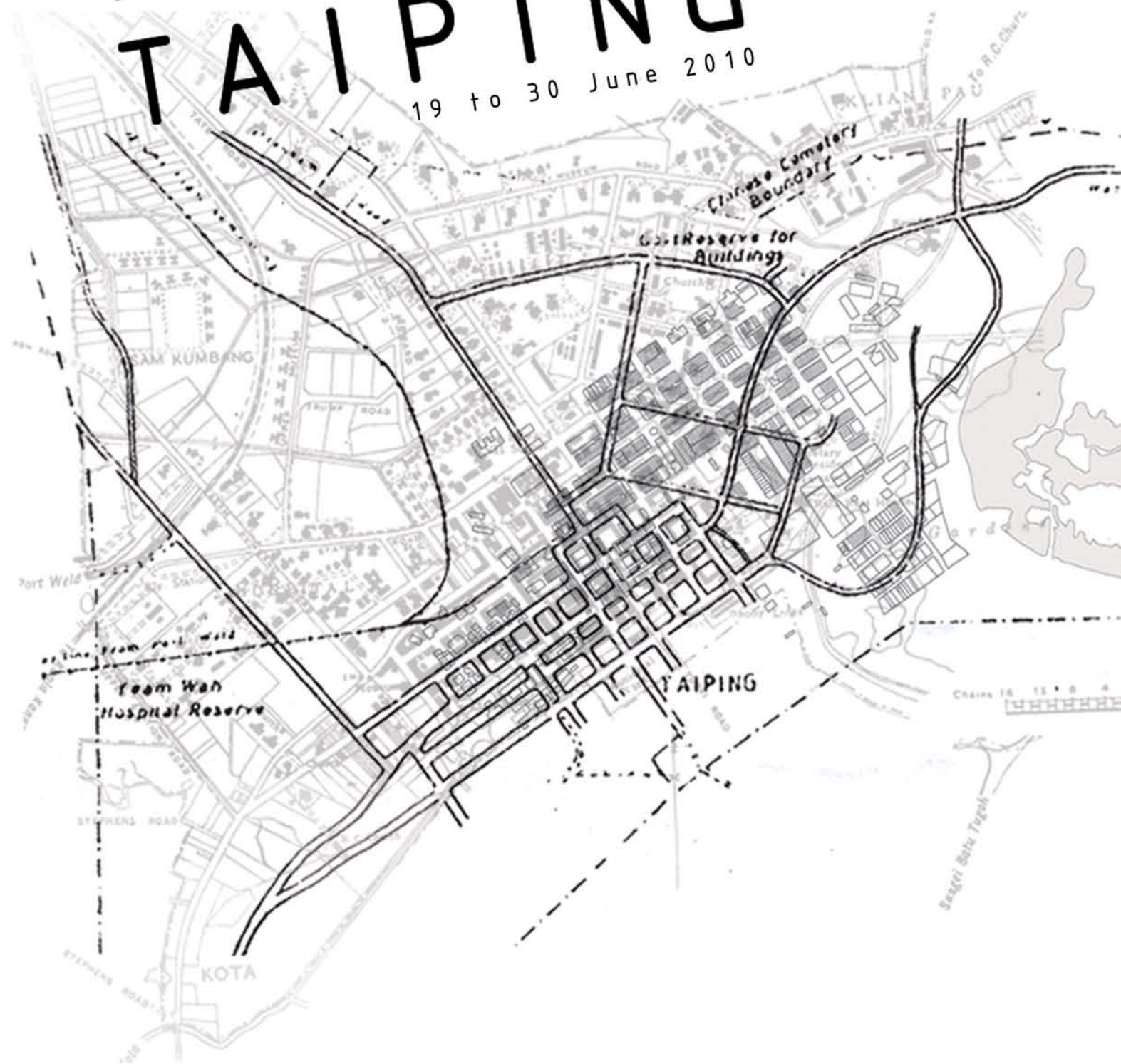


tracing TAIPING

19 to 30 June 2010



Foreword

A project organised and managed by participating staff and students of the University of Malaya - National University of Singapore Joint Studio Programme, this exhibition was first presented at the NUS Museum in 2009. The NUS Museum, which aims to facilitate faculties and students in engaging the University community and public through exhibition making, is once again honored for the opportunity to host this exhibition and continue its ongoing partnership with the Department of Architecture, NUS School of Design and Environment. We also welcome students and staff of the Department of Architecture, University of Malaya, as the two universities seek to consolidate their ties and shared ideals.

As part of a systematic survey that started in 2005, the Studio Programme continues to focus on vernacular architecture of the region. This year, the Malaysian town of Taiping, with an architectural heritage inextricably linked to its social and economic history, and unique geography, provided an intriguing backdrop for the study. The Singapore component of the programme included an introduction to conservation and restoration efforts of shophouses in Singapore, where we are pleased that the Baba House at 157 Neil Road - a heritage home conserved with the joint efforts of NUS Museum, NUS School of Design and Environment and the Urban Redevelopment Authority - was highlighted as one of the case studies illustrating challenges, potentials and dilemmas in city planning and cultural preservation. This exhibition is a culmination of an intensive programme of 'action learning' conditioned by the dynamics of mobility, experience and culture.

The NUS Museum congratulates the students and teaching staff of the two participating universities. We wish to thank Dr Lai Chee Kien and Dr Johannes Widodo for initiating the exhibition project. We are also grateful to Dr Wong Yunn Chii, Head, Department of Architecture, for inviting the Museum to play a role in the Department's innovative efforts in collaborative and experiential learning.

Ahmad Mashadi
Head, NUS Museum
National University of Singapore

This year's road trip to Taiping marks our fifth joint study. It continues to strengthen not just the historical ties between our two universities, but it has also cumulatively heightened our systematic experience and knowledge of shop-house precincts in historic urban centers of Southeast Asia.

