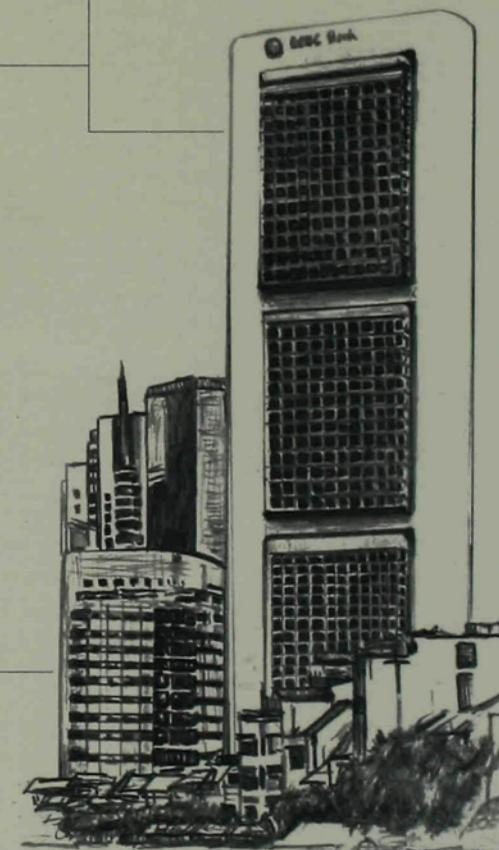
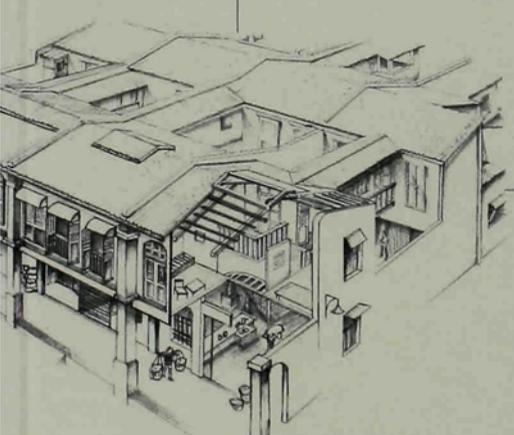


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**Alternative Visions
for a Modern Singapore**



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CONTENTS

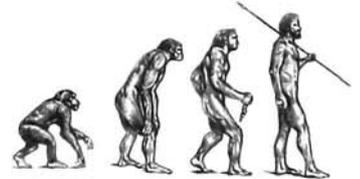
Dinesh Naidu, Ho Weng
Hin and Tan Kar Lin 5 **Alternative Visions for
a Modern Singapore**



Janet Hoskins 19 **Postcards from the Edge of
Empire: Images and messages
from French Indochina**



Theera Nuchpam 27 **Evolving Narrative of
Human Evolution**



Theera Nuchpam 31 **Baghdad Museum: slowly
recovering from its darkest days**



Ean Lee 37 **Art & Archaeology –
International**



Alternative Visions for a Modern Singapore



In the following article, **Dinesh Naidu, Ho Weng Hin and Tan Kar Lin** argue that there were multiple streams of architectural practice or theory in the history of Singapore's post-war architecture.

The discourse on Singapore's post-war architecture is dominated by the late E. J. Seow's 1973 doctoral thesis, *Architectural Development in Singapore*ⁱ. As the basis of local university courses on the subjectⁱⁱ and the semi-official history put forth by the Singapore Institute of Architectsⁱⁱⁱ, it presents an important starting point for the authors' study^{iv}.

In his thesis, Seow describes a large and varied body of post-war work. He argues that this was heavily influenced by foreign sources, the result being "a mixed bag of international styles from various movements, and tending to... eclecticism."^v Seow also calls architecture an 'individualistic art', arguing that, "although every architect derives inspiration from various sources the final output as expressed in design is the result of individual personality".^{vi} However, he does not consider if 'individual personality' contributed

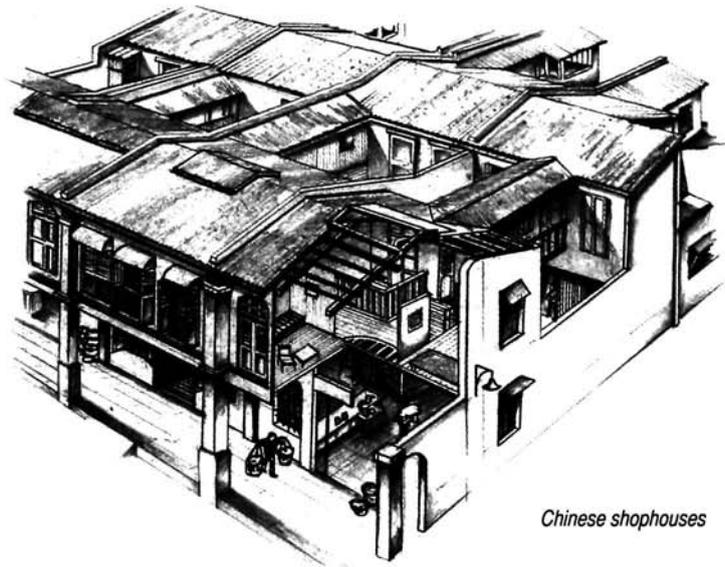
to the development of wider architectural approaches. Ultimately, all diversity is subsumed under the singular category of 'Modern architecture'.

Furthermore, the post-war architectural diversity in Singapore was expressive of a wider culture of pluralism. The post-war era up to the 1970s has been called Singapore's 'false spring' of political pluralism, a window between the waning of British colonial authority and the consolidation of hegemonic power by the People's Action Party (PAP). Only now is this period being re-visited by scholars, offering insights for this article.^{vii}

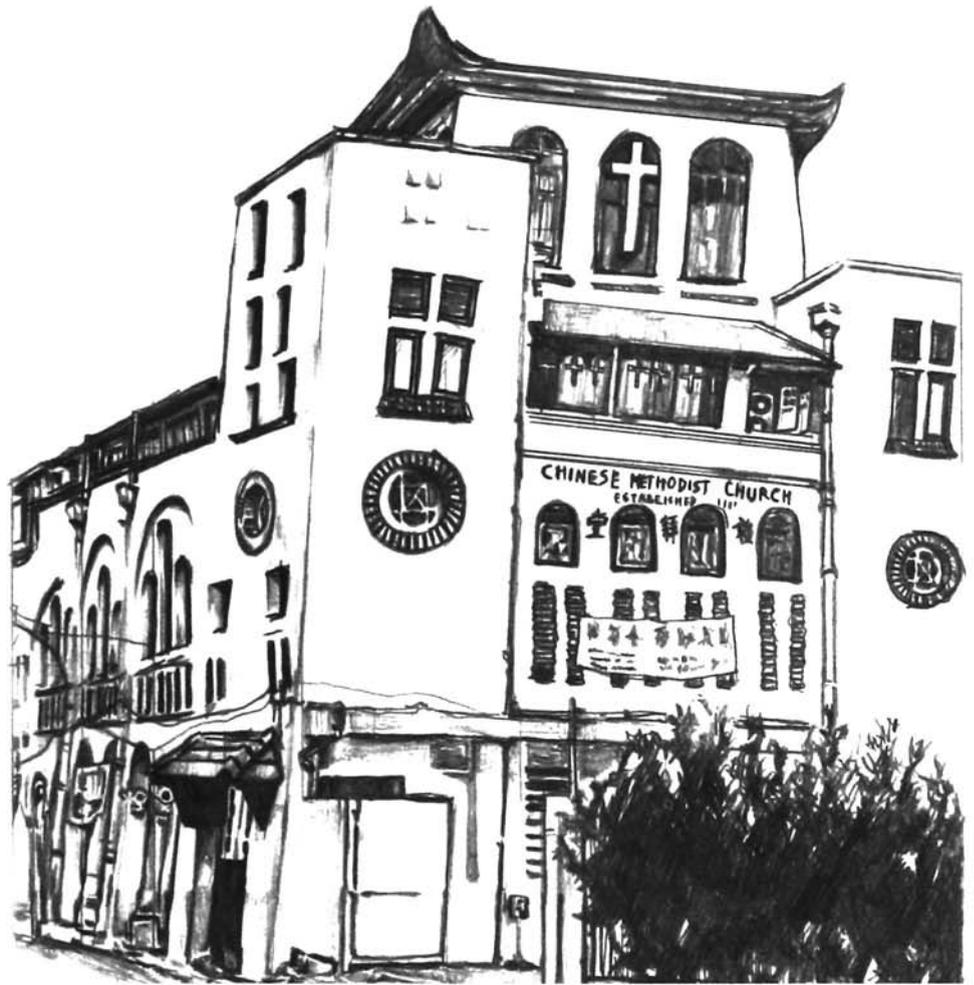
There were three alternative streams of architectural development in Singapore's post-war architectural history. They allowed architects to engage larger groups where they could develop ideas, and even meet potential clients. This article focuses on three of these groups – the Nanyang community, Malayan nationalists and the SPUR group – and their associated architectures.

Nanyang Architecture 1920s-1960s

Pre-war Singapore was a magnet for Chinese migrants who referred to the region as 'Nanyang', meaning the 'South Seas'. In the 19th century, they overtook the native Malays to become the largest community, forming 75% of the population. Among the Chinese, a select group was English-educated, culturally oriented towards the West, and loyal to the British crown. However, the majority developed a strong identity as Chinese nationals, maintained links with China through modern media and communications, and sent their children to Chinese-medium schools.



Chinese shophouses



Telok Ayer Methodist Church

Architecturally, the Chinese presence in Singapore was seen in their traditional mansions and temples, as well as the hybrid 'shophouse', which was partly based on the Chinese courtyard house. In addition, a hybrid of Chinese and Modern architecture – 'Nanyang' – was developed between the 1920s and 1960s.

Major Nanyang buildings included Chinese clan houses, the Telok Ayer Methodist Church, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and Nanyang University, which was the first Chinese university outside China. The university epitomized the educational aspirations of the China-oriented community, and a desire to promote Chinese language and identity as compatible with the modern world. This desire also influenced its architectural form.

Built in the mid-1950s, the Nanyang University library combined a reinforced concrete structure with a neo-classical triple-bay façade, and Chinese elements such as roof bracket supports and glazed green roof tiles.



Nanyang University library

After the University opened, but without referring directly to it, Seow and his co-editors at the local architectural journal expected architects and designers to be anxious over the application of “superficial motifs – such as Chinese or Malay details – in an attempt to be ‘Malayan’.” They also urged discrimination “between spurious stylism and legitimate style. In the cause of a national architecture, we should expect... quality and integrity.”^{viii}

In Seow’s view, the building’s Chinese elements were arguably appropriate for its client, but the design was ultimately illegitimate. Traditional ornament was applied on a modern building without any apparent relationship to its materials or method of construction. This contravened basic ideas about Modern design.

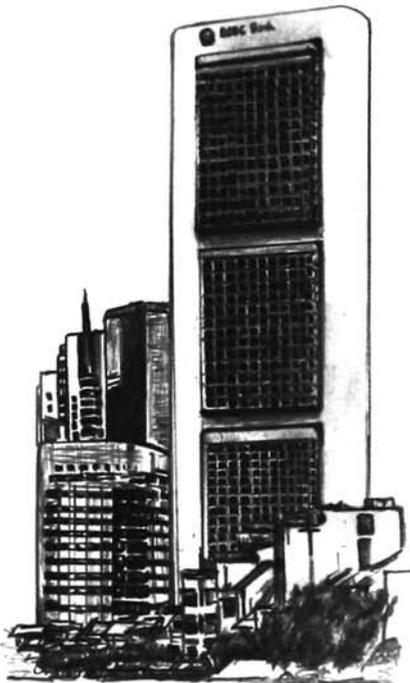
If this building lay beyond the discourse of its day, how was it produced? Its designer was the late Ng Keng Siang, a pioneer Chinese-Singaporean architect favored by Chinese clients over white expatriates. Seow describes Ng as a ‘businessman-architect’, preoccupied with clients rather than design, which was left to his draftsmen.^{ix} While Ng also produced the similar Teochew Building in 1947, he is better known for his Ngee Ann Apartments and Art Deco Asia Insurance building. Ng does not provide us with many clues to the origins of the design for the library.

