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Management of World Heritage Sites in Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR

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Preah Vihear Temple, Cambodian-Thai border
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The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) promotes professional competence, awareness and preservation of cultural heritage in the fields of archaeology and fine arts in Southeast Asia. It is a regional centre constituted in 1985 from the SEAMEO Project in Archaeology and Fine Arts, which provided the acronym SPAFA. The Centre is under the aegis of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

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Heritage Protection in Southeast Asia: Management Plans and Conservation of World Heritage Sites

Selected case studies in Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR

Beatrice Messeri carried out research for her PhD dissertation at IMT Lucca, Institute for Advanced Studies (Lucca, Italy), and was based in SEAMEO SPAFA regional centre as she completed her thesis, *Perspectives and Projects of Preservation, Conservation and Management in WHL Sites in South East Asia: New Proposals for Management Plans Guidelines.* The following is a brief summary of her findings.

Introduction

Vat Phou and the cultural landscape at Champasak (Laos), Sukhothai and the associated sites as well as Ayutthaya (Thailand), and the problematic case of the temple of Preah Vihear in Cambodia-Thailand are all inscribed in the World Heritage List (WHL), and had been carefully selected due to their emblematical context.

The case studies in this article were chosen because the archaeological sites belong to the same geographical area, and inscribed in the World Heritage List during different historical periods. They feature interesting comparable characteristics, and offer perspectives in cultural heritage management in their current states and evolutionary stages.

Other factors contributing to the selection of these sites as case studies are the availability of documentation on the management of the sites, and the opportunity of contacts with local authorities that bolstered the factuality of the investigation.

In particular, the cases in Thailand (1991) and the Borobudur and Prambanan sites in Indonesia (1991) were among the first in the area to be inscribed in the World Heritage List, and therefore have been a point of reference for the entire Southeast Asia region. The Vat Phou site in Laos was inscribed in 2001, while the controversial case of Preah Vihear, now closed due to conflicts in the area, was inscribed in 2008.

Reference to Angkor and other exemplar sites in the area is essential. The author visited all the sites, except Preah Vihear, and carried out her studies there (for long periods at such sites as Vat Phou). She also participated in the restoration of the temple complex, and the conservation of Nandin Hall, on behalf of the Lerici Foundation and Politecnico di Milano.

Analysis of the mechanisms involved in WHL inscription was also made, that led to the identification of and comments on certain proposals concerning the management of the sites, including the use of territorial indicators and other interesting measures for improvement.

General remarks

The copious documentation collected and the visits to the various sites offered a realistic panorama of the conservation status of the cultural assets in Southeast Asia and the situation of the sites inscribed in the World Heritage List, thus allowing comprehension of the situation in times before inscription, the evolution thereafter and the changes that have been made in terms of laws or from social, economical and environmental points of view.

Over recent years, the number of international documents referring to Asia has increased greatly; for instance: the Burra Charter (1979), which was reviewed several times before the illustrated one in 2004; the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994); Unified Cultural Resource Management Guidelines for Southeast Asia (SPAFA, 1995), China Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (2000); the Indonesia Charter (2003); the India Charter (or INTACH Charter, 2004); Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practise in Asia (2003); Xian Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas (2005); ICOMOS Thailand Charter, regarding conservation and management of monuments and sites and related cultural heritage (2005-2006); Silpakorn Charter: Proposal on Guidelines for Conserving and Managing the Setting of Thailand's Cultural Heritage (2005-2006); lastly, The Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Areas (2005) and the Hanoi Declaration on Historic Urban Landscapes (2009). There is great cultural ferment in Asia now and many international congresses, workshops and debates have been organised on the topic of conservation, protection and management of cultural heritage, including the stimuli coming from other parts of the world. What is happening under the regional ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) control can be seen directly in practically all the cases studied.

Sukhothai, Buddha statue of Wat Mahathat (2009)

The case studies

Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns and the Historic City of Ayutthaya

The sites at Sukhothai (the Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet Historical Parks) and at Ayutthaya represent some of the most significant remnants of ancient civilisation in the history of Thailand. These sites have changed positively over the years, even before their

inscription in the WHL in 1991. International campaigns have already drawn attention to these sites, and the funding subsequently collected made it possible to start a lengthy process that involved not only the individual sites but also the conservation, protection and management of cultural assets in general throughout the country.

Collaboration between local and international experts has produced very good results, although there are aspects that can still be improved, such as the coexistence of the modern city and the archaeological sites, particularly in the case of Ayutthaya and Kamphaeng Phet, or the villages and schools inside the Sukhothai Park. Particularly, in the case of Ayutthaya and Kamphaeng Phet, what is most surprising is that the part of the city with the monuments cannot be disregarded by the residential part, since the two form a symbiosis.

For both these examples, it is difficult to define the boundary between the ancient area and the modern part. According to the local authorities, the biggest problem for all of the Parks is the lack of sufficient funds to cover the expenses of general maintenance (small but urgent conservation work, including keeping back the vegetation in the park beyond the core area), and the need for more staff to carry out the maintenance and improve the safety systems, so that even the less known parts of the sites can be opened to visitors.

There have been a few conservation 'experiments', and compared to the first restoration campaign in Sukhothai, great progress has been made in recent years, with the benefit of new technologies, such as the advanced devices employed in risk preparedness at Ayutthaya. Nevertheless, Sukhothai and its other sites (but principally Sukhothai, because of its fame) have received a great deal of investments which were more than the other archaeological sites managed to have throughout the years. A certain amount has been used for restoration that in some respects might be considered too radical, especially at the beginning; but with the more recent experiences, the Sukhothai experience has become a point of reference, and has provided working guidelines for the country to adopt.

In Ayutthaya, a barrier made of cement slabs in a cement canal (temporarily closed with bricks), as in the Portuguese settlement, was

Ayutthaya, Wat Chaiwatanaram (2009)

Sukhothai, Wat Mahathat (2009)

rapidly constructed after the 1995 flood to protect the monuments at high risk of flooding. The tendency nowadays, following advanced studies, is toward the use of metal barriers placed at the margins of the site. They could be activated in a very short time, as in Wat Chaiwattaram, but entailed complex work, and is certainly a more expensive method. Installing the metal barriers improperly may also result in adverse consequences within the environment; and thus the recommendation is for terracotta paving.

The present investments and projects for Ayutthaya have been and are considerable. Apart from the budget for the anti-flood barriers, certain restoration work is required in the central part of the city, according to the master plan indications, costing a further 221 million baht (US$7.3m). Such restoration should greatly improve the present situation, and the investments will serve to "… preserve integrity and outstanding universal value in a sustainable dimension and let the site be free from modernization", to quote Methadol Wichakana, the Park Director.

In general, for all the Parks, the participation of the local community arose as a direct result of the projects inside the Park, such as special

Sukhothai, Wat Si Chum, restoration project area (2009)

Sukhothai, Wat Si Sawai (2009)

Sukhothai, Wat Si Chum, main Buddha statue (2009)

training programmes, or recreation activities involving the community members. The economic situation of the area has improved due to an increase in profits coming from expansion in tourism and because the infrastructures and services have improved in the whole area. Tourism is a vital feature in the management of the Parks, even though there have been none of the problems that are causing difficulties at Angkor in Cambodia; in effect, even local tourism should be stimulated since it would make the population more appreciative of the historical-archaeological heritage of their own country. Statistics show that few local tourists visit the Parks; there is therefore a need for nation-wide campaigns promoting them better in order to attract and involve the population more, perhaps by creating a series of itineraries from one site to another since they are easily reached from most parts of the country.

It is crucial to manage the tourism in Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai, and Kampheng Phet. According to related studies, the current system of services offered should be improved and informed tourism is the ideal approach, perhaps involving the tourist in a combined tour of the three Parks for a richer experience. It should be carried out by suitably trained personnel and, if necessary, with the aid of advanced technology. Enhancing a site successfully is not simple; continuing to make the locals and tourists appreciate the importance of the site is fundamental to preventing vandalism (which has decreased greatly in recent years) and indifference towards the value of the place they are visiting. Though a vital feature in the sites, even the entertainment provided must be studied carefully not only to assess its appropriateness to the environment but also to avoid any damage to the area.

