

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 architecture students from both University of Malaya and the National University of Singapore (NUS) to work together as a unity as 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, currently 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.

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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 shophouse 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 travelling companions.

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