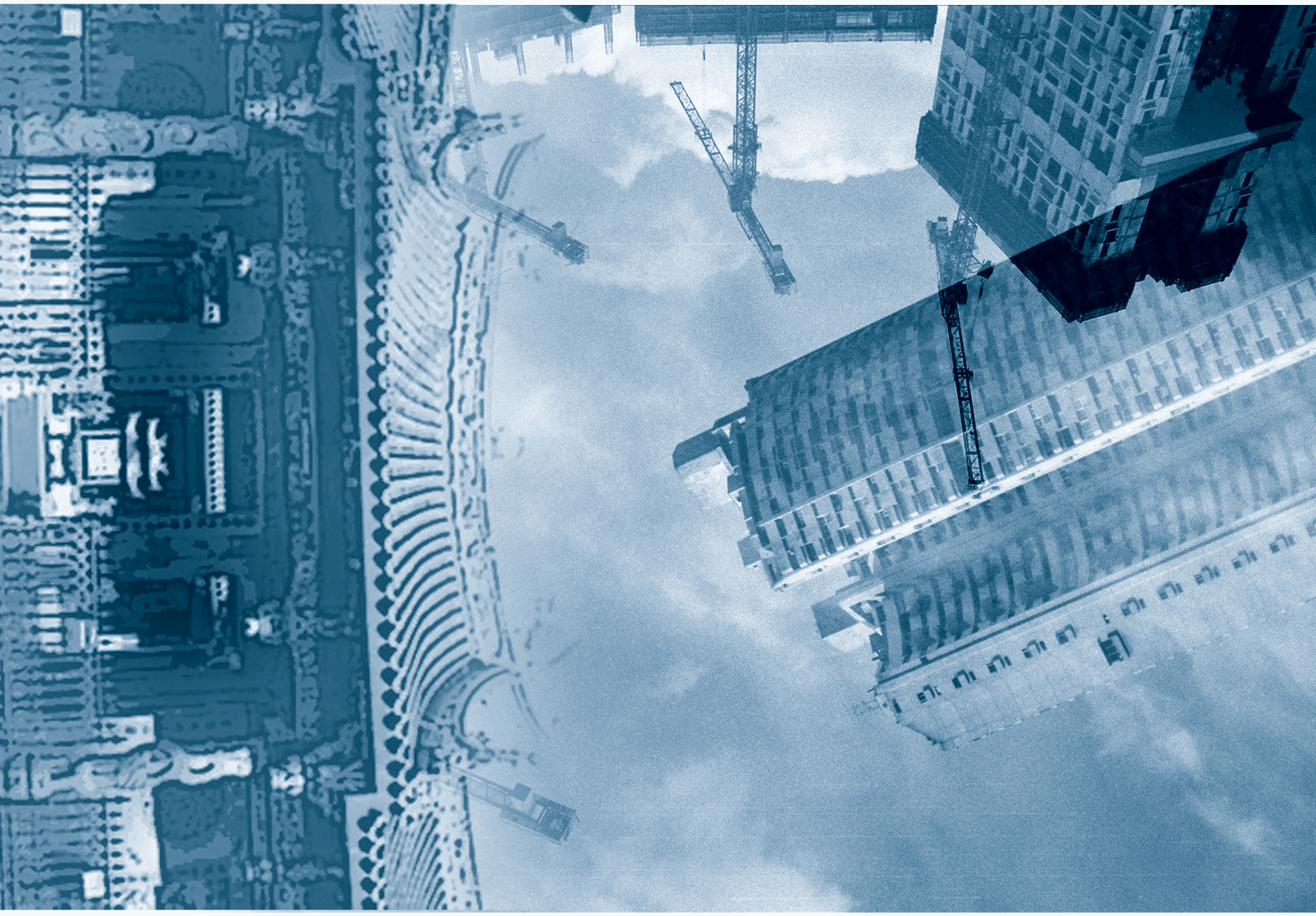
SPAFA JOURNAL

Architectural Conservation in Singapore



A Publication of the SEAMEO Reginal Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts
Volume 21 Number 3 September - December 2011 • ISSN 0858-1975

SEAMEO SPAFA
Regional Centre for
Archaeology and Fine Arts

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SPAFA Journal will be published twice a year

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SPAFA Journal

Volume 21 Number 3 (September - December 2011)

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Architectural Conservation in Singapore

Architecture and urban development have been undergoing varying phases of change in Singapore through the decades. Johannes Widodo discusses these changes in this article following his talk at SEAMEO SPAFA's *Capitals' Archaeology: Urban Origins and Conservation Lecture Series*, held on 29 April 2011, at the Siam Society, Bangkok, Thailand.

The Central Role of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA)

Soon after separation from Malaysia, and becoming an independent nation, Singapore was in dire physical and economic conditions. Two of the most important institutions, namely the Housing Development Board (HDB) and the Economic Development Board (EDB), were set up in 1965 to deal with the most pressing physical and economic issues, and to

develop Singapore. In 1967, the Urban Renewal Department (URD) was established under the HDB to tackle the physical, social, and economic regeneration of the city.

On 1 April 1974, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was created as an independent statutory board under the Ministry of National Development (MND) to take over the responsibility of the URD. The URA's primary task was to redevelop the central area, and resettle residents affected by the redevelopment. Within the period of 1967-1989, a total of 184 hectares of land were cleared, assembled, and sold under the URA Sale of Sites Programme, resulting in the development of 155 projects. Through this programme, the central area was transformed from an area of slums and squatters into a modern financial and business hub.

In 1980, the URA prepared a comprehensive long-term plan for the central area, including the development of Marina City on 690 hectares of reclaimed land. Three years later in 1983, the Urban Design Plan for the Central Area was created, and served to guide "an orderly transformation of the city skyline and the creation of an environment interwoven with the historical, architectural and cultural heritage of the older parts of the city", followed by the announcement of the Central Area Structure Plan in 1985. Thus, the URA was exercising its power to "develop" and at the same time to "conserve" the central area of Singapore. Although the URA's conservation policy seemed comprehensive in adhering to good conservation principles, in reality the results have not been satisfying. It focused too much on the physical and economic aspects of gentrifying most of the remaining heritage buildings in the central area, and not giving enough attention to preserving the existing community or social-cultural fabric.

"While Singapore continues to transform, it is important to enhance our sense of identity and identification with our city. Singapore is our home. People must feel this in themselves and in their surroundings. URA's role is to make Singapore a city with character and identity through our physical landscape. So far, more than 6,500 buildings and structures across the country have been conserved, despite our limited land and a relatively short history. Retention of our identity through conservation will become more important as more of our city becomes developed and redeveloped to cater to the needs of a larger population."

Excerpts from a speech by Mr Mah Bow Tan, Singapore's Minister for National Development, made at URA Corporate Plan Seminar 2007, Orchard Hotel on 9 February 2007 (http://www.ura.gov.sg/pr/text/2007/pr07-14. html)

The "demolish and rebuild" policy during the 1970-1980s has cleared or destroyed a large stock of old shop-houses and town-houses in a vast area of the island's central area, and communities have been displaced from the historic mixed-use settlement areas, and dispersed elsewhere. Some of the reasons for the demolition and population-removal policy were attributed to:

- *over-crowding, prostitution, gambling, and organised crime;*
- *environmental issues (causing problems relating to public utilities, sanitation, and structural dilapidation of buildings); and*
- *commercial development (reclaiming and transforming unproductive areas to generate much higher values and returns).*

Vast areas with shop-houses inside the old central area (Kampong Glam, Middle Road, and Kereta Ayer) were re-developed and filled with high-rise housing-cum-commercial blocks to benefit some original communities while relocating others elsewhere.

The demolition and re-development were so extensive that the government realized the irreversible loss of tangible cultural heritage and the identity of places, especially in the central area. Therefore, conservation plans have been implemented to save the remaining valuable urban heritage since the 1990s, although it was mainly driven by the tourism industry and speculative property re-development schemes. Many old shop-houses were given a second lease of life by the "adaptive re-use" approach. Empty buildings were turned into new shops, restaurants, cafés, hotels, or offices. Major changes in the interior space to adapt to new functions, and comply with stringent building safety regulations were permitted, while façade features or style were retained. The original white-indigo lime-based plaster was removed and replaced by stronger PC-based plaster, often with new weather-proof and colourful exterior paints. Modern contemporary technology and materials replaced the dying traditional craftsmanship and the usage of traditional building materials, and resulted in the loss of authenticity and continuity in the production of material culture.

After the URA Conservation Plan was announced in 1989, conservation statuses were bestowed on historic districts such as Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, Singapore River – including Boat Quay and Clarke Quay – as well as residential areas of Emerald Hill, Cairnhill, Blair Plain, and secondary settlements of Joo Chiat and Geylang, etc.. The naming

or labelling of these areas followed the Singapore Tourism Board's "branding" strategy to sell Singapore, which turned the central areas of the city into "theme parks".

URA Early Conservation Approach

Together with the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), the URA published "Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation" in 1993, which was specifically written with the Singapore context in mind. The objectives, principles and standards were derived from local experience, and, where appropriate, drawn from international sources (Venice Charter 1964, Burra Charter 1988, etc.).[1]

The URA prescribed the "3R Principle": maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration, and careful Repair. This principle stressed that:

1) a building should not be altered, or parts of it demolished, if it can be preserved in its original condition;
2) when upgrading and adapting a building to new uses, the existing structure must be retained. This can be done through strengthening and repairing the structural elements in the most sympathetic and unobtrusive way, and using original methods and materials, wherever possible;
3) selective replacement should only be considered when absolutely necessary;
4) total reconstruction goes against accepted international conservation practices;
5) a thorough research of the conservation building will also facilitate the proper execution of works on site; and
6) the technical aspects and process of the various activities must be documented at every stage.

