SPAFA JOURNAL

A Publication of the SEAMEO Reginal Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts
Volume 22 Number 2 July - December 2012 • ISSN 0858-1975

THE ART OF VIETNAM'S MINORITIES

SEAMEO-SPAFA
Regional Centre for
Archaeology and Fine Arts

SPAFA Journal is published by the SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. It is a forum for scholars, researchers, professionals, and those interested in archaeology, performing arts, visual arts, and cultural activities in Southeast Asia to share views, ideas, and experiences. The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of SEAMEO SPAFA.

SEAMEO SPAFA's objectives :

- Promote awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asian countries;
- Help enrich cultural activities in the region;
- Strengthen professional competence in the fields of archaeology and fine arts through sharing of resources and experiences on a regional basis;
- Increase understanding among the countries of Southeast Asia through collaboration in archaeological and fine arts programmes.

Editorial

M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn

Assistants

Girard Bonotan
Linh Anh Moreau
Nawarat Saengwat
John Itao
Kantanach Chayapong

Publication Co-ordinator

Ean Lee

Cover Image

'Pray for Rain', courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ

Photographic Services

Nipon Sud-Ngam

SPAFA Journal is published bi-annually

Available online and Free of Charge

Printers

Amarin Printing and Publishing
Public Company Limited
376 Chaiyaphruk Road,
Taling Chan, Bangkok 10170, Thailand
Tel. (662) 882-1010 (30 Lines)
Fax.(662) 433-2742, 434-1385
E-Mail : info@amarin.co.th
Homepage : http://www.amarin.co.th

Publisher

SPAFA Journal
SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre
SPAFA Building
81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road, Samsen, Theves
Bangkok 10300, Thailand
Tel. (662) 280-4022-29
Fax. (662) 280-4030
E-mail: ean@seameo-spafa.org
spafa03@yahoo.com
Website: www.seameo-spafa.org

The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeologyand 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).

SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

SEAMEO SPAFA member-countries:

- Brunei
- Cambodia
- East Timor
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Vietnam

Associate member-countries:

- Australia
- Canada
- Germany
- France
- New Zealand
- Netherlands
- Spain

SEAMEO SPAFA collaborates with governmental agencies, international organisations and academic institutions to achieve common goals and objectives.

SPAFA Journal

Volume 22 Number 2 (July - December 2012)

CONTENTS

The Art of Vietnam's Ethnic Minorities: Portrait of the Chams

In this article, **Rie Nakamura** examines how ethnic minority artists respond to a market-driven national integration, and how they represent themselves and their ethnic identity. While Vietnamese modern art and artists have become popular research subjects, most of the studies on them concentrate on the artistic activities in the North[1], with little mention about art produced by ethnic minority peoples. Dr. Nakamura explores the possibility of art as a medium for ethnic minorities to voice their feelings and thoughts in a rapidly changing Vietnam; and analyses the artwork of a number of artists working with Cham and Champa themes.

The Cham ethnic minority

The Vietnamese state recognized 54 ethnic groups living in its territory. For classifying the ethnic groups, Vietnamese ethnologists heavily depend on language, and the population of Vietnam consists of three major language groups, Austronesiatic, Austroasiatic, and

[1] Boi Tran Huynh (2005) wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on South Vietnam's art movement. Art critique Huỳnh Hữu Ủy published several studies on pre-1975 arts in South Vietnam (1990, 1993).

Sino-Tibetan[2]. The Cham[3] ethnic group belongs to the Austronesiatic language group, and was regarded as a sea-oriented people in the past (A. Reid 1999; S. Momoki 2001). Their ancestry is linked to the people of the Kingdom of Champa. It is understood that Champa was established around the second century when it shed off Chinese influence, and accepted Hindu culture. Champa enjoyed considerable prosperity from the ninth to the fifteenth century by providing significant relay ports of the maritime trade route in the South China Sea. Today, the vestiges of the wealth and power of Champa can still be seen along the coast of central Vietnam (Y. Shige-eda & Tran Ky Phuong 1997; Momoki 1999).

The Cham population is around 132,000[4]. There are two distinct Cham groups in Vietnam, distinguished by their place of residence, historical background, and religion. One group lives in the south-central coastal region, particularly Ninh Thuận and Binh Thuân provinces, where the largest concentration of Cham people in Vietnam can be found. About 86,000[5] Chams who live in this region follow two main traditional religions, Balamon (an indigenized form of Hinduism), and Bani (an indigenized form of Islam[6]). The Balamon and Bani appear to be two separate religious groups; however, they are rooted in the Cham's cosmology of dualism. They are complementary aspects of one traditional religion of the Chams (Nakamura 1999, 2009). Cham visual artists are found amongst the Chams living in the south-central coast area.

---

[2] Ito Masako's work on ethnic classification in Vietnam discusses problems of ethnic classification and how people negotiate with the State's static ethnic classification (Ito 2008).

[3] In Vietnamese language, Cham is written as "Chăm" but in this article, the author uses the word without the diacritical mark.

[4] National census of 1999.

[5] National census of 1999.

[6] Toshihiko Shin-e argued that the group that call themselves Cham or Ahier is not really adherents of the Balamon religion but also believe in the God of Islam, Allah. This is a result of French scholars' misunderstanding of the Cham religion during the French colonial period. Though both Cham Balamon and Bani are adherents of Islam, only Bani hold ceremonies for Allah while Cham Balamon conduct ceremonies for gods known to the people prior to the arrival of Islam (Shin-e 2001b: 243, n8, n9). I have not yet further explored his argument, and for this article, I have adopted the conventional understanding of the differences between the Balamon and Bani based on local informants' explanations.

The second Cham group lives in the Mekong Delta, mainly around Châu Đôc city in An Giang province, close to the border with Cambodia. About 12,000 Chams[7] live in this region, and most of them are Sunni Muslims. The Mekong Delta Chams also live in Ho Chi Minh City, and surrounding provinces, such as Đồng Nai and Tây Ninh provinces (Phan Văn Dốp & Nguyễn Thị Nhung 2006: 25).

Ethnic minorities in Vietnam

The policies affecting Vietnam's ethnic minorities were shaped by the two Indochina wars, and are clearly connected with the development of socialism after the reunification of North and South Vietnam. During the pre-reunification period, North and South Vietnam had different approaches toward ethnic minorities. While they both utilized the ethnic minorities in the war efforts, communist North Vietnam took a Stalinist approach to the ethnic minorities (W. Connor 1984). It was critical to gain support from ethnic minorities living in the strategic areas to win the wars, and the Communist party promised to set up ethnic autonomous regions. After the victory of Điện Biên Phù against the French, North Vietnam established three different ethnic minority autonomous zones between 1955 and 1957. The right of secession amongst these autonomous zones was somewhat left ambiguous. However, in 1959, all three autonomous zones were quietly dissolved.

South Vietnam took an assimilation approach toward the ethnic minorities, particularly during the Ngô Đình Diệm regime that encountered strong opposition from the ethnic minorities living in the central highland. South Vietnam shifted to integration policies, and tried to promote the ethnic minorities by establishing the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities. It was crucial for South Vietnam to win the support of the ethnic minorities who lived in the areas most suspected of communist infiltration (G. Hickey 1982, 1993).

[7] National census of 1999.

After the reunification of the North and the South, ethnic minority policies have been set within the socialist ideology, which appears to support self-determination, but in practice promotes assimilation through what is known as a "socialist civilizing project". In this project, all Vietnamese citizens, including various ethnic minorities, shall strive for the common goal of socialism. The state recognizes multiple paths to reach the goal for the ethnic minorities, which should be suitable to their social, cultural, and economic characteristics. However, such different paths to socialism amongst the minority peoples are under the state's control. The state has the authority to decide what kinds of society they should live in by selecting "their correct tradition and culture" for the minorities to preserve. The state pressures ethnic minority peoples to eliminate obstacles to progress and development. Consequently, various religious practices and traditions have been banned as they are considered superstitions (Connor 1984; G. Evans 1985; C. Keyes 1987; M. Furuta 1995; Shin-e 2007).

By adapting *đôi mó'i* policies (economic reforms initiated in 1986 to create a "socialist-oriented market economy" in Vietnam), the government softens its control over people's cultural activities; and under relaxed cultural policies, many traditional rituals, rites, or religious pilgrimages and other traditional activities have seen a revival (Hy Van Luong 1992; J. Kleinen 1999; S. Malarney 2002); such changes were experienced by the ethnic minority groups as well. In 1991, the Vietnamese government released Notice No. 3 of the central politburo on policies toward the Cham ethnic group (*Thông tri cua Ban Bií thu' về công tác đôi vó'i đông bào Chăm*. Notice No. 3 stated that the government of Vietnam would conserve and protect the Cham people's historical and cultural heritage, establish cultural centres, popularize Cham script, and encourage mass-based artistic activities. This notice implies that the state respects Cham traditions and their customary laws in dealing with communal issues (Shin-e 2001b).

Ito argued that the special release of Notice No. 3 indicates that the government has been less successful in integrating the Cham ethnic group with mainstream Vietnamese society (Ito 2009b: 51). She further stated that after reunification, the Vietnamese government did not pay

as much attention to the ethnic minorities as before when they were mobilized in the war effort. In post-reunification Vietnam, they have been considered as obstacles to socio-economic development. In particular, ethnic minorities living in the mountainous areas have been left behind. The uprisings of ethnic minorities in the central highlands in 2001 and 2004 proved that government policies did not improve their lives. The uprisings were caused by the government's failure to understand the problems of ethnic minorities, mainly the issues concerning loss of land and livelihood as a result of the massive migration of the Kinh majority and other ethnic minorities from the North and other parts of Vietnam. These massive movements of people were credited to the new economic policies. Instead of admitting that its policies pertaining to the ethnic minorities failed, the state resorted to providing economic subsidies, and preserved the ethnic minority policies with the top-down approach (Ito 2009a).

The Vietnamese art world and *đổi mó'i*

Vietnamese art in đổi mói era

The *đôi mó'i* policies brought significant changes to the Vietnamese art society. Before the *đôi mó'i* era, paintings were considered as a tool to propagate communist ideology, and strengthen national unity. The principles of the Vietnamese art under the Communist Party were established during the anti-colonial struggles, and were used to fight bourgeois decadence in art. The party believed that art should be scientific ("abandoning religious themes, mysticism, and idealism, and popularising the Marxist perspective"); national ("dedicating to the needs and aspirations of the Vietnamese nation, putting one's art in the service of the revolutionary cause"); and popular ("producing work that would simultaneously appeal to and educate the vast majority of people, labourers, farmers, and soldiers, inciting them to be loyal to, and be ready to sacrifice for, the revolution")

(Jamieson 1996: 19). Art was closely associated with Vietnamese nation-building projects such as national defence, national unity, and national integration. The artists were to serve the nation using their artistic talent. All artists belong to the centrally-controlled artists association (*Hội mỹ thật)* (M. Jamieson 1996; Taylor 2009: 15-17), and they painted and sculpted to glorify the image of the Vietnamese people. The dominant style of the art was called Socialist Realism, and abstract paintings including Cubism, Fauvism, and Surrealism were prohibited.

Art as a tool to propagate idealogy

Two years prior to the implementation of *đôi mó'i* policies, the Secretary General of the Communist Party Nguyễn Văn Linh organised a meeting with artists and cultural cadres who complained about the state's tight control over artistic activities. The Politburo Resolution 5 released a month after the meeting admitted that their policies on art and cultural management were "simplistic, coarse, superficial, and undemocratic", and relaxed the state control over arts (Jamieson 1996: 25). In the following years, the adoption of *đôi mó'i* brought drastic changes in the Vietnamese art scene.[8]

[8] N. Taylor argued that there was a liberal art movement between 1984 and 1989, prior to *đôi mó'i*, and it was such a movement that pushed the government to adopt the new policy of *đôi mó'i* (Taylor 2009 : 88-93).

The free market economy, however, has been transforming Vietnamese art into commodities, with artists selling their work through private galleries both in Vietnam and overseas. Although the number of such artists is limited, there are artists who can make their living by just selling their art work in the private galleries without joining the artists' association. Naturally, the style of artistic work has also been diversifying rapidly. Abstract paintings are no longer prohibited; installation art have become popular; and artists carry out performance art in public space (Taylor 2007). The work of some artists who have been neglected prior to *đôi mó'i* have gained national recognition and prestige, and have become the most demanded items in the Vietnamese art market. Bùi Xuân Phaí is one such artist. He was born to a family with Confucian values, and grew up in Hanoi. Educated in l'École des Beauxarts d'Indochine (established by the French colonial government), he joined the anti-colonial force and the Artists' Association of Vietnam. He is known for his street paintings, which often depict cloudy, gray, quiet, and lonely streets that evoke a sense of melancholy. At that time, the authorities needed to promote patriotism, heroism, and optimism, and Phaí's work were not well received and rarely exhibited – he kept a distance from the artists' association. However, after his first and only exhibition in 1984, he became one of the greatest modern artists in Vietnam, and received the Ho Chi Minh Award for his artistic contribution to the nation (Jamieson 1996: 24-25; Taylor 2009: 63-66).

While Vietnamese art is diversifying, rapid modernization and globalization compel the Vietnamese to question and redefine their art. The dominant buyers of Vietnamese arts are foreigners, and some art observers point to the influence of the international market (Taylor 1999: 247, 2009: 9; Kraevskaia 2005: 9, 22-23) in dictating the direction of Vietnamese art. There is a demand by foreigners for "Vietnamese art" that remind them of an agrarian-based, and rural Vietnam prior to *đôi mó'i*. Phaí's paintings, for example, can present a Vietnam that foreigners want to see. Taylor examines the reasons for the popularity of his paintings amongst foreigners, and states that foreigners or foreign travelers "see a 'truth' to Phai's painting. In contrast to the bustling city that is growing in the Vietnamese capital, they consider Phai's rendition of Hanoi streets

as a better representation of what they imagine to be a 'true' Asian city: pristine and untainted by Western goods" (Taylor 1999: 246).

