

# “Natural” Traditions:

## Constructing Tropical Architecture in Transnational Malaysia and Singapore

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### SYNOPSIS

This paper seeks to understand the resurgence of tropical architecture in Malaysia and Singapore by examining the discursive constructions and practices of tropical architecture in Malaysia and Singapore during the 1980s-1990s. Although tropical architecture is often hailed as “natural,” I argue in this paper that “nature” is inextricably also “political” in its entanglement with the larger politics of globalization, postcolonial development and cultural identity. The arguments in this paper are made through a close study of three built exemplars of tropical architecture in Malaysia— The Datai Resort, The Tanjong Jara Hotel, and The Salinger House.

### The Resurgence of Tropical Architecture

The 1980s saw a resurgence of tropical architecture in Malaysia and Singapore’s architectural discourses. From key regional academic publications such as Tay Kheng Soon’s *Megacity in the Tropics* (1989) and Ken Yeang’s *Tropical Urban Regionalism* (1987) to popular picture books such as Robert Powell’s *Tropical Asian House* (1996) and Tan Hock Beng’s *Tropical Architecture and Interiors* (1994), numerous publications propagated tropical architecture and urbanism. This resurgence of tropical architecture came after decades of invisibility, when it hardly featured in architectural discourses. The last time tropical architecture featured prominently in architectural discourse in Malaysia and Singapore was in the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of decolonization and nation-building. Tropical architecture then referred to the International Style modern tropical architecture, as popularized in Maxwell Fry’s and Jane Drew’s seminal book *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone* (1956). Modern tropical

architecture was preceded by Colonial tropical architecture, as exemplified by the British Colonial Bungalow in India. There exists the notion that “tropical architecture” was a colonial invention<sup>1</sup> and one may argue that the resurgence of tropical architecture in the 1980s would inevitably be entangled with this colonial and neo-colonial history of tropical architecture but that is not within the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> The recent resurgence of tropical architecture brought about diverging tendencies in architectural designs, from ecological tropical architecture to neo-traditional tropical architecture to modern tropical architecture,<sup>3</sup> and became a highly contested domain;<sup>4</sup> one of the perceptible differences with its modern and colonial predecessors is the emergence of a type of architecture that appears traditional. This type of architecture appears to be traditional because it bears certain formal resemblances to traditional vernacular architecture and it is often constructed out of similar local construction material such as tropical hardwood employing traditional building crafts. However, this type of architecture that resembles traditional architecture needs to be

differentiated from the traditional architecture in that they are produced in contemporary conditions under current social, cultural, political and economic contexts. Moreover, the contemporary architect chooses to produce this type of architecture as a conscious decision, selecting from a wide array of aesthetic choices presented to him. This emergence of an architecture that appears traditional is especially apparent if we look at the award winners of Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) in Malaysia. Three of the four AKAA winners in Malaysia – Tanjong Jara Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitors' Center, Salinger Residence, and Datai Resort – fall under this category of tropical architecture. Interestingly, although these three AKAA winners appear traditional, their referents are not explicitly any type of particular traditional architecture *per se*, despite apparently bearing certain formal resemblance to particular traditional architecture. Instead, they are considered primarily as tropical architecture, with the referent being directed towards the primacy of tropical "nature" with the associated abstract notions such as environment, climate and ecology.

What led to the resurgence of tropical architecture in Malaysia and Singapore during the 1980s? Why was "nature" valorized and reference to specific "tradition" suppressed in this recent resurgence of tropical architecture? What are the larger socio-cultural, political and economic contexts underlying the production of the type of tropical architecture that appears traditional? What are the repercussions of this type of architecture and how could it be understood in relation to its predecessor of modern tropical architecture? I attempt to answer the above questions by examining the global, regional and national architectural discourses surrounding the production of tropical architecture in the 1980s, focusing specifically on discourses produced by institutions such as AKAA, Malaysia and Singapore Institutes of Architects. I situate this resurgence of tropical architecture in relation to the complex interactions (entailing confluence, conflation, disjunction and contradiction) within and between the following themes:

- Architecture and the politics of development: AKAA is an enterprise that seeks to promote alternative paradigms of development in response to the perceived failure (by the developing countries in general and the Islamic countries in particular) of the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigm of develop-

ment. Intrinsic to this enterprise is the quest for alternatives to International Style modern architecture, which is synonymous with failed development. This AKAA-initiated quest for alternatives reclaimed "traditional" architecture and reconstituted it as both "natural" and "sensuous," contributing to the resurgence of tropical architecture that appears traditional in Malaysia and Singapore. Tanjong Jara Hotel and Datai Resorts will be used as case studies to illustrate the issues raised in this section.

- Globalization and the politics of architectural identity: Appearing traditional is a way of articulating architectural identity through the assertion of difference in the purported homogeneity of the globalized world. It was an outcome of the negotiations and contestations between Malaysia's state imposition of ethno-religious symbols in architecture as "visible politics," the local architectural fraternity's assertion of the profession's creative autonomy, and their appropriation of the discourses of critical regionalism (disseminating from the West and through AKAA) and Austronesian regionalism (as revealed by linguistic and archaeological research into the prehistory of Southeast Asia). The discussion in this section will be illuminated by the case study of Salinger Residence.

I will argue that both "nature" and "tradition" are valorized in the resurgence of tropical architecture and deployed for an array of purposes within the above-mentioned themes– to validate and revive subjugated traditional architecture in the quest for alternative paradigms of development; to deflect the questions of problematic traditions in a multicultural, multiracial nation; to unify diverse traditions in a vaguely defined region; and to differentiate and thematize places in order to encourage new modes of consumption. However, despite all these different strategies of deploying "nature" and "tradition" by different agents, they are, inevitably, also very much structured by the hegemonic logic of capital accumulation. Instead of understanding "nature" and "tradition" as timeless and immutable entities, I argue that "nature" and "tradition" are continuously constructed and re-constructed, valued and de-valued according to the various strategies outlined above, and complicit with the capitalist modes of production and reproduction.

## Natural Nature: Tropical Architecture and Constructing Nature

In many discourses, tropical architecture tends to be presented as “natural,” or as self-evident for the “nature” of the tropics. As Jimmy C. S. Lim, the architect of the Salinger Residence and one of the foremost practitioners of tropical architecture in Malaysia, puts it:

We have plenty of sun, so I keep the sun out. We have a lot of rain, so I attempt to keep the rain out. We need a lot of shade, so I provide it by having a lot of trees. With a lot of leaves we should not have any gutters as blocked gutters are useless. Because we are living in a hot climate, we should have cross ventilation and as much space as we can.<sup>5</sup>

But what is “nature” and when is it “natural?” Donna Haraway reminds us that “nature cannot pre-exist its construction.” Instead of assuming “nature” to be self-apparent, many scholars have posited “nature” as a situated knowledge,<sup>6</sup> one that is materially constructed and socially produced. However, one needs to qualify that by saying, that “nature” is constructed and produced does not equate to some kind of ontological relativism or saying that “nature” is untrue because one is not free to construct nature in any manner one wishes. Rather, understanding “nature” as construction(s) will lead us to ask: who speaks about which aspect(s) of “nature” for what purpose(s)?

What is the nature of “nature?” Raymond Williams notes that “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language.”<sup>7</sup> Williams distinguishes three specific intertwined meanings of the word:<sup>8</sup>

- a) The ontological essence or essential quality of something
- b) The inherent force which either directs the world or human being or both
- c) The external material world itself

In Lim’s statement about “tropical architecture” cited above, the assumptions are that the ontological essence of architecture is to provide shelter against the elements of “nature” (in the sense of meaning a) therefore tropical architecture is the “natural” response in that it is shaped by both the inherent force (in the sense of meaning b) of tropical “nature” (heat, humidity and heavy rainfall) and the external material world (the flora and fauna) of tropical “nature” (in the sense of meaning c). The three inter-related meanings of “nature”

are collapsed in Lim’s statement about tropical architecture, justifying the underlying ideology of environmental determinism. What is interesting about such an ideological statement lies as much in what is left unspoken as what is said.

Interestingly, such a “naturalization” of tropical architecture has a colonial precedent. When the concept of tropical architecture was first invented and presented in a paper to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1868, the author of the paper T. Roger Smith rationalized the built form of British India Colonial bungalow as determined by the responses to the harsh Indian climate.<sup>9</sup> Under Smith’s environmentally deterministic formulation, the significance of the dominance of the colonizers and their socio-cultural practices in producing the bungalow was concealed. As Anthony King noted:

The anodyne phrase “tropical architecture” masks a cluster of controversial facts. Its emergence as a sphere of (European) knowledge marks the expansion of Europe into areas where Europeans had not previously lived. It elides or skims over the fact that “tropical architecture” was for people of alien cultures exercising colonial power. The application of its principles, whether concerning design, construction, materials, sanitation, lay-out or technology, first to colonial and then to “native” populations was inseparable from the total economic, social and political restructuring of the culture being controlled.<sup>10</sup>

In the discourse of colonial tropical architecture, nature, in this case climate, was given primacy in the determination of architectural forms and mobilized to “naturalize” colonization and conceal the unsavory aspects of colonialism.