To implement the principles, the URA defines "7 Levels of Conservation Activities" and "Top-Down Approach". The seven levels of activities are:

1) Maintaining the essential character of the building
2) Preventing further deterioration

[1] URA & PMB (1993), p. 12

3) Consolidating the fabric of the building
4) Restoring the building to original design and material
5) Rehabilitating the building without destroying its character
6) Replacing missing significant features of the building
7) Rebuilding severely damaged parts of the building

The "Top-Down" approach literally means that works start from the top (roof) and proceed downwards, while retaining the floor(s) and roof. This enables the lower elements of the building to be repaired or replaced without affecting the existing structure. The benefits from this construction method are: the building remains structurally stable, the work can be carried out under all weather conditions, and deterioration due to climate is minimized.

In shop-house conservation, the URA endorses "facadism", and prefers to retain the façade but allows alteration of the rest of the building. To facilitate this retention of the façade, classification is defined according to linear periodisation, with meticulous stylistic description of its parts:

1) Early Shophouse Style (1840-1900);
2) First Transitional Shophouse Style (early 1900s);
3) Late Shophouse Style (1900-1940);
4) Second Transitional Shophouse Style (late 1930s); and
5) Art Deco Shophouse Style (1930-1960).

Similar stylistic classification/approach was applied to different conservation areas (Chinatown, Kampong Glam, and Little India, etc.) with some adjustments to match the special "theme" designated for these particular areas. Three books that elaborate on the historical background of the places and the special physical and typological features of shop-houses in each conservation area were produced but they gave very little attention to the existing social-cultural significance.

To encourage and offer incentives to private conservation initiatives, 'The Architectural Heritage Awards' was created.[2] The URA presented "Good Effort" awards for well-restored buildings in 1994, leading to the annual "Architectural Heritage Awards", first introduced in 1995 to replace the previous award. In 2003, the awards category was further refined: "Category A" for national monuments and fully conserved buildings, and "Category B" for old buildings with new, innovative and sensitive interventions. The judging was conducted by an Assessment Committee that had been appointed by the URA.

In Singapore, conservation policies and guidelines are decidedly inclined towards the physical conservation of the country's multi-racial, colonial, and national heritage while the conservation of the social fabric of communities is noticeably missing. It became apparent later that the conservation policy which focused mainly on the tangible aspect of heritage led to problems.

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[2] URA (2004), Architectural Heritage Singapore – Architectural Heritage Awards 1994 to 2004

Holistic Urban Heritage Conservation and Regeneration

Cultural purification and elimination of parts of Singapore's layered or hybridized identity – formed over generations – are practices that are not truthful to the country's history and to its future generations. Buildings and elements from various cultures and influences from past to present have become indispensable parts of a nation's evolving cultural heritage. Inhabitation is always related to the articulation of built forms or material culture. When the social fabric (community, inhabitants) is gone, buildings and settlements turn into empty shells, and deteriorate. In this critical stage, the choices are demolition or re-development, especially when it takes place in the central prime locations.

The aim of conservation, preservation, restoration, and revitalization efforts of material and living heritage should be to facilitate cultural continuum of the community. This cultural continuum can be maintained by preserving the community's tangible and intangible cultural heritage through faithful and careful restoration, and through sensitive and sensible care and interventions. The disappearing traditional skills and craftsmanship can be revived and restored through training and education, and adopting advanced technology. Following the principles involved in using traditional medicine to cure sickness by invoking positive energy for a holistic healing of body and soul, effective and affirmative actions can be developed in the spirit of good will and good faith to preserve memory and identity through conservation of cultural heritage in entirety and holistically.

The community should be empowered by technical skills, and sustained by economic and institutional infrastructure, through holistic conservation and preservation strategies in mobilizing all stakeholders. Recognitions such as awards and status should be aimed at generating greater impacts on the development of a more sustainable and effective heritage policy, planning, and management of the community's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and not for the sake of marketing or branding to gain profits from tourism.

Good conservation projects and practices are those which successfully demonstrate the following points:[3]

1) articulation of the heritage values to convey the spirit of place through conservation;
2) interpretation of the cultural, social, historical, and architectural significance of the structure(s) in the conservation work;
3) understanding of technical issues of conservation/restoration in interpreting the structure's significance;
4) appropriate use or adaptation of the structure;
5) use of appropriate materials;
6) how well any added elements or creative technical solutions respect the character and inherent spatial quality of the structure(s);
7) manner in which the process and the final product contribute to the surrounding environment and the local community's cultural and historical continuum;
8) influence of the project on conservation practice and policy locally, nationally, regionally, or internationally;
9) ongoing socio-economic viability and relevance of the project, and provision for its future use and maintenance; and
10) technical consistency, complexity and sensitivity of the project methodology.

Changes in Singapore's Urban Conservation Approach

Recognizing the need to involve the community in the urban planning process, the URA started to embark on public consultations in the urban planning process after drafting the Concept Plan 2001 (August 2000-May 2001). The ideas and contributions from the public were gathered through public forums, exhibitions, and public dialogues before the Concept Plan was finalized at the end of 2001. In 2002, a similar process was repeated

[3] Refer to UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation criteria. Detailed information on the awards can be found in:
http://www. unescobkk.org/culture/wh/unesco-asia-pacific-awards-for-cultural-heritage-conservation/

when the Master Plan 2003 was drafted. Three Subject Groups were appointed by the Minister of National Development to study proposals relating to: 1) Parks & Water-bodies Plans and Rustic Coast, 2) Urban Villages and Southern Ridges & Hillside Villages, and 3) Old World Charm. The ideas and recommendations were incorporated in the draft of Master Plan 2003.

The Subject Groups comprised professionals, representatives from interest groups, and laymen. They felt that a shift in the balance between conservation and re-development was required, and a new framework was needed for holistic conservation in an integrated, synergistic approach that goes beyond physical structures to include communities and activities that contribute to the old world charm.[4] Holistic conservation encompasses the whole neighbourhoods, including contemporary and less architecturally significant buildings. It is multi-dimensional, and includes buildings, road patterns, streetscapes, open spaces and vistas; demands multi-disciplinary involvement across local and national levels; and incorporates all stakeholders (users, owners, heritage-supporters, decision-makers) of the conservation process.

Besides specific recommendations for different places across Singapore, the Subject Groups also suggested the following proposals to take conservation efforts in Singapore to the higher level:[5]

1) Valuing the priceless: conserving areas with rich heritage, charm, and social value, even though there may be loss in development potential at the local level.
2) Concentrating on different levels of conservation: conserving significant exteriors, interiors, and details of selected buildings; and controlling the use of selected buildings with strong social and historical values.
3) Acting fast: preparing a comprehensive list of buildings for safeguarding.
4) Networking of heritage assets: linking up areas of the conserved area with new developments that serve as heritage connectors.

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[4] MND (2002), *Parks & Waterbodies Plan and Identity Plan – Subject Group Report on Old World Charm,* p. 8
[5] Ibid. pp. 26 - 33

5) Matching expectations and planning: adopting different performance and planning standards that are sensitive to the urban structure of areas identified with the conserved area.
6) Embracing new solutions, beyond efficiency: exploring alternatives to widening of roads.
7) Recognizing heartland heritage: keeping blocks of public housing architecture and townships that encapsulated the range of public housing from the 1950s to the present.
8) Making a wish list: retaining more built heritage for future generations, including the more recent buildings that depict the history of Singapore in achieving independence and in nation-building.
9) Promoting heritage economy: recognizing how conservation contributes to the economy, and provides funding for conservation initiatives and efforts.
10) Money talks: introducing more incentives for owners of conservation buildings.
11) Private sponsorship: encouraging the establishment of a privately-run heritage trust.
12) Getting insights: commissioning a study on the property value of conserving buildings.
13) Promoting traditional trades: developing ways to recognize owners of traditional trades that are valued by the public.
14) Active citizenship: precipitating the formation of local business improvement groups.
15) Renaissance community: developing a heritage education programme that takes a more active and concerted approach to informing, educating, and inspiring people.

Recognitions and the Future of Conservation in Singapore

In October 2007, Singapore rejoined UNESCO after 22 years of absence, but even before this historic turning point, UNESCO had given Singapore three awards in recognition of the achievements of individuals, private sector organisations and public-private initiatives in successfully restoring and conserving heritage structures in this small city-state.

UNESCO aims to promote the stewardship of the world's cultural resources, including built heritage which constitutes collective cultural memory, and the foundation upon which communities can base their future. In Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO supports conservation activists at all levels, and particularly seeks to encourage the role of the private sector in preserving the region's cultural heritage. The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation is one of the regional initiatives that support the organisation's global strategic objective of promoting the localisation and empowerment of the culture profession to develop and implement the best conservation standards.

Thian Hock Keng Temple

Since 2000, the Heritage Awards committee has received more than 300 entries from across Asia. Many of the entries have set technical and social benchmarks for conservation in the region, while simultaneously acting as catalysts for local preservation initiatives. Over the years, the projects illustrate the increasing momentum and level of conservation in Asia and the Pacific. Four Singaporean conservation projects have so far won UNESCO Heritage Awards: the Thian Hock Keng Temple (Honourable Mention Award in 2001), the Convent of Holy Infant Jesus (Award of Merit in 2002), Old St. Andrew's School (Honourable Mention Award in 2006), and finally the Hong San See Temple restoration project that won the highest Award for Excellence in 2010.