In the pre-*đôi mó'i* era, ethnic minorities appeared in paintings to promote war efforts and national solidarity, while in the post-*đôi mó'i* era, ethnic minorities are no longer depicted in the context of national defence, national unity, and national integration. Contemporary Vietnamese artists often depict ethnic minorities by presenting young women in their traditional clothes, against a natural backdrop, engaging in daily routines, work, and child-caring, deprived of the materialistic wealth of urban society, but content with the peaceful life in harmony with nature. The work of artist Dinh Ngoc Thang fall into this category. His paintings are displayed in one of the art galleries on Đồng Kho'i Street of Ho Chi Minh City, where many foreign tourists visit to purchase high-end souvenirs. He was born in North Vietnam, and educated in the University of Fine Arts in Ho Chi Minh City. His paintings of ethnic minority women from northern Vietnam are one of the best selling works in the Nguyen Gallery. Almost all the buyers of his work are foreign visitors, and the gallery attendants explained that "foreign visitors want to buy paintings that remind them of Vietnam, that is why they buy Dinh Ngoc Thang's work". Dinh's short biography given by the gallery mentioned that he made a tour of Vietnam in 2003, and was enchanted by the beauty of highland scenery and the people: "this land really enchants me with their daily life, its simplicity, and its natural surroundings … a brook is murmuring all day. H'mong, Dao, and many other ethnic groups go on with their lives:

Dinh Ngoc Thang, courtesy of Nguyen gallery

fetching water, carrying children on their backs, blanketed by mist at dawn on a market day. They all become one as a unique national character that is charming to me." Such phrases are reminiscent of musings found in travel book. Dinh's gaze cast upon the ethnic minorities is similar to the foreign tourists' gaze. His sense of romanticization of the life of ethnic minorities in the highlands and his nostalgia for pre-modern Vietnam are reflected in his paintings, and thus perhaps appeal to foreign buyers who sought the images of "traditional, authentic" Vietnam. Ethnic minorities are used to create images of pre-modern Vietnam in their "less developed status" and unique cultural tradition. They have become one of the symbols of a Vietnam that are embeded in tourists' fantasies.

Mainstreaming minority culture and alienation of minority people

The new global art market has pushed the marginalized and highly localized population of Vietnam into the mainstream national culture. Responding to art market demands by mainstreaming ethnic minorities reflects a shift in evaluating the cultures of ethnic minorities. When I was conducting field research in Vietnam in 1993, something "ethnic" did not have positive meaning. I used to carry my belongings in a bag made of the Cham handwoven textile, and it was quite unpopular among my Vietnamese friends. The Vietnamese much preferred factory-manufactured textiles in the way they preferred plastic dishes over handmade pottery. They considered those industrially mass-produced products as modern and fashionable since they were made with modern technologies. As Chandra Mukerji said, the "taste" of consumers determine the demand for the products which eventually control the pattern of economic development (Mukerji 1983: 28). The textiles produced by ethnic minorities did not appeal to the "taste" of the majority Kinh people in Vietnam. Ethnic minority handicrafts, including handwoven textiles, had been neglected by the majority population and officials alike; however, 1994 seems to have been a turning point for ethnic minorities' weaving. This period witnessed the increase in the number of foreign tourists in Vietnam. (L. Kennedy & M. Williams 2001: 139). The tourists appreciated ethnic handicrafts, and

became major buyers. In the same year, I saw many female students carrying cloth bags made from Cham traditional weaving that were sold in every corner of downtown Ho Chi Minh City. The young Vietnamese generation has adapted to the "taste" of foreign tourists within a very short period. In the following year, a Vietnamese fashion company, Legafashion, held a fashion show in Ho Chi Minh City in which they introduced clothing such as cocktail dresses, business suits, and mini-skirts all made of Cham handwoven textiles. While models were cat-walking, two Cham women demonstrated weaving at both sides of the stage. The fashion show aimed to demonstrate that ethnic minority weavings can be used to make fashionable modern clothing.[9]

However, the mainstreaming of ethnic minority culture neither means that the ethnic minorities have attained a certain status nor gained some power in society. What can be observed is that the more ethnic minority cultures become popular and visible in public space in Vietnam, the more the ethnic minorities detach from their popularized culture. In early 2000[10], I began to notice, at the various tourist attractions, some souvenirs made of Cham textiles bearing the name of places such as Điên Biên Phu', Mỹ So'n or Huê. This type of souvenirs seemed to cater to domestic tourists. For this reason, Cham textiles were chosen not because they were produced locally but probably because it represented "otherness." Tourists buy such souvenirs to remember their unusual time and experiences, and the attributes of ethnic minorities appealed to them as the "other" and the "unusual." I was told by Cham weavers that many of these souvenirs with Cham textile patterns were manufactured in factories. The Chams were not involved in producing their ethnic textiles – factories made them on a massive scale.

---

[9] Vietnam Investment Review 1995 Dec. 18.

[10] I started to see Cham culture and historical vestiges being promoted as tourist attractions. In these tourism promotion and advertisements, the Cham traditions and historical vestiges are introduced as a part of the rich Vietnamese heritage. Today, one can find a magnet souvenir of Po Klong Garai temple with a Vietnamese flag or chocolate cookies in the shape of the temple sold as souvenirs at the airport duty free shops in Vietnam.

The Chams are well known for their rich music and dance tradition. Modern Cham royal court dance performances show how the ethnic minorities have been detached from their culture. According to History of Great Vietnam (*Đại Việt Su' Ký*), Vietnamese emperor Lý Thaí Tông attacked Champa's capital in 1069, and brought back more than 100 court dancers to the north, where they performed in the Vietnamese court (Đặng Hùng 1998: 143). The Cham royal court dance had been forgotten for a long time until in the mid-1990s, when it was recreated by a Vietnamese artist called Đặng Hùng. He was a native of Binh Định province, a former territory of Champa, and studied dance and theatre in Hanoi, North Korea, Nanjing, USSR, Bulgaria, and Cuba. Đặng Hùng argued that there was a need for the Cham royal dance to be restored since other Hinduinized Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, have kept their royal court dance (Đặng Hùng 1998: 15)[11]. The recreated Cham royal court dance has become quite popular. It has been performed in various events, including international conferences, and also in restaurants and other tourist attractions holding theatrical performances. The more the Cham royal dance is accepted as part of Vietnamese national culture, the more the majority Kinh people perform this dance. I saw the Chams dancing the royal court dance only once at a theatre in Ho Chi Minh City in 1995. All other Cham royal court dances that I saw after 1995 were performed by Kinh dancers. As the Vietnamese government claimed that they encourage ethnic minorities to practise and preserve their culture, a part of Cham tradition was revived and preserved yet without Cham people as cultural agent. In the theatre, the ethnic minority culture and tradition have become a mere genre of performance (ethnic dance).

The young Vietnamese generation has adapted to the "taste" of foreign tourists within a very short period.

Several lacquer paintings I found at the gallery attached to the Ho Chi Minh City art museum seemed to symbolize alienation of ethnic minorities from their culture. The paintings were a series of pop art-like portraits of ethnic women wearing different head dresses, clothes, and jewelries, like

[11] Đặng Hùng legitimized his restoration of the Cham royal dance by referring to the decison of the 8th national assembly on culture and arts policies of the new era. The national assembly agreed to encourage "exploring and displaying people's traditional culture and art, and also making their culture and art more progressive and rich" (Đặng Hùng 1998: 15).

dressed-up dolls trying out different attire. This series of lacquer paintings conveys the message that the identity of ethnic minorities is formed by the style of head dresses, clothings, or jewelries rather than their lifestyle and culture. In the art market, the ethnic minority culture has become, quite prominently, a mere artistic style.

Mainstreaming minority culture has detached ethnic minorities from their cultures. Their lack of control over their socio-cultural life reveals that the ethnic minorities remain a passive body onto which the state imposes its policies (Ito 2009b). Such a passive political position of ethnic minorities in Vietnam is reflected in some of the paintings of ethnic minorities. In the following section, the work of a Kinh artist – who has been painting the Cham people – and two Cham painters are examined to offer glimpses of the images of the Cham ethnic minority people on canvas. The author explores how art provides a potential contested space for ethnic minorities to express their identity and culture through their own symbolisms and artistic vocabularies.

Cao Thị Đu'ợ'c

Cao Thị Đu'ợc belongs to the Kinh majority, and was born in Bến Tre, a city in the Mekong Delta. She had wanted to attend the University of Fine Arts in Ho Chi Minh City but could not because of economic reasons. Instead, she studied art at the teacher's college, and worked at the office of education in her local district in Bến Tre, during which she was in contact with many who studied art in Ho Chi Minh City, and learned art from them. On a visit to Bến Tre, artist Văn Đen became acquainted with Đu'ợc's work, and recognized her talent. In 1980, Đu'ợc finally went to study in, and graduated from, the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University in 1990 (Nguyễn Kim Loan 2007: 128-134).

She has been painting on the theme of the Cham people for a long time. Her teacher, Sỹ Hoang, used to carry out field work in the Cham village of Mỹ Nghiệp in Ninh Thuận province, and exhibited his work at the

university. Inspired by his art, she went to stay in Mỹ Nghiệp and Bâu Trúc villages. She was in Bâu Trúc, which is well known for traditional pottery production, for three months, and produced her graduation work, *Cham Market* (*Chọ Chăm)*. Later, Đu'ợc' visited Bâu Trúc with her students to practise sketch painting almost every year, and she produced a series of paintings on the Chams.[12]

Đu'ợc' often depicts Cham women; Cham men are rarely seen in her work. She is sympathetic toward Cham women who have been tied down by various social restrictions and constraints, and entitled to less freedom than the majority Kinh women. She also finds beauty in Cham women engaged in hard labour.[13] The artist usually does not use any models when she paints, using pastel colours for figures and portraits. Her pastel drawings provide models for her oil paintings, which comprise of her oeuvre. There are distinctive differences in the depiction of Cham women in her oil paintings and her pastel drawings. Her pastel drawings of Cham women were exhibited at the gallery of Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University in May 2010. The portraits are titled in the models' names, without indication of the women's ethnic origins. It may not be easy to tell that the models were Cham women.

On the other hand, her oil paintings of Cham women depict them with darker complexion, connected eyebrows similar to Champa sculptures, and thick lips. They wear earrings, bracelets, and necklaces, and are often portrayed with bare breasts to connote their ethnic origins, proximity to nature, and isolation from modern life. The titles of her paintings do not bear the models' names, simply "a young Cham woman", "an Old Cham woman" or such. Laurel B. Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams examined tourism in Vietnam, and discussed how the image of Vietnamese women who were depicted as "heroic mother and female guerilla fighters" have been depoliticized and marginalized as "ornamental and sexual" (Kennedy & Williams 2001: 158-9). Similar comment can be made about Đu'ợc's oil paintings of Cham women; they are anonymous, decorative, retrospective,

[12] Interview with Cao Thị Đu'ợc in May 1, 2010.
[13] Ibid.

mythical, and sensual. The Chams that Đu'ợc' paints are Cham pastiche, and they are featured most in her paintings, projecting images of ethnic minorities as others wish to see them.

Chế Thị Kim Trung

Chế Thị Kim Trung is a young Cham painter. She was born in An Nho'n village, and liked to paint since she was young. She studied at a teachers' college; became an art teacher; and continued to study art after marriage. In 2002, as a mother of two children, she took the entrance examination, and successfully enrolled in Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University.[14]

Some of Kim Trung's paintings reflect the unity and solidarity of ethnic minorities, such as those that celebrate the liberation of Phan Rang city, as well as those of ethnic women preparing food for soldiers. Most of her paintings, however, are about the Cham people and their traditions and religious activities. She said that she painted Cham rituals and traditions to pass on the Cham people's rich history and heritage to the next generations of Chams.[15] Her work have been shown in national exhibitions, receiving various prizes from the Vietnamese government. The national museums of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City[16] have purchased her award-winning works. Kim Trung's life and artwork have been publicized in a national TV programme, and she has become one of the most popular Cham artists.

---

[14] Interview with Chê Thị Kim Trung in June 1, 2010.
[15] Ibid.
[16] One of her paintings, titled Làng Chăm o'n Bác (Cham village gives thanks to Ho Chi Minh) received a national prize, and was purchased by the National Museum in Hanoi. This is a painting of Ho Chi Minh standing in front of Po Klong Garai temple (Hindu temple constructed during the 14th century) surrounded by Cham people and communities. Amongst the Chams, the painting created discussion on the copyright issue. The painting is named after the title of a song composed in 1985 by a Cham musician, Âm Nhân. Some of the lyrics in the song, "Hồ Chí Minh trong trái tim ngu'ò'i Chăm (Ho Chi Minh is in the hearts of Cham people) and "Hồ Chí Minh trong trái tim Việt Nam" (Ho Chi Minh is in the hearts of Vietnam) are rendered on to the plates placed above the God of Siva on the temple, which upset some people who considered it disrespectful (Inrasara).

Kim Trung painted *Kate* festival (*Lê Hội Katé*) in 2007, which was awarded a prize at the national exhibition of the Vietnamese Art Association, and purchased by the Ho Chi Minh City Museum. *Kate* is one of the most important ceremonies of the Chams, organised at their Balamon (Hindu) temples, and probably the most well-known Cham religious ceremony in Vietnam. During the *Kate* festival, many Chams go to temples to pray for prosperity, happiness, and the safety of their families. In her *Kate* festival painting, Kim Trung depicted a male and four female dancers accompanied by four musicians playing Cham traditional musical instruments. The background of these dancers and musicians is a brick Balamon temple, such as Po Klong Garai, a famous Champa monument built around the 14th century.

When I saw Kim Trung's painting on *Kate* festival in the Ho Chi Minh City Museum in 2011, I wondered about her knowledge of this ceremony. Most of the people depicted in her painting do not play any roles in the actual *Kate* ceremony. The male dancer, known as *Ong Kaing*, who wears a red jacket, and holds a stick in the centre of the painting, dances at other religious ceremonies, together with a drummer who plays a tambourine-like drum. None of the musicians depicted in this painting would be found in the actual *Kate* ceremony, yet the most significant musician, *Ong Kathar*, who plays the two-string instrument is not found (see Xu Man painting). Her painting of the *Kate* ceremony surprised me since Kim Trung explained during an interview that she painted so that Cham culture would be passed down to the next generations.

Xu Man, Ho Chi Minh City Museum

Her painting of the *Kate* festival reveals a striking similarity to the painting done by Nguyễn Công Văn, a Vietnamese painter from Ninh Thuận province, who also produced a painting in 2003, titled *Kate Festival* (*Lê Hội Katé*) which shows a male dancer, *Ong Kaing*, at the centre and groups of female dancers and musicians surrounding him in front of Po Klong Garai temple. Nguyễn Công Văn also did not include the *Ong Kathar* musician who plays the two-string insturment.