Besides masking controversial fact in the process of naturalization, what is left unspoken in the construction of nature could also be located in what is deemed “unnatural.” As David Demeritt noted, “these inter-related meanings of ‘nature’ depend upon linguistic (and conceptual) oppositions [my emphasis] to that which is said to be cultural, artificial, or otherwise human in origin... Since the cultural references by which what is not nature and the natural are defined change over space and time, so too must ideas of what nature is.”<sup>11</sup>

## Developing Traditions: "Unnatural" Development and AKAA's "Natural" Traditions

"We were gifted with the word liberty, but were made slaves."<sup>12</sup>

-AKAA conference participant from India

For countries from the developing world, questions surrounding development are important issues in the production of architecture. In these countries, AKAA is an important institution because, unlike other architectural awards such as the Pritzker Prize, AKAA is not just concerned with architecture as an autonomous discipline and architectural excellence per se but also gives due consideration to the larger questions of development. AKAA, a triennial award, was established in 1977 to "address contemporary issues [of development] and sustain a dialogue with the best Islamic architectural achievements of the past."<sup>13</sup> The late seventies was a time when the Eurocentric paradigm of development with the West as the singular measure was being interrogated.<sup>14</sup> Under the Eurocentric paradigm of development, the non-West was regarded as backward and underdeveloped with the perpetual need to "catch-up" in order to achieve emancipation from poverty and attain "progress." Although development was premised upon the promise that "things are getting better all the time," its prolonged failure to deliver led instead to the perception that the paradigm of development was producing and sustaining the underdevelopment of the "Third World." Hence, development theories and the underlying Eurocentric modernist discursive formations were seen as a form of neo-colonial geopolitics that enabled the continual hegemony of the West through the use of "developmental language of emancipation to create systems of power in a modernized world."<sup>15</sup>

In the discourses of AKAA, the spread and dissemination of the architectural aesthetics of the International Style from the West to the developing world was interpreted as being complicit with neo-colonial project of development. The architectural aesthetics of International Style, produced under specific industrial conditions in the West that were lacking in the developing world, was seen as legitimizing the concomitant importation of modern (Western) building construction technology and industrialized building materials by the developing countries under the guise of "pro-

gress." The spread and dissemination of International Style was seen as precipitating the developing countries' reliance on foreign professional building expertise.<sup>16</sup> As such, deeply entrenched ideologies in modern architectural aesthetics and paradigms in architectural development only contributed to the pervasive underdevelopment of local building expertise, local building industry and local resource base in most of the developing world. The perceived failure of the development paradigm brought about widespread re-evaluation and revival of that which has previously been rendered regressive (by the supposedly progressive International Style) and repressed- traditional architectural forms, techniques and practices. AKAA plays a pivotal role in this reevaluation and revival of traditional architecture of the developing world. This larger concern with issues of development explains why the title of the magazine that AKAA publishes is called *Mimar: Architecture in Development*,<sup>17</sup> why various Kampung (which is the Indonesian equivalent for village) Improvement Projects in Indonesia were awarded AKAA despite the "absence of notable physical architectural achievement,"<sup>18</sup> and why Soedijatmoko, a development specialist, was appointed as the chairman of the Master Jury for the third cycle of AKAA (1983-1986).

Issues of development are deeply entwined with questions of modernity and inevitably, one of the recurring themes in AKAA's discourse is that of "the dichotomy between 'modernity' (al-hadatha) and 'tradition' (al-turath)."<sup>19</sup> With the "chaotic and unsettling present"<sup>20</sup> in much of the developing world, which is largely attributed to the failed attempts at development and modernization, it is perhaps not surprising that AKAA turned away from a future-oriented notion of progress implicit in development and became inclined towards privileging the traditions of the historical past. Hence, one of AKAA's stated objectives is to "re-awaken the cultural consciousness of Muslims and to sensitize those who would build in the Muslim world to the unique heritage of Muslim art and architecture"<sup>21</sup> by reclaiming traditions that are on the verge of vanishing. This is evident when one examines the list of AKAA award winners, where approximately half of the 76 winners (until 2001) are either heritage conservation projects or projects related to (re)interpretation and continuation of traditional building typologies, crafts and materials.<sup>22</sup> Another important indication is

that two of the three recipients of the prestigious Chairman's award, presented to an individual architect in recognition of his/her lifetime achievement, are exponents of "neo-traditional" architecture— Hassan Fathy (1980) and Geoffrey Bawa (2001). Hassan Fathy was awarded to promote the architect's role as a "decoder of a past legacy" and in recognition of the importance of "learning from vernacular architecture."<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Bawa was credited with "raising both the formal and popular indigenous traditions from the degraded status assigned to them in the colonial era."<sup>24</sup> With these awards, AKAAs "was recognized as championing indigenous architecture."<sup>25</sup> The extent of AKAAs's reverence for tradition was such that it was accused of having "a romantic bias towards traditionalism, historicism and the vernacular"<sup>26</sup> by a dissenting member of the grand jury.

The justification for the "bias" is that traditional architecture is perceived to be in harmony with nature through place-specific design that is shaped by the intrinsic forces of the environment and utilizes local crafts and resources, while the International Style modern architecture uses modern technology that dominates over nature and brings about homogenized condition of placelessness and alienation by disturbing the supposed harmony between man and nature.<sup>27</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that "traditional" and "vernacular" are used in interchangeable manners whereby traditional is equated with that which is indigenous to the region while the vernacular architecture is assumed to be traditional and timeless. This romantic view of traditional architecture is evident in Hassan Fathy's remark:

Before the advent of the industrial era and mechanization, man depended on natural sources of energy and available local materials in forming his habitat according to his physiological needs. Over many centuries, people everywhere appear to have learned to interact with their climate. Climate shapes the rhythm of their lives as well as their habitat and clothes. Thus they built houses that are more or less satisfactory at providing them with the microclimate that they need.<sup>28</sup>

Such a formulation is not dissimilar to the environmentalists' criticism of the techno-centricity and the domination over nature of modern industrialization, and their harking back to pre-industrial ideas about nature and man's harmonious relationship with nature through the reiteration of "demised" non-Western

traditions.<sup>29</sup> This alignment between the traditional and the natural/ecological is noted and celebrated by Charles Correa:

If we look at all the fashionable concerns of environmentalists today: balanced eco-systems, recycling of waste products, appropriate life-styles, indigenous technology, etc., we find that people in the Third World *already have it all*.<sup>30</sup> [my emphasis]

In contrast to "unnatural" development and modern architecture that alienates man from his "natural" environment, traditional architecture is constructed as "natural" in that it returns man to his pre-industrial ontological essence of "dwelling" in harmony with nature. Compared to the "sterile" environment of the technocentric International Style modern architecture that supposedly impoverished the senses, traditional architecture in harmony with nature would apparently accentuate the sensorial experience of living in harmony with tropical nature creating "a heady cocktail of hedonistic delights, a kaleidoscope of emotions."<sup>31</sup>

### *Tanjong Jara Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitor Center*

Tanjong Jara Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitor Center (Figure 1), completed in 1980 and awarded AKAAs in 1983 during the second three-year-cycle of the award, is the earliest of the three case studies to be awarded the AKAAs award. The complex<sup>32</sup> is the first major tourist facility in the underdeveloped east coast of peninsular Malaysia, which has "lagged behind in Malaysia's drive for modernization."<sup>33</sup> The complex was originally proposed in a 1971 tourism study commissioned by the Tourism Development Corporation of the Malaysian Government to transform the "culturally rich and physically beautiful but economically depressed east coast of Malaysia"<sup>34</sup> into a major tourist destination, providing an impetus to economic development in the region (Figure 2). The complex was planned to be sited in the State of Trengganu, specifically the Dungan area because an iron mine that was the traditional job provider there had closed and new employment opportunities were desperately needed there.<sup>35</sup>

In the AKAAs Master Jury's citation, the architect and the developer of the complex were hailed for their "courage to search out and successfully adapt and develop an otherwise rapidly disappearing traditional



Left: Figure 1. Tanjong Jara Hotel exterior view: coconut trees, white sandy beach, drift log and "traditional" timber houses. (Source: Mimar). Right: Figure 2. Tourism Development Concept Map of Malaysia (Source: AKAA Technical Review)

architecture and craft" and that "the project has revived a number of building-material industries, crafts, and traditional constructional skills" producing "an architecture that is in keeping with traditional values and aesthetics, and of an excellence that matches the best surviving examples."<sup>36</sup> The complex was also commended for not just only pursuing economic development but for following the "broader strategy for the development of local architecture and the economy."<sup>37</sup>

The design for Tanjong Jara Hotel follows AKAA's ideological alignment of "tradition" and "nature." Together with Peter Muller's works in Bali<sup>38</sup> and Geoffrey Bawa's works in Sri Lanka, Tanjong Jara Hotel is one of the earliest neo-traditional resorts/hotels in the region. It represents a new typology of boutique hotel that seeks to avoid the environmental and socio-cultural problems brought about by earlier tourism boom and hotel constructions<sup>39</sup> by proclaiming to be more sensitive to the ecologies of the natural environment and socio-cultural context. Tanjong Jara Hotel was designed by the Hawaiian architectural firm of Wimberley, Whisenand, Alison, Tong and Goo (WWATG)<sup>40</sup> based on the design brief of creating a

project that would appear as "a natural, inevitable outgrowth of local elements— the land, sea, mountains and people who live and work there and their existing art and architecture."<sup>41</sup> Prior to commissioning WWATG in 1976, a modernist design scheme by Architects Team 3<sup>42</sup> was rejected because the modernist design "did not reflect anything Malaysian"<sup>43</sup> and was not sensitive to the fragile natural ecology of the site.

In search of the elusive "natural Malayness" desired by the developer, Tourism Development Corporation of Malaysia, WWATG researched extensively on traditional architecture of the east coast states of Malaysia and chose the traditional timber architecture of the Istana, royal palace of Malay Sultans, as the inspiration for their design. However, there were no discussions on the spatial structure of the buildings or the patterns and symbolism of the timber carvings, from which the inspirations would be drawn. Instead, the focus was on (re)presenting the "traditional" architecture as "natural," on how the Istana "blends in with the local environment and is ideally suited to local weather conditions."<sup>44</sup> The architectural features of the Istana, such as the porous walls, "open-sided rooms, lattice soffits, steep pitched roof with gable grilles"<sup>45</sup> are ra-

tionalized as environmental features that facilitate natural ventilation and help in achieving thermal comfort in the hot and humid tropics. Accordingly, it was claimed that these environmental features would eliminate the need for air-conditioning and achieve substantial savings in construction cost and energy consumption. The environmental performance of the “traditional” architecture was presented in contrast to the energy profligacy of the modern building, which “often seems an aberration in the environment.”<sup>46</sup>

Another feature of “traditional” architecture— that of being elevated on stilts— was used for Rantau Abang Visitor Center (RAVC) so as to minimize disturbance to the ecologically sensitive ground on the site. The beach at the site was one of the few remaining breeding grounds in the world for leather-back turtles, a species that is facing the threats of extinction. Hence, “traditional” architecture is not only “natural” in its appropriateness to the climatic conditions of the tropics but also the fragile ecological conditions of the site. Moreover, for Tanjong Jara Hotel, drawing inspiration from Istana and incorporating “traditional” architectural elements entailed the use of local materials, such as the tropical hard and softwoods chengal, kapur and nyatoh; hand-made red Trengganu tiles kilned in nearby villages; and the employment of local timber craftsman to produce “authentic” traditional wood-carvings. According to the architects, to which the Master Jury of AKAAs concurred, such utilization of “traditional methods in a honorable way” will help the local to preserve their heritage and prevent them from “losing their ‘roots.’”<sup>47</sup> The “traditional” architecture of Tanjong Jara Hotel was thus not only “natural” in the environmental and ecological sense, but also in the social and cultural sense.

