SUMMARY

Understanding man's relationship with the built environment has become vital as the latter is changing rapidly today, particularly in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. In these nations, modernisation is advancing fast and urbanization has altered man's relationship with his environment. With regards to urbanisation, certain Western values and urban design concepts may not apply to Singapore's context because of differences in culture and the local community's relationship with its built environment.

The built environment is composed of many elements that structure and define spaces. Hall (1966) and Rapoport (1982) classify these as fixed-feature elements ('FEs'), semifixed-feature elements ('SFEs'), and nonfixed-feature elements ('NFEs'). Man's relationship with the built environment is expressed through the various forms of interaction among these elements. Many modern built environments fail because of the wrong application of these elements. As a result, man is alienated and separated from his environment.

Experiencing man's relationship with his built environment in Chinese and Malay settings is therefore crucial as the two ethnic groups are the dominant cultural groups residing in fast-growing Singapore and Malaysia as well as the Southeast Asian region. Water-edge settlements were the early forms of settlement in this region which is marked by lengthy coastlines with many intersecting waterways. To date however, there has been little research in man-environment relationships in the traditional public spaces of these two ethnic groups. The academic definition of traditional public space in these two types of settlement has also been vague and too general.

This research paper focuses on the definition of traditional public space in Chinese and Malay water-edge settlements. It tries to define traditional public spaces through the operation of the different elements mentioned above. The operation is based on two interactive levels relating to one another. The first interactive level refers to Frey's concept of 'goal' and 'path' (1949) and Norberg-Schulz's spatial concept of man's existential space (1971). These two concepts describe the spatial framework of the built environment and man's existential meaning in space with reference
to his position in the spatial framework. The second interactive level applies to the definition of boundary associated with Altman's (1975) concept of territoriality and the roles of each element in spatial definition. Hall's (1966) and Rapoport's (1982) 'FEs', 'SFEs' and 'NFEs' operate in these two interactive levels and inform spatial definition and complexity.

For the purpose of this study, field work was carried out in Singapore and the southern part of Malaysia. A comparison is made between the two cultural specific groups namely the Chinese and the Malays. The method used to collect and analyse field data is based on the metaphor of a 'stage'. Different forms of village activities are classified under the notion of 'Act'. Each 'Act' describes various boundary definitions and man's interaction with the elements in the built environment.

Chapter I deals with the failure of modern built environment and an overview of traditional public spaces. Chapter II is a background study of various theoretical approaches and methodology. Chapter III and IV study traditional public spaces in the Chinese and Malay water-edge settlements respectively. Chapter V is a evaluation of traditional public spaces in both Chinese and Malay water-edge settlements.