

S P A F A

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

SEAMEO, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, was born on 30 November 1965, during the time when the Ministers of Education and the Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning from Asian countries came to Bangkok, Thailand, to attend a UNESCO conference on education planning.

H.E. Mom Luang Pin Malakul, then the Minister of Education of Thailand, invited his colleagues of five Southeast Asian countries attending the Conference—Loas, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam, to an informal meeting where, for the first time, the ideas about working together for educational development of the region was conceived. Once this seed of idea was planted, it received much care and attention. It grew into a strong regional organization, SEAMEO, which reached its 25 years of existence in November 1990.

Under the auspices of SEAMEO, seven regional centres and one project were created to implement SEAMEO policies and planning in different subject

areas of vital importance to the region, and thus it constitutes concerted efforts to meet the main purposes and objectives of SEAMEO, which are in Pargraph I, Article I of the SEAMEO Charter:

“To promote co-operation among the Southeast Asian nations through education, science and culture in order to further respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are the birth rights of the peoples of the world.”

SPAFA is one of the Regional Centres created by the SEAMEO Council to undertake joint responsibilities to cultivate awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage through collaboration in information dissemination and other relevant programme activities; to promote and help enrich archaeological and cultural activities in the region; to further professional competence in the fields of archaeology and fine arts through regional programmes of activities, and through sharing of resources and experiences; to

advance mutual knowledge and understanding among countries of Southeast Asia through regional programmes in archaeology and fine arts.

SPAFA came into existence, first as a SEAMEO Project on Archaeology and Fine Arts, in March 1978. The launching of its initial operation, the First Development Plan covered a three year phase 1978–1981, with only three member countries—Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand—and focussed on the restoration and preservation of ancient monuments, prehistory, and underwater archaeology. In its Second Development Plan which covered five years, 1981–1986, the programmes in fine arts activities were included. Stress is given to the promotion of the understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the region. The plan emphasizes archaeological researches as well as researches dealing with documentation of the vanishing forms of the traditional arts, both creative and performing arts, and the continuance of programmes on preservation and conservation of surviving artifacts which abound in the region.

Being a project, the SPAFA organizational structure consisted of a Co-ordinating Unit which was based in Bangkok, and a network of Sub-Centres established in the participating member countries. During the planning stage, in the early 1970s, three Indochina countries, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam were

members of SEAMEO. Around the middle of the 1970s, the political situations in these countries prevented them from continuing their membership. In 1976, there were only five SEAMEO member countries, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. Malaysia and Singapore were not ready to participate in SPAFA.

Arising from the needs expressed by the member states through visits and surveys by the working team to prepare the project personnel, it was decided that in order to achieve objectives, the nature of activities of the project would be in five areas i.e. training; seminar and conferences; research and development, personnel exchange; library and documentation. It was also decided that information about the project activities as well as academic and professional knowledge should be disseminated through publication of a journal entitled SPAFA Digest, and the proceedings of workshops and seminars. These information materials are distributed to scholars, researchers and those interested in archaeology, history and fine arts, within the region as well as outside.

The Project achieved its goals successfully and was well received by SEAMEO member states, SEAMEO associated member countries, donor countries and international organizations having similar purposes such as UNESCO, ICOM, ICCROM, and so on.

Contributions of books for the library, and fellowships were received from France, the Netherlands, and the Bangkok Bank, Thailand. The works of the Coordinating Unit and the Sub-Centres network were duly recognized.

SPAFA, having acquired working experience as SEAMEO's specialized agency in the area of culture, in 1984 began to work out its future plan which would enable it to play a bigger role along with other SEAMEO Centres/Projects for improvement of the quality of life of the peoples in Southeast Asia. The programmes and activities were to be strengthened by reconstituting SPAFA into a Regional Centre. The idea was endorsed by the SEAMEO Council at its Twentieth Conference in Manila in 1985, and the Government of Thailand agreed to host the new Regional Centre, which would be called the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. The acronym SPAFA, however, was maintained because of its well established recognition.

In the year 1987, the new Regional Centre had the opportunity to welcome two new friends who were not able to join SPAFA before: Malaysia and Singapore. Later, Brunei Darussalam also became a SPAFA colleague. The first 5-year programme of activities, formulated by the working team to reconstitute the project, was ready to be implemented.

