# \$AAAA JOURNAL



Arts Festivals in ASEAN region



### SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

SPAFA Journal is published three times a year 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 SPAFA.

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- Strengthen professional competence in the fields of archaeology and fine arts through sharing of resources and experiences on a regional basis;
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Ean Lee

### **Photographic Services**

Nipon Sud-Ngam

### Cover

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### **Printers**



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SPAFA Journal 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

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## The Mekong Goes Global: International Festivals/ Regional Gatherings

Theatre professor and reporter **Catherine Diamond** traverses Southeast Asia to participate in performing arts events

### Mekong Arts Festival in Phnom Penh

The end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010 have seen a burgeoning of international performing arts festivals all over the ASEAN region, revealing the increased networking amongst Southeast Asian artists and the forging of a recognized and shared "Mekong" regional identity. During the week 23-27 November 2009, Phnom Penh hosted sixty performers at the fifth Mekong Arts and Media Festival organized by the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) that has expanded its offices to Thailand. The "Weaving Cultures, Weaving Lives" festival included pageants on the capital's streets, workshops and performances as groups from Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar focused on the role of youth theatre. Events started with a seminar in which most of the scholars and directors talked about the integration of their cultures. With sponsorship and coordination of various NGOs, the workshops and performances used a variety of



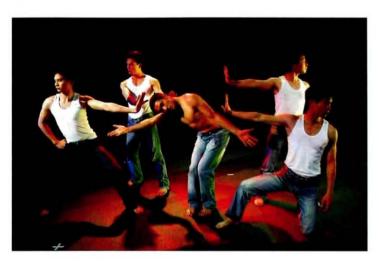
Two circus artists from Phare Ponleu Selpak Cambodia in the performance of "Puthou" at the Mekong Festival in Phnom Penh. Photo: Phoonsab Thevongsa, courtesy of PETA Mekong Partnership Program



The cast of the PETA's "Ismail and Isabel"
restaged for the closing night
of the Mekong Festival in Phnom Penh.
Photo: Phoonsab Thevongsa, courtesy of
PETA Mekong Partnership Program

traditional and contemporary arts to educate about HIV-Aids and trafficking. As many of the troupes involved were supported by NGOs in presenting works with specific themes, they have built up repertoires around health and education issues, but the festival allowed them to view what others were doing. Directed primarily at children and young people, several works focused on teenage gender relations and identity, such as the Hanoi-based Youth Theatre's production of *Stereo Man*, created by Filipino choreographer Agnes Locsin, that explored homo-eroticism, images of masculinity

and violence – issues rarely directly tackled in the Vietnamese media or stage. Many of the Cambodian participants were from Phare Ponlue Selpak (the Brightness of Art), a group that started informally in 1986 in a refugee camp on the Thai border, and has trained its members in circus acrobatics. It presented *Les Ballayette*, a song-and-dance piece about expanding young women's view of their life choices. Incorporating shadow puppets, marionettes, traditional myths, and contemporary social issues, the performances took place in the Chaktomuk Hall, Phnom Penh's premiere venue, or outdoors in the theatre's gardens, and were part of the ongoing rebuilding of Cambodia's performing arts culture.



Hanoi's Youth Theatre's presentation of "Stereoman" restaged at the Mekong Festival in Phnom Penh. Photo: Courtesy of Youth Theatre of Vietnam



Hanoi's Youth Theatre's presentation of "Stereoman" restaged at the Mekong Festival in Phnom Penh. Photo: Courtesy of Youth Theatre of Vietnam

### Dance Festival in Vientiane/Luang Prabang

Between 20 and 31 January, Laos held the 'Fang Mae Khong' (Mekong), its first International Dance Festival in Vientiane and Luang Prabang that featured traditional, contemporary and hip-hop dance. Although the categories were distinct in the program, dancers from France, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos often demonstrated their creativity in the fusions of all three styles. In addition to group and solo performances, workshops were offered to the public, and a hip-hop competition attracted a large crowd. The festival was cosponsored by the Lao Bang Fai dance group and the French company A'Corps to transcend borders and encourage performers and spectators to "Listen to the Mekong River." Lao Bang Fai consists of young hip-hop dancers who have previously been involved in Handicap International's projects in Laos.

Although the government initially discouraged it because it had no roots in Lao culture, and threatens traditional music, hip-hop is extremely popular in Laos. The dance form is now recognized as a vehicle for original Lao creation, replacing the previous dominance of Thai and Western pop music. Lao hip-hop dancers proudly point out that their expertise has put the country on the map, and made Laos known in international hip-hop circles. At the same time, they are both bolstering the small country's culture by instilling pride in original songs and creativity in the hip-hop medium, and dismantling contentious boundaries with their immediate neighbors, by reinforcing their shared Mekong identity. Perhaps hip-hop's exuberant acrobatics and lack of overt sexuality has allowed it to be seen as an exercise of youthful high spirits rather than foreign cultural corruption. Government authorities make sure that the song lyrics and performers' dress do not transgress Lao norms. That the first days of the Fang Mae Khong festival were held on the grounds of the circus school emphasized the spectacular acrobatic aspects of the dance, and the final performances filling the 1,500-seat National Cultural Hall demonstrated its overwhelming popularity. The country's famous literatus Somsanouk Mixay commented that the people of the Mekong River "have many things in common but they have their ancient and rich culture of their own. One aspect of their culture is dance, which was very rich and diverse as well."1 The common cultural heritage of the young people of the Mekong now includes a passion for hip-hop, and it, alongside traditional dance, was incorporated in Vientiane's celebration of its 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the capital of the ancient Lan Xang kingdom.