The key to the library’s architecture appears in one of the University’s publications, which says its ‘design and institutional character’ was “modeled after the best modern university in China”, a reference to Amoy University, founded in the 1920s by Tan Kah Kee, a Chinese-

Malayan millionaire. Scholars Chiang Bo-Wei and Chi Chang-Hui explain that Tan innovated an architectural style called *yang zhuang wan mao* (Western dress with a Chinese hat) for his campus.^x The similarity between the Nanyang and Amoy University libraries is striking. Apart from the similar roofs, both have a central bay one storey higher than the fair-face brick flanking wings, and a Chinese style verandah on the third storey.

Chiang and Chi argue that Tan's propensity for this expression could be due to the consciousness of his own hybrid identity of being China-born, yet resident overseas. "Tan's hybrid style echoed the famous statement, *zhong xue wei ti xi xue wei yong*, which means using Chinese knowledge as the body, and applying Western knowledge to it, an attempt to resolve the contradictions between tradition and modernity stemming from the early Republican period's May Fourth Movement." Nanyang University therefore traces its architectural and institutional roots to the Chinese reform and modernisation movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These were part of China's struggles to reconcile Modernity with the weight of her traditions.

Despite their Chinese ancestry, most Singapore architects and critics were not attuned to these traditions or struggles. Instead, they belonged to the small Western-oriented elite. Australian-educated Seow and the rest of his peers could not appreciate Nanyang architecture as part of a very different intellectual and historical trajectory. They could only understand it as a 'misguided' form of Modern architecture.



OCBC Bank



Old OCBC building

By the 1970s, Nanyang architecture went into decline due to falling support from its traditional advocates. This was symbolized by the replacement of China Building,^{xi} a Nanyang-style Chinese bank, with OCBC Building, an International Style skyscraper built by I. M. Pei in 1975 for the same client. The choice of the prominent Chinese-American architect marked a turning

point from, on the one hand, the adaptation of modernity to suit a Chinese cultural context, to, on the other hand, the appropriation of International Style modernity to address a wider national and international audience.

We will return to the reasons for a shift to the International Style, but first we will consider another stream of development: the search for a Malayan national architecture.

Malayan Architecture 1950s-1960s

In the pre-war period, the British ruled the different States of the Malay Peninsula, including Singapore, which were collectively known as 'Malaya'. As part of post-war decolonization of the British Empire, Malaya achieved independence in 1957. Partly due to fears that its large Chinese population would upset the delicate ethnic balance in Malaya, Singapore was separated and made a self-governing British protectorate. An island about 12 times the size of Manhattan, Singapore was considered too small to be a viable independent nation. Singapore's PAP (People's Action Party) State government argued that the island's economic and political destinies were tied to Malaya, and advocated merger as the only way to secure independence from Britain. This was achieved in 1963 when Singapore merged with Malaya to form a new nation, Malaysia.

In common with other post-colonial societies, local artists and architects in the 1950s and early 1960s searched for a national, Malayan, identity in their work. At the same time, it was evident to architects imbued with Modern ideals that a national architecture must be true to values such as rationality, integrity and the avoidance of superfluous ornament. As in the case of Nanyang University, this was a source of much anxiety and debate. A more legitimate approach was to modify Modern architecture by making it responsive to the local tropical climate, focusing on scientific issues of drainage, ventilation, etc..

The analysis of climatic effects on architecture often drew lessons from indigenous Malay houses, which contained accumulated wisdom

on building in the tropics. This allowed architects to connect with Malayan culture without recourse to superficial or ethnocentric motifs.

Seow himself contributed to ideas about a national architecture in his manifesto-like essay, 'The Malayan Touch',^{xii} published in 1960. It argued for more attention to climatic concerns and proposed the selective and creative application of local ornament, materials and craftsmanship. While proscribing the imitation of traditional architecture, he advocated adaptation in a way that is 'useful' and 'apt'. Seow envisaged buildings that communicate to the observer their national context, through the light 'Malayan touch' evident in them.



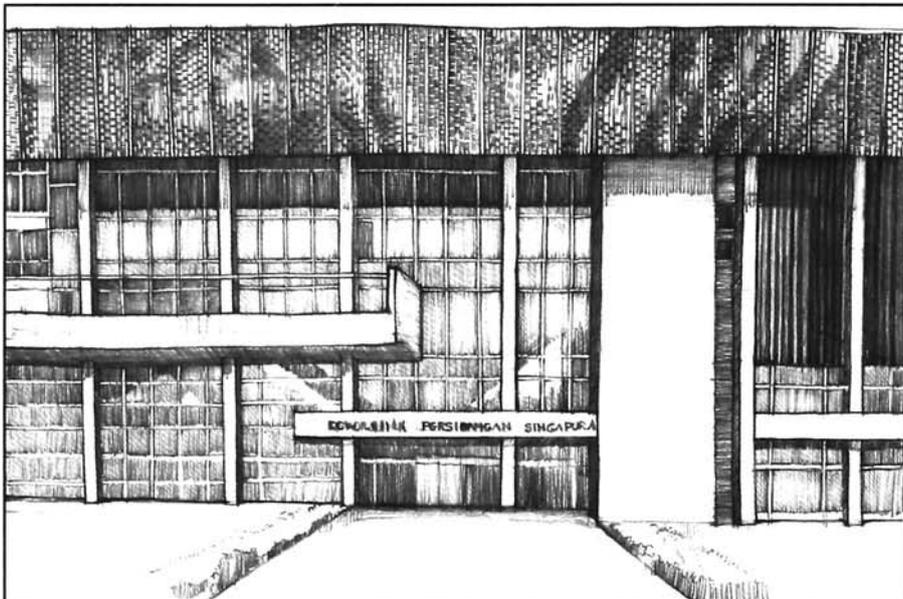
Malay house

Thirteen years later in his 1973 thesis, Seow distinguished buildings that were climatically responsive, most notably the 1965 Singapore Conference Hall, designed by Lim Chong Keat of Malayan Architects Co-Partnership. Referring to its lofty concourse, clerestory lighting and aluminum sunscreens, he said that the Hall was "an outstanding example of contemporary architecture", which "demonstrates the high competency and functional approach of some present-day architects."

Other prominent climatically-sensitive buildings were the Scouts Association by Seow himself, several Catholic churches by Alfred Wong, and private houses by Malayan Architects Co-Partnership. However, while praising their sensitive response to climate, Seow refrains from speaking in his thesis about these buildings as part of any larger effort to develop a self-consciously Malayan architecture.

Seow's sudden loss of interest in Malayan architecture between 1960, when he wrote 'The Malayan Touch', and 1973, when he wrote his thesis, can be explained by the events of 1964 and 1965. Ethnic and political rivalry between Chinese majority Singapore and Malay majority Malaysia escalated into bloody race riots in 1964. These traumatic events led to the expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965.^{xiii}

Following this, the term 'Malayan' was expunged from architectural and other discourses. Malayan architecture blithely was not, however, replaced by the search for a Singaporean architecture. For Singapore, Malaya had always been more than a political ideal. Malaya's much larger population and thriving tin and rubber industries provided the markets and resources Singapore needed in a world where newly independent countries were pursuing import substitution policies. The loss of Malaya required a fundamental re-thinking of Singapore's purpose and image in the world, and compelled the island to



Singapore Conference Hall

strategically re-position itself as a global city with the world replacing Malaysia as its hinterland. Subsequently, the city-state opened itself to the industrialized world, in its search of markets, resources, capital and skills. As Singapore Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam articulated in 1972, Singapore depended on the “international economic system to which we as a Global City belong and which will be the final arbiter of whether we prosper or decline”.^{xiv}

In this new mould, Singapore desired an identity as a pro-business, internationally-oriented modern city, an image provided by the International Style. Almost overnight, the development of architecture with national inflections became an irrelevant and unaffordable indulgence. Coincidentally, the widespread introduction by the 1970s

of air-conditioning also undermined the pursuit of climatically-sensitive design.

Singapore's economic integration with global capitalism was tied to the arrival of celebrity architects, beginning with I. M. Pei in the late 1960s.^{xv} More famous for earlier works built elsewhere, these celebrities delivered generic International Style designs for their Singapore clients, who abhorred controversy and desired conservative yet prestigious buildings. This trend narrowed the scope for local architects to produce more critical or original work. In the words of architect Alfred Wong, "no chances were to be taken with Singapore architects who were still trying to find the desired expression appropriate to our wet enervating climate or to engage in developing an ethnic heritage since this might remind people of the Third World from which Singapore had only just emerged. The instantly recognised forms of high-rise office towers best typify the desired expression of self-confidence..."^{xvi} By the late 1960s, the search for a national architecture had ended. Historiographically, the handful of experimental 'Malayan' buildings became subsumed into larger Modern architectural history.

Architecture of SPUR 1960s-1970s

The loss of the Nanyang and Malayan projects did not spell the end of local architectural innovation. Rather, they marked the end of identity anxiety as a generator of form. Where the ethnic and national were once the alternative frontlines of architecture, these were replaced by new issues and concerns.

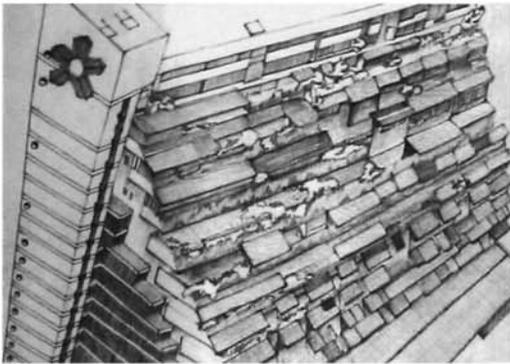
By the late 1960s, architects shifted their focus to the massive changes taking place in Singapore. The PAP government had initiated the physical transformation of the island to make it more amenable to global capital. Villages, slums and tenements were demolished, and replaced by public housing estates and industrial townships. A new skyline emerged from the reformed landscape. An interconnected network of highways, seaports and airports connected these to one another and the wider world. The hallmark of these changes was the extensive use of modern planning and International Style architecture.

Some architects launched a critique of this transformation, focusing on quality-of-life and social justice issues. They were part of the wider global backlash against Modern architecture. They formed an organisation called SPUR (Singapore Planning and Urban Research group). SPUR had a core membership of architects, joined by intellectuals from fields such as economics, geography and law. Collectively, they were part of Singapore's intellectual class, who were chafing under increasingly illiberal political conditions. The collapse of a viable opposition, and curbs on the media, were symptoms of this trend.

In addition to criticizing the government, some SPUR architects used the group as a platform for airing broader visions for the city, and the theoretical basis of their built works. William Lim and Tay Kheng Soon were the two most prominent SPUR leaders. They were also partners in the architectural firm, Design Partnership. Key ideas behind the works of Lim and Tay were expressed in their paper, 'The Future of Asian Cities', published in 1966 in *Asia Magazine*.^{xvii}

In this article, the writers addressed post-colonial identity anxiety, warning that "we must not make the mistake of identifying the requirements of modern living and the process of industrialization with de-orientalisation." Having de-linked the Modern from the Western, they argued for high-density urban formations as appropriate for Asian cities. This was based on the population explosion in Asian cities and the fact that Asians were "conditioned to live in a highly concentrated manner." Contemporary issues of congestion, pollution, and heritage conservation replaced old obsessions with ethnic or national identity. The 'Asian' also replaced the 'tropical' as the regional level of identification. Aware that the city-state was in an uneasy relationship with its former hinterland, Singapore architects developed a regionally-oriented discourse, as a form of resistance to the hegemonic International Style.

The article goes on to advocate high-density, mixed-use architecture, and policy prescriptions ranging from transport to urban land reform. Its architectural ideas were later expressed in the design of both the Peoples' Park and Golden Mile Complexes. Their vision was of a



Aerial view of Golden Mile Complex

highly built-up continuum of buildings, arranged in a continuous linear urban development. Decks, podia, railways, bridges, and open spaces connect buildings to each other.

In particular, Golden Mile Complex which was completed in 1973, seven years after the article by Lim and Tay, bears a striking resemblance to the sketches that accompanied their article. However, Golden Mile stands detached from its neighbours and street, merely

the first piece in a vast urban jigsaw that was never assembled. It was apparent that such an ambitious urban scheme required State involvement. As the writers noted in the last line of their 1966 article, “no amount of ingenuity can make up for a lack of political leadership, for any planning action must be accompanied by a political decision.”