In the overview of the programmes and activities of the SPAFA First Five-year Development Plan 1987–1992 it is stated that: "Fully aware of its responsibilities for SEAMEO in the area of culture, SPAFA seeks to understand itself and particularly its role in serving the Southeast Asian region through its programmes and activities on culture. In so doing, SPAFA, first of all views culture as the totality of collective beliefs, values, technology and other means of adapting to the environments, as well as the complex of shared values that link people to their common past and give direction to their future: cultures serve as the integrating and motivating force which can sustain or hinder all development efforts. SPAFA contributes to this effort by focusing on those aspects of culture where it is most able to contribute and where it will not duplicate what other institutions, agencies and organizations are better equipped to undertake."

The programmes of activities for FYs 1987/1988–1991/1992 consisted of 36 training courses (eight in general cultural fields, 22 in archaeology, six in fine arts) five seminars/workshops (four in archaeology, three in fine arts) five research/development (three in archaeology and two in fine arts.) The total amount of funds required for the implementation of the programmes is estimated approximately US\$ 2,700,000. The capital and operating funds for five years is

approximately US\$ 900,000, non-inclusive of the building budget.

It is stated in the Memorandum of Agreement concerning the operation and funding of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts, from July 1, 1987 to June 30, 1992, that the Government of Thailand agrees to underwrite the capital and operating costs of the Centre; SEAMEO through SEAMES, undertakes to raise Special Funds for the implementation of the approved programmes and activities of the Centre. It is also stated that the Centre may seek contributions from third parties to meet its obligations. SEAMES and SPAFA shall continue to co-operate in seeking assistance in the form of experts, equipment and any other forms of assistance from interested donors.

The first SPAFA Regional Centre Director, Professor Subhadhadis Diskul was appointed in July 1987. Immediately after the appointment he took courtesy missions to SPAFA member countries, where he met will officials concerned with the newly reconstituted Centre, and discussed with them the possibilities of financial cooperation to fill the shortfalls of funds needed for the implementation of the programme of activities, as well as the ways of their implementation. The Centre Director also, in his fund raising efforts, contacted the embassies for foreign governments in

Bangkok. He met with some success, though not very encouraging in the beginning. Only later, from 1988, financial constraints were relaxed. SPAFA received contributions from Canada, France, Japan and New Zealand for training courses, staff development and technical assistance.

In the meantime, the work for the planning and construction of the SPAFA Regional Centre Headquarters, and the re-organization of administrative structure began. Two other main concerns of the Centre Director are the strengthening of the Library and Documentation Services, and the establishment of the scientific research laboratory, since these two components are of vital significance for the information on cultural subject fields of SPAFA competency, and for innovative research techniques required for conservation and management of cultural heritage.

The Library and Documentation Centre already formed an integral part of the Regional Project, but for many years suffered from shortage of space, personnel, and budget. However, the Library managed to document and publish promotion materials, proceedings of the workshop seminars, and issue a journal entitled SPAFA Digest. The scientific research laboratory is a new concept and needed to be conceptualized.

For the planning and construction of the building, as

well as the structure of the organization, and the monitoring of programmes of activities implementation, SPAFA received technical co-operation from Silpakorn University which graciously seconded Associate Professor Kamthorn Kulachol to undertake these responsibilities. For the Library and Documentation Services, the position for the Library and Documentation Services Officer had been vacant for two years, despite repeated newspaper advertisements, screenings and tests, due to the high qualifications essentially required for the job. Finally the Centre was able to secure temporary services from Professor Khunying Maenmas Chavalit, who is renowned for her experience in the field of library science and documentation. As for the scientific research laboratory, Dr. O.P. Aggrawal, Director-General of the INTACH Indian Conservation Institute, who is well known worldwide for his expertise in conservation of cultural materials, agreed to act as advisor in the formulation of the project and the project proposal for funding assistance.

The construction of the building was completed in September 1992. The Royal Thai Government did not include budget for the purchasing of furniture, air-conditioners and necessary equipment to make the building functional and operational. However, many benefactors in Thailand who appreciate SPAFA's contribution towards the promotion of cultural heritage appreciation, have generously donated cash and kind.

