

Conference on Current Developments of Southeast Asian Archaeology and Museum Studies

Art and archaeology museums are not as common within the Asia-Pacific region as they are in the West, where these interactive museums provide extra-institutional education for the populace. In Southeast Asia, the museology in utilising archaeological museums for education and leisure still lags behind.

In view of this, SPAFA has conducted a **Conference on Current Developments of Southeast Asian Archaeology and Museum Studies** for the region's museologists to come together and scrutinise Southeast Asian archaeology and museology, and their latest trends of development. Museologists, more so than the administrators who decide on museum operational functions and acquisitions, can contribute toward deepening mutual respect for neighbouring nations and their histories and cultures.

Taking place at the National Museum, Manila, the Philippines, the Conference lasted from May 5-11, 1997 and was attended by twenty-four participants, with the National Museum, Philippines, and SPAFA acting as collaborating institutions.

It provided a forum for discussions on the current trends in Archaeology and Museology as experienced in the individual countries and/or institutions of the different delegates; introduced some of the region's expert opinions on Archaeological Museology as an established science; and developed a framework of ethics to guide Southeast Asian Archaeological Museologists;

The Conference brought together a great diversity of knowledge in Southeast Asian archaeology and museums. All the SEAMEO Delegates presented Country Reports, with observers from Chinese Taipei and Japan giving papers in Prehistoric Archaeology. The general consensus of all the participants was that the Conference was very worthwhile, and had achieved its aims. Some of the participating museologists were impressed with the field visits to archaeological sites excavated by the National Museum of the Philippines, which had been, for them, the first time that they had seen an ongoing excavation.

With the growing number of member countries in the SEAMEO-SPAFA family, participants also recommended that SPAFA operate as a database centre for archaeology and museology, to be accessible to all the members. This would include data on museum collections in the region, and seminar-training courses on archaeological databases to be conducted by SPAFA.

The participants further suggested that SPAFA conduct training courses in the field of archaeometry (due to the volume of archaeological materials in the collection of all member countries). Also, as the archaeology of Southeast Asian countries are all interrelated regardless of their political boundaries, recommendations for SPAFA to sponsor co-operative archaeological research projects among member countries were made, including exhibiting the results of these projects in museums, publishing and making them available to all ASEAN countries.

There were calls for member countries to assist one another through SPAFA in eliminating illegal excavation, looting of archaeological sites, and the illicit trade of cultural artifacts.

Further recommendations included considering the possibility of Myanmar joining the membership of the SEAMEO-SPAFA grouping, and for SPAFA to request governments to arrange exchange of artifacts for display in their museum, and if so required by a member country.

The Resource Persons for the Conference were Mr. Pisit Charoenwongsa, Senior Specialist, SPAFA; Mr. Alfredo Evangelista, Assistant Director (Retired), National Museum of the Philippines; Mr. Wilfredo Ronquillo, Head of Archaeology Division, National Museum of the Philippines; Dr. Eusebio Dizon, Head of Underwater Archaeology Section, National Museum of the Philippines, and Mr. Elmar Ingles, Senior Specialist in Visual Arts, SPAFA.