It is said that there are several kinds of rituals in Cham tradition, involving various musicians, dancers, and other religious practitioners. Who can work with whom in these rituals is strictly determined (Nakamura 1999: 294-300). To the Kinh majority, with the exception of ethnologists or anthropologists, such intricate cultural systems do not mean much. The painting of the *Kate* festival covers two subjects: Cham culture and festival. Both Kim Trung and Nguyễn Công Văn painted Cham temples, dancers wearing traditional clothes, and musicians playing traditional instruments.

The similarity of the paintings of Kim Trung and Nguyễn Công Văn, who belongs to the majority ethnic Kinh group, seems to indicate that the former has adopted the Vietnamese signifier for Chams. She paints in the perspective of the Kinh majority in viewing the Chams as a people of the Champa kingdom, and who have a rich history, colourful costumes, and unfamiliar traditions.

Kim Trung adopts the Kinh's gaze in perceiving ethnic minority groups as a result of her drive and position in the Cham community. She has been living at the margin of Cham society – away from her native Cham village – in the capital city of Phan Rang for the last 15 years, working as a teacher, with a husband who is a communist party cadre. The first floor of her three-storey house on one of the main streets of the city is an art gallery where she exhibits and sells her paintings, including souvenirs such as Cham textiles and earthenwares from Bâu Trúc village.[17] She puts her work on the art market through the small art gallery, and to

[17] Traditionally, earthenware from Bâu Trúc are without colouring.

make her paintings marketable, she has to cater to the majority's taste and perspective. She paints Chams in a pastiche way that outsiders can recognize Cham culture as that of an ethnic minority.

Đàng Năng Thợ

Đàng Năng Thợ is one of the most well-known contemporary Cham artists. He studied painting at the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University, and is also known for his terracotta sculptures. He was born in Bâu Trúc village in the Ninh Thuận province that is famous for earthenware production. His father did carpentry and his mother made earthenwares, and was also one of the ritual dancers of her lineage group. Thợ did not have siblings and was not very sociable as a child. He used to play alone at home and considered his mother as his only friend during childhood; he liked to observe funeral ceremonies, often staying overnight at the ceremonial house made temporarily for a funeral. He was fascinated by stories of Champa kings, princes, and princesses told by village elders at night. He studied at Po Klong High School for Cham ethnic minorities, and became known for his paintings of the Po Klong Garai temple, having painted many pieces as requested by fellow students – paintings that opened up a new life in arts for him.[18]

Immediately after the liberation of South Vietnam in 1975, the Ministry of Culture in Hanoi dispatched a group of scholars to the south to take action on publications supporting the ideas of the Saigon government. Phan Đăng Nhật, an ethnologist, was one of the scholars on this mission, during which he visited a Cham village to carry out research. He noticed that many Cham households hung a painting of the Po Klong Garai temple painted by a young Cham man named Đàng Năng Thợ. He met Thợ, and asked him if he wanted to study arts. With the help of the ethnologist, Đàng Năng Thợ was admitted in 1976 to the art college in Ho Chi Minh City where he studied until 1979. After working for the Office of Culture, Sports and Tourism at Ninh Thuận province for a few years, he enrolled at the University of Fine Arts in Ho Chi Minh City

[18] Interview with Đàng Năng Thọ in May and September 2010 and May 2011.

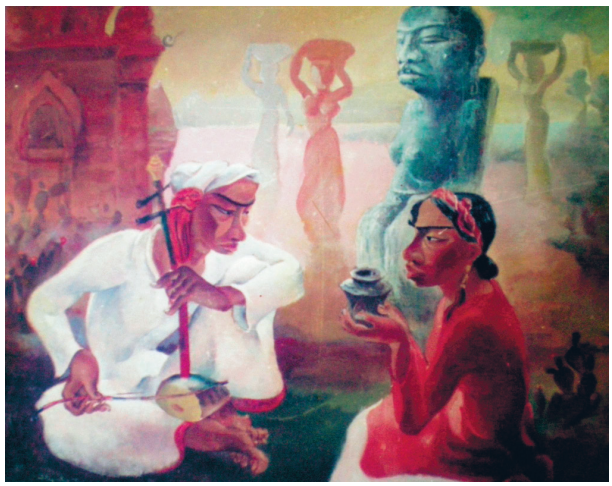
in 1987. While he was there, he frequented the National Library to do research on Champa and the Cham people.[19]

Thọ' considered Phan Đăng Nhật's help crucial to his major achievements in studying art at the university; holding his first exhibition in Hanoi in 1995; participating in an art conference in India (one of his teraccota sculptures was depicted on the cover page of the conference pamphlet); and selling his sculpture to the Museum of Hanoi. His story of artistic achievement has similarity to Champa legends in which people who are born with unusual talent or supernatural ability would become rulers or important persons in society with the help of persons who have ability to discover the extraordinary but hidden gifts of the protagonists.

Thọ' majored in painting at the University of Fine Arts. His graduation work is a piece called *Pray for Rain* that depicts a lady visiting a ritual musician (*Ong Kathar*), sitting in front of a brick temple. The female statue in the background indicates that she is Queen Bia Thanh Chi, and enshrined in the temple is her husband King Po Rame.[20] Thọ' originally painted the background with orange-red colour but it was not very well received by the graduation committee members at the university, so he altered the background by painting several women carrying their offerings to the temple.[21] The altered painting offers a better perspective, and has a classical look but it had lost significant symbols of the Cham culture. The original background colour of orange-red symbolizes the sun and fire, especially the cremation fire of the Balamon religion of the Chams who worship gods at temples like Po Ram. The province of Ninh Thuận is one of the driest places in Vietnam, with only 700-800 mm rainfall[22] in a year while the annual average rainfall in Vietnam is above 1000 mm.[23] The scorching sun over the area results in a dry landscape, and the Cham villages that could not be irrigated only harvest rice once a year instead

[19] Interview with Đàng Năng Thọ in May 2010 and May 2011.
[20] Po Rame temple was established between the 16th and 17th centuries.
[21] Interview with Đàng Năng Thọ in May 2011.
[22] http://www.ninhthuan.gov.vn/Pages/Dieu-kien-tu-nhien1.aspx accessed May 31, 2011
[23] http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/hi/country_guides/newsid_9384000/9384374.stm accessed May 31, 2011

Pray for Rain, courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ



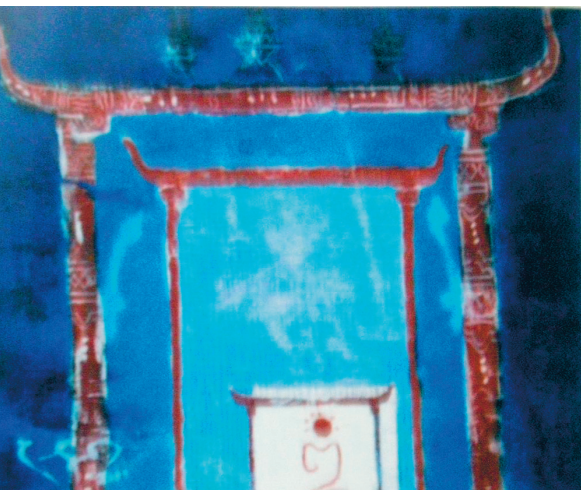
Pray for Rain (altered version), courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ

of the 2-3 times in other areas. Naturally, rain is an important driver of the Cham's livelihood. Cham women, considered to be the source of life, visit the temples to pray for rain. In this context, the painting by Thọ' has two hidden notions of fire (sun) and water (rain) which present the most significant symbol of the Chams: *ahier* and *awal* dualism.

The concepts of *ahier* and *awal*, which can be interpreted as male and female dichotomy, are the foundation of the religion, cosmology, and world view of the Cham people (Nakamura 1999, 2009). One can also see this dualism in Thọ"s paintings, and, most vividly, his terracotta sculptures. After finishing his studies and returning to his native village which is famous for pottery production, he adopted this medium to express his artistic inspirations.[24] He created sculptures expressing the male and female unity, Linga and Yoni or *ahier* and *awal*. His sculptures can be better appreciated through our understanding of the *ahier* and *awal* dichotomy and the Cham's sacred symbol of *Hon Kan*, which consists of two male and two female signifiers.

[24] During the interview in May 2011, Đàng Năng Thọ explained that terracotta was the traditional medium of Cham people, and he was very familiar with it since he grew up watching his mother make earthenwares. He also mentioned that this medium was less expensive, compared to oil paintings. Thọ' never formally studied sculpture at the university, but he was already interested in sculpturing at the university, and often visited sculpture classes to practise.

There is a striking contrast between the work of Chế Thị Kim Trung and Đàng Năng Thọ. Trung's paintings are etic (external approach), descriptive, and painted for the majority Vietnamese (Kinh) viewers, while Đàng Năng Thọ's paintings are emic (internal approach), symbolic, and painted for the Cham people.[25] Thọ's work are filled with coded messages which can be read by people who have knowledge of Champa history and Cham traditions. Comparisons can be made between the paintings of Trung and Thọ through the ceremony called *Rija prong* that is organized by a lineage group. In this ceremony, a female dancer called *Muk Rija* dances to the music sang by a ritual drummer called *Ong Mutho*. There are different types of *Rija prong* ceremonies; those that belong, and others that are associated with the sea group.[26]



Painting the Rija prong, courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ

In Trung's painting of *Rija prong*, a *Muk Rija* sits on a swing, indicating that she painted the *Rija prong* of the sea group.[27] *Muk Rija* is surrounded by musicians[28], and a woman praying. The painting is descriptive, and evokes the atmosphere at *Rija prong*. In contrast, the painting of *Rija prong* by Thọ shows no dancer or musician. He painted only red wooden structures, the sun, and a letter-like figure with a blue background. It is a painting of *Rija prong* of the sea group. The red wooden struc-

[25] During the interview in May 2011, Đàng Năng Thọ explained that he creates his art for his family and the Cham community. He said that he was not concerned about whether he could make a living through his art.
[26] For more information on the historical significance of *Rija prong* ceremony and other *Rija* ceremonies, see Truong Van Mon (2008).
[27] The *Rija prong* of the mountain group does not use a swing, and the duration of their ceremony is shorter than that of the sea group.
[28] Chế Thị Kim Trung painted 5 musicians playing various musical insturments. In the actual Rija prong ritual, only the tumberine-like drum is used.

tures indicate the supporting structure of a swing, and the blue colour background indicates sea. The sun and a letter-like figure indicate a part of the *Hon Kan* symbol marks of the Chams. Also present in this painting is the symbolic dualism of Cham culture. The blue background colour and the frames for the swing where the *Muk Rija* sits symbolize the female realm while the red colour, sun, and the letter-like figure symbolize the male realm.

The paintings by Thọ̀ invite the observer to recognize hidden codes, and exclude those who cannot. Finding the cultural codes hidden in his paintings creates intimacy between the observer and the painter. Sharing the symbolic messages with the painter produces a sense of "in-group" identity.

In interviews, Thọ̀ explained that he only depicted the pre-1975 life of the Chams, which he considers more beautiful than the life of contemporary Cham people. According to him, the former Chams were more religious and respectful. They kept their genuine traditions from ancient times, and they were closer to the gods.[29] During the pre-1975 era, Chams had control over their communities and culture; in a way, they were the masters of their own lives. They could study their own culture together with the French priest, father Moussay, at the Cham cultural centre; Cham students went to their own Po Klong High School; they could form a Cham unit in the military which worked side by side with US soldiers; there were Chams in high-ranking positions in the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities; and so on. However, after 1975, the Chams were placed in the socialist framework, and taught, guided, and controlled to become citizens of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. After the reunification of North and South Vietnam, Cham religious traditions were abandoned under the instruction of the government, which carried out policies to protect the cultures of the ethnic minorities, yet abolished so-called "backward" customs and superstitions. The agrarian lands were collectivized, leading to the demise of many of the Cham rituals relating to rice fields and the agrarian cycle.

[29] Interview with Đàng Năng Thọ̀ in May 2011.

After the introduction of *đôi mó'i* policies, Cham traditions and historical heritage have been "commodified" for the sake of tourism. The more Cham culture is recognized as part of Vietnamese national heritage, the less Cham people can assert their ownership of it. Cham traditional hand-woven textiles are now woven in factories; Cham traditional dances are performed by Vietnamese dancers; the *Kate* ceremony is organised by the prefectural office of culture and sport which "invites" Cham priests to carry out the ceremony in the temple; and Champa vestiges have been renovated and transformed into something else[30] (Shin-e 2001a: 234-236; 2001b: 244 footnotes 12; Tran Ky Phuong 2006: 22-23). The Po Klong Garai temple has unfortunately been Vietnamized.[31]

Portrait of a Cham Balamon priest, courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ

Đàng Năng Thọ"s portrayal of a Cham Balamon priest seems to comment on the current situation of the Cham. In this painting, a priest wearing a white gown stands in front of a red background symbolizing a funeral fire. Behind him in the distance is a Cham village painted with green. The priest was painted facing slightly diagonally[32], giving an impression he is looking towards the side of viewers. The priest is wearing a white gown and a red scarf over his white turban, signifying he is taking a break from his duties in rituals. His wrinkled face expresses discontent or disagreement. It is as if the priest is taking a break from his pre-1975 Cham community to give a disapproving look at the contemporary Chams, and for how they are losing their religious traditions and culture.

While many artists are trying to make a living through their artistic work, Thọ' is not interested in selling his work at all. Many of his

work have been lost or he does not know their whereabouts.[33] Just as well that he values the process of creating art more than the finished work. It is probably because the process of creating art is his requiem to the lost Cham culture and tradition, and to the Cham people who have lost ownership of their culture. He expresses his mourning for the loss of Cham culture and traditions, through paintings that evoke feelings, emotions, thoughts; and turn spiritual values into something tangible.[34]

Conclusion

Dru Gladney, who studied Muslim minority populations in China, maintained that the ethnic identities of majority groups have been constructed in opposition to the image of the ethnic minority. The majority is an unmarked entity that does not possess any unique, exotic or "bizarre" culture or customs in comparison with the ethnic minority people who are decorated with colourful dresses, and possess unusual culture (Gladney 2003: 51-98).

---

[30] Hoa Lai temple is located approximately 14 km north of Phan Rang city along the National Highway No. 1. Originally, it consisted of three towers but the central tower was destroyed by bombardment during the war period. Hoa Lai temple had gone through several renovations. The renovation done by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Ninh Thuận province in mid 2000 caused outcry among the Cham intellectuals. An American writer, Mike High, wrote a short article expressing his concern about poor conservation work on Hoa Lai temple in 2009. However, English newspaper, *Vietnam Times*, rejected his article, and it was never published.