Constant monitoring and maintenance of all the Parks are equally as important as the large projects. Much needs to be done still to safeguard the local intangible heritage, but the religious culture as a factor should not be disregarded. The religiosity of the monuments is still a very important matter for the population, as can be seen in their celebrations, shows, etc. in the sites.

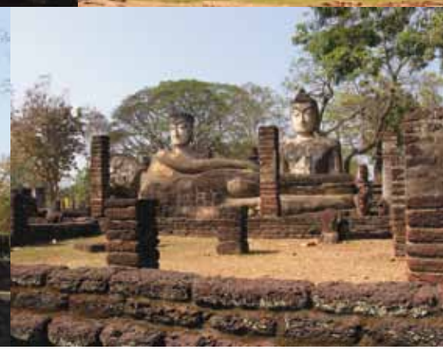
Si Satchanalai, Wat Chom Chuen Archeological Site Museum (2009)

Si Satchanalai, Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That Chaliang (2009)

Si Satchanalai, Wat Chang Lom (2009)

Si Satchanalai, Wat Nang Paya (2009)

Kamphaeng Phet, Wat Phra Non, ancient building supported by a wooden structure (2009)



Kamphaeng Phet, Wat Pra Keo next to the modern town (2009)

The peculiarity of the site is not only its historical significance but also the fact that the sites together eloquently relate centuries of the country's history with their archaeological importance. In this case, it is important to safeguard against the possible destructive effects of progress, to maintain the uniqueness and identity of the site, and at the same time preserve the vitality of the intangible heritage of the site, and attend to the social and economic needs of the community.

Temple of Preah Vihear

Another of the sites studied is the Preah Vihear temple, which was founded in the 9th century and is situated on the border between Cambodia and Thailand. The site is authentic because it was isolated for many years for historical reasons and because of its geographical position. The temple cannot be considered on its own but together with the surrounding landscape comprising the other two mountains that represent the Hindu triad of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma.

Preah Vihear monument (2008)
Photo: Alongkorn Juthagate

Its history is extremely complex, and it was inscribed in the WHL three years ago (July 2008). Even before the site was formally inscribed, it was a source of contention between Thailand and Cambodia. In 1904, France and Siam signed a treaty delineating the borders of Cambodia, which at the time was a French protectorate, and acknowledging the Preah Vihear temple as lying inside Cambodian territory. Later, Thailand claimed the site, and in the 1940s included it in the nation's list of heritage. After Cambodia declared independence, the Hague International Court attributed the Preah Vihear temple to it in 1962 but, in effect, the two countries never came to an agreement. When it was inscribed in the WHL, Thailand requested it to be considered a transboundary property but, in spite of the fact that part of the archaeological ruins lie inside Thai territory, its pleas have been ignored. Attempts to solve these long-standing problems with the WHL inscription has failed so far; on the contrary, the conflict at the borders between the two nations has intensified alarmingly.

The supplementary report of the site documentation, Conservation et Gestion (2008), contains an in-depth study of the area performed by local and international specialists (Autorité National pour Preah Vihear ANPV, National Commission of Cambodia for UNESCO, APSARA, national and international experts) in their different areas of expertise. According to this document, the management of the site should ensure protection for the tangible heritage and produce positive improvements, deriving from tourism, for the whole area at both local and provincial levels. Every single part of the site has been analysed in such a way as to ascertain the timeframe required for the architectural, hydrological and territorial preservation and conservation work. The areas studied are divided into different sectors according to whichever treatment the different characteristics will require. Managing floods is one of the major concerns, and advanced studies in this respect are being undertaken to provide better canalisation, for example.

Strategies for development of the area with education and eco-tourism in mind are among the prime objectives, and the idea of referring, i.e., to the ecological aspects of the USA National Park Service, has been postulated. Some of these points and recommendations would be incorporated in the management plan being studied. Moreover, buildings should be subject to strict regulations, and in this respect there are attempts to define some of the parameters to be followed.

9th-century ruins on the Cambodian-Thai border (2008)
Photo: Patcharee Kunasarn

Technical reports stressed the religious importance of the site (2008)
Photo: Alongkorn Juthagate

Even interpretation of the territory now reconsiders the Hindu culture, so as to comprehend all the most significant reasons that led to the choice of this location in the past, acknowledging the cultural landscape as an essential element of the environment.

The local population and the social and cultural traditions of the area are taken into account, although they are a secondary consideration for the optimisation of the site. Shifting one of the border villages and the market has been debated but this plan has been revised. The population could also participate in the management of the site by becoming part of a committee of consultants where all the stakeholders would be represented. However, technical reports point out the importance of the religious aspect of the site, and stress the intangible heritage linked to it.

The Cambodians access the site mainly from the south (where they encounter the Visitor Services Zone near Saem) by means of a road built by the Chinese government, but Richard Sussman's report suggests that the ancient Northeast route from Thailand and from Laos might need to be resumed.

Relocation and construction of tourist accommodation facilities are considered priorities. Profits derived from the sale of entrance tickets form a significant part of financial resources; proposals seeking support from certain international agencies, as was the case in Angkor, have been made. In spite of the best intentions, some of the choices in the project appear to be dictated strictly by political reasons rather than by concerns linked to the site; an example is the choice of the perimeter to be considered for inscription in the WHL and the improvements to be carried out in the infrastructure network for improved access, which are only contemplated at national level for the time being. The controversies with Thailand have unfortunately clouded this issue, and consequently the perimeter has been defined only in Cambodian territory, leaving out an important section that lies in Thailand. Since this is a very recent inscription, one would have thought it advantageous to organise a better network of roads not only with Thailand, for the obvious reasons (that is, if the political reasons had not prevailed), but also with other countries such as Laos.

Links with the other very famous Angkor site are mainly technical, with the APSARA authorities offering training. Due to the fact that the Angkor site has been well known for many years, a regional itinerary of visits that embrace the two sites was mentioned, but, in effect, the project has yet to be implemented.

In spite of the fact that collaboration between Cambodia and Thailand is greatly encouraged in official documents, the disaccord between the two countries continues. A focus point is that ICOMOS has requested for more detailed cartography, in particular for the northern and eastern areas that will be co-administered by Thailand and Cambodia. This is why, in more than two years after its inscription, the site has been closed and opened repeatedly, and all the projects and studies concerning its management have yet to be implemented. As a result, it has been impossible to apply the customised system of management (Autorité National pour Preah Vihear) for the site, based on the APSARA model employed for Angkor.

Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape

The Vat Phou site lies south of Laos, and is a significant vestige of the Khmer period (tracing back to the 9th-12th centuries); moreover, studies have discovered even traces of pre-Angkor period settlements nearby.

The site and the cultural landscape at Champasak should really be considered as one, since they are the vestiges of antique traditions belonging to the country's history and Hindu cosmology, explaining thus the WHL inscription in 2001 under the name of Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape. The inscription includes not only the Vat Phou temple but also the sacred mountain of Phou Kao, the Hong Nang Sida temple and the city of Lingapura, the ancient roadway that once led to Angkor, Thao Tao, Tham Lek, Vat Oubmung, the Tomo temple, the ancient city of Shrestrapura, Champasak and the Island of Don Deng.

The procedure for inscribing the site actually commenced with studies for a master plan supported by UNESCO and funded by foreign countries. These initial basic studies triggered off a series of mechanisms, such as better laws for protecting the cultural heritage and the creation of an NIMCC (National Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee) consisting of national and international experts, which followed the inscription procedures step-by-step. Once the site was inscribed, great changes took place: an office for the management of the site was created on the premises, the ancient outlet ditches for the

Vat Phou, bird's-eye view of the complex (2008)

Vat Phou, stone stairs damaged by the tree roots (2009)

Vat Phou, main façade of the sanctuary (2008)

Vat Phou, quadrangular building with the destroyed gate (2009)

Vat Phou, Buddha statues inside the sanctuary covered by a recent roof (2008)

Vat Phou, ruined south side of the sanctuary (2008)

disposal of water particularly during the monsoon season were recovered, a museum and offices were organised inside the temple, ceremonial access was restored, including the restoration of Nandin Hall by Italian Institutions, the work by the French government in safeguarding the quadrangular buildings inside the Vat Phou site, as well as tourism management. The local staff has constantly increased their experience and improved their skills and qualifications through trainings and on-site experience. There is now more personnel, and special training has been programmed both for them and for local tourist guides.

