

Multi-National Cultural Mission

to Luang Prabang, the idyllic northern town of Laos, where tourism is increasing.

"We want to make sure that tourist activities will not tamper with our cultural heritage, whether they be old temples, cultural customs, handicrafts, etc.," he said. "They should remain as authentic as possible."

On cultural exchange and its benefits, Mr Robert Eagle, Research Services Director, Technical University of Nova Scotia, described what has been happening in Nova Scotia where strong steps have been taken in the music industry and with the cultural music of Nova Scotia.

"We have developed quite a force in cultural music which is a blend of Irish, French, Scottish, and Canadian music into new sounds which have become a major force in the Canadian music industry or in US and Europe as well," Mr Eagle said. "To take the economic side of music and the cultural side of Nova Scotia, the Minister supports a programme for the next three years: an international music event of Nova Scotia; a celebration of music with many spin-offs, such as the recording industry, individual recording, sound tracks for movies, film making etc., all using Nova Scotia artists or artisans."

This support will create new opportunities for artists and musicians to make a living while keeping alive the cultural and traditional crafts, Mr Eagle said, with major shows, educational sessions, production of instruments and music lessons, and many other aspects. He saw it as "a big programme" covering information dissemination, and the economics of organising "specifically what your objectives are in terms of profit, number of people attending the shows that you are putting on, where to put them, etc."

Finally, Mr Eagle was interested in the economical aspects of SPAFA's participation in the "atlantic extravaganza"; its cultural tours, etc..

Dr Ruang concluded by expressing his appreciation of the Minister's and his colleague's suggestions of a linkage between SPAFA and Nova Scotia.

The Minister and Dr Ruang agreed to follow up on the possibility of a partnership, with the understanding that the Minister will draft a framework for agreement by both parties. In due course, upon refining it, SPAFA Centre Director shall visit Nova Scotia to formalise the partnership.

On April 4, 1997, a delegation of Japanese officials met with SPAFA representatives to discuss a multi-national cultural mission proposed by the Prime Minister of Japan, Ryutaro Hashimoto.

The delegates were Mr. Jun'etsu Komatsu, Director of Japanese Cultural Centre (Bangkok); Hidetoshi Ukita, Counsellor, Embassy of Japan, Bangkok; Toichi MaKita, Program Officer of International Division, The Toyota Foundation; Ikuhiko Ono, First Cultural Affairs Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Ms Mariko Oka-Fukuroi, Director of Intellectual Exchange Division, The Japan Foundation Asia Center in Tokyo, Japan.

Mr Komatsu began the discussion by presenting the proposal of Prime Minister Hashimoto, which calls for more value-added relationships by:

- 1) enhancing relationships between Japan and Southeast Asian countries
- 2) Putting into practice cultural co-operation, and improving understanding; and
- 3) Addressing the various socio-cultural problems faced by individual communities.

The Cultural Mission will compose of intellectuals/private sector members within ASEAN and Japan. The Mission team hopes to implement an Action Plan that will create cultural collaboration and strengthen ties between SPAFA and the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information.

The proposal presented by the Japanese delegation refers to recent social trends, such as the expansion of the middle-class, rapid urbanisation, proliferation of new information media, and increased migration of populations among Asian countries, particularly those of the ASEAN organisation.

It points out that despite the different cultural and social backgrounds between Japan and the ASEAN countries, there are common issues that bind them. These issues include "threats to the environment, over-population in metropolitan areas, the potential tension between local cultural uniqueness and the spread of global mass culture, or the need to create a more equitable society."

The proposal finds that Japan-ASEAN ties are not confined to trade and commerce; co-operation in the areas of scholarship and links between those working in the private non-profit sector has been on-going.

In the circumstance, the need for Japan and ASEAN to share their experience, knowledge, and

technology in shaping the future of Asia (which shall not only be "stable but dynamic, pluralistic yet unified") forms the basis of this proposal for a multi-national cultural mission.

To attain this cultural co-operation, Japan and the countries of ASEAN will need to recognise the importance of regional "multi-lateral" cultural exchange in an equal partnership; and the need to co-operate with the private sector through dialogue and consultation. Although co-operation among governments is necessary, the participation of foundations and organisations in the non-profit private sector must be included.

The plan is for Japan and ASEAN countries to form a "Mission Team", the members of which would travel to each of those countries to "identify the common agenda for better understanding of each other's society, history and culture by meeting with and seeking the advice of representatives of governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, and leading intellectuals". The general areas of interest to focus on would be the encouragement of mutual understanding and tolerance for multi-cultural co-existence in ASEAN countries; co-operation in handling cultural issues common to ASEAN societies today; and finding the balance between universal human values and respect for local cultural values and their application.

A Japan-ASEAN Multilateral Forum on Culture shall be organised to establish a conceptual framework for region-wide cultural exchange activities through consultation and dialogue.

The goal of the mission is an Action Plan, which would eventually be carried out by participating governments and non-governmental organisations.

During the discussions, SPAFA Centre Director, Dr Ruang Chareonchai explained the development of the ASEAN and SEAMEO organisations. He stressed that the latter is an educational organisation, and co-operation among SEAMEO countries is related to education, science, and culture. Dr Ruang informed that SPAFA's interests are in strengthening identities and restoring cultural parameters.

He posed some questions on whether aid would be bilateral or multi-lateral, and whether the nature of exchange would be limited to material, information or cultural. The Japanese delegation assured that aid would be multi-lateral, as in ASEAN/Japan, and that the nature of exchange would not be limited, but inclusive of all types of activities.

In response to Japanese delegate's question on SPAFA policy towards non-governmental organisations and the existence of independent selection policy for trainees, Dr Ruang replied that SPAFA works through the Ministry of Education of member countries, and selection of participants is up to individual member countries, but there is no rule limiting participation to governmental employees. He proceeded to provide some examples of previous non-governmental participation in SPAFA's programmes.

He explained that while SPAFA is responsible for the final selection of participants, the nomination process begins from each country through national selection bodies. To add to the point, SPAFA's Senior Visual Arts Specialist, Elmar Ingles, said that SPAFA has endorsed a policy of requesting member countries to nominate a pool of candidates; in the circumstances, SPAFA will act upon request for non-governmental participation if it came from the SEAMEO Secretariat.

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia introduces many traditional forms of theatre that are not widely known outside their countries of origin. Edited by Dr Chua Soo Pong, Currently the Director of the Chinese Opera Institute in Singapore, the book discusses how traditional forms of theatre should be revitalised in the rapidly changing socio-economic environments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia (US\$ 10 excluding postage cost) can be obtained from:

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