[31] Po Klong Garai temple is one of the most well-known Champa vestiges. The Balamon temples of the Cham people are only opened four times a year. The rest of the time, few Chams visit the temples due to the respect and fear for the power of the gods. The Champa vestiges are now under the care of the provincial museum that belongs to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the province. The Po Klong Garai is now opened all year round for tourists. Inside, the temple is decorated with illumination, and the linga is decorated by the king's attire. There are flowers, incense, a donation box and other offerings, and none of these represent the Cham tradition. Tourism seems to drive the Vietnamization of the Cham's historical and cultural heritage.

[32] Tran Ky Phuong pointed out that the priest's posture, called *tribhanga* (triple fletion), represented the noble people in Champa art tradition as influenced by Hindu art.

[33] Most of his work are now his former wife's property; those exhibited for sale in Hanoi had been kept in his acquaintance's residence in Hanoi. However, his acquaintance has passed away, and Thọ' does not know what happened to his paintings. The work exhibited in India were not returned to Vietnam, and the artist does not know where they are now.

[34] Interview with Tran Ky Phuong, May 2011.

In Vietnam, the ethnic minorities' image as "less progressive", "less civilized", "pre-modern", "nature friendly" provides contrast to the modernized majority Vietnamese (Kinh). Such image of ethnic minorities is favoured by a foreign-oriented art market and tourism industry. Ethnic minorities have become essential to promoting an image of traditional, pre-modern Vietnam. While ethnic minority culture and their images have been co-opted, ethnic minorities have been estranged from their own cultures, and remain subject to government top-down policies. What is good and what is bad for them are decided by the government, leaving the ethnic minorities passive recipients of governmental aid and guidance. Ethnic minorities themselves have adopted the images created by the government about them, and have used state vocabularies to express their own identity. The situation is akin to colonized people having no vocabularies to explain themselves other than the ones given by the colonial masters (A. Loomba 2001: 75). Chế Thị Kim Trung's paintings demonstrate such a situation for the Cham ethnic minorities.

Đàng Năng Thọ"s work, however, indicate a possibility of breaking the spell on ethnic minorities, allowing them to talk about themselves in their own vocabularies. The art market opened up by *đôi mó'i* may provide a platform for the ethnic minorities to express their own identity and thoughts using their own artistic vocabularies in Socialist Vietnam.

Bibliography

Boi Tran, H. (2005). *Vietnamese aesthetics from 1925 onwards*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Connor, W. (1984). *The national question in Marxist-Leninist theory and strategy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Evans, G. (1985). Vietnamese communist anthropology. *Canberra Anthropology*, *8*(1 & 2), 116-147.

Gladney, D. C. (2003). *Dislocating China: Muslims, minorities and other subaltern subjects*. London: University of Chicago Press.

Hickey, G. C. (1982). *Free in the forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese central highlands 1954-1976*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Hickey, G. C. (1993). *Shattered world: Adaptation and survival among Vietnam's highland people during the Vietnam war*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hy Van Luong. (1992). *Revolution in the village: Tradition and transformation in north Vietnam, 1925-1988*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.

Jamieson, N. (1996). The evolving context of contemporary Vietnamese painting. In *Cultural Representation in Transition: New Vietnamese Painting* (pp. 14-27). Bangkok: Siam Society.

Keyes, C. F. (1987). Tribal peoples and the nation-state in mainland Southeast Asia. In B.O. Anderson (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups and Ethnic Minorities: Prospects for the Eighties and Beyond* (Vol. 22, pp. 19-26). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cultural Survival, Inc.

Kleinen, J. (1999). *Facing the future, reviving the past: A study of social change in a northern Vietnamese village*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Kraevskaia, N. (2005). *From nostalgia towards exploration: Essays on contemporary art in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Kim Dong Publishing House.

Kennedy, L. B., & Williams, M. R. (2001). The past without the pain: The manufacture of nostalgia in Vietnam's tourism industry. In Tai Hue-Tam Ho (Ed.), *Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (pp. 135-163). Ewing, NJ: University of California Press.

Malarney, S. K. (2002). *Culture, ritual and revolution in Vietnam*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Nakamura, Rie. (1999). *Cham in Vietnam: Dynamics of ethnicity*. Washington, Seattle: Department of Anthropology.

Nakamura, Rie. (2009). Awar-ahier: Two keys to understanding the cosmology and ethnicity of the Cham people (Ninh Thuân province, Vietnam). In A. Hardy, M. Cucarzi & P. Zolese (Eds.), *My Son* (pp. 78-106). Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

Anthony, R. (1999). *Charting the shape of early modern Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Taylor, N. A. (1999). 'Pho' phai and faux phais: the market for fakes in Vietnam and the appropriation of national symbol. *Ethnos*, *64*(2),

Taylor, N. A. (2007). Vietnamese anti-art and anti-Vietnamese artists: Experimental performance culture in Hà nôi's alternative exhibition spaces. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, *2*(2), 108-128.

Taylor, N. A. (2009). *Painters in Hanoi: An ethnography of Vietnamese art*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

Tran Ky Phuong. (2006). *Cultural resource and heritage issues of historic Champa states in Vietnam: Champa origins, reconfirmed nomenclatures, and preservation of sites, Asia Research Institute working paper series no. 75*. Singapore: Asia Research Institute.

Truong Van Mon. (2008). *Historical relations between Champa and the Malay penninsula during 17th to 19th century: A study on development of Raja Praong ritual* (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Malaya).

Images on pages 1, 5, and 6 courtesy of Nguyen Quang Thang
All other images courtesy of Rie Nakamura

Rie Nakamura is currently a visiting senior lecturer at the School of International Studies at Universiti Utara Malaysia. She studied socio-cultural anthropology at the University of Washington, and received a Ph. D. in 1999. Her thesis was on the Cham ethnic minority people in Vietnam. After graduation, she worked as a programme officer at the Toyota Foundation in Japan, and also as the regional coordinator for the Southeast Asian programme of Open Society Institute (based in Thailand).

Jokasta: transnational performance by Balinese artists

Jokasta is a new creation *(kreasi baru)* by the Balinese choreographer and dancer Ni Madé Pujawati and the Balinese composer I Nengah Susila. It was performed by the London-based Gamelan Lila Cita and Lila Bhawa Dancers in October and November 2012. This article by **Margaret Coldiron** is part of an ongoing study of the transnational and transcultural work of these Southeast Asian artists.

Ni Madé Pujawati in Oleg Tamulilingan (photograph: Mark Hobart)

The *dramatari Jokasta* dance drama is based on the ancient Greek tragedy of *Oedipus Tyrannus,* the story of a Theban king who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. This new interpretation, however, initiates the story from the point of view of Oedipus' wife, Jokasta.

Without question, the myth of Oedipus has had a global impact, not just as a result of Freud's psychological theories, but because its tropes of broken taboos and implacable fate resonate across cultures. However, it may be worth asking whether the drama really has a "universal" appeal, or if the use of such a potent myth from European civilisation is just a clever sales gimmick for today's globalised performance market? Does transcultural and transnational work of this sort strengthen or dilute the elements that are brought together in this way? Can artists from outside a culture bring something to the interpretation of such a potent narrative that can make an old story new, even for the 'parent' culture? Finally, how do diasporic and cosmopolitan artists find accommodation between their own traditions and those of cultures they inhabit, and what adjustments must be made with work presented in different cultural environments?

Ni Madé Pujawati as Candra Kirana (photograph: Catherine Diamond)

Background

Traveling to London since 2003, the Balinese composer I Nengah Susila has been creating new work in collaboration with the British musicians of Gamelan Lila Cita and the London-based Balinese dancer and choreographer Ni Madé Pujawati. The fruits of their collaborations include the story dances *Jayaprana*[1] (2003) and *Candra Kirana*[2] (2006) which have been performed in a variety of contexts in Britain, the United States, and Indonesia (Bali). Their third collaboration, *Jokasta,* had its premiere at the Indonesia Kontemporar Festival in London in October 2012 accompanied by the *gambelan*[3] *semar pegulingan saih pitu,* and was performed again in November 2012 at the London Symphony Orchestra's Jerwood concert hall accompanied by the *gambelan semaradana.*[4] Whereas previous works created by Susila and Pujawati

---

[1] Based on an important Balinese legend of the orphan Jayaprana, who is adopted by the king of Kalianget and brought up at court. He is a loyal servant of the king but when his benefactor sees the beautiful village girl with whom Jayaprana has fallen in love (Layon Sari), he is inflamed with desire and arranges to have Jayaprana killed. When the deed is done, all nature cries out in protest and Layon Sari, prisoner of the court, feels the loss of Jayaprana. When the king tries to take his "prize", she takes his kris and commits suicide.

[2] The story is taken from the adventures of Panji, legendary prince of East Java, and there are a number of variations. In this one, Candra Kirana, princess of Daha, is engaged to be married to Panji, but on their wedding day she learns that he plans to marry someone else. Broken-hearted, she feels at first that she cannot go on, but she musters her strength and decides to dress as a man to follow Panji. She presents herself at the court of Panji's new love, and makes an extraordinary impression. This rival princess falls in love with Candra Kirana in her male garb, and the piece finishes with Candra Kirana haughtily rejecting the princess's advances.

[3] Spelling of gamelan in the Balinese lanaguage. The gamelan is a traditional instrumental ensemble of Indonesia.

[4] This gamelan, named *Semara Wertih* (meaning 'pure, sincere desire') was commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra in 2003, and created by the well-known Balinese gamelan maker I Madé Gabeleran of Blahbatuh, Gianyar, Bali. It is currently the only *gamelan semaradana* in London, and is used as part of the education and community programme for 'LSO Discovery' based at the St. Luke's Music Education Centre.

were based on well-known stories in the Balinese repertoire, *Jokasta* is the first collaboration of these artists using a European story.

The Creators

I Nengah Susila comes from a family of musicians in the village of Batubulan in south Bali. The composer was primarily trained in the traditional pattern, learning by imitation together with members of his family and the gamelan groups of his *banjar.*[5] He initially trained as a school teacher, and only after that did he study music formally at the Institute of Indonesian Arts[6] in Denpasar, but by this time he was already an experienced and accomplished professional musician. In 2003, he was brought to London under the auspices of an Arts and Humanities Research Board project on cross-cultural music and dance, and was commissioned to write a traditional piece for *gamelan semar pegulingan* to be choreographed by Ni Madé Pujawati. It was his first visit to Europe, and he had never studied Western music or notation.

Ni Madé Pujawati was born in the Balinese village of Tegallalang, just north of the so-called 'arts centre' of Ubud, and learned to dance in the traditional manner from childhood. She later studied more formally, first at the high school for performing arts (KOKAR), and later at the Institute of Indonesian Arts, focusing on training for *arja* (sometimes referred to as "Balinese Opera"). Pujawati first visited London in 2000, and worked with Gamelan Lila Cita, and in 2001 she settled in the UK permanently. She is artistic director of Lila Bhawa Balinese Dance Troupe and dancer-in-residence at Gamelan Lila Cita. Since settling in Britain, she has spent a few weeks each year studying Javanese dance in Jogjakarta. Apart

[5] The *banjar* is a local neighbourhood association that deals with the practicalities of activities, including music and dance performances for civic and religious events. Interestingly, Susila lives in the banjar Pagoetan, where Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies did much of their ground-breaking research on Balinese dance and drama in the 1930s.

[6] It was then known as STSI, *Sekola Tinggi Seni Indonesia.*

from her regular performances of Balinese dance for Lila Cita, she also performs with Javanese gamelans throughout the UK and Europe. Since 2007, Pujawati has been working with the London-born Singaporean choreographer Hi Ching as well as the Foundation for Indian Performing Arts, performing in contemporary pieces with a range of other Asian dancers and in a number of dance styles.

Gamelan Lila Cita is the UK's most significant Balinese gamelan ensemble, which began playing Balinese *gambelan angklung* called *Kembang Kirang*[7] in 1992, and changed its name when it acquired a *gambelan gong kebyar* in 1999. This ensemble of musicians has grown and developed over the past twenty years, drawing new members from the gamelan music courses at the School of Oriental and African Studies, City University, and from the Community Gamelan group at the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO)'s St. Luke's education and outreach centre. The group performs regularly on four different gamelans: the eponymous 5-tone *gong kebyar,* the 4-tone *angklung*, the LSO's 7-tone *semaradana*, the traditional and courtly *semar pegulingan saih pitu*, for which the pieces discussed here were initially composed. In 2006, the group was invited to perform at the Bali Arts Festival, and presented a programme that included the first two collaborations between Susila and Pujawati (*Jayaprana* and *Candra Kirana*).

At the beginning, only a few members of Lila Cita had ever been to Bali, and most were musicians entirely rooted in Western music and notation. However, since collaborations with Susila began in 2003, several Lila Cita members have gone to study gamelan music in Bali either on *dharmasiswa* scholarships (non-degree programmes) sponsored by the Indonesian government, or on postgraduate field research. The group's repertoire is wide-ranging, from traditional 'classics' of court and temple music and *gong kebyar* to new creations,

[7] The name means, literally, missing flower, since this traditional Balinese *angklung* has only four tones, rather than the five tones of the standard *slendro* scale.

both by Susila and by British composers[8] as well as arrangements of contemporary Western music, notably John Adams' *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine.*

So, although *Jokasta* was created by two Balinese artists, both were working outside Bali in a European milieu, and their aim was to create something that would deal with a classic story accessible to a non-Balinese audience. Yet *Jokasta* is not, strictly speaking, an 'intercultural work, if we understand 'intercultural' by Patrice Pavis' (1996) definition as "hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas," which usually constitute the adaptation or appropriation of non-Western forms by mostly western artists for Western audiences.[9] The author suggests instead that this piece falls more naturally under the category of the *transcultural*, which, by Pavis' definition, "transcends particular cultures on behalf of a universality of the human condition" (Pavis 1996, p. 6). The piece is, without question, cast in a thoroughly Balinese style but has at its heart a human story that is comprehensible across cultures.

Ni Madé Pujawati and Melanie Knowles in Jayaprana at the Bali Arts Festival (Pesta Kesenian Bali) 2006 (photograph: Catherine Diamond)

[8] The composer Nye Parry has been commissioned to create two pieces: *Suara Lila Cita,* which has been performed in the UK and at the Bali Arts Festival, and *On Bunhill Row,* for gamelan and Western instruments (harp, flute and viola, inspired by the Debussy Trio). Andy Channing, leader of the group, arranged his piece "Pig in the Kraton" for both *gong kebyar* and *semar pegulingan,* and it proves a perennial favourite.