Less attention has been given to the other sites. Apart from some work for tourist accommodation in Champasak, the protection plan of Champasak town to manage traffic passing through the centre, has not been implemented. The Island of Don Daeng remained unspoiled for many years, almost without influence of any tourism until the lodge, a type of hotel made of detached wooden structures under concepts relevant to eco-tourism, was built. Electricity reached the island only in the last few years. Since this place has been inhabited since ancient times, there are many archaeological remains that must be safeguarded, and others that still have to be studied; certainly, the vernacular architecture must be protected before the onslaught of modern developments that destroy traditional dwellings to make way for poor quality brick buildings, as is happening in other nearby districts.

Champasak, example of precious architecture in the town (2008)

Champasak also has valuable buildings, such as the typical timber ones, those of French colonial architecture, buildings for the nobles and religious structures, which may disappear or be replaced by poor quality modern constructions and even more hotels and restaurants. "While it is true that the area needs modernisation, especially better services for the population and tourists, the historical heritage and all its traditions may be forgotten in the process, unfortunately. Positively, some new timber constructions are still being made; these include homes for families who respect the ancient rites of having Buddhist priests bless their houses. These rituals and traditional feasts for particular moments of family life are part of the rich cultural heritage of the area and, while they have almost disappeared in the larger cities or in the capital, they continue in villages and small towns such as Champasak. This intangible heritage must be safeguarded at the same time as the tangible heritage.

Many experts from regional administrations and different countries have contributed technical and advisory support, especially Italy, Japan, France and recently India (which has strong cultural links with Laos) have become involved in some projects.

Crucially, efforts should be made in the both routine and exigent maintenance (e.g. the sanctuary at the top of the Vat Phou complex) of the site, with a more detailed and complete inventory of all the heritage in the area. The efforts should also include a general surveillance of all the sites, even those not easily accessible, as well as an improvement of the local infrastructure and general services, and a constant reform of the laws. In fact, over the past few years, there has been progress in adapting national and local rules and regulations; the site is attracting an increasing number of tourists, so much attention must be given to this, and to improving residential structures. Moreover, it should be considered an important site from a religious point of view, and there needs to be proper management during the peak period for tourism when the Vat Phou Festival, a sacred Buddhist festival that attracts worshipers from all over the country, takes place in February every year.

It remains that the original purpose of these sites were religious, and therefore, besides representing an important vestige of the cultural heritage, they are still sacred sites, and managing such sites must be done with respect for the spirit of the place (genius loci).

In addition to proposals for certain improvements, the management plan (which has been compulsory since 2002 for WHL sites) is a valuable tool. In implementing it, territorial indicators have been introduced. The use of territorial indicators as guides should facilitate the task of both specialists and non-specialists when making decisions concerning management and, above all, help them steer clear of purely political choices. Furthermore, this system of indicators would permit monitoring the management plan throughout time, and allow it to be adjusted according to different situations and necessities that might arise. Only a dynamic, evolving and interactive management plan will be able to bring success to a sustainable development of the site while maintaining its identity.

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PREAH VIHEAR

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Contributor's Note

In general, work on my thesis required me to be in Southeast Asia for an extensive period to establish contacts with the local authorities, collect copious material, and visit and study the case-study sites. In particular, the documentation concerning the sites was gathered at the sites themselves, with the aid of local authorities in interviewing the managers of the Parks and other members of their staff, experts, and also representatives of institutes, universities and libraries in Asia, Europe and in the United States. During that period, I also participated in an important workshop, *Risk Preparedness for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage,* that was held in Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai and Vat Phou.

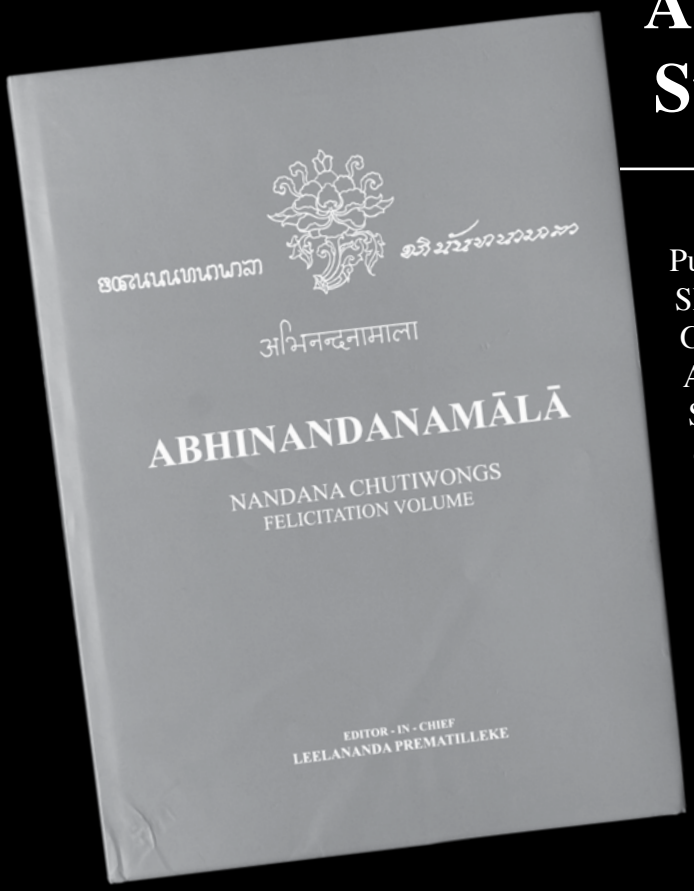
The doctorate thesis analyses the sites in Vat Phou and the cultural landscape at Champasak in Laos, Sukhothai and the associated sites in Thailand, as well as Ayutthaya in Thailand, and the problematic case of the temple of Preah Vihear in Cambodia-Thailand. It includes a report on the conservation, restoration and management of cultural assets in Southeast Asia, taking into account the historical, political, social and economical situations in those countries. There is also a study on the implementation of the management plan (which has been compulsory since 2002 for the sites inscribed in the WHL), and the last part deals with a more analytical study of the procedures a WHL inscription entails, including the author's personal comments on the subject.

I would like to thank Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa (SEAMEO SPAFA, Thailand), Prof. Maurizio Boriani, and Prof. Marco Dezzi Bardeschi (Politecnico di Milano, Italy) for their assistance with my research. In addition, I would express my gratitude to the authorities and scholars who faciltitated my research work.

Photos: Beatrice Messeri except those on page 12-13

Beatrice Messeri is an architect with specialization in preservation, protection, enhancement and management of architectural and archaeological heritage. She has a Master's Degree in Architecture with Distinction at the Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy; and a PhD in Technology and Management of Cultural Heritage at the IMT Lucca Institute for Advanced Studies, Italy. Ms Messeri has international experience in research activities, and preservation and cultural heritage management projects in U.S.A, Asia and Europe. She is an active participant in ICOMOS' activities, and the author of 27 scientific papers and articles, and co-editor of the publication, 'Third Exhibition on the Monumental Restoration: from Restoration to Preservation'.

Abhinandanamala and Supplementum



Published in 2010 under the joint auspices of SEAMEO SPAFA and the Abhinandanamala Committees in Colombo and Bangkok, Abhinandanamala and Abhinandanamala Supplementum constitute a felicitation volume dedicated to Dr. Nandana Chutiwongs by her colleagues and friends. The volume was compiled under the editorship of Professor Leelananda Prematilleke (Peradeniya and Colombo), Professor Pisit Charoenwongsa (Bangkok), Professor Kalpakam Sankarnarayan (Mumbai) and Professor Timbul Haryono (Yogyakarta).

The volume contains 57 significant research articles covering countries of Buddhist and Hinduist Asia. Divided into sections on prehistory and cultural history, art and archaeology, religion, iconography, museology and heritage, the articles were contributed by scholars of established international repute, and young researchers. Serious readers will find many topics which are both unique and inspiring in these richly illustrated publications that were splendidly designed by Gunaratna Printing of Colombo and the Museum Press of Bangkok.