It is easy for trips like this to devolve into a training routine and to become subsumed into a formulaic system of observation and interpretation. For this reason, we keep reminding ourselves that more than new grounds covered, we are also developing better tools and frames to understand these urban artifices and the lives they sustain. If the process becomes dulled by habitudes, we hope that the findings have been redeemed by fresh views, and better still, by fresh metaphors; for these would provide new ways of feeling and understanding as well.

To the staff of both institutions who contributed to this learning enterprise, I express my thanks and gratitude. To the students who participated in the undertaking, I trust that they found not just new wonders in our common built heritage, but also lasting friendship among their traveling companions.

Assoc.Prof. (Dr) Wong Yunn Chii
Head, Department of Architecture
National University of Singapore

The UM-NUS Joint Studio Programme 2010 is now in its fifth year of existence. Since its inception, it has provided a wonderful platform for architectural students from both University of Malaya and the National University of Singapore (NUS) to work together as a unity which it was originally intended; to study, record and disseminate the knowledge gained through first-hand research into the built heritage of Malaysian towns and cities.

The urban studies and measured drawings documentation undertaken so far have taught the various cohorts of students to appreciate their own rich architectural, social and cultural heritage, which currently is under siege from the onslaught of unsympathetic modern development. This year's choice of Taiping as the venue is appropriate as it is a historic city with many charms and 'firsts' in Malaysia for example, the first railway line in the Malayan peninsula was built between Port Weld (now Kuala Sepetang) and Taiping.

We would like to record our grateful thanks and appreciation to NUS and the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation for generously funding this excellent programme for the last five years. We hope that this fruitful collaboration will continue for many years to come to enrich our shared knowledge of our built heritage, foster lasting friendships and understanding between students and faculty members of both universities.

