12. Golden Triangle Area Study

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In the spring of 1985 a design workshop was held concurrently at MIT, the Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) and the Universiti Teknology Malaysia (UTM) that concentrated on various sites within the new development in Kuala Lumpur known as the Golden Triangle. In all about thirty students from the three institutions took part in the program. The students developed ideas about solutions to the problems produced by rapid high-rise development. Their work was displayed concurrently with the conference, and it is that work that is the subject of the session reproduced here.

1. View of high-rise development along the Jalan Sultan Ismail, Kuala Lumpur

JULIAN BEINART: Every place develops its own historical and cultural context and every building reflects that context, even if the technology used to build it is entirely borrowed. Asian cities, including Kuala Lumpur, have been accused of mimicking European and American cities, and undeniably they do use the curtain walls of Mies and the prefabricated building systems developed by the Germans, and admittedly the buildings that result look very like buildings in the West. But the minute a building is inhabited, the space around it, decorations on it, trees nearby it begin to change its character.

Just as development is not immune from the influences of history, culture, and environment, so it is not uninfluenced by the regulative and administrative framework that governs it. Architects and other creators of the built environment all have to learn to work within an administrative framework. Professor Johnson has already illustrated how public opinion can modify the attitudes of administrators. Lim Chong Keat has suggested that the administrative framework can be influenced to implement ideas.

How do areas like the Golden Triangle come about? The answer seems to be that they come about when investment opportunities are no longer attractive in the city core, and that this most often happens in places where plots are small, that is, where the original city started. Since cities often develop at the confluence of rivers or other waterways, that adds a further stricture to their development. In Kuala Lumpur the government sector was also very close by—in this case, across the river.

An investment boom often begins with the building of an international hotel usually in the vicinity of upper-income housing. Because virgin land is not often available there, low-density developed land, preferably nearest to the high-income sector, is the next to be developed. This pattern has been well documented all over the world. In the late 1930's, classic studies of American cities found that the sectoral growth of high investment always followed the direction of high-income residential areas, which in their turn were determined by conditions such as climate, water, and altitude Development leapfrogs over a hill into a new area, where villas on large plots of land are replaced by denser and taller buildings, constructed, however, on the already existing infrastructure. The prestigious environment created by the international hotel is then followed in order by prestige offices and condominiums, all reacting to the pressures of the market. It is obvious that this happens very rapidly. People describe the 1970's boom here as if it had just come out of nowhere.

Always present is a curious separation of government civic functions, both central and local, from commerce. In formerly colonial countries. the older, colonial city retains the functions of government, but that function is not readily apparent because the capital buildings are kept at a distance from the rest of the city. This is a phenomenon of modern capital planning: little or no overlapping between governmental and commercial functions. Washington is only now being rescued from this division by the spread of commerce into the areas of government and of paragovernmental agencies out into the city.

In line with this phenomenon the Golden Triangle contains no major civic buildings and no religious buildings of any consequence—no monuments, no formal buildings. They have both been replaced by hotel lobbies. The Shangri-La lobby makes a curious public place for human contact,

2. New high-rise construction, Shangri-La Hotel in the background

however. It is monumental in scale—it must be the largest air-conditioned space in this whole area—but that very fact (and this is not a phenomenon restricted to Kuala Lumpur) robs the streets of public life. It is a phenomenon encouraged by the promoters like the Hyatt Regency chain, which in all its buildings goes to great lengths to make the interior seem more real than the outside world. The totally controlled, conditioned, policed environment, as opposed to the less safe, more classless, more random life on the street is a phenomenon we can see everywhere, but it is particularly noticeable in Kuala Lumpur because sidewalks and street life have so completely disappeared. Under current bylaws, even hawkers are put in tall buildings, again to screen the participants and control behavior, as in an airport. In the United States many argue that this phenomenon has been brought about by the complete breakdown in government's ability to enforce the law, which has led to demands for private police forces and posses to control restricted spaces.

The boom phenomenon is also propelled by the notion that building must be done quickly before investment opportunities disappear As a result the speed of development completely outstrips the ability of the public sector to act, especially considering the unpredictability of the market

All this is not new, and one or two precedents might provide guidance for action The three stages of the commercial boom I mentioned can be demonstrated by the development of Shanghai—to give an example I happen to have handy The original settlement on the Yangtze River showed a marvelous continuity. In it was built what Fodor's guide called the most palatial hotel in the Orient, once the Palace Hotel, now the Peace Hotel; nearby were the racecourse and the villas of the rich. Nanking Road was the major commercial area. In the second stage, the commercial boom began with the building of another hotel called the Park Hotel It in turn spawned new department stores around it The third stage includes a Russian-built exhibition center, and right next door a new $150 million hotel complex built by Portman.

