



unit 2 the living house



This lecture deals with the most significant building type of the Austronesian cultures outlined in the Introduction, the village house.

The south - east Asian archipelago basically comprises Indonesia, The Phillipines and Papua New Guinea. Indonesia alone contains some 13,000 islands, nearly 1000 of which are permanently inhabited. More than 350 ethnic groups occupy these islands, by and large maintaining their own languages and cultures. Despite the diversity of its peoples traditional Indonesian society displays a remarkable cultural unity which points to a common if distant origin. In fact all the Indonesian cultures and languages, with a very few exceptions, share a common cultural - linguistic heritage in that they belong to the Austronesian group of languages and cultures. The Austronesian cultures are spread from Madagascar in the western Indian Ocean, through the Indonesian archipelago, the Malay peninsula, northern Vietnam, Taiwan, Micronesia, Melanesia [excluding New Guinea] and Polynesia as far south as New Zealand and as far east as Easter Island. It has also been recently argued that the Japanese language, whose Austronesian underlay has long been acknowledged, belongs in fact in the Austronesian language group rather than the Altaic group to which it had previously been thought to belong. Certainly, as we shall see aspects of Japanese traditional architecture indicate a close connection with the traditional architecture of both mainland and island south east Asia.

The original Austronesian language may have already been established as early as 6000 BC and the original Austronesian homeland is argued, on linguistic grounds to have been Taiwan although , as suggested above, there is some archaeological evidence pointing to an earlier homeland in the Yangtze river basin of southern China,

the region known as Yunnan. Southern China did not become "Chinese" until the arrival of the Han around 200 AD and many of the threads of South East Asian history seem to lead back to this region. From Taiwan the "Austronesians" seem to have spread south into the Phillipines about 3000 BC and thence into the Indonesian archipelago. The colonization of Oceania to the east did not begin until after 2000 BC and the Malay peninsula and Vietnam were colonized by the Austronesians sometime after 1000 BC. Madagascar was not reached until about 400 AD. At roughly the same time New Zealand was colonized from Tahiti by other Austronesian speaking peoples.

Another wave of Austronesian dispersal from southern China, either via Taiwan or Korea, resulted in the arrival in southern Japan, by 300 BC at the latest, of the people who became known as Yayoi. This dispersal over an enormous area becomes really remarkable when you consider that it is mostly ocean and that transport was probably in wind powered canoes very much like today's traditional Polynesian canoes

Another important but somewhat later influence on the development of traditional Indonesian culture at about this time was the Dong Son culture which flourished in the Annam region of north Vietnam for about 600 years from 5 or 600 BC. Some commentators have seen a connection between the "ancient peoples" inhabiting the interiors of the major Indonesian islands (apart from the populous Java and Bali) and the outlying islands and the Dong Son culture whose artefacts have been found over the entire Indonesian archipelago.

The theory that the widespread presence of Dong Son artefacts and the apparent cultural similarities indicated a wave of Dong Son immigration approximately 2000 years ago has now fallen out of favour however and the presence of artefacts and cultural characteristics of the Dong Son is now generally attributed to nothing more dramatic than strong trade links over a protracted period of time. The Dong Son homeland in Annam was close to, and clearly in contact with, the older cultures of the Yangtze river basin from where the Austronesian cultures seem to have originated.

Before proceeding to outline the impact on the development of Indonesian culture of the various later waves of influence from external cultures we should briefly summarize the physical characteristics of the domestic vernacular architecture which was already established by the Dong Son period and which continues to this day 2000 years later. As I have already commented; despite the diversity of ethnic and language groups present in Indonesia it is possible to identify common characteristics in the vernacular architecture of the archipelago which tend to support the other evidence of a common, if distant cultural heritage.

There are three main distinguishing characteristics of the traditional architecture of the ancient Austronesian peoples, for our purposes the modern Indonesians.

Pile Foundations

Saddle Backed Roofs

Crossed Gable Fascia Boards

Buildings with pile foundations are a general feature of the built form of mainland and island South East Asia as well as Micronesia and Melanesia.

In Indonesia itself traditional buildings are only rarely set directly on the ground - Java being the notable exception. However, even in Java, temple friezes from the 9th - 14th century AD indicate the presence of pile dwellings suggesting that in earlier times pile construction may have been common. The founding of buildings on stone platforms sitting directly on the ground is generally attributed to the Indian influence. In Bali that remains Hindu, and to where the Javanese aristocracy fled when displaced by the 16th century advance of Islam, most domestic structures are founded on raised stone platforms.

In the rest of Indonesia, only the tiny island of Buru, some highland regions of both Irian Jaya and Timor appear to lack a tradition of pile construction. Piled construction of this type is the norm also in mainland South East Asia and its prevalence in Indonesia is simply an indication of the longstanding cultural continuity of the region.

Another distinctive element of the style that which recurs widely in Indonesia is the saddle-backed roof - with an extended ridge-line often resulting in outward sloping gable ends. Even in New Guinea and the western Pacific with its marked ethnic and linguistic differences from Indonesia, raised pile construction and saddle-backed roofs are common.

The saddle-backed roof was clearly also a feature of the Dong Son culture previously mentioned. The bronze kettle-drums of this culture, widely traded throughout the archipelago were covered in bas relief decorative motifs. Some of these show stilted (pile construction) boat shaped wooden houses with a saddle-backed roof. However, the clear presence of saddle backed roofed dwellings also in parts of the Austronesian culture zone beyond Dong Son influence (such as Japan, Micronesia, Melanesia, Madagascar and north east India) tends to indicate an Austronesian point of origin for the house type which was apparently shared by the much younger neighbouring Dong Son culture.

Just one piece of evidence for this conclusion is provided by the artefacts of the Austronesian peoples who spread into Southern Japan from either Korea or Taiwan (the Yayoi) who left many fired clay objects. Many model houses have been recovered whose saddle-backed roofs appear to be very similar to those portrayed on the Dong Son bronze drums. The Shinto temple complex at Ise, near Nagoya in southern Japan has been identically rebuilt every twenty years for at least 1200 years and to judge from the similarities to the haniwa that have been discovered the building types represented at Ise are considerably older even than this. The pile construction, the raised floors and the characteristic roofs clearly show the relationship of these buildings to traditional buildings found throughout South East Asia and the Pacific.