On the community level, some individuals have recently registered themselves to become individual members of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which is the first important step towards the formation of the ICOMOS National Committee. The government is also interested in the possibility of submitting some sites in Singapore

Old St. Andrew's School

for UNESCO World Heritage listing. Although these developments seem preliminary, and it is still very early to generate real impacts, these are significant steps toward better preservation and conservation of heritage.

In Singapore, both land and heritage are scarce. These constraints should drive better and more effective conservation strategies and methods so that the full positive impact of conservation may contribute to strong economic development, nation-building, and a sense of home. In working towards these ends, it is essential to form a civic coalition, a community network and an alliance among all stakeholders to maintain a balance between conservation and development, and to ensure an orderly and healthy evolution of the built environment and the community that lives within it.

Society is obliged to prolong the life-cycle of its tangible and intangible

heritage for the sake of future generations. Conservation means nurturing the community's cultural continuum. Enhancing links with one's roots and transmission of memory from the past to the future by prolonging the duration of heritage should bear invaluable benefits for future generations.

As Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, one of the founding fathers of independent Singapore (1915-2006), said: "A nation must have a memory to give it a sense of cohesion, continuity and identity. The longer the past, the greater the awareness of a nation's identity."

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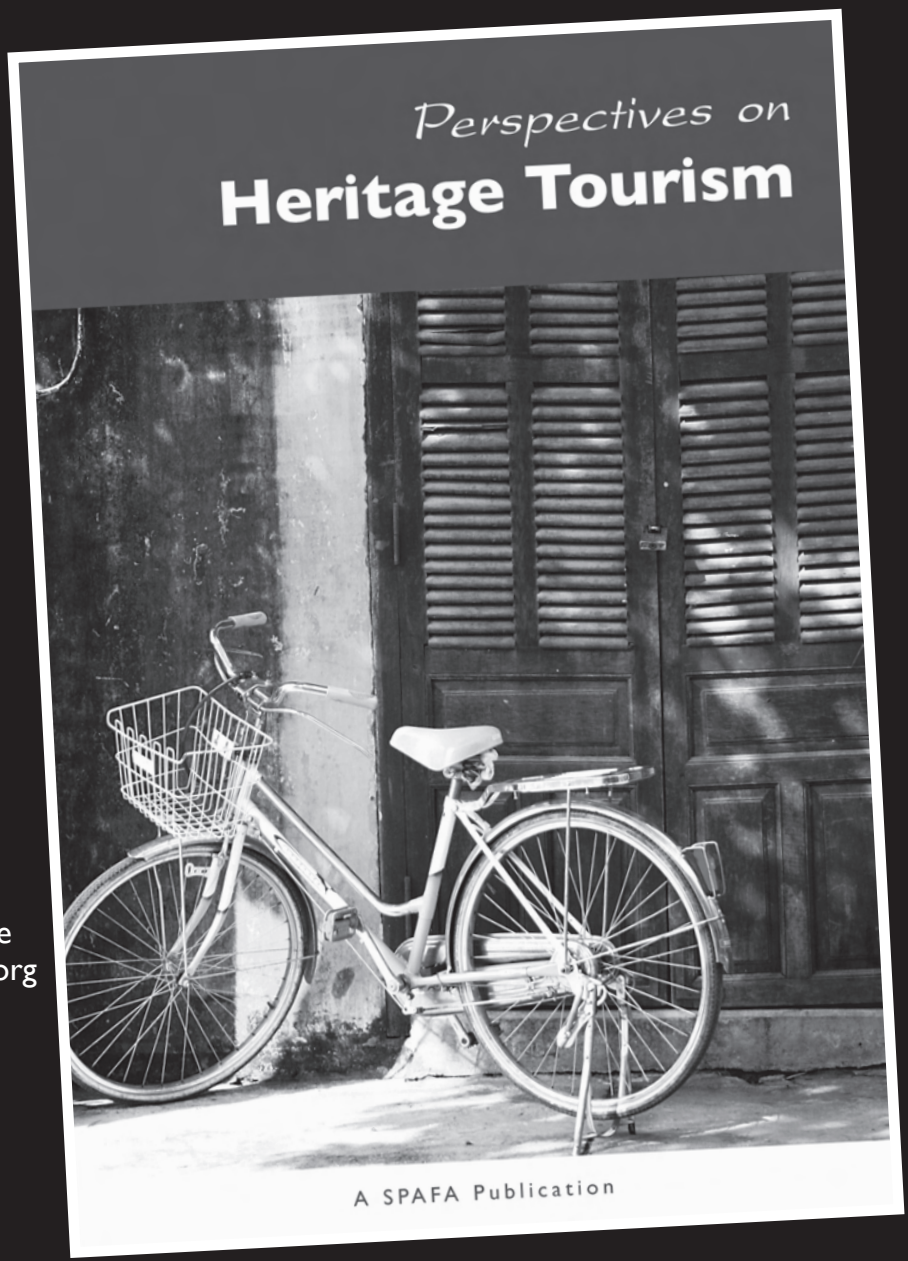
A collection of perspectives on managing tourism with sensitivity to the heritage, values and goals of local communities



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The Wonder of *Kantan:* Using Torch Ginger Fibres to Produce Fine Art Papers

Elham Shafaei, Izmer Ahmad, and Adnan bin Mat of the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, investigate the potential of torch ginger fibres to produce hand-made fine art papers for drawing and painting.

Introduction

Torch ginger is a member of the ginger family of plants that are native to tropical areas. It grows abundantly in South and Southeast Asia, and thrives in tropical countries which have hot and humid weather, including Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Bast fibres obtained from plant matters are commonly used in the making of paper, and are an important component in the paper-making process. The bast fibres in the stem of torch ginger have been found to contain sufficient quality for making hand-made art papers. Studies show that papers made from torch ginger fibres are highly appropriate for drawing and painting mediums, including pencil, charcoal, acrylic, and ink. Torch ginger fine art papers have the capability to produce a wide range of line; offer remarkably good tonal variations; and are versatile for executing different mark-making systems and techniques. This study shows that hand-made torch ginger papers are a viable product for artists in Malaysia and elsewhere to use.

Generally, paper-making relies on bast fibres that are obtained from plants. The fibres are beaten and broken down, and mixed with water to form sheets of interlocking fibres that become paper once dried and pressed. Research undertaken by the authors indicates that the bast fibres in the stem of torch ginger contain enough elasticity, flexibility, and tensile strength for making hand-made fine art papers. Based on a series

of studio experiments and tests, the papers made from torch ginger fibres were found to be highly responsive to drawing and painting mediums such as pencil, charcoal, acrylic, gouache, and ink, and confirmed the suitability of torch ginger fibres for producing excellent hand-made papers specifically tailored for artistic use.

What is Torch Ginger?

Torch ginger (*Etlingera elatior*) is known locally in Malaysia as *Bunga Kantan* (Figures 1 and 2). A tropical plant which grows in Malaysia, Indonesia, and other tropical locations, it takes a year to bloom, and reaches the height of about 3 metres with a diametre of about 4 cm. The leaves are evergreen, and can grow up to a length of about 80 cm.

The torch ginger plant has black seeds and rhizomes for propagation, and grows quickly in rich and well-drained soil, and when watered well regularly. Its flowers are white, pink or red in colour, and the leaves grow from separate stalks along the rhizome.

Traditionally, people in Southeast Asia believe that a daily intake of raw ginger inflorescence can reduce diabetes and hypertension, and use the torch ginger plant for medicinal purposes. To relieve postpartum flatulence, women eat it together with the ginger's bitter leaves. Its root is a rich source of antioxidants, and is believed to prevent some forms of cancers. In addition, it has antibacterial properties, and is used as a decongestant and expectorant to fight respiratory problems and sinus infections. It is also useful for arthritis because of its anti-inflammatory

Figure 1: Torch ginger plant

Figure 2: Torch ginger stems

properties. Moreover, it helps reduce flatulence, intestinal cramps and gastrointestinal problems.

The young torch ginger's buds have a spicy flavour. Local inhabitants in Malaysia use it as an ingredient for some food. They chop up the stems of the flowers, and add them to curries or soups with rice noodles. The stem of torch ginger is a good source of cellulose, a characteristic that makes it useful for making hand-made paper (Foster, 2011).

Why Torch Ginger?

Torch ginger stem was chosen for this paper-making research due to its rich content of cellulose and bast fibres, all of which offer suitable thickness, length, diametre, flexibility and strength for paper-making. The process of making this paper involves some experimenting with pulp preparation in producing raw materials ideal for paper-making. This process begins with cutting, cleaning, cooking, washing, and beating the torch ginger stem, followed by the pulping process, sheet forming, pressing, and drying the paper. In some instances, sizing and finishing are done to further the potential of the fibre. Every single process has to be finely harmonized with one another in order to achieve optimal results.

Pulping

The most important step in paper-making is the pulp-making process because the type of papers to be made will be determined by the finesse of the pulps. For example, generally more textured paper is useful for watercolour, thus requiring less finesse of the pulps (Hunter, 1978; Hibert, 2000; Asuncion, 2003). For this research, the pulping process started with cleaning the torch ginger stem to get rid of dust, dirt, leaves, etc.. Then, the stems were boiled in clean fresh water for 3 hours. To further break down the fibres, soda ash was added to the water (1 spoonful for 1 litre of water).[1] The boiling process softened the stems, and removed lignin from the fibres (Figure 3). After this, the cooked stems were put

[1] Apart from soda ash, washing soda, sodium hydroxide, caustic soda, wood, and lime are among the common alkalis used by paper-makers to break the plant fibres (Hunter, 1978; Hibert, 2000; Asuncion, 2003).

