, imageability, and how to beautify London. So they were talking of a kind of British identity if you like; they relate to St Paul’s and to the spire on the south of Thames. Yes, they were worried too, because the high-rise is not something characteristic of the British tradition.
It is a difficult thing to summarise a conference in which so many people felt they didn’t have any answers!

It seems to be that I should really start with what Sumet Jumsai said. I think he gave an overview which is terribly important. Going back 30,000 years in time was an extraordinarily useful way of getting to know about oneself, because you saw deep currents of history, many, many things which told us how much we all have in common You know, this question of identity can be a divisive thing, a political thing. It has so many other implications What we heard this morning was like a healing process You felt, very, very clearly that this was all one people, one family So the first thing, I think we learned in this search for identity is that if it takes place with the right overview, (which was illustrated so brilliantly), it is really a marvellous integrative process, not a divisive one.

The second thing I think, is that the identity we are searching for is going to be pluralistic. It is not a single mono-centric one. I think the reasons for this were well covered by our twins, Robi and Romi, (or should I say our Siamese Twins?). It was very interesting that Robi Sularto Sastrowardoyo was talking about a very special mono-culture, Bali, which is very beautiful, static and completely in balance. And therefore extremely fragile! Any intervention breaks the whole thing. As opposed to that, Romi Khosla gave an incisive description of India, with all its vertical and horizontal planes, and showed a highly pluralistic society which looks (even to many people who live there), like tremendous chaos and disorder. But when you examine it, India is actually many layers of order, even a bazaar scene has several such layers, (all those cows, and cycles, and camels, all following different patterns), and yet this seems really to have a kind of stability.

This pluralism is not just found in India, it is the strength of much of Asia. But if you define yourself in narrow, mono-cultural terms, you are going to be fragile and you are going to break, as surely and as sadly as Bali is going to break, or is in the process of breaking.

So to repeat: the first thing we learnt is that overviews are very, very important in looking for identity. We cannot start with a parochial mind, for then we are just going to learn how to hate and kill each other. It is the overview which gives real depth to the exercise and makes it worthwhile.

Secondly, identity is pluralistic. It is not a single pattern. It cannot be, even in what looks to outsiders like a monolith culture or a monolith nation, there is diversity.

The third thing is, identity is dynamic. I think a number of people said, it is a process, which is continuously changing. I think of Fawizah Kamal, and her photographs and slides which she showed so quickly I think of Lim Chong Keat, who used the word “integrity” and, to me I understood that to mean process (i.e. a situation which is in balance etc.). In fact, how often Buckminster Fuller’s ideas and thoughts have come up! Lim Chong Keat, I must thank you for the silent tribute you paid him. As architects, we all owe him a profound debt, whether we knew him personally or not, and it lets me forgive you for some of the other slides you showed.

Once we realise that identity is pluralistic and dynamic, does it mean then that anything goes? That anyone can come in and build anything anywhere, anytime? No, I think often we might not know what something is, but we surely know what it is not. I think someone said that to reach truth, one must shed light That is a marvellous thought. I think we know what we can begin to throw out. In that way, we will find that thing which we are looking for, that truth. Things that we don’t throw away are the timeless elements, the deep structure determinants of our built-form. The climate, and the sea, as Sumet Jumsai pointed out this morning, are aspect of our environment which not only affect us directly, but which affect culture, and therefore ritual and therefore built-form. Now, if
we cannot tell the difference between some thing as authentic as those images Sumet Jumsai showed, to something which is just superficially picked up, then we are in trouble, for if being an architect means anything, I would think it is to have the right instincts

How is this identity — or these identities — expressed in architecture? For as designers, we deal in objects. We are producing hardware, i.e. the built environment. And it seems from our discussions that there are three streams which create this built-form. The first is what is being constructed in the rural areas — and Asia is still predominantly rural. When Fawizah Kamal showed those slides, she commented herself that what we see is a dynamic process of continuous change. Now do those images, that indigenous architecture, move to the city, or as Hasan-Uddin Khan questioned, does it go the other way? In the slides of Mona Serageldin, we saw that today the mythical images are coming out of the urban areas, from the top down. This is what is happening in Egypt, and I think it is certainly happening in India as well. If you are asked to design housing for villagers, and you say, "I will give you a beautiful mud house", they feel insulted. They would like to have a cement floor, and electric lights etc., they think you are patronising them.