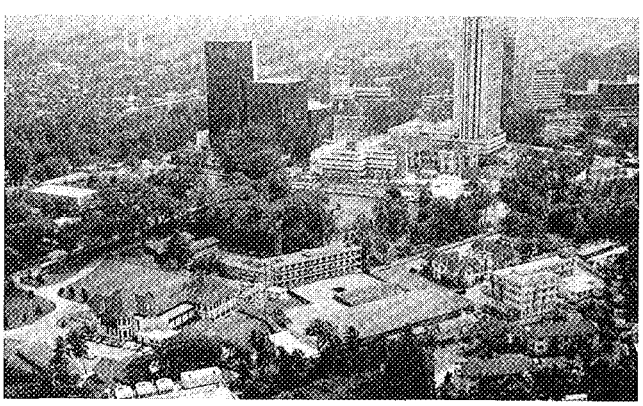
The other examples that come to mind are largely from the nineteenth century, when the rapid expansion of cities was a relatively new phenomenon Then expansions were conceived as a total idea, however, and carefully planned There are many of these plans, and you probably know them all very well. The late-nineteenth century expansion of Barcelona, for example, used a totally integrated solution, the result of a competition, in which the streets are as significant as the subdivision. The large square blocks and chamfered corners were subdivided into speculative apartment blocks, with shops at the bottom. But the continuity is precise, and the relationship between the built form and the public space is continuous.

Perhaps the largest real-estate speculation in the nineteenth century was in Vienna, but there again the expansion was totally controlled and part of an integrated package. The river was dammed up at the same time; public transportation was introduced into the scheme, and the whole composition centered on the streets—they were not just randomly established traffic connectors. The quality they sought was built right into the environment. So were the amenities, because the speculators believed that they would lose on their investment if the amenities were not maintained. That is why along the street new civic institutions—the theater, the university, and the city hall—can be found with apartment blocks next to them. All were part of a carefully designed investment strategy that avoided what we have come to recognize as the costs of the boom phenomenon

Finally we have the biggest boomtown in history, Chicago. Its cycles of growth and decline from 1840 onward resulted in a series of booms, each of them stimulated by a very specific event. the building of the canal linking the Mississippi to the Great Lakes; the advent of the railroad; the rebuilding of the city after the fire; the end of the Civil War; and finally the skyscraper. Urban land speculation has never been more out of control than it was in Chicago during these booms, and in every case the bust that followed was equally dramatic. Chicago has a loose, neutral grid which allows development to occur as quickly and as willfully as it can, and it was not until after the boom had become apparent that someone finally suggested making a plan. This was the famous Burnham Plan, commissioned not by a public agency but by the Chicago Businessmen's Club, which had probably, just like the developers in Vienna, decided that unless some amenities were salvaged, land in the city center would soon lose its value altogether.

This brings us back to the situation in Kuala Lumpur, where similar boom conditions suggest that either the public or the private sector will have to intervene very dramatically if the market viability of this area, let alone any civic or moral value that one might have regarding public standards in the city, is to be preserved. You can argue on the basest economic principles, if need be, that unless the amenities are retained, eventually values will drop, as investors leave the area behind and look somewhere else

The rapid growth in the area has resulted in an increase of density in three different ways. (1) First, in the shophouse area population was increased, either by adding a floor to the existing buildings or by rebuilding completely. (2) In the area where the villas were, density was increased by adding fringe construction, generally of modest height (five or six stories), along the roads That modesty, however, was only because the demand was not yet great in the sixties when these buildings were put up. (3) Finally, in the seventies, density was increased by the construction of tall buildings on the villa sites. This last step was the most significant in creating the Golden Triangle Area image, and for that reason it was examined in detail in the studios we held that studied the Golden Triangle's problems.



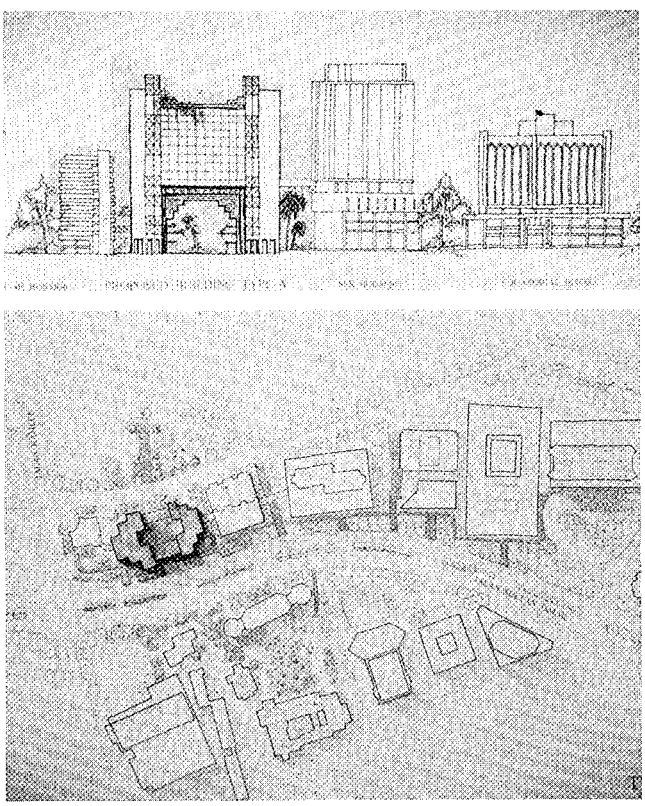
3 High-rise buildings with old colonial villas in the foreground

RONALD LEWCOCK: Let us now turn to the projects produced by the students in the studio Their solutions are necessarily different from those that grow out of the realities of professional work, but educational exploration can nonetheless serve many purposes by bringing up questions that are not ordinarily asked.