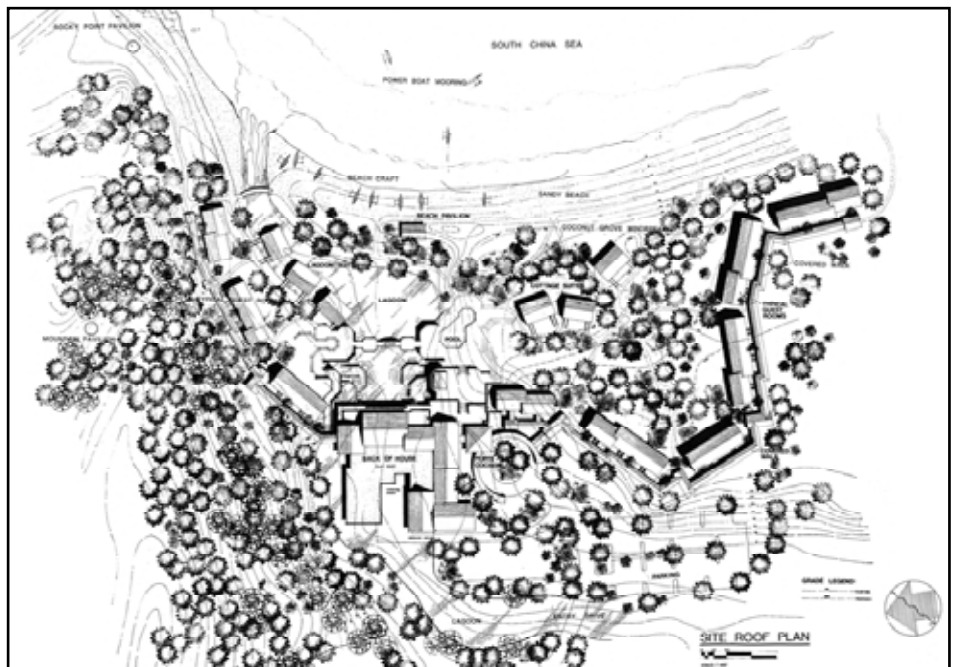
With traditions “naturalized,” the architects were able to exercise their creativity to “mix-and-match” different “traditions” to achieve the desired effects for a “resort of international standards.”<sup>48</sup> The grandeur of the architecture of Istana was combined with the “causal rambling” layout of a “Trengganu fishing village” to produce “pictur-

esque vistas” that avoided any sense of “monolithichness.”<sup>49</sup> (Figure 3) Such a historical and socio-cultural incongruity of combining the royalty of the palatial architecture of the Istana, built for the Sultan (a ruler of Malay state), with the laity of the architecture of the kampung (village), built for the Sultan’s subject, could only be realized in a contemporary context, where the social hierarchy between the rulers and his subjects could be disregarded. In place of the feudal order, new social differentiation is defined according to different consumption capacities— whether one could afford to stay at Tanjong Jara Hotel and enjoy the “unmistakably Malay” blend of grandeur and picturesque (starting at US\$200 a night for a basic room).<sup>50</sup> However, instead of an “unmistakably Malay” authenticity, Tanjong Jara Hotel is, what Jean Baudrillard calls, a simulation of hyperreal “traditions,” one which supplants the origin.<sup>51</sup>

### *Datai Resort*

Datai Resort (Figure 4) was completed in 1993 and awarded AKAAs in 2001 during the eighth cycle of the award. Datai resort is built on Peninsular Malaysia’s West Coast island of Pulau Langkawi. The Malaysian Government has been developing tourism on this heavily wooded and sparsely populated island that possesses “some of the country’s finest coastal scenery”<sup>52</sup> since the 1980s. Datai Resort, completed in 1993, is

*Figure 3. Site Plan of Tanjong Jara Hotel (Source: AKAAs Technical Review)*





located in an undeveloped part of the island, on a fragile coastal ecological site, at the intersection of the rainforest with the sea, encompassing highly sensitive eco-systems. The design of Datai Resort attempts to address the ecological and socio-cultural contexts in a sensitive manner. The Singapore-based Australian architect, Kerry Hill, who was involved in the master-planning and the selection of the site from the onset, chose to locate the resort away from the sea to minimize visual disturbance to waterfront view. By situating the building away from the waterfront, Hill claimed that "the impact on a very fragile ecosystem containing swamps, freshwater streams, flora and fauna immediately adjacent to the beach has been minimised."<sup>53</sup> The resort was instead sited behind, on a ridge that descends through a steep slope to the waterfront. The visual bulk of the building was reduced through breaking down the massing of the resort into smaller buildings and distributing these buildings across the site in a manner that reduced tree felling. With the assistance of the consultants from the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, measures taken to minimize disturbance to the surrounding rainforest included the provision of recycling plants, localized soak pits and septic tanks that allow filtered seepage of water back into the forest.

Moreover, the resort bored its own wells and harvests some rainwater for its own water supply and efforts were taken to allow the original catchments and flow patterns to be maintained by minimizing disruption on the local topography and storm-water drainage system. In the felling of the trees, trained elephants rather than bulldozers were used because they could penetrate the forest with minimum damage. After the felling of the trees, the 'festering wound' effect created by the exposure of the perimeter species to harmful ultraviolet rays was mitigated by careful replanting.<sup>54</sup> To further enhance what the architect considered as "communion with nature,"<sup>55</sup> trees felled during the clearing of the rainforest were reused. Some of the "tree trunks [were] left in their original form, with only the rough edges finished, so the visitors could experience the colonnaded area as extensions of the forest."<sup>56</sup> (Figure 5) Besides local timber, the other main construction material, granite, was also quarried locally on the island. Timber and granite were left to weather and age naturally and leave behind the patina of age. After the resort was opened, its operation included an education program where an in-house horticulturalist takes guest on tours to see the local flora and fauna. This activity is supplemented by resort-sponsored publications to

Left: Figure 4.  
Datai Resort in  
the middle of a  
tropical  
rainforest.  
(Source:  
Frampton,  
Correa and  
Robson eds.,  
Modernity and  
Community)



Right: Figure 5.  
Some of the  
felled tree  
trunks were left  
in their original  
form giving the  
impression that  
the  
colonnaded  
area was an  
extension of  
the forest  
(Source:  
Architect's  
submission to  
AKAA)





educate the occupants about the diversity and richness of plants and wildlife in the forest. The resort even sponsors an experiment to compare the productivity of forest with agricultural land and “[t]he hotel and its horticulturalist are confident they will prove that tropical forest can be as productive in economic terms as agricultural land.”<sup>57</sup>

The alternative mode of development pursued in Datai Resort, just as the case of Tanjong Jara Hotel, could be seen as adopting the ideology of “sustainable development,” as popularized by the 1987 Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*.<sup>58</sup> “Sustainable development” is an approach where previously irreconcilable dichotomies of economic growth (which would dominate over nature and exploit nature as resources) and the protection of the environment (which would thwart economic development) could be reconciled. The reconciliation could supposedly be achieved through the management of global environmental problems at a planetary scale. However, without any significant adjustments to the market systems, “the management of nature [would only] entails its capitalization, its treatment as commodity.”<sup>59</sup> Is “sustainable development” not another guise under which the capitalist logic of developmentalism is reproduced?<sup>60</sup> Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that the resorts are designed first and foremost as “marketable products” central to which is the production of “exotic nature,” for the consumption of “rich tourists from all over the world.”<sup>61</sup> Even Kenneth Frampton has to confess that the Datai is but “a hedonistic complex catering to the high end of the elite global market.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, some facets of these developments were suppressed in order to present an image of environmentally friendliness. For example, the environmental impact of the construction of a 30km access road through the forest in the development of Datai and the provision of an 18-hole Championship golf course as part of the recreational facilities of the Resort were not taken into account when claiming that the Datai Resort is a sustainable development.

Besides presenting environmental and ecological sensitivity, the Datai resort was presented as a unique sensorial experience. In the words of the architect:

We believe that hotels play a social role in which they offer a range of guest experience that transcends the norm of everyday life and hence, through a sequence of unfolding spatial experi-

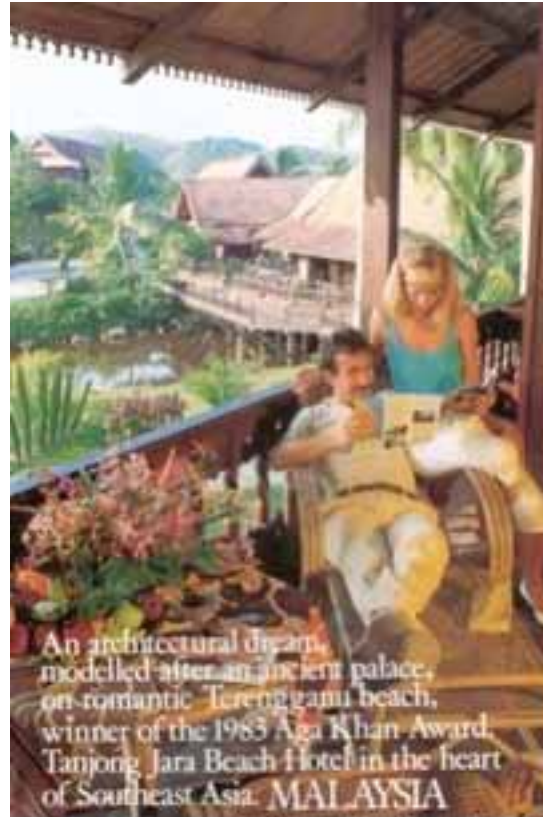


Figure 6.  
An advertisement of the original Tanjong Jara Hotel (Source: Mimar)

ences, the design of Datai seeks to promote a journey of discovery and ultimately, a sense of occasion.<sup>63</sup>

Raul Mehrotra, the technical reviewer of Datai for AKA and himself a renowned architect in India, commented, “users enjoy not only a great sense of ceremony—like transversing a large stage set— but also well-lit and ventilated spaces.”<sup>64</sup> As a commentator noted, “good design may be capable of eliciting strong emotional reactions”<sup>65</sup> and in the case of the Datai Resort, good design is indeed mobilized to create an illusory sense of occasion for the consumption of those who could afford it.