The Abhinandanamala and its Supplementum are available for free, but are in limited number. Research institutions and scholars may apply for printed copies at:

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Khmer Circus Arts for Peace

Khmer circus arts, one of Cambodia's unique performing traditions, virtually disappeared over the war years. Now the younger generations are being engaged in circus arts' revival while at the same time using it to impart the message of peace, writes **Kusuma Venzky-Stalling**

Phare Ponleu Selpak

Phare Ponleu Selpak (meaning the Brightness of Art) is a creative group based in Battambang, Cambodia, that uses the arts to support community development. The idea took shape in 1986 in Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border where young refugees were encouraged to overcome the trauma of war through arts. Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) was formally established as a non-governmental organisation in 1994 after Khmer refugees were repatriated to their homeland. Its main aim is to provide local children and communities with social, educative, and cultural services. PPS set up three artistic schools in visual arts, performing arts, and music. Circus art is a section of the performing arts school. Since its inauguration eleven years ago, the school has already produced as many as seventy-five circus graduates.

Circus Arts: A Cultural Treasure

Thailand and Cambodia share many traditional forms of performing arts, including theatre, dance, and music. Among their common practices are masked dance-drama (Khon in Thai; Lakhon Khol in Khmer), grand shadow theatre (Nang Yai in Thai; Sbaek Thomm in Khmer), and small shadow play (Nang Talung in Thai; Sbaek Tauch or Ayang in Khmer). The Siek Khmer or Khmer circus, however, is a unique art form, and can only be found in Cambodia within Southeast Asia.

Exactly when and how the art of circus came into existence in Cambodia remains unknown. Although old records were largely destroyed during

the times of war, some archaeological evidence reveals that the art of circus dates back more than a thousand years to the great Khmer empire.

Early evidence of Khmer circus can be found at many old temples where different circus skills such as balancing, juggling, or tightrope walking, were carved on stone walls. Dr Sam-Ang Sam, an ethnomusicologist and a leading force in preserving Cambodian performing arts, indicated that the existence and wide practice of Khmer circus dated back to at least the Angkor period, from the 9th to the 15th centuries.

He said that "Khmer circus tradition can be observed particularly in ancient Khmer stone carvings on the temple walls at Sambaur Prey Kuk (7th century); the Bapuon temple under the reign of King Utey Tityavarmann II (1050-1066); and the Angkor Wat temple under the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1218). Other terraces such as the Leper King terrace and the Elephant Fighting terrace also have carvings of Khmer circus and magic acts – balancing, juggling, spinning the wheels, walking on tightrope, animal training, and so on."

"Prasat Sua Proat (Walking on Tightrope temple) might have something to do with Khmer circus of the Angkor period. At the western corner of the northern wall on the first level of Bayon temple, the Khmer circus scene depicts a strong man on his back who is spinning a wheel with his feet; above is a group of tightrope walkers. Khmer circus has also been featured on murals and frescoes, for instance, at the Kampung Tralach Leu pagoda in Kampuang Chhnaing province", Dr Sam-Ang Sam added.

Balancing sword
(Photos: Pich Tum Kravel)

Bayon circus tightrope walking
(Photos: Pich Tum Kravel)

Khuon Det, founder and director of Phare Ponleu Selpak
(Photo: Kusuma Venzky-Stalling)

Transmitting Traditional Knowledge: From Memories to New Creations

During the reign of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), an estimated 2 million Cambodians died from execution, starvation, disease or forced labour. Veteran performing masters were killed; the few who survived are still scarred by deep trauma. Many written records on ancient arts were destroyed, leaving scarce sources of knowledge for new generations to rely on.

Today, circus arts in Cambodia are among many endangered art forms in need of safeguarding. Only recently has various governmental agencies and nongovernmental organisations focused on reviving the arts as well as teaching young people to continue the practices.

For some time now, state schools and agencies have been reviving circus at the national level. Dr Sam-Ang said that "following the fall of Angkor in the 15th century, the art of Khmer circus declined and was forgotten. In 1980, following the depose of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, the Ministry of Culture created the circus section at the School of Fine Arts, with students receiving training on the circus arts both in Cambodia and abroad. Since then, Khmer circus artists have been performing in Cambodia and international stages."

Away from the capital, the same effort is replicated in Battambang where a circus school offers performing space and training for local children. Khuon Det, the founder and director of PPS's circus school, leads the mission in promoting Khmer circus arts, and inspiring the young generation.

French teachers at the refugee camp where Khuon Det used to stay introduced him to the world of circus, encouraging him to establish PPS. He received the support of numerous grants to pursue professional training in France.

Khuon Det explained that he learned circus arts abroad, and also visited temples to study. “No elderly people came to say you should do this and that. I incorporate what I learned abroad with the traditions, [innovating new art forms]. I created my own style which I call ‘Social Circus’, a modernised Khmer circus art form mixed with traditional circus practices that address social issues.”

“Due to wars and troubles, Cambodia lost many of its ancient arts. Researchers have the duty to search for what the past generations had left for us. They should document what exists in old people’s collective memories of this art form,” he said.

Asked how he inspired young people to be involved in the preservation of traditional arts, he said: “Development is conservation; conservation is development. When we want to involve young people in the preservation of traditional art forms, we have to develop our present works by combining old people’s experiences and records from researchers.”

He added that “due to the lack of basic knowledge in circus, we looked outside the country for ideas, but when we started training, we noticed and realised that circus knowledge exists in Cambodia.”

Khuon Det elaborated on the characteristics of Khmer circus, saying that “when we began studying circus history, we found that the styles of circus arts is not divided according to country but regionally; for instance, Africa has its own style, Europe and Asia also have their styles. Most of the traditions of acrobatics are from Asian countries.”

“I want to improve our circus arts despite the fact that the Battambang circus group is now recognized, especially by the international community. My ambition is to make the name of our circus synonymous with the name Battambang. So, when people think of Battambang, they think of circus and ‘art’.”

“When we speak of ‘transfer of knowledge’, we don’t just tell our children ‘here you go!’ but we support them by giving them professional training, assisting them to adjust to society, and improve their livelihood. That is why we are trying to help troubled children. When we motivate them to train, however, we should be concerned about their empty stomachs. If our artists have the opportunity to perform and make a living, they and their families will survive. When artists no longer worry about hunger, they can help transmit knowledge to the next generation as well,” Khuon Det concluded.

Distant Haze

In one of PPS’s productions, titled ‘Distant Haze’, the circus performance depicts a story of a girl named Sokha (which means healthy), who was traumatised by the torture and terror experienced during the rule of the Khmer Rouge. Her daily life is haunted by her horrible past and she lives in endless fear. One day, Sokha comes into the custody of a foster parent whose love and kindness brings her comfort, and they eventually help her to overcome the pain of the past. Realising that there are countless

Children and teenagers receive daily training in acrobatics at the Phare Ponleu Selpak’s circus school, Battambang (Photos: Phare Ponleu Selpak)

Skillful and dramatic balancing arts showing acrobatic precision and balance (Photos: Jaroenchai Treetanakitti)

Cambodian children who suffer the same plight, Sokha returns to her homeland on a mission to help in healing their wounds.

Through the spectacle of circus, dance, shadow play, and theatre, the performers of PPS's circus school evoke in their performances the harrowing memories of war and its destruction. Scenes of childhood happiness are depicted through various circus acts: acrobatics, balancing, juggling and wheeling.

Circus skills of contortion and tightrope walking were demonstrated to express human suffering and fears as danger looms and war erupts. In a singularly poignant scene, Sokha becomes set on casting her fears away; the performer displays supreme skills shooting an arrow at a heart-shaped ballon with her feet as she contorts herself into an acrobatic pose.

Human Dialogue

PPS staged the performance during their Chiang Mai visit, and conducted a circus workshop for youths aged 14-18 years old at the Regional Juvenile Vocational Training Center 7 Chiang Mai (RJVTC).

The 'Distant Haze' performance garnered a very warm reception from a large audience of young enthusiasts, both male and female, who gathered around an outdoor space. Despite no safety equipments, proper lighting or sound effects, the show proceeded with great ambience and energy, thrilling and amazing many spectators.

The young performers demonstrate their balancing skills (Photos: Jaroenchai Treetanakitti)

PPS group presents the 'Distant Haze', and conducts a workshop for young juveniles in Chiang Mai (Photos: Piyashat Sinpimonboon)

The event was followed by a workshop for some seventy young participants, to try circus acts, such as juggling, balancing, contortion, acrobatics, and diabolo deals.

PPS was invited to Chiang Mai by Piyashat Sinpimonboon, an organiser of CNX Art Connex. She was confident that, with the PPS members' personal histories and success, young Thai juveniles will be inspired by, and learn from, them.