Figure 3: Cooked torch ginger stems

Figure 4: Hollander beater

in a blender to macerate the fibres. Clean fresh water was also added to facilitate the blending for about 2 minutes. After blending, the fibres were washed again to further remove remaining lignin and alkaline. Finally, the fibres were beaten for 3-4 hours to produce pulps, using a machine called the Hollander beater (Figures 4 and 5).

Sheet Forming

The torch ginger pulps were turned into sheets that become paper once dried. To form the sheets, the torch ginger pulps were put in a tank of water called the vat. A mould and deckle were fitted together, submerged and pushed to the bottom of the vat. The torch ginger pulps in the vat were stirred to suspend them in water. The deckle and mould were then brought up quickly from the bottom of the vat, gently shaking it side-

Figure 5: Pulp

Figure 6: Sheet forming process

to-side to spread out the torch ginger pulps on the mould, through the screen of which water drained (Figure 6).

Couching

Next, the process of couching transferred the wet sheet from the mould onto felt, one sheet on top of the other. The felts should be soft and very absorbent, and the mould was left to tip over naturally, not too slowly or too quickly. The mould was pushed onto the felt firmly so that the paper adhered to it. At the end, a stack of wet sheets of paper – called post of papers – was left on the felt (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Couching process

Pressing

On top of the post of wet torch ginger papers, an even pressure was applied to squeeze the remaining moisture out. A piece of Plexiglas and wooden plate was put on top of the post of papers. Then, weight is applied evenly across, from the top. When the pile was properly cantered on the press, papers were pressed until no water emerge from the post of paper, which was left to be pressed overnight (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Pressing process

Laying

During the pressing process, the water was squeezed out, and the sheets were transferred on to a large vertical wooden panel or hung on a rope to dry. The moist torch ginger papers should be peeled carefully from the felt. This peeling process was a delicate one, as tearing and pinch marking must be avoided. Once the sheet was completely peeled off, it was put on the wooden vertical panel to dry (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Wet sheets on vertical panel

Drying

In this step, torch ginger papers were placed on a large vertical panel to dry. At this level, 100 grammes of metal cellulose was mixed with 2000 millimetres of water in a blender to make a solution, which helped the sheets to stick on the panel. The sheets were also evenly spread onto the panel through a roller. Finally, the papers were left to dry at room temperature for a day (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Torch ginger paper

Sizing

Due to the hydrophilic quality of cellulose, the torch ginger paper may easily absorb moisture and lose its shape if the artist uses a wet drawing or painting media such as ink or watercolour. To avoid this problem, sizing glues[2] were added to the papers. Thirty grammes of alum (aluminium sulfate)[3] and around 300 grammes of gelatine were soaked in 6000 millimetres of cold water until they swelled, and when heated slowly, dissolved

Figure 11: Soaked papers in sizing solution

Figure 12: Sized papers on vertical panel

completely. Each sheet of *kantan* papers was immersed in the sizing solution (Figure 11). The full immersion ensures that each sheet was well covered. At the end, the sized papers were placed on the vertical panel to dry (Figure 12).

Samples of Results and Concluding Remarks

Every kind of torch ginger papers produced during this research was tested with drawing and painting mediums using different techniques (that are commonly used by some of Malaysia's well-known artists), such as pencil, charcoal, acrylic, gouache, and ink. The results indicate that papers made with torch ginger fibres are clearly suitable for drawing and

[2] Common materials used for sizing hand-made papers include animal glue, pure gelatine, and alum (aluminium sulphate) (Asuncion, 2003; Turner & Skiöld, 1983; Staff & Sacilotto, 1978).

[3] Dry alum is salt; when it dissolves in water it becomes acidic, reducing the PH value to 3-4. To solve this problem, the alum salt is necessary for precipitating the binding substance – consisting of gelatine or animal glue – onto the fibre surface, thereby making the paper writable and water resistant (Tegethoff & Rohleder & Kroker, 2001).

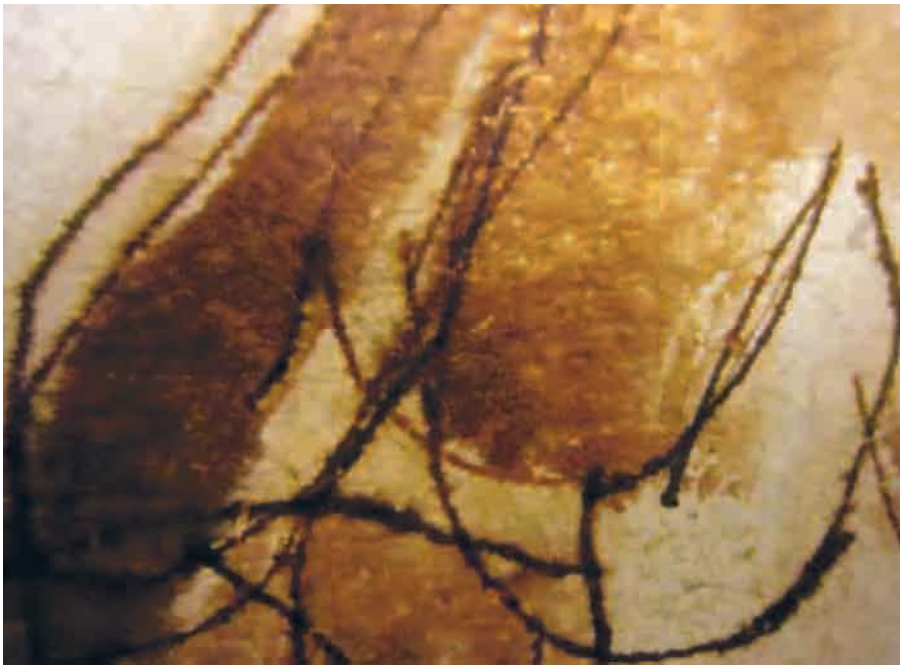

Figure 13: Ink on kantan paper

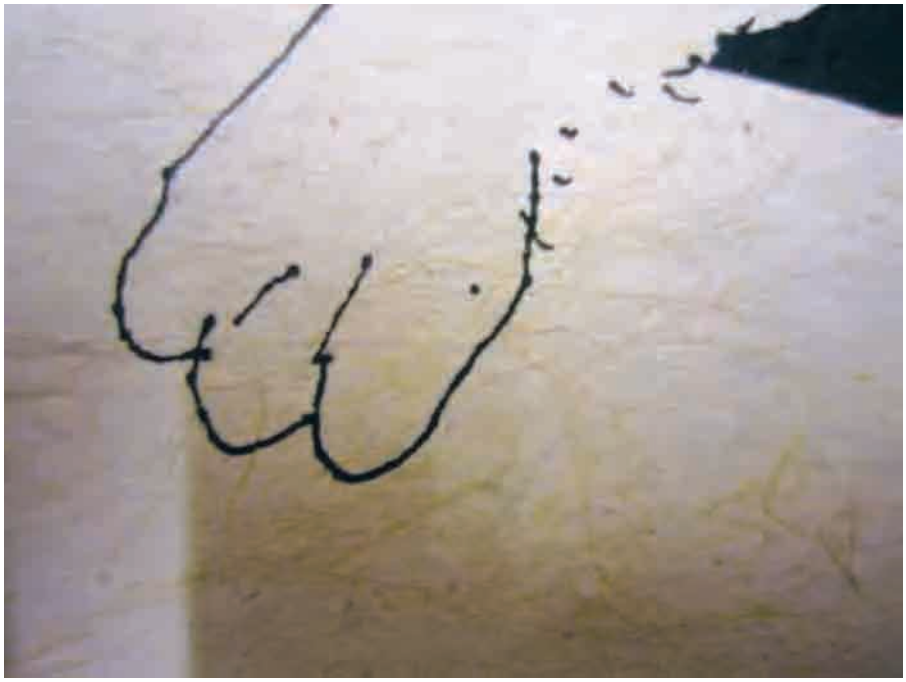

Figure 14: Pen marks on kantan paper

painting (Figures 13 and 14). The artists believe that *kantan* papers are not suitable for detail painting treatment as they are thick and rough but good for rough treatments. By coating torch ginger paper with recycle paper pulp or other suitable materials, it would be smoother. Since this paper has a good degree of absorbency, it is an appropriate paper for work with wet mediums but colour quality would be affected, because it fades easily. Gouache, acrylic, pencil, and charcoal also do well on these papers. It was found that the papers produced during this research responded positively to the mediums and techniques commonly used in drawing and painting.

This finding indicates that torch ginger fibres have an excellent potential for developing high quality fine art papers, and the commercially promising ability in providing cheaper yet higher quality alternatives to local artists and art students. It can be viable and beneficial for the artists and users, enabling them to be more self-sustaining by reducing their reliance on expensive imported art papers.

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Images courtesy of Elham Shafaei

Acknowledgement

Authors acknowledge the support of Universiti Sains Malaysia (providing USM Fellowship) for this research.