Both Tanjong Jara Hotel and Datai Resort are very successful resorts commercially. Datai especially has garnered an impressive list of 17 international awards.<sup>66</sup> The “naturalization” of traditions of Tanjong Jara Hotel and the heightening of sensorial experiences in Datai should not be understood outside the logic of product differentiation for “niche marketing” in a highly segmented tourism market (Figure 6). Even though AKA considered them as more sensitive modes of alternative development attentive to local socio-cultural practices and the environmental implica-

tions, nowadays often couched in the language of sustainability, it should also be noted that these new modes of development are still primarily aligned to the logic of capital accumulation. Both Tanjong Jara Hotel and Datai Resort are in fact, what Ellen Dunham-Jones theorized elsewhere as, highly customized architectural products in post-fordist mode of production.<sup>67</sup> Traditions and nature, instead of being "preserved" as constructed by the ACAA discourse, are being rarified and commodified as symbolic capital.<sup>68</sup> When tropical sensuality "infiltrates the intellect of the tropics and influence reasoning," instead of producing new emancipatory subjectivity as envisioned by Stagno's formulation of "I feel, therefore I am;"<sup>69</sup> it produces the delusory sense of subjectivity of "I consume, therefore I am." As Arjun Appadurai puts it:

These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is increasingly helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser.<sup>70</sup>

### (Re)locating Malaysia's Architectural Traditions: Regionalism and "Multi-cultural" Nature as Alibi for Problematic National Traditions

A key impetus behind the resurgence of tropical architecture in the 1980s was the state-initiated search for Malaysian architectural identity at that time. In 1981, there was a Seminar on National Identity in Art and Architecture, organized by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports<sup>71</sup> where the politicians made an official call for a Malaysian identity in architecture. The seminar was followed by a series of articles addressing the question of a Malaysian identity in architecture in *Majallah Akitek*,<sup>72</sup> public seminars such as the first "PAM Annual Discourse on Design"<sup>73</sup> organized by the Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) in 1983, the Malaysia Institute of Architects, and the 1983 ACAA regional seminar on "Architecture and Identity"<sup>74</sup> co-organized by ACAA, University of Technology in Malaysia and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

This search for a Malaysian identity in architecture arose from the confluence of a number of diverse factors. Firstly, it was about Mahathir Mohammad, Prime Minister of Malaysia who came to power in 1981, exploiting architecture's potential for the "visible poli-

tics"<sup>75</sup> of expressing Malay/Islamic nationalism under his peculiar brand of "authoritarian populism."<sup>76</sup> For "visible politics" to work, immediately recognizable exterior forms using ethnic and religious "symbols" were especially appealing to the politicians.<sup>77</sup> Mahathir was quoted as saying: "There should be no reason why a skyscraper should not have a roof which reflects our national identity. Many elements of Malaysian art can be incorporated into any modern building."<sup>78</sup> Secondly, the phenomenal regional economic growth starting in the 1980s, has led to increasing self-confidence and rising self-awareness of Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. With the economists predicting the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the "Asia-Pacific Century," rapid economic expansion provided Southeast Asian countries an impetus to assert difference from the hegemonic "West," which could be seen as representing "a wished-for resistance to modernity and modernism and a peculiarly colonial and post-colonial form of redemption."<sup>79</sup> Thirdly, as discussed earlier, there was pervasive disenchantment with the paradigm of development and the associated International style modern architecture.

One of the earliest manifestations of Mahathir's "visible politics" is the Bumiputra Bank completed in 1980 by Kumpulan Akitek. It was "hailed as a pioneer in the emerging postmodern search for a Malaysian identity in the 1980s."<sup>80</sup> In this project, a high-rise International Style office tower is juxtaposed with a low-rise banking hall, articulated as a blown-up version of "traditional" Malay house (Figure 7). The Putra World Trade Center, completed in 1985 and designed by the same architect, is another project with similar awkward juxtaposition of an over-sized "traditional" Malay house with an International Style office tower. (Figure 8) Both simulations of "traditional" Malay architecture are based on superficial similarity in exterior form, ignoring the difference in tectonics.<sup>81</sup> Besides the reference to ethnic traditional architecture, the other tendency of "visible politics" is to appropriate religious references. Dayabumi Complex (Figure 9) completed in 1984 by MAA and BEP Akitek and Tubang Haji Building completed in 1986 by Hijjas Kasturi Associates are two early examples of high-rise buildings with Islamic references.<sup>82</sup> For the Dayabumi complex, the sun-shading grilles and the plan of the office tower are derived from Islamic geometrical motifs,<sup>83</sup> while the five massive columns<sup>84</sup> on the exterior



Left: Figure 7. Exterior view of Bumiputra Bank. The “traditional” styled building is the banking hall while the International-style high rise behind is the office tower (Source: Author’s photograph) Right: Figure 8. Exterior view of the conference Hall of Putra World Trade Centre. (Source: Author’s photograph)

of the Tubang Haji building allude to the five pillars of faith in Islam.<sup>85</sup> The latest manifestations of Mahathir’s “visible politics,” albeit on a much grander scale, such as the mega-projects of Petronas Towers and Putrajaya (Figure 10), perhaps show the ascendancy of the mobilization of “Islamic forms” over that of the use of “ethnic symbols” in the representation of Malaysian identity in architecture.

Be it the use of “ethnic symbols” or the application of “Islamic forms,” the types of architecture produced under Mahathir’s “visible politics” are considered by modernist architectural critics, such as Kenneth Frampton, as forms of “Populism... [that] function as a communicative or instrumental sign.”<sup>86</sup> Frampton’s “Populism” refers to architectural “Postmodernism”<sup>87</sup> that has pervaded global architectural production, including those in Southeast Asian cities, since the 1980s. According to Mohammed Arkoun, the chief ideologue of AKAAs discourses, “Postmodernism” has reduced traditional religious and ethnic symbols to “mere signals...[that] have lost all their old symbolic value in the contemporary design environment.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, the onslaught of “Postmodernism” led a critic to describe a Southeast Asian city as becoming the “playground... for pastichers, those who are producing wholesale imitations of Western [and local traditional] architectural styles for public consumption.”<sup>89</sup> Underneath these criticisms was the perception that “Postmodernism” was countering certain deeply entrenched tenets of design in modernism, such as the honesty of architectural expression in function, structure and

construction; and abstract language of architectural expression, devoid of explicit ornamentation. Hence, “Postmodernism” was deemed superficial and skin-deep because it produced scenographic effects instead of tectonic innovation,<sup>90</sup> and it was based on imitation of ornamental “traditional” forms (pastiche) instead of interpretation of spatial and formal principles.<sup>91</sup> Similar perceptions were shared by many Malaysian architects<sup>92</sup> and some of them derided the architects



Figure 9. Exterior view of Dayabumi Complex. (Source: Author’s photograph)

Figure 10. Alignment of State and Religion: View of power center in Putrajaya with the Prime Minister's Office to the right (with Green Dome) and the Putra Mosque to the left (with Pink Dome) (Source: Author's photograph)



practicing "Postmodernism" as "tarting up" their designs.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, the Malaysian architects felt that the autonomy of their profession, especially with regard to their design expertise, often idealized as a creative act unfettered by politics, was threatened by Mahathir's "visible politics" and the possible imposition of a particular style of architecture as Malaysian identity. In his status paper presented at the Seminar on National Identity in Art and Architecture, the president of PAM was emphatic that:

an architect is an individualist in his mental and creative thinking which needs to be flexible to meet the conflicting demands. Therefore, the pre-determined concepts of planning, or form styles or shapes are totally inappropriate to his nature, training and make-up and he cannot be dictated to create pre-conceived national styles and still come up with good architecture.<sup>94</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that one of the responses of PAM to the politicians' call for Malaysian architectural identity was to initiate an Annual Discourse on Design from 1983. The pronounced purpose of organizing a public forum for discussing Design was to reinvigorate Design with a capital 'D'— the "raison d'être... [and] the very basis of [the] profession"<sup>95</sup> of architects— so that the Malaysian architect could "attempt to improve the quality of architecture and be less so dictated by whatever powers that be (Dollars and Politics)."<sup>96</sup>

Other than threatening the tenets of modernist design and the autonomy of the profession, the application of ethnic and religious specific signs and the underlying Malay/Islamic nationalism of Mahathir's "visible politics" was perceived to be inappropriate for the multi-racial, multi-cultural society of Malaysia. For

the profession of architecture, within which many architects are Chinese, the "implied ethnic [and religious] sectarianism" is "dangerous because it inadvertently exacerbates ethnic cleavages that lie just below the surface of new-state cultures."<sup>97</sup> Even if the problems of Mahathir's ethnic politics in multi-racial Malaysia are disregarded, another problematic aspect of the expression of Malaysian identity in architecture would surface— should the identity be ethnic-based (through the use of "ethnic symbols") or religion-based (through the use of "Pan-Islamic clichés")? This is not an easily resolved question because "Malayness rests on three arches referred to locally as agama, bahasa dan rajah, literally religion/Islam, language/Malay and royalty/sultans."<sup>98</sup> Even if this question could be resolved, there are further complications, such as "What exactly constitutes an Islamic architecture?" and the relevance of "Islamic forms" to Malaysia. A writer noted, "an Uzbek muqarna or an Iranian iwan do not spell 'Malaysian' any more than a deconstructivist LRT station or a pseudo-Egyptian shopping mall."<sup>99</sup> He has perhaps noted the use of different Islamic motifs is not unrelated to the logic of "postmodernism" and the proliferation of different architectural styles in late-capitalism. The problematic "traditions" implicit in Mahathir's visible politics contributed to the shift in locating identity from within the national context to that of the broader regional context of "tropical Asian countries."<sup>100</sup> Instead of referring to problematic ethnic and religious "traditions," the regional identity would be based on the "more intrinsic design agenda... [of] the environment itself."<sup>101</sup> Hence, the regional identity would be located in "tropical architecture," one which is derived from the environment of the redefined imaginary boundaries of the tropics.