By the end of May the beautiful six story building will be almost entirely air-conditioned and carpeted. Its library on the first and second floor is modernly furnished. Computer systems have been installed for automated technical services and in-house desk-top publishing activities. The class rooms on the fourth floor, are ready to be used for training. Similarly the rooms on the fourth floor, designed as a research laboratory, is well equipped with essential laboratory tools. Heartful thanks go to the Royal Thai Government for funding the construction of the building, and to all Thai benefactors who furnished it and made it operational.

In pondering efforts to develop the New Regional Centre to meet requirements for its new status, one of the policies decided by the Centre Director is to make the Centre an effective centre for information services, as stated in the SPAFA objectives. The limited budget prevents the purchasing of books and other information materials in subject fields of SPAFA interest. Books and scholarly journals on archaeology and fine arts are very expensive. Research reports and proceedings of seminars and workshops are difficult to obtain; produced by academic institutions and organizations, in general, they cannot be purchased through conventional bookstores. Measures undertaken to strengthen the collection, therefore, are to build contacts with those institutions for exchange of publications, to approach the

governments and organizations for donation. SPAFA's requests were met with good response. We received, for example, from the French Government a large collection of research documents on Indochina countries by outstanding French scholars and historians. The Centre Director himself, to ensure that the SPAFA Library is one of the best reference libraries in Thailand on Southeast Asian archaeology and arts, loaned his own valuable and rare collection to the library, on more or less, permanent basis.

The fiscal year 1991/1992 marks the end of the SPAFA Regional Centre's First 5-year Plan, July 1987-June 1992. During the first five years, SPAFA has completed the construction of the building of its own headquarters, the re-organization of its administrative infrastructure, the strengthening of its Library and Documentation Services, the establishment and strengthening of cordial linkages with donor countries, governmental international organizations, such as UNESCO, ICOM, ICCROM, non-governmental organizations, agencies and institutions.

As for its programmes of activities, in spite of the financial shortfall, the SPAFA Regional Centre, with the co-operation of member countries who offered to host training courses, seminars and workshops, has successfully completed about 90% of the programmes scheduled. Out of 30 training courses, only three were cancelled because of monetary shortfall. Six seminars

and workshops were planned and successfully completed. In addition, with the financial contribution from the Japan Foundation (now the Japan Cultural Centre) two special seminars, were organized. Moreover, SPAFA has cooperated with UNESCO in holding one workshop on the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property, 1970.

The formulation of the Second Five-Year Plan was executed and submitted to the Special Governing Board Meeting in May 1990 for endorsement. The plan was finally approved by the SEAMEO Council at its meeting in 1991. Since July 1992, the programmes for FY 1992/1993 have been implemented.

All is well when it begins well. This can be applied to SPAFA's historical evolution. In line with its objectives, SPAFA has made attempts to promote cultural solidarity among its member states, with the view to strengthening mutual understanding and co-operation for common goals. Through its training courses, workshops, seminars, researches, information dissemination and personal exchanges, it has been possible to establish firm linkages among artists, archaeologists, scholars and other personnel responsible for cultural administration for cultural and development.

SPAFA's success is due to the following factors, which

is hoped, will continue:

1. The adequate financial support from the Royal Thai Government for capital and operational expenses, in particular for the tenure and moral support of SPAFA staff, both professional and general services.
2. The financial contributions from SEAMEO, the members states, and country donors for the effective implementation of SPAFA programmes and activities.
3. The financial and technical contributions from the benefactors, both individuals and organizations, public and private, who appreciate SPAFA's mission.
4. The support of individual scholars who contribute their

knowledge and professional expertise to the SPAFA training courses, seminars, workshops and the publication of the SPAFA Digest (now SPAFA Journal).

5. The devotion and competency of the staff, who, so far, have given much of their time, efforts and knowledge to SPAFA, in spite of some disadvantages in work conditions. Some, after a short time of working, decided to leave SPAFA for better opportunities, but a few remain in order to see that the new Regional Centre has achieved its goals in the first five years.

Taking these factors into consideration, we can be confident of good prospects for SPAFA in the years to come.