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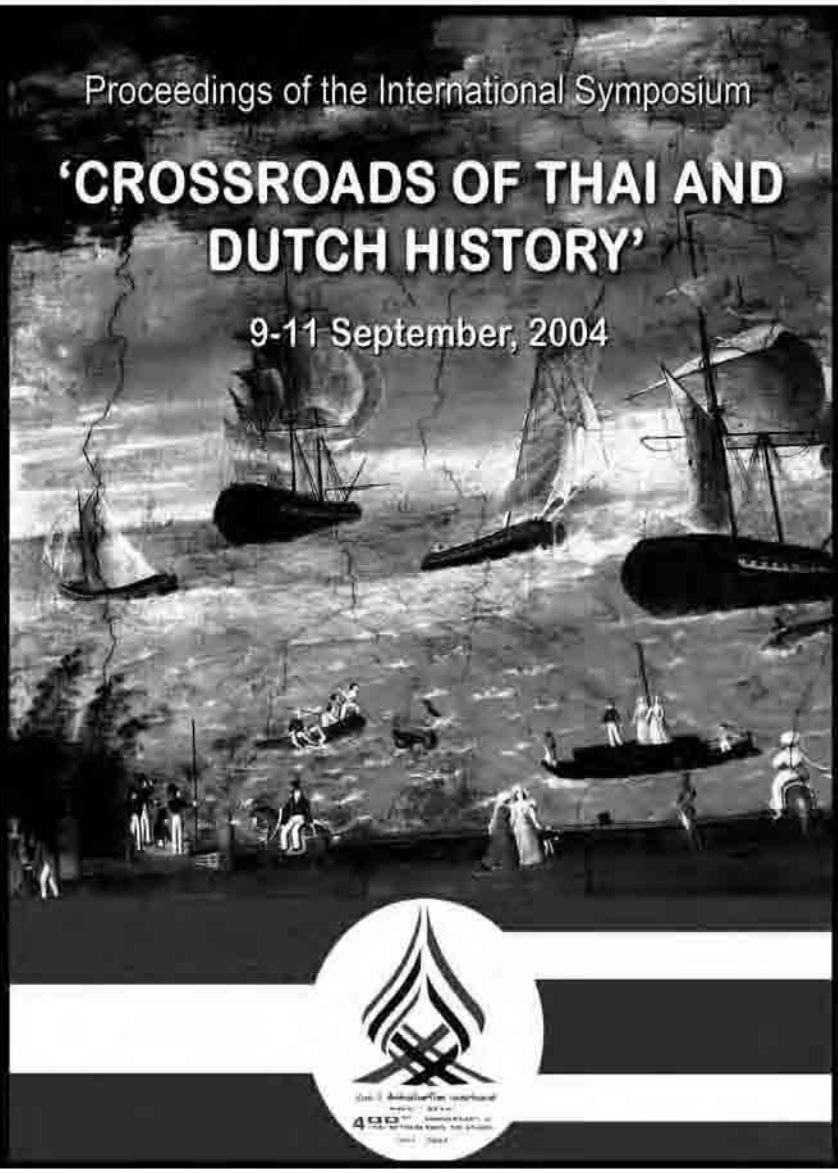

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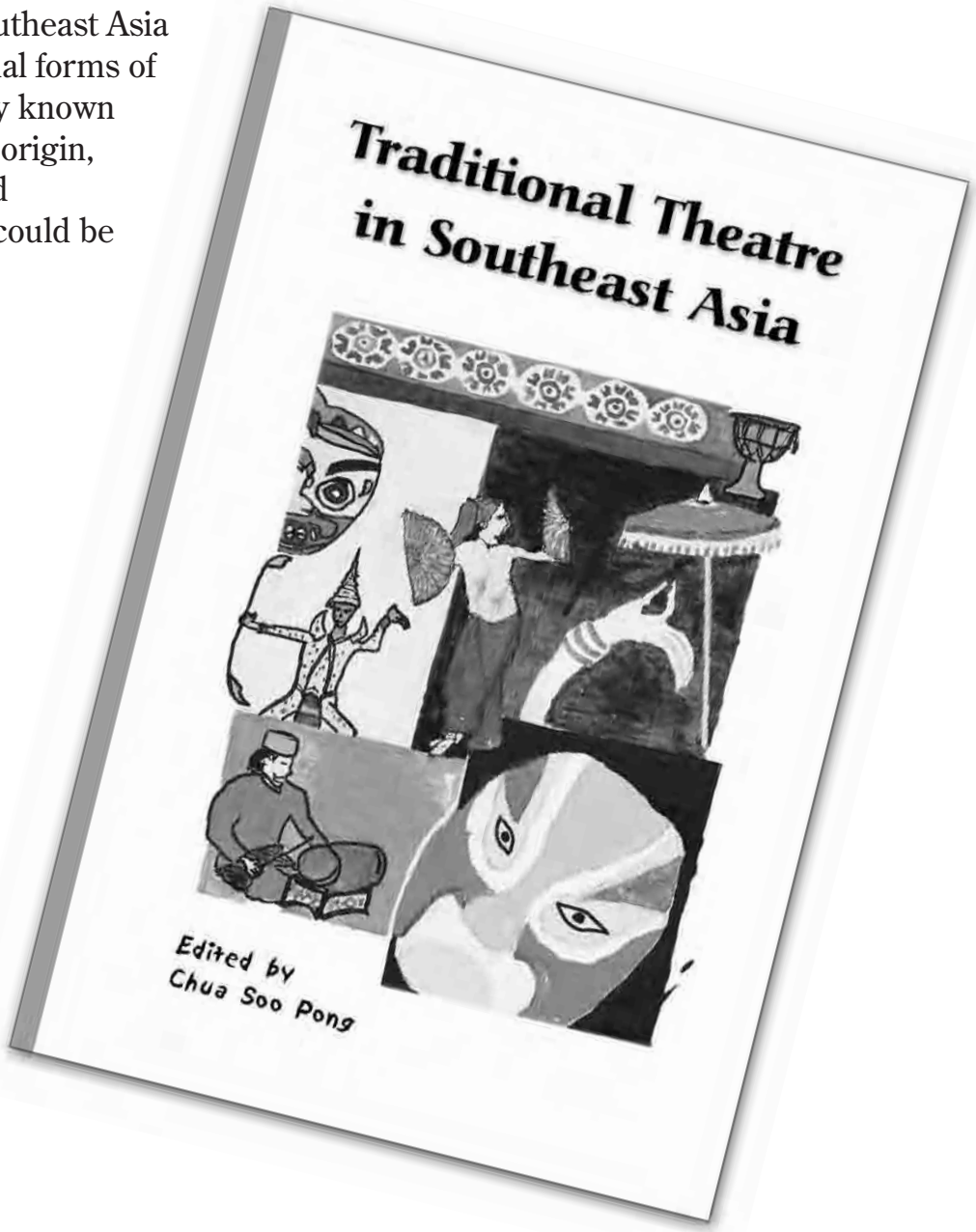

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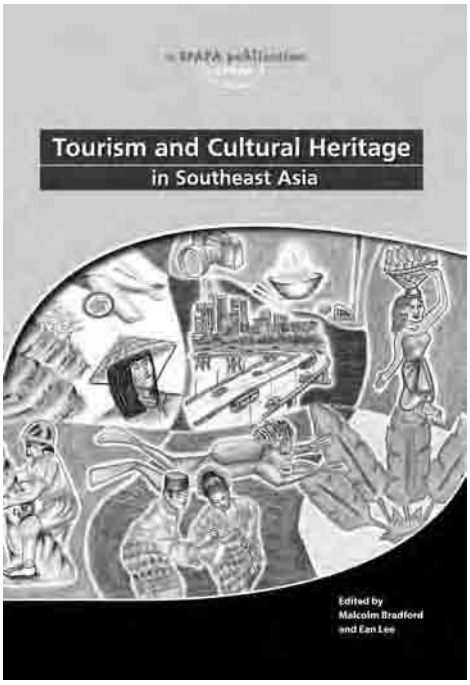
Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia



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.

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Celebrating the Right to be Hybrid: Sie Jin Kwie

A Play by Indonesian Group, Teater Koma

Talha Bachmid **discusses how a theatre group in Indonesia uses dialogism to create a hybrid spectacle, and at the same time manipulates all kinds of theatrical forms to celebrate the right to be different.**

Introduction

As a multi-ethnic country, it is a given reality that various cultures live together in Indonesia. However, problems, such as conflicts between ethnic groups and pressures asserted by communities on one another, arise from time to time, causing an imbalance. Conflicting situations within pluralism are also reflected in artistic forms, for example in theatrical performances. Teater Koma, under Nano Riantiarno, is well known as a theatre group that often makes use of various ethnic characteristics in their performances, such as combining Javanese theatrical conventions with other conventions. In addition, their productions always foreground social issues as their themes. In March 2010, a play entitled *Sie Jin Kwie* once again offered a fusion of various theatrical conventions, from Java, China, and the modern musical. The plot is taken from an ancient Sino-Javanese puppet show *Wayang Potehi*, but recreated as a contemporary play that actually transforms into a hybrid performance. This show corresponds to the group's desire to celebrate the diversity of ethnic groups, and to showcase the richness of a hybrid society. In order to do so, the different conventions mentioned above were made to confront/interact with one another, and create a particular form of performance which is, according to Bakhtin's concept, carnivalesque. Thus, in celebrating hybridity, Teater Koma seems to indicate that even contradictory forms and different cultures can live together and produce harmony.