"PPS was actually founded after the end of the Khmer Rouge reign. Members and founders of the PPS are living proof that they have overcome war. Moreover, many of the young practitioners also experienced numerous problems – living on the street as street children; complicity in theft; trauma from a broken family; and loss of self-esteem, etc.. With their passion in circus and rigorous training, they successfully prevailed over their problems and difficult situations," she said.

From left to right: Chhuon Chandann (rolling balance performer, 28), Pin Phounam (contortion performer, 19), and Heng Samnang (acrobatic performer, 22) (Photo: Kusuma Venzky-Stalling)

Last scence: Old Sokha returns to her homeland; listening to a poem by a new generation who reflects on how fear can be overcome by courage, and peace should be maintained (Photo: Jaroenchai Treetanakitti)

Teenagers trained at PPS have become talented circus artists who earn respect and a living for their families. Piyashat added that "they should be given an opportunity to share their experience with our youngsters who have similar backgrounds. It is great that RJVTC understood our mission, and invited the group to perform and conduct a workshop there."

Pin Phounam, 19, is the leading performer of the group, and she took on the role of Sokha. She said that since joining the circus many years ago, her life has improved dramatically. "I came from a very poor family. Since I joined the circus, I found myself becoming stronger physically and mentally. To be able to practice circus arts, you need three things: some natural talent, hardwork, and concentration – I believe I have these qualities. Performing circus boosts my confidence, and at the same time, I can earn some money. Moreover, as we develop better skills, we can participate in international competitions. By performing on international stages, we gain recognition and many benefits."

Whether the group of young artists from Battambang managed to raise the audience's awareness about suffering from war or entertained them with the beauty of circus performances, the message that comes across is that we speak one common language – the language of humanity and peace.

Art has no boundaries and neither do human souls. In the last scene of 'Distant Haze', a young man reads out his poem to the dying Sokha to remind the audience of the importance of peace:

"Do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. Keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. I wish, all the people in the world, especially children, will have peace physically, mentally and socially."

It was apparent that Chiang Mai residents enjoyed and appreciated the recent visit of the PPS circus group. The timing of their show could not have been better under the circumstances of the present conflict between Cambodia and Thailand. In the end, perhaps, it is not the ugliness of war that 'Distant Haze' raises, but the celebration of the human spirit, peace, and the courage to re-emerge from the abyss of fear.

CNX Art Connex aims to act as a bridge that connects art works, artists, communities, environment, as well as art-related concepts and knowledge. Its mission is to bring together artists, art enthusiasts, audiences, communities, and art-related organisations in Chiang Mai. For more information: http://cnxartconnex.wordpress.com

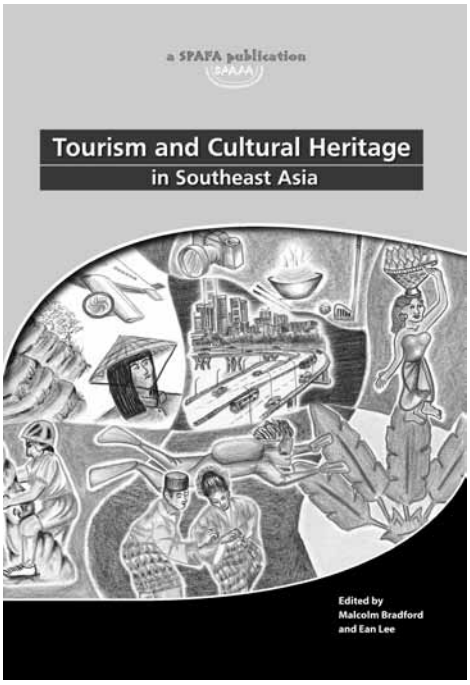
For more information on Phare Ponleu Selpak: http://www.phareps.org

Contributor's Note

The writer wishes to thank Dr Sam-Ang Sam for providing historical background of Cambodian circus and old photos. I also express my appreciation to all the members of Phare Ponleu Selpak, especially Khuon Det and Khuon Chanreaksmey. Lastly, my heartfelt thanks to CNX Art Connex for facilitating my visit to the Regional Juvenile Vocational Training Center 7 Chiang Mai, and arranging an interview with the artists.

Dr. Kusuma Vensky-Stalling is an independent researcher and advocate in Southeast Asian arts and culture. She studied Drama at Thammasat University, Bangkok, and obtained her MPhil and PhD degrees from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University in 1998. She worked as a theatre lecturer and cultural advisor as well as a senior specialist in performing arts at SEAMEO SPAFA. Her area of interest includes theatre research, pedagogy, cultural exchange, arts education and management, and literature. Dr. Kusuma currently lives in Chiang Mai where she founded a non-profit art space for children to promote creativity, literacy, and culture. She has been involved in many local arts and cultural activities, and helped in coordination between local and International artists. Dr. Kusuma can be contacted at kusumainuk@yahoo.com

Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia



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

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

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

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"What make these papers particularly interesting are the specific and in-depth treatments of subjects unique to the individual countries. Of special interest are those papers dealing with countries that are in the earliest stages of modern tourism development, such as Brunei and Viet Nam."

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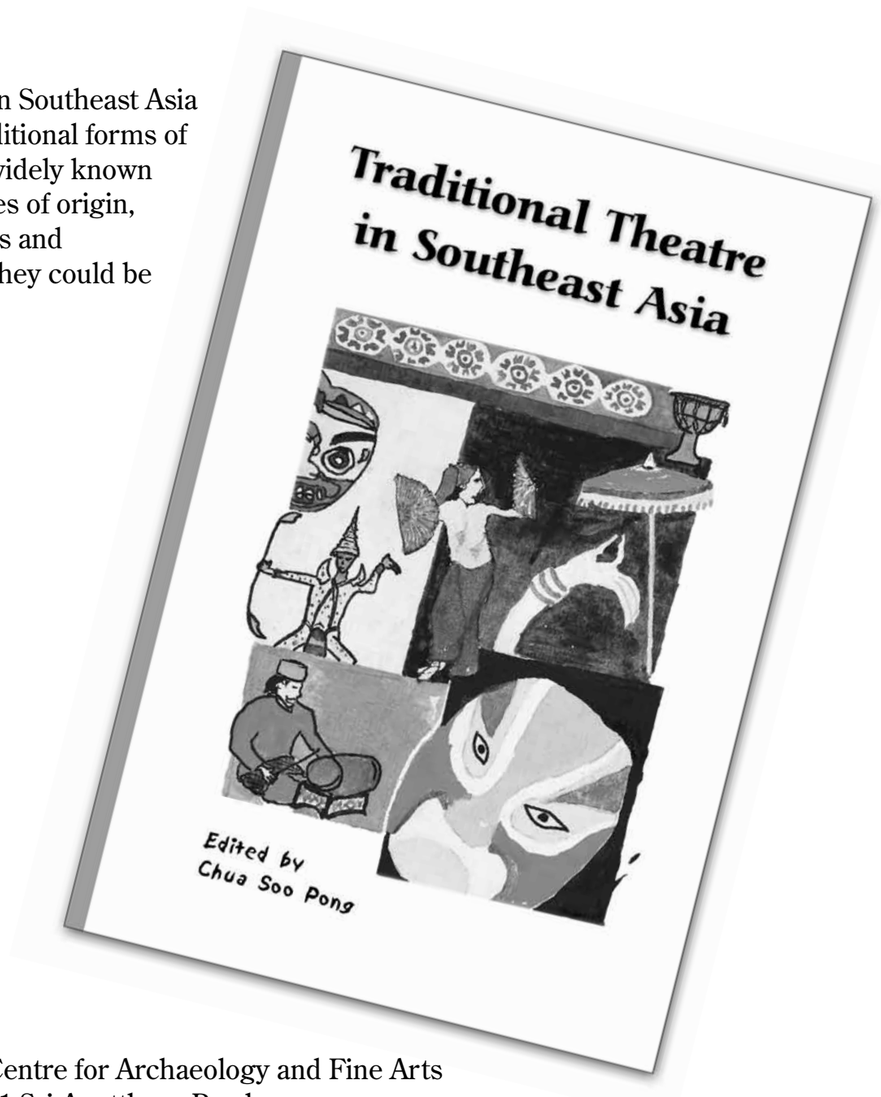
Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

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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Hindu-Buddhist Scrolls:
Sacred Architectural Ornamentation Reflects Javanese Muslims' Tolerance and Flexibility

Typical Javanese ornaments were constantly used both in temples and mosques as a result of syncretic Islam in Indonesia. The ornaments are derived from a combination of elements from mystic animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and an Islam that differs from orthodox Islam in the Near East and Arab world. **Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja** writes about her research on the topic.