Ar. Lee Mei Ming
Head, Department of Architecture
University of Malaya

Taiping: Rain and Grain

Taiping's twin accolades of the "Rain City" and "Heritage City" are of fact and aspiration. The second largest town in Perak receives the peninsula's highest annual rainfall of 200 inches, while its historical development as one of the earliest planned cities produced the many "firsts" with which it is now mining as heritage.

If one takes a larger cross-section across the vicinity of the city to include Kuala Sepetang (formerly Port Weld) and Bukit Larut (formerly Maxwell Hill), the picture of rain and heritage may be clarified and enlarged. Between the straits and the Gunung Hijau mountain range, the clouds carry and re-enact daily the cycle of precipitation over the former mining town, achieving such rhythmic recurrence that its timing may be anticipated or exacted. The liquid output then combs through the lake and the city's streets ritually towards the Kuala Sepetang estuary.

The town's historical creation in the 19th century was linked to tin mining and the settlement of the Larut Wars, but the legacy of the regimented town grid, grain and layout may be attributed to British colonial planning and the fires that required its replanning and reconstruction to produce main streets of seventy feet width and cross streets of sixty. This configuration and its array of mainly shophouses have largely been maintained up to the present day when the fifth UM-NUS Joint Studio conducted urban studies and measured drawings there in May-June 2010.

The grain of Taiping city may be discussed at two corresponding levels: that of the city elements as well as that for the daily life and activities that proscribe the use of its built structures and architecture. The large number of shophouses and their generally small scale replacements deploying more contemporary architectural renditions have maintained the form of the city to some extent. The two old markets constructed of timber and cast iron run centrally and perpendicularly across the main streets and loomed over many parts of the old town as a landmark and supplemented orientation along their adjacent streets.

Around the markets, small-scale businesses in the shophouses complement the markets and other bazaars, which over the years were assigned specificity, such as streets of predominantly gold and pawn shops, motor workshops, areas of dhoby lines, hotels, clinics, lawyers' offices and accountants etc.

The joint studio recorded the insipient presence of national and international chains and franchises that have joined the range of local shops and services in the old town. More importantly, the studio has traced the growth and addition of new markets extending from the older timber counterparts in a linear fashion towards the new town extensions to the south, to demonstrate the dynamic but tenuous relations the city areas are now poised in terms of future development.

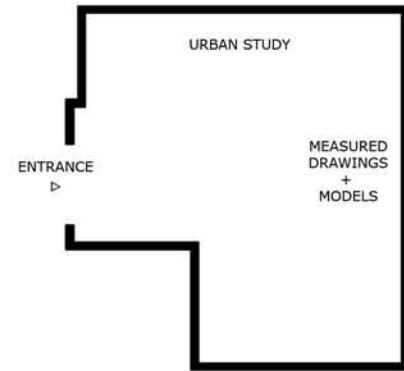
With the municipality's recently-launched development plan for 2020, alternative guidelines or answers to the questions surrounding the sustenance and future of Taiping become more urgent. The decanting of its younger generations to other cities, the instincts to "modernize" or to "conserve" the city's form and elements to be akin to other cities like Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore to generate tourist revenue, the conversion of shophouses and construction of new ones to harvest the rewards of swift farms, the maintenance of its natural and ecological landscapes in the face of tourism development, are all issues with which the city's residents and governors have now to grapple sensibly.

The four shophouses selected for the Taiping studio's measurement in 2010 reflect the life and trials of the city. The townhouse of Ng Boo Bee, the businessman who constructed more than half the town, has been vacated. The three others: a residential townhouse belonging to Mr. Cheah Png Sou, the Peace Hotel, and a workshop that was once horse stables, intersect the intricate and intertwined fabric and grain of a resilient city that, despite its tranquil demeanour and routine, is now facing particular challenges in the years to come.

In the city of rain and heritage, century-old street patterns and structures are refreshed by the punctual precipitation, while the lake delays the daily discharge to its urban neighbours. But the city's form and life are being transformed, as it had since its construction as a chapter of its mining and colonial history, and its subsequent chapters as administrative, market and leisure towns. The town's future script is inflected by its prior chapters, but the writing of new ones will require insight, knowledge and courage.



