SPAFA JOURNAL

Topeng: A Mask Dance Theatre of Bali

Culture, Identity and Globalisation in Southeast Asian Art

A Publication of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts
Volume 14 Number 1 January - April 2004 • ISSN 0858-1975

SEAMEO-SPAFA
Regional Centre for
Archaeology and Fine Arts

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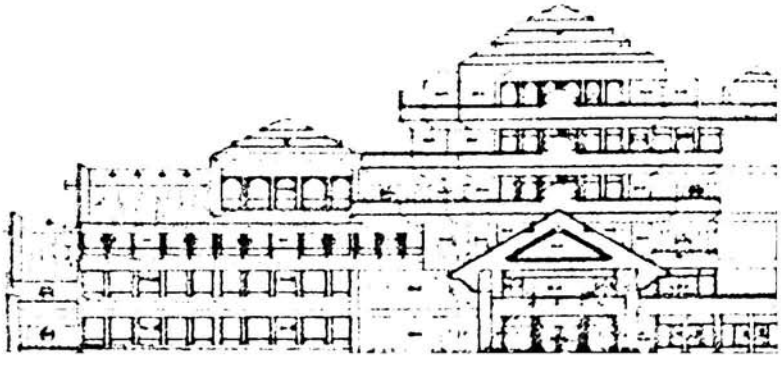

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65/16 Chaiyaphruk Road,
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Tel. (662) 882-1010 (30 Lines)
Fax. (662) 433-2742, 434-1385
E-Mail : info@amarin.co.th
Homepage : http://www.amarin.co.th

Annual Subscription Rates:
US $27 (Air Mail)
US $24 (Surface Mail)
US $19/Baht 465 (Within Thailand)

Cost Per Issue: US $6/Baht 150

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Topeng:
A Mask Dance Theatre of Bali

Old man (Tua) character in one of the solo introductory dances. He is the personality to appear in the beginning of Topeng Pajegan. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

Topeng, an historical theatrical art form of Bali, is a mesmerizing drama of masked dance, music, mime and comedy. It is believed to have originated in A.D. 840 and perhaps earlier, based on the stories and genealogy found in ancient palm-leaf manuscripts known as "lontar". The performance celebrates the mythology and folklore of the island, heroism of a kingdom or clan, and its relevance to the present society, with the characters reflecting the social structure and circumstances. In the following article, **I Wayan Dibia** *presents the history, role and a description of the various forms of this performing art, and speculates on its future.*

Introduction

T he island of Bali, in Indonesia, is the home of various performing art forms featuring mask. Presently, there are no less than seven forms of dance theatre on the island, and each form utilises different types of masks to enact different stories.[1] Among these is *Topeng*, the mask dance theatre enacting the Balinese chronicles, *babad.*

The Balinese word for masks is tapel (*tup* means cover) which is literally translated as "to close or press against the face". Perhaps, it is called *Topeng*, not only because most of the actor-dancers of this dramatic form wear masks, but more importantly that the artistic beauty of its performance lies in, and is very much determined by, the ability

[1] In addition to *Topeng* mask dance theatre, masks are also used in other performing art forms, such as *Barong, Wayang Wong, Telek and Jauk, Legong, Calonarang, Kecak,* and the modern Balinese dance drama known as *Sendratari.*

of its actor-dancers to give breath and soul to their masks by utilising the right movements, voices, actions, and energy. Making the mask come to life is, in fact, the key to the success of the *Topeng* performance. The dancers usually operate this principle not by simply putting their masks on but through a process of transformation they become the characters represented by the masks. In a sense, the actor-dancers "enter the world and life" of the masks.

Topeng is essentially an improvisational theatre; there is no script for the actors to follow, no one who directs the actors, or composers who write the music. Instead, the performers use a set of conventions as general guidelines when improvising their parts, and they work from their memories. The success of the performance, therefore, does not depend on how exact and precise the actors tell the story, or how they perform the choreography, but on how creatively they bring all the elements together to make the drama come to life.

Despite the changing culture of Bali, *Topeng* continues to have a special place and it is still highly valued by nearly all in the Balinese community. Perhaps this is because of the importance of *Topeng* in ritual and cultural activities on the island; its dramatic form continues to present and speak about the values and spirit in contemporary Balinese society.

The Variants of Balinese *Topeng*

For centuries, mask performances have been an important part of the Balinese cultural tradition. The origin of Balinese mask performances can be traced to the ninth century. One of the earliest records on mask performances was found in the *Bebetin* manuscript dating back to the Caka year 818 or 896 A. D. Among the important terms found in the manuscript, which suggest performances using masks, are *partapukan, atapukan,* or *hanapuk* (tapuk means "to cover" or mask). It is strongly believed that mask performances have developed well at that time, but no one knows whether the mask performances mentioned in the manuscript are similar to the *Topeng* mask dance theatre flourishing in Bali today.

A performer preparing to perform his role as the panasar. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Perforwing Arts', Archipelago Press

Currently, there are four variants of the *Topeng* genre in Bali: *Topeng Pajegan, Topeng Panca, Topeng Prembon,* and *Topeng Bondres.* These variants evolved during different periods of the Balinese history. The first and the second evolved between the seventeenth to

nineteenth century, and the others were created during the modern era (twentieth century).

Mask of Sidhakarya. At the conclusion of the performance, Sidhakarya would bless the audience with a sprinkling of rice grains and holy water. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

Topeng Pajegan, also known as *Topeng Sidhakarya,* is a mask dance drama performed by a solo actor-dancer.[2] It is believed that *Topeng Pajegan,* considered as the oldest variant of *Topeng,* developed around the seventeenth century during the reign of King Waturenggong's grandson, King Demade, in Gelgel-Klungkung. The King and his Prime Minister, I Gusti Pering Jelantik, created a dance drama using the masks brought home from the palace of Blambangan in East Java during the invasion of the Blambangan Kingdom.[3]

To portray the different characters in the play, the dancer changes his mask and headdress every time he appears on stage, but without changing his costume. He moves, sings and speaks according to the facial expressions of the mask. He also narrates the story, and describes the dramatic action of the play. One of the most important characters on *Topeng Pajegan* is Sidhakarya, which means "to finish the task", and refers to the ceremony in process. Wearing a white mask with narrow slits for eyes, buck teeth, and sporting wild white hair, he is indeed frightening. His movements are sparse, he hops around and laughs eerily. A young child in the audience will be snatched up and given Chinese coins with square holes in the centre, also a symbol of prosperity.

Due to the complex dramatic role the actor must perform, and the priestly duty he must carry out, *Topeng* Pajegan is usually performed by a reputed and mature actor who also has priestly knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising if the *Topeng* is acted by a real temple priest, or a shadow puppet master *(dalang)*. Alternatively, the actor must have undergone a purification ceremony called *mawinten.*

Topeng Panca (meaning *Topeng* theatre of five actors) is a derivative of the *Topeng Pajegan.* It is believed that *Topeng Panca* first appeared in the eighteenth century, if not later. *Topeng Panca* also called *Topeng Gede* (large *Topeng* performance featuring more dancers), requires a longer performance time. It began to reach its

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[2] One can now see a performance of *Topeng Sidhakarya* at religious rites of two to three dancers. This is because nowadays it is becoming more common for Balinese dancers to dance in a ritual as a part of performing their religious duty.

[3] These masks can be seen at the Penataran *Topeng* Temple in Blahbatuh-Gianyar.

popularity around the 1930s, and is still a popular dramatic form in Bali today.[4]

Unlike *Topeng Pajegan,* the requirement for *Topeng Panca* actor-dancers is relatively lighter. In the *Topeng Panca* performance, the dancers divide the dramatic roles in the play among them; the dancers are assigned to act as the king, minister, buffoon, clown, etc.. Those who are strong dancers with limited skills in dialogue, or story-telling, may take roles with less or no dialogue. However, the roles, such as the buffoons and the clowns, who narrate the story while making contemporary jokes, must be played by more mature and experienced actors.

A bondres mask for a comic character. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

Topeng Prembon is essentially a mixed mask dance drama featuring characters with and without masks. A derivative of the *Topeng Panca,* combining elements of *Topeng* and the opera dance-drama *Arja* of Bali, this dance theatre was created in 1942 through a collaborative production by a group of artists from Gianyar and Badung regencies. Many believed that the creation of this dramatic form was strongly stimulated by the growing awareness among the people of Bali, concerning their new provincial and national roles during the revolution of Indonesia. With the inclusion of these *Arja* roles, *Topeng Prembon* becomes a theatre of male and female artists although the performance is still dominated by male actors.[5]

Topeng Bondres or *Babondresan* is a mask dance theatre dominated by comic characters, such as buffoons and clowns, and its play contains endless amounts of spontaneous humour. Created around the early 1980s, the *Topeng Bondres,* the youngest in the *Topeng* genre, is a flexible dramatic form that does not rely on a formal performance structure. It tells no literary story and its entire performance is filled with humour. The play may be based on a classical story as a starting point but then it digresses into spontaneous criticism and comment on current issues.

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[4] Lately in Bali, it is common for a *Topeng Panca* performance to involve only three or four dancers. Once in a while, it may involue seven performers.

[5] *Prembon* is considered an important concept for art creativity, especially in Balinese performing arts, for it allows artists with different artistic skills to interact and to share their talents.

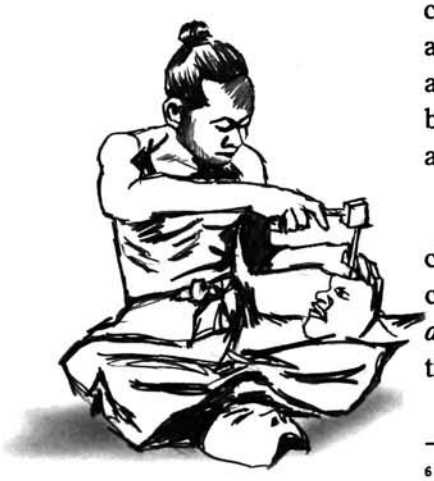
During the last five years, *Topeng Bondres* has been including female *Arja* roles of similar character types (comic characters). With the inclusion of these roles, *Topeng Bondres* has become a shorter version of *Topeng Prembon.*

Performance Elements

Topeng is a complex theatrical form integrating dance, story-telling, music, and mask. When performing a story, there are moments when a *Topeng* dancer must dance and sing, and later tell the story. Since mask, the most essential element of this theatrical form, is considered a sacred object, *Topeng* performance usually requires elaborate offerings.

The masks (or *tapel*) used in *Topeng* usually portray human faces. They are handmade of wood, painted with Balinese pigments and accentuated with hair and jewelry. The masks are held in place by a rubber strap.[6] Prior to the performance, the actors adorn their masks with *gegirang* leaves and flowers to enliven the performance.

There are normally eight to twelve different masks used in a *Topeng* performance. Based on their sizes and physical forms, these masks can be classified into three groups: full mask or *tapel bungkulan* which covers the entire face; half mask or *tapel sibakan* which covers from the forehead down to the upper lip; and mini mask, *tapel mini,* covering only the forehead and nose, or nose and jaw. The full masks are for *Topeng keras* (the strong characters), *Topeng tua* (the old man), and *Topeng dalem* (the refined king); the half masks are used by the buffoon or *panasar,* and some of the clowns *(bondres);* and mini masks are also for the clowns.[7]



Pajegan carver, working on a Topeng mask. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

The dance movements adopted in *Topeng* are based on the classical Balinese dance drama – *Gambuh. Topeng* dance, in general, consists of four main categories of movement: *agem, tandang, tangkep, and tangkis. Agem* are non-locomotive actions and *tandang* are locomotive. Together, these two aspects make up the main choreography.

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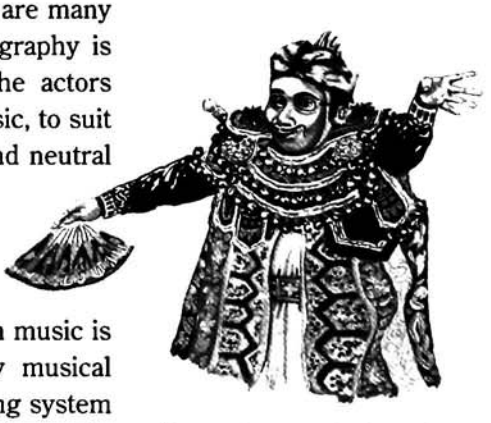
[6] The first masks found in Bali had mouthpieces *(canggem)* that the dancer bit on to hold the mask in place. This type of mask is still used in Ketewel villages in the sacred *Legong Topeng* dance.

[7] To make a *Topeng* mask for sacred dramatic form, the carver must first go to the graveyard where the *pule* (*Alstonia scholaris*) tree grows. Offerings are made and permission requested to take wood from the trunk of the tree.

Tangkis are traditional phrases, which connect *agem* and *tandang* movements, and *tangkep* are facial expressions. Since there are many speaking sections in *Topeng* performances, *Topeng* choreography is dominated by in-place movements and hand gestures. The actors move creatively, either leading or following the gamelan music, to suit the expressions of the masks, which at first appear static and neutral yet once animated, take on a multitude of emotions.



Topeng choreography is dominated by in-place movements and hand gestures.

Although there are parts of *Topeng* performance in which the actors perform a rather fixed choreography, in most parts of the play the dance is improvised. The gamelan music is always responsive to the dancer's actions; in fact, many musical changes are initiated by dance movement cues. This signaling system between dancer and musicians, through the drummers, allows the actors to shorten or lengthen their dance sequences depending upon their artistic impulse and the response of the audience.

In *Topeng,* as in most Balinese theatre, dance is a means of defining the social status, gender, and persona of the characters for the audience. The principals, representing the aristocracy, dance formally in more stylized and structured movements. To maintain their sense of formality, they reinforce their spoken lines with dance. In contrast, the servants and clowns who represent people of the lower class utilise rather informal, spontaneous movements, and their dances are relatively simple.

In most cases, the *keras* – strong characters – incorporate more percussive and forceful movements, and those of refined character adopt more flowing and softer movements.