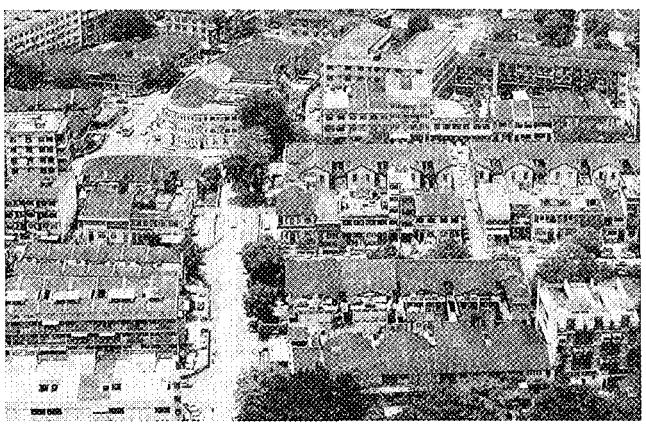
What struck us all as most curious about the Golden Triangle area was that the new tall buildings were in many cases set back from the road just as the villas they replaced had been; sometimes they even used the same driveway. This had two results: a visually and functionally weak link between the tall building and the street, and the cutting up of the sidewalk by access and egress roads into each site. The combination destroyed the pedestrian sidewalk along the street, a situation exacerbated by planting shrubs in the center of the sidewalks in an attempt to beautify the roadways. It was difficult to make one's way up and down the sidewalk with all these roadblocks. Then the trees that had once lined the roads were cut down so the streets could be widened, and that weakened the visual and functional strength of the street still further, both as a part of the city's life and as a foil to the high buildings. Each building withdrew into itself, independant of its neighbors and of society. The villa had, of course, also been a private place of meeting; its replication in buildings such as hotels that one might have expected to perform more public functions also posed problems

It is not surprising that in the studios both in the Malaysian universities and at MIT, the students often concentrated on combatting this excessive building isolation. Some designed extended lobbies reaching from the buildings toward the street; others designed new buildings, generally lower in scale, in the space between the tall buildings and the sidewalks. Often, these schemes suggested lateral links between the buildings, and, in a few, continuous covered pedestrian malls for some distance to refocus the life of the area on the street and the sidewalks. The proposals for tying the high buildings to the sidewalks were generally accompanied by suggestions for replanting trees along the roadways to provide shade for pedestrians and an "umbrella" to link the tall buildings by a bridge of a more comprehensible scale and a living element to a living element. To make space to plant these trees and for a number of other reasons, including the elimination of truck use, the width of the roads was reduced. An alternative truck route will obviously have to be provided.

The problem of the driveways cutting through the sidewalks also had to be dealt with Two different approaches were suggested: one developed access from back service roads that paralleled the main streets; the other constructed a series of transverse roads that formed a fairly tight grid to provide vehicular and pedestrian fluidity throughout the area. It is in concept not unlike Leon's Krier's proposal for the new quarters in Luxembourg.