Exhibition Layout



Participants

University of Malaya

Liow Ken Keat, Emir Safuan bin Supeni, Chai Xin Ying, Saiful Amar bin Mohd Sin, Mohd Farizuda bin Rosli, Huang Yuzhe, Muhammad Uzair bin Adris, Mohd Aminuddin bin Zakaria, Nor Ainaa binti Zakariah, Nur Siti Mardiah binti Zobri, Risha binti Ramli, Aiman Sarah binti Noorizan, Kok Hua Chyi, Chen Ai Chun, Sri Rohayu binti Ripin, Lum Ling Siang

Ar. Lim Take Bane
Associate Professor Dr. Yahaya Ahma
Associate Professor Ar. Saari Omar
Associate Professor Puan Sri Nila Inangda Manyam Keumala
Mr. Megat Ariff Shah Megat Omar
Ar. Aniza Aziz

National University of Singapore

Anna Yap Lai Fong, Lau Mun Fai Joel, Jaden Chow Zhaoyu, Chiang Pun Hon, Fok Kai Man, Pung Li Tu, Seah Hui Ling, Quek See Yee, Nurzhanat Kenenov, Gan Li Ling, Nur Syazwani bte Md Rauzan, Tan Si Ying, Ng Qian Zhi, Foong Kai Qi

Assistant Professor Dr. Lai Chee Kien
Associate Professor Dr. Johannes Widodo
Adjunct Lecturer Ho Weng Hin
Mr. Lee Chin Wei
Mr. Cheah Kok Ming

The UM-NUS Joint Studio Programme

Melaka (2005)
Penang (2006)
Kuching (2008)
Kuala Terengganu (2009)
Taiping (2010)

June 2010

Co-Organisers

NUS Museum
University of Malaya, Department of Architecture
National University of Singapore, Department of Architecture

Supported by

Tan Chjin Tuan Foundation



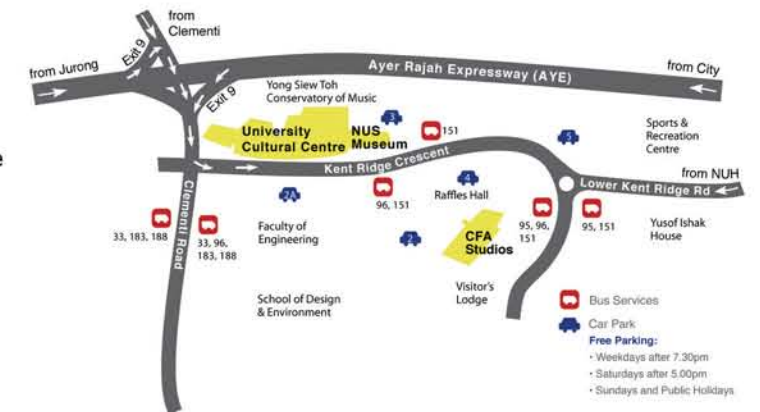
About NUS Museum

NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 7,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The Lee Kong Chian Collection consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the South and Southeast Asian Collection holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the Ng Eng Teng Collection is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the Straits Chinese Collection, is located at NUS' Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

NUS MUSEUM

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, National University of Singapore
Singapore 119279
Tel: (65) 6516 8817
Website: www.nus.edu.sg/museum
Email: museum@nus.edu.sg

Opening Hours:
10am – 7.30pm (Tuesday – Saturday)
10am – 6pm (Sundays)
Closed on Monday & Public Holiday



Getting Around:
SBS Bus No. 96 from Clementi Bus Interchange / No. 151 from Hougang Central Interchange / No. 33 from Bedok Interchange
SMRT Bus No. 188 from Choa Chu Kang Interchange.