In the discussion of Golden Mile Complex in his thesis, Seow skips these political and planning issues to dwell on formal aspects, noting “the use of spectacular forms in exposed positions”. Yet, perhaps because of his own inclinations toward the tropical discourse, his overall assessment of the work is critical: “it is doubtful if it is functionally adequate, especially from the weather protection angle under tropical conditions of intense sunlight, heat, glare and rain.” Almost dismissively, Seow concludes his comments on the work of the firm by noting their use of dramatic form, “yet continually experimenting with their own theories.” Tellingly, none of these theories are described, let alone discussed.^{xviii}

By 1975, SPUR itself was dissolved partly as a result of pressure and opposition from the government, which was increasingly intolerant of critical dissent.^{xix} As Koolhaas observes, “the issues SPUR raises – history, context, community – are delicacies that can only detract from the process of modernisation and interfere with its purity.” As such, the works become, again, subsumed into the wider history of Modern architecture, with little sense of their importance as critical theoretical and practical experiments to develop an alternative to the mainstream modernity practised in Singapore.

Conclusion

Having surveyed some neglected streams of architectural theory and practice, questions remain as to how and why these were historiographically lost. While many of the individual buildings today have been recognised as fine works, the wider architectural approaches or movements to which they belonged ultimately failed.

The urge to forget these failed alternatives may have been an architects' defence mechanism to counter rapid historical changes, such as the acquisition and loss of national identity almost overnight and the sudden influx of foreign celebrity architects. Singapore architects retreated from the collapse of idealistic positions into the refuge of Modern architecture's first principles, particularly its emphasis on a dispassionate rationality and the avoidance of overt symbolism. Reflecting on his celebrated Singapore Conference Hall, Lim Chong Keat says simply, "if one is referring to the rhetoric about identity... we actually weren't too bothered about that. We knew the environment in our country, so we did not have to be overly self-conscious about it. It was natural, rather than contrived or trying to meet any rhetoric."^{xx}

Despite this retrospective downplaying of 'rhetoric', the evidence indicates that architecture was developing along 'self-consciously' alternative lines in Singapore, before these were ultimately extinguished, along with their place in post-war history. While the bolder ambitions of an earlier generation have failed, they deserve to be recovered. The ability to remember these alternative pasts can expand the capacity to imagine alternative futures.

This article emerged from a paper delivered at the VIIIth International DOCOMOMO Conference at Columbia University, New York City, 26 Sep – 2 Oct 2004. The presentation of this paper was made possible with support from the Singapore International Foundation and the Lee Foundation, which the authors gratefully acknowledge.

Dinesh Naidu was a deputy editor of the *Singapore Architect: the Singapore Institute of Architects Journal*, and Executive Secretary of the Singapore Heritage Society. He studied architectural history and theory, and was a researcher

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Ho Weng Hin is an architectural restoration specialist and architectural historian. He recently graduated from the *Scuola di Specializzazione in Restauro dei Monumenti*, University of Genoa, Italy with top honours. A member of Singapore Heritage Society, he has been involved in a number of publications, including *Rethinking Chinatown* (1998), and *Memories and the National Library* (2000). He has also been involved in research projects with various government organisations, such as the Centre for Advanced Studies in Architecture, National University of Singapore, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, DesignSingapore, and National Archives of Singapore. Ho was formerly editor of the professional journal, *Singapore Architect*.

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Illustration by **Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayuddhay**; **Pattanapong Varanyanon**; **Wilasinee Siangwan**; **Wunnaporn Siangprasert**; and **Parinee Srisuwan**

Endnotes

- ⁱ Seow, Eu Jin, *Architectural Development in Singapore* (PhD. diss., University of Melbourne, 1973).
- ⁱⁱ Prof. Seow taught at Singapore's only architecture school (originally at the Singapore Polytechnic, now at the National University of Singapore), which he headed between 1974 and 1979. Dr. Jon Lim later took over the local architectural history courses and based his coverage of the post-war period on Seow's thesis.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Seow summarized his thesis in an essay published in two landmark books. Singapore Institute of Architects, *Rumah: Contemporary Architecture of Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 1981); Philip Bay Joo Hwa, Ang Choon Kiat, Peter Chen (eds), *Contemporary Singapore Architecture: 1960s to 1990s* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 1998), pp. 16-23.
- ^{iv} This paper emerges out of a book the authors are writing, tentatively titled *Our Modern Past: Architecture in Singapore 1920s-1970s*, to be published by the Singapore Heritage Society in 2008.
- ^v Seow, Eu Jin, *Architectural Development in Singapore* (PhD. diss., University of Melbourne, 1973), p. 352.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*, p. 400.
- ^{vii} An important initiative in this respect was the three-year long Australia-Singapore research project, 'Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Postwar Singapore', which culminated in a symposium at the National University of Singapore in July 2005.
- ^{viii} *Rumah: Journal of the Society of Malayan Architects* Vol. II (Sep 1959): 3.
- ^{ix} Seow, Eu Jin, *Architectural Development in Singapore* (PhD. diss., University of Melbourne, 1973), p. 353.
- ^x Chiang Bo-Wei & Chi Chang-Hui, 'Colonialism and the Formation of National Identity: Tan Kah Kee's Nationalism in Architectural Discourse, 1910s-1950s', *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture*, Vol. 5-6 (Nov 2003): 54.
- ^{xi} China Building was the headquarters of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC), a Singaporean Chinese bank. It was designed by the expatriate firm Keys & Dowdeswell, and built in 1931.
- ^{xii} *Rumah: Journal of the Society of Malayan Architects* (1960). Republished in Singapore Architect: *Journal of the Singapore Institute of Architects* No. 218 (2002): 158-9.
- ^{xiii} For details, refer to C.M. Turnbull's *A History of Singapore 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- ^{xiv} S. Rajaratnam, 'Singapore: Global City'. Speech to the Singapore Press Club, 6 Feb 1972. Published in Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq (eds), *The Prophetic and the Political: Selected Speeches and Writings of S. Rajaratnam* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1987), pp. 223-231.
- ^{xv} Celebrity architects after Pei include Paul Rudolph, Kenzo Tange, John Portman and Moshe Safdi.
- ^{xvi} Alfred Wong, 'A Brief Review of Our Recent Architectural History' in *Contemporary Singapore Architecture*, pp. 252-3.
- ^{xvii} Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group, 'The Future of Asian Cities' in *Asia Magazine* (May 1966). Republished in SPUR 65-7 (Singapore: SPUR Group, 1968), pp. 4-12.
- ^{xviii} Seow, Eu Jin, *Architectural Development in Singapore* (PhD. diss., University of Melbourne, 1973), pp. 380-2.
- ^{xix} Rem Koolhaas, 'Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis... or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa' in Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), p. 1055
- ^{xx} Quote from an interview in *Building Dreams*, an 8 Episode TV documentary series on architecture and urbanism in Singapore, Xtreme Productions and Mediacorp Singapore, 2002.

Postcards from the Edge of Empire: Images and Messages from French Indochina

Janet Hoskins



Fig 1: (Card#68 Una Bayadere Annamite: Sortie de bain d'une jeune femme annamite). The text, composed on April 17, 1908, reads on top of the image "Ni formes, ni couleurs! Rien de beau chez elle!" ("No form and no colour! Nothing beautiful about her!") On the back: "My dear Jane, I prefer to send you a few examples of this stunning collection. You will thus be able to judge for yourself the women who are represented on these cards. I agree with you: these yellow skins do not appeal to me at all! Oh, when will I be able to see again the pale faces of the pretty women in France!" The eroticized image is a way of flirting and teasing the young woman it is addressed to, giving her a frisson of the temptations of the Orient, while apparently assuring her of the writer's fidelity.

Postcards from French colonies are sold today as nostalgic evocations of a vanished world. The erotic, opium-infused images of Indochina have been particularly popular since the elegant fiction of exotic utopia they depict was carefully constructed to justify the colonial enterprise¹

Colonial postcards are often published and critiqued for their racist and propagandistic content, but the ethnographic value of the postcard has been neglected, as has the content of the messages printed on the other side. Including messages in the analysis amplifies and complicates the visual tendency to stereotype, exoticise and, at times, demonise. There is sometimes a synergistic consonance between image and message, at other times an unconscious, ironic or metaphoric dissonance.

A reading of colonial postcards from both sides, especially large collections like the 2,617 postcards in the Getty Cultural Exchanges Archive, suggests that we need to return them to the dialogical context in which they were first sent. Rather than reading them as aspects of a totalizing 'colonial gaze', we particularize the gaze, and recognize subtle variations in its content. The caption offers an official guide to interpreting the image, but the scribbled message is more personal, telling the reader "this is what you should think when you look at this card". It simulates, across a great separation of time and place, the experience of gazing together at the same image, and offers us data to historicise the reception of these cards in a colonial context. The signatures on many cards are illegible but the addresses are not, so the best analytic angle open to us is a 'reception study' – looking at the

cards from the perspective of the readers, consumers of the colonial spectacle and listeners to distant confessions. This focus offers us a more nuanced and complex perspective on how postcards are gendered, as they move from predominantly male senders in Indochina (71% of those in the Getty collection) to predominantly female addressees (59% of those whose addressee could be gendered).

Commentators of the period referred to postcard collecting as a 'feminine vice' (Naomi Schor 1994: 262), and women were major donors of museum collections and published announcements in exchange journals (Mathur 1999: 112). The postcard was the very example of the feminine collectible (Schor 1994: 262), but the activity of sending cards encompassed both genders and many different subject positions in colonial society, from simple soldiers and housewives to elite commanders and ladies of leisure. Opening family albums which display the images but conceal the messages provides the scholar with the transgressive thrill of lifting them out of their plastic slots and indulging in the guilty pleasure of reading someone else's mail.

The colonial postcard, which had its heyday in the first two decades of the 20th century, came to represent both the technological triumphs of western photography (printing and mass production) and the political triumphs of European conquest and expansion. Postcards were the public emblem of colonial travel, and the preferred form of correspondence for overseas residents of all classes. Printed both as part of imperial propaganda efforts (MacKenzie 1984) and church-based missionary societies (Mathur 1966), their main use was in personal communication. Their messages provide us with a diaristic form of note-jotting, reflecting on the daily grind, the experiences of feeling lost or disoriented, and – most interestingly – the projection of inner feelings onto exotic others, the use of visual images as foil for comments both sardonic and occasionally sincere.

The first French postcards were printed in 1873, and in French Indochina the first series of cards was published in 1900 by Francois-Henri Schneider and Raphael Moreau of Hanoi (Franchini and Ghesquiere 2001: 220). Within a year, they had published 3,000 cards



Fig 2: *Tattouer au travail*. Another card out of 11 sent to the same Jane as (Fig 1) repeats the theme of nudity and flirtation, by showing a scene of naked pain with the cheery greeting ("I wish you many joys! And you?") with an elaborate description on the back of how the skin is decorated (dated July 10, 1908): "They use a long piece of bamboo which becomes a very fine needle. How much they must suffer! But they are disciplined to accept it, and perhaps a quarter of those people we see do have their bodies decorated with tattoos in this fashion."



Fig 3: *Types d'Extreme Orient*. Racial differences and racial stereotypes were a common theme of postcards of this era, such as this portrait of three types (races) identified as the Annamite (Vietnamese), Malabar (India) and Chinois (China), followed by the comment (dated February 26, 1906) "Ce sont les trios races qui dominant ici, et elles se valent bien!" ("These are the three races which are dominant here, and not one of them is worth more than the other!")

and soon a competition developed with Pierre Dieulefils, a retired military officer in Tonkin, who issued more than 5,000 post cards from 1902 to 1925 (Vin cent 1997). The photographer is not always known or acknowledged on the cards, but the Saigon firms of August Nicolier and later Salin-Vidal published many early photographs by Emile Gsell (Franchini and Ghesquiere 2001: 224). Several Chinese photographers (Ton Sing, Pun-Lun, Yu Cong) and one Vietnamese (Phan Chau Trinh, an exile nationalist) were well known, although their photographs were sometimes rejected from official colonial publications (Franchini and Ghesquiere 2001: 241)

The French community in Indochina was tiny, estimated at between 25,000 and 42,000 at its peak in 1940, which was roughly 0.2 percent of the total population. At the turn of the century, almost all French citizens in Indochina were born in France, and the vast majority expected to return there, so they tended to see themselves as exiles rather than settlers. While Indochina was far from France both spatially and conceptually, its elaborate temples and conceptually, its elaborate temples and exotic culture made it 'the pearl of the Extreme Orient' (a rival to British India's 'jewel in the crown'), and it was promoted as the most civilised, as well as the most profitable, of the colonies.