So if the first stream is indigenous, the second stream is what you might call the new popular. I think we have to be very, very careful here before we dismiss — or condemn — this stream. We are searching for identity and yet for the last two days, we haven't thought about whether the search involved all those masses of people, and how and in what way they relate to our own questioning. That is very sad. Your Minister said, what are the aspirations of those people? It is one of the tragedies of architecture, of architects, all of us in Asia, that we have not connected our work more to the vast majority of these people. And that phrase which I quoted on that first day: "I am coming from where you are going" is really true. Those people are coming from where we're going. In fact, sorry Lim Chong Keat but you know those 'T' shirts you print, you should make one: "I am coming from where you are going" on one side, and on the other side could be the opposite "You are going to wherever it is I'm coming from". Because to me it sums up much what is happening on our spaceship Earth today.

So we have the indigenous, we have the new popular thing and then we have the architect. The intervention. We cannot miss the crucial importance of these interventions. They help generate the prototypes that filter down in the process we discussed. We are purveyors of myths, and of ideologies. As someone mentioned just now, very often of the wrong myths, the wrong ideologies. In order to change this, there are two ways we can proceed. One is to go back to the indigenous. The other of course, is to try and invent the future. New attitudes and life styles. Now you must not deride this approach. It is out of fashion right now but it is very, very powerful. Those post-modernists in America, they shouldn't be looking at Palladio, they should be looking at Frank Lloyd Wright. He is their past. He invented that past. Before he came along, no one had really tried to design house for the average American family, what Wright called the Usonian house. He didn't look up any references. He just felt, well, this was the way it could be done. And as you know, much of American suburbia, almost all of it, is a kind of hand-me-down version of a Wright house. What they call the ranch house, the split-level house etc., are all expressing basic mythical relationships of space first created by Frank Lloyd Wright. So it can be done. I am not saying everyone can do it but let us say that it addressed one of the crucial issues in the developing world. And that is the nature of change; the necessity for change, to look forward, not just backward.

Do you remember that book of Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful"? Well, he has got this chapter on Buddhist economics. He says that one of the problems of the Third World is that we are trapped in concepts like GNP, per capita income, etc. We know that they need have nothing to do with happiness. But we don't know any other indicators of how to judge our progress. And so you get someone working on a factory assembly-line, tightening bolts or something moronic. He is very unhappy but he is earning well, and therefore feels he should be happy. Schumacher says this occurs because we define work as producing an object or a service useful to society; a definition which I think we would all accept? Well, once you accept that, the rest follows automatically. That is to say, if you produce it faster, or if you use less materials you are better off which brings in all the old indicators, efficiency, GNP, per capita income, everything.

In contrast, Schumacher says that Gautama Buddha felt one should work for three reasons. One is that a life without work is a life in imbalance, i.e. life without play, or without love. Work is important to balance your lives. The second reason he said you should work, is because in working you grow, you define yourself. The third reason you work is to produce an object or service useful to society. It is wonderful because it explains why the poor mechanic standing in an assembly line is so desperately unhappy. For if you follow the Buddhist analysis, then obviously he is not achieving the first objective, i.e. he is not putting his life into proper balance. Nor is he defining himself in anyway. On the contrary, he is doing something moronic. So in
economic terms — Buddhist economics, anyway — our worker is being grossly inefficient.

I think that’s a wonderful analysis, food for thought for all of us. We define ourselves — and grow — by the tasks we address. If you are a doctor, for instance, you are constantly faced with the issues of life and death. This is why a GP is such a fine human being. He has to ask himself questions that are fundamental to existence — all these things of whether the child should live, or the mother, and so forth. But yet it seems to me, these are really the questions of the last century. It has just about been decided that human life is sacred and we shouldn’t really take it, and so forth. What is so marvellous about architecture and planning, and about some of the issues we have been discussing, is that they are the issues of this century. For instance what is your moral right to design a township for 500,000 people? Or to work with the kind of people Mona Serageldin was telling us about, and conning them into doing it your way? These are the central issues of the 20th century. This is what Fascism is about, deciding for other people. Yet also, what is your responsibility if you don’t do it? If you just walk away from it all saying: I have no right to decide? Couldn’t that also be a crime? And I think this is what torments us as architects. We know that these are not problems of our making, we didn’t cause these people to become poor, for God’s sake! there is really nothing you can do, there is no lever of power that you can pull, to change it. And yet it moves you. Doesn’t just move you, it torments you. Doubly so, in the Third World. But perhaps that is the advantage of being in this part of the planet. For it is the nature of the questions we address which allow us to grow. Even if you can’t find the answers, you have had a chance to grow which you don’t have living in Switzerland, or New York or some such place. (Maybe you do in New York now, because they are getting involved in their problems.) I think it was Stendhal, writing about Napoleon, who said “There are no great men, there are only great events”. But I think it is not just great events, it is great issues. That is what the Bauhaus was really about: heroic issues. And there are heroic issues here in Asia — right here and now.