Variations of this ancient house type are still the predominant style of domestic architecture among, for example, the Batak of Sumatra, the better known Toraja of Sulawesi and the Miringkabau of west Sumatra. This demonstrates a cultural continuity of at least 2.5 thousand years and underlines the extreme cultural conservatism of village life in general and in this region in particular. Another common feature of traditional South East Asian architecture, both mainland and islands, is decorative gable finials in the form of crossed horns. These may be simple extensions of the end rafters or elaborate carved representations of buffalo horns.

The names of these finials are often derived from the words for horns, and in some cultures elaborately carved representations of buffalo heads are placed on the eaves. These were originally seen as offering protection to the occupants from evil spirits. These traditional horned houses have a broader spread than South East Asia, their presence having been noted in Madagascar and among the Naga of North East India. The buffalo in its sacrificial role provides a link between heaven and earth in the traditional animist religions of many parts of the archipelago, the dead are, for example believed to ride to the upper world (the afterlife) on the back of a water buffalo. The relationship of traditional animist beliefs of the region to the major traditional belief systems of South Asia [Vaastu Shastra] and East Asia [feng shui], together with consideration of parallels with archaic western traditions is briefly highlighted.

Traditional Indonesian society is also marked by the location of the Indonesian archipelago on the sea trade routes between India, Arabia and Europe to the north west and China to the north east.

The cultures of all these regions have impacted on the development of Indonesian society – particularly in its more accessible regions, over a long period of time.

The foundations of the oldest cultural layer still discernible in the area were laid down in the Asian Bronze Age which occurred as early as 1500 BC in the Zhongyuan, Lingnan - Yunnan, and Yangtzi valley regions of what is now southern China and the coastal regions of what is now Vietnam and the river valleys of the Mekong, and Chao Phraya, in what is now Thailand. In his study of the Bronze Age in South East Asia Charles Higham includes as part of the region the Yunnan plateau and the Lingnan region of southern China which includes the provinces of Guangdong and Guanxi. This is logical as the Chinese only seized this territory relatively late under the Qin and Western Han dynasties, and even today local customs and languages connect this area more closely to the lands of the south than to the central plains area of China.

In this lecture I intend to briefly address some selected issues of meaning in relation to the traditional houses of these cultures.

The lecture draws heavily on Roxanna Waterson's excellent reference *The Living House*. If you were to purchase just one reference to cover this topic, Waterson would be the best and most comprehensive.

The special characteristics of the houses can at least partly be explained by the close relationship of house form with several important aspects of the indigenous [animist] religion of these cultures. To make any sense of this however it is first important to touch on some key aspects of the religions of the area. The traditional religions of the archipelago share a belief in a vital force, a life force which permeates and animates the universe. In the Malay and Indonesian languages the word for it is *semangat*. It is this concept which has caused western writers to label these religions as animist. The similarity of this concept to the Polynesian one of *mana* is a further indication of the existence of an underlying cultural continuum linking the societies we have labelled Austronesian. It is considered that this life force may attach itself in differing concentrations not only to living things such as animals, plants and humans but also to inanimate objects such as rocks, heirlooms textiles and houses. According to the

indigenous religions of the South East Asian archipelago [and many places elsewhere in South East Asia] that spirit can be concentrated in people and things thus imbuing them with some measure of power. People, it is claimed, are able to increase their own power by tapping into the power of the universe via techniques such as meditation, concentration and the cultivation of a particular state of awareness which the Buginese (to name one) call paringerreng. Power is anchored at the navel. Not only humans but houses, kingdoms and the cosmos itself are thought of as having a navel. Navels of people, houses and kingdoms are vulnerable and must be protected from harm.

In a discussion of the traditional Malay House Gibbs comments “. . . *Semangat is important to life. Without it a person will become weak - as if dead. The Malays believe that if the semangat of a person is weak, he will be easily disturbed or possessed by evil spirits which are always a threat to man's security. The house is similar to a human being . It also requires semangat. A house without semangat looks empty and isolated. Life inside is restless, the occupants always being disturbed by sickness and misfortune. They will never be at peace. Semangat has to be cared for and not neglected or it will disappear. Since it brings peace to the house, it is necessary that it be looked after and mistakes corrected. The Malays believe that Semangat originates from earth, water, fire and air these being the important elements that shape nature.* “[Gibbs 1987:85]

Various methods for inducing semangat into a house and retaining it once obtained, are described. These include:

Tying three pieces of cloth black, red and white at the top of each wooden post or tiang, in the structure.

Tying three pieces of cloth black, red and white, around the middle of the centre post or tiang seri before the tiang are planted.

These steps impart semangat to the house

Not making noise or rushing around in the house.

Not sweeping the floor on a Friday night.

Making sure that the inhabitants pray five times a day.

Always reading the koran in the house.

These steps retain semangat in the house.

Anybody inclined to doubt the contemporary relevance of these notions need only refer to the considerable popularity among the urban Javanese [at least] of the local version of yoga which seems to incorporate a combination of the ideas embodied by Indian and is strongly based on the notion that there is an animating force in the natural environment which can be tapped into by using a variety of techniques involving breath, physical movement and meditative concentration.

It is a characteristic of this world view that within it, it is possible for human beings to perceive themselves as one with, rather than separate from, the rest of the cosmos. The relationship between person and thing may also be much more intense as concentrations of vital energy may be transferred between them. This idea is illustrated by the frequent ritual use of textiles which are able to enhance the vitality and power of those wearing, or wrapped in them.