As a nation consisting of many ethnic groups, Indonesia is acutely aware of this reality and, hence, determined to adopt "Unity in Diversity" as a national motto. However, in the nation's history, many events have occurred to challenge the integrity of such ideals. From time to time, riots among ethnic groups have broken out because of different cultures and beliefs among them, but efforts to create peace by combining different cultures may still succeed. Sometimes, goodwill alone is not sufficient, and fear and anxiety arise because of the power of certain dominant communities, which may lead to the important question concerning Indonesia as a nation, such as the nation has experienced during various phases in its history.

One of the problems in the development of Indonesia is the multitude of conflicts involving its Chinese community, reaching a critical stage during the socio-political upheaval in 1965, to which thousands of members of various ethnic groups fell victim. Another crisis occurred in 1998 before the fall of President Suharto's regime (1967-1998), during which certain laws forbade Chinese cultural practices. It was forbidden to publish anything using Chinese characters (newspapers such as *Sin Po* were banned), and religious expressions and activities such as Buddhist ceremonies or celebrations were also prohibited. When Abdurahman Wahid became president (1999-2001), there came about a change in the political climate. The ban on Chinese cultural and religious expressions was lifted, and freedom for the community was guaranteed. Many Chinese customs, related to various aspects of their life (including religion, cultural shows, etc.), suddenly reappeared, and even the Lunar Year has now been declared as a national holiday, which is celebrated openly with spectacles such as the dragon show (*barongsay*).

One would expect that this kind of freedom would eradicate problems relating to cultural differences and pluralism, and it is true that the variety of cultural aspects does add to the richness of the country's culture in general. However, problems of ethnicity persist to emerge, mostly kindled by intolerance and pressures exercised by certain communities. Many social conflicts, riots between ethnic groups, and attacks on communities of different beliefs, continue to occur while the government fails to anticipate them.

This social condition is reflected in artistic forms i.e. theatrical performances. One of Indonesia's famous groups, Teater Koma, created and staged plays linked to the culture of the minority Chinese. The group was founded in 1973, under the leadership of Nano Riantiarno. In 1989, Riantiarno wrote and staged *Sam Pek Eng Thay* which was banned by the regime in power, and recreated in 2005. In 2010, a play called *Sie Jin Kwie* was performed and, as expected, reaped success. Taken from the repertoire of an old Sino-Javanese puppet show known as *wayang potehi*, which was famous in Central Java in the 1950s, Teater Koma adapted the dramatic text of *Sie Jin Kwie* (created by Tio Keng Jian and Lo Koan Chung, and turned it into a theatrical performance). With the intention of producing a trilogy, a year thereafter a sequel was staged, followed by the third sequel. Each part was a long spectacle – taking approximately three hours and 30 minutes – but the group had its faithful followers, and each part of the trilogy was staged for at least three weeks.

Ever since its early productions, Koma has often been adapting its performances by using various sources, domestic as well as foreign texts. Its productions, adaptations of Chinese works as well as those introducing political themes, have always foregrounded social problems as its main theme which has often resulted in protest and sharp criticism from the authorities, especially during Suharto's regime. Political themes such as tyranny, which is another trademark of Koma, caused serious problems with the authorities of that time. However, since 2000 Koma's productions no longer faced any resistance, and in line with the development of freedom of expression in the country, the social criticism in the performances has become more explicit. They have also developed humorous ways of criticizing social discrepancies, and this has become the forte of Koma.

In *Si Jin Kwie*, one can still find social criticism but this time Koma uses various theatrical conventions, and the exuberance sometimes conceals the critic. Apart from that, this play also represents an effort to combine various theatrical conventions in expressing the freedom to create arts that arouse the pride in being hybrid. Hence, this production is rich in many interesting aspects which are each equally interesting, but the aspect chosen to be discussed here is how issues of pluralism and its challenges are still present despite the many theatrical forms used. In this production, Koma uses a number of theatrical conventions, such as the

Javanese *wayang kulit* (the shadow play), Chinese puppet show, Chinese Peking Opera, and modern conventions such as the Broadway musical. Although these varieties of conventions seem incompatible, in the end they finally contribute to creating a unified performance that supports the idea of hybridity.

This performance corresponds to Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque, where contradictory elements are present, such as fantasy and realism, facts and fiction, rationality and irrationality (Danow, 1995: 142), in a kind of dialogism. By forwarding this aspect, Koma tries to show how established social values can often be reversed and still be accepted by society.

The Battle of Conflicting Forces

The plot, in relation to the narrative, consists of complex episodes, and is played out in various theatrical forms. The core of the conflict is shown in one third of the play, while the remaining part is about the battle between two forces, good and evil. The conflict arises from the struggles of the hero (Sie Jin Kwie) during his life. He first appears in the dream of emperor Lisibin as the only hero who can rescue the kingdom from its enemy, the kingdom of Kolekok. Lisibin is a Chinese emperor from the Tang dynasty in the 17th century. The hero's task is indeed not easy, for during the entire performance all kinds of obstacles come his way in different forms, and thus creating a complex plot.

Besides introducing the major conflict and the main hero, the dream device is used to depict two contradictory aspects in the performance: the dream as a fantasy and the reality represented by conflicts. These two aspects are present all through the performance: fantastic and realistic scenes to create a dialogue that prove to be difficult, and generate multiple aspects. Each aspect is dealt in various theatrical forms that are sometimes pushed to the extreme. Fantastic scenes may appear as extravagant, whereas the realistic sometimes touches the border of the fantastic aspect of the spectacle.

So, the emperor is determined to find Sie Jin Kwie, but other dignitaries within the emperor's circle are equally ambitious about fulfilling the emperor's wish, and so they become rivals. The emperor's uncle is especially offended by the way things are going, and discusses the matter with his

family. His wife, with the help of their two children, hatches an evil plan with the goal of eliminating the hero. In reality, the evil plans come from the women in the family, since the father, as the head of the family, takes no visible action, and submits to his wife's decisions. This also indicates the presence of a battle of the sexes, and clearly shows that the female elements are powerful, with the complexity of the performance enhanced by the actions of the female characters.

The obstacles posed by the emperor's uncle and his family are handled peacefully by Sie Jin Kwie. He tries to enter the imperial circle several times as an officer recruit but is constantly rejected; and since he fails to be appointed as the commander of the emperor's army, and is instead put to work in the kitchen, he builds his own troop of cooks and fights the kingdom's enemy. His success in the battlefield constitutes the victory of the centripetal force: to conquer an evil force, non-violence here represented by the cooks can be a convincing force.

The hardest struggle centres on Sie Jin Kwie's dealings with Kolekok's leaders. Here, he seems to have lost his power, while simultaneously the struggle inside the kingdom with the uncle's family continues. The battle is at its most crucial, and lasts until near the end of the performance. Help to the hero comes in the person of the goddess Kwan Im herself who delivers the ultimate weapons to the hero, who then uses them to kill the enemies. This supranatural element corresponds to the fantastic side of the performance, and to Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque, which is based on the boundaries between reality and fantasy (Danow, 1995: 142).

It seems that in the narrative aspect, the battle between good and evil forces may be considered as a conclusion. Three parties are involved in this battle with two of them representing the evil forces. The centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart (Bakhtin, 1981: 272, 273) are represented by the forces with many frightful faces that the hero has to conquer; whereas the centripetal forces, which strive to make things cohere, is represented only by the hero. Despite the fact of having to fight these forces alone, the hero conjures many "tricks" to counter evil forces; he uses humour, perseverance and determination as tools of non-violence. Although a goddess assists the hero to achieve his goal, the assistance is supposed to have happened in a dream, since Sie Jin Kwie is meditating in a cave when the goddess appears to him in an aura of supranatural surroundings.

The characters, as complex as the plot, are presented on stage in a complex way. Every side is filled with many aspects even if it is possible to determine the two categories of good and evil. Significantly, the hero himself – even if he appears on stage from childhood to adulthood – maintains his unchanging 'personality' throughout the performance. He is and remains a 'candid' character, and does not undergo any change. He reminds us of a folkloric character, and corresponds to what Bakhtin affirms about heroes: complete and unchanging (1986: 52). The other numerous characters represent 'complex designs of people, generations, epochs, nations, and social groups' (1986: 25) – all of them constitute and represent the multifaceted world we live in.

This complex narrative aspect of the performance is expressed in various forms. As is the case in Javanese shadow play or *wayang kulit*, the performance begins with a narrator who introduces the story and the characters wearing Chinese costume and make-up. The appearance of the hero, Sie Jin Kwie (commencing from childhood), behind a screen is similar in form to a Chinese puppet show, and is hence seen by the audience as a shadow play. This particular form is introduced by Koma through the narrator, called Tavip, the creator of the puppets, who narrates the story using a mixture of Javanese and Indonesian languages – this form is called *wayang Tavip*. The humorous manner used by Tavip in his narration adds to the carnivalesque aspect of the performance. Later, this form is used to depict some violent scenes, such as the death of the enemies.

The wedding scene may be seen as a symbol fusing the different cultures, with the stage set in spaces that clearly represent social spaces. For example, the curtain that isolates the family circle shows the intimate space in society (see Figure 1). The couple appears on stage, and after going through the rituals of the Chinese community, they go to the table – which represents the shrine – and pay homage to their ancestors. This scene would be a solemn scene if, within the same space, the 'event organiser' present was not dressed as an angel, an occidental influence. A touch of irony and humor is present in this serious event: the two opposing aspects contribute to the hybridization of the spectacle.

