"Enhancement Of Chinatown" tender for STPB

Late last year the Society was invited by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board to tender a proposal with a later submission on how Chinatown should be preserved. The Society entered into collaboration with the Associated Consultants (Melbourne) and submitted their proposal on 5 December 1996 and was shortlisted. The submission was presented on 17 April last. An edited edition of the introduction to the report follows.

"In the time-span of three decades, Singapore has reconstructed itself. Within living memory visual images of yesteryear, be they home, school, workplace, eating places, shops and places of entertainment have mostly disappeared. Rem Koolhaas, the eminent urban theorist, recently described the Singapore physical transformation thus: "...the city represents the ideological production of the past three decades in its pure form, uncontaminated by surviving contextual remnants."

The lifting of rent control has resulted in the rapid change in the income profile of some residents whilst in other areas the elderly are prominent with much less disposable income.

With the exception of Boat Quay because of its superb location, the special character in other conservation areas in the traditional city and their economic viability have yet to be established. However, its unplanned formula cannot be easily replicated even with major modifications. One obvious option is to turn these conservation areas into ethnic theme parks like many Chinatowns outside Asia. With enough money and expertise, Chinatown can be further theatricalized with the introduction of high-tech magic. It is debatable whether this will be a successful financial formula, even in appealing to mass tourism today.

The prime motivation of this conservation exercise must surely go beyond the simplistic formula of capitalist profit criteria. A serious attempt must be made to use this singularly available opportunity to offer Singaporeans an effective redress in the complex issue of lost visual memory and to strengthen the psychological and historical anchorage of our younger citizens. We can widen the understanding of our unique multi-cultural roots and contribute towards the building of our pluralistic multiracial society.

There are many complex layering of ethnic cultures and sub-cultures in all the zones under discussion. Historically the dilapidated conditions of the physical structure, the over-crowding and the unhealthy environment can only be understood in the larger political, social and economic context. Appropriate action should be introduced to generate positive response to attract new residents and the formation of a viable Chinatown community."
At an overcrowded National Museum theatre, the Society, in conjunction with the National Heritage Board, was delighted to host a talk given by the President of Partners for Livable Communities, Mr Robert McNulty.

After an introduction by Mr William Lim, Mr McNulty gave a brief description of the non-government organization, formed over twenty years ago which he heads. At that time, when radical social changes were taking place, and industry falling off, the National Endowment for the Arts ministry approached the organization to prepare a report on why the arts were an essential component of society. He then went on to illustrate to the large audience, how this was accomplished.

It is known, now, that two out of three people, in employment, rate the quality of life more important than quantity. The Rand Report echoes this and indicated that, in future, the perception of desirability, i.e. how a community perceives itself, would be its greatest asset in acquiring a quality of life.

Mr McNulty said that one of the most obvious means to improve the quality of life is architecture. It is well known that public buildings are always of the lowest standard and in order to address this the open competition was introduced. Out of this system came the Memorial Wall, in Washington D.C. dedicated to those who died in Vietnam. By hiring the best architects a company president, in a small town in Indiana, created an environment which attracted all sorts of people. He was then able to entice the best engineers to his company.

Other cities such as Seattle and Vancouver invested in their scenic uniqueness, passing legislation to protect mountain vistas. Seattle also improved town areas by creating parks and open spaces. One of the spin-offs from this is better air quality. The town has now attracted so many "clean" industries that it is the wealthiest city in the United States.

As the advantages of quality of life became apparent other towns began to
ums, Art Galleries and the Community in McNulty on 6 May 1997

look into their history and culture to see what they had to offer to attract people to their town, for either business or pleasure. The idea has grown sufficiently that now every American city has a culture plan which covers all aspects of culture from oral history to architecture, landscape, art, sports and every leisure activity. The result is tourism, as predicted by Herman Kahn, has become the greatest industry.