I am irresistibly reminded of those, to our eyes slightly comical press images of presidents and Prime ministers in lined up for 'the-photo-opportunity' during recent conferences in the region, all somewhat self consciously clad in their brand new batik shirts. *"In Sumba, personal possessions of all kinds are thought to share in the vitality (ndewa) of their owners, and their loss can cause a diminution of this vital force; the return of a mislaid object implies a strengthening of the owner's weakened 'ndewa' . In particular horses and personal slaves may share in a noble's personality; an important individual may be called by the name of his horse, and on certain ceremonial occasions a slave of appropriate sex heavily costumed in ritual regalia, acts as a substitute for a noble person."* (Waterson 1993 : 116)

The parallels between this general belief in semangat, an animating force suffusing the entire universe, and the Chinese concept of qi are striking. Rossbach [1991 : 21 - 22] states; *" qi [or ch'i] is a pervasive concept in Chinese traditional arts ranging from acupuncture and medicine to feng shui and gung fu [commonly known as kung fu]. It can include such diverse phenomena as the energy that moves waves; the source of fertile earth; what martial artists channel when striking powerful blows; what acupuncturists seek to activate with their needles; and even man's aura. To the Chinese Ch'i links spirit and substance. . . . In Chinese the character Ch'i has two meanings, one cosmic, one human. Heaven's ch'i encompasses air, steam, gas, weather and force. Man's ch'i includes breath, aura, matter and energy. "*

The two types of ch'i are far from separate. Man's ch'i is strongly influenced by the ch'i of both heaven and earth. In some parts of the archipelago houses are regarded as having a vitality of their own, interdependent with the vitality of their occupants. The health of one affects the health of the other as is illustrated by this account from a researcher who had been studying, and greatly admiring the long houses of a particular society on Siberut. *"My expedition ended with a violent attack of malaria. People explained this attack as a response to my excessive wonderment. I had admired the houses and touched and measured them to such an extent that I had, in effect, molested them. The houses, on their part, had consequently wondered at me; they had grown annoyed and had concentrated on me with such intensity that they had finally made me fall ill. A healing ceremony was then enacted to reconcile the offended houses."* (Waterson 1993 : 117)

Anger and disturbance are regarded as dangerous heat, and the ritual of reconciliation involved 'cooling down' both the houses and the patients with the leaves of sacred cooling plants.

In the west the house's functions as a dwelling take precedence over everything else. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of the primary purpose of a house as other than dwelling. However the South East Asian house is not always primarily or even at all, a dwelling. Some houses, although all important as places of origin, and ritual sites for family groups claiming their descent from them, may be left uninhabited despite the expenditure of substantial time and expense on maintaining them. Such houses may contain the sacred heirlooms of the clan and are regarded as having accumulated sacred power. These houses may have become so surrounded in ritual prohibitions that living in them is too burdensome for the owners who prefer to live elsewhere in more 'profane' dwellings. This situation is not uncommon amongst, for example the Sa'dan Toraja who live in Sulawesi. Limited by ritual prohibitions and the small size of the traditional houses, family members prefer to reside in more spacious, less sacred circumstances nearby but

are nevertheless happy to expend large amounts of money on the upkeep of the clan origin house.

Certain ritual roles are regarded as going with the house, so that if the house is occupied, whoever is in occupation is vested with the authority to carry out these tasks. This is as likely to be a woman as a man depending on whether the house belongs to the family of a female or a male head of the household. Since men most often move to live with their wives at marriage it is common for a woman to be the office holder, although her husband will assist with particular duties, such as pig slaughtering, which are considered to be masculine tasks. Minangkabau origin house about 250 years old which would formerly have housed a group of matrilineally related women and their families)

If a house is destroyed or falls into disrepair the ritual offices might be attached to a related house but move back when and if the origin house is restored. It is sometimes the case that entire villages consist of uninhabited origin houses which are only occupied / visited by their scattered clan members for ceremonies associated with births, deaths and annual agricultural events. Such villages are widely found throughout Indonesia on for example the islands of Lembata, Timor, Kedang, Flores and Sumba. As one might expect given the linguistic and archaeological evidence for common origins such origin houses are also to be found in traditional Madagascan society also.

Writing about the Atoni of Timor Cunningham says : The house is a ritual centre for prayer, sacrifices and feasts. Ritual of the life-cycle is conducted normally at the house of those immediately involved, and sacred heirlooms are kept there. A house (with its sacra) should endure; an heir should maintain and eventually inhabit it . Prayers may be directed from the house to the divinity, the powers the ancestors and to special tutelary spirits; and diviners normally work at the house of a client. Agricultural ritual begins and ends at the house.

Ritual functions can thus be seen to be inseparable from the house's identity. Buildings which were sometimes referred to as temples in the older literature were in fact simultaneously, inhabited houses of a kin group. The fusing of habitation and ritual site partly explains the relative absence of buildings set aside for sacred purposes.

Such structures were/are known but overall, however the presence of dedicated ritual structures in the villages and towns of Indonesia is more an indication of the presence of the later world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity rather than the traditional animist religions of the archipelago. The form of the traditional house can often be seen to have been modified by its heightened ritual significance.

There are numerous examples of structural features of traditional South East Asian houses which can only be described as superfluous with regards to the building's structural viability but whose symbolic importance is nevertheless great. An example of this can be seen in the houses of the Sa'dan Toraja in western Sulawesi. The most important origin houses of the nobility, those which were formerly the seats of political power over their respective communities, have the title of tongkonan layuk or 'great origin house' They have a special feature which is omitted from all other houses, even those built with the same style. This is a large central post a riri posi , or navel post.

This post although prominently placed has no structural role and is actually inserted after the house is completed. The post is always personified as either male or female depending on the gender of the main founding ancestor of the origin house. Origin houses are always founded by a married couple but it depends on whether the house is built on the family land of the husband or the wife who is designated the main founding ancestor. The female post is carved with projecting breasts and the post is dressed in male or female garments according to its designated gender before being placed in position. The post when in place becomes the focus of the major fertility enhancing ritual of the Toraja. This ritual which involves many minor stages culminating in a huge communal celebration takes an entire year to perform. For the duration of this period the house is considered to be pregnant and for several years after the event the entire community is thought to benefit from the enhanced fertility and good fortune which its celebration is thought to bring.