[9] Pavis' examples include works by Julie Taylor and John Emigh, that adapt the Balinese traditions in interpreting Western stories for American audiences (Pavis 1996: 8).

Development

Jokasta took a long time in development. Susila and Pujawati first began discussing a collaboration on the subject of the Oedipus story after they had both taken part in *Prabu Adipusengara*, an adaptation of the Oedipus story in the style of Balinese *arja* (a local genre of dance drama) by the dancer and choreographer I Wayan Dibia[10] that toured northeastern United States in 2006, and was subsequently performed in Bali in 2007. Susila's new piece on the subject was composed during his London residency in early 2008, but the choreography only emerged in the autumn of 2012, for reasons that will be discussed below. Since neither Pujawati nor Susila knew *Oedipus* from the Greek original, their initial conceptualisation of the story was derived almost entirely from Professor Dibia's adaptation. Dibia, on the other hand, was very familiar with Sophocles' tragedy, which he first encountered while a student at UCLA in the early 1980s in an undergraduate survey course he took to help him to become familiar with the Western theatre repertoire.[11] A comparison of Sophocles' play and Dibia's adaptation may help to explain the interpretive choices taken in the development of *Jokasta*.

Oedipus blinds himself (photograph: Margaret Coldiron)

Oedipus and Adipusengara

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrrannus* is a seminal text in European dramatic literature. In it, the tyrant Oedipus, who has saved Thebes from the curse of the Sphinx, consults an oracle to find the cause of the plague that is devastating the city. The oracle reports that the plague can be stopped

[10] Professor Dibia is a former rector and currently senior professor of performing arts at Institute Seni Indonesia in Denpasar.
[11] Dibia 2012, p. 479.

only if the murderer of the former king, Laius, is revealed. Oedipus vows to expose the culprit, but through the course of the play discovers that he, himself, is the murderer.[12] Just as was predicted by an oracle at his birth, he has unwittingly murdered his father and married his mother. Jokasta, his wife, realises the truth before Oedipus does and hangs herself. When Oedipus at last understands that he has not escaped his fate, he blinds himself and departs into exile.

In *Prabu Adipusengara,* Dibia has made a number of changes in the way the story is told in order to make it fit the traditional *arja* style, but he also departs from traditional *arja* by leaving out some characters that are usually considered central to the form.[13] Names of characters and locations were also changed to make them seem more familiar to Balinese audiences[14] and the structure of the scenario followed the pattern of Balinese *arja*, rather than Greek tragedy. Thus, whereas Sophocles' play concentrates on the protagonist, Oedipus, the construction of traditional *arja* required that the first scene feature the *galuh* (refined princess) in conversation with the *condong*, her lady-in-waiting. So the *condong* appears first expressing her concern about her mistress's distress. Jokasta, here

---

[12] The story of Oedipus' past is revealed by two messengers, the second a shepherd. The first messenger comes from Corinth to report that Oedipus has become king of that land upon the death of Polybus, whom Oedipus believed was his father. However, the messenger says that Oedipus was not the natural son of Polybus but was instead found on the mountainside with his ankles pierced and adopted by the king. The shepherd, who is the second messenger, reveals that he was given that child by Laius and Jokasta to expose on Mount Kithairon, but took pity on him and gave him to his colleague from Corinth. Thus Oedipus comes to realise that the oracle he and his real parents tried to avoid has come to pass. He murdered King Laius on the road to Thebes and, on winning the throne and the queen, married his own mother.

[13] "There are only nine characters as opposed to the traditional twelve. I omitted the Mother Queen, her servant, and her daughter the ugly princess. There are many jokes associated with these characters and by cutting them [out] I hoped to intensify the tragedy." (Dibia quoted in Kremer 2007, p. 11).

[14] The city of Thebes is called Tibuwana in this version; the seer Tiresias becomes Brahmana Tulusarsa; and Kreon, brother of Jokasta, is called Patih Kriyangga. (Kremer, 2007 pp. 6-8)

called Diah Yadnyawati,[15] appears lamenting "the changes that have taken place in the kingdom and in the palace, where the king seems transformed from his former calm and wise self and has taken to being suspicious" (Kremer 2007, p. 6). This sombre opening is unusual for *arja*, but Dibia wanted to create the atmosphere of tragedy from the outset. Traditionally, the *galuh* sings in *kawi,* a form of Javanised Sanskrit not widely comprehensible to ordinary Balinese, and her words are translated/paraphrased for the audience by the *condong.* On the American tour, however, Pujawati sang an English translation of the *galuh's* song, making the drama (and the character) more comprehensible to the local audience (Pujawati 2012).

When the *galuh* and *condong* exit, the following scene brings on Penasar Kelihan and Penasar Cenikan, two palace servants (acting as storytellers in Balinese traditional dance drama), who are "fulfilling the role of the chorus from Sophocles" (Kremer 2007, p. 7). They sing of the relationship between the king, Prabu Adipusengara, and his wife:

> "King Adhipusengara and Queen Yadhyawati are entering their bedroom to show their affection for each other. They are like the gods Ratih and Semara. [...] The queen is smiling at the king and her slim body is shaking. Her soft glances are like a light cloud waiting for the moon to strike its heart" (Kremer 2007, pp. 6-7).

After the two palace servants, *Penasars*, have discussed the problems facing Thebes, the *mantri buduh,* Prabu Adipusengara[16] enters. In traditional *arja*, this character is something of a figure of fun, but this would not be appropriate to a tragedy, as Dibia explained:

---

[15] "Dibia chose the name Diah Yadnyawati as it means a woman who likes to make sacrifices, and has the ability to see problems in life. Her name also indicates that she is interested in the occult." (Kremer, 2007, p. 6) The word yadnya refers to life-cycle rituals in Balinese Hindu Buddhist religious practice.

[16] The name, like that of Diah Yadnyawati, gives an indication of the character and his place in the story: "Prabu means king, Adhi means great, and Pusengara means chaotic life." (Kremer 2007, p. 7) Dibia sought to make the names meaningful for a Balinese audience but recognisable for an international audience as well. (Kremer 2007, p. 10)

> "Traditionally the king is crazy and coarse but that would not serve the text in *Adhipusengara*. So, the *Penasars* were not able to make fools of the king but needed to treat him with more dignity" (quoted in Kremer 2007, p. 11).

Thus Prabu Adipusengara is given an interpretation more in keeping with a Greek tragic figure, but audiences unfamiliar with the conventions of *arja* would be surprised to see that the role is taken by a woman, which is a significant departure from the conventional staging of Greek tragedy.

Dibia preserves the role of Tiresias, the seer, whose part is pivotal in Sophocles' play, but in Dibia's version he has many comic moments related to his blindness, very much in keeping with traditional *arja*, but unusual in Greek tragedy.[17] The role of Kreon, brother of Jokasta, whom Oedipus accuses of trying to de-stablilise his rule, is given to the *mantri manis* (literally 'sweet prince' and also played by a woman). However, rather than being in opposition to the *mantri buduh* (as would be the case in a standard *arja* performance) here the character functions as *Patih* or Prime Minister and advisor to the king. The roles of the messengers and shepherds are combined into a single character but apart from these deviations in character types and order of events, the plot of *Prabu Adipusengara* follows that of the Greek original.

Interestingly, Dibia's decision to adapt Sophocles' play was not taken to appeal to an American audience with a classic Western text (and it must be admitted that Greek tragedy is rarely a crowd-puller). Dibia's interest in the play had to do with its larger issues, beyond the taboos of incest and patricide, focusing instead on the protagonist's pursuit of truth and justice, which he hoped would prove meaningful for his Balinese audience.

"There are many themes in the Greek drama, such as the power of the gods and man's ability to consult them, karma, fate, oracles, going to a healer and plague that are recognizable to Balinese audiences as they

---

[17] "Cokorda Raka Tisnu plays Tuluarsa with some comic moments related to his blindness. He falls over one *Penasar*, and nearly trips over the other until the *Penasar* points him toward the curtain for his exit." (Kremer 2007, p. 8)

appear in Balinese stories. This familiarity made it an easy choice to adapt *Oedipus* to Balinese opera as I was fairly certain the play would resonate with the audience. I also see *Oedipus* as a play about discovery and truth. These are crucial topics of concern that Indonesia is grappling with today. People speak about truth but are hiding something under a nice exterior. Politicians hide facts and yet blame others for not doing the right job. Oedipus proclaims he will make the person who is responsible for the plague pay. When he discovers his own guilt he has no choice but to punish himself and take his eyeballs out. It is rare in modern life that someone chooses to pay for his mistakes or the wrong doing that endangers his country. I was compelled to share this story with our constituency to point out corruption. I hoped the story would function as a therapy for social life. I was also intrigued to make a new story for the traditional classical form of *arja*." (Quoted in Kremer 2007, p. 10)

The political dimensions of this interpretation are unlikely to have been apparent to its American audience, especially since it was marketed primarily as a rare opportunity to encounter Balinese *arja* performance, rather than as an intercultural theatrical event. For the American tour of *Prabu Adipusengara,* Ni Madé Pujawati played Diah Yadnyawati/Jokasta, and Susila took the role of Penasar Cenikan. The re-ordering of events in Dibia's version with its initial emphasis on the Queen's distress may account for the shift in focus from Oedipus to Jokasta in the work by Susila and Pujawati. Although they did not share Dibia's sense of the contemporary political resonances of the story, both connected with the human tragedy of well-meaning individuals who become victims of fate.

Developing *Jokasta*

When Susila arrived in London in January 2008, he wanted to create a new dance piece for Lila Cita and Lila Bhawa that would be different from the usual *semar pegulingan* repertoire yet would still adhere to classical principles (Coldiron and Jimenez 2008, p. 8). He was interested in trying his hand at Western drama and settled on *Oedipus* as a suitable subject. The story of the original Greek drama was outlined to him, and he set to

work. During much of this period, Pujawati was visiting her family in Bali, so the two discussed aspects of the construction of the piece via e-mail. Since Pujawati was not in a position to hear the music as the composition began to unfold, she was unable to exercise any artistic or editorial direction regarding the final product, as she had done in previous collaborations with Susila. As a result, the musical composition presented certain choreographic challenges that could not be immediately resolved. The difficulty was finding a choreographic mode for the piece that would be appropriate for the character of Jokasta, "an older, but still young-looking woman" (Pujawati 2012). Moreover, at the time the Lila Bhawa troupe had no male dancers and, although it is typical for young men to be played by cross-dressing female dancers, Pujawati felt strongly that the nature of the story required an attractive young man to play the role of Oedipus. After a great deal of experimentation, she determined that

Oedipus (I Ketut Asmara) sees Jokasta (Ni Madé Pujawati) (photograph: Margaret Coldiron)

the movement vocabulary of *oleg tamulilingan*[18] would fit best: "because Jokasta is a 'sexy woman' and *oleg* movements are sexy in the movements of hips and torso." Once the problem of finding the right movement vocabulary and a dancer to play Oedipus had been overcome, the rest of the choreography developed quickly.[19]

The Music and the Story

Traditional Balinese music generally follows a tripartite structure:

> "The classical three-movement form of a musical composition is likened to the human body: its opening section (*kawitan*) is considered to be the head, its middle section (*pangawak*) the torso or 'main body,' and the final section (*pangacet*) the feet" (Gold 2005, p. 126).

In this form, the opening section is short and quick; the main body of the piece, *pangawak*, is slower, metrically regular and may develop melodies and themes; the final section is usually fast, with increasing speed as it moves to the climax and ends (Gold 2005, p. 127). However, in *kreasi baru* the structure can "become expanded to four or five sections. Each section has become extended [...] with extensive transitional passages" (Gold 2005, p. 141), which is the case with Susila's *Jokasta.* The first section follows a fairly conventional pattern for *kawitan* in dance pieces, and as the piece develops, the conventional structure gives way to some startling innovations that heighten the drama. There are five clear sections, and the final movement, after Oedipus is blinded, is slow and dream-like.

---

[18] Oleg Tamulilingan is a rare duet for a male and a female dancer, and was conceived entirely to appeal to Western audiences. It was created for a 1952 tour of Balinese musicians and dancers to Britain and the US. See Bandem and de Boer 1995, p. 79 and Coast 1953 pp. 100-110.

[19] The role of Jokasta was originally danced by Melanie Montcrieff, a trained dancer in her early 40s, who has studied Balinese and Javanese dance since the early 1990s, and Oedipus was danced by Pujawati's brother, I Ketut Asmara who is in his early 30s. This balance of ages seemed appropriate to Pujawati, though she felt that Oedipus should look very obviously younger, perhaps in his late teens. Further biographical details are available at http://www.lilacita.com/2005/09/member-profiles.html

Pujawati's experience in the role of Jokasta/Diah Yadnyawati undoubtedly influenced the way she approached the story when she choreographed the piece (Pujawati 2012). She, like Dibia, felt that "it was necessary that Queen Jocasta move and look like a woman who can dominate or manipulate a king. She needed to appear older or at least the same age as the king." (Dibia, quoted in Kremer 2007, p. 11). However, *Prabu Adipusengara* was not the only story to influence Pujawati's interpretation. She was also struck by the similarity of the story to the Indonesian film *Sangkuriang,* based on a Sundanese legend. Here is how Pujawati described the plot to the author:

Romance between Oedipus (I Ketut Asmara) and Jokasta (Ni Madé Pujawati) (photograph: Margaret Coldiron)

"It's a mother and son story. She is a princess, pregnant by *'orang biasa'* [a commoner]. Her father, the king, exiles her to the forest and curses her lover to transform into a dog. The woman and dog live happily together and the child, when born, doesn't know that the dog is his father. When out hunting wild boar one day, the boy aimed at the boar but accidentally killed the dog. The boy brings the dog's heart home and the mother becomes angry, hits him on the head and cuts him. The boy runs away. Because she eats no meat, the mother remains very young-looking. Eventually a man comes into the forest, meets her and they are attracted to one another. One day, when he is asleep in her lap, she is stroking his hair [and] she finds the scar on his head. She asks him where it came from and he explains that his mother hit him, so she realizes this is her son. She doesn't reveal her secret but tells him that she will marry him only if he is able to build a boat between sunset and sunrise. She secretly observes him and is alarmed to see that he has nearly completed the boat before dawn so she sets the grass on fire and this somehow upsets his building and he is unable to finish. The boat

becomes Tangkuban Perahu – a mountain with what looks like an overturned boat at the top" (Pujawati 2012).[20]

This essential element of recognition, which utterly transforms the relationship, was central to Pujawati's vision of the piece. She conceived of the dance as a simple duet, omitting all the other characters besides Jokasta and Oedipus, and focusing only on their relationship. Oedipus as king or tyrant, his *hubris*, and any political or social issues that Sophocles' text might touch upon are set aside; *Jokasta* became a story of love and loss. However, this narrow focus left some gaps in the storytelling. These might not present difficulties for a Balinese audience, who are accustomed to sudden jumps of time and place in traditional dance-dramas because the general outline of traditional stories are already very familiar; however, for a European audience, to tell the story of Oedipus and Jokasta without any additional characters requires finding some physical sign by which Jokasta could recognise her son. The scar that Oedipus bears from his exposure on the mountain (Oedipus literally means 'pierced foot') served this purpose perfectly in this dance-drama. In Pujawati's interpretation, Jokasta has a disturbing dream about her lost child, and when she wakes she rather idly looks for a distinguishing mark on the body of her husband, but when she sees it she is horrified. She realises in an instant that this is her son, and the enormity of her unwitting sin drives her to suicide.