The stories for *Topeng* are drawn from Balinese chronicles *(babad),* which are usually written on palm leaf manuscripts or *lontar.* Usually, the outline of the dramatic plot for a *Topeng* story is taken from the historical past of the Balinese, which may depict, for example, the journey of the Javanese priests and noblemen to Bali from Java between the ninth and the fourteenth century; the historical journey of Balinese ancestors that took place later; the founding of many Hindu-Buddhist temples around the island; the inauguration of the local villages; the marriages of the local kings and their royal family members; and the role or emergence of clans in Bali. Among the most important literature containing *Topeng* stories, to mention only a few, are: *Babad Dalem* or the Chronicle of the Kings which tell of the

glorified history of the ancestral heritage of the more prominent caste on the island; *Kidung Pamancangah* which describes the family line of Balinese kings; *Babad Blahbatuh; Babad Wug Gianyar; and Babad Mengwi.* Whatever the story, there are always scenes depicting present-day inhabitants of Bali discussing contemporary issues and narrating jokes, despite the fact that the drama is set in the eighteenth century, or even earlier. Impressed by *Topeng's* mixed plot, some dramatists claim that *Topeng* bridges the past and the present, the distant and the immediate.[8]

Topeng stories are always heroic and didactic. They are heroic in that they tell of many great battles involving local kings, clan leaders, and other heroes. They are didactic since *Topeng* stories convey philosophical concepts, such as the duality *(rwa bhineda)* in life involving two conflicting forces: good *(dharma)* and evil *(adharma)*. The stories usually end with the victory of the good.

In *Topeng,* stories are vehicles chronicling lineage and the pity wars between local kingdoms as told in *babad* chronicles. The stories are generally about the *karma* or fate of the heroes, the stock-characters represent people of high and low classes, and the structure of the stories reflect the duality in the Hindu-Bali culture.

Topeng stories integrate balanced elements of both serious drama and comedy making the performance neither too serious nor frivolous. No matter what story is being enacted, there will always be four types of characters appearing in the play: knights and guards, servants and buffoons, king, and clowns. Some of these characters do not use spoken dialogue but only employ gestures, while others speak Balinese with Old-Javanese flourishes. Today, these characters may also speak the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia,* as well as other languages in order to reach much larger audiences.

A *Topeng* story is chosen in many ways; it can be based on the specific request of the host, or the actors choose one that is based on local situations as well as take into account the type of acting skills required. The story follows the structure of a performance in that they must include audience scenes with the king, the appearance of the villagers, and conclude with a fighting or meeting scene.

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[8] See Jhon Emigh. *Mask Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 105-156.

The music accompaniment for *Topeng* in most cases is gamelan *Gong Kebyar.* This is one of the largest gamelan ensemble on the island, employing between 30 to 35 musicians, and the most popular ensemble that can be found throughout Bali.

Gong Kebyar is a relatively new gamelan ensemble. It was first created in 1915 in Buleleng (northern Bali) by using elements of the older gamelan ensembles, such as *Gong Gede, Gender Wayang,* and *Gamelan Palegongan.*[9]

This five-tone *pelog* scale gamelan is composed of eight different kinds of instruments, most of which are percussive. The more important instruments in the ensemble are the vertical gongs *(gong ageng, kempul),* flat gongs *(bebende),* knobbed gongs *(reyong, trompong, kajar, kempli),* gangsa metallophones *(jegogan, jublag, ugal, penyacah, pemade, kantil),* drums *(kendang),* cymbals *(cengceng),* bamboo flutes *(suling),* and the two-stringed fiddle *(rebab).* Playing these instruments, the ensemble produces 'bursting' sounds (the meaning of the word *kebyar*), rich, dynamic, and complex music.[10]

The costumes for *Topeng* are based on the male costumes of the classical *Gambuh* dance drama. Known as the *sesaputan,* the basic costume is composed of many pieces of cloth worn together in many layers. Some of the most important items of the *Topeng* costumes are: an ornamented split robe *(saput)* covering the body (from chest to knee), a pair of white pants *(jaler)* and a white waist cloth *(kamen),* a belt, a dark jacket, a pair of leggings, a decorative back panel, decorative collar, a pair of long aprons, and a pair of epaulettes. Each dancer wears a dagger or *kris* across his back.

The head-dress used in *Topeng* includes the crown-like head-dress or *gelungan* used by the principals; a wig or *sobrat;* and head cloth or *udeng* for servants and clowns. Some clowns may also wear hats, caps, or even army barets. The commonly crown-like head-dresses used in the *Topeng* are called *cecandian* and *keklopingan* for ministers and guards, and *lelungsiran* for the king.

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[9] In the old days, two ancient gamelans, *Gong Kembang Kirang* and *Gong Gede,* were usually used. Nowadays, while some villages may use gamelan *Gong Luang, Semar Pagulingan,* or even gamelan *Angklung,* most villages use gamelan *Gong Kebyar.*

[10] I Wayan Dibia. *Selayang Pandang Seni Pertunjukan Bali* (Bandung: Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan, 1999, p. 127.

The offerings for *Topeng* performance is quite elaborate. *Topeng* dancers believe that their masks possess the soul and spirit of the respective characters. They always treat the mask with profound respect by always keeping them in an appropriate or special place, making regular offerings to them, at home and at the performance site, before and after the performance.

There are at least two sets of offerings usually required in every performance: an offering for the head-dresses *(banten gelungan)*, and an offering for the musical instruments *(banten gamelan)*. Presented before and after the performance, these offerings can serve to consecrate the stage, and also as rituals requesting for permission to perform on the stage – from the spirits who occupy the space. The offerings at the beginning of the performance are to invoke and invite the divine spirits of the arts to descend and embody the materials that would be used. At the end of the performance, the offerings are for sending the spirits back to the upper world.

Topeng Tua (old man), one of the four introductory masks. Drawing after 'Dance and Drama in Bali', Oxford University Press

In *Topeng Pajegan*, the *Sidhakarya* emerges with an offering bowl in his hands. He walks towards the main shrine, or to the main area of the ceremony, and throws out yellow rice in four directions, dispensing wealth and fertility to everyone.

In addition, every 210 days or six months of the Balinese calendar, many art troupes conduct an annual ritual known as *weton gelungan/gamelan*. On the day of this ceremony, all head-dresses will be displayed in an elevated place, and the gamelan instruments in a special place nearby, to be blessed and acknowledged. Frequently, the ritual is preceded by a feast for the troupe members.

In Balinese culture, all gamelan ensembles are considered sacred, since spirits may reside in one or two of the instruments. In the case of *Gamelan Gong*, the spirits may enter the large *gongs*. This is also true with the head-dress, where the divine spirits of the arts may also reside. To invite the spirits of the arts to join the performance, and to keep them happy, the troupe conducts rituals before the performance, and to keep the spirits from going away, annual rituals may be performed.

Another important purpose for conducting rituals is to attain *taksu*, the spiritual power for stage appearance. The presence of *taksu* will not only alter the artistic quality of the performance,

it will also transform the actor into the character he or she plays. *Taksu* transforms all "raw" materials and the *mise-en-scènes* of the drama into a "live" art production. It is through the presence of *taksu* that the performance can be "elevated" above a mundane performance. While there is no set formula for attaining *taksu,* rituals are certainly one of the most essential means for Balinese artists to invoke and awake their *taksu.*

Topeng as Community Theatre

Topeng is essentially the theatre of the Balinese community. This art form is well-loved by members of the community, so much so that it exists almost everywhere on the island. More importantly, it is produced and performed for the entertainment of the community by its members.

A *Topeng* performance may involve between thirty and forty performers; these include about thirty gamelan players and between five and ten dancers and their assistants. The dancers are usually chosen by the host (for a temple congregation, or a family ceremony); they may never have performed together as a group. It is important to mention that, to date, *Topeng* is still a male-dominated theatre.[11] It is rare to find principal female figures in a *Topeng* play; these characters are usually revered.[12]

The musicians, who organise themselves into a club or *sekaa,* are locals. Dancers can be from the local village, but if one is not available then dancers from outside will be brought in.

The audience for *Topeng* is comprised of all ages: children, adults, and the elderly; and they are from all levels, upper, middle, and lower class of society. Although the performers are exclusively male, *Topeng* plays appeal to everyone in the community. There are parts of the *Topeng* performance, which appeal to the children, and there are

[11] The most recent development is *Topeng Sakti,* an all women's group, which performed at the 2001 Magdelena Festival in Denmark. The musicians were women from the Mekar Ayu *gamelan* group in Pengosekan, Ubud and the dancers were Ni Nyoman Candri and Cokorda Istri Agung from Singapadu, and Cristina Formaggia from Italy.

[12] In the past, several experiments on *Topeng* performance involving female characters acted by female performers have been conducted in Denpasar, but so far, the results have not been too satisfying.

many sections in the play that can be enjoyed by the adults. Moreover, the themes of the play relate to social, cultural, and political issues for all classes in the community.

Topeng is usually performed for free. The performers, especially the musicians, who are local villagers, may participate in the performance as part of their social and religious duty known as *ngayah.* While this is also true for the local dancers, dancers from another village would receive a relatively small fee. In many cases, dancers from other villages, who have close relationships with the host, may also perform for free. In addition, *Topeng* performance can be held in any place, with relatively simple decoration and lighting. The only stage prop required is the split curtain, or *langse.* Hence, it is not necessary for the host to collect admission fees from the audience.

Topeng is entertainment for both the *rural* and *urban* communities. During certain holidays, such as Galungan and Kuningan, one may encounter *Topeng* performances in many villages, as well as in Denpasar city. Nowadays, many of the wealthy in Bali invite *Topeng* groups to perform and enrich various ceremonies arranged by their families, which are held inside family compounds, or in community halls. Each dancer brings a box of masks and various head-dresses and costumes. Before starting, a small ritual is carried out by one of the dancers to ensure success for their performance. The masks and head-dresses are set in a high place of respect, never touching the ground, and incenses are wafted towards them.

Topeng In Performance

Broadly speaking, the formal structure of *Topeng,* as performed in *Topeng Pajegan, Topeng Panca,* and *Topeng Prembon,* is composed of two parts: the introduction or *panglembar,* and the drama or *lampahan. Topeng* dancers consider the introduction as the part during which they can demonstrate their virtuosity through pure dance movements. The two most popular characters for the introduction are *Topeng keras,* a strong prime minister figure with a red or brown face denoting strength and courage; and *Topeng tua* or the old man. These characters do not speak, but move around the stage space as if they are spreading energy to the entire performance space.

The drama begins with the appearance of the clown servants, in the roles of two brothers who wear half-masks, speaking mainly

Balinese, and are the storytellers *(panasars)*. The *panasars* pave the way for the entrance of the king, and more importantly to set the flow of the entire play. The older brother *(panasar kelihan)* begins by singing his tale behind the dance curtain. Stepping into the stage arena, he regales the audience with glorious facts about his Lord and kingdom, and his joy at being able to work for the king. Only then he drops hints about which king, what century and which place he is talking about. He then calls for his younger brother *(panasar cenikan)*, whom he always blames for being invariably late and lazy, despite the fact that it is the younger brother who philosophises and educates the audience.

The panasar's half mask. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

These two traverse around the stage space discussing the issues of the day, always with humour that leaves the audience chortling. It is their responsibility to keep the story line going as well as integrate modern references in the ancient stories (such as the issues of development or the annoyance of handphones ringing while they're trying to tell the story). Thus, the audience can appreciate both worlds at the same time. In this way, the actor-dancers impart important social, religious and moral issues without sounding too pedantic.

The two *panasars* raise the problem or issue at hand: a princess has been kidnapped, land has been stolen, a large ceremony is to be held. Then the music suddenly changes and the two go into supplicating postures, sitting on the floor cross-legged with their hands set in respective poses.

The *Dalem* (king) then appears between the two halves of the curtain; his flowered head-dress quivering. His movements are dainty and refined, and his mask is a light cream colour with mother-of-pearl teeth shinning below his trimmed moustache. He sits on the top of a chair back to show his status. He then approaches his servants, and tells them through gestures what needs to be done. One *panasar* speaks for the king (as it is difficult to speak through a full mask, and also unseemly for such a refined character), and the other simultaneously translates into colloquial Balinese so the audience can understand. The King then takes his leave.

Then, the two brothers decide that they must gather their forces, whether it is an army or the people of the *banjar* (hamlet). Here, the clowns *(bondres)* come in, stuttering, with multiple layers of teeth, gimpy legs, deaf ears, monkey faces and so on. The *panasar* stays on stage while his younger brother and one of the actors who plays an introductory role, or even the actor who is the

king, change masks and headgear backstage, and come back on and engage in a dialogue. The brilliance of Balinese improvisation really shines here as the actors banter back and forth on issues of the day, contemporising events that happened hundreds of years ago, and making fun of everybody from priests to cab drivers to tourists.

Mask of the patih (prime minister)

If the plot or storyline involves an enemy (e.g. kidnapper, land snatcher), then before the clowns come out, other characters such as a Prime Minister *(patih)* or a messenger would emerge to converse with the King *(Dalem)*.

Functions of *Topeng* Performance

In Bali, nearly all performing arts are presented in accordance to the tripartite concept – *wali, bebali,* and *balih-balihan.*[13] In brief, the *wali* arts include all art forms which are considered sacred and religious, and are traditionally performed as an integral part of ceremonies. *Bebali* arts consist of all ceremonial arts, usually dramatic in nature, which are staged to complete the ceremonies. *Balih-balihan* arts are composed of non-religious or secular arts that are performed as public entertainment, almost without time and space restriction.

Based on this concept, *Topeng Pajegan* is considered as *wali* and *bebali* arts (*Topeng* for ritual) that is traditionally performed for a myriad of rituals and religious ceremonies. *Topeng Panca, Topeng Prembon,* and *Topeng Bondres* are mainly performed for secular entertainment, but sometimes in conjunction with religious activities.

Nearly all Balinese performing arts adheres to the wali, bebali and balih-balihan concept.