Such central posts [known as *tiang seri*], to which a similar ritual significance is attached, are also to be found in the traditional houses of the Malay peninsula.

Most indigenous belief systems of the Indonesian archipelago share the concept of a three tiered cosmos; a lower world inhabited by animals, a middle world the abode of humans and an upper world the realm of the gods. Examination of a section cut through a Minangkabau house reveals this tripartite division of space. The structure of the house reflects this tripartite division of the cosmos.

The area beneath the house is the most unclean part where the kitchen and other waste is thrown and where the animals are stalled. The house floor raised on piles, is the human realm and the attic space where the heirlooms are stored is the most sacred include a non structural (but nonetheless essential) decorative skirting board which surrounds the entire house at floor level and is thought to serve the purpose of emphasising the separation between the realm of humans and that of the animals.

The concept of the house as an entity with a soul and power of its own exists in some form or other in many of the societies of South East Asia. How does a 'house' acquire its vitality? One possible answer lies in the fact that living trees are considered to have their own vital force which must be managed in an appropriate way when the trees are felled and converted into house timbers. Among some people of the Vietnamese highlands, living trees in the forest are considered to have a wild yang (vitality, power) which must be converted to the safe domesticated yang of house timbers when they are brought to the village. Otherwise the health of the occupants would be threatened. Entry into a new house for example is surrounded by ritual. Invocations are chanted begging the yang of the timbers, harmful while in the forest to be happy and cool while in the house and to become benevolent yang now that they have taken their place in the world of humans.

In Indonesia, the Minangkabau are said to believe that large old trees are inhabited by spirits and to cut them down is dangerous unless there is someone present able to address the spirit and remove it to another place. When the timber is ceremonially fetched from the forest, it is carried only by members of the kin group which is building the house, while members of the other clans assist by playing gongs and drums and the women bring food for the occasion.

The Sa'dan Toraja also traditionally make offerings before felling the trees and the timber for the central navel post of a noble origin house must always be carried with its upper or head end held higher than the root end.

On the island of Roti the main house post was traditionally dressed with textiles to make it look like a king. Offerings were made to it during the house's inauguration ceremony. In this society it was noted that; The new house has a very strong personality which through its superior strength can kill people. Hence all participants in the inaugural rite especially the owner and the carpenters had to wear new clothes, gold and beads all of which were considered to protect them from harm. (Waterson 1993 : 118)

The Malays traditionally follow a principle of one house one tree in which the nine major posts [or tiang] of the house are extracted from a single tree trunk which is shaped into a large square section then sliced into three in each direction making nine main posts which are erected in the same relationship to each other as they had in the original tree.

Traditional Malay practices for the selection and consecration of a site are very similar to the equivalent Indian practices. This reflects the strong cultural connections known to have existed for at least 1000 years after about 500CE, across the Bay of Bengal. Compare the two quotes below. The first is translated from a traditional Malay building manual and is quoted in Gibbs 1987. The second is from Dagens' translation of the medieval Sanskrit Indian treatise on building, town planning and architecture known as the Mayamata.

" . . . If the colour of the earth is yellow and green, the smell sweet and strong, it is a sign of good fortune for generations to come. If the colour is red, the taste sour, his family will love him. And if the colour is any other, the smell fetid and stinking, it is a sign of misfortune and the occupants will suffer illness. If the earth is white the smell pleasing, the taste sweet, it is the best place to live; the occupants will amass and will always be happy. If the colour of the earth is other than this, the smell 'hot', sour and sweet, there will be a large family; and if the earth is yellowish green and red the smell sweet, the taste 'hot', it is a sign of fortune and many children.

If the earth is black, the smell rotten, misfortune will befall the occupants. The best place to live is where the earth is white, red, yellow, ash coloured or black. The bad signs are indicated by very black soil with splits, swells, holes, mounds, knots falling earth, or adjacent to shallow rivers. If the signs are bad and if there are holes in the ground, his family will die and his servants will run away.

If the land is low towards the east and high towards the west, then it is a good sign. If it is vice versa the signs are bad. If the land is low to the south and high to the north it is a sign of misfortune. If the land is low to the north and high to the south it is a good sign. "
[Gibbs 1987:64]

" . . . The shape of the site must be perfect and it must rise towards the west or south. It must be filled with the sound of horses, of elephants, of flutes, lutes, water and drums and must be impregnated with the fragrances of pum'naga, jasmine, lotus, grain and patala. Its odour is like that of cattle; it is perfect, able to make all seeds grow and of uniform colour. Its soil is compact, smooth and pleasing to the touch. The ground is even; its colour is white, red yellow or black as a pigeon; it has six flavours bitter, pungent, astringent, salt sour and sweet; such a ground is guarantee of success. The

sages however reject a site which smells like curds, melted butter, honey or oil, blood, carrion, fish or fowl. White, red like blood, yellow or black resonant with the trumpeting of elephants and of horses, endowed with six flavours, of one colour, perfumed by cattle as well as by grain and lotus, free from pebble and husk, rising towards the south or west, bordered by a river in the north or east, equal to the perfect surabhi, free from sharp objects and bones, such should be the site which according to the best experts, is suitable for everybody and which does not wither the seeds. . . . " [Mayamata Ch. 3, trans. Dagens 1997]

Traditional Balinese texts on architectural principles maintain that a tree should be fully grown before being cut for timber and after having been transformed into building timber a rite must be performed to establish its new life in this form. The parallels with the construction and consecration of the Shinto shrines at Ise are striking. In this case the timbers for the shrine and the construction of the shrines themselves are carried out by white clad workers who are removed from the task if they cut themselves or soil their clothing.

All these examples reflect the pervasive idea that the timber continues to be animated after its conversion to building timber. The second possible source of a house's vitality is in the process of its construction and decoration. It is this process after All which brings the building into being. According to Waterson traditional Malay sources maintain that the formation of semangat takes place similarly in both people and objects (which of course include buildings).