Structure of the Dance Drama

The contour of the story is determined by the structure of the music, and this piece falls into five clearly-defined sections:

1. *Papeson:* After a brief bright and quick *kawitan,* the tempo slows slightly and follows a steady rhythm. This section establishes the dance style. In classical *legong* (a popular form of Balinese dance characterized by intricate finger movements, complicated footwork,

[20] Pujawati's description is at odds with both the film and the legend, but her own remembered version of the story is important because it is this – however inaccurate – that influenced the development of Jokasta. The film is viewable on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b2WadOzHuY.

and expressive gestures and facial expressions), the first section is pure dance with no relationship to the plot, but in this piece it is used to establish Jokasta's character and begins her story: she is a beautiful and refined woman waiting for her husband's return. At the end of this section, Jokasta receives word that her husband (Liaus) has been killed on the road home, and there is a transition to a slower tempo.

2. *Pangawak* (slow movement): Jokasta grieves for her husband. Oedipus enters and observes Jokasta for a time before there is a transition to a brighter, faster tempo.

3. *Pangacet* ('romance'): Oedipus woos Jokasta. At first, she rejects his advances, but is gradually won over. This section has a bright, quick tempo.

4. This is a section in a ***kreasi baru*** where material can be added to suit the story, and there is some freedom for both composition and choreography. In this piece, the material moves through several moods in succession.

   - Jokasta and Oedipus are asleep, the music is slow, calm, and steady but shortly, Jokasta awakes from a disturbing dream, and rises.

   - She looks at Oedipus' feet, sees the marks where his feet were bound, and remembers her first child, sent to be exposed on the mountain. She realises that this is her child, now grown. At first, she tries to deny what she has seen but looks again and knows it to be true.

   - She becomes agitated as the tempo of the music increases. She writes a suicide note, and then stabs herself. The music breaks and resumes at a slow, but rapidly accelerating tempo.

   - Oedipus wakes and looks for his wife. He rises, finds the suicide note, and is distraught. The music accelerates to a very quick pace as he pulls out his *kris* (dagger associated with cultural symbols), and uses it to slash his eyes. The music builds to a climax.

5. Conclusion: The mood breaks, the tempo of the music slows dramatically with a quiet, gentle, and steady theme as Oedipus rises, becomes aware of his blindness, finds a stick to help guide him as he slowly exits.

The final section presents the greatest departure from standard Balinese dance compositions. Normally, the last section of a dance piece accelerates to a very brisk tempo for a spectacular and startling finale, but here the music actually slows down; there is a delicate melody but the mood is somber, and the piece finishes with a *ritardando* (gradual slowing of tempo) and a quiet gong stroke. When the piece was being composed, it was suggested that some narration might be inserted at this point, to be taken from the final chorus of the play:

> There goes Oedipus–
> he was the man who was able
> to answer the riddle proposed by the Sphinx.
> Mighty Oedipus–
> he was an object of envy
> to all for his fortune and fame.
> There goes Oedipus–
> proof that none of us mortals
> can truly be thought of as happy
> until he is granted deliverance from life,
> until he is dead
> and must suffer no more (Berkowitz and Brunner 1970, p. 33)

Once the choreography had been completed, however, this was felt to be unnecessary and intrusive. The poignancy of Oedipus' slow and halting exit with the quiet accompaniment of the *semar pegulingan* was sufficiently moving that the addition of text seemed superfluous.

The piece was costumed in a fashion that is intended to indicate *Bali kuno* (old/ancient Bali) so that Jokasta wears an elaborate *kain* (clothe) with a train that is in the style of Javanese *bedaya* dancers. There is no attempt to create a sense of ancient Greece – the tragedy has become a Balinese love story.

Transcultural Performance

The author contends that these re-interpretations of the Oedipus story do not diminish the original, but stand on their own as works of art in their own right. American audiences for *Prabu Adipusengara* were somewhat surprised by the comic elements that emerged when Greek tragedy was reconfigured as *arja.* The Balinese performers also had to make adjustments to working with slightly altered character behaviours, and limiting their improvisation, which is usually an important element of *arja* performance. Dibia changed elements of the performance to suit the different audiences encountered in the US and in Bali, and did not regard this as an artistic compromise, but rather as a creative challenge (Kremer 2007, p. 5). Pujawati's piece was accepted by both Indonesian and British audiences (at Indonesia Kontemporar and St. Luke's respectively) as a Balinese story dance. Those familiar with the Sophocles' play were interested in the shift of focus from Oedipus to Jokasta, and appreciated seeing the story in a new light. The story itself appeared to have equivalent appeal for both Balinese and western audiences.

Since the realm of "intercultural performance" has become such contested territory, the author prefers to characterise these two interpretations of this ancient Greek story as "transcultural" works. Richard Slimbach asserts that "transculturalism is rooted in the quest to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders" (Slimbach 2005, p. 206), and while both *Prabu Adipusengara* and *Jokasta* are cast in definitively Balinese modes of performance, they are inspired by and draw on themes in the Greek original that these two very different cultures share. The creators of these works and those who performed in them, whatever their nationality or cultural roots, were able to engage with these projects unhindered by confusion or prejudice in spite of the mix of cultural materials. Even a superficial examination of the history of performance will reveal that cultural borrowing and exchange have always been part of the artist's toolbox, so perhaps the time has come to acknowledge that transculturalism and transnationalism are not exceptional, but an increasingly natural mode for today's increasingly globalised world.

References

Bandem, I., & De Boer, F. (1995). Balinese Dance in Transition: *Kaja and Kelod*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Berkowitz, L., & F. Brunner, T. (1970). *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Sophocles). New York: WW Norton and Company.

Coast, J. (1953). *Dancers of Bali*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Coldiron, M., & Jimenez, M. (n.d.). *Kreasi Baru* for London Audiences: The Collaborations of I Nengah Susila and Ni Madé Pujawati with Gamelan Lila Cita. In The conference of the Association for Southeast Asian Studies UK.

World-Renowned Balinese Artists to Present Opera Inspired by 'Oedipus Rex' at Holy Cross. (2006, April 5). Retrieved April 5, 2006, from http://news.holycross.edu/blog/2006/04/05/world-renowned-balinese-artists-to-present-opera-inspired-by-'oedipus-rex'-at-holy-cross/

Dibia, I. (2012). Revitalizing Arja in Globalized Bali. *Asian Theatre Journal, 29*(2), 466-494.

Dibia, I., & Ballinger, R. (2004). *Balinese Dance, Drama and Music* (Periplus ed.). Singapore: Periplus Editions.

Gold, L. (2005). *Music in Bali: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pavis, P. (Ed.). (1996). *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London: Routledge.

Slimbach, R. (2005). The Transcultural Journey. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 11, 205-230.

Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism. Ethnic and Racial Studies, *22*(2). Retrieved from http:///www.transcomm.ox.ac.ukworking papers/conceiving.PDF

Pujawati, Ni Madé, Interviews, November and December 2012.

Dr Margaret Coldiron is a theatre director, performer, teacher, and a specialist in Asian performance and masks. She is currently Deputy Head of the BA in World Performance at East 15 Acting School/University of Essex, and is the Associate Director of Thiasos, a theatre company specialising in intercultural productions of ancient Greek plays. Dr Coldiron performs Balinese music and dance with Gamelan Lila Cita and Lila Bhawa Indonesian Dance Troupe, and her numerous publications include: *Trance and Transformation of the Masked Actor in Japanese Noh and Balinese Dance Drama* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2004) as well as articles and reviews in *Asian Theatre Journal, New Theatre Quarterly, Indonesia and the Malay World,* and *Women & Performance.*

Thai Puppet Performance: New Idioms and Reinterpreting Traditions

Mural painting (at Temple of the Reclining Buddha, Bangkok) depicting traditional Hun performance

Puppet performance used to be among the most popular forms of entertainment in the central part of Thailand. However, with the introduction of new forms of entertainment and the changing Thai society, its popularity declined. There has been interest in traditional puppet theatre and new performance idioms in recent years. In this article, **Jirayudh Sinthupahan** discusses contemporary tradition-based practices of puppet theatre and the efforts of practitioners to preserve and develop the performance form.

Puppet theatre once held a very special place in Thai culture. A puppet performance was not merely theatrical entertainment; it also formed a part of ritual and folklore that were once embedded in the Thai way of

life. Since the changes in Thai political order in the 1930s, the popularity decreased, and the art form almost disappeared from public consciousness. It was only recently that a new surge of interest in this traditional theatrical form began to emerge.

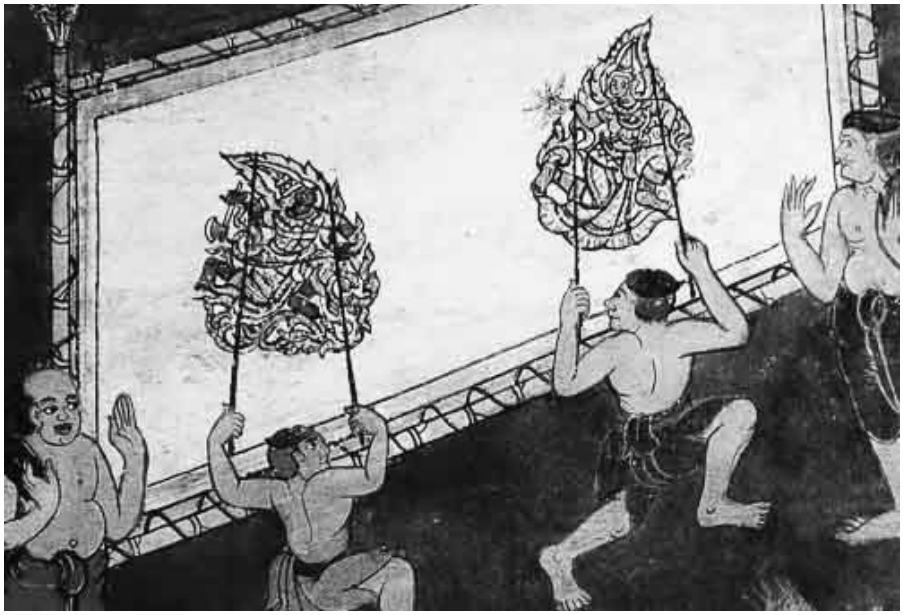
Traditional Puppet Theatre and Tradition-based Practices

Generally, there are two forms of traditional Thai puppet theatre – *nang* or shadow puppet and *hun* or doll puppet. *Nang* is considered to be the oldest form of Thai theatre. The word *nang* literally means 'skin' or 'hide'. As a theatrical form, it denotes a puppet performance that employs a set of two-dimensional hide-figures in its enactment of dramatic stories. *Hun* can be translated as 'body', 'model' or 'sculpture', and therefore refers to puppet performance with the use of three-dimensional figures. These two puppet forms can also be classified further into several sub-forms, in terms of differences in technical and performance conventions as shown in the following table.

Forms and sub-forms of Thai puppet theatre

Nang – Shadow puppet	*Hun* – Figure puppet
Nang Yai - large shadow puppet performed in front of the screen in Central Thailand	*Hun Luang* - large figure puppet of the royal court
Nang Talung - small shadow puppet performance of Southern parts of Thailand	*Hun Lek* - miniature-sized figure puppet of the royal court
Nang Pramotai - small shadow puppet performance of the northeastern part of Thailand	*Hun Krabok* - small to medium-sized puppet of popular entertainment
	Hun Lakorn Lek - *bunraku* type puppet of popular entertainment

Traditionally, the arts and crafts of puppet theatre were transmitted within a family of puppeteers with few changes over the generations. Thus, the term 'traditional puppet theatre' will be used here to refer to the puppeteer practice associated with this form of training. On the other



Mural painting (at Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok) depicting traditional Nang Yai performance

hand, the term 'tradition-based puppet theatre' will be used specifically to refer to the practice of puppeteers who came from social and educational backgrounds different to traditional puppeteers'. This article focusses on contemporary tradition-based practices of *nang yai* and *hun* performance.

Nang Yai in the Changing Thai Socio-cultural Context

Nang Yai, or simply *nang*, were popular when the city of Ayudhya was the royal seat of a newly founded kingdom of the same name in the fourteenth century. It is believed that *nang yai* was a form of visual communication to promulgate the idea of the demigod monarch among its ethnically diverse population. As a result, *nang yai* is considered to be a ritualistic performance rather than a form of entertainment. All of its existing repertoires are strictly derived from the Ramayana epic. Although two new plays based on Buddhist themes were commissioned in the mid seventeenth century, there has been no evidence that they have ever been performed.

The production of *nang yai* is a colossal and costly venture. A normal sized puppet is about 2 metres in height, and weighs around 5 kilogrammes. Each one takes 3 to 4 months to make. There is no record of the cost

of a puppet in the past (today, a simple puppet may cost around 600 US dollars). For each episode of the Ramayana that lasted between two and three hours, 150 or more puppets were normally required. Additionally, the staging of a performance also used to involve compulsory military recruitment and a large work force connected to royal patronage. With the introduction of Western-style military training in late nineteenth century and the dissolution of absolute monarchy in 1931, it is not a surprise that *nang yai* lost its significance and popularity in Thai society. After many decades of the puppets being left to decay in storage, a group of aging puppeteers from Wat Khanon temple began reviving the *nang yai* performance in the early 1980s. Now, there are three *nang yai* troupes actively performing across the central plain region. They are Wat Khanon temple troupe in Ratchaburi province, Wat Bann Don temple troupe in Rayong province, and Wat Sawang-arom temple troupe in Singhaburi province.