Few of the writers of the belle époque expressed a desire to spend the rest of their lives in what seemed a remote outpost of a far-flung empire. Some were bored, depressed and homesick, while others found their adventurous travels exciting, interesting and challenging. As a group, they were wealthy and had great economic power, since they controlled the most sizeable French colonial economy after Algeria's (Brocheux and Hemery 1995: 310). As individuals, however, many were poor and plagued by debt and disease, often asking relatives in Europe for financial assistance. Dysentery and malaria were endemic, and cholera was an intermittent threat to public health. Colonial nostalgia has come to cloak the region in a fog of dark romanticism, epitomized by the cliché of an opium-inspired reverie, in which naked concubines and noble savages float around on sampans [relatively flat-bottomed Chinese wooden boats], drifting across the bay of Ha Long [North Vietnam]. Postcard messages, while

they often comment sardonically on these themes, also move us away from remembered delights to everyday concerns, and show us a population not merely reflecting on a lost past but grappling with present concerns.

It is my argument that the interiority of the colonizer is often made visible through images of the colonized. Although racial stereotyping remains part of the picture, there is also a more subtle process of seeking out the mysteries of the 'natives' and using this peculiar world as a mirror to reflect upon aspects of their own lives. In 1854, Oliver Wendell Holmes described photography as the mirror with a memory, a new technology that reflected one's past to oneself. What he failed to understand was that the heyday of popular photography and postcards coincided with the heyday of empire. Holmes' mirror encompassed colonized peoples and lands, whose frozen images would provide alternative selves through which colonial residents might search for their own reflections.

The postcard writers had a variety of reactions to the images, and while we do not know very much about them as individuals, we can contextualise their comments and try to understand them for what they are – part of a process of mirroring and projection, which is uniquely suited to the world of photography. Erotic images (figs. 1,2,4 and 5) make up about a quarter of the whole, followed by scenes of daily life (3,6,7,9) and landscapes or street scenes (8). Sardonic jokes and cheery greetings inscribed in the front image are often paired with painful confessions on the back (5,8).

One couple in Hanoi, Paul and Berte Ullman, received over 70 postcards from former



Fig 4: *Une horizontale Annamite*. The Pigeon French phrase "chi trouve 2ième femme pour Jean, beaucoup jolie!" ("I'll find you a pretty second wife") mimes invitations from local touts. The locker room tone of this card and several others recalls Alloulla's analysis of *The Colonial Harem* cards printed in North Africa (Alloulla 1989).



Fig 5: *La Japonaise Oki Kon*. Repulsion mixes with attraction again in this image of a Japanese courtesan baring her breast, inscribed with the local gossip: she was killed by a jealous client. The back text says: Saigon 8 November. "My old buddy boy (vieux potaux), You know the punishment that I received at the infirmary when you left Saigon, the Colonel changed that into 15 days in prison. After that I went back into the hospital for hot piss <gonorrhoea> and cystitis. When I get out I will send news of our pals." The women are presented by implication as a possible source of his infection, perhaps during an unauthorized leave taken in the company of the male addressee.



Fig 6: Charette de Buffle. A postcard of rice fields from Tonkin bears this message for Eugenie: "Thank you for your sign of affection. I am glad to see you haven't forgotten me. It is useless to tell you how my life has become sweeter here, one can live like a landlord, and the climate is healthy which is very appreciated. We are getting along marvelously, my little doll as well, though she has become a real devil. At this instant she is on the veranda with her congaie playing the tamtam (annamite music). At least the time is passing and my daughter is growing up without causing me too much trouble." The message of European comfort and prosperity is directly juxtaposed to the products of native labour.



Fig 9: Les bonzes a la pagode (dated December 11, 1916). Back text: "What can we hope for if not the end of this cruel war and that God will keep us in good health! I hope that the end of all that is near, and that soon God will tell you that we should all come together to cry and pray together for those who have so courageously given their lives for the country and for God!" Christian prayers are invoked with the image of Buddhist monks, in a text showing more identification than distance.

houseguests, another couple who lived in Laos from 1904 to 1908. Mr. Ullman was an engineer and the Chief of Public Works in Hanoi. The sender is a railroad official nearing retirement who writes that he is depressed and tired. He feels homesick and believes he is cursed with bad luck (J'ai toujours le guigne qui me poursuit). He worries about his health and his finances and declares he has no taste to stay on in Indochina. His wife, on the other hand, describes life as wild and full of charm, and is enthusiastic about the beauty of the countryside, local festivals, women's hairstyles and theatrical performances. He finds the weather exhausting (énervant), while she finds it invigorating (température idéale). Their child becomes tanned and healthy from the mother's perspective, but tired and vulnerable from the father's. He sends 26 cards, all of them rather restrained and respectful, to the man who may be his employer. She sends 43 cards, filled with a large, loquacious script, to the woman she describes as her dear confidant. They seem to inhabit two very different countries – hers is utterly enchanting, while his is repugnant.



Fig 7: Enfants mois. "My dear little friend, Please hug your father and mother and tell them that next Sunday I have to go off on a hunting expedition among the gentlemen who live on the other side. Big kisses to my little Georges." Naked ethnic minority children holding cross bows are sent to a young friend or relative with news of a visit to their territory by the writer, underlining an implied contrast between the lives of children in France and Indochina.

The transition from a glorified, masculinist age of conquest (which in Indochina corresponds to the turn of the 20th century) to a tamer, more bourgeois form of settler colonialism is not only denied in French colonial postcard images, it is the motivation for their miniature format. Susan Stewart observes that “the miniature, linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination” (1993: 69). Similarly, the postcard image embodies many potentially troubling aspects of colonial life, such as racial inequality, sexuality, violence; and, at least for the writer, transforms what might otherwise be threatening and overwhelming into something small, endearing, and exotic.



Fig 8: Repas annamite. The front of this card says in misspelled English, “What a joye!” while the back describes (to a daughter studying in London) the “dirty and disgusting” foods that local people eat. This card comes from a long series sent by this man to both his son and his daughter, with a clearly gendered selection of images – cooking, theatre troops and village scenes for his daughter, military fortifications, ethnic minority warriors and soldiers for his son.

“I let myself live between fierce animals and forests”, one writer tells us on the back of a card showing a Vietnamese woman in a rocking chair, adding that “here there is much wild game and wild lovemaking, and there are also rabbits.” His reference to a soft, furry,

small and decidedly benign animal familiar to him from his childhood 'downsizes' the exotic menacing wildness of his surroundings, and also domesticates it, as does the picture of the native woman in his (westernised) home. A 'hot rabbit' (*lapin chaud* in French slang) designates an ardent lover, while one who 'leaves behind a rabbit' (*poser un lapin*) has jilted his beloved and gone his own way. The rabbit, which lives both in the wild and captivity and is both eaten and kept as a pet, is a crucial image of the transition from conquest to concubinage, from penetration to cohabitation. The writer identifies with the rabbit, an animal known both for its sexual assertiveness and for its cuddliness, but also one not usually associated with long-term fidelity. It miniaturizes the colonial experience into one of comforting familiarity, but reminds the reader of the fact that the writer will someday leave his partner 'rabbit' (the native woman) behind to return to France.

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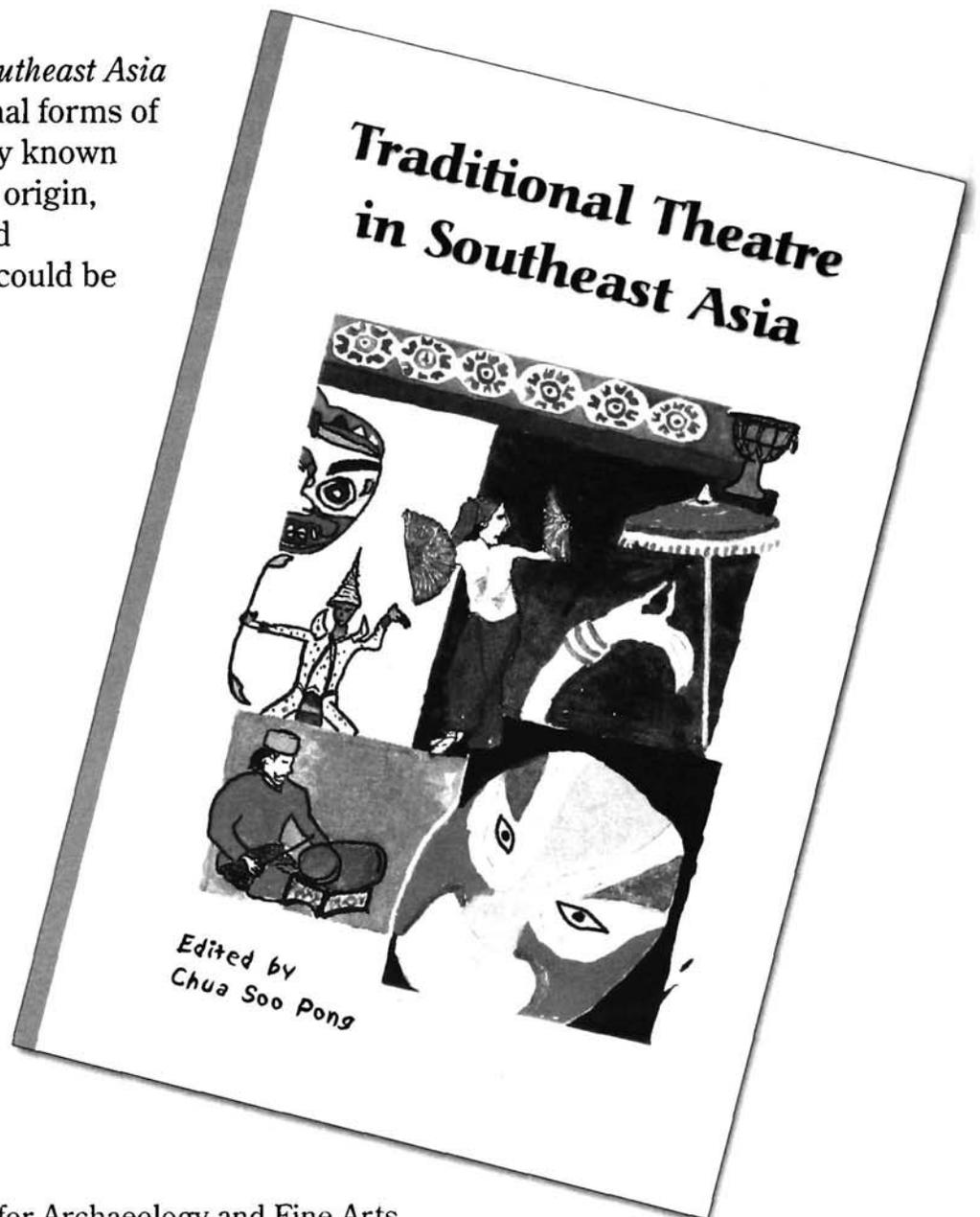
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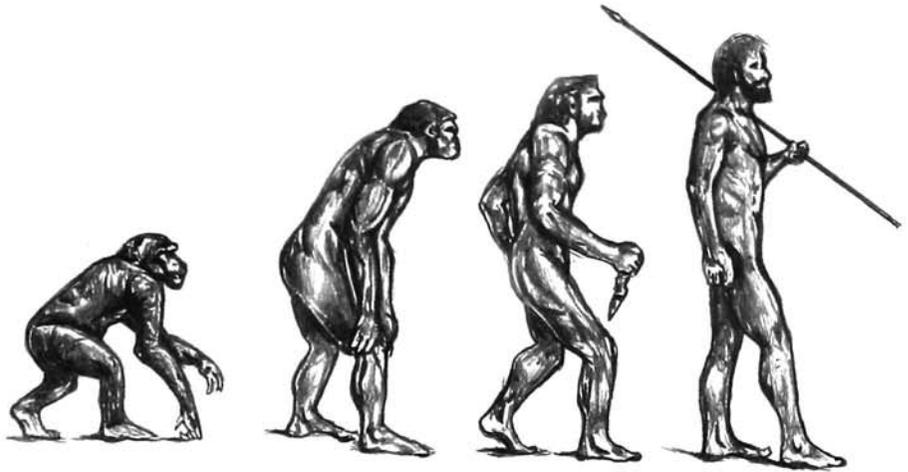
Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

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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Evolving Narrative of Human Evolution

Human evolution is not such a straightforward story as new evidence emerges, writes **Theera Nuchpiam**

The story of man seems to be shrouded in darkness as it has always been, but we still have enough information on human evolution to go on speculating. Scientists have accumulated much evidence that makes it no longer possible to adhere to the previously accepted evolutionary story – the one we have been familiar with since childhood, especially in the form of cartoon illustration, of a straight line evolution from knuckle-dragging ape to briefcase-carrying man.