### *Regionalism*

Besides the aforementioned problems of appropriating “traditions” and imposing selective ethnic and religious identities in Malaysia’s context, the shift from locating identity in the national context to the broader regional context should also be attributed to the dissemination of the discourses of regionalism in ACAA contexts. Following the 1983 ACAA regional seminar on “Architecture and Identity” held in Kuala Lumpur was the 1985 ACAA regional seminar on “Regionalism in Architecture” held in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In Suha Özkan’s introduction to the 1985 seminar, he noted, “[I]t is very difficult to talk about identity without going into regionalism. A geographical region defines many aspects of society both culturally and environmentally.”<sup>102</sup> By associating the problems of identity formation in the developing world with the regionalism discourse disseminating from the West, Özkan inadvertently weakens the socio-political dimensions of the debate of modernization and quest for identity in the developing world with a discourse formulated for the developed world and responding to its own particular set of problems.<sup>103</sup> The discourse of critical regionalism, as expounded by historians/theorists from the West such as Kenneth Frampton and William Curtis (both of whom were participants at the 1985 seminar) is purportedly a form of resistance against both the superficial historicism of architectural postmodernism and the placeless homogenizing tendencies of International Style architecture, with an underlying objective to resuscitate modern architecture from its supposed bankruptcy. As such, the discourses of critical regionalism emphasize the search for “deeper lessons of order,”<sup>104</sup> privileging “indigenous archetypes” against “national stereotypes,” “tectonics” against “scenography,” “transformation” against “transfer,” ... etc.

However, as Curtis admitted, “‘Region’ is at best a hazy notion. It may refer to the distribution of racial or ethnic groups; to common geographical or climatic features; to political boundaries de-limiting a tribe or some other federation...”<sup>105</sup> Hence, the discourses of critical regionalism cannot but be general and abstract, resorting to vague statements and familiar categories such as “regionalism is a restorative philosophy in favour of supposed harmony between people, their artifacts and nature.”<sup>106</sup> It also appears that the discourses of regionalism seek to overplay the role of geography

in determining architecture and underplay other complex religious and political forces. For instance, Curtis insisted that regionalism in Islamic countries “identifies many of the most relevant patterns for dealing with climate, local material and geography in epochs before the arrival of Islam.” [my emphasis]<sup>107</sup> In the quest for “deeper” order, certain patterns are idealized and imbued with timeless qualities while others are rendered as inhibitive obstacles that should be discarded.

As one of the most abstract qualities, “nature” would emerge to serve as the common denominator for diverse “traditions” within the rather undefined region. “Nature” is also adequately vague to accommodate a variety of different approaches and conceal larger ignorance about the socio-cultural and political specificities of a locale. Hence, the loaded symbolism of Charles Correa’s later works, which are infused with “Indian” mysticism, was simply construed by Curtis as the modernist “form-follows-climate” approach, and:

is based on the consistent strategies directed at the outdoor room, the ambiguous edge, the shaded platform, the meandering route and so on. In other words he has tried to work out a viable modern language that draws upon the past eras without mimicking them. More than that Correa had to adapt his solutions to the wide range of Indian climate, from the dry heat of the north to the damp tropical conditions of the south.<sup>108</sup>

Similarly, when Geoffrey Bawa was presented the ACAA’s prestigious “Chairman’s Award” in 2001, he was singled out particularly for being an exponent of “an architecture that is environmentally in harmony with tropical contexts... [and] in creating an architectural language that is fully integrated with its site and place.”<sup>109</sup> “Nature,” in the form of climate, local resources and site conditions, gains prominence in the discourses of regionalism.

Based on abstractions and broad generalizations, the region in the discourse of regionalism has fluid boundaries that could be easily be configured and re-configured to serve different constellations of alliances as it is not difficult to locate some level of commonalities even between very dissimilar entities. This fluidity of regional boundaries has been mobilized by Malaysia and Singapore architects, such as Tay Kheng Soon and Ken Yeang, to (re)imagine a regional tropical architecture and city. As Abidin Kusno noted elsewhere, this tropical imagining is “an abstraction of ‘people,’

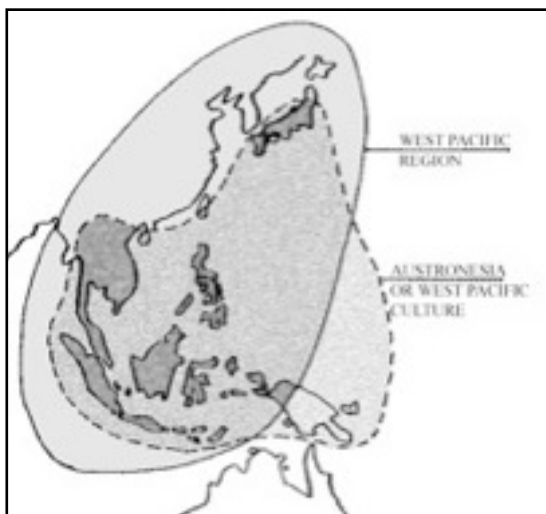
'Asian' and 'independent identity' and a reference to a translocal pan-Asian environment that is deprived of any localized cultural categories."<sup>110</sup> Recently, tropical regionalism was again reconfigured by Alexander Tzonis, the historian/theorist who first coined the term "critical regionalism," to include "representatives as varied as possible from the subregions of overall tropical regions."<sup>111</sup> Although Tzonis claimed tropical critical regionalism as an emancipatory form of architectural identity that resists the hegemony of the International style modern architecture, he actually evoked the colonial hegemonic construction of the tropics, citing Anthony King's work on the British colonial bungalow while remaining silent on the fact that the bungalow was a product of socio-cultural and political practices of colonialism, which embedded the asymmetrical power-relations between the colonizer and the colonized. When I raised the problem of "the tropics" as being too diverse and heterogeneous and overly undefined to be useful in the articulation of any form of common identity with Jimmy Lim and Tay Kheng Soon, prominent architects in Singapore and Malaysia, they acknowledged that problem and in turn counter-proposed modified, but in my opinion equally problematic, regional formulations. One proposed "Asian tropical architecture" while the other suggested "equatorial architecture."<sup>112</sup> It appears to me that they are primarily interested in going beyond the confines of the modern nation-state, and its concomitant politics, by formulating a supranational identity, but they are not too concerned with the validity of their regional configuration.

### *Austronesian Architecture*

Other than the discourse of (critical) regionalism, another key influence in the imaginings of a transnational region in Southeast Asia during the 1980s is the discourse of Austronesia. Based on linguistic reconstruction and archaeological evidence, scholars have been able to trace the Austronesian seafaring migration that might have started as early as 5,000-6,000 years ago from coastal south China via Taiwan. Austronesia refers to the broad region that stretches from island Southeast Asia, such as present day Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, to places further afield, such as the Pacific islands and even Madagascar, which came to share common biological, linguistic and cultural characteristics because of maritime migration.<sup>113</sup> Architectural historians and theorists were undoubtedly influenced by this discourse. Accordingly, some of them argue that architecturally, the houses in the Austronesian region share certain common characteristics.<sup>114</sup> One of them, Thai architect Sumet Jumsai, presented his version of Austronesian culture and architecture that is loosely based on the linguistic and archaeological scholarship.<sup>115</sup> Jumsai sees Southeast Asia as belonging to the larger region of Austronesia, or what he calls, "West Pacific." (Figure. 11) Jumsai argues that underlying Austronesia is an Austronesian culture that has ancient origin that precedes even the beginnings of the two cultural mainstreams in Asia – India and China. Jumsai sees Austronesian culture as constituting the oft-ignored third cultural mainstream that should rightfully coexist with those of India and China.<sup>116</sup> By suggesting the greater continuity from prehistoric antecedents to modern Southeast Asia, Jumsai's construction of Austronesian culture helps elevate Southeast Asia from the shadows of the two major civilizations of China and India that purportedly shaped its civilization. Not only is Southeast Asia no longer a backward appendage to the more advanced cultures of India and China, Jumsai's construction also provides a unifying historical origin to the culturally diverse, vaguely defined and only recently invented Southeast Asia<sup>117</sup> and accordingly, the basis for a new regional imagining for architects in Southeast Asia.

The prehistoric unifying origin of Austronesia could be located in "nature" and geography. For Sumet Jumsai, the Austronesian culture is a water-based culture as shaped by the geography of the coastlines, islands and archipelagos of the Austronesian region.

Figure 11.  
Sumet Jumsai's  
sketch of  
Austronesia  
and West  
Pacific (Source:  
Sumet Jumsai,  
"The West  
Pacific Region  
versus Punk  
Architecture."  
Redrawn by  
author)



Similarly, the aquatic and semi-aquatic architecture of the “house on stilts”<sup>118</sup> that characterized the Austronesian region is deemed to be a natural outcome of environmental factors. According to Jumsai, this geographical instinct of the water-based culture is transcendental,

In West Pacific, particularly in Southeast 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. [my emphasis]<sup>119</sup>

On hearing Jumsai’s presentation at an ACAA conference in Malaysia, prominent Singapore architect, Tay Kheng Soon remarked “[a]s 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 Southeast Asia; we have a certain distinct tradition with a distinct underlying area of subconscious.”<sup>120</sup> For Tay, the architectural identity of Southeast Asia is to be located in “geography and pre-history, but not history as history is corrupted by politics.” [my emphasis]<sup>121</sup> Tay explained that “geography is the wisdom of the inhabited earth.”<sup>122</sup> By emphasizing the “instinct” inherited from the prehistoric past, the “subconscious” that lies within and “wisdom of the inhabited earth,” are Jumsai and Tay not also urging the Southeast Asian architect to search deep within his/her self for his/her creative identity? By alluding that the genius of place is to be found within the genius of the (architect’s) self, are Jumsai and Tay not also attempting to carve out an autonomous space for the modern Southeast Asian architect where he/she could exercise his/her creativity without restraint? Other than providing a new regional imagining that propels Southeast Asia into the future as Kusno claims,<sup>123</sup> could it be that the discourse of Austronesia, with its emphasis on the primacy of “nature” and geography, is also an attempt to delineate for architecture an autonomous sphere of

activity, and for the architect a continual professional relevance and creative autonomy in the contemporary world?