4 Student designs for proposed buildings and pedestrian malls

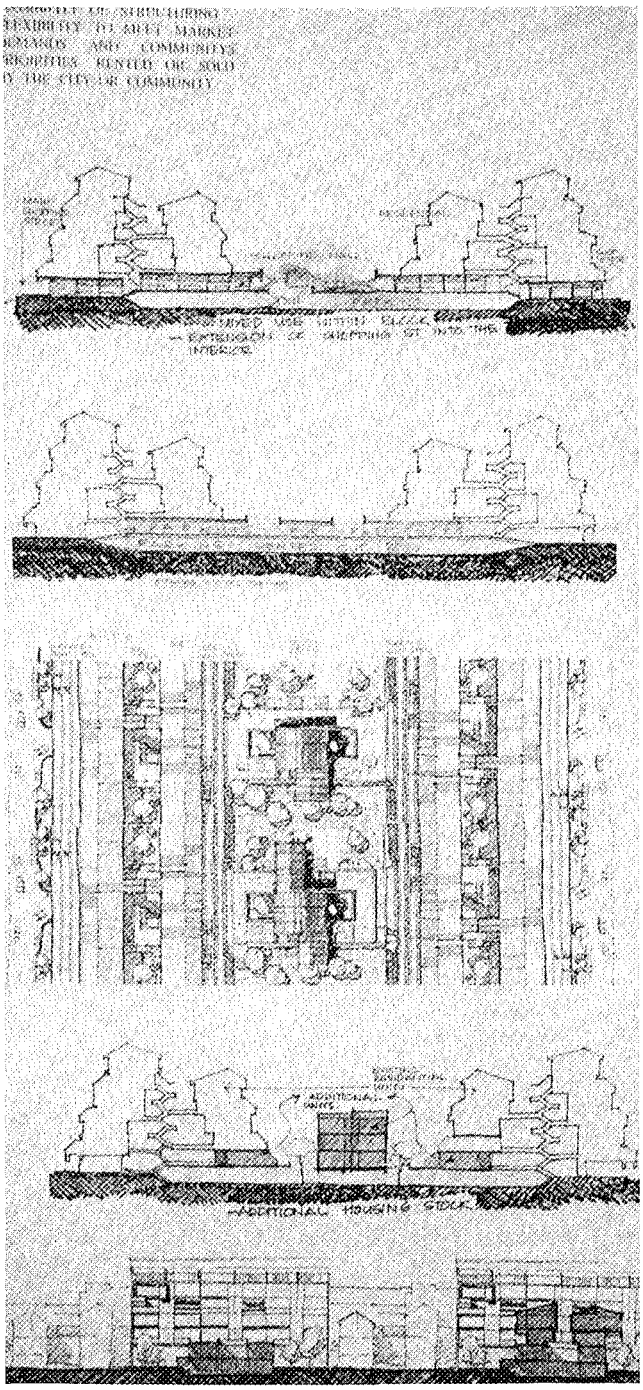


5 Aerial view of shophouses

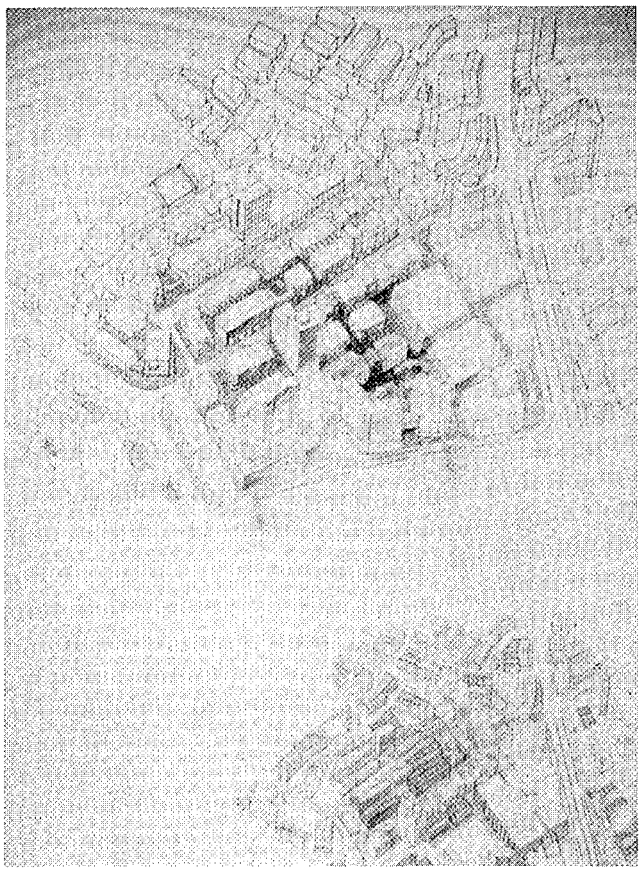
P. KASI: The hot, wet climate of Malaysia produced, in the countryside, the traditional timber house raised on stilts with its pitched roof and, in the city, the shophouse with its veranda that fronts onto the shop so that pedestrians can walk under its shelter. The two floors above are used as dwellings by the people who own or work in the shops below. The windows are large and well shaded, but not glazed, blinds are used to keep out sun and rain The colonial buildings also adopted some of these semi-open spaces to take care of climate. The old villas used ventilation slots above the windows. The later buildings, even office buildings, that developed still followed the traditional urban architecture with the colonnade at the base and metal sunshades. Finally the Golden Triangle Area introduced the curtain wall, partly for reasons of prestige, since it advertised the ability of the owner to spend money on energy Screens are added to shade the glass. The large trees on which street activity depends for both ventilation and shade were all cut down, and office workers in the Golden Triangle Area developments have none. One area in the Golden Triangle is still used as a makeshift market, but though hawkers assemble in it, it has lost much of its quality, and there is talk of shifting it to a floor in one of the tall buildings.