Topeng for Ritual

As *wali* or *bebali* arts, the performance of *Topeng Pajegan* normally takes place inside the temple, near the sanctuary, and within the area of the ceremony, along with *Wayang Lemah* (ritual Shadow Play), and during the same time that the priest is conducting the ritual. The arts serve as an obligatory part of the ritual, and the performances are intended to please an invisible audience: comprising of the gods and deities residing temporarily inside the temple, as well as deified ancestors.

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[13] The *wali, bebali, and balih-balihan* concept was a result of the 1971 art conference sponsored by the Bali Provincial Government. One of the best work explaining this concept is *Kaja and Kelod Balinese Dance in Transition* (1981), by I Made Bandem and Frederik Eugene deBoer.

In the Hindu Bali culture, sacred religious practice includes different kinds of rituals and ceremonies, collectively known as *Panca Yadnya*. The five main ceremonies are *dewa yadnya* (ritual dedicated to the gods and deities), *resi yadnya* (ritual to the priests), *bhuta yadnya* (sacrifice to *bhuta kala*), *pitra yadnya* (rituals to human souls), and *manusa yadnya* (rites of passages).

The most significant *Panca Yadnya* ceremonies which *Topeng* performance is associated with are: temple ceremony *(odalan)*, cremation *(ngaben)*, weddings, tooth-filings, and other rites of passage. Due to the importance of the *Topeng* to these ceremonies, many Balinese consider a ritual to be incomplete without the *Topeng* performance.

Topeng for Entertainment

As *balih-balihan* arts, the performance of *Topeng Panca, Topeng Prembon,* and *Topeng Bondres* traditionally take place just outside the temple, inside a village hall or theatre, outdoor stages in hotels, or at other places. As secular art forms, the primary goal of these performances is to entertain the audience, even though the performances may also be held in conjunction with religious ceremonies listed above. As these performances are held in a secular space, outside the temple, they are observed by the public.

During rites of passage ceremonies, such as wedding receptions, tooth-filing, etc., *Topeng Bondres* may also be performed in the yard of a house. Presently, it is very common for a Balinese family to arrange a *Topeng Bondres* performance before inviting the guests to eat. *Topeng Bondres* is usually brief, less than an hour, mainly to entertain the guests.

There are several secular events in which a *Topeng* performance may be included. Some of these events are: village fairs or *rame-rame* which may be organised after harvests, or during the inauguration of a new building, other public facilities; national fairs *(pasar amal)*, a regional or national celebration sponsored by the government (Indonesian Independence day, for instance) or art festivals, such as the Annual Bali Arts Festival, *Pesta Kesenian Bali.*

It is clear that there are many religious ceremonies and festivals to which the Balinese commonly relate *Topeng* performances. This also explains the importance of the Topeng mask dance theatre in the modern Balinese society.

The mask of the old man charater (Tua). Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

The Future of *Topeng*

As a *Topeng* dancer myself, and from my observations and performing experiences during the last twenty years, it is apparent that *Topeng* remains a favourite theatrical form because of two major reasons. First, *Topeng* is a community theatre that is produced and performed by the locals, and cherished by the community. In a sense, the *Topeng* performance becomes a place for community members to socially and artistically interact. Secondly, *Topeng* is a multi-functional dramatic form that is required in the sacred and secular realms of Balinese culture. The Balinese perform *Topeng* in conjunction with their myriad religious occasions and festivals. It does not, however, mean that *Topeng* will not have obstacles to overcome in the years ahead.

The most serious challenge to *Topeng* is the decreasing use of the Balinese language *(Bahasa Bali)*. During the 1970s, after the removal of *Bahasa Bali* from the core curriculum of school programmes, Balinese students have been encouraged to speak more *Bahasa Indonesia* at school, and most classes are taught in this language, rather than Balinese. This condition has lowered the interest of young Balinese in learning their native language, and their literature, which are the two most important aspects of Balinese art and culture. Meanwhile, people of the middle class tend to prefer speaking in *Bahasa Indonesia,* even at home with their families and relatives. Such a trend has gradually created an image whereby the use of *Bahasa Bali* is perceived as unsophisticated. Fortunately, for the past ten years *Bahasa Bali* has been reinstalled in the provincial curriculum for both secondary and high school students. There is a great optimism that this programme will fortify the use of Balinese language.

The patih warrior. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

Sadly, educated Balinese are less able to enjoy performances of traditional drama, such as *Topeng,* because they have lost pride in their native language, including the understanding of the three-speech levels (low, middle, high), the metaphors, riddles and proverbs used by the actors. Actually, the decline of Balinese language and literature is a threat to all Balinese traditional performing arts in two ways: losing audience and failing to inculcate a new generation of actors and dancers. If the language and literature are dying out, how can the arts survive?"[14]

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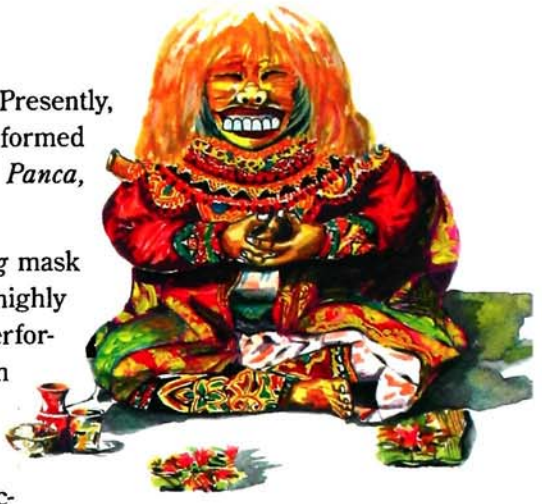
[14] Putu Setia. Menggugat Bali (Jakarta: PT Pustaka Gratitipers, 1986), p. 83

Conclusion

Topeng is one of Bali's most important theatrical forms. Presently, there are four variants of *Topeng* that are being actively performed throughout Bali; these include: *Topeng Pajegan, Topeng Panca, Topeng Prembon,* and *Topeng Bondres.*

Amidst the rapid changes of Balinese culture, *Topeng* mask dance theatre continues to have a special place and it is still highly valued by the Balinese. This is mainly because *Topeng* performance, known as *wali* and *bebali* art forms, is required in Hindu-Bali rituals; it also enriches non-religious activities, as a *balih-balihan* art form.

In response to the modernisation of Bali, *Topeng* dancers continue to introduce new ideas in their performances by selectively adopting elements of contemporary cultures, without neglecting *Topeng's* artistic conventions. A traditional art form like *Topeng* will remain popular and relevant only when it speaks about the values and reflect the spirit of contemporary life.



Sidhakarya, the awe-inspiring character with long white hair, in Topeng Pajegan. Drawing after 'Indonesian Heritage: Performing Arts', Archipelago Press

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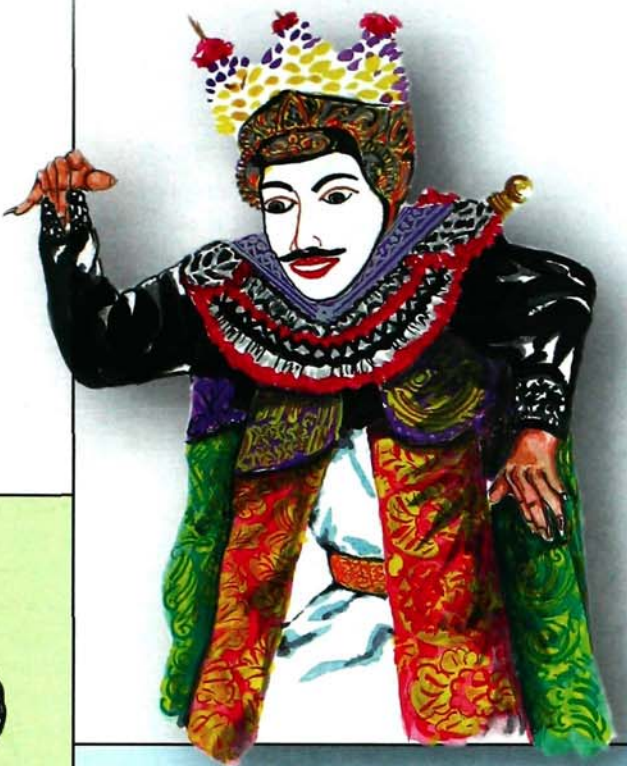
Paper presented for Seminar and Workshop on Southeast Asia Performing Arts, SEAMEO-SPAFA, Bangkok University, Thailand, 10-14 November 2003. ***Illustration by Pattanapong Varanyanon***

I Wayan Dibia is a distinguished performer, choreographer and scholar specialising in Balinese performing arts. He started experimenting with elements of traditional Kecak (a well-known performing art form of Bali, also known as Cak) to create innovative works in the 1970s that have achieved widespread appreciation. Dibia served as Director of STSI Denpasar (Indonesia College of the Arts) from 1997 to 2002, and lectures at ISI, the Institut Seni Indonesia (Indonesia Institute of the Arts), Denpasar. He holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies in Southeast Asian Performing Arts from UCLA (U.S.A).

A section of a gamelan. In Balinese culture, all gamelan ensembles are considered sacred.

The hero-King, epitomising nobility of character



The patih (minister) in Topeng Keras.

A collection of bondres' masks for the clown characters

Two Sides of the Golden Coin
2003, installation
Nguyen Dam Thuy
Vietnam

The atmosphere that envelops the viewer as he steps into the display hall is warm and welcoming; the materials and textiles used exude an air of security and well-being. The blue of the silk and of the oil paintings evokes a feeling of depth and infinity. The landscape of traditional hats and lamps, and the "little flame" that symbolizes the individual in the great mass of humanity, create a mood of harmony - if not for the barbed wire that connects the row of coins in the centre picture, gold coins that are associated with traditional funeral rites. What we have here is a metaphor that draws from an ancient tradition according to which the departed, in keeping with their social status, are to symbolically take their money with them to the other world in the form of a gold coin placed on the tongue of the deceased, so as to obviate the necessity of them having to start from scratch again in the other world. This may be understood as a sign of monetarisation of society and the growing demands made of life by its individuals, particularly in the instance of a "hat" gathering several coins beneath it. At the same time, however, this also poses a tremendous challenge to Vietnamese society to strive hard to preserve values that were once important and provided the community with a regulatory framework.

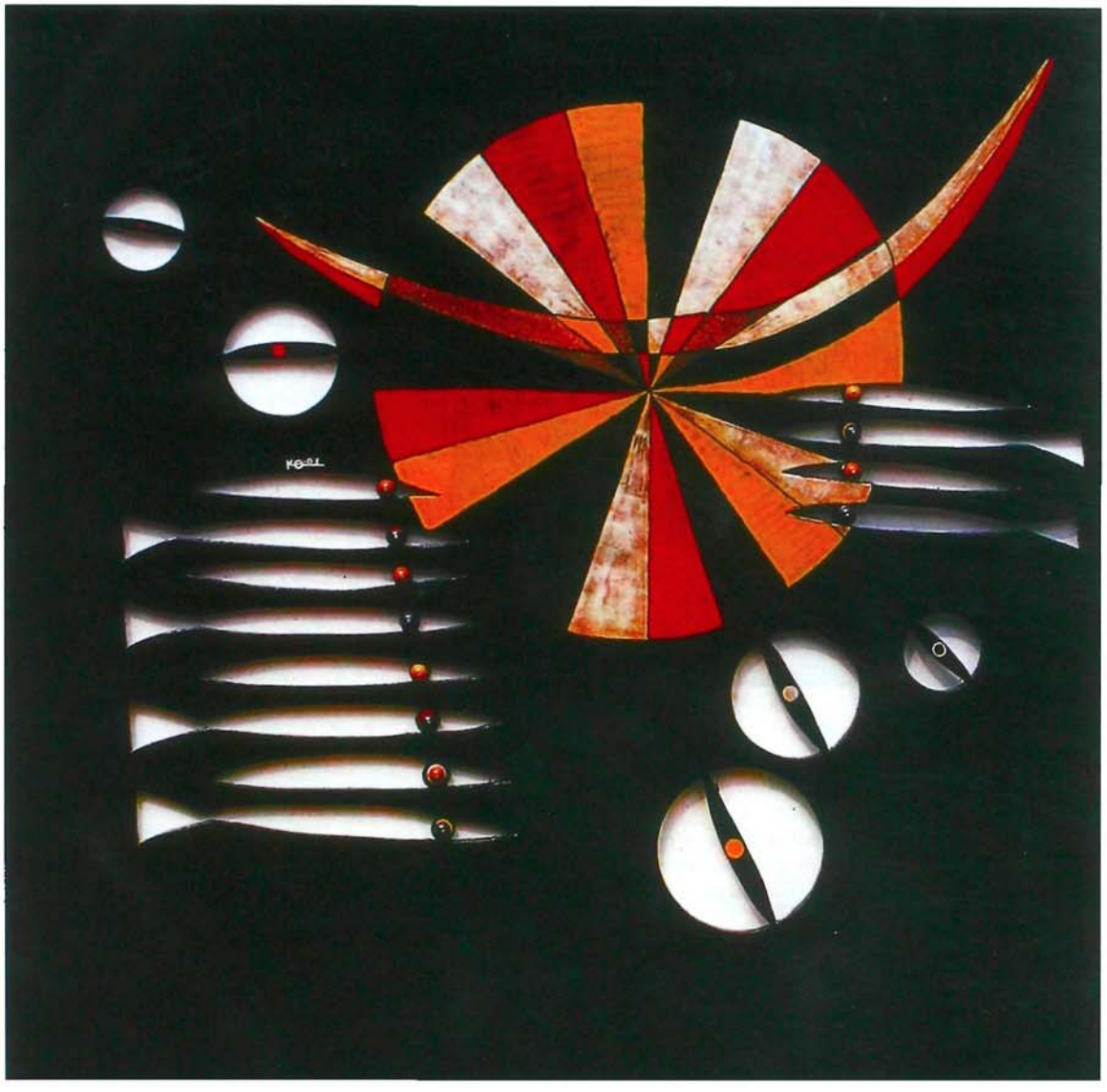
We Vietnamese are known for retaining our integrity in the face of tremendous challenges and preserving our national character. I believe in a future in which the best of our national traditions and attributes stand preserved, not blindly succumbing to the power of money. The faces on the blue background symbolize the great mass of humanity which toil hard every day to earn a small income, but is nevertheless ready to share.