Introduction

Indonesia, located in Southeast Asia, is the fourth most populous country (c.237 million) in the world. Its main island of Java is blessed with active volcanoes, tropical climate, and fertile soils. Indonesia's ethnic formation falls largely into two groups, Malayan and Papuan, each with sub-groups, resulting from extensive immigration, largely from Asia. Nearly 90% of the population are Muslim, making Indonesia the largest Islamic nation; and 7% are Christian, 2% are Hindu, and 1% is Buddhist.

The influence of Indian civilisation began in the 5th century through trade and Buddhist missionaries. In the eighth century, the Buddhist Sailendra and Hindu Sanjaya kingdoms were founded in Central Java; they constructed Borobodur and Prambanan temples respectively. Around 930 CE, political power shifted to East Java, and the Hindu kingdoms of Singasari and Majapahit arose, covering vast areas of the Malay Peninsula. Under Majapahit in the 14th century, the country went through a golden period of Indonesian history, as demonstrated by the magnificent temple complex of Panataran.

Muslim traders arrived in Indonesia in the 11th Century (1082), starting the gradual penetration of Islam in the country. By the end of the 16th century, Islam replaced Hindu-Buddhism as the main religion. The first Islamic Demak kingdom was established on the coastline (pasisir) of Java, and political power was stabilised during the period of the Mataram kingdom in the 16th century. Mataram was Islamic, but it was patterned after Majapahit, absorbing influences from mystic animism, Hindu-Buddhism, Europe, and Islam.

Wagner (1959) attributed the Javanese's absorption of various religious ideas to their open-minded tolerance, and considered their ability to syncretise them as a characteristic feature of their religious life. European influences arrived with the Portuguese's capture of Malacca in 1511 in pursuit of spice, and the Dutch followed in 1596, colonising Indonesia until independence in 1945.

Temple Ornamentation

A candi (temple) is a place where gods are considered to be actually present, and serves to represent the Cosmos Mountain, Meru, the mythical abode of the gods. The central object of worship in the candi is the image of God. The king is treated as a living god, and when he dies he is united with God. Borobodur (8th Century) in Central Java is a model for the study of the form, function, and meaning of Javanese temple architecture and ornamentation. Believed to be a 'hill monastery', it was built by the Buddhist Sailendra kingdom. Stutterheim (1956) regarded Borobodur as a symbol of the Cosmos Mountain, Meru.

Borobodur (8th Century), Central Java

Panataran temple (1197-1454), East Java

Four holy motifs are regularly found in the ornaments examined: tumpal, kala-makara, the lotus, and the integration of the symbols in the carvings and the Arab aesthetic. They illustrate the harmonization of Islam, the local genius of Indonesian society, and sacredness. The tumpal represents the "cosmic mountain," or place of God; the kala-makara protects sacred monuments; the lotus symbolises life and creativity; and the carvings the birth of life.

As candis represent the universe and the home of the gods, their proportion, number of pillars and corridors, and sculptures should conform to the canon of Hindu religious architecture and sculpture, called silpasastra. The walls, carved with decorative motifs of humans, animals, and mythical characters, as well as floral motifs, have a specific place in the scheme of temple architecture. However, the canon does not deal with temple ornamentation in depth; consequently, Javanese artists elaborated on and appropriated a wide range of decorative motifs from India. A combination of different motifs was usual, varying according to location and group of temples, in order to show the divine nature of structures and ornaments. Many motifs are of things that the Javanese believed are found in heaven.

In fact, the Chinese-influenced Dong Son style of the Bronze and Iron ages had already reached Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, spiral lines and geometrical decorative figures, such as tumpal and swastika, appeared along with ancient symbolic signs; while popular plant motifs were later introduced during its Hinduisation period in the fifth century.

A common motif is tumpal, a decorated triangle carved in different variations on walls and cornices. The tumpal is a common ornament in Java. It first appeared in Neolithic and megalithic times, and its use was continued in Hindu-Buddhist temples. Despite the uncertainty of whether it originally depicted a human figure or a stylised bamboo shoot, the motif was used because of its magical character, or because it symbolized fertility. Probably, its triangular shape represents the worship of the Cosmos Mountain, Meru.

The kala-makara appears as a motif of two animal forms on the lintels of doorways and stairs. In Java, kala (lion) has a human face or demon's head, and a pair of curved makaras is placed at the foot of a gatepost. The makara, a mythical animal with the body of a fish and the trunk of an elephant, was introduced at the same time as the kala during the period of Hinduisation. In Indian mythology, kala-makara represents the holy Cosmos Mountain, and protects temples from demons. Kala, sometimes interpreted as 'time', is a symbol of the celestial element, and makara is the water element in creation – the primal source of life. Combined, they form duality and totality.

a b c d e

a: Tumpal: prehistoric (drawing taken from Pepin Press 1998, 'Indonesian Ornamental Design', Amsterdam), b: Panataran (1147-1454); c: Kala-makara: Borobodur (8th Century); d: Lotus bud: Prambanan (8th-9th Century), e: Kalasan (9th Century)

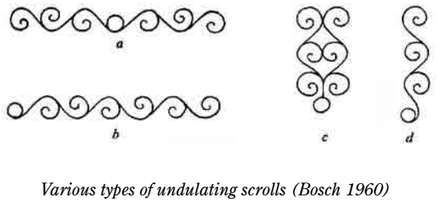
The sacredness of a temple is mostly expressed by the lotus (padma), which signifies the seat of the highest divinity, the birth of the Universe, the birth of the Buddha, and the ultimate truth. Indian mythology says that gods were born from lotus flowers on which they were seated. It is, thus, not surprising that the lotus has the most significant role in Hindu-Buddhist art. In Mahayanist Buddhism, the abstract notions of the Dharma (truth in Buddhist understanding) were patterned after the lotus, as creator and supporter of the cosmic tree. The bud of the lotus flower, which undergoes a series of natural changes, provides the basic symbol.

Other temple ornamentation includes kalpataru (the wishing tree), which represents heaven, found on relief panels and niches of temples; and purnaghata (a pot of plenty), which appears with flowering plants or scrolls growing from ewers of holy water, symbolising the elixir of immortality. To this, the kinnara (heavenly musician), usually female, half-human, half-bird, is added.

Hindu-Buddhist Scrolls

The significance of scrolls lies in its function as a symbol. It was not until the Hindu period in Java that vegetal ornaments came into vogue; from then on, they became principal elements of Indonesian ornamentation (van der Hoop 1949).

A variety of Hindu-Buddhist ornament, the scroll motif often appears in the shape of a recalcitrant spiral. It is the rootstock of undulating lotus which produces nodes (Sanskrit, parvan) at regular intervals; from each node emerges a leaf-stalk in the shape of a spiral. These spirals undulate alternately to the right and to the left. At the end of each leaf-stalk is a leaf which bends in the opposite direction to the stalk. Where the stalk curls clockwise, the leaf undulates the other way. For this reason, Brandes named it 'the recalcitrant spiral'. Different adaptations were introduced to lotus scrolls in temple ornamentation. Somewhat stylised, the submerged, horizontally growing part of the plant was made perceptible to the observer, and transformed into a decorative motif. It represents 'the origin of life', called Hiranyagarbha ('the Golden Germ').



Various types of undulating scrolls (Bosch 1960)

According to Bosch (1960), the Indian concept of the origin of life has been dominated by the belief in dual forces in nature: (i) the male element is creative and omnipresent, and (ii) the female element is chaos, an inert mass of primeval waters. When the breath of creation enters the waters, 'the Golden Germ', the beginning and origin of all creation, is born. A close look at Borobodur exposes an interesting variant of the lotus rootstock. An animal or a human or other emblem in a circular form replaces the lotus root, and rises upwards, introducing nodes, indicating 'the Golden Germ'.