"The semangat of a person makes its appearance at the moment the umbilical cord is severed . . . The same is said of the boat soul which becomes of itself when all the planks of the boat have been fitted together, Similarly the semangat rumah or house soul comes automatically into existence as the various parts of the walls and roof are fitted together. " (Waterson 1993 : 118)

One researcher suggests of the Toba Batak; "The house is a habitation an altar, and a shrine. Its inhabitants are its soul and its structure and decorative features serve to protect that soul. The house decorator is responsible by medium of his craft, for the inhabitants of the dwelling. Certain of the decorations he inscribes on the wall (for example) consist of long flowing lines - of necessity because a broken line may bring misfortune on the inhabitants." (Waterson 1993 : 120)

The third and perhaps most significant source of a house's vitality are the ceremonies performed during its construction. A house building expert often acts also as the ritual master, taking responsibility for the carrying out of the appropriate rituals for the relevant society at the various stages of the house's construction. Non observance of the required rituals would seriously endanger the house's occupants.

One of the first things that must be done in building a house is to select an appropriate site. As the land may already be occupied by a spirit of the locality, its permission must be sought. The Sa'dan Toraja traditionally stick the stems of particular plants into the ground with a section of bamboo filled with water propped up against them. If after three days and three nights the bamboo is still full to the brim the spirit of the locality is considered to have given permission. Then a chicken is killed and offerings made. A piece of iron from an old frying pan (representing longevity) and a bead (representing nobility) are buried on the spot. Failure to comply with these rituals is inviting trouble and

examples are known of houses which are claimed to be the sites of misfortunes caused by spirits of the localities on which they are built, unhappy because of the failure to carry out these rituals correctly.

The Malays also traditionally perform a divination to make sure that it is acceptable to the spirits of a locality that a house be built there. Various offerings are placed in the hole for the centre post. The centre post is traditionally regarded by the Malays as the guardian or strength of the house, anchoring its semangat.

In northern Thailand a ritual exorcising of the earth on which a house is to stand precedes the planting of the house posts with the aim of ensuring that no evil influence will be present.

Among the many formerly head hunting people of the archipelago more than one instance can be found of the erection of a house post demanding the literal sacrifice of a human being. In Borneo for example a slave used sometimes to be killed and his body thrown into the first post hole of a new chief's residence. Even today offerings are sometimes made to the guardian spirits which are thought to inhabit house posts. In south Nias the great house of a chief and the village council house both required the taking of a human head. The construction of the village of Bawømataluø required a total of seven human heads beneath the foot and head of each of the stone steps leading to the village and beneath the village 'navel' stone.

The purpose of these sacrifices and strategic placement of the heads seems to have been the belief that the vitality represented by the head could be transferred to the building and thus protect the inhabitants of the building from negative forces. Similar beliefs seem to have been held in Burma where the construction of the walled city of Mandalay in 1858 required the sacrifice of fifty-two people who were buried alive under the walls and in other strategic locations.

An apparently universal rule in South East Asian societies is that the house posts must always be 'planted' . . . with their root or base end down, the same way as the tree originally grew. " *Symbolism of 'base' and 'tip' is highly elaborated in some Indonesian societies, and rules may even extend to the placement of horizontal members. In the Toraja house, beams on the long sides must be oriented with their base ends to the south. . . . in the Sesean region of Toraja, the southernmost room of the house is consequently known as the 'root' of the house and sacred heirloom cloths and swords are sometimes stored here. For as a priest explained. " The roots must be fertilised, so that the 'branches and leaves' (the heavily decorated facade of the house) will be beautiful "* (Waterson 1993 : 124)

The Karo Batak from Sumatra orient the base of all beams to the north west corner of the house, and the apartment in this corner of the house is called benangkayu 'base of the tree'. It is occupied by the chief of the house. His deputy who is one of his wife taking kin occupies the diagonally opposite apartment which is called top of the tree and all of the other apartments (there are normally eight apartments in all) are given names which relate them to these points of reference. Opposite the base of the tree', 'Sharing a kitchen with the top of the tree', etc.

Both the houses of the Acehnese from northern Sumatra and the northern Thai have identical arrangements of paired main posts which are designated male (the first to be

erected) and female, and named the king and queen posts. People sleep with their heads towards the 'ancestor shelf' where offerings are made and their feet towards the posts. The erection of the posts is preceded by the placement of food, plant and cloth offerings in the post holes, to appease the spirits of the earth.

In Aceh the main frame of the house is erected with communal labour, supervised by the village elders, religious leaders and a master builder. The site is first blessed and a favorable time appointed. First to be erected are the two main posts, called 'prince' and 'princess', accompanied by the reading of prayers from the koran. In the finished house these posts stand in the main bedroom, the most important room in the house, and during wedding ceremonies they symbolize respectively the groom and the bride who each sit adjacent to their designated posts.

Similar customs in connection with the two main posts of the house are to be found in north west Malaysia. At the planting of the main post (designated female) the woman of the house places her hands upon the post as a sign that the house belongs to her and will be under her care after completion.

During its construction the house is under the care of the head carpenter who is often a ritual expert. Completion of the house is often accompanied by an elaborate ritual of handing over during which authority is transferred from the builders to the house owners whose first entry to the house is a solemn affair. The Toraja, the Northern Thai, the Karo and others all carry out elaborate hand over rituals.

Despite the Islamic and other overlays, the striking parallels between the customs of Indonesians, Thai and Malays again make it apparent that a fundamental cultural continuity exists here.

If a house can be brought to life by the processes of construction, ritual and inhabitation what happens to its vital force should its material form be destroyed? As we have seen there is a close relationship between the health of a house and the health of its inhabitants. Fire is perhaps the greatest danger to the physical presence of timber buildings. Waterson describes the destruction by fire of fourteen of the twenty-four houses, including two noble origin houses, together with numerous granaries with their stocks of rice. The local traditional priest conducted a ceremony for the oldest of the burnt origin houses, and by extension for the other houses lost in the fire.