However, while the simple story of such a unilinear descent no longer holds, scientists still have to piece together the evidential jigsaws they have so far unearthed before they can tell what would seem to be a far more complicated story of man – especially in so far as this concerns our ancestor’s ancestors.

It is generally accepted that modern humans, the mammalian species *Homo sapiens*, originated in Africa about 200,000 years ago. But who were their ancestors? The best known story is one that depicts their straight line descent from *Homo habilis*, hitherto believed to be the first and oldest species of the genus *Homo*, through *Homo erectus*, the species of the genus who walked “upright”, and who then became modern humans.

However, recent discoveries have enabled scientists not only to trace the story of man increasingly further back but also to challenge such a straight line evolution. These new finds have already sparked a debate on how many branches of human ancestors existed perhaps as far back as six million years ago.

Two oldest known human ancestors are *Australopithecus anamensis*, who lived some 4.2 million to 3.9 million years ago, and *Australopithecus afarensis*, who existed from 3.6 million to three million years ago.¹ One of the frustrating puzzles of human evolution is how to bridge the gap between these two known human species, as well as their links with later ones.

A most important find is a 3.2-million-year-old fossil that was unearthed by Donald Johanson and Tom Gray at the Hader site in Ethiopia in 1974. Named after a popular song of the time,² the largely complete fossilised skeleton, Lucy, is believed to belong to the species *A. afarensis*. It is also believed that Lucy and others of her species were descendants of *A. anamensis*. This hypothesis nevertheless needs to be more conclusively validated.

Searches into the mystery of human origins have yielded remains of various species of the genus *Australopithecus*. For example, bones were found in 2.5-million-year-old sediments that are supposed to have been associated with some of the earliest known stone tools used to butcher animals. Moreover, a skull and other fossils were also unearthed that suggest descent from the much earlier Lucy species.³

A recent discovery of ancient jawbones in the fossil-rich Afar region, just 32 kilometres north of the site where Lucy had been found, was



Sketch of a reconstruction of 'Lucy', which was based on a fossilised and nearly complete skeleton

¹ Nick Wadhams, "Ancient jawbone could shake up the fossil record", *National Geographic.com News*, published in the *Bangkok Post*, 31 July 2007

² The name came from the Beatles' song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" that was played during the jubilant night of 24 November 1974 (the day the fossilised skeleton was found). See her full story in "Lucy's Story" in Arizona State University's Institute of Human Origins website <http://www.asu.edu/clas/iho/lucy.html>

³ John Noble Wilford, "Frustrating search for beginnings", *Bangkok Post*, 29 September 2007

expected to shed some light on the relationship between these two species.⁴ Dated to 3.8 million to 3.5 million years ago, the bones can be expected to determine the possible evolutionary relationship between *A. anamensis* and its later species, *A. afarensis*, of which Lucy is a crucial specimen.

With all these finds, especially the most recently discovered jawbone, scientists now reconstruct a possible evolutionary story. *A. anamensis*, the earlier species, had large canine teeth and a narrow jaw. When Lucy appeared, compared to *A. anamensis*, the jaw had widened, and canines had become smaller, and the molars had grown. Such changes suggest that the *A. afarensis* chewed: it did not tear its food.⁵



Homo habilis

What happened after the period when these primitive hominids (human ancestors and their close kin) roamed the plains of Africa also remains puzzling. Probably about 2.6 million years ago, some clever hominids were beginning to make stone tools. It was perhaps then or sometime later that the first *Homo* appeared. Unfortunately, we have no confirmed evidence of this evolutionary stage. There is indeed a dark age from three million to less than two million years ago.

The earliest remains of the *Homo* date back to about 1.9 million years ago. It has been identified as *Homo habilis*, or the “handy man”, a species with a somewhat larger brain and a more humanlike face, teeth, and stature than the apelike Australopithecines. *Habilis* used be regarded as the first of the genus *Homo*, preceding the more advanced *Homo erectus* from which modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, were supposed to have directly descended. However, a report in the August 2007 issue of *Nature* raised a major question on this hypothesis.⁶

There is now evidence that those two earlier species existed side by side about 1.5 million years ago in parts of Kenya for at least half a

⁴ Wadhams, “Ancient jawbone could shake up the fossil record”.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ John Noble Wilford, “Frustrating search for beginnings”

million years. Eight years ago, palaeontologist Maeve Leaky of Kenya found a complete *Homo erectus* skull within a walking distance of an upper jaw of *Homo habilis*; both have been dated to belong to the same general time period. The *Homo habilis* was dated at 1.44 million years ago, which is the youngest to have been unearthed so far of a species that had been generally believed to have died out sometime between 1.7 million and two million years ago,⁷ while the remarkably well preserved skull of *Homo erectus* paradoxically dates back even further to some 1.55 million years ago.⁸

These finds make it unlikely that *Homo erectus* evolved from *Homo habilis*. Rather, the recent finds now enable scientists to conclude that *Homo erectus* and *Homo habilis* lived at the same time. In much the same vein as we once thought that *Homo sapiens* evolved from Neanderthals (we now know that both species lived during the same time period), scientists now have to rethink another evolutionary stage further back in time. What we can say is that *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* have some still-undiscovered common ancestor that probably lived two million to three million years ago.⁹



Homo erectus

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Illustration by **Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayuddhaya**

⁷ Seth Borenstein, "Who was our ancestor's ancestor? African fossils paint a messy picture of human evolution", *Bangkok Post*, 14 August 2007

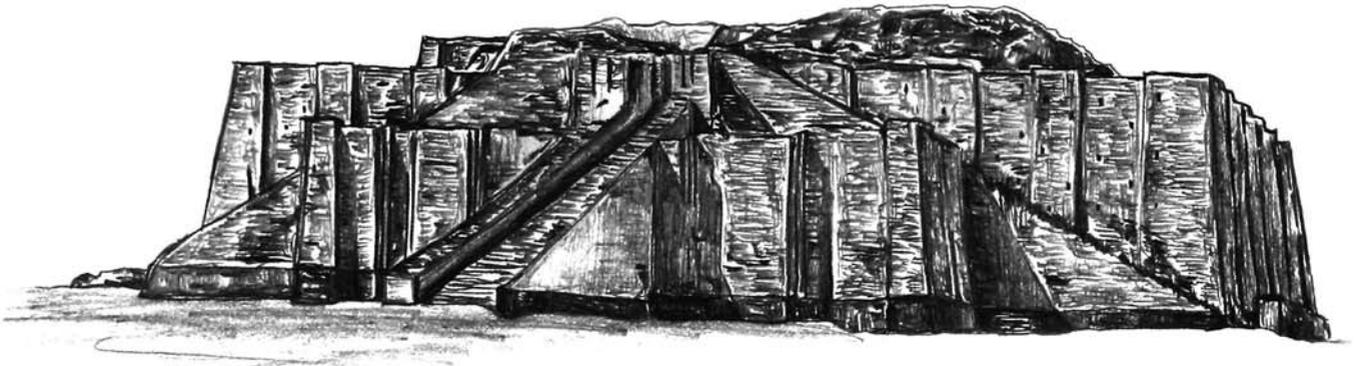
⁸ Vilem Bischof, "Fossils renew debate on man's origins", *Bangkok Post*, 9 August 2007

⁹ Borenstein, "Who was our ancestor's ancestor?"

Baghdad Museum: slowly recovering from its darkest days

The National Museum of Iraq is struggling out of the debris of war, **Theera Nuchpam** reports

Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, is generally regarded as the “Cradle of Civilisation”. The land largely corresponds to modern-day Iraq, though it also covers parts of Syria and Turkey, as well as the Khuzestan Province of Iran. Spanning the Bronze and Iron Ages in history, it is the birthplace of several ancient empires, including those of the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, before it came under the Persian rule, which lasted from about 550 BC to the 7th century, when the Iranian Sassanid Empire succumbed to an Islamic conquest.

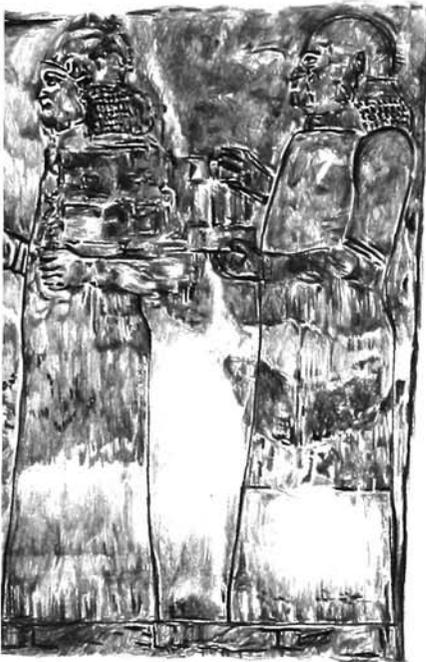


Ziggurats of Mesopotamia

It is the Mesopotamian civilisation that gave us writing and literature, including the first literary epic; science and technology, especially astronomy, mathematics, and medicine; and architecture, as exemplified by the Ziggurats, or the temple towers in the form of terraced pyramids of successively receding levels; and other cultural achievements.

Located near the Tigris and Euphrates, Baghdad, now the second-largest city in the Arab world (Cairo being the biggest), can rightly claim to be a modern-day centre of the Mesopotamian civilisation. This claim can also be justified by the presence in this city of the National Museum of Iraq that contains priceless relics of this civilisation.

Given the importance of this “cradle of civilisation” site with its archaeological richness, the museum’s collections are among the most important in the world. It contains invaluable artefacts from the more than 5,000-year long history of Mesopotamia in 28 galleries and vaults.¹



Khorsabad relief

The Museum’s Assyrian Gallery, for example, is breathtaking. Stone panels from Khorsabad run along the walls. Khorsabad was the fourth capital of the Kingdom of Assyria. Located 15 kilometres to the northeast of Mosul (Iraq), the capital was built by King Sargon II (722-705 BC) as a centre of his reign.² The carvings on the friezes depict daily life in the Assyrian royal court, whose power at its height about 3,000 years ago stretched over a territory covering much of the modern Middle East. One panel depicts a distinctly regal king looking at his subjects while he is being fanned by a courtier. Another panel shows priests performing religious rites.

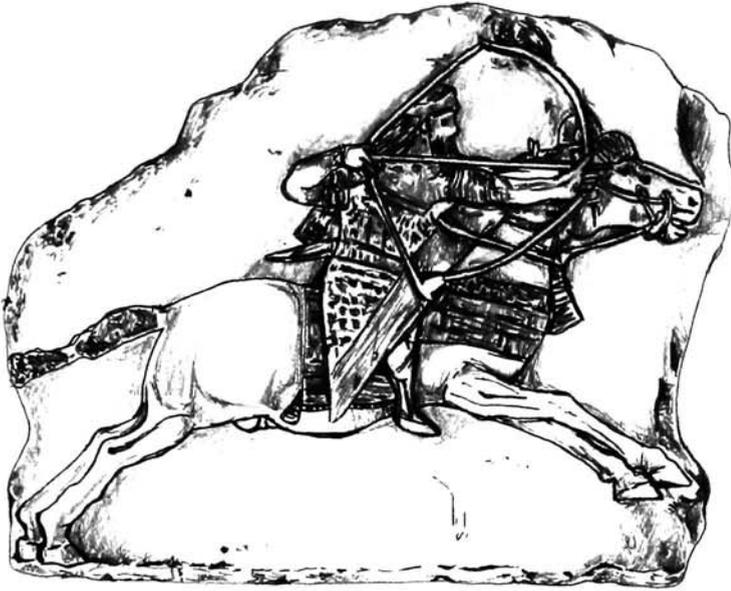
The carvings on the friezes are works of delicate craftsmanship, which are brought to life by the museum’s carefully placed spotlights. Once

¹ “National Museum of Iraq”, *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Museum_of_Iraq

² “Khorsabad, Iraq”, *AtlasTours.Net* <http://www.atlastour.net/iraq/khorsabad.html>

in the hall, the visitors have the impression of being transported back to ancient Mesopotamia.³

During the Gulf War in 1991, the museum was closed out of concern about U.S. air-strikes. It was not until 28 April 2000 – a birthday anniversary of former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq – that it was re-opened. However, it was accessible only to Saddam’s personal friends, and thus became known as “Saddam’s personal treasure chest”.⁴



Assyrian palace artefact

In the months leading to the 2003 Iraq war, which started in March that year, various antiquity experts, including representatives of the American Council for Cultural Policy, asked the Pentagon and the British government to protect the museum from combat as well as looting. Having given no assurance, the U.S. forces did nevertheless avoid bombing the site.

