

# Transfer From Vernacular

Architectural Workshop in Malaysia and Singapore '98

Takeo Muraji

When we think of architectural and urban design, it is important to understand the local context in terms of its culture, society and geography through direct experience. Direct experience would provide stimuli for design rather than mere abstract information. We can produce interesting proposals by taking the "vernacular" as a strong keyword against the modernism that has been reproduced *ad infinitum* throughout the world. From this perspective, we embarked on an architectural workshop from 17th to 23rd July 1998 in Malaysia and Singapore.

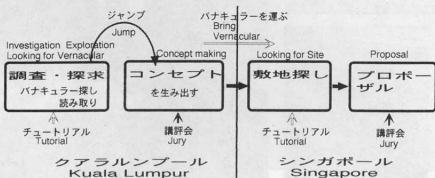
## Aspect of the Programme

The tutors involved in this workshop were Noriyuki Tajima, Hiroshi Yanagihara and I. William Lim in Singapore, Frank Ling and Pilar Gonzales Herraiz in Kuala Lumpur also supported our workshop. The participants include Japanese students, young architects, a businessman and Dr. Tokio Suzuki, as an observer.

The programme was as follows:

- 1) Investigation of the vernacular in KL.
- 2) Analysis and formulation of concept
- 3) Travel to Singapore to look for suitable sites
- 4) Conceal design proposal in Singapore with the concept formulated in KL.

## ワークショップのデザインプロセス DESIGN PROCESS





Visiting Jimmy Lim's residence. Jimmy Lim and Frank Ling supported us.



We had tutorials at restaurants, hotels, buses, etc.



Briefing about architecture in Singapore at William Lim's office.



Final jury at LaSalle College of the Arts which William Lim and his students participated.

### *Investigation of the Vernacular in KL*

In KL, we visited various places including Jimmy Lim's residence and a traditional kampong. Jimmy Lim, himself presented the ideas of his residence, which was very interesting for us in terms of thinking of the vernacular as architectural response to the environment. After the visits, the participants individually investigated the city in various personal ways, conducting interviews, collecting materials, taking photos, making sketches and shopping.

They were interested in how people shop and eat in the city. Water elements, advertisement boards, windows, boundaries, fruits, etc were studied. It was a lot of hard work not only for the participants but also for the tutors in the workshop including Frank and Pilar. A participant even called me in the hotel to talk about the project at 7:00 o'clock in the morning.

### *Looking for Suitable Sites in Singapore*

When we travelled to Singapore, William Lim briefed us about the architectural situation in Singapore. We then visited some shophouses, the *Lau Pa Sat*, some housing flats and a community centre. At night, we were invited to a gathering at William Lim's place where we chatted with some Singaporean architects and students. There was an exchange of slide presentations. The presentations were rather different: the Japanese showed design processes while the Singaporeans showed beautiful pictures of completed projects.

The next day was designated for personal investigation. The participants struggled to find suitable sites for their respective concepts.

### *Jury*

On the last day, we invited William Lim and his students for a presentation at the LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts. We had a fruitful discussion, which was meaningful not only for the participants but also for the tutors. Various issues were raised in the projects that were presented, such as the relationship between disorder and order comparing the situation in KL and in Singapore, the meaning of waste materials, the notion of boundaries, the nature of street patterns, etc. I appreciate very much William Lim's comment that the participants successfully explored various views of what the vernacular constituted in their projects. I feel that it is very important to think of the meaning of the vernacular and to think of how it can be transferred to a contemporary situation.

### *Re-Recognition of the Vernacular*

A re-recognition of the vernacular has been argued for, as a response to problems of modernist architecture in 80s. Now after the Cold War it is increasingly important to understand and appreciate cultural differences and to keep a balance between localisation and globalisation. It is thus more cogent to understand the meaning of the vernacular from various points of view.



#### *Takeo Muraji*

architect, BA, ME, AA Grad Dip (Honours), was born in Kyoto in 1956. He graduated from Tama Art University, Graduate School of Tokyo Metropolitan University and worked in General Construction Company for 10 years. From 1991 to 1996, he studied at the AA in London and subsequently taught with Cedric Price. After coming back to Japan, he established Muraji Takeo Architectural Laboratory, and is now teaching at both Tama Art and Tokyo Denki Universities.