So if I get back to try and summarise this thing, it would seem to me, that what we did agree on in general, is that identity is a process, it is like that snail’s trail, the outcome of tackling a series of issues which you perceive as real. It is not an end in itself; it is a by-product. Secondly, it is pluralistic — which doesn’t mean you have to accept it all. Pluralism just means that you don’t think there is a single answer, that identity has many, many manifestations, and I think that is the strength really of Asian societies — of their tremendous resilience and stability. The third thing of course is that the patterns, we are talking about are dynamic. There is continuous change (and looking at change over 30,000 years was like a speeded-up cartoon, it went so fast) But even if you zoom down to 500 years or 50 years, you would see enormous changes in the patterns. And the one thing I would add, that I felt came out from Sumet Jumsai’s talk this morning, is that this process, this searching for identity, can actually be a healing kind of process.
Concluding Remarks

Parid Wardi Sudin

It has been a very important three days. I would like to thank all the participants in the seminar for having kindly agreed to come, participate and debate. And now, to say a few words on behalf of The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Dr. Suha Özkan.

Dr. Suha Özkan

Thank you very much. This is my first experience East of Turkey. I was not really expecting anything so nice; so beautiful, a set of experiences both on the part of the country and the seminar! I am really happy that I came here.

This was also our first regional seminar organisation attempt, which had been thought of for almost six or seven years since the inception of the Award. So thanks must go to Parid Wardi Sudin and to the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. I wish to thank him personally, and also Hasan-Uddin Khan on behalf of the Award and Charles Correa, who really made the thing happen for The Aga Khan Award for Architecture. It was our first experience on a regional scale.

As far as the contents of the seminar go, I can frankly say that we are very much satisfied with the content of the remarks, and the ideas displayed, and especially the friendly atmosphere and the incredible sense of humour. The most radical ideas and polarisations have been put in such a nice way and received with great tolerance. The impression that has been reflected on us has been a very nice one. For the realisation of that, of course, the main input comes from the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, from Tan Sri Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid, whom I met as one of the first Malaysians in my life in Ankara years ago, and we had one collaboration which came to fruition last year. This has become a second opportunity for me to work with him. I am really happy that this has been realised. I also thank His Excellency in his absence, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports who extended a really kind hospitality on behalf of the Malaysian Government, and he made this seminar a success. So I extend all my thanks to all participants and all contributors on behalf of the Award, and on behalf of His Highness The Aga Khan. Thank you very much.

Tan Sri Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid

Mr. Chairman sir, Dr. Suha Özkan, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed an honour for me to be invited to close this seminar this afternoon. The seminar has discussed the subject ‘The Search for Identity in Architecture in South East Asia,’ at length for the last three days. I only wish that I had the time to be with you all during the very interesting and educative discussions. However, I managed to read a few of the seminar papers that were given to me at the opening ceremony.

I am very happy indeed to read Romi Khosla’s view in discussing which tunnel leads to the light. He said “I think what is significant is that all this is the beginning of the search to one’s own identity”.

Indeed I became happier when I read Tay Kheng Soon’s paper stating “architecture has become instrumental again, and has now a clear cultural purpose”.

However, he also said, “the principle dimension in the Singapore cultural dilemma is, therefore, the contradiction between tradition, history, and science and technology”.

He appears to feel that the ancient values like tradition and religion, and the modern values of science and technology are pulling in the opposite directions. So, allow me here to quote Einstein’s views on science and religion. I quote.

“Now even though the realms of religion and science, in themselves are clearly marked off from each other, nevertheless there exists between the two, strong reciprocal relationships and dependences.
Though religion may be that which determines the goal, it has nevertheless learned from science, in the broader sense what means will contribute to the attainment of the goals it has set up. But science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with aspirations to a truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from this sphere of religion. To this there also belong the faith and the possibility that the regulations valued for the world of existence are rational, that is comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

All this, to me, could only mean one thing. The search for identity is a must, otherwise you are a none-entity. Even in a garden of a thousand blooms, we would like to establish the identity of each of the blooms. In the Quran it is stated in surah Al-Hujarat, verse 12.

"O man, behold we have created you all out of male and female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another".

This verse shows that identity is an important item in our lives.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank The Aga Khan Award for Architecture for their generous contribution and support towards the seminar, to those people who have worked hard to make this seminar a success.

My heartfelt thanks to all the participants for making this seminar meaningful. I would also like to thank those individuals and organisations, both in Malaysia and overseas, who have helped to organise this seminar, and I hope that sooner or later we will meet again.
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</tbody>
</table>