Figure 1: The couple appears before the shrine to pay homage to the ancestors

As Ubersfeld mentioned, scenic space represents social space in real life, with its values, whether historical or merely contextual (1978: 144). The wedding scene refers to the sacred ceremony in society which continues to be practised, a rite that has always been an important phase in social life. The social values here are not merely contextual to the performance in that it is connected to a rite of passage in the hero's life, but it is essential as it is one of the most important parts of *Koma*'s discourse of hybridization. The intimate space is also pure, far from other spaces wherein conflicts are developing. This is the space where hope for an ideal life seems possible.

Figure 2: Paying homage to the parents

In the wedding ceremony, not only is the Chinese custom represented but also the Javanese custom known as *sungkem* (see Figure 2) in which the couple are obliged to seek forgiveness by paying homage to their parents. This part of the ceremony is obligatory in every wedding in Indonesia's cities, although it may not be the custom in some regions. This can be seen as an irony as it demonstrates how dominating Javanese culture is. On the other hand, this scene shows a touch of humour, since the

parents act like puppets – a convention adopted by Koma from the Sino-Javanese puppet show known as *wayang potehi*. The mechanic gestures of the characters also insinuate the degradation of sacred values as the ceremony becomes a mechanic event.

The fusion of different cultures illustrates two different faces of the social event: a space free of conflicts, full of tolerance, but simultaneously at great risk of being a mere formality and lacking in substantial social values.

Figure 3: General Kosiabun and his wife of Kolekok

In a scene which depicts the kingdom of Kolekok on stage, the kingdom is represented by the commander of the army and his wife (nicknamed Centipede King and Queen) who appear in an exaggerated manner (see Figure 3). Representing the forces of violence, both characters wield weapons indicating that they are ready to fight. They appear on stage as two monsters, and their death (by beheading) is thus permitted as evil power has to be destroyed. However, it can be interpreted that Koma makes an effort to push the centrifugal force to its extreme, and hence, the two characters appear as caricatures. Even so, sometimes the excessive

humour with which they are presented, can be regarded as deliberate to offset the fear that these two characters might evoke, and the evil force that they represent.

Figure 4: The female warrior of Kolekok

The couple who represents the centrifugal force, as has been mentioned before, consists of two different elements, male and female. Obviously, the female element evokes more power and violence, as the general's wife expresses her intentions by singing, whereas the general does not say much. Her song expresses her determined character, ready as ever to destroy her enemies. At the same time, her facial make-up visualizes violence through very bright colours, and the dagger that she holds and points at the audience (Figure 4).

Multiple forms of performance in this play are adapted from different genres and styles: classical conventions such as *wayang* from Java and Peking Opera, are combined with contemporary performances, Broadway musicals, for example. Each of these styles has different aspects which sometimes melt into a hybrid scene (e.g. the wedding scene), and the organisation of the stage represents modern performances where various stage properties connote modern urban life (the bridesmaid dressed as an angel).

The intention to foreground the idea of pluralism is also expressed on stage in the many symbols which refer to various cultures. Besides the clothes and face make-up, the mythical Chinese animals such as the dragon, the tiger, and the phoenix are used as stage setting. Dragons decorate the setting of Lisibin's palace, whereas a tiger decorates the palace of the emperor's uncle. The two animals represent the two conflicting forces within the country. The phoenix, however, is multi-functional. It appears as the backdrop for the wedding scene, and represents sacred social values, which include the survival of mankind, since the phoenix represents immortality. This symbol, however, also accompanies the general of Kolekok and his wife (see Figure 3), thus implying the continuation of conflicting forces in the world. Indonesian culture is symbolized, among others, by the narrator who manipulates a rhythmic instrument (known

as *kecrek*) when opening the show, and also when he appears on stage to narrate or sometimes to direct the characters' acting. He is at the same time narrator and director, and sometimes he surpasses his role to prove the tyrannical power of one man.

Dialogism, hybridization

While the stage is the representation of social spaces, the performance is a dialogue of the various social spaces. Social groups, even in conflict, and complementing each other, fill the stage and are involved in the act of either dominating or communicating. As the social groups involved in this play are numerous, many different spaces are present. Intimate or domestic spaces such as the family (e.g. wedding scene and the house of dignitaries), offer different aspects: the space of the hero's family may be the only 'peaceful' place where idealism is shown, whereas conflicting aspects with the will to dominate fill the other families. Open spaces are versatile, from the woods to the battlefields where Sie Jin Kwie meets the tiger and robbers that he conquers, and who join him as members of his troop. Each of them presents its own characteristic but within a dialogue, and this creates a universe of rich cultures.

Some spaces function as the agent of fear and terror, for example when the Centipede King and Queen appear on stage or when the robbers in the woods attack people. Even inside the family, menace can be a part of the space because of evil plans and the determination to attack those who obstruct their way to obtain power. Women here can also be the agent of terror or at least threaten other characters.

In every space, there are always two contrasting aspects: terror is balanced by excessive humour, either in the form of physical appearances (e.g., the Centipede Queen), or gestures (the tiger is transgender), and the language spoken is filled with jokes. Hence, dialogism appears to be a tool of hybridization, which according to Bakhtin is the result of many voices in a text (1981: 358).

Terror and menace are balanced by the representation of the social values of perseverance and determination that the hero demonstrates in dealing with the different kinds of ordeals he faces. In every challenge he takes on, the determination to remain the same character persists. Another

different aspect of the hero that is demonstrated in this play as a positive value is the fact that he uses violence only as a means of defending the ideal values such as independence or freedom. The play demonstrates many times that the hero is able to maintain his candid side amidst the corruptive elements.

One of the hero's positive features can be seen in the dialogues with the transgender tiger in the woods. In a scene in which one of the dignitaries from Lisibin's kingdom is attacked by the tiger in the woods, the corrupted dignitary is saved by Sie Jin Kwie who has the ability to talk to animals. The tiger admits that its attack on the dignitary was caused by the concession he received from the government to exploit the forest, and which destroyed the forest. This is a message for the environmental ecology which is, at the same time, delivered with the right to be hybrid (transgender).

The two faces of humankind are always present, and one of the spaces that symbolizes the ideal space is the cave where Sie Jin Kwie meets the goddess Kwan Im who gives superpower to the hero as well as the five weapons to defeat Kolekok (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Sie Jin Kwie meets the Goddess Kwan Im

She appears before him with the two contradictory elements: darkness and light. On the one hand, the hero now is well equipped for his ultimate task after so many ordeals, and he truly deserves to be. On the other hand, seemingly the goddess does not merely symbolize the good elements as she is supposed to. In Chinese culture, Kwan Im is usually worshipped by women who wish to bear children or to keep their family safe. In this play, though, she has other capacities which include granting superpower as well as weapons. This can be seen as a form of dialogism of contradictory elements, but at the same time as a characteristic of a folkloric type in which case the hero requires superpowers, and obtains it.

Dialogism functions as means to build a discourse of celebrating the right to be hybrid. Here, monoculture is rejected in spite of the many forces of pressure, whether political or social. Political forces sometimes create social injustice, and end up in ethnic riots. This play which presents various forms of differences clearly show the conflicting forces even if social injustice does not appear explicitly. Only one scene in the play depicts how methods to obstruct the domination of another party is rejected, and become obstacles for the right people to occupy certain positions. The privileges of some parties create a monopoly in social life (Sie Jin Kwie has to struggle hard to achieve the role of commander in the army).

The issues that this performance raises, from the narrative level as well as the theatrical forms, are conflicting forces in society that cause fear and terror. The performance also proposes, in an implicit manner, some counter aspects to balance the situation, which is dialogism between many aspects of realism and fantasy. The contradictory elements should be tolerated because of the necessity to live and accept this reality, in order to create a society where people can live, maybe not happily but at least without fear.

Conclusion

An extensive experience in elaborating its characteristics in the performing art has made Koma a successful group with a faithful following. As the result of presenting diverse contradictory elements within a dialogue, the group has created a highly exuberant performance. In the end, the proposed message is that in this era harmony can result from the coexistence of different cultures: in fact, each particular culture needs other

cultures to complete the whole 'universe'. By putting all multitudes of different elements in the performance, Koma seems to affirm that each of us has the right to be different, and that people have the right not to side with the unique category forced upon us.

The presence of various contradictory aspects in cultures and customs represents contemporary Indonesia, where some problems, such as the repression of some minority communities by the dominant group, continue to emerge. It is a challenge to promote tolerance in a plural country in the context of the extreme ways favoured and chosen here, a challenge that Koma has embraced in expressing these anxieties through the arts, rejecting uniformity, and celebrating hybridity.