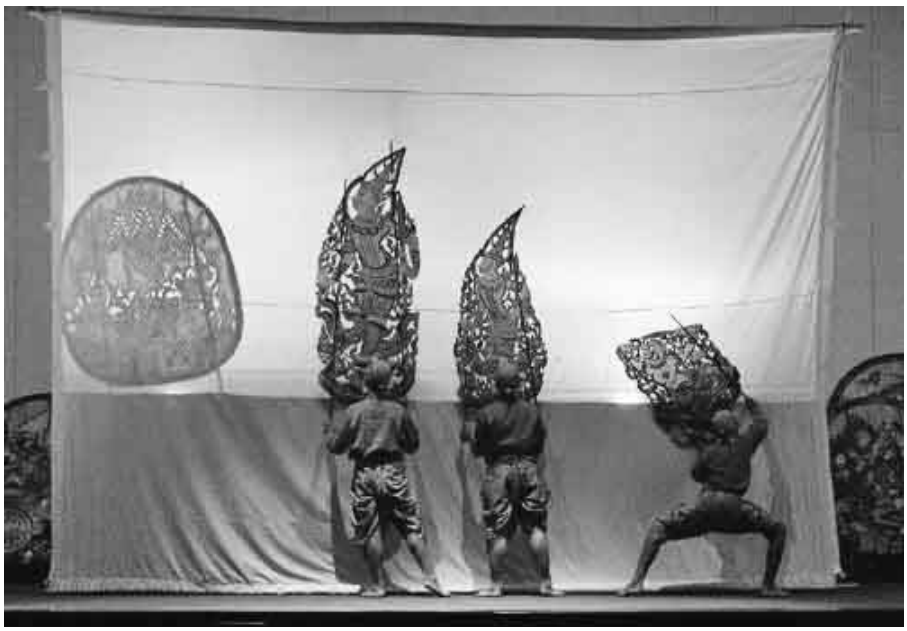
One of the major challenges of restoring *nang yai* to its proper glorious state is clearly the issue of work force. It is not easy to recruit and train new generations of puppeteers in a modern Thailand. In traditional Thai society, Buddhist temples were the centre of education and the community. Since the secularization of the Thai education system in the late nineteenth century, this responsibility has been transferred to the Ministry of Education, whose mission is to raise the nation's literacy level and to prepare the labour force for its economic production. Although many schools are still located within the monastery compound, the temple has lost its intellectual along with administrative influence over the school. Of the three monasteries, only Wat Khanon has a school attached to it, and all of its performers are students attending the school. Wat Baan Don and Wat Sawang-arom have no school attached to the temple. Hence, their performers are students from other schools in the area. The temple, therefore, need to convince the schools and parents that *nang yai* training will not interfere with, but will complement their education. In place of compulsory recruitment, the students are persuaded to voluntarily join the troupes at the age of 7 or 8. They will attend daily training session in the evening, and during the weekend as a part of their extracurricular activities. Most performers remain with the troupes until they leave schools at 17 or 19 years old. Only a few of them have been able to stay on to continue training and performing. Accordingly, the troupes'

A scene from Nang Yai performance at Wat Khanon, Ratchaburi

inclination to develop fully trained performers and a new creation of full-scale repertoire remains quite a challenge.

Another challenge for the troupes is adapting the *nang yai* performance to the changing aesthetic sensibility of the modern audience. Due to its rigid performance structure and conventions, *nang yai* has never been an inherently enjoyable spectacle (Eiwsriwong 1995). With the emphasis on the beauty of court-style poetry along with *nhaa phat* (a set of musical modes and tightly choreographed movements for specific moods and character types), *nang yai* was congenial to aristocrats who were trained to appreciate such refinements. The commoner, on the other hand, would probably enjoy *nang yai* for its spectacular staging and battle-like procession; but as P. Posakrishna (cited in Nawigamune 2003) wrote in 1990, the *nang yai* performance was generally "too slow and too repetitive. The audience will be fascinated at first, but will gradually find the performance couldn't keep up with their own pace."

With regard to performance structure, the three *nang yai* troupes drastically cut the full-length performance (that usually lasted all night) to between one and three hours. However, they still retain some of the rigid conventions; for example, the lengthy "*berk nhaa pra*" (the invocation of deities) and "*chab ling huakam*" (catching monkeys at dusk) that mark the beginning of the performance, and the rule that requires the story to reach its conclusion. In other areas of performance, each temple has adopted its own approaches to entertaining audiences, which resulted in the creation of distinctive performance styles. Wat Khanon troupe has gone for a more conservative approach, and sought collaboration with educational and art institutions in conducting a number of experiments and research projects to reinstate the authenticity of the art. As a result, Wat Khanon has been able to reproduce *nang* puppets with old construction techniques and to re-imagine *nang yai* performance in an archaic style. Wat Khanon's performance style is considered more vigorous and masculine than those of the other two troupes, and is delivered by male performers playing female roles. Wat Khanon has not trained any female performers or let them touch the puppets. This is due to the belief that *nang yai* is of Hindu origin, and that the puppets are inscribed with male sacred power. In this matter, Wat Sawang-arom holds a similar approach to Wat Khanon's even though the troupe is generally



A scene from Nang Yai at Wat Baan Don, Rayong

more open towards experimentation. Wat Baan Don, on the other hand, possesses a different attitude towards the issue, and has trained female performers for some years. The temple has also collaborated with contemporary theatre practitioners such as Patravadi Meejudhon who brought in contemporary staging techniques and the use of the method in *khon* dance drama training to train the puppeteers.

Modern staging of Nang Yai by the Wat Baan Don troupe

The most difficult challenge to the *nang yai* troupes is probably the issue concerning performance outlet and patronage. Traditionally, *nang yai* would be engaged as a part of important festivities and funerals sponsored by the state or a wealthy person; and it would be staged free of charge in an open public space such as temple grounds. Nowadays, the troupes get less of this form of engagement as *nang yai* began to lose its meaning in Thai society, and its traditional patronage system gradually disappeared. Accordingly, the troupes have had to find new performance outlets and new form of patronage in different contexts. One form of patronage comes through the Tourism Authority of Thailand, who often engages the troupes to perform during state occasions and to represent the country at numerous international events. Another form of patronage comes as occasional financial grants from the local government or charitable foun-

dations. The funds were used by the troupes to set up a museum and a small permanent theatre. Every Saturday, the troupes will put on a special performance that includes demonstrations and lectures for students and tourists. Increasingly, donations from these visitors become essential to the livelihood of the troupes and the museum.

Diverse Practices of Contemporary *Hun* Performance

In contrast to the ritualistic nature of *nang yai, hun* (figure puppet) has always been a more popular form of entertainment. With its less strict performance conventions, this puppet form has always been open to new elements and changes. Throughout its history, diverse forms of *hun* have constantly been conceived and reinvented. Yet, there has been very little material evidence of these diverse practices left to us. This is probably due to the belief that a puppet carries a trace of its owner's soul as well as having its own soul. In the past, it was customary for the puppet to be cremated after the death of the puppeteer. Although some puppets have survived in temple and museum collections, puppeteers do not know how to operate and perform with them.

Hun Luang and Hun Krabok

The courtly puppet form of *hun luang* is a classic example of such a case. A set of *hun luang* puppets has been in the collection of Bangkok National Museum since it was opened; and yet little is known about how they were used in performance. The first record of this puppet form can be found in a seventeenth-century Buddhist cannon, *Pra Nemiraja*, where it is mentioned alongside *khon* dance drama and Javanese *topeng* as a part of royal festivity. *Hun luang* is a large-sized marionette type puppet of 1 metre in height. It is carved out of wood and dressed up in the manner of a *khon* dancer. In contrast to Western-style marionette, its complicated mechanical strings are hidden inside the body to be manipulated from underneath. It is believed that *hun luang* used the same script and performance convention as *nang yai* and *khon*. *Hun luang* was at its height during the early nineteenth century. It became extinct after the suspension of the Royal Performing Arts Department in 1926. Since then, there have been several unsuccessful attempts to revive *hun luang*.

Hun krabok is a much simpler form of puppet than *hun luang,* with similar mechanism to the Western-rod puppet. At the height of its popularity in the late nineteenth century, there were at least 10 puppet troupes in the Bangkok area alone. Its repertoire came mostly from folktales and folk literature. Only a few troupes under aristocratic patronage performed stories from the Ramayana or Javanese *Panji* cycle. The popularity of this art form declined after the Thai government introduced the cultural policy of 1942, prohibiting public exhibition of non-Thai cultural activities. This affected *hun krabo*k, which had been thought of, quite mistakenly, as having foreign origins. However, it gained another surge of popularity during the 1950s when Mr. Piak Prasertkul's troupe held a regular show on television. It was this television show that drew Chakrabhand Posayakrit to the world of *hun krabok*, and inspired his lifelong quest to reinvent and elevate the art form. Following in Chakrabhand Posayakrit's footsteps, younger generations of puppeteers have been shaping contemporary *hun krabok*. At one end of the spectrum, there are practitioners who are developing their practices within the framework of conventional forms. At the other end, there are those who have chosen to adapt elements from other cultures, and integrate new idioms and techniques with what they have drawn from traditional Thai forms.

Chakrabhand Posayakrit

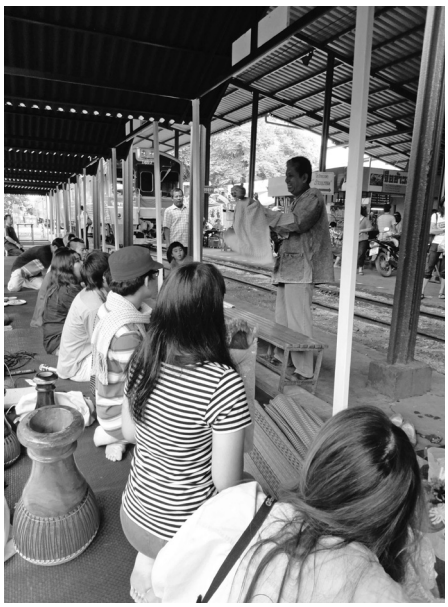
The works of Chakrabhand Posayakrit fall into the first category. Chakrabhand is a graduate of the Thai Arts Department at the privileged Silapakorn University. He is a skilled and innovative artist who excels in a variety of artistic activities. These artworks are universally admired, and he is considered to have brought glamour to the world of tradition-based art. Chakrabhand worked with *hun krabok* in the early 1970s under the guidance of Mr. Piak's daughter, Mrs. Cheun Sakunkeo. Gradually, he designed and constructed his own puppets. Chakrabhand's puppets are very delicate and exceptionally beautiful. Extremely refined and technically complex, his style of performance reflects the influence of court theatre on his aesthetic ideals and artistic execution.

Chakrabhand works with a close-knit group of assistants, many of whom have been with him from the beginning. Although there is no shortage of

people who want to join this elite group of practitioners, the lack of work force is still evident due to the scale of his works. For Chakrabhand, *hun krabok* is a labour of love, and bears him no personal monetary gain. As a result, Chakrabhand overlooks the needs of the audience/consumers, and instead focuses on perfecting his production. He pushes the art of *hun krabok* to its limit, technically and aesthetically. His performance has been praised for the refinement of puppet animation and exciting repertoires. Besides traditional *hun krabok* repertoire such as Ramayana and *Pra Apaimanee*, Chakrabhand also looked for material from other sources. For instance, he staged a production of *Sam Kok* based on the Chinese 'Romance of Three Kingdoms' in 1992. His current project is *Taleng Pai*, a historical play based on the actual event of the sixteenth century Siamese-Burmese war.

Somporn Kaetkaew

Another contemporary practitioner belonging to the first category is Somporn Kaetkaew. Somporn is one of the country's most accomplished traditional fiddle makers. His Siamese fiddles or *sor* are very much in



Somporn Kaetkeaw and his young students at the Weekend Market in train station, Amphawa

Somporn Kaetkeaw talks to students from Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

demand and could fetch exceptionally high prices. Somporn originally came from a family of farmers. After completing his compulsory education, he went to the Mae Klong region in the west of Bangkok to learn the craft of *sor* making. The Mae Klong region is regarded as the cradle of central Siamese arts; and is home to many accomplished musicians and performers, including *hun krabok* puppeteers. *Hun krabok* of the Mae Klong region is different from those of other regions in its vivacious and inventive choreography. Somporn studied and performed under the direction of two of Mae Klong's famous puppeteers: Wongse Ruamsook and Chit Rodphai.

After the death of Wongse, Somporn decided to run his own troupe, and invited former members of Wongse's troupe to perform with him. This venture, however, did not last long. In the early days of his development as an artist, Somporn looked up to Chakrabhand Posayakrit as a career model. Nonetheless, he gradually developed a distinctive style of performance to suit his own aesthetic ideals and cultural context. While Chakrabhand draws his inspiration from court art, Somporn based his creation on folk arts and crafts. After he saw that a *hun krabok* puppet is usually expensive, he had the idea of creating *hun krabok* from everyday materials, such as coconut shells. He also draws inspirations from television soap opera and the popular music scene, to expand the repertoire and make puppet theatre more accessible to the mass audience.

The issue of work force is also a major challenge to the development of puppet theatre in Somporn's view. Apart from the recruitment of puppeteers, it is equally difficult to find a group of traditional musicians who are both responsible and talented. There were many occasions when he found his musicians too busy for a rehearsal or too drunk to perform. Accordingly, Somporn developed a form of solo puppet performance to be accompanied by recorded music. He began to perform in unusual settings, e.g. on the platform of a provincial train station or in a local marketplace during the weekend. He also had an open-air theatre built for him in the middle of his orchard. This is an outlet for occasional performances for devoted audiences.

Vilawan Svetsreni and the Hobby Hut Puppet Theatre

The work of Vilawan Svetsreni and the Hobby Hut took a different direction from that of the puppeteers previously mentioned. Although their form of *hun krabok* appears Thai, its origin is strictly a cross-cultural one. Vilawan is a drama graduate from Thammasart University (Bangkok), who had a chance to study *hun krabok* with Cheun Sakunkaew at the university's Drama Department. After spending some years at the University of London, Vilawan came home to lecture at the School of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University (CMU). Her starting point was an art project on puppet theatre that she and her students decided to work on. The classroom project developed into a permanent puppet troupe. At one time, the troupe was supported by Chiang Mai University's arts centre. Later, Vilawan independently ran the troupe herself under the name of 'Hobby Hut Puppet Theatre'. Most of her troupe members are the graduates who attended her class. Vilawan and her students experimented with the idea of borrowing some constructing techniques from Sundanese *wayang golek*. Thus, Hobby Hut's *hun krabok* has a full realistic body instead of the baggy costume of the traditional puppet. What has made her performance interesting is the way she brings together the art forms, whose origins are from the central plain, and the distinct Lanna culture.