A buffalo calf was sacrificed as a funeral offering for the house, which like humans had a bombo or spirit which exactly resembled it, and which would require food, like humans on its journey to the afterlife. People were in mourning for three nights during which they did not eat rice. As well as death the ritual symbolized continuity as the belief is that an origin house should never be allowed to disappear. If the family can afford it, it will always be rebuilt. The names of origin houses which have not stood for decades or even centuries are always remembered by the family concerned as there is always the possibility that some day their descendants might give them material form again.

The rites which were performed following the fire which destroyed the kraton or sultan's palace at Solo in Java in February 1985 again emphasized continuity. The palace is considered to be keramat, to have a particularly strong concentration of vital energy, and its destruction and that of its contents was a sad loss. The ashes of the burnt building were carefully gathered into bags some to be buried beneath the new kraton and some to

be thrown out to sea as an offering of appeasement to the goddess of the Southern Ocean. The beginnings of the reconstruction started only a few months later when a deer's head and other offerings were buried in a casket beneath the fire damaged part of the palace. Just as ritual helps to bring the building properly into being in the first place, so it can also help to ease the period following the physical loss of a house whose identity is to be preserved until rebuilding can be undertaken.

The material of this lecture should illustrate just how widespread are the South East Asian ideas of the house as an animate entity. The vitality of the house is seen to emanate from a number of sources. These include the life force present in trees used for timber, the process of construction itself with its attendant rituals, and the association of house and body by which the house becomes a sort of extension of the bodies of its inhabitants. The ongoing power and relevance of these ideas is illustrated by the widespread practice of emigrant villagers continuing to support the maintenance and rebuilding of their clan origin houses and continuing to return to the home villages to participate in the important rituals which are carried out in the origin house.

I have highlighted the belief in the natural force called *semangat* among the traditional cultures of South-East Asia and the consequences of this belief for the design, construction and occupation of dwellings in these cultures. The rituals associated with site selection, preparation of building materials, house construction and occupation all have their origins in the desire to reconcile the actions of humans with the forces of nature and thus avoid misfortune befalling the people concerned. Such an idea is not exclusively an Eastern concept. very similar beliefs and operations once characterized the lives of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans in the western tradition as Joseph Rykwert has made clear in his book 'The Idea of a Town'. Now I will briefly address the two great ancient Asian traditions for harmonizing the building activities of man with the forces of nature, and even more briefly, examines some of the parallels between these traditions and the building practices of western antiquity.

These two traditions are *feng shui* the Chinese system for regulating the built environment to optimize and harmonize with the flow of *qi*, and *vaastu shastra* the equivalent set of Indian traditional practices.

Feng Shui

To make any sense of this however it is first important to give some background.

The concept of *qi* is very ancient. It was mentioned in the *yi - qing* or book of changes, one of the world's most ancient texts, reliably claimed to be at least 3000 years old. Lip that the practice of *kanyu* [feng shui] started in the west Han dynasty in the 3rd century BC.

Lip [1995 : 62] describes *qi* as "*the energy according to the geography of the site*". Rossbach [1991 : 21 - 22] states "*qi [or ch'i] is a pervasive concept in Chinese traditional arts ranging from acupuncture and medicine to feng shui and gung fu [commonly known as kung fu]. It can include such diverse phenomena as the energy that moves waves; the source of fertile earth; what martial artists channel when striking powerful blows; what acupuncturists seek to activate with their needles; and even man's aura. To the Chinese Ch'i links spirit and substance. Light ch'i floats as air; heavy ch'i sinks to form matter. . . . In Chinese the character Ch'i has two meanings, one cosmic, one human. Heaven's ch'i encompasses air, steam, gas, weather and force. Man's ch'i includes*

breath, aura, matter and energy. The two types of ch'i are far from separate. Man's ch'i is strongly influenced by the ch'i of both heaven and earth."

The Chinese saw a magical link between man and the landscape: Nature reacts to any change and that reaction resounds in man. . . . The Chinese felt they shared a fate with the earth. When it was healthy and prospered, they thrived; when the balance was destroyed, they suffered . . . Man was vulnerable to nature so he kept watch on it. Rossbach [1991 : 8]

Qi is thought to spiral around and around in the earth, sometimes exhaling towards the crust and sometimes inhaling towards its depths. It may in rising to the surface create mountains or even expand so strongly as to escape in the form of a volcano. If it recedes too far from the surface the land will be dry desert-like and flat. The best situation occurs when ch'i nearly brushes the earth's surface, causing mountains to form, trees to grow tall, grass to be green, air to be fresh, water to be clear, clean and accessible, flowers to bloom and man to live comfortably and contentedly. [Rossbach 1991 : 24]

The 'science' of shaping the physical environment to maximize the beneficial effects of qi is called feng shui literally 'wind and water'. In the third century it divided into two main schools, one which developed in Fukien province stressed direction and depended on a cosmic compass. The other which originated in Kiangsi province was concerned with shapes and directions of land and water masses.

Attitudes to feng shui vary among Chinese. Some philosophically minded might see it as a way to stay in step with the cosmos, others see it as providing a necessary edge over others in life. Some scorn it as superstition but most don't turn their backs on it completely, suspecting that feng shui experts possess an innate special wisdom power and knowledge. Even amongst its proponents feng shui is thought to have limitations. The appropriate use of feng shui principles is thought to be able to influence the state of a persons well being but not to be able to alter the general flow of his or her destiny which is pre-determined by fate.

The techniques and practices of feng shui are a closely guarded secret, being passed orally down from father to son - there are some feng shui texts but the tradition is still basically oral and patrilineal.

The practice traditionally exists in one form or another in Korea, Japan, Laos, Thailand, the Phillipines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore as well, obviously, as in China itself. One of the origins of feng shui was Chinese divination particularly astrology, a celestial model of cosmic order on earth.

Rossbach [1991] points out that divination and siting rituals are not new to the west - the Greeks and Romans for instance inspecting the livers of animals which grazed on the site for a building or development to ensure that they were healthy. They also consulted astrologers to ensure that a new town was properly aligned with the cosmos. Joseph Rykwert's *The Idea of a Town* is an excellent source of material on traditional western divination practices as they applied to urban design.