Krit Chaisinboon as Phra Lor dances with Puen Keaw (Potjana Phattong) and Pang Thong (Maneerat Ratanang) in Phra Lor. Photo: Thanis Studio, courtesy of Patravadi Theatre

### Fringe Festival in Hua Hin

The 10th year of Thailand's International Fringe Festival, annually sponsored by Patravadi Medjudhon at her performing arts center on the banks of Bangkok's Chao Phraya river, was instead held in the resort town of Hua Hin to celebrate the inauguration of her new Vic Hua Hin Performing Arts Complex. Her latest play, a musical drama based on the classical *lilit* poem, *Phra Lor*, opened the 320-seat theatre. Patravadi has been in the forefront of adapting Thai

Violinist Kyle Dillingham as Phra Lor in Phra Lor. Photo: Chattiya Thaipirosamukkee, courtesy of Patravadi Theatre

literary classics to make them relevant to contemporary audiences and attractive to young people. The famous love story between a prince and two princesses from the North of Thailand incorporated lanna and *khon* traditional dance along with hip-hop and aerial acrobatics. *Phra Lor* is a literary classic written during the Ayutthaya period over 500 years ago, narrating a tale of war, revenge, magic, and passion. While it was being staged indoors, Burmese dancers were performing the candle dance in the outdoor dance space, and northern Thai musicians played the *khaen* pipes. A workshop on paper-cutting drew participants who were sampling the delicacies at the food stalls on the grounds. French textile artist Nicole Lamarche, who offered workshops on the use of herbal dyes, was one of the guests who stayed in the unique igloo-like apartments for visiting artists.

This time the festival featured troupes from outside Southeast Asia, such as comic performer Yael Rasooly from Israel, glove puppets from Taiwan, and the American contemporary dance troupe ODC that was





Sarawut Martthong playing the Director in Phra Lor, holds up the Phra Lor mask. Photo: Chattiya Thaipirosamukkee, courtesy of Patravadi Theatre

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Patravadi Medjudhon starring as the Grandmother in Phra Lor, which she directed and adapted. Photo: Chattiya Thaipirosamukkee, courtesy of Patravadi Theatre touring the region. While a few Thai performers, such as Pichet Klunchun, a soloist famous for his experiments in *khon* dance, were featured, there was a noted absence of Thai theatre groups that previously appeared at the Fringe when it was held in Bangkok. The move, however, is in line with a new national policy to culturally develop other areas in the country rather than focus solely on the capital. In the future, perhaps more troupes will venture south to Hua Hin, while in the meantime, the intention of the complex is to stimulate participation in the arts in the vicinity, and promote year-round cultural activities.

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### Performance Art Festival in Yangon

Over the past decade, Myanmar has been making news in the art world for the imaginative work of its visual artists in dramatic performance, and festivals such as 'Beyond Pressure: Festival of Performance Art' have been organised in Yangon. In 2009, the second 'Beyond Pressure' took place in the city between 2 and 6 December with predominantly Asian participants. Solo artists from Thailand, India, Korea, Japan, China, and Vietnam as well many Burmese performance artists, including organizer Moe Satt, participated in the event. For three days, they conducted workshops, and on the last two days they performed in the Sein Lan So Pyay Garden, a park beside Inya Lake. Foreign performers have previously not been allowed to perform publicly in Myanmar, but the festival broke new ground by applying for and receiving permission to perform in public. The participants realized that showing and explaining their works to the censorship officials was instructive performance in itself.

Since performance art is visually oriented and has no narrative, it is open to a wide variety of interpretations, such as Moe Satt's "Mr. Happy" in which he handed everyone colored ping pong balls on which to draw smiley faces. He then invited people to stick them on his face while Natalie Cole's song "Smile" played in the background. A young emerging international artist, Moe Satt is one of the members of the Gangaw Village Artist Group in Myanmar, and has been very



Mrat Lunn Htwann's O! Picnic (Beyond Pleasure) at Yangon's Beyond Pressure Performance Art Festival Photo: Courtesy of Moe Satt

active in the international performance art scene in recent years. In another performance, "O! Picnic (Beyond Pleasure)", by local artist Mrat Lunn Htwann, members of the audience were requested to hold a banner with the Burmese word 'ha' repeatedly printed on it. They were then requested to laugh one-byone into a megaphone, while the artist standing on the other side of the banner



Audience participation in Mrat Lunn Htwann's O! Picnic (Beyond Pleasure) at Yangon's Beyond Pressure Performance Art Festival Photo: Courtesy of Moe Satt

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imitated each laugh also through a megaphone. This generated a lot of genuine laughter while some of the works received bemused looks or amazement such as that of Korean Soni Kum who arose from being buried in the dirt to be an ephemeral figure dressed in flowing white.