Only a few weeks following the start of the war, all the staff left the museum, which was then used, in violation of Geneva Conventions, by the Iraqi forces in their engagement with U.S. troops. Looting took place between 8 and 12 April, when some of the museum staff members returned.⁵ Evidence suggests that some of the thefts were the work of insiders. Although U.S. officers insisted that no American forces had been involved in the lootings, the U.S. government was criticized for doing nothing to protect the museum after its forces occupied Baghdad.

³ Crispin Thorold, “Baghdad Museum’s Slow Recovery”, *BBC News*, 14 December 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/7144701.stm

⁴ “National Museum of Iraq”, Wikipedia

⁵ *Ibid*

The national collection in the museum was devastated by the looters: the only items that were saved were either too heavy to carry, like those in the Assyrian Gallery, or were being stored elsewhere at the time, like the Nimrud treasures. As a consolation, some important artefacts have been returned.⁶

Forty pieces were stolen from the galleries, mostly the more valuable. Thirteen of these have so far been recovered, including the three most valuable: the Sacred Vase of Warka (though broken into the original 14 pieces, i.e., in the original form when it was first excavated), the Mask of Warka, and the Bassetki Statue. Moreover, the museum's above-ground as well as underground storage rooms were also looted. Approximately 3,100 pieces were stolen from the above-ground storage rooms. These included pieces, from excavation sites, such as jars, vessels, and pottery shards. Over 3,000 of the stolen artefacts have been recovered. The theft in the underground storage compartment occurred only in a single corner of the furthest room, from which 10,000 small objects were stolen. Nearly 2,500 of the stolen items have been recovered.⁷

Recently, the Iraqi National Museum conducted a ceremony in Baghdad to receive about 700 artefacts that had been looted after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The returned objects included gold necklaces, daggers, clay statues and pots, which the Syrian authorities had seized from traffickers.

It was said to be the largest mass return of artefacts since 2003, and Iraq's acting state minister of tourism and archaeology was reported to have said that he would visit Jordan soon to persuade its authorities to hand back over 150 items.



*The Assyrians ruled over
a vast empire*

⁶ Thorold, "Baghdad Museum's Slow Recovery"

⁷ "National Museum of Iraq", Wikipedia



*Assyria offers a glimpse of
ancient Iraq*

Initial reports on the extent of the looting amidst the “fog of war”, which presented the impression that the museum’s 170,000 items had been stolen, have been disputed. Although the exact figures of the losses have not yet been firmly established, official and other sources now seem to agree that 3,000 remain unaccounted for (of these, 47 were the main exhibition artefacts), along with 10,000 other items that are mostly tiny or simply fragments.⁸ Approximately 50 of the missing artefacts are considered to be of great historic importance. The items may never be returned, and there are persistent reports that archaeological sites in Iraq continue to be looted.

Since then the museum has been undergoing challenging times. Its doors have rarely been opened. A recovery, however, has been taking place, though still very slowly. Now only small groups of visitors are being let in, and it is not yet known when the public will be allowed to return. Apart from the Assyrian Hall, the only other gallery that is open is the one containing ancient Islamic artefacts. It is not known when the whole museum will be opened.

The museum actually has many galleries, such as the Sumerian Hall, the Akkadian Hall, and the Balylonian Hall. These are unfortunately closed off from view. The city remains unsafe, even while a lot of reconstruction work has been carried out, and Baghdad’s security situation has somewhat improved. The museum director, Donny George Youkhana, fled to Syria in August 2006, because the “pressure to follow a radical Islamic agenda in the preservation of Iraqi antiquities made his position impossible” (he is now a visiting professor in the Anthropology Department of the Stony Brook State University of New York).⁹

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*



Sculpture of ancient bull with eagle wings and human head at the Assyrian Palace

This is perhaps why the Assyrian Hall is so stunning; indeed so impressively unexpected in Baghdad at this time. Not only is it one of only two galleries that are open to visitors to the museum, it has also undergone important renovation, including the addition of a modern arch flanked by ancient bulls with eagle wings and human heads. The arch forms the entrance to the hall,

which evokes in the visitors a sense of walking into the Assyrian Palace.¹⁰

Most significantly, it may now be one of the only few things that could give the Iraqi people, who are fiercely proud of their cultural heritage, some consolation at this time of political and social dislocations. Despite the traumatic experiences of the past several years, the National Museum of Iraq remains for many Iraqis a symbol of a glorious past, and a hope for a better future that the country so urgently deserves.

Theera Nuchpam taught at the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, until his early retirement in 2000. He is now formally affiliated with Dhurakij Pundit University as a senior research fellow and with SEAMEO-SPAFA as an advisor.

Illustration by **Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayuddhaya**

¹⁰ Thorold, "Baghdad Museum's Slow Recovery"

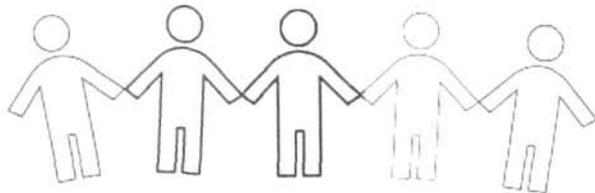


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Dwarf buffalo fossil, Philippines

The Field Museum in Chicago will soon return fossils belonging to a new buffalo species to the National Museum of the Philippines.

Discovered by Michael Armas, a mining engineer, while excavating in a tunnel in Cebu about 50 years ago, the fossils were donated to the American museum.

Scientists have identified the find as a new species of dwarf water buffalo, now known as *Bubalus cebuensis*.

Compared to the domestic buffaloes, which stand 1.8m at the shoulder, and can weigh up to 900kg, the *Bubalus cebuensis* would have stood at 80cm and weighed 160kg.

The size and features of the creature were determined by studies of its partial skeleton of two teeth, two vertebrae, two upper arm bones, a foot bone and two hoop bones.

Art i facts, the newsletter of the National Museum of the Philippines, reported that the buffalo is believed to have lived between 10,000 and 100,000 years ago during the Pleistocene (ice age).

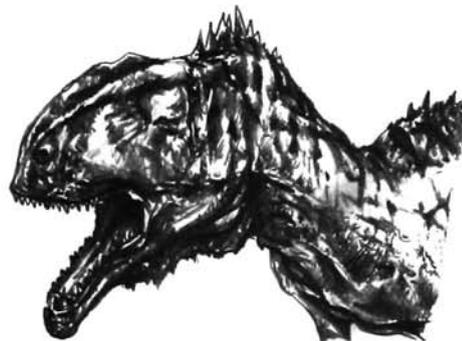
New carnivorous dinosaurs found

Fossils of two previously unknown types of flesh-eating dinosaur have been discovered in the Sahara desert.

The carnivores are believed to have hunted in the rich forests of Africa about 110 million

years ago. Fossilized remains of the dinosaurs were unearthed in the Tenere Desert in Niger.

One of the creatures, named *Kryptops palaios* (old hidden face), had a short armoured snout, and was about 7.5 metres long.



Baring horny like blades, the *Eocarcharia dinops*



Sporting a horny cover on top of its snout, the *kryptops palaios*

The other is a heavy-browed predator with strong claws and teeth suited to attacking live prey and severing body parts. Its swollen bony eyebrow ridge gave it a menacing appearance, and may have been used as a battering ram against rivals. The 12 metre-long meat-eater is called *Eocarcharia dinops* (fierce-eyed dawn shark).

Indonesian 'boom' in art hampering development

The most sensational event in the Indonesian fine arts scene in 2007 did not even take place in Indonesia. A painting by a Balinese artist was sold for almost US\$60,000 at a Sotheby's auction in Singapore, according to a report in the *Jakarta Post*.

Titled 'Looking for Wings', the artwork by Putu Sutawijaya was bought at a value ten times the estimate price fixed in the auction catalog.

Another Balinese artist, Nyoman Masriadi, and other painters from Indonesia also saw their works sold at high prices in Singapore.

The sales have shaken up the market in Indonesia, including the critics, collectors and artists themselves. Emerging young painters' works are now valued at prices that surpassed those for the 'Old Masters', such as Affandi, S. Sudjojono and Hendra Gunawan.

Suddenly, collectors and brokers have descended on fine art centres of Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Bali, triggering a "boom" for Indonesian art. As a result, works similar to that of Sutawijaya and Masriadi have been produced by young artists hoping to exploit the lucrative market.

Critics lamented that the growth of the local art market has not been accompanied by esthetic development of art. The 'boom' was caused by an opportunistic movement which treats art work as commodities, rather than an increased quality of art or a heightened appreciation of Indonesian painters.

As dealers and galleries compete to capitalize on the market trends, local artists are without support and taken advantage of. They opted to make a living by serving the demands of the market, and are increasingly abandoning creative exploration and the search for unique expressions.

Paintings stolen from museum in Brazil recovered

Police in Brazil have recovered two paintings that had been stolen from a Sao Paulo museum.

They arrested two suspects for theft of the works valued at million of dollars.

The undamaged paintings, by Picasso and Brazilian painter Candido Portinari, were found in a house outside Sao Paulo.

Officials at the Museum of Art, Brazil's premier modern art museum, had been embarrassed by the theft as it emerged that the stolen art pieces, as well as 8,000 other works, were not insured. The museum closed after the theft, in which three thieves are believed to have used only a crowbar and a hydraulic car jack to enter the building, and left with the pictures in a few minutes.

HOPSEA picks Philippines' Tabon Cave

The Tabon Caves of Palawan, where the first archaeological proof of human existence in the Philippines was found, was selected as a field school for the Human Origins Patrimony in Southeast Asia (HOPSEA) project.

Filipino and French archaeologists conducted fieldwork in Lipuun Point, in late 2006, to reassess the site as well as identify and map the areas excavated during the 1960s. Past reports and field records were also studied before potential sites were chosen for the 2007 field school.

HOPSEA is initiated by the National Museum of Natural History in France, within the frame of the European Commission's ASIA-LINK programme. Major activities of the project include development of cultural heritage; skills training for students and teaching staff; and preparation of the 'Hominid Environment and Lifestyle in Southeast Asia' virtual platform.

Museum of laziness

A museum dedicated to laziness has opened in Colombia.

Located in Bogota, the museum has been attracting visitors, including those hoping to evade traffic, pollution and the pressures of city life in the South American traffic.

The museum features sofas and televisions, hammocks, beds, and other exhibits encouraging people to think about laziness, extreme work, and reach their own conclusion.

It may be expected that the museum may have shorter opening hours.

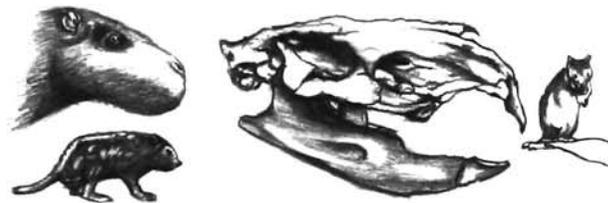
Gigantic rat fossil found

Scientists have described the fossilized skull of the biggest rodent ever documented.

Discovered in Uruguay, the remains indicate that the beast would have been as huge as a bull, weighing a tonne.

It is believed to be a 3-m long herbivore which lived 2-4 million years ago.

An amateur palaeontologist unearthed the half-metre-long fossil skull on the Rio de la Plata coast.



Comparisons between the giant rat and normal rat today

There have been other oversized finds in South America, such as giant ground sloths and terror birds, including armadillos which were the size of a car.

Biologists believe that South America was part of a land mass that had been separated for several million years, and the flora and fauna there developed in isolation from those of the rest of the world.