The Follower ▶
2003, installation
Mella Jaarsma
Indonesia

Through my work I try to reject the question of origin and actually deconstruct identities by producing renewable identities, seeing identity as a transient invention.

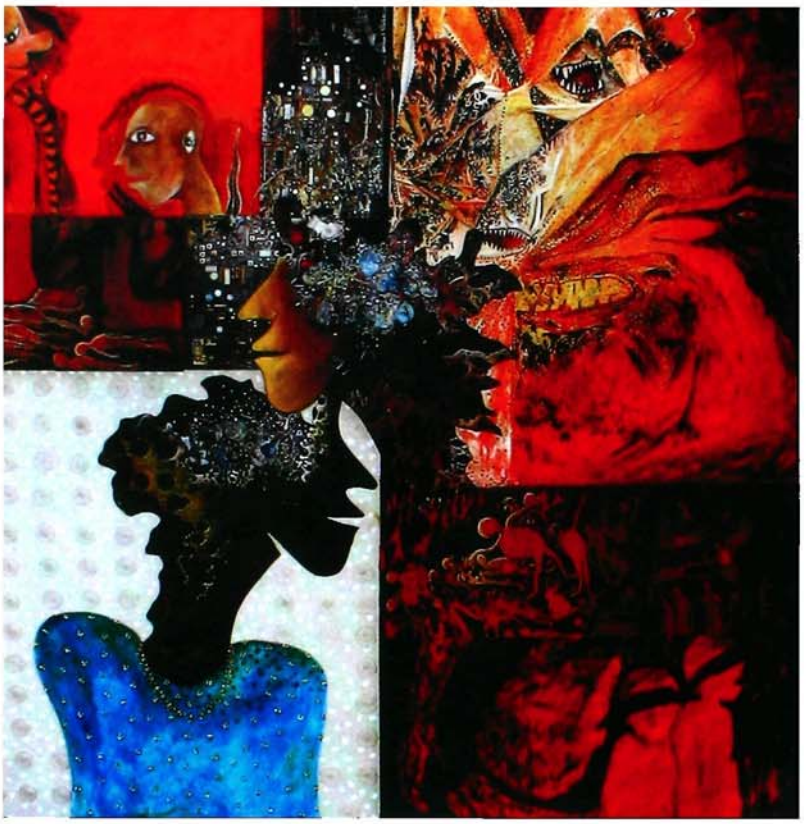
We wear a second skin every day that indicates, for instance, our membership of specific groups in our cultural, social and religious surroundings. Wearing a veil, covering the body and face, on the one hand, can be seen as a dress code that signifies the group to which we belong. On the other hand, it conceals identity much in the same way that camouflage does. In both cases, it is about giving up individuality and personal identity for the sake of becoming unapproachable and untouchable - the person's identity becomes totally blurred.

In "the Follower", I sewed the badges of all manner of organizations together, which I collected in Yogyakorta; from religious groups, political parties, schools, separatist movements, sports clubs, etc..



Young Moon
2003, laquer on board
Kim Quang
Vietnam

The reflection of the earth's structures on the new moon varies with the yellow terrestrial segment of the Asians covering the black of the Africans and the Americans - every division will be overcome.



The Looks
2000, mixed media
Pg. Timbanng bin Pg. Hj. Tuah
Brunei

Man makes man human and inhuman. My work expresses the inevitable destruction humanity shall face when we are not able to live up to our responsibilities: as an individual, community, nation and part of the world.

"The looks" depicts the morality of man in the diversity, harmony and unity of art-form.

"The looks" portrays a father in emptiness and a child in aimlessness. The beautiful woman symbolises materialism and greed. In this new millennium of sophisticated technology, moral decay is represented by fusion of vicious elements by which men prey on men. The motives in "The Looks" represent the diversity of senses behind each look. We are therefore urged to be cautious of anybody as their looks are just masks concealing their true selves.

Aggression
2003, oil on canvas
Kongphat Luangrat
Laos

The powerful monopolise and use information to the detriment of poor countries and people around the world, giving birth to global chaos. This is sold to people as progress and the nails are hammered into the coffin of human cultural diversity.

Laos is defined by the cultural diversity of the various ethnic groups that have lived sustainably within its boundaries for centuries. Their livelihoods, culture and values are under threat as media and advertising attempt to redefine and dictate how they will live their lives. They begin the descent into a chaos precipitated by displacement. This loss of cultural diversity is a loss for humanity, ensuring the success of globalization can be nothing more than a pyrrhic victory.

Khmer Identity and Globalisation
2003, oil on canvas
Chhoeun Rithy
Cambodia

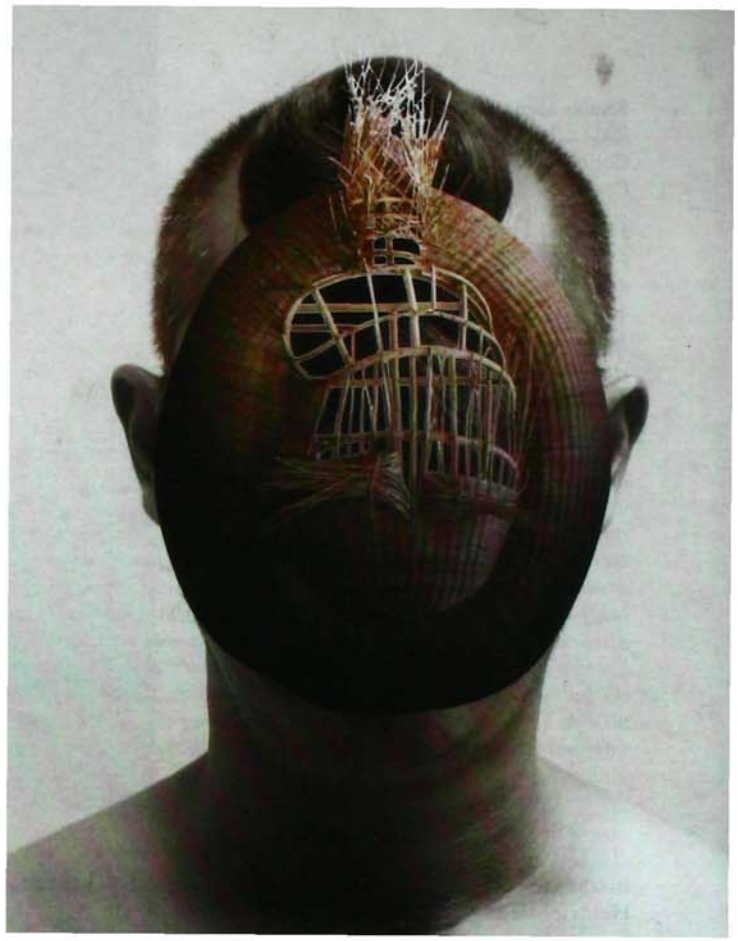
I want my country to develop rapidly. As a Khmer artist, I must contribute to this process by preserving Khmer identity as the basis for the country's modernization and integration in a globalised world.

The Apsara with the face of Preah Brum (the Hindu god Brahma) represent the Khmer culture as well as the four basic moral precepts of conduct (compassion, empathy, joy at another's happiness, sincerity). The Apsara has many arms holding various implements of arts; Bisnakar, the celestial architect who represents all Khmer artists is invoked. Two of the Apsara's arms are brought together with the palms joined in the traditional form of greeting, welcoming all visitors to Cambodia and symbolizing the country's openness and desire to integrate in the world after years of isolation and civil war. Her remaining arms hold artifacts representing the various arts of painting, sculpting, singing, dancing, architecture, etc. that brought Cambodia fame and recognition in the past. Depicted around the Apsara are signs of a growing tourist industry with airplanes, buses, boats, bullock carts and the famous temples of Angkor. In the background is a representation of Cambodia in the form of a map with the Tonle Sap Lake. Ensconed in the heart of the Apsara is the city of Phnom Penh, marked in red as the political center of modem Cambodia. Roads, rivers, canals and railways all run through the city like streams providing the requisite infrastructure of Cambodia's modernization and participation in the globalization process.

Images and captions reproduced from 'Identities versus Globalisation', Heinrich Böll Foundation

The Aura of Globalisation
2002, mixed media
HJ. Md. Abldin bin HJ. Rashid
Brunei

We are at the beginning of the 21st century. People are striving to meet the new challenges it brings in its wake. The world is connected via modern communication technology enabling high-speed transfer of data, money and all manner of visual information. In this way, we learn of events in far remote corners of the planet. But with all this information, my view of the world has become extremely contradictory and confusing. This confusion is symbolised by the image of a computer chip forming the background of my work. Globalisation promised to provide human beings a better life, but it has many adverse impacts that are not in keeping with this promise. Egoism is growing worldwide. People are simply out to grap advantages and benefits, forgetting their obligations to society in the process. Globalisation creates huge gaps between the rich and the poor. I can see this gap getting wider. I have expressed my criticism through different images of the impact globalisation directly has on people's lives. I am trying to highlight with my artwork the urgent need to do something to halt the negative aspects of globalisation and to minimise global injustice in all areas of development. Poor children in particular need better care. There must be a global responsibility for them, as they are our future.



Producing and Reproducing
2003, installation
Nindityo Adipurnomo
Indonesia

My work raises the question of items of local origin being reproduced on a massive scale; items that originally represented a particular local identity and tradition.

At a time when it seems that the world is unceasingly producing diverse images in every segment of life, both through scientific discoveries with applied technologies and through art expression, contemplating the issue of "identity and globalisation", art as a "media of expression", faces an increasingly imposing challenge. Art is like a trap which perpetually emerges, sinks and re-emerges in testing out understanding of the issues of identity or globalisation. Art also represents an extremely fertile field to sow the seeds of ideas about indentity and globalisation.

My work more than just "uses" several general stereotypes in the tradition of "fine art", such as "self-portrait", idioms and "local" material, such as Javanese hair coils and rattan handicrafts. At the same time, it introduces a prime opportunity for items to be produced and to reproduce themselves on a massive scale; and the eternal question that follows is: which segment of the community must view the Javanese hair coil and rattan as their idioms and local materials?

Monument of Round Trays
2003, installation
Ly Hoang Ly
Vietnam

My monument can be seen as a depiction of the inner conflict that Vietnamese women struggle with during this time of modernisation and globalisation, combining the potential for more personal choice with the pain of self-liberation.

I have built a conic-shaped tent, a monument for Vietnamese women using round aluminium trays, the traditional tool used for serving meals. This monument reflects colors of the sky changing in sunlight, electric light, and when it rains, it can describe the sensibility and perseverance of Vietnamese women facing daily challenges. It also resonates as the trays tease each other when the wind blows, an audible monument.

The similar pattern of the structure create an image of monotony, which is seen as "perfect" for the routine of a traditional women. I invite people to explore the inside of the "hut" to find out about the most intimate aspirations of these women being imaged by one hundred nude female figures flying in spite of the restriction imposed by conditioning.

Development is a Lie
2003, oil on canvas
Myint Swe
Burma

Development often focuses on material infrastructure, such as construction of buildings. People are left behind - feeling small and insignificant. Women are especially vulnerable. They are frequently exploited as they make rather easy targets for abuse of power.

A recent conference and exhibition in Chiang Mai, Thailand, explored the impact of globalisation on Southeast Asian artists and their artwork. **Kerstin Duell,** *who attended both events, shares her views on the exhibition 'Identities versus Globalisation?', and the conference 'Debating the Politics of Culture, Identity and Globalisation'.*

Culture, Identity and Globalisation in Southeast Asian Art

Globalisation appears like a huge stream that intrudes, overflows and in the best case fertilises societies around the globe. How Southeast Asian artists deal with this stream of information and rapid growth of visual culture will determine their survival, cultural significance, and expansion beyond the region.

A wide range of issues linked to the construction of identity in this increasingly globalised world were discussed and displayed during the conference "Debating the Politics of Culture, Identity and Globalisation" and the art exhibition 'Identities versus Globalisation?' in February in Chiang Mai. Both events were skilfully organised by the Chiang Mai regional office of the German Heinrich Boell Foundation, an institution affiliated with the German Alliance 90/ Greens Party. Since its inception in early 2000, the Heinrich Boell Foundation has worked at the merging issues of art, gender and development politics in Southeast Asia.

The exhibition featured nearly sixty artists from Southeast Asian states and their more than one hundred works on defining, expressing and defending their identity in a globalised world. The conference brought together these artists with journalists, researchers and political scientists mainly from Southeast Asia as well as South Asia, Europe and North America. Over three days, very lively discussions ensued: Art and identity construction within the framework of socio-political dynamics and transitions, censorship and in some cases foreign domination were tackled from very different, and sometimes

opposite angles. The artwork displayed and the controversies that emerged revealed scepticism, criticism or hesitant optimism at best towards globalisation and "progress".

Conference
Photo: Kerstin Duell

Choong Kam Kow, director of the Malaysian Institute of Arts, voiced the insecurity and even fears experienced by many over the possibly diluting effect of globalisation on individual and national cultural identity. Looking at Asia as a region, he touched on the implications surrounding the very survival of Asian social structures and values in the face of globalisation.

Exhibition
Photo: Kerstin Duell

While the negative effects and the inevitability of globalisation are very well known, the question remains whether they outweigh the positive developments. Some of the pros and cons from developmental, economical and political viewpoints were provided by interesting presenters, such as Nicola Bullard, co-director of Focus on the Global South; Markus Balser, author and journalist; and Khaled Ahmed, consultative editor with *'The Friday Times'* in Pakistan. From an artist point of view, Farah Wardani, editor of the Indonesian 'Carbon Art Magazine', stressed the positive effects of internationalism in interdisciplinary creative processes, which allow like-minded people to connect with the global art scene. At the same time though, she pointed at the danger of marginalisation of artists having to defend themselves on the global art market.

Farah Wardani,
Editor, Carbon Art Magazine
Photo: Kerstin Duell

The two workshops during the conference dealt with religious fundamentalism, ethnic identity, regional and Thai-Burmese relations as playing fields of identity politics.