The proposals made in the studio assumed that all the buildings now there would remain and that something had to

be done to upgrade the environment for pedestrians and provide shelter against rain and sun. Archways and colonnades were suggested to encourage the return of tradesmen to the area who could provide services to the workers there—cobblers to mend their shoes, for example—without incurring the high rents that the area now requires. The pedestrian way, it has been suggested, could be on the first floor above ground level, with the ground floor used for access in and out of the buildings. In addition to providing shade, it also would create a lively atmosphere and allow people to use the facilities in other buildings. Some of the advantages of the shophouse environment could thereby be revived. Connecting some of the multi-storied structures was also tried in some of the designs



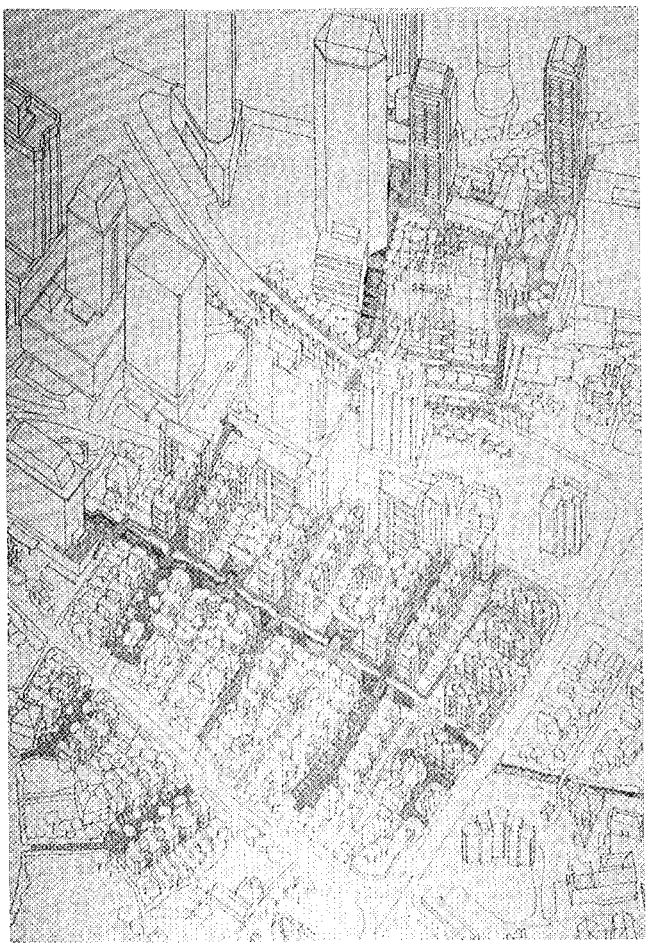
6 *Shophouse-area development proposal showing dwellings, shops, markets and parking facilities*



7 *Shophouse-area development*

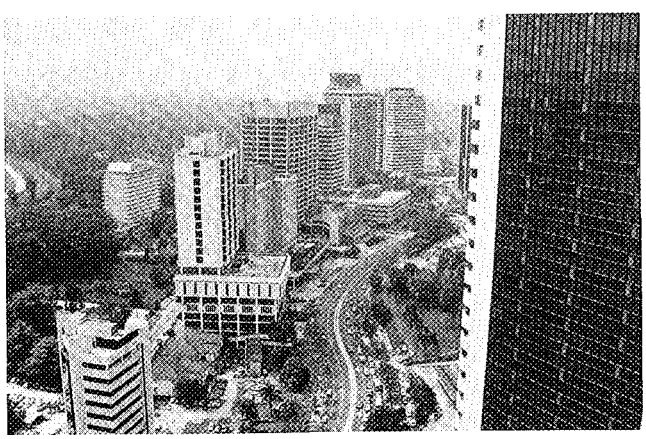
JULIAN BEINART: The second exercise the studio dealt with were possible major interventions that might give the area some significance. The students from the MIT studio suggested strategies such as connecting the hotel lobbies and the streets using the precedent of the Strada Nuova in Genoa, for instance, where public and private spaces are interlocked to make a great street. One of them used one of the few large sites left on Sultan Ismail, the Saint Mary's School site, to do this. He retained the school buildings and transferred the development potential of the site to its edges, where he put new condominium towers with public parking facilities under the platform. He designed an open space between the school buildings. The change in elevation allowed a street crossover, and he suggested it cross to a new housing development of high-density maisonnettes, with its own water course on the racecourse side of Sultan Ismail. Yet another student created a parallel access front running from north to south, cutting across the existing racecourse, which suggests the possibility of linking it to the major shophouse road and pointing it toward the kampung on the other side of the river, thus tying two low-income environments, the shophouses and the kampung, together by a new vertical access. The access is non-vehicular, with public transportation alongside.

The river was regarded as an under-utilized asset, and some had the idea of using the river, the racecourse, and a nearby hill as a green recreational system for the whole city. The racecourse would be a civic park, with library, mosque, and other public buildings; housing could be built around it, and the whole center part reticulated with roads and vegetation.