Ayutthaya faces delisting as a World Heritage Site

Authorities in Thailand have begun to act against settlers encroaching on the land of an ancient and deserted temple in the World Heritage site of Ayutthaya.

Among the different types of settlers are a group of monks who claimed to possess

supernatural power. They have been charged with damaging an archaeological site by illegally building structures and occupying the area.

In the middle of January this year, it was reported that Unesco planned to send experts to evaluate world heritage sites in the country, and there were speculations that the world heritage site status of the historic city of Ayutthaya might be withdrawn.

Lack of maintenance and inadequate city planning have raised concern among many that the standards set for the renowned city to maintain its status as a World Heritage Site are not met.

An ancient capital of Siam, Ayutthaya was added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 1991.

Ancient ruins in Peru discovered

The ruins of the oldest known structures in Peru have been found by archaeologists.



Ruins of a circular plaza in Casma, Peru

Built 5,500 years ago, the ruins consist of a sunken and circular plaza. The find is situated in the coast of Casma, constructed around 3,500 BC, with another structure added about 2,000 years later, according to 25 carbon-dating tests.

Dpa reports that scientists believe the original plaza was used for meeting and social gatherings.

Peter Fuchs, director of the Sechin Bajo archaeological project, says that the discovery may verify the first societies in Peru, according to the Lima daily, *El Comercio*.

Da Vinci linked to chess illustrations

Leonardo da Vinci might have made the illustrations in an ancient manuscript that features chess puzzles.

The Italian manuscript, written by mathematician and Franciscan friar Luca Pacioli, had been lost for a long time until its discovery last year at a private library in Gorizia, northeast Italy.

Pacioli produced the book 'De ludo scacchorum' around the year 1500, which is a collection of puzzles showing exquisite drawings in the colours of black and red. Researchers describe the representations of the King, Queen, Bishop and Knight chess pieces as elegant and distinctive, and are confident that they are the work of Da Vinci.

Leonardo and Pacioli were close friends, and assisted each other in their work. Experts say that Leonardo understood chess and perhaps

even played it. He made a reference to a technical chess term in one of his manuscripts.

If the *De ludo scacchorum* is verified to contain to collaboration of Leonardo, it will be priceless.

Biggest sea reptile known

Norwegian scientists have declared the fossilized "sea monster" found on an Arctic island as the biggest reptile of its kind known to science.

Unearthed on Spitspergen, in the Arctic island chain of Svalbard, in 2006, the specimen is 150 million years old. It is a Jurassic-era leviathan and one of 40 sea reptiles discovered on the island's treasure trove of fossils.

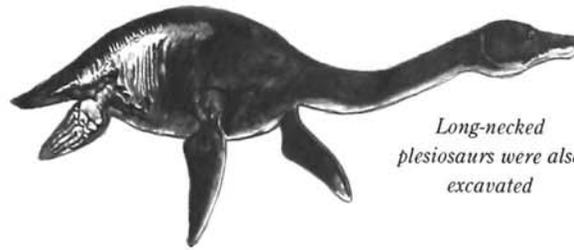


A sea monster fossil

The colossal creature would have measured 15 metres, and is classified as a pliosaur nicknamed "The Monster".

Another pliosaur's remains were also excavated during the last field expedition, and it is thought that it might have been equally massive.

Pliosaurus were a short-necked type of plesiosaur, a group of extinct reptiles living in the oceans at the time dinosaurs were roaming on the earth.



Long-necked plesiosaurs were also excavated

The Monster was unearthed in 2007 and is now kept in the Natural History Museum in Oslo. Members of the excavation team removed hundreds of tons of rock by hand while enduring high winds, rain, fog, freezing temperatures and the threat of polar bear attacks.

The fossils were lodged in a sedimentary rock known as black shale. When the creatures deceased, they sank to the bottom of a shallow sea, and were covered by mud, whose oxygen-free,

alkaline chemistry might have contributed to the excellent preservation of the specimen.



Artist's impression of the monster chasing a pterosaur

South Korea's national treasure destroyed

The Namdaemun Gate, South Korea's greatest cultural treasure, was ravaged by fire, police say.

A blaze destroyed the 600-year-old wooden pagoda with only its stone base remaining intact after over 100 firefighters struggled to extinguish it.

Police in Seoul have arrested a 69-year-old man who has a record of arson, and say he committed the crime as a result of a land dispute.

Namdaemun was constructed in 1398 as the major entrance in the south leading into the walled city of Seoul.

The two-storey structure was the oldest wooden monument in the country, and a national heritage and tourist attraction which contained part of the original 14th century structure.

Preliminary estimate for reconstruction of the landmark symbol is set at US\$21m.

Spectacular art theft at Zurich museum

Police in Switzerland have recovered two of the four oil paintings stolen from a Zurich museum this month.

The two paintings by van Gogh and Monet were retrieved from a stationary car outside a psychiatric hospital about 500 metres away from the museum.

In one of Europe's biggest art thefts early this month, three armed men made off with four art works by Cezzanne, Degas, Monet and van Gogh.

The historic Namdaemun Gate after a fire



Police described it as a “spectacular art robbery” after the masked robbers in dark clothing broke into the museum, and forced museum staff to the ground while two of the thieves seized the paintings.

They placed the masterpieces in a white vehicle parked in front of the museum, and sped off. Estimates put the paintings at over US\$91m.

Giant ‘frog from hell’ fossil found

The fossil of a giant frog has been discovered in Madagascar, and is recorded to be 70 million years old.

Nicknamed *Beelzebufo* (frog from hell), it would have weighed around 4kg, and measured up to a “squashed beach ball” in size. It would have been 40cm long, and was one of the biggest of its kind.

Researchers say that the discovery supported the theory that Madagascar could have been linked to the Indian and South American land



The ‘frog from hell’ found in Madagascar

masses until the late Cretaceous Period some 75 million years ago.

Penis painter aims for top award

Australian artist Tim Patch paints with his penis, and often exhibits his artistry at international sex product fairs.

The artist uses his penis as a brush to apply paint to the canvas.

He calls himself Pricasso, and has recently announced that he has submitted an exotic self-portrait in Australia’s top art competition, the Archibald Prize.

The self-portrait entry shows the artist wearing only a hat and holding a blank canvas to hide his ‘brush’.

New primate fossils discovered

Geologists unearthed the fossils of a previously unknown primate in a coal mine in the north of Thailand.

The fossils of the small primate, which has been extinct for a long time, were discovered four years ago in a coal bed of the mine in Lampang (Mae Moh district).

Four years of verification have established that the 13-million-year-old primate is a new species. Named *Siamoadapis maemohensis*, the specimen was only 15cm long, and weighed about 500gm.

The find enhances the Mae Moh coal mine as an important fossil site, which is considered to be the richest known freshwater snail fossil deposit in the world.

Ancient frescoes on show in Rome

Frescoes commissioned by Rome's first emperor, Augustus, were put on public display in March for the first time since they were created around 30 BC.

Restoration of the ancient frescoes had been carried out for decades after they were uncovered about 50 years ago. At that time, archaeologists discovered a single fragment of paint plaster buried in rubble accumulated over 2000 years while they were searching for the ruined house of Augustus in Rome. The tiny find led to the discovery of the series of exquisite frescoes.

BBC News reported that experts believe the frescoes are among the most splendid examples of Roman wall paintings to have survived, and that they may have been the work of an Egyptian.

Archaeologist discovered pre-Inca temple in Peru

Ancient temple ruins in Peru that could predate the Inca empire have been found by archaeologists.

Located on the edge of the Sacsayhuaman fortress, the temple overlooks Cuzco, the Incan capital.

The discovery includes ancient roads, irrigation systems and rooms believed to contain mummies and idols.

Carbon dating tests are still being carried out to determine the age of the ruins.

A part of the temple was destroyed by dynamite explosions at a rock quarry close by, almost a century ago. Researchers said that they had been fortunate to discover the ruins, and excavations would continue for another five years.

Wat Pho inscriptions recognized

The ancient inscriptions at the Wat Pho temple in Bangkok have been included in Unesco's Memory of the World (MOW) list.

Together with the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum Archive (Cambodia) and the Nagara Kertagama (Indonesia), the inscriptions have been endorsed as international documentary heritage.

Made in the 1830s, the ancient Thai language inscriptions were set on marbles. The temple and the Fine Arts Department have been involved in efforts to restore damaged parts of the inscriptions.

Earlier, in 2003, the inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great was registered on the MOW list.

Fossil feathers in amber found

Fossils more than a hundred million years old may provide clues to how birds evolved from dinosaurs.

Scientists reported the discovery of seven feathers preserved in amber in Western France which could indicate a vital point in feather evolution.

They said that the specimens contain features of feather-like fibres known to have been found on two-legged dinosaurs as well as that of modern birds.

The research, published in the journal, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, did not conclude that the fossils belonged to a bird or a dinosaur.

Eight years ago, palaeontologists at the University of Rennes discovered the tiny feathers lodged in a lump of amber in a Poitou-Charentes quarry (West of France). The fossilized tree resin was scanned at the European Synchrotron of Grenoble when the fine structures of the feathers were revealed.

It is believed that primitive feathers evolved in dinosaurs that benefited from the insulation provided as they generated heat internally. Feathers were gradually used for flight, theory suggests, but the debate continues with regard to whether the descendants of birds were the tree-dwelling, gliding dinosaurs or terrestrial dinosaurs which ran at high speed to gradually lift off the ground.

Remains of ancient human in Europe uncovered

The oldest human remains in western Europe have been unearthed in Spain.

Dated between 1.1 and 1.2 million years old, the remains consist of a jawbone and teeth found at the archaeological site of Sima del Elefante, north of Spain. Stone tools and animal bones were also discovered.

The site is located in the hilly Sierra de Atapuerca region close to Burgos where a series of ancient Unesco World Heritage Site limestone caves have already yielded a great amount of well-preserved evidence of ancient human settlement.

Three different dating techniques were used on the recently discovered fossils: palaeomagnetism, cosmogenic nuclide dating and biostratigraphy.

Spanish researchers involved reported that the fossils represented the earliest reliably-dated evidence of human inhabitation in Europe, perhaps the European descendants of the first migration out of Africa.

Dig a dig for a holiday?

Should you happen to be in Argentina, stressed-out, and needing a vacation as a relief therapy, consider the dinosaur graveyard as a tourist destination – contact Jorge Calvo.

An Argentine geologist and palaeontologist, Calvo runs the Calvo's Dino Project. He will take you to a vast graveyard, and dig for dinosaur fossils.

The project, some 88km north of the Neuquen city, consists of a few trailers and a makeshift museum where fossils excavated are displayed. Attracting 10,000 participants annually, the excavation vacation drew tourists from around the world.

Patagonia, where Calvo operates his growing project, has joined the Gobi Desert of China and Western America as some of the most explored areas for dinosaur remains.

Fossils from the Cretaceous period (145-155 million years ago), are prevalent around Neuquen, where the country's first dinosaur fossils were found in 1882.

The latest sensational find in the area eight years ago on the banks of Lake Barreales is a new species of giant plant-eating dinosaur, *Futalognkosaurus dukei*.

Measuring no less than 32m in length, it is one of the largest dinosaurs ever discovered.

Believed to have lived about 80 million years ago, this particular creature is thought to have perished and washed into a river, forming a barrier which accumulated the remains of other animals, fish and foliage fossilised at the site.

Almost whole dinosaur discovered

The fossil of a nearly complete dinosaur is being carefully uncovered in Dakota's state museum.

An international team has been working on a rare mummified dinosaur encased in a 65-million-year-old rock tomb unearthed in 2004.

Discovered in 1999 in southwestern North Dakota, USA, the Edmontosaurus - named Dakota - is a duckbilled dinosaur whose bones, including flesh, have been preserved in an environment which allowed fossilisation to overtake the process of decay.

Staff at the North Dakota Heritage Centre are preparing part of the discovery for display in the coming summer.

Prehistoric fossils have been frequently found in the western North Dakota Badlands, a region which has been heavily eroded by the climate.

Oldest gold artefact in the Americas

A necklace discovered in southern Peru is, according to archaeologists, the oldest known gold object created in the Americas.



A reconstruction of the necklace of gold and beads

Radio-carbon dating puts the origin of the necklace, found near Lake Titicaca, at approximately 4,000 years ago, when the region was inhabited by hunter gatherers.

The artefact appears to be made of gold nuggets, and its existence suggests that the use of gold jewellery to signify status started before the emergence of more complex societies in the Andes, researchers reported.