Art as an Expression of Identity

Art is an articulation of existence through visual strategies that captures one's being in a particular moment. Artwork is the embodiment and expression of the artist's identity, yet this artwork also creates a new identity for the artist at the same time. While in modern times, art is seen as the creation of an individual, the individual cannot escape the influence of his or her particular society, time, Zeitgeist and so on.

Identity, then, is only partly constructed, and art can function to express both the process of construction and the struggle with externally induced aspects of identity. As a channel of identity con-

Nearly sixty talented artists from ten Southeast Asia countries are participating in the exhibition, "Identities versus Globalisation?", which is organised by the regional office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, following the predecessor "The End of Growth?" exhibition.

The exhibition, shown at the Chiang Mai Art Museum between February 7th and 29th 2004, is scheduled for a tour (the National Gallery in Bangkok, May 8th – 28th, 2004 and the Dahlem Museum, Berlin, October 22nd 2004 – January 16th 2005). Exhibition curator Dr. Jorg Loschmann has been working with the artists, other curators and partners, in identifying and presenting relevant works.

The Heinrich Boell Foundation has been initiating efforts in the region with reference to the formation of identity in the context of modernisation and globalization, and the theme of this exhibition arose as these concerns influence intellectual and artistic endeavours in this part of the world. The exhibition demonstrates the growing function of visual arts in offering glimpses into the social uncertainties and significance felt here, and it examines questions about how people think of themselves and their societies, and how the individual is perceived by and relate to the community – the wider world.

The event in Chiang Mai was complimented by an international symposium "Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation" and a conference "Debating Identity and Globalisation". These activities provided the artists, curators, art critics, administrators, managers, specialists, journalists, archivists, educators, and the general public to discuss the issues.

In Berlin, the exhibition will offer Germans and other Europeans to discover how inhabitants of the East are responding to the phenomenal economic growth, increasing commerce and trade, and rampant tourism.

At the 'Monument of Round Trays'
2003, Installation
Ly Hoang Ly, Vietnam
Photo: Kerstin Duell

White Love, Love White
2003, Installation
Norberto Roldan,
The Philippines

struction, art can mirror personal conflicts of different loyalties and identities on the individual, religious, ethnic and national level. As an agent of change, art can document and criticise the artists' particular environment which is shaped by contemporary ideologies and polemics, socio-political systems, religion and the like.

Historically, the development of art has played a substantial role in the construction of national identity. However, as Erica Tan (a Singaporean artist living in London) said, artwork is context-based rather than nationality-based. Shifting artwork to a different context exposes it to new interpretations. Ultimately, identity is more about strategy, she stated.

Several artists presently live and work in countries other than their origin. While multiple identities and heritage in the 'Diaspora' do not present a new development in history, globalisation has increased this trend.

Art and Globalisation

Ideally, globalisation means reaching out and encompassing the globe by breaking down vast cultural, geographical, ideological and technological differences. Hence, the notion of a 'global village', that is a world shrunken in size due to speed and infrastructure. Powerful images can be transmitted via TV and the Internet to everybody who has access to this technology. This very access, however, presents the limits of globalisation: access to technology, internet, electricity and English literacy. People without that access remain voiceless and unseen. The installation "From the Perimeter" by the Vietnamese Dinh Quan Le, therefore, shows photos on wooden stalks with parts of faces to remind the world of the "unheard and unseen others". Enlarged mouths are calling out, and huge eyes are staring at the onlooker in an impressive reflection of their muteness and our deafness and blindness.

Photo: Kerstin Duell

In 'Protest', Manit Sriwanichpoom (Thailand) sets out with a similar intention to document the politically marginalised and even discredited. His series of photographs shows the weekly demonstrations in front of the Government House in Bangkok between April 2002 and April 2003.

Inherent to the concept of globalisation is a notion of a centre from where this movement originates. Arguably, this very scattered 'centre' is the 'Western world' that includes Europe, North America, and Australia-New Zealand. As modernisation conveys Western values of individualism, democracy, and a capitalistic market economy, modern art is, similarly, dominated by

Refugee Only 2002, Installation Mella Jaarsma, Indonesia

Western aesthetical concepts, values, concerns and products.

From the Perimeter
2003, Installation
Diah Quang Le, Vietnam

Artists have not been the only ones resenting the Western domination in all spheres. Counter-movements have emerged to what Farah Wardani calls a 'totalitarian grip of globalisation', and Roshan Dhunjibhoy a 'net around people forcing them to march in the same direction and dictating ONE way of happiness and entertainment that everyone has to adopt'. At the same time, Western institutions also facilitate and support local art infrastructures and local contexts, just like the Heinrich Boell Foundation has done with the organisation of this conference and exhibition.

For artists, this increasingly globalised world provides on the one hand great opportunities in terms of learning, inspiration, networking and interchange with other artists as well as a much wider audience/public. Entering the international market may, on the other hand, lead to marginalisation. This is especially the case with artists from developing countries who are notoriously under-represented in international art fairs and exhibitions held in Western countries.

Norberto Roldan's installation "White Love, Love White", a life-size photo of the execution of a Filipino insurgents by a Filipino collaborator under the supervision of an American soldier drastically depicts the love-hate relationship of Asians and "Whites". The label of a Filipino whitening agent further exaggerates the "Whiteness".

Transforming Identity in the course of Globalisation

Immense changes in the socio-economic structures due to development, modernisation and mass media have given rise to the emergence of new societies and new options of identity construction. While there are increased opportunities in every aspect of life, a crisis of values and loss of tradition also exists. Where, then, do Southeast Asian artists place themselves in the face of expanding visual culture and in the information age induced by capitalism and globalisation and the double standards inherent in it? They are struggling to come to terms with identities that accommodate the tensions between tradition and modernity, rural and urban life, centre (the

Photo: Kerstin Duell

West) and periphery, minority and majority, inferiority and superiority, race, gender and so on.

Throughout the discussions, many artists agreed that the first level of identity remains the human being as an individual without any notion of nationality. Therefore, a strong separation and, hence, choice between 'the East' and 'the West' is pointless. It would be more fruitful to adopt or reject some aspects of both. "The more we talk about identity the more we get lost. It's just art - a fusion between East and West, and we are artists," said a Malay artist.

Eddin Khoo, Malaysian poet
Photo: Kerstin Duell

However, the fusion has to be a conscious choice. Choong Kam Kow warned that an adoption of Western values without evaluation, examination and discrimination could only lead to a decline of other cultures and values. Local identities, social obligations and cultural missions should not be forgotten.

Eddin Khoo a Malaysian poet, writer and translator, criticised the "bastardisation of culture, and disenchantment and dispossession of history in Southeast Asia". He reminded the audience that "there are vast points of reference, but we create many categories for us out of fear".

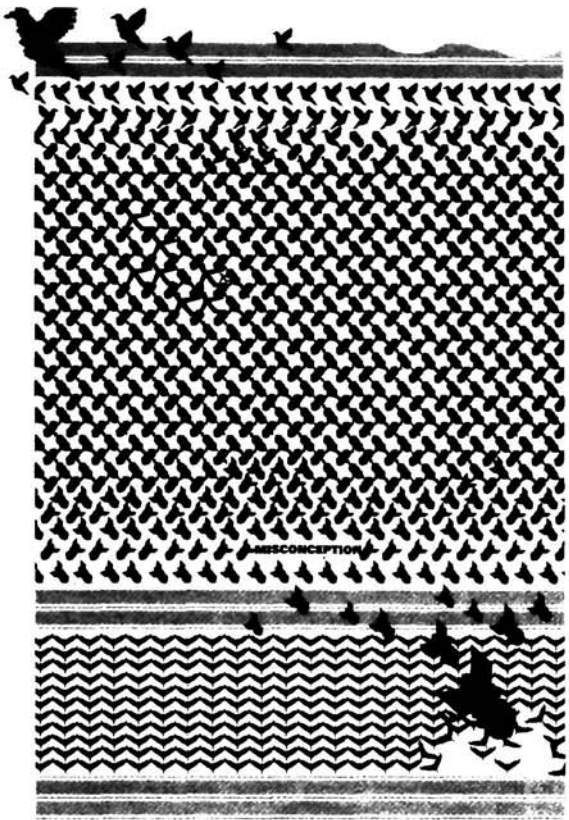
The Hidden Faces of the New Generation
2003, Video Installation
Minh Phyong, Vietnam
Photo: Kerstin Duell

Art and Identity Politics

Art mirrors and reacts to socio-political realities. It has been patronised, celebrated, utilised and suppressed by political and economic actors. State policies effectively shape an artists' environment, freedom of expression and make art the ownership of either a small elite or of the masses – two extremes that prevent the diversification of art. In the latter case, art tends to be subjected to mainstream aesthetics and themes, and tailored to commercial needs.

Traditionally, the arts have flourished under private and state patronage while at the same time the dependence on those in power was resented in varying degrees. Today, roles and dependencies of artists vis-a-vis the respective ruling political and economic class range from opposition to documentation to support. Especially in the face of political realities in Southeast Asia where many countries are undergoing various stages of political transitions, artists are very conscious and wary of politics.

Photo: Kerstin Duell



Misconception
2002, print on canvas
Zaid Omar, Malaysia

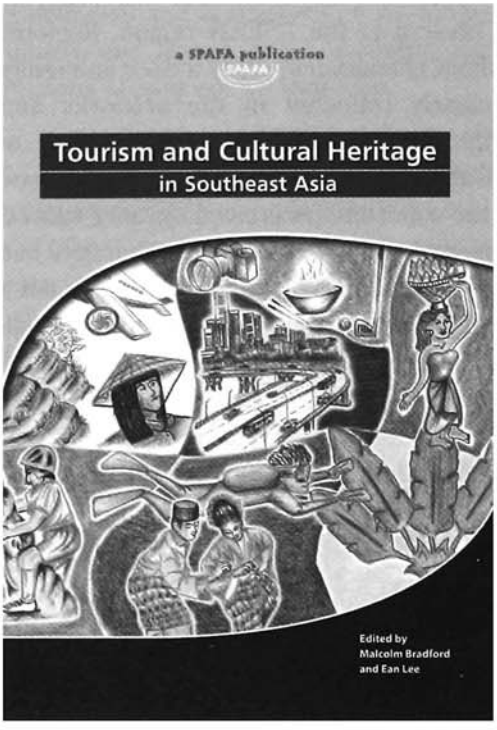
During the conference, there was a strong emphasis on Islam and several of the pieces of art dealt with the struggle of preserving a Muslim identity in an increasingly hostile environment. In 'Misconception', Zaid Omar, a Malay, used a traditional Muslim pattern and its now hybrid meanings: the pattern dissolves into birds signifying peace that fly away at the top of the canvas. At the bottom of the print, the pattern slowly disintegrates into planes and then bombs.

The conference and the art exhibition displayed the vast cultural, ethnic and religious diversity present in the ASEAN region. Regional notions about globalisation carry a deep ambiguity that is clearly reflected in the artworks and statements. The tension between the fear of marginalisation as developing countries on the one side and the opportunities created by 'open spaces' and the overcoming of limitations and barriers in a globalised world remains to be resolved. It is not a question of preventing globalisation but of regulating it to benefit all.

Kerstin Duell studied Southeast Asia, Latin America and Political Science in Berlin, and completed an MA at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Currently, she is on a PhD scholarship for international relations at the National University of Singapore. She has worked for the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (Berlin) on issues connected to Afghanistan, and for UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (Paris) concerning Burma. Kerstin spent more than a year in Bangkok, working as a researcher and photographer on Burmese issues; her latest research documents HIV/AIDS projects for children in Cambodia and Thailand. She has also held solo photographic exhibitions at UNESCAP and the Goethe Institute (Bangkok), and her photographs on Buddhism and socio-political topics have been published in several newspapers and magazines.

Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia

US$10 9 Euro
@2004 ISBN 974-92382-1-4
Published by SEAMEO-SPAFA



Tourism is today one of the largest industries in the world, and Southeast Asia is a favourite destination among tourists. It generates immense income and employment, and is economically beneficial, but can also leave a negative impact on the environment and culture of the host country.

The management, preservation and sustainability of cultural heritage and an ongoing discussion on their effectiveness in the Southeast Asian region are the particular focus of this publication. Case studies, and essays on heritage management and eco-tourism are presented in this volume, which includes information on the effects of tourism on Southeast Asian society and culture, and the measures and actions taken in response to the phenomenon.

***Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia* is published by SPAFA, and is available at book shops of Asia Books, River Books, all Bookazine branches, and Muang Boran in Bangkok. For information and purchase, contact:**

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Born to Paint

Burmese artist **Chaw Ei Thein** *grows up painting, and now wants to help children to do the same*

There is no lunch hour rush in this 'downscale', unpretentious and bucolic restaurant, with tables and chairs that are made of wood. Set by the Mae Ping River, the place is surrounded by a natural environment for which the northern parts of Thailand are well known. Almost as if embarrassed, the waiters rouse from their slumber, and prepare to serve lunch. Chaw Ei Thein makes eye contact, and smiles, and talks. The Burmese artist has been invited to Chiang Mai to participate in the conference, 'Debating the Politics of Culture, Identity and Globalisation', and is now taking a break, visiting the northern city.

Chaw Ei, wearing a blue denim shirt, speaks of her work. "I paint mostly portraits of people, abstractions and feelings. I do many abstract paintings of women," she says. "Portraits of my mom – her life has not been a comfortable one – and an expression of my attempts to understand women's lives, including my own."

At the age of two, she used to sit quietly watching her

father paint, and then began dabbling with her father's unfinished oil paintings when he was away. Chaw Ei also drew pictures of people, and learned how to mix paints. Her father gave her paints, colour pencils, crayons, and drawing books, and took her out of the house to observe the natural world outside, encouraging her to draw when they returned home. She was fond of drawing people, who still figure in the majority of her drawings today. Her recent works consist largely of oil paintings of abstract portraits of women.

