SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the spatial concepts found in Southeast Asian architectural systems and to examine these as defined in selected architectural systems in that region. Prevailing concepts of space and architectural elements do not satisfactorily describe or define the various spatial ideas manifested in Southeast Asia. The selection of six Sumatran house forms provided the base for cross-cultural comparisons related to spatial perceptions, ideas and ordering patterns in each culture, as well as across all six cultures. The cross-cultural method was chosen because it provided both the possibility of in-depth analyses of spatial formation in each of the house forms as well as a comparative breadth of view of the subject matter across six sub-groups of three geographically proximate cultures.

In Southeast Asia, the tripartite spatial division of house as related to cosmology has been long recognised. In the thesis, two main architectural features were found constructed to articulate these cosmological ideas as translated to the spaces in all six house forms. These are, respectively, a raft, which defines the boundary plane between cosmological readings of the Underworld and the Middleworld of man, as well as a roof plate-frame, which marks the plane between the Middleworld of man from the Upperworld.

The perception, formation, and articulation of these features were explored and analysed in relation to architectural expression, spatial formation and other related ideas. In the thesis, it was found that architectural elements on the raft and in the roof are organised to reinforce ideas of social order in defining and articulating space. Spatial readings in the vertical axis were also found to be tied inextricably with the readings on the horizontal plane in expressing these ideas.

The identity of these architectural elements and concepts that define and orientate bound-space in the six Sumatran house forms will, hopefully, fill an important role in our understanding of Southeast Asian concepts and formations of space.