8 Student proposal for redevelopment of St Mary's site and area behind the Holiday Inn

The Golden Triangle has gone through the sort of boom that leads to decline unless its amenities are soon upgraded, through both public and private action. The racecourse area is the signal opportunity for transforming this area, and I suspect that it will not be done through private-sector intervention alone. Municipal and state action will be required. If the racecourse is delivered over to the same kind of private speculative development, the cycle of boom and bust will simply be perpetuated. Now is the time to reconstitute this area into something approximating a city, rather than a low-quality commercial enterprise.



9. View of area as it is today Holiday Inn is in the background, race course at far left

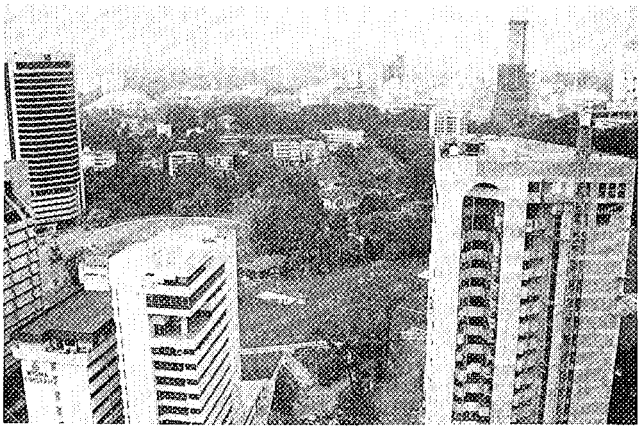
10 View of race course area

RONALD LEWCOCK: The question of finding an identity for the city revolves around the same issues as those considered in conservation. One has to provide a sense of reassurance through familiar association and to retain the best surviving features of the area, including the natural vegetation. One of the most destructive aspects of rapid construction is the wholesale cutting down of trees it always seems to involve. In this case the trees had made the area one of the most beautiful in the city. Many of the student proposals included considerable tree-planting, not only for the reasons already cited, but to reconstitute this identity.

Conservation suggestions also included retention and conservation of buildings for historical or aesthetic reasons. A few of the old villas are candidates for this treatment, notably Abdul Rahman's house, now a museum, and the villa that is now the Coq d'Or Restaurant. The shophouse areas and dense residential areas adjoining them are also candidates for conservation, but in this case represent, not preserving buildings for their aesthetic value, but preserving a system for the amenities, continuity, and a sense of identity through familiarity that it supplies Arguably preserving this whole quarter of the Golden Triangle Area would not be a bad idea. The studios at both MIT and UTM recommended it, though not in a form that would stultify the area. They would rehabilitate and upgrade the old shophouses and retain the five-foot passageways, extending them into a grid for a purely pedestrian area. To achieve this, every tenth or twelfth shophouse in long blocks would have to be demolished to open up transverse routes. The grid was further extended by incorporating what once had been service lanes between the back-to-back shophouses and giving them new roles as a series of shopping malls.

The possibility of reacting to increased land values by modestly increasing building height was investigated. The shops could then expand upward into another floor, and the residential accommodation above could be extended to three or four dwelling units above each shop. To do this, some schemes proposed amalgamating a number of adjoining buildings to share vertical access Until public transport could be improved to the point of reducing or even eliminating the use of private cars, it was proposed that additional off-street parking be provided on the periphery and tied with the ends of the circulation grid. Alternatively, parking could be provided in transverse bays with the shophouse blocks When public transport should have been developed to the

point that cars could be eliminated altogether, the parking areas could provide additional shopping space. On market days they could already perform that role by temporarily denying automobile access in the area However practical these solutions may or may not be, they deal with important questions.



11 New construction in Kuala Lumpur Plaza Atrium (T R Hamzah & Yang, architects) on right

P. KASI: There is still considerable green space adjoining the Golden Triangle Area, but it is not very well integrated, accessible, or usable The riverfront is not developed; neither is the racecourse, which comprises a significant 6 or 7 percent of total available open space Many suggestions have been made for its use after the racecourse has been moved, ranging from schemes by the Turf Club to develop it themselves to suggestions that it be turned into a park. Since the area surrounding the racecourse is still predominantly residential, a park would be a suitable use, especially in view of the fact that all the rest of the green space in the city is only accessible by car. Some of the surrounding space could then be used for high-rise condominiums, to complement office development and reduce commuting. If it is planned correctly, the additional housing need not eat up the green space. One could built interlocking areas with both commercial and residential spaces, so that car parks could be shared The commercial layer of the buildings would use them in the daytime and the residential layers at night New York's Central Park gives you an idea of the density to which the surround could be taken without damage to the actual park. The important point is to find a way to induce residential development near office blocks and develop local urban parks rather than large metropolitan recreation areas on the fringe.

Discussion

COMMENT: The idea of using the racecourse for future development horrifies me. It is about the only piece of decent land that is left in this part of Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore we long ago decided that we should build on all the bad land first, and keep the good land until we have learned how to build. I suggest you do the same I am sure you can find acres of land that one could build on. Save the good land until we have all learned how to build a city.