### *Salinger Residence*<sup>124</sup>

The Salinger Residence (Figure 12), completed in 1992, was awarded ACAA in 1998 during the seventh award cycle. The house was designed for Dr. Haji Rudin Salinger, an American citizen of French and German descent. He first came to Malaysia as a Peace Corps volunteer, fell in love with the place and chose to return years later, converted to Islam, married and settled down. Dr. Salinger is a connoisseur of Malaysian culture, having written papers on Malaysia traditional crafts such as timber woodcarving and handmade clay roof tiles, and Malaysian cooking and culture.<sup>125</sup> According to the architect, Dr. Salinger desired a “distinctively Malaysian house”<sup>126</sup> that would serve as a cultural center, where he could conduct orientation classes for expatriates where visitors would spend a whole day in his house learning “[stereo]typical Malaysian activities such as batik making, rice grinding, etc.”<sup>127</sup> Hence, the architect, Jimmy C. S. Lim’s declared intention was to reinterpret the “traditional” Malay house typology in order to produce a “uniquely Malaysian vernacular.”<sup>128</sup>

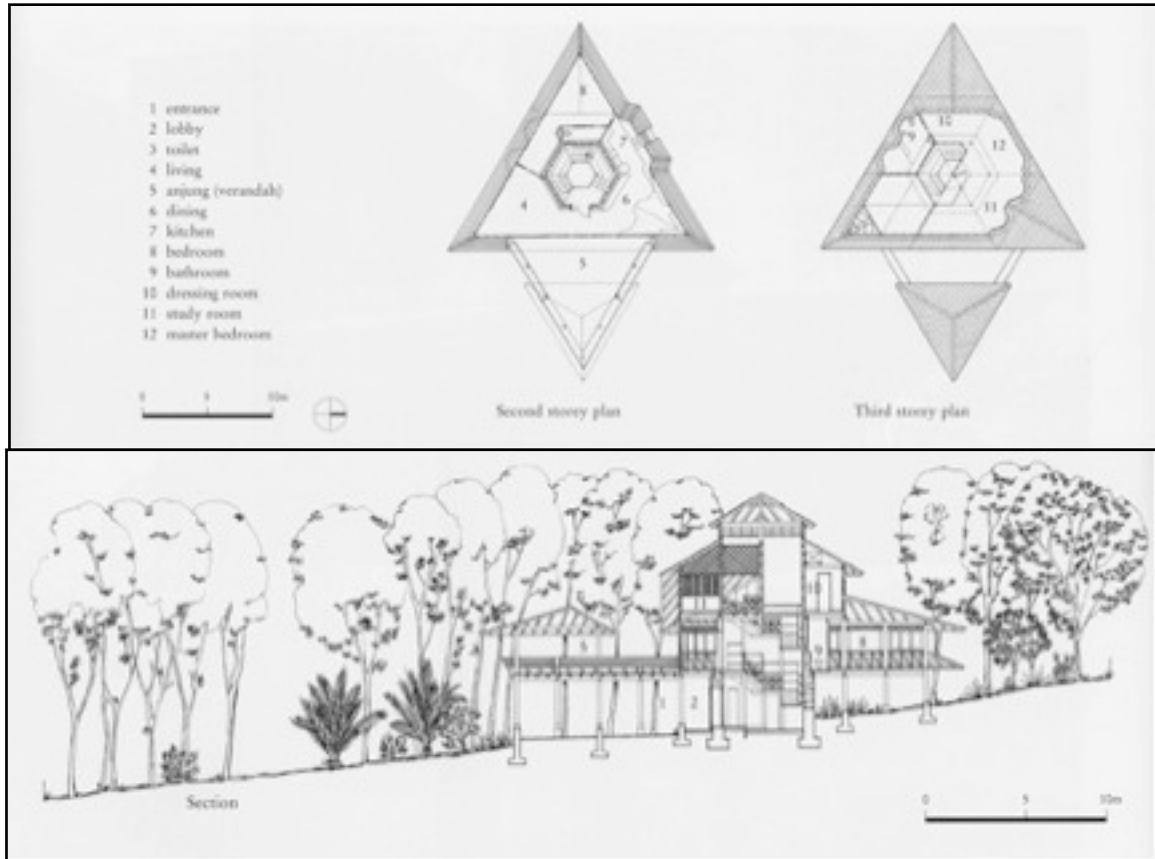
Although the spatial conception of Salinger Residence is unmistakably modern, with the juxtaposition of two equilateral triangles on plan and the asymmetrical interlocking angular spaces in section,<sup>129</sup> (Figure 13) traditional Malay architecture is evoked through the



Figure 12. Exterior view of Salinger House (Source: Robert Powell, *Tropical Asian House*)



Figure 13.  
Plans and  
Section of  
Salinger House  
(Source: Robert  
Powell, *Tropical  
Asian House*)



association of the spaces in Salinger with traditional building components and the quest for "authenticity" through the faithful use of traditional crafts and the strict adherence to traditional rituals. For example, the verandah is associated with the traditional Malay House's anjung (entry porch) and the roof over the verandah is related to the waqaf, which is "a gift of money that is translated into a physical structure to provide shade for men working in the rice fields."<sup>130</sup> The constructional method and process is especially unusual in contemporary suburban Malaysia in its faithful compliance with vanishing traditional techniques and rituals. In contrast to the standard industry practice of employing contractors using low-cost, unskilled and young laborers, a team of craftsmen from the Malay heartland of east coast Malaysia, all of whom were over 60 years of age, was employed by the client to build Salinger Residence. The team was led by Ibrahim Adam, whose physical disabilities of being blinded in one eye and having no right hand actually emphasized his ingenuity. They employed laborious traditional building techniques, where timber members are held together by traditional joinery and wooden pegs

(tebuk pasak) without the use of nails or bolts. The original details by the architect which were designed using metal fittings were changed to suit the traditional construction techniques, in consultation with the craftsmen.<sup>131</sup> The conveniences of modern machinery were irrelevant as a portable cement mixer was the only machinery employed and all the timber members were lifted into place by a system of pulleys and hoists. Traditional building customs of a bygone era were observed, for example, the timber used for the construction of the house came from trees personally selected by the craftsmen from the east coast states of Trengganu and Kelantan; the clay roof tiles were hand-made by craftsman from the east coast; and at the raising of the Tiang Seri (first column), Surat Yassine from the heart of the Qur'an and Doa'a Salamet were read by a religious teacher. These different factors perhaps account for the unusually lengthy period (by Malaysian standards) of six and a half years taken to complete the construction.

Despite the apparent reverence for tradition, Jimmy Lim chose to (re)present the basis of his reinterpretation of the elements of traditional Malay House using

the justificatory structure of “ecologically sustainable principles,” claiming that building with “minimum impact upon the environment” was “one of the driving forces in designing.”<sup>132</sup> Hence, the elevation of the house on stilts and its location on the highest point of the site was rationalized as to take advantage of the prevailing winds for cross ventilation and natural cooling, and reduce water run-off during the monsoon seasons. Like the previous example of Tanjong Jara Hotel, architectural features such as the porous walls and the deep overhangs were rationalized in terms of facilitating ventilation and providing shade and protection from the heavy tropical monsoon rain. The choice of tropical hardwood as the main construction material was cited as a “renewable resource,” a fact not uncontroversial,<sup>133</sup> and considered as an ecological building material that has lower embodied energy than other common construction materials such as concrete and steel by the technical reviewer.<sup>134</sup> However, there is no mention or discussion as to what constitutes a “uniquely Malaysian vernacular” and how the Salinger Residence is a “distinctively Malaysian House” as Lim claimed in his submission for the award. Instead, when the question of a Malaysian architectural identity was raised during my interview with Lim, he deflected the question with vague notions about how he managed to “rediscover” himself and “understand ourselves” through shutting himself off from overseas influences when he first returned to Malaysia in 1972 after spending more than a decade in Australia.<sup>135</sup> This emphasis on self is not different from the earlier emphasis on “instinct,” “subconsciousness” and “wisdom of the inhabited earth” in the Austronesia discourse. Through the conflation of the two selves – himself (Lim) and ourselves (the citizens of Malaysia) – Lim draws a parallel between his own self-discovery and the search for Malaysian architectural identity. By re-centering the role of the creative architect and the individual genius in the question of a Malaysian architectural identity, Lim could afford to avoid any discussion of ethnicity and nationalism in spite of his desire to create a “Malaysian vernacular.” Instead, Lim emphasized on the need to “reinterpret these elements [of traditional Malaysian architecture] in the modern context”<sup>136</sup>

and designing according to the “ecological sustainable principles.” Even though the craftsmen, their techniques and the building material originated from the Malay heartland of east coast Malaysia, Lim’s “Malaysian” architecture (not “Malay” architecture) is an abstract, unbounded notion, part of the “wisdom of the inhabited earth” gleaned from the larger regional geographical imaginings of the “tropics” and “Austronesia.”

### (De)valuing Nature: Traditions, Nature and the Stigmata of Capitalism

During my visit to Trengganu in 2000, I discovered that Rantau Abang Visitor Center had closed down, the structures had been abandoned and “nature” had reclaimed the ruinous structures. The so-called Eco-tourism there proved to be unsustainable. The numbers of leatherback turtles in Rantau Abang Beach have declined to an extent of near extinction and tourist numbers too have dwindled.<sup>137</sup> Tanjong Jara Hotel too has changed. The management has changed hands and the hotel was extensively refurbished. It appeared that the timber structures, especially those at the base in contact with the ground and water, might have deteriorated badly as the new structures were designed with masonry bases (Figure 14). Similarly, when I visited Jimmy Lim in August 2004, I was told that the Salingers had sold their residence and it is no longer serving as a “Malay cultural center.” When I asked Lim for



Figure 14.  
View of the  
New Tanjong  
Jara Hotel  
(Source:  
Tanjong Jara  
Hotel official  
website)

Figure 15.  
2002 view of  
Salinger  
Residence  
(Source: Janita  
Han)



directions to visit the Salinger Residence, he was evasive, claiming that the neighborhood had changed beyond even his recognition and dissuaded me from going there. Instead, Lim drove me around Kuala Lumpur to view other well-maintained houses he designed. I subsequently found out from a former student of mine who visited the Salinger Residence in 2002 that the house has weathered badly and was in a dire condition – the timber structures were decolorized and stained with algae and many of them have hairline cracks (Figure 15).<sup>138</sup>

One might argue that the fates of the case studies are merely isolated instances and not representative of any larger phenomenon. However, I argue that their fates are not unrelated to the manner in which "nature" and "traditions" were constructed and valued. Although the case studies were all exquisitely designed and crafted architectural objects, their "traditions" were not traditional and their "nature" was not natural but constructed by and complicit with the hegemonic logic of the capital. In these projects, both "traditions" and "nature" were valued on monetary terms and constructed as commodities for consumption. Sustainable development only serves as another guise for the reproduction of capitalist logic of development. Hence, these commodified hyperreal "traditions" and "natures" are subjected to the ever-updating fashion of consumption trends, and the constant "creative" destruction of the capitalist mode of (re)production. When the commodities outlive their "shelf life" or need to be re-thematized to extend their "shelf life" in the marketplace, "nature" and "tradition" would necessarily have to be re/de-constructed re/de-valued.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Anthony King, *The Bungalow, The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984)

<sup>2</sup> For a (post)colonial history of tropical architecture in Southeast Asia, see Jiat-Hwee Chang, "Hybrid Modernities and Tropical Architecture in Southeast Asia" *DO-COMOMO* 29, (2003): 76-81.