Mr McNulty then went on to give examples of how towns can create "cultural tourism". Outdoor events which show something unique attract hundreds of local people as well as tourists. San Francisco has a museum and art centre where local unknown artists are allowed to exhibit. Several cities have built new sports stadiums with better facilities in downtown areas which has made the inner city a livelier place after office hours and a focal point for other activities.

Will all the money generated by these activities go back into culture? The answer is probably not, but the intangible rewards are incalculable and each community is realizing this.

He then wound up his talk by saying that the yardstick is to make your own community livable and do not do anything for an outsider which you would not do for yourself.

There were many questions from the floor which indicated the level of interest in the ideas put forward. It was a very rewarding talk which has given much food for thought for our own "cultural tourism".

This was the second talk which we were pleased to organize with the National Heritage Board. The other on 14 March was entitled "Conservation and Redevelopment - Achieving a Balance" given by Mr Peter Lovell, an Australian building consultant involved in conservation.

Reported by Ms Win Randas

Listening intently.

Mr William Lim, President.
Launch of "LETTERS FROM MAO'S CHINA" by David Mars

The many Society members and friends who gathered at Select Books for the launch of the late Mr David Marshall's "Letters from Mao's China" on 17 September 1996 bore testimony to the high esteem in which this man is held. Many came to honour our first Chief Minister and acknowledge his contribution to the birth of Singapore as an independent nation. Guests included the British High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr Gordon Duggan and Mrs Duggan, His Excellency Mr S R Nathan, Ambassador-at-large, Mr and Mrs Lee Seng Gee were on hand representing the Lee Foundation.

Ms Lim U Wen, Managing Director of Select Books, as distributor, spoke of her delight at being associated with publication of the book. She then introduced Mr S R Nathan who gave a personal insight into the author, whom he had served under when Mr Marshall was Chief Minister. This was just prior to making the trip to China which is the subject of the book.

Mr Lim Siew Wai, President of the Society, spoke warmly of the support the Society had received from Mr Marshall, who contributed so much to the foundation of Singapore. He outlined the circumstances under which the idea of publication came to
fruition and acknowledged the people who researched and edited the letters. He then thanked Mr Lee from the Lee Foundation for the donation which made the book possible and presented Mrs Lee with a small token of appreciation from the Society.

Mr Lim then asked Mrs David Marshall to accept a gift from the Society. She was then kept extremely busy autographing the book. The book has been so successful that the first reprint was almost immediate.
Our host, Mr Jack Sim, was on hand to welcome guests upon arrival at his home to celebrate the Mooncake Festival. The programme, organized by Mr William Sim and Miss Boey Yut Mei, began with a talk and slide show by Yut Mei of the Asia and West Pacific Network for Urban Conservation symposiums she attended in Hanoi, Vietnam and Nara, Japan. Following this there was a calligraphy demonstration by Mr Ong.

Mr Sim recounted his childhood memories of family celebrations at the Mooncake festival and explained the usage of various items used when worshipping the Moon fairy. Geraldene Lowe then discussed the significance of the lantern festival. As well as buffet dinner, Chinese tea and mooncakes were served.

Other festivals were commemorated including Navarathri in October and Deepavalli in November. The former included a tour around the temples conducted by Ms Geraldene Lowe to see the dancing, and the latter demonstrations of henna hand decoration and rangoli floor patterns using rice as well as dancing and a costume parade.
SHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
AND RENEWAL FORM

I wish to join the Singapore Heritage Society as (tick appropriate box below):

☐ Ordinary member
  (Singapore citizens/permanent residents aged over 21 only, annual subscription $50.00)

☐ Corporate member
  (all organisations, no voting rights, not eligible for office, invited as observers to meetings, annual subscription $1000.00)

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Organisation: (corporate members)

Address:

Telephone: ........................................ (Home) ........................................ (Office)

I enclose my cheque for $ ........................................ No ........................................ made out to the Singapore Heritage Society. (Due to shortage of space, a detailed application form for membership will follow shortly.)

RENEWAL OF SUBSCRIPTION

1. ........................................ enclose a cheque for $50.00 in renewal of my subscription.