On a detailed point, the idea of tearing down every tenth or twelfth shophouse to build a transverse road allows too short a distance between interruptions. Has any study been done to determine what the optimal city block might be?

JULIAN BEINART. On the question of preserving the racecourse as an open space, many of the projects agree with you. In practice, however, the only place I know of in the world where a racecourse has in fact been transformed into a public park is Shanghai—it is across the street from what used to be the Park Hotel and is now the most significant public open space in the city. It was not very carefully done; few traces of the racecourse are maintained, and it is difficult to remember it was there. The grandstand building, already enormous, has been added to and transformed, and is now an administration building. Whether one should build on all the difficult land and keep the few good pieces for parks I am not convinced is necessarily a good strategy, especially in Kuala Lumpur where there is so much luxuriant vegetation.

P. KASI: Many have questioned the rationale of having selected the Golden Triangle Area for study, there are many others that would have served the purpose as well. The reason was that this particular exercise was to involve three teaching institutions, and therefore we needed to find an area that has a common base among the three The other areas were local to a particular place and a particular people. We are under no illusions, however, about how simple it is to implement schemes, and we have never considered the suggestions we have come up with to be definite or even feasible proposals. This can happen or that should happen is beyond the scope of any academic exercise, which merely seeks to consider things that might prove useful.

KEN YEANG: The objective of this conference has been to elicit ideas about urban design. Two years ago, we debated what Malaysian architecture was; now we should be expanding that debate to the question of what the Malaysian city should be. If we continue nit-picking about details—what to do with this shophouse or that racecourse, we will end up with a set of very fine buildings, and no comprehensible whole. I would like to ask those involved in the study, what conception of the Malaysian city they used, and what definitive, concrete suggestions they can offer for creating it.

JULIAN BEINART: I do not think any one person should be allow to implement an overarching philosophy for a whole city anymore. The city is made up of those things you regard as nit-picking. I do not regard solutions for a set of shophouses or a single quarter as nit-picking at all; we obviously differ in our view about the way cities are built Very few cities are built based on some grand strategy for the whole place. One can have a strategy for redevelopment, but it does not need to amount to a single vision. The single grand gesture is an architectural, not an urban, solution.

I can think of many things that would add drama to the city. Fixing up the river would be one. Not many cities have allowed a river to be degraded quite to the extent yours has One should forget about parking and transportation systems on top of the river It should be kept as a waterway through the center of the city Secondly, the racetrack is hardly a nit-picking item. It is the largest piece of open space in the Golden Triangle area. It could be a dramatic and useful addition to the city; some of the ways have been indicated in the student projects.

RONALD LEWCOCK: Successful cities do have systems, and one ought to have some fundamental idea of what the

system is before approaching a city, for it is from the system that the sense of place comes Louis Mumford thought that the greatest city in the world was Amsterdam, because it did not have a single structure that was not accounted for by an incredible system that goes right through it and gives character to every part In the three studios we tried to work out a comparable system for Kuala Lumpur, and to provide remedial suggestions for problems as we came across them. In the short time that we had to work on this problem, less than three months, it was the only reasonable approach

JOHN DAVIDSON: I do not want to appear to be telling Kuala Lumpur how to handle its problems, but I have known the city for a long time, and, regardless of differences, I do think that some of the experience we had in Melbourne is applicable. Certainly, it is a different city, but it struggled along for many years without any planning, other than simple legislative, statutory, zoning measures which set down what could be built where. The picture did not change, as Peter has indicated, until an act was passed which enabled the planning ministry and the planning authorities to act in terms of objectives rather than statutes as a tool for land-use control. That act changed the whole direction of planning. Three basic options were considered for the future of the whole metropolitan area: the choices were centralized development, dispersed development, or incremental development. The community then debated those choices for quite a time, advisory committees were set up, the Institute of Architects and the Planning Institute were all involved The decision was finally reached to use incremental development as our basic model for the whole metropolitan area. The central city then became simply one of the precincts within the whole metropolitan area which had to be planned out in terms of that objective. Giving power to government agencies to act within the guidelines set down for those objectives was the key to success. If there is no government action, not just in planning the area, but in the infrastructure, then there is no hope of ever achieving the objectives The act must enable all government agencies to work together The private sector will only respond if guidelines are set down and incentives for development provided. At the moment in the Golden Triangle, there is development for development's sake, and none of the public and private mix either in planning or implementation that makes things happen

PETER JOHNSON. We are struck by how much secrecy is involved in the development process here in Kuala Lumpur, bred I assume by the intense competition for land. That secrecy means that the public cannot play the role it plays in Australia, at least not yet. When the rate of development has slowed down, that will probably change, and the public sector will then have more opportunity to debate and use public pressure.