More than astrology feng shui was influenced by and perhaps itself influenced the very ancient pre Taoist text the yi qing. Taoism, a philosophy based on an understanding of the constantly shifting rhythms of nature and the place of mankind in these shifting

patterns was also influenced by yi qing or it might be more correct to state that the same basic world view produced the concept of qi, the yi qing and Taoist philosophy.

Rural Feng Shui

Feng shui is a language of symbols in which the environment takes on a metaphorical quality. Mountains can be watchdogs, tigers or dragons; rivers can be dragons or serpents. Man is affected by these forms which take on the attributes of the things they resemble. A mountain shaped like a calligraphy brush rest might for example spur scholarly success.

The classic feng shui site is generally agreed to be the protective 'arm-chair hill' formation with a house ideally built half way up a central 'black-tortoise' mountain, facing south over a bend in a river to a lower 'vermillion-phoenix' hill and flanked by a 'white-tiger' mountain on the right and a slightly higher 'green-dragon' mountain to the left. The bend in the river is important as it slows the flow of the water and prevents the river from carrying qi away from the site.

Roszbach is full of anecdotes about the impact on contemporary life of satisfying the requirements of good feng shui in Hong Kong. In 1972 for example, because of a road the government proposed to build over their guardian mountain, villagers threatened to move from an area inhabited by their ancestors for ten generations. They explained: 'if the dragon's neck of our feng shui is cut, our good fortune will vanish, then bad luck will come.' More than forty five years before they noted, the people of Ting Kau village were all killed because the dragon air there was destroyed. [1991 : 45]

Living in the wrong place may bring disaster. Back in the early part of this century, one entire village re-sited itself because no village male had ever attained the age of forty would live there; obviously the feng shui was bad. Although the villagers were very poor they expended a lot of time energy and labor. Through their own effort they moved from one side of the valley to the other. After they moved [of course] the men lived to ripe old ages and the chickens never strayed from their coops. [1991 : 47 - 48]

Graves

For thousands of years, the Chinese have applied great thought to the siting of graves, believing that unless the deceased were properly buried the descendants would suffer. One feng shui man blamed the deaths of John F., and Robert Kennedy on the poorly placed tomb of their grandfather and predicted, on this basis that Ted Kennedy would never be elected president.

People are not beyond using the dead to hurt their enemies. About fifty years ago in Taiwan, people attributed the rise of a rich family to the good placement of the father's grave by an artful feng shui professor from China. The family prospered and had lots of sons who also prospered until the feng shui man's son came to Taiwan and was ill received by the family. To punish their ungratefulness he ought the land in front of the grave and planted a semi circle of bamboo trees with a road joining the ends of the grove and another perpendicular road aimed towards the grave, like a bow and arrow. Strangely the gravestone cracked in half. Within three years the family went broke and many of them died. So they hired another feng shui man from China who discerned the problem and set it right by replacing the headstone and placing two stone rabbits either side of the grave with their hands out ready to catch the arrow [rabbits are quick]. In a year, all was well.

Townscape fengshui

Arrows are also important in urban feng shui. Sites terminating the end of a straight road or at the junction of two perpendicular roads are regarded as particularly inauspicious and will often fetch lower prices than more auspicious neighboring sites.

Residents of houses skewered by straight road ch'i may fall victim to strange accidents and unexpected illness. Their friends will be untrustworthy and secretly critical, 'stabbing' them in the back and pointing accusatory fingers.

There is also a kind of opposite, draining effect which can also damage a house's feng shui. Even a propitious house midway up a hill can have problems if its entrance drive leads straight down from the front door, allowing ch'i and thus money to roll out.

Another source of trouble is a too narrow driveway restricting the flow of ch'i into the house. The best driveway is one that tapers from the narrow end to the house to the wide end at the roadway so that ch'i is funnelled into the house.

Remedies for poor feng shui sites

Mirrors are used to fix a myriad of problems related to poor feng shui. In Chinese communities throughout the world they are the all-purpose solution to a vast range of feng shui ills. In police stations they are often hung to ward off corruption. They can also be placed to balance poorly shaped rooms and even attract positive ch'i. Aware of reflective powers people often get very upset when evils are deliberately sent their way.

Mirror wars are the result, and some have nearly ended up in court. One story starts with a Hong Kong family whose house had a feng shui deficiency. The solution was deemed to be a mirror with two menacing prongs sticking out of it. Unfortunately it was aimed at a neighbors house who retaliated with a larger mirror with three prongs. For years the battle raged with each side putting up more and more mirrors. Finally the issue was decided by the police who deemed the battlefield to be a hazard to night-time motorists and ordered the armaments removed.

Various combinations of fountains and lights, strategically placed are recommended to offset the deleterious effects of irregularly shaped building sites. As with building sites, the more regular a house plan form is, the better. In a 'u' shaped house it is apparently best to locate guest rooms or gambling rooms in the 'wings' of the house. In a boot shaped house it is best not to place the bedroom in the 'sole' of the boot. In a knife shaped house the bedroom should be in the handle rather than the blade etc etc.

Finally, before leaving the subject of feng shui it should be noted that feng shui also encompasses more or less elaborate house consecration rituals which involved traditionally the sacrifice of animals and/or humans whose bodies were then placed under shrines or stelae [monuments] to protect the users of the house, village or palace.

Today the details of a house-warming ceremony vary. They may involve splashing citrus water on the floors of the house to remove bad ch'i and discourage evil spirits. On the first day of occupying a new dwelling the occupants should walk through every room in the house carrying a flute and a flower vase tied with a red ribbon, just to establish the new presence in the house. Firecrackers should be used all over the house especially in the front door.

The parallels with the rituals of construction and occupation of houses which I touched on in Unit 2 are clear.

Vaastu Shastra

The south Asian equivalent of feng shui is called vaastu shastra. As with feng shui it currently enjoys some popularity in the west. As with feng shui the objective of these building and planning practices is the harmonization of human occupation with the forces of nature.

One of the most coherent and perhaps best known treatises on vaastu shastra is the Mayamata which has been translated into English from the Sanskrit by Dagens [1997]. It is a South Indian text divided into 36 chapters which is tentatively dated to the beginning of the 11th century.