Portrait of a Young Artist

Born in Mingaladon in 1969, Chaw Ei is a daughter of the famed Burmese artist, U Maung Maung Thein. She already showed great promise as a young artist, winning her first International Children's Art award when she was five years old. Since then, she has won several World Children's Art and other prizes in various countries (Yugoslavia, Hungary, India, etc.), including a Unesco's prize. Today, together with her father she runs an art gallery, whose art pieces are usually bought by foreign collectors, expatriates from the embassies or tourists.

During the lunch interview, Chaw Ei comes across as an intelligent, sincere and sensitive woman, soft-spoken and sensual. She's also a law graduate, having graduated from Rangoon University with a Major in Law.

Chaw Ei in Chiang Mai

"I decided to study law because my grades qualify me for Law Studies. But I know myself – I don't want to be a lawyer. I'd wanted to study arts or music but at that time, there was no university for the study of arts or music, so I took up law. In hindsight, I should have taken the other choice of studying philosophy."

Art and children have been her concerns for a substantial part of her professional involvement. She's been teaching children's art at YMCA and YWCA Summer School for more than ten years, and with her father founded (in 1994) the 'Sunflower Gallery', where she also conducts private art

courses. Chaw Ei has also taught at pre-schools, primary and high schools, as well as the Yangon International Education Centre where for three years she was a full-time art teacher. 'The international school job was too demanding. I was expected to do a lot – I had eight periods for teaching every day!" she says. "It was too much. I was tired by it, and couldn't even paint, which I wanted very much to."

These days, she says she lives a much more relaxed life. "I work on articles and other aspects of the magazine, 'Beauty', of which I'm editor, going into the Yangon office on some days. Before, I needed to get up at 7 a.m. to go to teach at the private international school, and finished at 6 p.m.," Chaw Ei explains. "Since last year, however, I have been concentrating on helping my dad with our Sunflower Gallery, and the magazine, and some art tuition. Now, I don't have a routine, and I feel freer."

Patients

Evil, bird and myself

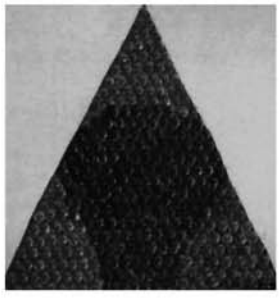
Asked about her concerns for children's art, she expresses her view that art education in Burma is rather poor. "It is not considered a priority, and creativity is lacking because creative thinking has not been encouraged at school. Solving problems, for example, has always required a certain way of thinking and only that way. The curriculum is too restrictive," Chaw Ei laments. "My contribution is introducing people to children's art, and children to art, hoping to sustain their interest; children's art is fun, to begin with, and I also publish children's publications relating to arts, design and creative thinking – I want to do many things for the children."

It has also not always been seemingly so easy for her. There was a time a few years ago when she had to earn extra income by singing traditional Burmese songs in a restaurant,

to supplement the family income because her father did not make much as a teacher. For more than three years, she held a day job and sang in the night. "I love singing; it's a big part of my life. After teaching in the school or art classes, I went to the restaurant, and I sang till two in the morning, every night – I enjoyed it," the artist grins, her fingers playing with the ends of her suave, black and long hair, and she continues: "However, I had to cut my hair short because it might help to reduce the illusions of the male audience in the restaurants about who or what I am. I used to have even longer hair than what I have now. When I sang at the restaurant, I wore t-shirt and pants, and did not put on make-up – I tried to look as much as a boy as I could."

That Chaw Ei is also very much concerned with the youth and particularly the young girls of her country is obvious. "I'm from a working family, and have been interested in women's issues since I was a teenager," she reveals. "In my country, the young, especially girls, do not seem to receive proper education on the matters of relationships and sexual interaction, and I see many problems arising from this. My father's generation did not explain to us the complexities of boy-girl relations and sexual experiences. I was fortunate in that I love to read books – and my mum did advise me on hygiene and care as a woman – but what about those who did not learn how to read to understand contraception and health issues, and their parents and teachers could not help them?"

We are not clone



Prayer

Being an editor of a teen magazine provides her knowledge and experiences about the difficulties of the young. "I see the problems of the girls and boys, concerning their confusion about relationships, and the frustration of not knowing how to resolve issues, or who to turn to," she says.

Similar to the social behaviour in Thailand, where young girls were obliged to inform their parents of their whereabouts, and many could not stay out after midnight, Chaw Ei says that the situation in Burma is changing, with the young engaging in activities that their family are unaware of. "My parents are very open-minded, so I had a relatively liberal up-bringing, but many other families control their daughters, and restrict their movements," she goes on to explain her view that the more the youths are controlled, the more they will stray.

Chaw Ei

Chaw Ei switches her attention to her brother. Her brother, who has a condition known as autism, communicates well, is also artistic, and paints but can't read and write. "I don't like it that he's sometimes still treated as a child, or immature adult, and labeled a "Saturday-born." (In Burma, to be born on a Saturday may mean an inauspicious omen when combined with some other factors). She describes her brother as an articulate and sensitive human being, and insists that being autistic does not mean that one cannot contribute to the society. "I grew up with him, and he's one of the most important persons in my life, so I encourage him in his artistic interests," she says.

"My parents are separated, and my dad has a female companion now, but she does not live with him. As he looks after the art gallery, he's found time during the day to spend with her. In the evening, he's with my brother and me," she talks about her family, focussing now on her father, and jokes: "So, he's a Lover by Day, and Family Man by Night!" Chaw Ei breaks into an irresistible laugh, and upon collecting herself, says that she is more concerned about her mother. "I have no problem with whoever she wants to be with, and would encourage her to remarry if she is comfortable with the man. Life is short, and I would like her to feel fulfilled," she says in an introspective mood. "I want to help her – she hasn't had an easy life."

Newcomer

She savours her meal, and eats gracefully, expressing that she usually has quite simple food, mainly vegetables. What will she be turning her attention to when she returns to Burma? "I'm focused on supporting children in their artistic pursuits, and hope to be able to be involved in more projects," she says. Between 1997 and 2003, she has taken part in arranging and organising art exhibitions and fairs that have displayed more than 1,000 artworks. She reports that over five hundred children contributed the works, including psychiatric patients in Rangoon, and that the shows were attended by about 4,500 visitors.

Next year, Chaw Ei intends to hold an individual exhibition of her work, having taken part in five joint exhibitions. She also hopes to establish her website on the internet. Smiling widely, she leans back on to the back of the wooden chair, adding: "And to run a school myself – some day."

"Dedications to Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra on her 80th birthday," published by the Siam Society, is a 255-page book that was offered to Princess Galyani Vadhana on the auspicious occasion of her eightieth birthday. Her Royal Highness, who is the elder sister of the current Monarch of Thailand, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, has been interested in the history and culture of Thailand throughout her life, and has been Honorary President of the Siam Society since 1984. It is appropriate that she should be honoured by the publication and gift of such a book, which should be a must-have item for collectors.

"Dedications" is a hardcover book, bound in smart-looking, green-black snakeskin leather, complete with gold-rimmed pages and several glossy-coloured photos. The book is comprised of fourteen articles – twelve in the English language, and one each in Thai and French – and covers a wide variety of subjects. These articles were written by statesmen and noted scholars who work in the field of Thai studies.

There are three reflection/recollection articles, the first of which was the script of a brief but informative May 2001 speech given by H.E. General Prem Tinsulanonda (President of the Privy Council to the King) in Washington, D.C. The speech focuses on the author's perspective of Thailand's social, political, and economic progress under the guidance of the present Thai king. The second article is by C. F. W. Higham, and is a reflection on the author's thirty-three years of archaeological research in Thailand. The writer discusses his participation in several excavations, and reflects on the common themes he found in the archaeological research projects that he had been involved in. The third is a vivid personal reflection by Sirichai Narumitrekagarn on the physical and social conditions of an area in Bangkok called Thung Bangkapi (around the Siam Society building) in the mid-1930s. The article is well illustrated with a diagram and photographs.

"Dedications" contains four articles on inscriptions. The first is written in Thai by Therm Meetem, and is about how the culture of Thailand can be traced using inscriptions. The article examines thirteen inscriptions that were written in Palawa (early inscriptions were written in this Indian language). Apart from translating the inscriptions, explaining what they mean, and dating them, the author also lists recently published books on the study of inscriptions, and supplies a chart that compares modern Thai language with Palawa. The second piece, by Michael Wright, questions the authenticity of Inscription I, specifically the modern language that is found in Inscription I. Wright argues that while all the other Inscriptions are ancient documents, Inscription I is an "extremely scholarly 19th century imitation". He hypothesizes on why Inscription

I has been accepted as genuine, with a parallel discussion on counterfeit English artefacts, in a comparative study. The third article by Olivier Bernon is written in French. Bernon examines the inscriptions on Vatt Buddha-ghosacary in Phnom Penh. Lastly, Hans Penth discusses the inscriptions on an inscribed Buddha image that an art historian presented to the Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions; the article contains a photo of the inscribed Buddha image and the Thai and English translations of the inscriptions.

There are two articles that examine and question past archaeological finds. Peter Skilling looks at Dvāravatī, which he defines as a state located in the lower and central Chao Phraya plain. He discusses the discoveries of Dvāravatī, the definition of Dvāravatī, recent literature on the state, and raises questions about the future of Dvāravatī studies. In the second article, Piriya Krairiksh focusses on the current interpretations of the Chedi Sri Suriyothai in Ayutthaya. The author offers clarifications, and makes an argument on the origins of Chedi Sri Suriyothai. Both articles contain extensive reference sections.

There are articles in "Dedications" that look at the history of Thailand from relatively unknown sources. Dhiravat na Pombejra examines what published historical sources state happened in the Thasai Prince's Rebellion and the aftermath of it, using an unpublished Dutch primary source. The article shows how unpublished sources actually contain a wealth of information on the politics of the era after 1629. In the second article, Michael Smithies reproduces a rare anonymous pamphlet, published in London in 1690, that discusses the "revolution" of 1688 in Siam. The pamphlet states that it was written by the French, and was translated into English (old English). The discovery and publication of this pamphlet may prove to become a beneficial primary source for researchers.

The last three articles of the publication concentrate on the arts, culture, and theoretical ideas. M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs demonstrates how the use of photography can enhance what we know about the history and culture of a society. The author discusses the utility of panoramas and enlarged photos. He states that old photos, in combination with advanced technology, should be used alongside traditional research methods because "photographs do not lie", and much information can be gained from them. In the second article, Sumet Jumsai examines how the stage sets were produced for the Mae Naak opera that premiered on January 6, 2003, in Bangkok. The article reflects on stage design, the use of Thai murals, cut-outs, and the role of colour. Lastly, Chetana Nagavajara queries whether Thailand has indigenous theories, revealing that some individuals have argued that theory is not an integral part of the thinking process that Thais are used to, and that there is no tangible set of theories in Thailand. He counters that theory is not alien to Thailand, and that Thailand has more implicit rather than explicit indigenous theories. The author points to the various arts, as examples, to demonstrate this.

The book, as a whole, consists of articles that are studies in many aspects of Thailand. The articles vary in format and approach; some are papers of reflection while others are analytical. The varying content and format make the book both an easy and enjoyable read.

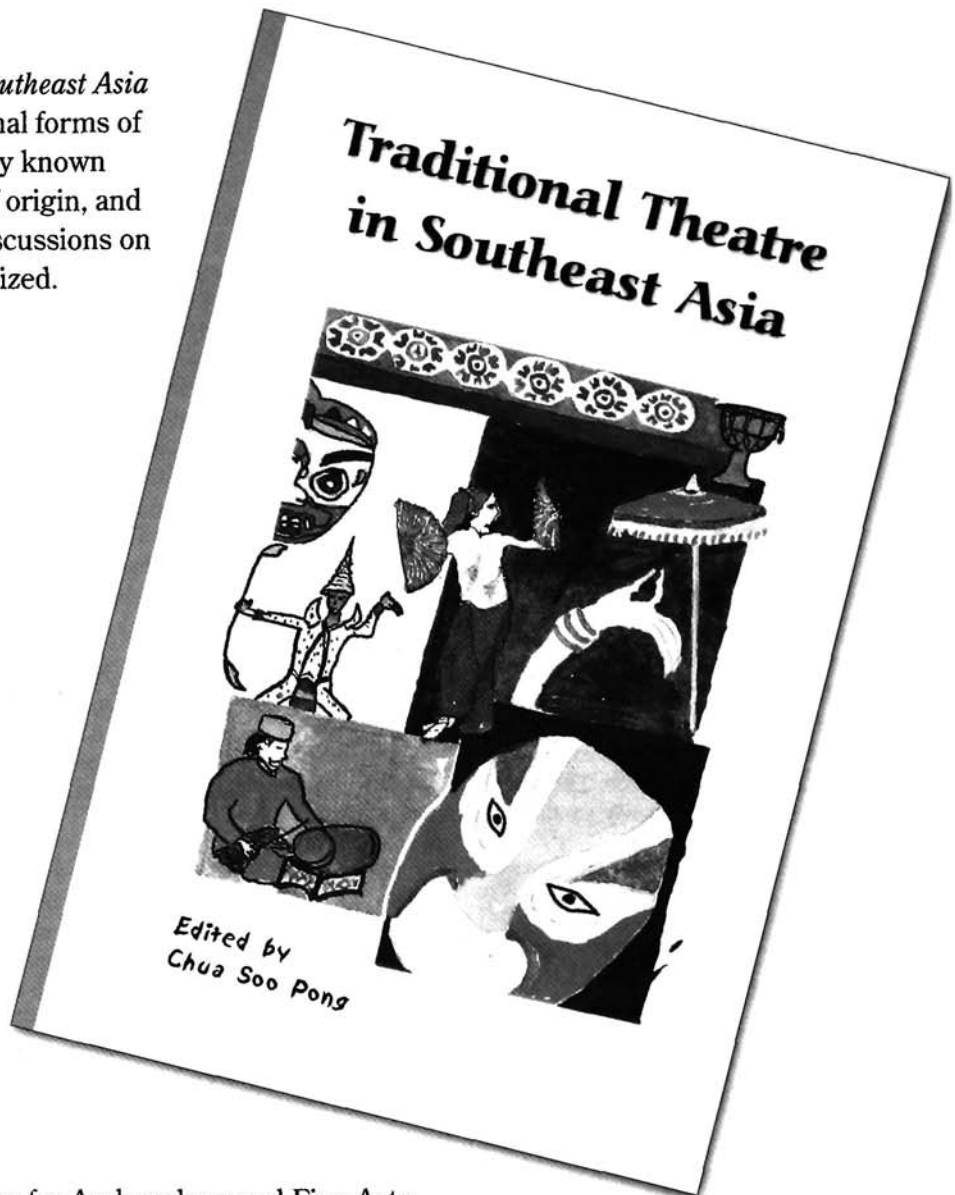
I believe that "Dedications," in part or in full, is a successful resource tool for academics in the different areas of Thai studies. The articles are written in a way that would stimulate and inspire young students in Thai studies as well as build on the fact that analytical thought and reflection are two essential building blocks for study and work. "Dedications," however, is not merely for the academically oriented. It is, for the general public, an enlightening read on the fascinating world of Thai archeology, arts, and culture. Upon finishing the book, I was inspired to think about all the important artefacts still to be discovered, how photographs taken today might serve as historical evidence for archaeologists in the future, and how important the contribution of personal reflection/recollection is on research.