It must be emphasised that 'the Golden Germ' is the most crucial concept in using scrolls on Hindu-Buddhist temple ornamentation. It is also a vital clue for identifying the origin of scrolls in Javanese monuments, whether Hindu-Buddhist, or Islamic, or both.

Moreover, compared to Indian scrolls, the sculptural ornaments in Borobodur are influenced by the Greco-Buddhist style. They also reflect the lotus scrolls of Bharhut in India in the 2nd Century BC, although the reliefs in Bharhut are smaller, while at Borobodur, panels separated by vertical recalcitrant spirals are larger.

A profusion of flowers and curly leaves are also found in Yogyakarta's Kalasan, a 9th Century Buddhist temple with blends of Hindu and Javanese artistry. Vine scroll, a variant of lotus scroll, emerges from a tuber and spreads sideways. As tuber is a symbol of plenty, scrolls are supposed to sprout from the tuber. The beauty of the temple was described thus: This temple is overcrowded with ornament … but when seeing the good taste with which it has been applied; when realizing that all these decorations are not contrived, being merely enlargements of what the dogma prescribes, when observing how perfectly they harmonize with the whole, then we must admit that this temple had to be built that way and no other in order to be perfect (Bruyn cited by Bosch 1961).

Central Java: Borobodur (8th Century)

Prambanan (8th-9th Century)

Kalasan (9th Century)

Mendut (9th Century)

Top to bottom:
East Java; Panataran (1197-1454), Djago (1268), Jawi (13th Century), Simping (13rd-14th Century)

Nevertheless, Mendut (9th Century) has the most beautiful pattern with 30 panels of scrolls. It is another Buddhist temple, located in the village of Mendut, Central Java. The panels illustrate sprouts from a round tuber, fishes, vases, or tortoises. These decorative panels are often purely ornamental, and sometimes filled with depictions of semi-divine beings.

On the contrary, East Javanese scrolls are more stylised and indigenous than Central Javanese ones. On the posts and lintels at the Djago temple (1268) in East Java, scrolls show a variant of the spiral ornament. The vertical movement of the shortened scrolls has lost much of its smoothness. On the flight of steps, a complicated arrangement of curls and scrolls with a height of 1.8 metres springs from the back of a lion. In Panataran temple (1197-1454), a compound of ancient monuments, scrolls are mostly expressed in the form of medallions whose diametres are ca. 35 cm. All kinds of animals within a circular shape are used as decoration. Their tails continue into a scroll, reflecting the styles of Central Java, but are reduced to a single curl which fills the entire medallion. Scrolls seem to evoke both the connotations and beauty of the sacred life.

Trilling's theory raises an enquiry. Zimmer (1960) claims that the sculpture of Borobodur was of Indian origin, probably from Gupta, while Stutterheim (1956) associates Borobodur with the Greco-Buddhist school of Gandhara, and this was accepted by Kempers (1959). There are still debates on whether the original Greek vine scrolls in Borobodur came to Indonesia through India, or whether it also travelled to the Middle East and was transformed into Islamic arabesque in mosque ornamentation. This supposition can suggest an example of syncretic ornaments beyond time and space. Ornament can be a mediator between different cultures.

Pre-Islamic Ornaments in Javanese Mosques

Krom (1923) is one of the foremost scholars on the Islamisation process in Java. He pointed out that the minaret of Kudus in Central Java was an adaptation of an old form. Islam in Java was not opposed to established architectural traditions, due to the gradual – rather than revolutionary – Javanese conversion to Islam. Nevertheless, significant modification was restricted by the principles of decoration to observe the hadith (a

Islamic Umayyad,
Syria 8th Century

Buddhist Borobodur,
Central Java 8th Century

traditional account of things said and done by the Prophet of Islam and his companions), which prohibits the depiction of living figures. His opinion was further supported by two leading archaeologists, Tjandrasasmita and Ambary.

Tjandrasasmita (1984) attempts to prove that Islam has been sensitive to local conditions and, to a certain degree, contributed to the preservation of indigenous cultural values and traditions. Islamic propagators and Indonesians themselves have always exercised cultural tolerance in the fields of architecture, decorative art, and other aspects of culture. For example, the Mantingan mosque (1559) in Central Java and Sendang Duwur mosque (1561) in East Java display a fusion of Hindu-Javanese and Islamic elements of fine arts that demonstrates a close relationship between Hindu Majapahit and Islamic cities on the coast.

The role of ornaments needs to be underlined when looking at the integration of Islam in Javanese culture, during which artists were encouraged to adjust to new realities, instead of submitting to impositions placed on them. Islam penetrated Javanese minds slowly without force; the locals easily adapted to its principal concept of tolerance and flexibility. Sendang Duwur, as the earliest product of Javanese Islamic art, reflects the process of acculturation to which tolerance, syncretism, local genius, and

friendship contribute. According to Wales (1948), the term "local genius" is designated to certain Southeast Asians who have the ability to shape a foreign culture, and make it suitable to local conditions, and thereby create a new culture.

Sharing the same view of Tjandrasasmita, Ambary (1983) maintains that Indonesian Islamic art was essentially a continuation of prehistoric indigenous art. In his 'Finding the Civilization of Islam and Archaeology in Indonesia' (1998), he suggests that Javanese Islamic art tends to be non-iconoclastic, especially in places of worship, and does not separate architecture and ornamentation; they are integrated. He divides Javanese art into the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. According to him, (i) Hindu-Buddhist art reflects its political and cultural background, while Islamic art is not; (ii) research on the arts of the Islamic period has not been intensive and continuous, compared to that of the Hindu-Buddhist; and (iii) Islamic art has lost its continuity in certain areas. Some cultural centres deviated from the original art forms because of the foundation of small kingdoms, different interpretations in art, and diverse tastes of local art. In short, Hindu Majapahit art was completed during the Islamic period through the incorporation of Islamic and Chinese styles.

Roman coffin from Sidon, Lebanon 2nd-3rd Century CE
(Wilson 2001)

In Astana Mantingan, a large number of sculpted, foliated stone medallions are combined with stylised animal forms, indicating a clever and artistic way of representing living figures, instead of rejecting them (orthodox Islam). An arrangement of kala head and deer on a doorway at the winged gate of Sendang Duwur indicates the influence of the artist's Hindu-Buddhist predecessors.

Greco-Buddhist Gandhara,
Pakistan 2nd-3rd Century CE
(Wilson 2001)

In an interview (2004), Prijotomo claimed that the floral decoration at Sendang Duwur is a combination of pre-Islamic and Islamic ideas and forms. He said: "It is not real floral, but a modified one, seen as floral. This ambiguity is a Javanese characteristic. Javanese mosques use Hindu-Buddhist motifs in an Islamic way. The form is Hindu, but the idea is Islamic, or vice versa. As Islam allows freedom, everybody can make their own style, but keeping continuity."

Marwoto (2003) found many types of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic motifs in early Javanese mosques along the coastline, such as natural, fauna, floral, calligraphy, etc.. Among them, kala-makaras, floral motifs, and lotus were present in both periods. Islamic poets depict flower as a book from which one gains knowledge relating to God. While combining flowers and birds on graves is a characteristic of Islamic decorative art in Java, the representation of living figures was not sanctioned.

Sacred Mosque

The Holy Koran defines the mosque as the place where Muslims worship, and an expression of their belief in, and submission to, God was achieved through prayer. The Arabic word 'masjid' (mosque) literally means the place of prostration.

At the time of their introduction in Indonesia, the mosque and the idea of a communal prayer were new, and the Koran contains few regulations regarding the form of a mosque. Consequently, Javanese architects had the liberty to interpret its basic requirement and integrate these with their experience in building temples. It is known that pre-Islamic traditions prescribe the form, location, and structure of sacred places and what images to put inside them. Mystical Sufis borrowed these traditions based on their belief of mosques as sacred places; thus, they combined indigenous and Islamic ideas and forms in their mosques.

In 'The Javanese Mosque, a Regional Interpretation of Form and Mystical Concepts' (1996), Isnaeni discusses the continuity of pre-Islamic mysticism that is reflected in Javanese mosque elements. For instance, the multi-tiered roof symbolises a link between God and Muslims, according to Sufis' view. A mustaka, a crown of red lotus at its apex, is a container of the essence of divine unity in Hinduism; in Islam, it embodies the ultimate goal of the mystical path to God. Soko guru (four master columns) signifies the spiritual context. Its verticality and centralisation express the ultimate unity between God and his believers, continued from the Hindu belief in the identity of self and the universal soul. In Islam and Hindu-Buddhism, water has been significant in spiritual purification rituals. In Islamic practice, ablution before prayer is required. Located in front of the mosque, water channel represents new creatures that will fill the void of the universe with life.