Historically, the north of Thailand (known as Lanna in the past), has gone through a different historical and socio-cultural transformation to that of the Central Plains. Similar to other ethnic or regional cultures, the culture of Lanna was regarded as inferior to that of the Bangkok court. Only for the past 10 to 15 years has Lanna culture begun to get a new breath of life with the Hobby Hut puppet theatre being a part of the Lanna cultural resurgence movement. Vilawan and her colleagues researched traditional Lanna arts, which became the basis of their creations. Most of their repertoire is based on northern folktales and literature. The troupe performs in the Lanna dialect, and innovatively employs northern style music to accompany the performance. During their period at CMU Arts Centre, their audience mostly came from intellectual and expatriate communities. Vilawan and the Hobby Hut Theater have also been invited to perform around the country and abroad. After they moved out of the CMU Arts Centre, a permanent outlet for their performance became an

issue. As a result, they have adopted the management style of a mobile theatre to perform upon request.

Hun Chang Fon

Another puppet troupe from Chiang Mai is Hun Chang Fon. The troupe is a creation of the husband and wife pair, Pasakorn and Sapthawee Sunthornmongkol. Pasakorn, who is a graduate of Silapakorn University, is responsible for the design and construction of the puppets; while Sapthawee, a native of Lanna, is responsible for the choreography and puppet animation. Their inspirations came from *hun luang* and Lanna arts. Similar to Vilawan's puppetry, their form of puppet theatre is an innovation with noticeable traditional Lanna flavours, in terms of the style of the performance and repertoire. The pair began performing as amateur street performers at various open-air events in Chiang Mai; and they still continue to do so even after winning a prize at Prague's World Puppet Festival in 2009.

Hun Lakorn Lek

Another form of contemporary Thai puppet theatre is *hun lakorn lek*, a type of puppet constructed and animated in the same manner as the Japanese *bunraku* puppet. The period of its popularity lasted from around 1914-1920 until the outbreak of the Second World War. According to Chakrabhand Posayakrit (1984 pp 76), *hun lakorn lek* became less popular due to the difficulty of puppet manipulation and its slow performance pace. Just before his death, Master Krae, a master of *hun lakorn lek*, dumped almost all of his puppets into a river to prevent other people from copying his craft. In the 1980s, a former member of Master Krae troupe named Sakorn Yang-keawsot, or Joe Louise, began to reconstruct *hun lakorn lek* puppet just for his own amusement. His work caught the attention of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), which took *hun lakorn lek* on their tourism exhibitions across the globe.

Mr. Sakorn was a *khon* mask maker by profession. After the initial recognition by TAT, he started to train the members of his family to perform *hun lakorn lek* under the name Joe Louis Theater. The troupe

performed as a traveling company for many years before deciding to have a permanent theatre built for them on the family ground outside Bangkok. The theatre was destroyed in a fire, but with some financial aides they were able to rent an old gymnasium at Suan Lum Night Bazaar in central Bangkok to establish a new theatre. Joe Louis' Natayasala Theatre became the only permanent puppet performing facility in the country at the heart of Bangkok's commercial area. In the early 2004, the theatre was threatened with closing down due to the high management cost. A grant from Princess Galyani Vadhna of the Thai royal family helped until a new development plan for Suan Lum Night Bazaar forced the theatre to officially close in 2010.

Of all the puppet theatre troupes, Joe Louis Theater is probably the only one that earns a living from its performance. It is hence important for them to embrace the audience, most of whom were tourists. The troupe's main selling points are their unique performance conventions and the exoticism of Thai-ness. During their run at Natayasala Theatre, their performance normally lasted about two hours, and composed of a documentary about *hun lakorn lek*, a choreographed performance showing how the puppet is manipulated, and a scheduled play. The performance would be followed by an episode from the Ramayana presenting the monkey Hanuman attempting to capture the ogress Benyakaya. To these days, this is still an act that they often perform since it allows the two characters to interact with the audience and to receive gratuitous tips from them.

Without a permanent theatre, the troupe has had no space for their full-scale performance. Their attention has been directed towards developing short performances for commercial promotional events and for international festivals. After Natayasala Theatre at Suan Lum Night Bazaar, there have been several attempts by the troupe to set up a dining theatre, first in Pattaya and now in Bangkok, as an outlet for performance and as an additional source.

After the closure of the Natayasala Theatre, former members of the Joe Louis Natayasala have been involved in several *hun lakorn lek* projects, one of which is the founding of Aksra Hoon Lakorn Lek Theater, a new business venture of the King Power Group that is better known as an operator of duty free shopping malls in Thailand. The Aksra Theatre was established

in the group's flagship store in central Bangkok to provide an extravagant experience of Thai culture for visitors to the country. The one-hour performance composes mainly of different forms of Thai dance re-enacted by *hun lakorn lek* puppets, as well as their interpretations of international performing arts, particularly Japanese, Korean, and Chinese Dance.

Another newcomer to the world of *hun lakorn lek* is Kum-nai Thai Puppet. The young troupe was founded by a group of graduates from Silpakorn University (Bangkok), with an ambition to develop their own performance style and aesthetics. The troupe works and performs at the Artist's House, a non-profit artist commune outside Bangkok. With a permanent performance outlet, they can direct their goal towards achieving artistic and technical brilliance. Kum-nai Thai Puppetry style of performance is understated when compared with that of the other two *hun lakorn lek* troupes. They perform in the open air without sets, which allows them to focus on achieving precise puppet animation. The troupe offers a daily performance, and provides a workshop in puppet animation for visitors free of charge. The eventual goal of the members is to establish a training centre for the art of puppetry.

Conclusion

At one end of the spectrum, practitioners with a background in traditional Thai arts (i.e., Charkrabhand Posayakrit, Somporn Kaetkaew, and the members of Joe Louis Theatre) have chosen to develop their practices within the framework of conventional forms such as *hun krabok* and *hun lakorn lek.* At the other end, practitioners coming from other educational backgrounds have chosen to look into other cultures, and incorporate new idioms and techniques into the elements that they have drawn from traditional Thai forms.

From a few examples of practice described in this article, one can observe a series of recurring challenges to the existence and the development of contemporary Thai tradition-based puppet theatre. The first and the most difficult challenge is the provision of working and performance spaces for puppet theatre, fully or partially subsidized by the state or a charitable organisation. Such support will provide the practitioners with a

freedom to solely invest their energy and time in artistic pursuits. With a permanent performance space for puppet theatre, it will also allow puppet companies to develop more complex full-scale productions; as well as give the audience the opportunity to regularly attend puppet performances.

After researching contemporary practices in Thai tradition-based puppet theatre, and conducting interviews with puppetry artists, the author has identified the socio-cultural challenges to the development of the art form, and feels that it may be an appropriate time now for Thailand to establish a training centre or a study programme devoted to the art of puppet theatre. This will help solve the problem of the lack of skilled work force in the field. As we have seen, there has never been a shortage of people who wish to enter the world of Thai puppet theatre. Each person comes with original ideas and the intention to bring puppet theatre through the time of socio-cultural changes. Formal as well as informal pedagogic institutions would be equally beneficial to the education of the audience about the development of puppeteers. The socio-historical background of the art form and the challenging issues that practitioners encounter in the contemporary Thai socio-economic climate must be understood. Aesthetic and practical concepts employed by contemporary practitioners in their search for new performance idioms should be appreciated too. Above all, the training centre and study programmes could also act as a platform where practitioners can interact and consider the future of contemporary Thai puppet theatre together.

Bibliography

Chandavij, N., & Pramualratana, P. (2004). *Thai Puppets & Khon Masks*. Bangkok: River Books.

Daninivat, H. H. (1962). The Nang. Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department.

Eiwsriwong, N. (1995). *Quills and Sails: Studies of History and Literature of the Early Bangkok Perio*d. Bangkok: Praew Publishing.

Fine Arts Department. (2003). *Collection of Ramayana Plays for Shadow Puppet, Khon Dance Drama and Doll Puppet Vol. I, II & III*. Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department.

Nawigamune, A. (2004). *Puppets in Siam*. Bangkok: Pimpkham.

Nawigamune, A. (2003). *Shadow Show*. Bangkok: Pimpkham.

Pannaengpetch, S. (1992). *Development of Puppet Theatre in Western Region*. Bangkok: Unicom.

Paradonsutham, V. (2011). *Communication of Thai Contemporary Puppet Companies*. (Mater's thesis). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

Posayakrit, C. (Ed). (1986). *Thai Puppets*. Bangkok: Arun Amarintra.

Silapakorn University. (2001). Hun Lakorn Lek: a Typescript for Special Lecture and Exhibition on 22 August 2001 at Silapakorn University. Bangkok: Silapakorn University.

Sinthuphan, J. (2007). *Animation in Siamese Puppet Theatre*. (Doctoral dissertation). Exeter: University of Exeter.

Virulrak, S., & Foley, K. (2001). Hun: Thai Doll Pupetry. *Asian Theater Journal, 18*(1), 81-86.

Wongthes, S. (1999). *Music and Dance of the Siamese*. Bangkok: Matichon.

All images contributed by author

Jirayudh Sinthuphan is a lecturer in Aesthetic Communication, and the Director of Research at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

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

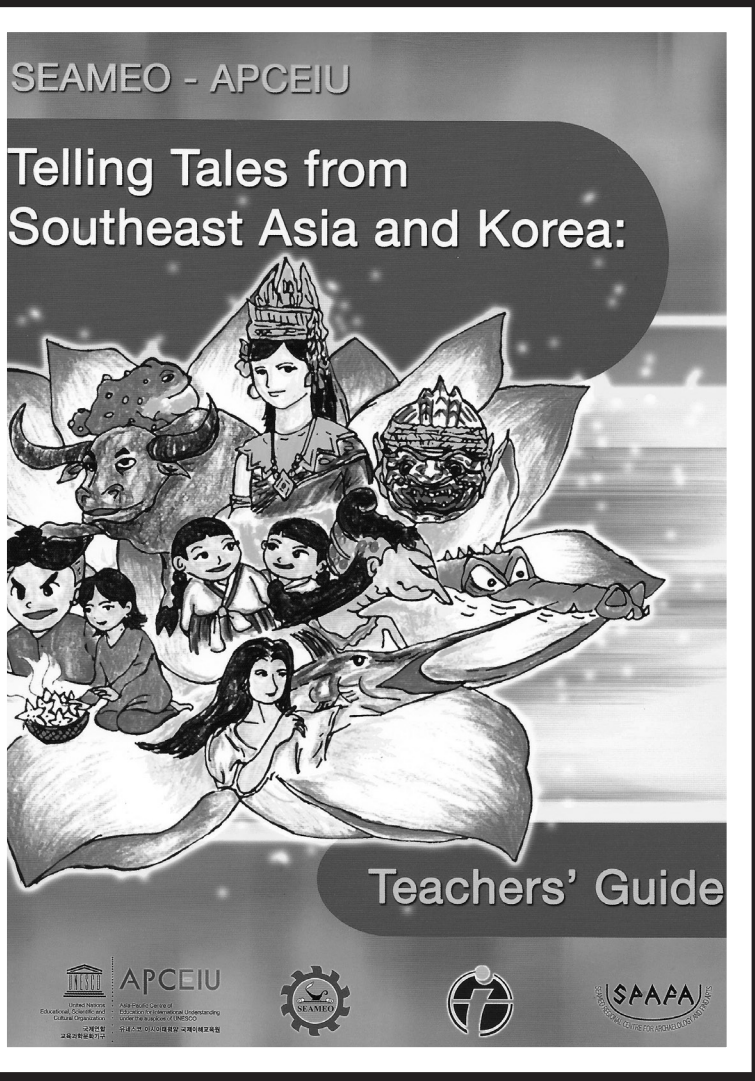
Published in 2010, 'Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea' is a collection of 27 folktales from 11 Southeast Asian countries and Korea.

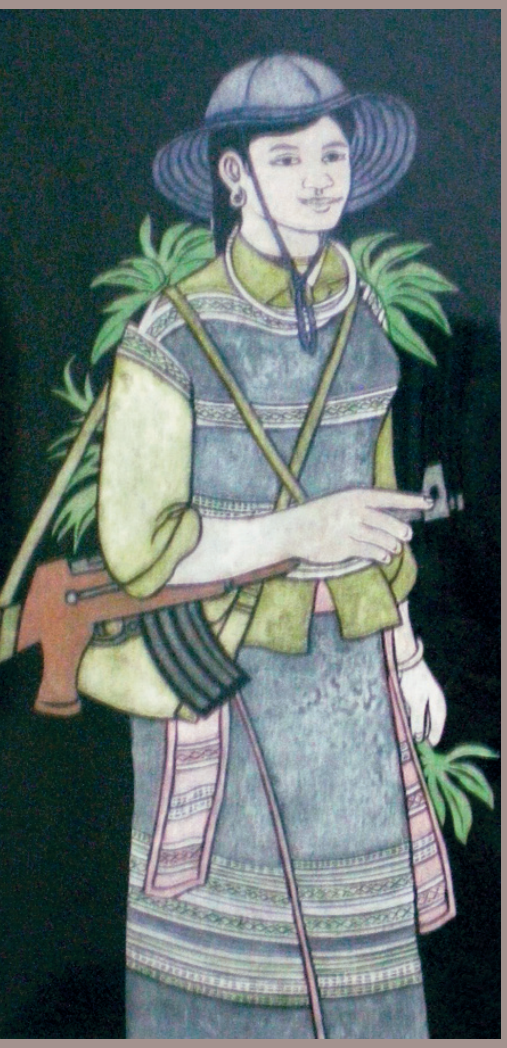
As story-telling is one of the most effective ways to teach young people about the world, the folktales in the book promote better awareness among school children of the similarities, diversity, and inter-dependence of the Asian community. The publication is designed particularly to guide teachers in 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.

Download PDF file for free
http://www.seameo-spafa.org

Printed copy also available for free
To obtain, contact:
Publication Manager
SEAMEO SPAFA
81/1 Si Ayutthaya Rd
Tewet, Dusit 10300
Bangkok
Thailand
www.seameo-spafa.org

Tel: +662-2-2804024 up to 7 ext 109
Fax: +662-2-2804030
Email: spafa@seameo-spafa.org
Email: spafa03@yahoo.com





Portrait of the Chams