The reviewer, Soni Desai, had been asked to describe and comment on the above book after reading it. She is trained in the fields of sociology and criminology, and is a Canadian intern at SEAMEO-SPAFA for six months.

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

9 Euro / US$10

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia focuses on many traditional forms of theatre that are not widely known outside their countries of origin, and provides analyses and discussions on how they could be revitalized.



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Royal Court Dance of Thailand

Thai dance theatre is a strict form of disciplinary performing art whose training starts from 'pleng-char-pleng-reo' (elementary dance following the pace of slow to fast tempo). Among the various dancing styles of Thai classical dance is the pattern of 'tua-phra' (male characters) which is usually performed by female dancers. The following piece, by **Chommanad Kijkhun**, *is extracted from research that explored the components, structure and grammar of this dance form.*

T his research discusses some major essences of Thai classical dance. An interdisciplinary approach was employed with research methodology based on Bharata Muni's Natyashastra theory of ancient Indian dance, and linguistics and laban movement analysis.

mue bae, the first variation

mue bae, the second variation

In Thai classical dance, bendable and flexible arms and fingers are requisite. There are sixteen directions of dancing, involving three levels of body postures: high (head level), middle (shoulder level) and low (abdomen level). For the backward posture, the position of the arms must be at the low level. Placing foot at the side-diagonal position creates a visual dimension, which helps the dancer to achieve an angular posture while kneeling down. To make the curving posture discernible and elegant, dancers rotate their lower arms into and out of the body trunk as much as much as possible. The muscles that are used most are side and back muscles.

In terms of structure, there are three patterns of hand posturing: '*mue-bae*', '*mue-jeed*' and '*mue-loe-kaew*'. There are eighty-eight posturing patterns and seven dancing sets. The principle of body movement concerns a reciprocal relation between body weight and limb rotation. While the posturing and the moving of arms and hands do not relate to those of head, body trunk, legs and feet, they help balance the body and implement visual aestheics.

Concerning the grammar, the *tua phra* has forty-nine alphabets, five vowels and twenty-one tonal accents, and the construction of its vocabulary comprises of '*ta-ton*' (beginning posture), '*ta-tor*' (interval posture), '*ta-tarm*' (following posture) and '*ta-toke-tang*' (decorative posture), with the last being the beginning posture for the next vocabulary. In this logic, all dance vocabulary is like the formation of a chain.

Studying the *tua phra* (male role)

Traditionally, there are two groups in Thai classical dance. The first is performed by the common people, and the second is by the Royal Court dancers. The former features only men, and has an imprecise and heavy movement compared to the latter. Only women are allowed to perform the Royal Court dance. A woman dancer is assigned the male role, known as *tua phra*, and for training, she has to start with *pleang cha* and *pleng reo* routines which would help to familiarise the body to the Royal Court style, whose gestures have been kept alive from generation to generation.

My research on *tua phra*, the Royal Court Dance, centres on its characteristics that are based on theories from Bharot Natyasart, linguistics and Laban Notation. The objectives of the study are: to study the dance characteristics, the structure of these characteristics, and the grammar of the dance.

mue jip

mue lokaew

Characteristics of *tua phra*

The characteristics of a good tua phra relate to the desirable qualities of different body parts, such as a beautiful face, an oval-shaped face, a pronounced forehead, and a tall and slim body. The *tua phra* has to perform daily exercises of bending her fingers and arms backward. Three hand gestures are predominantly found in *pleang cha and pleang reo.*

In the first main position, *mue bae*, four fingers are placed together, extended upward and bend backward. There are two variations (page 43, left image): one with the thumb bent inward and the other is with the thumb in the same plane as the finger.

In the second position, *mue jip*, the tip of the thumb is joined to the index finger, while the other fingers extend upward and reeled backward, while the wrist is bent toward the forearm.

In the third position, *mue lo kaew*, the tip of middle finger is pressed into the joint of the middle joint of the thumb to create a circle. The other fingers are extended upward and reeled backward, while the wrist is positioned at 90 degree to the forearm in either direction, depending on the specific gesture.

In Thai classical dance, one is required to twist the forearms as far as possible, whether they are in a bent position or extended straight. The lower legs must be equally flexible. During the arm-twisting, the dancer must maintain the *jip* (second position as described above) without breaking the connection between finger and thumb. The wrist must also maintain its 90-degree angle to the forearm. The head, the chest, the stomach, arms, hands, fingers, legs and feet are in action continuously, whilst the shoulders, hips, palms and knees are used from time to time.

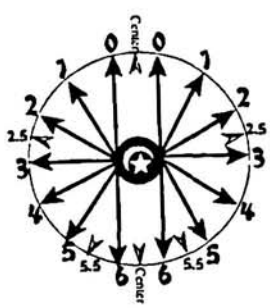

Diagram 1
Directions of body parts in male role dance

From an aerial view of a dancer in standing position, the limbs point to sixteen possible horizontal directions. You can compare these directions to a clock-face although you need to add 2.5 and 5.5 and remove 4, 5 and 6 to give seven directions on either side of the clock-face (see diagram). The centre line that runs from 0 to 6 offers the other two directions, with the leg bent behind or lifted forward.

It is a rule that the dancer neither adopts a horizontal position, nor jumps, nor lifts her leg above her waist, nor extends her arm above her head. When the dancer rises to the tip of her toes, she must keep her knees bent. The leg must always remain bent when raised.

There are three main arm levels. The extended arm can be at (1) shoulder level and (2) approximately 30 degrees above shoulder level (see photos at bottom of page). The third level is with arms downwards, with hands at abdomen level.

There is only one position for the arm behind, and it is at 5.5 on our imaginary clock.

There are only two leg positions, (1) the raised and bent open leg and (2) the knee bent backward, with heel close to the hip (see top two photos)

The rhythm is in a 2/4 time, and can be compared to the continuous flow of the links in a chain. The dancer moves with lightness and, at the end of each musical phrase, should complete their gesture on the final beat. They can choose how to arrive at that position, using a fast or slow movement. The best achievement of the *tua phra* is through a strong controlled flowing movement.

Grace is attained by the following position: the legs are bent at the knees, with knees together and the leg turned out; the shoulders are held back with a straight spine and the arms twisted out at shoulder level.

To keep the body in balance during movement, the head may tilt to one side while the torso remains relaxed with the body weight locked within the pelvis. The shifting of weight is simple and slow. The path of the dance is either a straight line or curved, and the steps tend to be small. It is the upper body, the arms and hands which are the focal point of Thai dance.

Variations of the *tua phra* pose

I analyze the *tua phra* poses, with reference to the Indian dance form called *naritta* and the dramatic theory from Bharot Natyasart. Like the naritta, there is essentially no emotion or meaning in the *tua phra* form; there is only pure gesture.

The raised, bent open leg

The knee bent backwards

(Twist the forearms)

The first and the Second levels of arms

The third level of arms

Knee bending

twist forearm

The combination of different gestures creates a series. There are eighty-eight poses derived from the two songs and seven sequences. They combine three hand positions, the arm positions, the three levels and the directions. For example, when the arm is in the wong bon position, with the *meu bae* hand, and the arm is bent inward to the body at the 2.5 direction, one can derive nine separate poses. If both hands and arms are symmetrical, there are forty-nine possible poses.

A table of the directions and levels of *mue bae* (first variation), *mue jip* and *mue lo kaew* that twist inward and outward. ▼

Direction	mue bae												mue jip												mue lo kaew					
	Arms twisted inwards						Arms twisted outwards						Arms twisted inwards						Arms twisted outwards						Arms twisted inwards			Arms twisted outwards		
	stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms		
	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low
0					✓	✓					✓	✓					✓	✓		✓										
1		✓			✓			✓			✓	✓					✓			✓			✓							
2				✓		✓					✓	✓					✓	✓						✓						
2.5		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓		✓			✓				
3		✓						✓						✓						✓									✓	
5.5															✓			✓												
Cent																														

A table of the directions and levels of *mue bae* (the first variation), *mue jip* without twisting arms, and *mue bae* (the second variation) ▼

Direction	mue bae, without twisting arm						mue jip, without twisting arm						mue bae, the second variation					
	Arms twisted inwards			Arms twisted outwards			Arms twisted inwards			Arms twisted outwards			Arms twisted inwards			Arms twisted outwards		
	stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms			stretched arms			bent arms		
	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low	high	mid	low
0											✓	✓						
1						✓												✓
2																		
2.5																		
3										✓								
5.5																		
Cente																✓		✓

The legs and feet of the dancer must always be turned out. When the body weight is on one foot, the other foot needs to be in a specific position. As the dancer steps forward, the weight shifts to the forward-most foot. The step is always made with the heel first, then toe, with the knee bending as the dancer moves forward. This creates the illusion of the *tua phra* gliding gracefully forward.

To execute turns, the whole body must rotate at the same time. The dancer can only move from side-to-side or forward-backward, but never diagonally, and the weight must always shift forward before the body turns. All turns are made strictly with bent knees.

Open feet, heels together, toes raised

Walking step

For the *yued yup* movement and the *hom khaw* movements, the leg has to be held in tension, and because the rhythm is a *staccato* one, the leg must pause a little before it completes its movement.

The grammar of *tua phra*

Before we apply the Laban Notation to the *pleang char* and *pleang reo* dances, we have to begin with a linguistic and movement analysis of the *tua phra* poses.

The Thai linguistic system, as we know, has twenty-one consonants, twenty-one vowels and five tones. Borrowing from the Thai sound system, I am able to derive forty-nine consonants, six vowels and twenty-one tones that can be assigned to the characteristics of the dance poses.

I define the "consonant" as the smallest possible unit to denote the combination of the hand with the arm. Combining two "consonants" together gives rise to a *mae tha*, which comprises of the *tha ton* and the *tha tam*. The "vowel" is the continuous movement that links two " consonants" together to create *tha tor*. The "vowel" movements include straightening the entire body vertically, bending, bowing, gliding and turning.

The tone is used to polish the movement and concerns the leg positions and the angle of the head. These factors are isolated from the head and arms, and are used to make the poses at all levels more elegant, balanced and smoother.

Therefore, I identify these twenty-one tones:

1. Walking Step
2. Knee bent, foot behind
3. Knee bent, ball of foot touches ground (behind)
4. Ball of foot touches ground (front)
5. Rapid running on the spot (very small movements)
6. Open step with pause
7. Open step with sweep
8. Open stamp (heel-toe)
9. Open step (heel-toe)
10. Twist sideways (heel-toe, heel-toe)
11. Open step advancing further
12. See 6 but with a tap of the ball of the foot instead of pause
13. Open feet, heels together, toes raised

14. Open foot raises with knee bent
15. Raising on toes and lowering with knees bent
16. Lowering with knees bent and raising on toes
17. Cross step, knees bend
18. Lowering shoulder, tilt head in counter direction
19. Back foot slides forward
20. Standing with one ankle touching instep, toes raised
21. Tilt head

A 'word' can be created by a combination of consonants, vowels and tones, as shown in diagram 2

To recapitulate, the *tha ton* is the consonant to be linked by a *tha tor*, a movement (the vowel) which will take us to the next *tha ton*. The final consonant that appears at the end of a musical phrase is called the *tha*

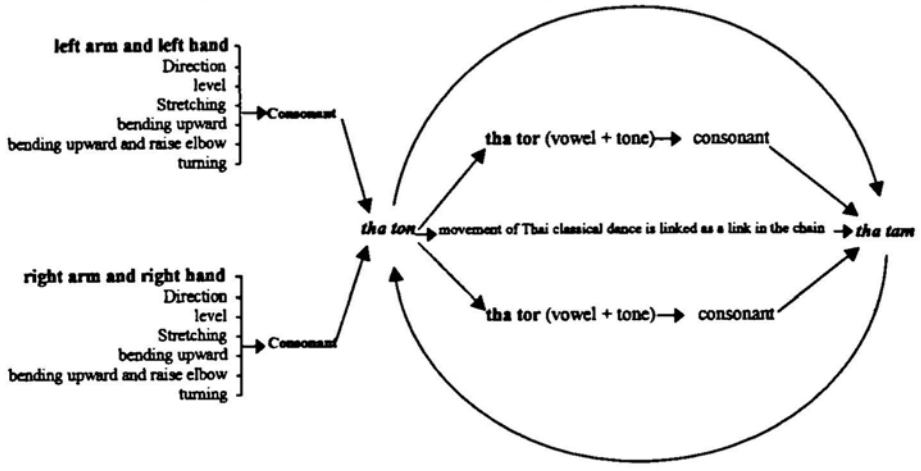

Diagram 2 Pose mixing formula

tam, and it is always the first consonant at the beginning of the new phrase - a link in the chain.