It was found together with the jawbone of an adult skull in a burial site at Jiskairumoko, a hamlet occupied between 3,300 and 1,500 BC.

Super scanner Synchrotron

The European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) in Grenoble, France, produces an intense, high energy light that can penetrate almost any material.

A monumental X-ray machine which can reveal the internal structure of amber, the ESRF has been used by palaeontologists to find ancient organisms.

Many of the fossil specimens discovered by the ESRF have been unseen by the human eye. Trapped insects in amber, for example, have been revealed in great detail. Three-dimensional processes, after spinning a virtual insect on the computer screen, can produce fine anatomical details in resolution on the micron scale (millionths of a metre).

The accumulated electronic data can be sent to a 3D plastic printer to create a physical model.

An insect no more than a millimetre long, which is encased in a resin block, can become a 30cm-long facsimile one can hold in one's hand.

It is proposed that the techniques used with the synchrotron can form the basis of an alternative means of cataloguing new species found in amber.

Ear Chipper fined for damaging statue

A Finnish tourist who made off with the ear of a famous stature in Easter Island has been caught and fined US\$17,000. He could have been imprisoned for seven years.

Marko Kulju, 26, was also ordered to stay away from the island for three years, as well as write an apology for damaging the statue.

There are about 900 such statues, known as moai, on the Pacific island, an overseas territory of Chile. These statues of Polynesian ancestors, said to be nearly a thousand years old, can be over 10m tall and weigh more than 80 tons.

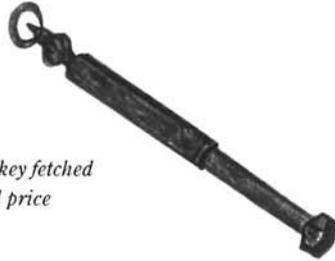
The moai are located in the Rapa Nui National Park, which was declared a World Heritage Site in 1995.

Record sale for Islamic art

A key to Islam's holiest shrine has been auctioned in London for US\$18.1m.

The 12th Century key to the ancient cube-shaped shrine in Mecca, known as the Kaaba,

was sold to an anonymous buyer at Sotheby's, who said that the price set a record for the sale of an Islamic work of art.



*The ancient key fetched
a record price*

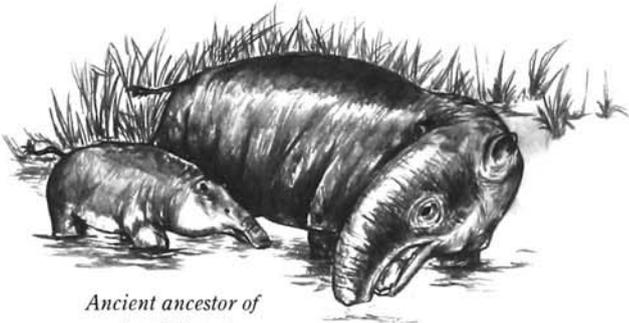
It was the highlight of Sotheby's Islamic auction which brought a total amount of US\$40m, further underlining the growing international demand for Islamic art.

Measuring 37cm in length, the key is made of iron and engraved with the words, 'This was made for the Holy House of God'.

It is the only key known in private ownership; the other 58 keys are held in museums.

Elephant ancestor lived in water

The fossil of an ancient ancestor of the elephant indicates that it lived in a way similar to that of a hippo.



*Ancient ancestor of
the elephant*

Said to have lived in water 37 million years ago, the creature appeared to resemble a tapir, a hoofed animal that looks both like a horse as well as a rhino.

Researchers at Oxford University and Stony Brook University, New York, analysed chemical signatures preserved in fossil teeth, and found the isotopic pattern is close to that of living aquatic mammals, suggesting that the mammal might have grazed on plants in rivers or swamps.

Why and how the ancestor of elephants evolved on land are yet to be determined, and the current theory is that a climate change at the end of the Eocene dried up rivers and swamps, compelling the marine creatures to survive on land.

Dinosaur fossil for sale

Christie's has held an auction in Paris of a rare fossil of a dinosaur, a huge three-horned triceratops, *Horridus*, that inhabited the Earth about 65 million years ago.

The sale came after an auction of natural history objects at Christie's last year which has been criticized for encouraging private ownership of artefacts.

There were many bidders for the four-legged 7.5 metre-long Triceratops, among whom the Dinosaur Museum of England.

The triceratops skeleton is 70% complete, and its auction was the first time that such a

dinosaur specimen was put up for public sale since October 1997 when a T-Rex named 'Sue' was sold.

Oldest primate in North America found

Recently discovered fossils of a 55-million-year-old creature on the Gulf Coastal Plain of the Mississippi belonged to a newly found species of primate.

Named *Teilhardina magnoliana*, the animal was tiny enough to have been carried in the palm of a hand.

It is the oldest known primate found in North America, and is linked to fossils of similar age, from China, Europe and Wyoming's Big Horn Basin.

Researchers say that the find suggests that *Teilhardina* primates migrated to North America from Asia, and onward to Europe across the Atlantic land bridge which was formed thousands of years later.

A previous theory has it that such primates arrived in the Americas from Asia through Europe.

Oil painting originated outside Europe

Oil paintings were produced in Afghanistan centuries before Europeans took up the technique, scientists say.



The Teilhardina primate was small enough to be placed in the palm of one's hand

Researchers based in France have been studying cave paintings at Bamiyan, an ancient site where two massive 6th-Century Buddha statues were destroyed by the Taleban in 2001.

A network of caves, where the monks lived, contains 7th- Century murals made with oil paint that possibly came from walnuts or the poppies grown in the region.

The oil paintings which may be the oldest in the world, were devoted to Buddhism, depicting the Buddha in colourful robes.

It is believed that the art work was created by travelling artists who plied the Silk Road, and that painting with oil only took place in Europe about six centuries later.

Archaeologists have discovered a sarcophagus which they believe hold the remains of St Paul the Apostle. The tomb has been dated to at least AD390, and was found in a crypt under a basilica in **Rome**.

Japan recently opened its biggest art museum, a high-tech complex that combines elements of Japanese traditions with a futuristic all-glass façade. The National Art Centre (Tokyo), with no collection of its own, holds exhibitions by famous foreign artists as well as emerging artists who are less known.

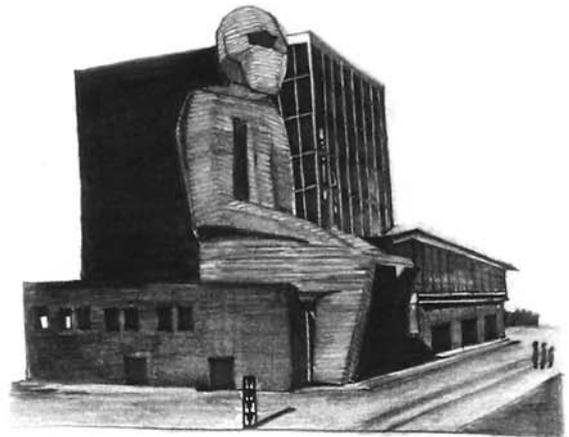
A new **exhibition** at the American Museum of Natural History is displaying over 200 fossils and artefacts as well as DNA evidence and a range of technology and interactive features to illustrate the origins and evolution of the human species. Both fossil record and genomic science are combined to reinforce the story of how humans evolved.

In **Peru**, a 4,000-year-old temple with murals has been discovered. The Ventarron site on the northern coast is situated in the Lambayeque valley, near the ancient Sipan complex, about 760 km from Lima.

A new amusement park in the **Netherlands** takes visitors on a voyage through the human body. Known as Corpus, the attraction is both entertainment centre and science museum. Containing holograms of cartoon sperm, a gigantic nose rubber tongue and many other aspects of the human body, the building presents a 35m-tall human figure, inside which one can go on a fantastic journey of experience, knowledge and health education.

Archaeology, a popular magazine of the Archaeological Institute of **America**, reports concerns that archaeologists are excavating but neglect to publish their discoveries. It says that the practice may be the cause of grants and digging licences not being given by relevant authorities.

Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum recently found a dinosaur skeleton buried in its own collection. The 24-metre-long Barosaurus had been forgotten since 1962; it was divided among collections as the



*Corpus amusement park
in the Netherlands*

museum did not have the space to display the assembled creature. An employee searching for the rare dinosaur found through research that the museum has had it all along.

Soldiers of the Sri Lankan armed forces helped to evacuate tourists from the famous **Sigiriya** rock fortress when wasps swarmed the area, and stung many visitors. Police say that approximately 100 individuals have been taken to hospital. The authorities have been unwilling to fumigate the 200-metre-high World Heritage Site due to concerns that the ancient frescoes in the rock may be damaged.

The Starbucks café in Beijing's **Forbidden City** has been replaced by a traditional Chinese coffee shop. Accused of tarnishing the historical site, the Starbucks' outlet was forced to close by an on-line campaign that attracted 500,000 signatures.

Government sniffer dogs in **South Korea** have been trained to seek out termites from many wooden heritage sites. The practice can save time and money previously spent by pest controllers on setting traps which took between three and six months to achieve results.

A masterpiece painting by **JMW Turner**, which had not been seen in public for 150 years, has been sold for nearly US\$5.9m. The 'Bamborough Castle' dates from the 1830s, and depicts a castle, on the very edge of the North Sea, which had a reputation as a refuge for sailors during storms.

A 1729 **Stradivari** violin also exceeded its estimated worth by fetching US\$2.7m at a Christie's auction in New York. Last year, Christie's sold another Stradivarius for over US\$3.5m.

Anthropologist Srisakara Vallibhotana of **Thailand** has been named a recipient of the 2007 Fukuoka Asian Culture prizes, in recognition of his research on Thai history study. Mr. Srisakara drew on anthropology, archaeology, history, folk tradition and beliefs to interpret Thai history, challenging the traditional approach based on national events and those associated with royal dynasties. He has established his local history focus as an alternative to the chronological order of past events.

The tusks and fossilized remains of a 3-million-year-old extinct elephant, mastodon, have been unearthed in northern **Greece** by Greek paleontologists. According to a report, the tusks weigh a tonne each, and measure 5 metres long.

An amateur paleontologist in **Switzerland** may have discovered the biggest dinosaur mass grave in Europe. He excavated the remains of two Plateosaurus in a village near the German border.

Meanwhile in **Australia**, a raid on illegal fossil trade has led to the return of a dinosaur egg to Argentina, where it belongs. It was handed back to the South American country together with another 122kg of seized fossils.

A Dutch artist has induced an image depicting **the events of 11 September 2001** in a stained glass window of a cathedral. A section of the 20-pane window he designed shows an aeroplane crashing into one of the World Trade Center towers.

AFP recently reported that **Asian pop** fans are listening to the music of local artists more than Western music. A survey indicated that worldwide music tastes are changing, with Korean, Chinese and Thai pop gaining popularity in Asia over Western pop, rock and rap. Taiwan's Jay Chou, Singapore's JJ Lin and Hong Kong's Andy Lau are favourite across the region.

The National Museum of **Thailand** has initiated a project to assist the blind to better enjoy their visits to the museum by offering spaces where they can touch artefacts. According to the museum, the touch tours will help the visually impaired to increase their appreciation of their cultural heritage, and opportunities for work in tourism will also become available to them.

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Southeast Asian Arts in Transnational Perspective



Convenors: Dr Matthew Isaac Cohen and Dr Laura Noszlopy

A panel at the 24th Association of South-East Asia Studies in the United Kingdom Conference, Liverpool, 20-22 June 2008

Studies of the performing arts and visual cultures of Southeast Asia have until recently emphasized local origins and significance over international links and cross-cultural flows. This academic focus is at odds with the region's long history of intercultural exchange, and the interest of many Southeast Asian arts workers in situating their practice in relation to extra-local configurations. This panel examines the arts of Southeast Asia and their dynamics of movement and exchange across national boundaries, with an emphasis on the period of WWII to the present. Possible topics include: cultural diplomacy, intercultural collaboration, local artistic practice in relation to the global arts market, performance and art for tourism, diasporic arts, the international circulation of mediated performance (via the internet, VCD etc), ASEAN art projects and teaching Southeast Asian arts outside the region. Traditional academic presentations as well as video lectures, workshops and lo-tech solo performances are welcome.

<http://mercury.soas.ac.uk/aseasuk>

for further information, or contact the panel convenors.

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