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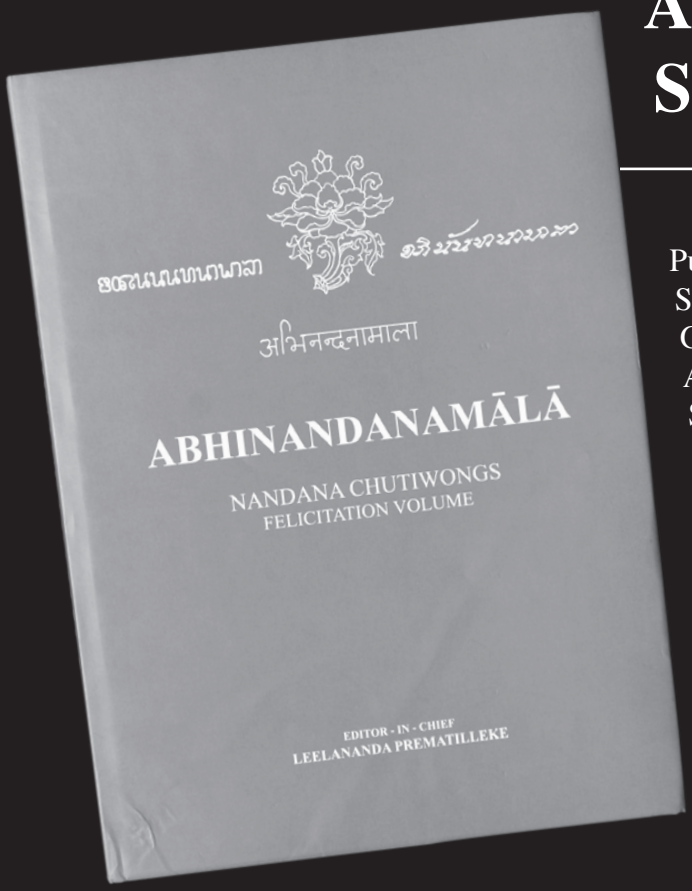
Images contributed by the author

Dr. Talha Bachmid (bachmidtalha@yahoo.fr) graduated from the Faculty of Letters (renamed the Faculty of Humanities since 2004), Universitas Indonesia in 1972, in the French Study Programme, majoring in French modern literature. Since receiving a doctoral degree in 1990, with a thesis on the comparison of an Indonesian play (Kapai Kapai by Arifin C. Noer) with Eugene Ionesco's play Rhinoceros, Dr. Bachmid has produced articles, particularly in the drama and theatre domain, and is currently interested in oral traditions (researching on Moluccas' oral tradition).

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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Making Mangrove Eco-Museums (2010)

Mangroves support eco-systems of biological diversity, and are sources of productivity in terms of aquaculture, fisheries and forestry. The mangrove swamps provide aquatic nurseries (breeding ground for several types of fish, shellfish and a wealth of marine life forms); complex and diverse wildlife habitats; shoreline stabilization which protects coastal areas from severe wave damage and erosion; and also maintain the quality of coastal waters (by trapping, immobilizing or absorbing heavy metals, pesticides and inorganic nutrients which would flow to the sea).

With this understanding, establishing museums out of mangrove swamps contributes to the conservation and management of mangrove eco-systems. The museums also perform the role of disseminating information that enhances public awareness and appreciation of the importance of mangroves.

Making Mangrove Eco-Museums is a publication of papers presented at a Regional Workshop on Making Mangrove an Eco-museum, organised by SEAMEO SPAFA in 2007. It consists of presentations, discussions, explorations, and the results of co-operation of a multi-disciplinary group of museum professionals, environmental and marine science experts, architects, artists, teachers and students from nine Southeast Asian countries. The papers mostly relate to developing eco-museums in mangrove swamps; increasing interest and understanding among museum personnel and other professionals in the conservation and management of mangrove eco-systems; and supporting research and sustainable management, rational utilisation and rehabilitation of mangrove environments.

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Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea: Teachers' Guide - SEAMEO APCEIU

Published in 2010, 'Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea' is a collection of 27 folktales from 11 Southeast Asian countries and Korea.

As story-telling is one of the most effective ways to teach young people about the world, the folktales in the book promote better awareness among school children of the similarities, diversity, and inter-dependence of the Asian community. The publication is designed particularly to guide teachers in integrating folktales in school lessons to stimulate creativity and discussions in classrooms. It is the product of a collaboration involving the SEAMEO Secretariat, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), SEAMEO INNOTECH, and SEAMEO SPAFA.

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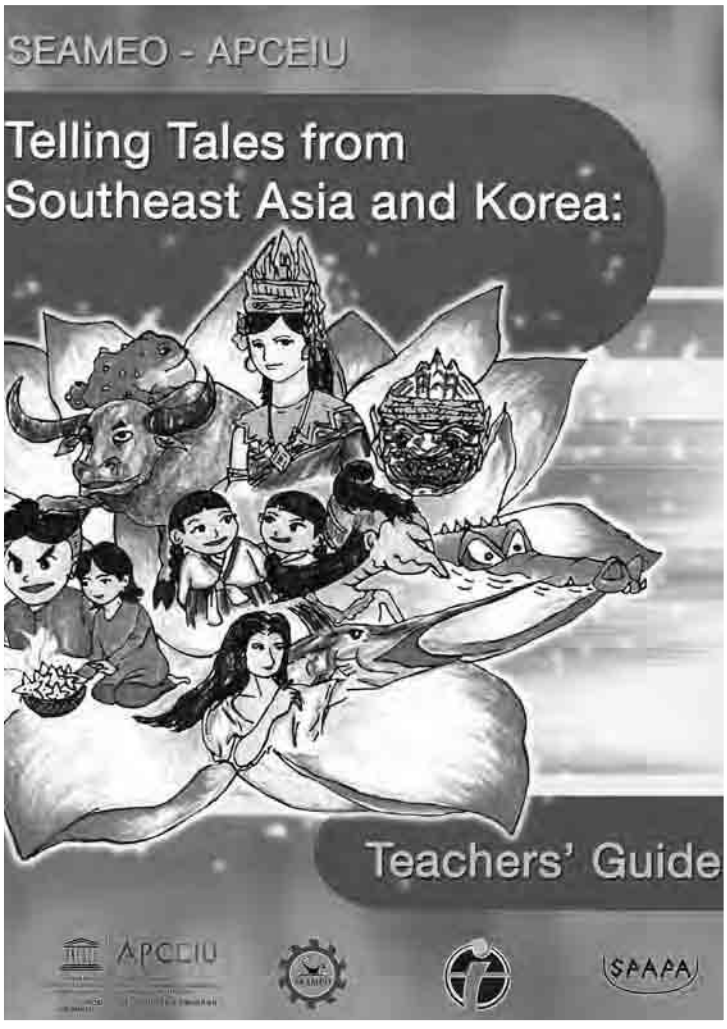

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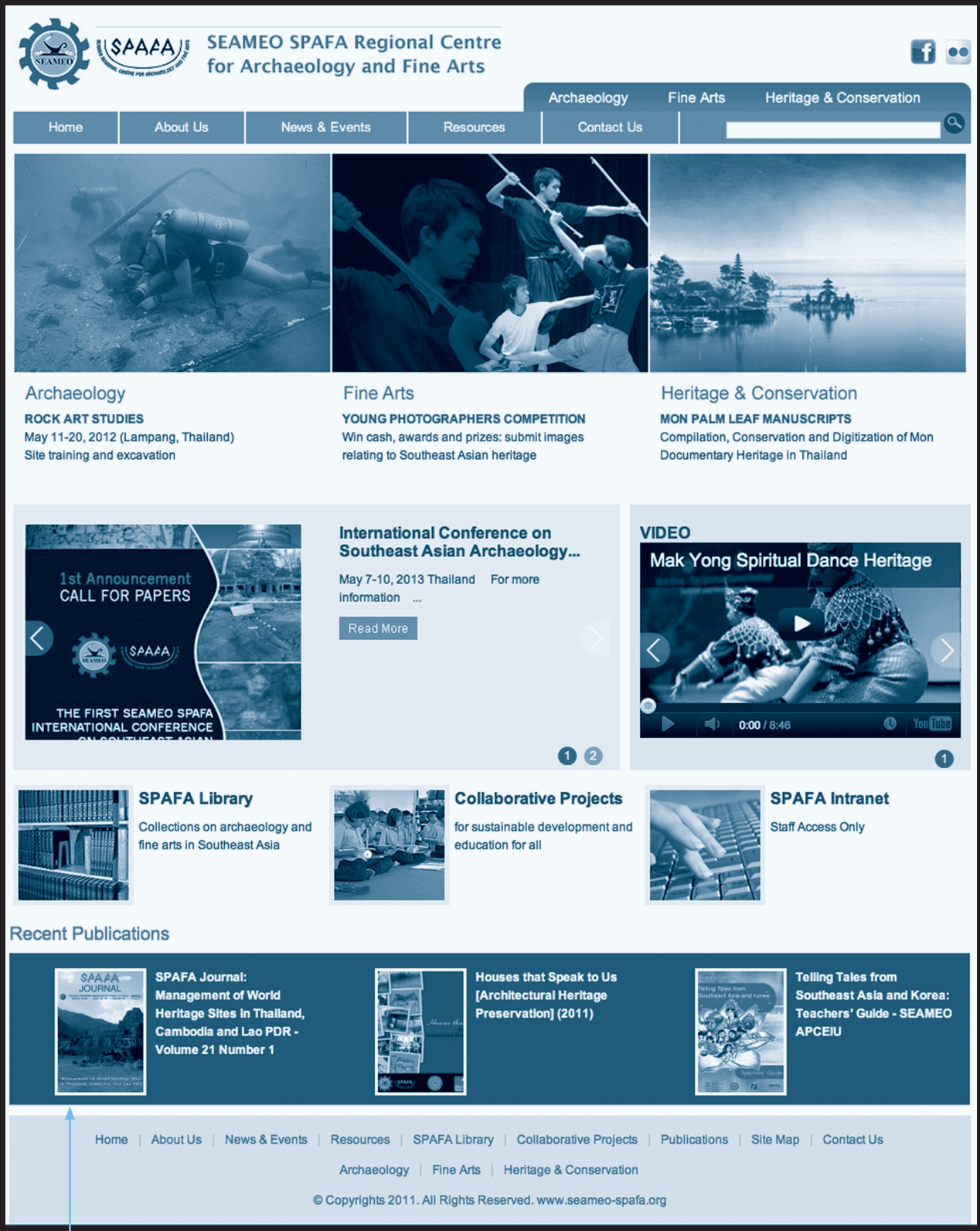

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