By closely observing the one-dancer *tua phra* form, we gain the means to describe a larger system. From this research, it is clear that the characteristics of the *tua phra* can be applied to all other aspects found in Royal Court Dance. Further analysis of the directions, levels, variations, poses and grammar can also be used to explore the roots of Thai dance, as well as other Asian dance forms.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Southeast Asian Tradition-Based Contemporary Performance

A panel convened by Matthew Isaac Cohen and Laura Noszlopy for the 22nd Association of South-East Asian Studies (UK) Conference, 29 April - 1 May 2005, University of Exeter, U.K.

Southeast Asian performing art traditions have offered non-traditional artists and art promoters fodder for quotation, appropriation, abduction, and repackaging for more than a century. Southeast Asian traditions famously 'influenced' and 'inspired' a raft of late imperial European and American composers, directors and choreographers including Debussy, Artaud, Craig, Ruth St. Dennis, and La Meri. The traditions also less famously provided a basis for Southeast Asian modernists, such as choreographer and dancer Raden Mas Jodjana, who reworked the traditions for presentation on elite stages to Euro-American and Southeast Asian avant-garde audiences. In the twentieth-century, many politically inspired Southeast Asian artists educated in Euro-American practices of theatre, music and dance drew upon their own traditions of artistic expression, quoting folk melodies in their symphonies or traditional dance gestures in their ballets to authenticate their work in nationalist or regionalist frameworks. At the same time, 'pseudo-traditions' and 'new traditions' of various degrees of longevity have emerged in various Southeast Asian contexts.

The last decades have seen the emergence of new relations between Southeast Asian 'traditional' and 'contemporary' performing arts, to be discussed in this panel under the rubric of 'Southeast Asian tradition-based contemporary performance.' Euro-American and Southeast Asian tradition-based contemporary practitioners embody codified disciplines of music, theatre and dance. Such praxis must be learned through many years of 'deep learning' and application. Other choreographers, directors and composers, lacking such practical experience, have collaborated with traditional or tradition-based artists, producing work both respectful of tradition and startlingly novel. These traditional and non-traditional practitioners have not only expropriated traditional disciplines for 'fusion' performances; their reinterpretations for audiences in national and international venues have transformed tradition in the process. Theatre, music and dance artists, some of whom are as adept in performing folksy comic turns as in discoursing on critical theory, have brought new life, meaning and to time-honoured performing arts through their work, earning the respect and attention of non-traditional audiences. Their creations are critical cultural interventions at this time, due to the eroding of traditional audiences and old patterns of sponsorship. Such work is not without legal and moral problems.

Suggested areas to be considered by presenters include: questions of ownership arising when contemporary practitioners (foreign or local) repackage tradition for contemporary audiences; contrasts and similarities between European and Southeast Asian modernist appropriations of Southeast Asian tradition with contemporary tradition-based work; standards for judging and criticising tradition-based contemporary performance; differences between tradition-based new music, theatre and dance created in 'diasporic' contexts and in the 'homelands'; the politics, economics and legal issues in the production of tradition-based contemporary performance; traditional and non-traditional aesthetics and criticism of tradition-based contemporary performance; tradition-based contemporary performance in television and film; tradition-based contemporary performance and artistic exchange in national, ASEAN and global contexts; forms of ambivalence, resistance and antipathy to tradition-based artistic work; the reception of tradition-based contemporary work by Southeast Asian audiences outside cosmopolitan, urban scenes. Presentations can take the form of academic papers, lecture-demonstrations, videos, or possibly performances.

All abstracts to be sent prior to 1 January 2005 to:
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Further conference information at: http://www.ex.ac.uk/geography/research/aseasuk05/intro.html

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Ean Lee

Penang's Blue Mansion

The **Cheong Mansion,** also known as the 'Blue Mansion' because of its indigo exterior, is a landmark on Penang, an island off the west coast of Malaysia. The building was built more than a hundred and twenty years ago by Cheong, who had left South China in 1856 to make his fortune. Labelled 'China's Rockefeller', Cheong is another Asian **spectacular rags-to-riches story**: a 16-year-old Chinese boy who sailed to Jakarta (known as Batavia then), and found work as a water carrier, then started his own business, and gradually owned plantations, tin mines, railways, a shipping line and banks throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and China.

Cheong's mansion, a 19th Century 'Straits Settlements' **architectural classic,** won Unesco's Heritage 2000 award, after more than a decade of restoration. In 1990, local architect, Lawrence Loh, bought the run-down mansion, and has helped to restore it as both a historical and contemporary icon in Penang. The two-storey building contains thirty-eight rooms, with a courtyard in the centre of the complex. While the building is primarily Chinese in style, with its intricate decorative, other influences are included, such as gothic windows, Scottish cast iron work and art nouveau stained glass panels. Today, the mansion is a part of the tourism landscape, providing sixteen guestrooms for tourists to experience a part of the past. In Georgetown, the capital, there are Chinese temples and rows of shop houses in narrow lanes. The Chinese influence in Penang is obvious, in its inhabitants, businesses, lifestyles, food and architecture.

Cheong, who built the Blue Mansion for his seventh wife, is now a prominent figure in the history of the island, which had been established as a British trading post in 1786. He represents one of the masses of Chinese who migrated to Penang in the 19th century, and made their lives while preserving their customs and traditions in foreign lands.

Saving Angkor Temples

In November 2003, Unesco organised a two-day international conference on the **restoration of Angkor Wat and a complex of temples in Cambodia** that have become popular destinations of international tourism. At the conference, Dominique de Villepin, France's Foreign Minister, suggested a "new action plan" to cover the following ten years of preservation and development efforts at Angkor.

The conference dealt with tourist development and management of the site of Angkor; development in the nearby city of Siem Reap; and development of the neighbourhood between Siem Reap and Angkor. Unesco are drawing up a "Charter of Angkor" for an international revitalisation of other post-conflict world heritage sites in such countries as Iraq or Afghanistan.

As part of an international co-operation, a French-Japanese project is already in progress; it is aimed at saving a number of significant temples and other smaller ancient structures in Angkor – the area was the capital of the Khmer Empire from the late ninth century to the fifteenth century CE. Several of the twelfth century monuments have deteriorated during decades of conflicts and neglect in the war-torn Southeast Asian country.

It was only in 1991 that a peace treaty was implemented. Angkor Wat was recognised as Unesco World Heritage in 1992, and the International Coordination Committee was established the following year, after the first Unesco inter-governmental conference in Japan. Since then, the committee has been involved in clearing an estimated 25,000 land mines, a large amount of which surrounded the temples. It has also reduced the incidence of looting of statues and friezes from the lesser known and more vulnerable temples, and has built a new Visitors' Centre.

Currently, many projects in Angkor that involve various nations are being overseen by the committee:

- A Japanese team is training a new generation of Cambodian archaeologists and architects;
- A Japanese team – having completed work on the northern library of the Bayon – is restoring the causeway across the moat of Angkor Wat and the twelve towers of Prasat Suor Prat (opposite the Terrace of the Elephants);
- A German team is preserving the 1,850 Apsara stone reliefs inside Angkor Wat;
- A French team is reconstructing the Baphuon temple (inside Angkor Thom), using the "anastylosis" technique (removing all 300,000 stones of the temple-mountain and then rebuilding it);
- A Chinese team is restoring Chau Say Thevoda (near the Eastern Gate of Angkor Thom);

- A Swiss team is reinforcing the structures of Banteay Srei (32 kms northeast of Angkor Wat);
- An Indian team is involved in the structural preservation of Ta Prohm (near the East Baray); and
- SPAFA, regional cultural heritage centre based in Bangkok, is engaged to design the new National Museum at Siem Reap, with gallery displays including statues brought out of storage from the Angkor Conservatory.

Cambodia's archaeological heritage: loss of artifacts to private collectors

Just as in Siem Reap where the ravenous energy of business and tourism is gradually gobbling up the area around the 9th century glory (Angkor Wat) of the Khmer Kingdom, so is the **heritage of Cambodia being traded at obscenely affordable prices.** Bit by bit, piece by piece, the wealth of the ancient civilisation passes from one collector to another; admirer to profiteer; opportunists to tourists, etc.. Reporter Samantha Brown filed an *AFP* report, to inform of trade taking place in markets all over Phnom Penh, and the country, where "ancient beads are snapped up at two for a dollar, while 15 dollars secures a 3,500-year-old stone tool". With sales of such ordinary antiquities, she reported that experts warn of a slow robbery of Cambodia's rich history that "archaeologists are only just beginning to study after decades of conflict ended here in 1998".

Archaeologists are concerned that such items as beads, ceramic pots, tools and bronze bracelets that were looted from sites, are being sold on the market. They believe that the situation is contributing to the irretrievable loss of Cambodia's prehistory. Impoverished Cambodians sell the findings from the sites and mines - remnants of the war – that are cleared, preventing historians and archaeologists from making sense of a site that's been looted, failing to assess and examine the artifacts. **The discovered objects are transferred to local markets where both Cambodians and tourists buy them, and which can also be obtained in the international black market.**

The Angkor Wat temple site has been recently taken off the list of UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger, when it, ironically, had been listed because of illicit excavation and pillaging, among other reasons. Now, artifacts all over the country are slipping from the hands of those who should study them. These objects from diverse sites, including burial areas, contain information that larger and more prominent pieces, such as stone statues, do not. **Some of these artifacts are believed to be unique in the region.**

Samantha Brown wrote that the Cambodian government is planning to raise awareness, and impress upon the people and the communities on the needs for protection and preservation of the antiquities. The report added that there are laws in place, but enforcement was poor. A group, Heritage Watch, is planning to inform the locals of the artifacts' value, and aims to build museums in the concerned areas.

Inca heritage, Peru

Similar to the situation in many ancient sites, such as Cambodia's Angkor, the former Inca capital of Cuzco, Peru is suffering from human threats to its fragile heritage. Stone and rock surfaces are being further damaged by the accumulated salts of hands that touch them (visitors and tourists, please keep your hands to yourselves). With pollution, lichen, extreme temperatures, poor conservation and a lack of civic conscience to defend archaeological heritage in Cuzco, **humans touring the area are also greatly contributing to the deterioration of its rock walls.**

Picasso masterpiece edges out Van Gogh's as most expensive painting

Picasso's 1905 painting 'Garcon a la Pipe' – or Boy with a Pipe – was sold for $104m (£58m) at New York Sotheby's in May, to an anonymous bidder.

The event overtook the record sale of Vincent Van Gogh's 'Portrait of Doctor Gachet', which was sold for $82.5m (£46m) in 1990.

Garcon a la Pipe shows a young Parisian working boy with a crown of garlanded roses, and a pipe in his left hand. It was created when Picasso was twenty-four years old.

The painting had been put up for auction from among a collection of about thirty paintings that once belonged to New York's Whitney family. John Whitney, who was a former US ambassador to England, obtained 'Garcon a la Pipe' in 1950 for $30,000 - £16,800 at

current values. **The painting, exuding an image of adolescent beauty, is considered one of the most beautiful of the Picasso's Rose Period collection,** and a significant work by the celebrated artist during the early part of his career.

In November 2000, Picasso's 'La Femme aux Bras Croises' (Woman with Crossed Arms) was sold at an auction for $55m (£30.6m); it was the previous most expensive painting of Picasso, who now has four of the top ten most expensive paintings sold at auction. Van Gogh is second, with three.

Thai Artists in Laos

Six artists of Thailand will trip about in Laos as part of a project, 'Thai-Lao Artistic Cultural Ties', which aims to **improve relations between Thailand and Laos** in the arts and cultural sphere.

In February, the participants will start their travel from Luang Prabang in the north of Laos, and will have the opportunity to appreciate the scenery, and observe the way of life of the locals, their traditions and customs. They will also be in dialogue with Laotian artists, learning from each other, and reflecting on their own work. Photographer Surat Osathanugrah, who is president of the Photographers' Association of Thailand, will be documenting the journey with his camera, while the artists sketch and look for ideas and inspiration. When they return to Thailand, each artist will complete five works for exhibition. The other artists are Chiranan Pitpreecha (SEA-Write Poet Laureate in 1989); Prayad Pongdum (National Artist in Visual Arts); Thavorn Koudomwit (Vice-Rector of Art and Culture at Silpakorn University, and Outstanding Artist in Visual Arts); Pichai Nirun (National Artist in Visual Arts); and Pratuang Emjaroen (reknown artist).

Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site

Cambodia has requested Unesco to designate the Preah Vihear ruins a 'World Heritage Site'. Such recognition is envisaged to garner financial resources and international technical assistance in restoring the Preah Vihear temple and site, which is situated in the north of Cambodia, but more accessible from the northeast Thailand province of Si Sa Ket.

The example of Angkor Wat, the major site in Cambodia that is of great historical and cultural significance, has encouraged the Cambodian government to obtain similar status for its Preah Vihear site. Angkor Wat was declared a world heritage site in 1992, and along with its fame, has attracted multi-national co-operation in the restoration of the ancient complex of monuments.

There has been **a history of contention between Thailand and Cambodia over the Preah Vihear site,** with both countries claiming ownership of the historical treasure. In 1962, the International Court of Justice recognised that the site and monuments on it belong to Cambodia.

The Khmer ruins and temple were closed to public access during the civil upheaval in Cambodia, and the reign of the Khmer Rouge. It was opened to visitors again in 1998, but was in adverse conditions. The four-storey high Baphuan-style sandstone temple is located on the top of a six hundred-metre escarpment, and was built during the reign of Jasovarman I (889-910 AD).

Presently, the Cambodian authorities are amendable to the idea of receiving assistance from Thailand; they are cautious, however, about attempts to shape the restoration effort to reflect Thai cultural influence, and about any manipulation to gain control of the temple.

The Cambodian government is anxious to avoid conflicts, in view of the fact that the site is a major source of tourism revenue; each year, an estimated one hundred thousand Thai visitors come to Preah Vihear, from Si Sa Ket province, raking in thirty million baht (US$750,000) in entrance fees. During a recent bi-lateral meeting on the restoration of the ancient temple, the Cambodian Senior Minister to the Prime Minister's office, Sok An, stated that Thai help with the conservation of the monument would be acceptable, after Unesco has decided whether to list Preah Vihear a world heritage site.

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Two Sides of the Golden Coin
(For details, see inside page 22)