<sup>3</sup> The three admittedly reductive categories of "tropical architecture" in Singapore and Malaysia here refer to the common labels of the works of the three arguably most renowned practitioners in Singapore and Malaysia – Ken Yeang, Jimmy C. S. Lim and Tay Kheng Soon. The labels serve more as an indication of the diversity of approaches to "tropical architecture" than as precise descriptive categories.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the recent debate between Tay Kheng Soon and Chan Soo Khian in *Singapore Architect Journal*. Tay, Kheng Soon, "Neo-Tropicality or Neo-Colonialism" in *Singapore Architect* 211 (2001): 21 and Chan, Soo Khian, "Who is afraid of the Neo-Tropical" in *Singapore Architect* 212 (2001): 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Robert Powell, "Introduction" *The Tropical Asian House* (Singapore: Select Books, 1996), 13.

<sup>6</sup> I am referring to the work of a group of geographers and the field of political ecology. For the work of the geographers, see, for example, the essays in Noel Castree and Bruce Braun eds., *Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001). For political ecology, see, for example, Michael Watts and Richard Peet eds., *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1<sup>st</sup> ed.]).

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219.

<sup>8</sup> In the following summary and extrapolation of William's meanings of nature, I rely on David Dereritt's insightful interpretations in his "Being Constructive about Nature" in Castree and Braun eds., *Social Nature*, 22-40.

<sup>9</sup> King, *The Bungalow*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>11</sup> Demeritt, "Being Constructive about Nature," 32

<sup>12</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, "Background: A Vision of Harmony, of Hands and Green Grass" in Robert Powell ed., *Regionalism in Architecture* (Geneva and Singapore: AKAA and Concept Media, 1985), 41.

<sup>13</sup> Renata Holod, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Award in Perspective" in Cynthia Davidson and Ismail Serageldin eds., *Architecture Beyond Architecture* (London: Academic Editions, 1996), 160.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief introduction to the genealogy of development and development discourses, see Watts and Peet, "Liberation Ecology: Development, Sustainability, and the Environment in an Age of Market Triumphantism" in *Liberation Ecologies*, 13-27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Shanti Jayewardene, "Reflections on Design in the context of Development," *Mimar* 27 (1988): 70-75.

<sup>17</sup> Published from 1981 to 1992. Ceased publication in 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Ismail Serageldin, *Space for Freedom: The Search for Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies* (Geneva and London: AKAA and Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 18.

<sup>19</sup> This dichotomy persists despite the fact its inadequacy has always been raised. *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Although officially the AKAA is a program for Muslims, AKAA is a much more inclusive program that deals with the developing world at large, especially those countries in Asia and Africa. Many non-Muslim projects have also been awarded. See Serageldin, *Space for Freedom*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> A large proportion of the rest of the projects are public housing and infrastructure related projects, including self-help housing improvement and the renowned Grammeen Bank Housing Program. Only a very small number of projects awarded could be considered "modern," at least aesthetically. For a recent overview of the projects awarded under AKAA, see Suha Özkan, "Cultivating Architecture" in Kenneth Frampton, Charles Correa and David Robson eds., *Modernity and Community: Architecture in the Islamic World* (London and Geneva: Thames and Hudson and AKAA, 2001), 161-170.

<sup>23</sup> Serageldin, *Space for Freedom*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Shanti Jayewardene, "Bawa: A Contribution to Cultural Regeneration" *Mimar* 19 (1986): 49.

<sup>25</sup> Serageldin, *Space for Freedom*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Mehmet Douruk Pamir, "Dissenting Reports" in Serageldin ed., *Space for Freedom*, p. 75. He was protesting the 1986 (third cycle) grand jury's decision to leave out modern works such as SOM's National Commercial Bank in Jeddah, Henning Larsen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh and especially Louis Kahn's modern masterpiece of Sher-E-Bangla-Nagar Parliament Building in Dhaka.

<sup>27</sup> This view is not only commonly expressed in AKAA discourses but has a history in the architectural discourse in the West from Amos Rapoport to Bernard Rudofsky, see Susan Ubbelohde, "Ecological Vernacular" *Design Book Review*, 20 (1991): 27-29. For discourses related to AKAA, see, for example, Mulk Raj Anand, "Background: A Vision of Harmony, of Hands and Green Grass," Uttam C. Jain, "Regionalism – Resources for Identity" and Kamil Khan Mumtaz, "A Case for Indigenous Development" in Powell ed., *Regionalism in Architecture*, 40-57.

<sup>28</sup> Hassan Fathy, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture: Principles and Examples with Reference to the Hot Arid Climates*, Walter Shearer and Abd-El-Rahman Ahmed Sultan eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>29</sup> See David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Charles Correa, "Scanning the Options" in Serageldin ed., *Space for Freedom*, 272.

<sup>31</sup> Powell, "Introduction," 13.

- <sup>32</sup> Although the Tanjong Jara Hotel and the Rantau Abang Visitors' Centre are located 10 kilometers apart, they were designed by the same architects, developed and managed by the same people (Tourism Development Corporation of Malaysia) and conceived as a single scheme. As such, I consider them as one complex and use the term Tanjong Jara Hotel to refer to both of them.
- <sup>33</sup> Sherban Cantacuzino, "Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitors' Centre" in Sherban Cantacuzino ed., *Architecture in Continuity* (New York: Aperture, 1985), 141.
- <sup>34</sup> Syed Zaighah S. Jaffery, "AKAA Technical Review Summary" 1983, available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 15 July 2004.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Cantacuzino, "Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitors' Centre," 141.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Peter Muller is the architect of Kayu Aya Hotel (later Bali Oberoi) and Amandari in Bali. He is considered the pioneer of Balinese Style tropical architecture. See Philip Goad and Patrick Bingham-Hall, *Architecture Bali: Architecture of Welcome* (Sydney: Pesaro Publishing, 2000)
- <sup>39</sup> For example, in Maldives, the hotels' consumption of large quantity of water and careless disposal of sewage have brought about the salination and pollution of ground water, culminating in the 1978 Cholera epidemic. In Bali, the construction of the International style multi-storey Hotel Bali Beach was regarded as a socio-cultural intrusion which breached the "sacred landscape" of *Gunung Agung* through its tall "alien silhouette." See Goad and Bingham-Hall, *Architecture Bali* and Romi Khosla, "Lead Us Not..." *Mimar* 36 (1990): 22-23.
- <sup>40</sup> The official website of WWATG, now known as WATG after George Wimberly passed away in 1995, boasts that they are the "world's number one hospitality, leisure and entertainment design firm...creating the world's most successful destinations." Besides designing boutique hotels and destination resorts, WATG is also the architect for the Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino in Las Vegas. See <http://www.watg.com/>, last accessed 4 November 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> Said Zaighah S. Jaffery, "1983 AKAA Technical Review Summary" available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed 14 July 2004
- <sup>42</sup> Architects Team 3 is a leading architectural firm in Malaysia and Singapore with Datuk Lim Chong Keat at helm. Lim Chong Keat was the former partner of Malaysian Architects Co-partnership, the practice that designed some of the most acclaimed modern architecture in Singapore and Malaysia during the 1960s.
- <sup>43</sup> Jaffery, "AKAA Technical Review Summary"
- <sup>44</sup> Cantacuzino, "Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitors' Centre," 142
- <sup>45</sup> Jaffery, "AKAA Technical Review Summary"
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Wimberly, Whisenand, Allison, Tong & Goo, "1983 Architects' Record" unpagged. Available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 14 July 2004.
- <sup>48</sup> This need for Tanjong Jara Hotel to be a resort of "international standards" was repeatedly stressed in the different literature.
- <sup>49</sup> Jaffery, "AKAA Technical Review Summary"
- <sup>50</sup> "Unmistakably Malay" is the new marketing slogan of Tanjong Jara Hotel. Current room rate ranges from US\$200 a night for a basic room to US\$1600 a night for a suite, see official website of Tanjong Jara Hotel, <http://www2.tanjongjararesort.com/rates.htm>, last viewed 5 December 2004.
- <sup>51</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Sheila Faria Glaser transl., (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- <sup>52</sup> Kerry Hill, "AKAA Architect's Record" available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 15 July 2004.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Master Jury, "Statement of the Award Master Jury" in Frampton, Correa and Robson eds., *Modernity and Community*, 150-152.
- <sup>55</sup> Hill, "AKAA Architect's Record."
- <sup>56</sup> Rahul Mehrotra, "2001 AKAA Technical Review Summary" available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 15 July 2004.
- <sup>57</sup> Mehrotra, "AKAA Technical Review Summary."
- <sup>58</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- <sup>59</sup> Arturo Escobar, "Constructing Nature: Elements for a poststructural political ecology" in Watts and Peet eds., *Liberation Ecologies*, 1996 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.), 49.
- <sup>60</sup> See James Steele, "A Contradiction in Terms" in *Sustainable Architecture: Principles, Paradigms, and Case Studies* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 19-58.
- <sup>61</sup> Mehrotra, "AKAA Technical Review Summary."
- <sup>62</sup> Kenneth Frampton, "Modernization and Local Culture" in Frampton, Correa and Robson eds., *Modernity and Community*, 13.
- <sup>63</sup> Hill, "AKAA Architect's Record."
- <sup>64</sup> Mehrotra, "AKAA Technical Review Summary."
- <sup>65</sup> Brian Brace Taylor, "The Displaced Moment: Intangible Qualities of Hotel Environments" *Mimar* 25 (1987): 19.
- <sup>66</sup> See the official website of Datai Resort at <http://www.thedatai.com/awards/index.html>, last viewed 13 August 2004.
- <sup>67</sup> Ellen Dunham-Jones, "Stars, Swatches, Sweets" in *Thresholds* 15 (Fall 1997): 16-21,
- <sup>68</sup> For symbolic capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171-183.
- <sup>69</sup> Bruno Stagno, "Tropicality" in Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre and Bruno Stagno eds., *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (West Sussex: Wiley Academy, 2001), 65.
- <sup>70</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 42.
- <sup>71</sup> See Cheong Kok Cheow, Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) president, paper at that seminar in "Status Paper" *Majallah Akitek* 1 (1981): 18
- <sup>72</sup> PAM, Malaysia Institute of Architects' journal.