Date: ........................................ Signature: ........................................

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

6TH AWPNUC INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
- 21 TO 25 NOVEMBER 1997 IN TAIPEI, TAIWAN
The theme is "Retrospective/Perspectives of Grassroots Conservation Organizations: Roles and Achievements".

Further information can be obtained from the Secretariat on 472 6938 (until 31 July) or Ms Boey Yu Mei on pager 9309 1243, fax 474 9066 (office hours).

"CHINATOWN ENHANCEMENT" PROJECT
The highlights of the Society’s submission to the STPB will be published later this year. This will be the definitive position of the Society on our cultural heritage and how to promote and increase our "cultural tourism".

"CHINATOWN WALK" BY GERALDENIE LOWE
This project is scheduled for publication in January. It will be an adjunct to the above publication but part of the pamphlet series.

"OUR PLACE IN TIME"
This project has taken considerably longer to collate than originally realized but publication is now set for early next year.

SEMINAR: CHINESE-EDUCATED COMMUNITY IN SINGAPORE
Due to unforeseen development, this project has been further postponed.

"LIVING LEGACY"
First reprint now available in all major bookshops.
5th Symposium Of AWPNUC:
International Grassroots Symposium For Urban
Conservation held in Yogyakarta 28 Sept - 1 October 1996

attended by Ms Geraldene Lowe and
Miss Boey Yut Mei

The main theme of the symposium, sponsored by the Japan Foundation, was “Better Living Environment and the Existence of the Area”. Its aim with the Workshop was to find the “best means of managing Conservation Districts with particular emphasis on enhancing community involvement and participation”. This was broken down into three areas - a) legal and institutional framework for conservation areas, b) community involvement and participation and c) the role of the private sector.

The opening address was given by the Rector of Gadjah Mada University, Dr Soekanto Reksohadiprodjo, followed by the keynote speakers, Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, Mr Wiyoga Atmodarminto, Chairman of Badan Warisan Budaya Indonesia and former Governor of Jakarta and Prof. Hidetiko Sazanami, Professor at Ritsumeikan University and former Director of UNCRD.

Five Yogyakarta Heritage Awards were given to owners of buildings either more than fifty years old which showed “strong interest and effort to conserve heritage buildings, natural and cultural environment or a new building designed with respect for the environment. They included an hotel, office as well as a family complex consisting six houses.

After reports were given by each participating organization it was time to commence the field trips, where delegates discussed urban conservation issues with members of the local community concerned.

The first stop was Tamansari (Water Castle), to which we were transported in andongs (horse carts), passing through Malioboro Street, the main axis of Yogyakarta. Tamansari was built in 1758 as a place of meditation, recreation and defence. It has a banquet hall, stage, mosque and living quarters for the Sultan’s family. Flower-strewn pools abound on the surface and an underground canal and tunnel system was used as a means of escape by the Sultan and his family in times of danger.

Kraton, the Yogyakarta Palace is still occupied by the Sultan and his family although many rooms are open to the public. Javanese court traditions and ceremonies are still practiced and are a great tourist attraction.

Kampong Ratmakan is a squatter area near the Code River. Although it is subject to flooding community leaders along with church organizations persuaded the government to allow the community to stay. The government then built a dyke to alleviate flooding and initiated improvement schemes so that the community could continue to live there under better conditions. The community leaders briefed the delegates on the social, economic and political significance of the area.

The group then held a workshop in Kotagede aimed at facilitating an “interactive learning and working together with the community related to conservation issues”. The town was founded in the sixteenth century. The community has maintained the buildings and historical sites. The living culture is preserved with ceremonies and traditional crafts such as batik and silverworking. The participants were shown how the local people have managed this and a discussion and interaction began on how to develop new alternatives in managing conservation areas.

It was an interesting and informative symposium which left much food for thought.

A copy of our latest publication “Letters from Mao’s China” was presented to Professot Dr Ir Parmono Atmadi and Professor Hidetiko Sazanami.