Pre-Islamic features in Javanese mosques indicate that Islam in Java did not initiate new forms of religious architecture. The teaching itself was more important than the physical mosque. Islam teaches that Allah has created this world as a mosque.

Hindu-Buddhist Scrolls and Islamic Arabesque

Syncretic Javanese scrolls are significant proof that Java has been and is a melting pot. A visual presentation of a large number of scrolls directly taken from temples, graves, and mosques in Java, chosen and arranged by chronology and geographical area, can offer a glimpse of the continuity in scroll styles. Hindu-Buddhist scrolls in Central Java have naturalistic and elaborate decoration, reflecting the influence of India. They run vertically in a narrow panel beside arched gates. Scrolls in East Java are simple and stylised, revealing an indigenous character. They undulate horizontally in a narrow frame, or fill a medallion. Both types are sometimes accompanied with animals, humans, and circular objects.

In Javanese mosques, Hindu-Buddhist scrolls resemble Islamic arabesque. They are an amalgamation of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic ideas and forms (geometrical, abstract, repetitive, continuous), and were created by local craftsmen.

Most scrolls in temples and mosques share common symbolisms and elements. They also appear (i) all the time (ii) over the whole surface area (iii) in different materials, (iv) in colour sometimes, and (v) adorned

with kala-makara or calligraphy. Undulating regularly, repetitively, and continuously in rhythm, scrolls seem to represent 'the Origin of Life' in Hindu-Buddhism, and 'the Vision of Paradise' in Islam.

In this regard, Islamic scrolls became symbolic in syncretic Javanese mosques despite their main function as decoration in Islamic art. Five groups of scrolls below are chosen to assess the thread of continuity (from the pre-Islamic to Javanese). The scrolls in Group 1 contain 'the Golden Germ' at the bottom of the scroll through makara, either natural or stylised. Those in Group 2 bear the purnaghata (a pot of plenty) or 'life giver' from which the scrolls emerge, while Group 3 scrolls depitct a medallion that is common in East Java. Scrolls in Group 4 flow vertically (that of Agung Yogya was made during the syncretic Mataram kingdom during the Dutch colonisation era).

Borobodur temple
(8^{th} Century)

A1 W Mangkunegara mosque
(1878-1918)

Kalasan temple
(9^{th} Century)

Hidayatullah mosque
(1750)

Panataran temple
(1197-1454)

Astana Mantingan mosque
(1559)

Kalasan temple
(9^{th} Century)

Agung Yogya mosque
(1773)

Three Islamic periods in Java: transitory (15C-1619), Dutch colonisation (1619-1945), Contemporary (1945-present)

Conclusion: Inherited Tolerance and Flexiblity

The Javanese coined the term, 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (unity in diversity), to stress their identity and culture. Java has been a centre where animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and Islam co-existed, moving toward a syncretic Islamic religion.

The research findings show that Hindu-Buddhist scrolls displayed its design continuity in Javanese mosques under a variety of influences, to which several reasons can be attributed: (1) a tolerant attitude to the arrival of Islam, and the Javanese's acceptance of it; (2) similarity in the mysticism of Sufism and existing animism and Hindu-Buddhism, facilitating the transition of ancestor worship from animism to Hindu-Buddhist gods, and to Allah; (3) flexibility of Islam towards local motifs in mosque ornamentation, (4) the role of local ornaments in religious conversion, (5) orthodox Islamic ornaments made by unskilled foreign missionary; and above all (6) need to preserve Javanese traditions.

Whatever it was, the continuity was mainly attributed to 'the sacredness' in symbolism, rooted deeply in the pre-Islamic period. The sacred Javanese temples and ornaments were extended to mosques by mystic Sufis. As Javanese mosques were sacred (Isnaeni 1996), any motif used in mosque ornamentation became sacred and symbolic as well.

Tjandrasasmita, a distinguished scholar and specialist in Islamic archaeology, argued in an interview (2005) that Javanese Islam has a few distinctive characteristics. Javanese Muslims are greatly concerned with cultural heritage, toward which the local craftsmen contribute through their work that transcends beliefs. They made connections between the holy ornaments, which originated from Hindu-Buddhism, and Islamic influences. A continuing Islamic idea of a symbolic tree from the Garden of Eden was linked to the Tree of Life in Hindu-Buddhism.

It is known that Hindu-Buddhist ornaments are symbolic, and orthodox Islamic ones are for aesthetics. Javanese Islamic ornamentation assimilated different principles of Hindu-Buddhism and Islam, concentrating on the common aim of 'sacredness' in mosques. Eventually, Chinese and European influences were tossed into the mix.

As a melting pot, Java develops a Javanese Islam that is syncretic; Javanese Muslims, who cherish their cultural heritage of tolerance and flexibility, invent beautiful amalgamation of different sources to pay tribute to Allah.

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Illustrations: Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja except those on page 40a, 41 and 45

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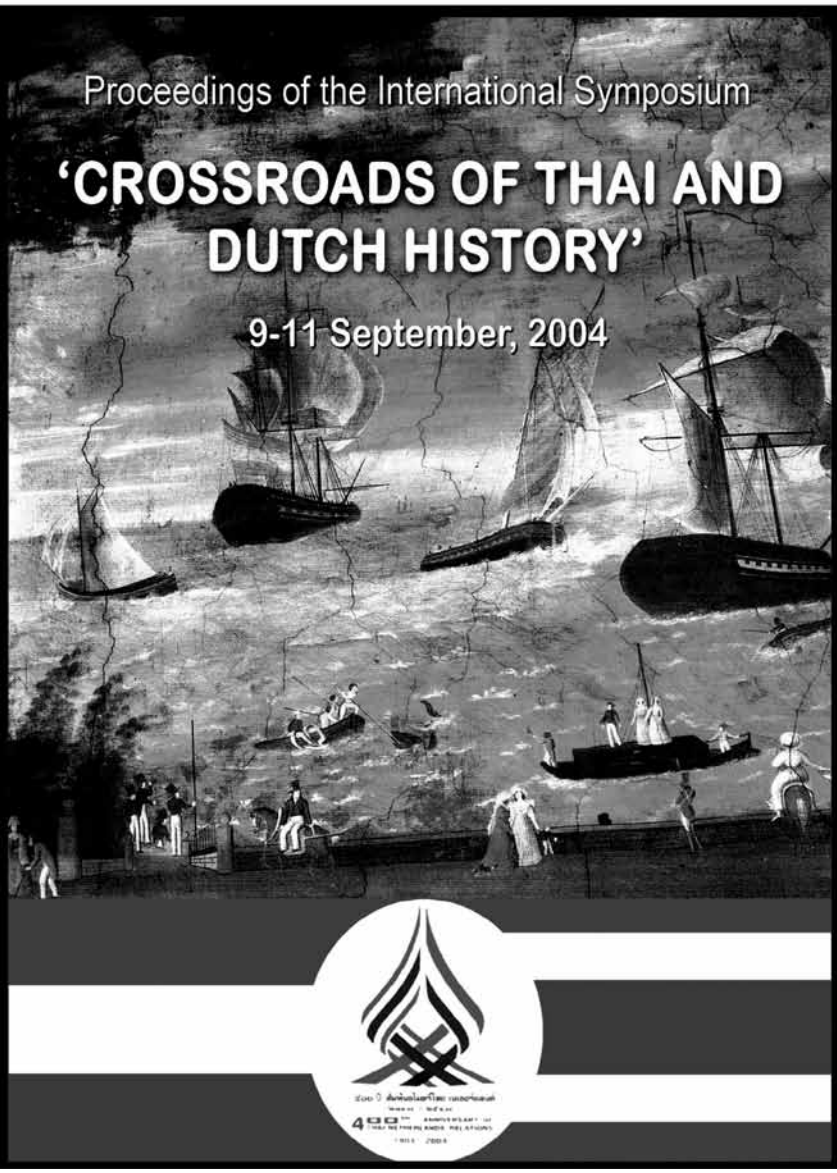

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