<sup>73</sup> For proceedings of the seminar, see *Majallah Akitek 1* (1983). The event was organized by Ken Yeang, who was to be an important figure in the revival of “tropical architecture.” The event involves prominent international figures such as Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa and the Chair of Architectural Association then Alvin Boyarsky.

<sup>74</sup> For proceedings of the seminar, see Robert Powell ed., *Architecture and Identity* (Singapore and Geneva: Concept Media and AKA, 1983).

<sup>75</sup> Sibel Bozdoğan’s term for another context. See her *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002)

<sup>76</sup> John Hilley, *Malaysia: Mahathirism, Hegemony and the New Opposition* (London: Zed Books, 2001). Mahathir’s role in initiating this search for Malaysia identity in architecture was further affirmed in an interview with Tay Kheng Soon, 29 July 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Mohamad Arkoun would consider them signals as they are symbols without symbolic values. Tay Kheng Soon, *Mega-cities in the Tropics: Towards an Architecture Agenda for the Future* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asia Studies, 1989), 8-11.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Udo Kultermann, “Architecture in South-East Asia 4; Malaysia” in *Mimar 26* (1987): 68. This is confirmed in an interview with Tay Kheng Soon, 29 July 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (London: Ashgate, 2004), 170.

<sup>80</sup> *Bumiputra* is the Malay word for “son of the soil” with implication of his entitlement to special privileges in economic life in the postcolonial Malaysian state. As such the architecture of the Bumiputra Bank is symbolically loaded. For the socio-economic and political constructions of Bumiputra, see T. N. Harper, “The Advent of the ‘Bumiputera’” in *The End of Empire and the Making of Modern Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 228-273 and Lillian Tay and Ngiam eds., *80 years of Architecture in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia, 2000), 115.

<sup>81</sup> “Tectonics” is the constructional craft of architecture, with emphasis on the structural and constructional modes. See Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1995).

<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that these are buildings housing important public institutions. Dayabumi Complex houses the General Post Office, the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange and Commodity Exchange. Tubang Haji refers to the “the hajj fund” that was established to help rural Malays perform the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Putra World Trade Center comprises of a convention center and the headquarters for UMNO (United Malays National Organization), Malaysia’s ruling party since independence.

<sup>83</sup> “Dayabumi: A Project Review” in *Majallah Akitek 3* (1983): 35.

<sup>84</sup> These columns, which appear to be structural or service core are in fact hollow on the inside.

<sup>85</sup> Zainuddin Sardar, *The Consumption of Kuala Lumpur* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 131-133. Tay and Ngiam eds., *80 years of Architecture in Malaysia*, 126.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Bruce Brice Taylor, “Perspectives and Limits on Regionalism and Architectural Identity” *Mimar 19* (1986).

<sup>87</sup> Architectural “Postmodernism” is to be differentiated from postmodernism in other cultural and artistic fields. For postmodernism at large, see Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991)

<sup>88</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, “The Aga Khan Award as a Process of Thinking” in Cynthia C. Davidson ed., *Legacies for Future: Contemporary Architecture in Islamic Societies* (London and Geneva: Thames and Hudson and AKA, 1998), 153.

<sup>89</sup> Taylor, “Perspectives and Limits on Regionalism and Architectural Identity,” 20.

<sup>90</sup> This is a commonly used opposition by Kenneth Frampton, see especially his “The Owl of Minerva: An Epilogue” in *Studies of Tectonic Culture*, 377-387.

<sup>91</sup> See William J. R. Curtis, “Towards an Authentic Regionalism” *Mimar 19* (1986): 24-31.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example the functionalist critique of Bank Bumiputra in terms of its lack of structural honesty and its excessive decorative expenditure in W. Y. Chin, “Towards a National Identity in Architecture” *Majallah Akitek 1* (1981): 19-22.

<sup>93</sup> See Jimmy Lim’s comments in “A Chat on Design Trends in Malaysia” *Majallah Akitek 4* (1981): 29.

<sup>94</sup> Cheang, Kok Cheow, “Status Paper” *Majallah Akitek 1* (1981): 18.

<sup>95</sup> Tan, Eng Keong, “Introductory Speech” by President of PAM, *Majallah Akitek 1* (1983): 17.

<sup>96</sup> Steven Onn, “Discordant Notes in the Discourse,” *Majallah Akitek 1* (1983): 72.

<sup>97</sup> Tay, *Mega-Cities in the Tropics*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Sardar, *The Consumption of Kuala Lumpur*, 132.

<sup>99</sup> Ahmad Nizam Radzi, “New Directions” in Tay and Ngiam eds., *80 years of Architecture in Malaysia*, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Tay’s term in *Mega-Cities in the Tropics*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Suha Özkan, “Introduction: Regionalism within Modernism” in Powell ed., *Regionalism in Architecture*, 8.

<sup>103</sup> For a critique of the regionalism expounded in the seminar “Regionalism and Identity,” see Shanti Jayewardene, “Review of Regionalism in Architecture” *Mimar 25* (1987), 78-80. For a detailed critique of regionalism, which is not within the scope of this paper, see Keith L. Eggner, “Placing Resistance: A Critique of Critical Regionalism” *JAE 55*, no. 4 (2002): 228-237.

<sup>104</sup> William Curtis, “Towards an Authentic Regionalism” *Mimar 19* (1986): 25. It should be noted that Curtis’ presentation at the 1985 seminar is largely quoted from the cited article in *Mimar*.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>108</sup> William Curtis, “Regionalism in Architecture” in Robert Powell ed., *Regionalism in Architecture*, 76.

<sup>109</sup> Özkan, “Cultivating Architecture,” 167.

<sup>110</sup> Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political cultures in Indonesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 199.

<sup>111</sup> Tzonis, Lefaivre and Stagno eds., *Tropical Architecture*, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Tay Kheng Soon, 29 July 2004 and interview with Jimmy C. S. Lim, 15 August 2004.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Peter Bellwood, "Southeast Asia Before History," in Nicholas Tarling ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume 1, Part 1: From Early Times to c. 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55-136.

<sup>114</sup> James J. Fox ed., *Inside Austronesian Houses: Perspectives on Domestic Designs for Living* (Canberra: Australia National University, 1993)

<sup>115</sup> Jumsai includes Japan as part of Austronesia, which is not consistent with the archaeological and linguistic scholarship. Sumet Jumsai, *Naga: Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988)

<sup>116</sup> Sumet Jumsai, "The West Pacific Region versus Punk Architecture" *Mimar* 19 (1986): 22-23.

<sup>117</sup> Southeast Asia is a World-War-II invention arising out of military strategic needs. For the origin of Southeast Asia, see Benedict Anderson, "Introduction" in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 1-28.

<sup>118</sup> Sumet Jumsai, "Case Study 4 – Thailand: House on Stilts, Pointer to South East Asia Cultural Origins" in Powell ed., *Architecture and Identity*, 55-61.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>120</sup> Tay Kheng Soon's remark in "Panel Discussion 4" in Powell ed., *Architecture and Identity*, 86.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Tay Kheng Soon, 29 July 2004.

<sup>122</sup> Rudolph de Koninck's phrase, cited by Tay Kheng Soon during interview on 29 July 2004.

<sup>123</sup> Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture*, 190-205.

<sup>124</sup> The house is also known as Rudinara, coined from the Dr Salinger and his wife's name. See Rudin Salinger, *Rudinara: The Story of the Handmade House* (Malaysia: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2007)

<sup>125</sup> Hana Alamuddin, "1998 Technical Review Summary," available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 15 July 2004

<sup>126</sup> Jimmy C. S. Lim, "AKAA 1998 Architect's Record" available on [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), last accessed on 14 July 2004.

<sup>127</sup> Alamuddin, "1998 Technical Review Summary." For a description of the activities, see <http://www.magiccarpetjournals.com/rudinara.htm>, last accessed on 22 January 2007.

<sup>128</sup> Lim, "AKAA 1998 Architect's Record."

<sup>129</sup> Interestingly enough, the triangles were rumored to be well-received by Zaha Hadid, a jury member for the 1998 AKA. Michael Sorkin wrote that "... the house by Jimmy C. S. Lim in Malaysia, a fine but less than extraordinary work that continues the award's long-standing tradition of recognizing vaguely folkloric houses for the better classes. One of my sources tells me that Zaha, who apparently saw shades of a Proun in the plan juxtaposition of two triangles, was a strong advocate for this project." in "The Borders of Islamic Architecture" in *Metropolis* (December 1998). available at [http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_1298/de98bor.htm](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_1298/de98bor.htm), last viewed 5 December 2004.

<sup>130</sup> Alamuddin, "1998 Technical Review Summary."

<sup>131</sup> In fact, this is the only building designed by Jimmy C. S. Lim that uses such traditional techniques.

<sup>132</sup> Lim, "AKAA 1998 Architect's Record."

<sup>133</sup> The claims that Malaysia has a systematic forest management that would ensure that timber remains a sustainable resource have been contested. See, for example, PAM brush with UIA over the use of tropical hardwood as documented in Jimmy C. S. Lim, "Foreign Architects must support Malaysia's Timber Policy" in *Berita Akitek: PAM Newsletter*, 1992: 10, 1-2.

<sup>134</sup> Alamuddin, "1998 Technical Review Summary."

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Jimmy C. S. Lim, 15 August 2004.

<sup>136</sup> Lim, "AKAA 1998 Architect's Record."

<sup>137</sup> Hillary Chiew, "Leatherback Turtle- Decline of the giants" in *The Star*, 1 July 2003.

<sup>138</sup> Conversations with Janita Han, undergraduate student at National University of Singapore, in 2002.