The treatise commences with consideration of the methods of examining and taking possession of a site. The direction of slope, orientation and shape of its boundaries, taste dampness and fertility of the site are all considered. The site suitable for Brahmins is square, white, without defects, planted with Udumbara trees, sloping towards the north, perfect and has an astringent and sweet savour [Dagens Ch. 2 : 10 - 15a]. For a king the ideal site slopes to the east is red in colour and has a bitter savour and so on and so on.

Once he has chosen a piece of land endowed with the prescribed qualities of shape, colour and sound [etc] the learned architect should make an offering to the gods accompanied by exclamations such as 'svasti' and cries of good omen such as 'jaya'. Next he pronounces this formula: That Spirits, Gods and Demons depart! That they leave this place and go elsewhere for I take possession. Thus possession is taken of the site. [Dagens Ch. 4 : 1 - 3]

Then the architect ploughs and plants the site with various plants. When they have germinated he puts cows there along with bulls and calves. Then on a lunar day chosen as auspicious according to the configuration of the asterisms, in the favourable half of the day at a moment determined by an inspired man, hulled rice and white flowers are to be offered, and if possible, Brahmins should pronounce propitious words.

[Dagens Ch. 4 : 8b - 10a]

Then at the centre of the site a square hole oriented to the cardinal points of the compass must be dug to a depth of one cubit filled with various offerings and water. After meditating and sleeping by the hole facing the east the architect makes the final decision as to the suitability of the site according to how much water is retained in the morning.

The architect himself is described in The Mayamatam as being *from a renowned land and he is of mixed caste; a man of quality, he must know how to establish buildings and must be well versed in all the sciences; he must be physically perfect, just, compassionate, disinterested, free from envy, without weakness, handsome, and learned in mathematics; he must know the ancient authors and must be straight-forward and master of his senses; he must be able to draw and must know the whole country; he must be generous and not greedy; his health must be good, he must be attentive and*

free from the seven vices, possesor of a well chosen name and persevering, he must have crossed the ocean of the science of architecture. [Dagens Ch. 5 : 13b :18a]

Compare this to the Roman Vitruvius, commonly viewed as a sort of founding father of the western architectural tradition, who lived about a thousand years earlier than the compiler[s] of the Mayamatam.

An architect ought to be both naturally gifted and amenable to instruction Let him be educated, skillful with the pencil, instructed in geometry, let him know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.

There is not the same emphasis on the physical and moral qualities of the architect but otherwise the similarities are striking.

Then the method is given for determining the orientation of proposed works in respect of the cardinal points of the compass and the method of setting out the thirty two diagrams which determine the layout of the the building, village or town which is to be constructed. The setting out of the diagrams on site is accompanied by appropriate offerings to the deities which act as guardians for the various parts of the diagram.

The place of brahma is to be honored with perfumes and garlands, incense, milk, honey and ghee, rice boiled in milk and roasted rice. The offering at the place of Aryaka is a cake of fruits as well as cooked beans and for Mahadikara, milk. These are the offerings to the gods of the interior. [Dagens Ch. 8 : 2.4a] etc etc.

The importance of placing appropriate foundation deposits for the town or building is strongly emphasized and precise instructions are given for elaborate foundation rites which vary dependent on the nature of the building task to be carried out, village, town, house or temple.

The importance attached to these rituals in the traditional building practices of medieval south India has strong parallels with the rituals of foundation and occupation which I described in the context of the traditional building practices of south-east Asia in the last lecture. Especially, it seems to me that the notion that buildings and villages [and people for that matter] have a vulnerable 'navel' through which power is channelled and which must be protected against potentially malign nature spirits is connected with the careful foundation rituals described in vastu shastra.

In the discussion of layout of villages careful instructions are given as to the location of gates and temples and the orientation of temples. In settlements such as villages the temple of Isa is oriented towards either the east or west; it is beneficial if turned towards the exterior of the settlement. The dwelling of Visnu may be oriented in any direction but it is beneficial if turned towards the centre of the village

[Dagens Ch. 9 : 84 - 85]

The discussion sets out the parts of the diagram to be avoided in the placement of buildings. These are the six places where there should be no temples or buildings of that kind: the heart [of the Spirit of the site] and its bones, the stakes, the lines [of the

diagram] , their intersections and the diagonals [and] parallels. [Dagens Ch. 9 : 86] and warns of the consequences of failing to observe either the rules of placement of buildings or the rites of foundation. If the house of candala or curriers or the cemetery or well are badly placed or if there is any departure from the rule as regards temples, village[itself] visvakostha, surrounding territory or streets, then misfortune will result; destruction of the village, loss of the prince and death. [Dagens Ch. 9 : 95 - 98]

The treatise goes on to elaborate in great detail the plans and dimensions of buildings of all types, methods for manufacturing building materials, the appropriate construction, the proportions and placement of their openings and the type and proportions of appropriate decorations.

Although the Mayamtam is dated to the early 11th century the building practices it codifies are thought to be much older.

Thus in both East- and South Asia, and [as we saw last week] in South-East Asia we find elaborate traditional systems of ritual related to both site selection and building foundation, building detail, construction and proportion. In all cases the purpose is the reconciliation of human existence with potentially malign natural and/or divine forces.

Perhaps the most critical application of these processes of harmonization are seen in respect of temple building. In the words of Râmacandra Kaulâcâra an 11th century Orissan architect. This small universe [the temple] has to be situated with respect to the vaster universe, of which it forms a part. It has to fall into line with the position of the earth in relation to the course of the sun, and also the movements of the planets. Far from being a simple arithmetical operation to be achieved by applying the measuring rod, the layout of a temple is based on fundamental cosmic and metaphysical conceptions that govern the whole structure. The situation of the temple must, in its space directions, be established in relation to the motion of the heavenly bodies. But inasmuch as it incorporates in a single synthesis the unequal courses of the sun, the moon and the planets, it also symbolizes all recurrent time sequences; the day the month, the year.

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