JULIAN BEINART: The debates we have had here do not differ much from one I heard eighteen months ago at a conference we organized in and on Boston. The developer of International Place, a very large, tall complex designed by Philip Johnson, was asked by a panelist why the building had to be so high, and how much profit he would have made if the building had been kept to, say, twelve floors The developer had to acknowledge, of course, that he would have made a reasonable enough profit at that height, but he claimed that by building it higher he had also provided benefits to the city In some ways, he had a point: he was generating jobs, taxes, and other things as well, because the city has now recognized that the market for office buildings is so intense that it can milk developers for certain public advantages which it was never able to do before. This developer, and many others like him, is providing open space—in this case a public atrium; he has signed an agreement that he will only employ labor from the Boston area; he is paying what is known there as "linkage taxation," a percentage of the total cost which goes into a fund to provide public housing elsewhere in the city. The city's hope is to distribute wealth from the center to the poorer areas of the city. At the same time, these tall towers will damage the quality of the central area I am not arguing here either for or against tall office buildings. I am simply pointing out that the debate is neither new nor restricted to Kuala Lumpur; it is also going on in a city that Leon Krier would surely categorize as "mature."

The other comment I want to make refers to a remark someone made here that would have been more useful if this conference had dealt with the realities of investment—land values and the influence of private development. I disagree I think that it is impossible for a conference such as this one to be that specific, and I would argue that its value has been precisely its freedom to deal both in conceptual and in practical models. We have been very fortunate to have had speakers able systematically to build models from basic ideas. Education is as much the business of building up arguments as it is about assembling their content.

I will end with a few suggestions, both theoretical and practical, that came to me over the past few days The first is to propose a research program on the form the tropical city, or if you prefer, the Southeast Asian city, or the low-energy city, should assume. The West has a tradition of designing city forms, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which it has rapidly and selectively exported. One immediately thinks of Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine or Mumford's Garden Cities (somehow the models of Cerda or Tony Garnier or Leonidov didn't travel so well). The fact that fragments of these have turned up here sixty or seventy years later is indicative of their tenacity. I cannot think of any generative idea of such power that exists for the modern tropical city, so why not make one? It would be very exciting research task and I think it can be done.

I do not think Kuala Lumpur has realized its potential as a city. It could be a splendid city. There are not many great cities in the world, and maybe Kuala Lumpur will become one of them someday whether or not that happens, it could certainly be a much better city than it is It has the resources needed—nature, people, and relative wealth.

The central area, particularly the Golden Triangle, has gone through a boom in which private development has outstripped the provision of infrastructure. I think we all agree that the public sector should contribute to this infrastructure and that urban planning should deal with the design of the infrastructure as well as with public/private relationships. Unlike architecture, urban design is concerned with long periods of time and multiple clients The state and local government should undertake a professional urban design plan for the Golden Triangle area. a generative metaphor for the area, if I had to choose one as a result of this conference, would be something like an "urban garden." It

would be a place that has both intensity and relaxation close at hand, vegetation and buildings, open and built areas, places for sharing and gathering. An urban garden, as I conceive it, is possible in Kuala Lumpur because of the luxuriance and beauty of the natural vegetation upon which any future city should be based.

In the first stage of such a plan, one should concentrate on the streets and sidewalks and the gaps and the connections between the buildings. One could then begin to think about the great opportunities in the still unbuilt areas—the racecourse, the river—and about guidelines for future buildings. The plan would take what already has been built for granted and develop around these I can think of more great public spaces in the world that have mediocre buildings around them than ones that have great ones. A good urban system—in fact, a good architectural tradition—is one that absorbs mediocrity and does not have to depend upon greatness alone for its effect. There will be some grand parts, there will be some humble parts; there will be some unfinished parts. That is how splendid cities are built.

KEN YEANG: I would like to direct some comments to the Malaysians here, because when the conference is over and all the overseas participants have vanished, they are the ones who will remain and therefore are presumably the people on whom the conference will have the most impact

Planning involves knowing where you are now, as well as knowing where you want to go and how to get there. In 1983, we held the first of the series of annual design discourses, of which this is the third. Our concern then was the quest for a Malaysian architecture, or more generally the search for a Malaysian identity which would provide some terms of reference for an architecture. Between that discourse and the next, this quest for a Malaysian architecture turned into the quest for an architecture with a Malaysian theme. It seemed a good idea because it was less deterministic and allowed for experimentation. It certainly influenced my work, for some of my experiments today are a direct result of that first design discourse

Now, in 1985, between the second discourse and the third we have gone from a Malaysian theme in architecture to what has emerged from this colloquium, which is the quest for an entire Malaysian city. Julian prefers us to be more generic and call it the tropical city, but whatever it is called, it seems a good enough indication of where we now think we want to go In the same way that the quest for a Malaysian architecture became a quest for architecture with a Malaysian theme, most likely the tropical city or Malaysian city will turn into a city with a Malaysian theme or a city with a tropical theme. That defines where we want to go Now we have to find out how to get there.