Despite public accessibility to the festival, Moe Satt said that the absence of many of the well-known Burmese performance artists and the small number of spectators – even though the second night attracted more than the first – was a disappointing aspect of the event. The reputation of 'Beyond Pressure', nevertheless, continues to stimulate interest internationally.



Mrat Lunn Htwann's O! Picnic (Beyond Pleasure) at Yangon's Beyond Pressure Performance Art Festival Photo: Courtesy of Moe Satt

### Contemporary Theatre Festival in Yangon

Two months later, between 5 and 13 February, the Alliance Française, with additional sponsorship from the Goethe Institute, launched the second iUi-#02 (initiating, updating, integrating) International Festival of Contemporary Theatre. The brainchild of Nyan Lin Htet, the Burmese director of the Paris-based Theatre of the Disturbed, the first festival was held in 2008, and was so enjoyed by both local and foreign participants that many returned for the second. Nyan Lin Htet is recognised as a prominent promoter of contemporary art and theatre in Myanmar, and has directed dramatic works by Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka and Eugene Ionesco.

The festival started with a seminar on the state of the arts in today's society, followed by four 5-day workshops held by foreign directors for local participants. The culmination was two evenings of performances of narrative and experimental theatre, puppetry, dance, video, and music.



Top : Young Po and Baby Tiger meet in the forest in "Po and Tiger" at the iUi #02
International Festival of Contemporary Theatre-Myanmar in Yangon
Photo: Thu Rein, courtesy of the Theatre of the Disturbed.

Middle : The audience attending the iUi #02 International Festival of Contemporary
Theatre-Myanmar at the Alliance Française in Yangon.
Photo: Thu Rein, courtesy of the Theatre of the Disturbed.

Bottom: Adult Po and Big Tiger argue about "debt of gratitude" in "Po and Tiger" at the iUi #02 International Festival of Contemporary Theatre-Myanmar in Yangon.

Photo: Thu Rein, courtesy of the Theatre of the Disturbed.

status quo. The new version concluded with a twist in which the animals and trees complain about human cruelty and lack of recognition of their contributions, and ordered the tiger to eat Po.

For the workshop, the story was re-scripted (a la San Francisco Mime Troupe) to comically present the tiger's point of view, with the additional irony of being performed while Chinese drums signaling the Year of the Tiger pounded in the background. The nine participants translated the text in one day, memorized it the next, rehearsed it in two days, and then put together costumes, makeup and set to give a 40-minute performance in Burmese. A very proud and sensitive tiger informed his friend Po of the consequences of forest destruction and offered four alternative endings to the original conclusion.

Untitled Lear by director Ruth Pongstaphone of Dhamma Theatre West in New York/Berlin and Australian actor Ralph Coterill presented an adaptation of King Lear in English, which has never been publicly performed, even though it is one of the few Shakespearean plays that has been translated completely into Burmese. Uttered with powerful conviction by Coterill in a solo tour-de-force, the Shakespearean language might not have been understood by all, but the plight of an old man going insane from the loss of his identity was forcefully conveyed.

Manual Lutgenhorst, the German director of the Empty Space in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Khin Maung Htwe, a Burmese puppeteer, and Amy Trompetter, a mask maker (formerly of the Bread and Puppet theatre) adapted a well-known Burmese story by Khin Myo Chit. Their Four Puppets presented an updated version of a puppeteer whose son is swayed by the temptations of the big city. Before he goes, his father tells him to rely on the advice of his four puppets that would bring him first wealth and power, and later wisdom and happiness. The signature oversized papier mache masks of Bread and Puppet provided colorful interludes about the dangers of capitalism. Puppetry also featured in the presentation by U Ye Dway that reprised the traditional Satitayma Sambula jataka about the devotions of a princess whose husband is struck with leprosy, and an experimental work that combined Western and Burmese puppetry and dance in Fragments by Ye Nyi Nyi.



Audience watching "Po and Tiger"
at the iUi #02 International
Festival of Contemporary Theatre
Festival-Myanmar at the Alliance
Francaise in Yangon.
Photo: Thu Rein, courtesy of the
Theatre of the Disturbed.

Solo performers included Moe Satt's performance art piece, *Hands*, that had been presented at the PETA festival. Burmese dancer Sithu Win who trained in France and Laos, performed a virtuoso dance that combined aspects of his multicultural training. Raka Maitra from Singapore also integrated her training in Orissi classical dance with contemporary movement and projections to present a deeply personal exploration. German video artist Patrick Palucki collaborated with Myanmar playwright U Lu Wa Lay to

create a video piece "Ediets" (Every day isn't exactly the same) in which Burmese participants examined the monotony of their everyday lives in three scenes. In one, Sisyphus-like, they moved stones from one side of the room to the other while projections of advertisements culled from the Yangon streets blasted exaggerated promises of a better life through consumerism.

Traditionally, dramatic performance has been very popular in Myanmar, but over the past decade it has declined. The all-night zat pwe that featured traditional song and dance, comedy routines, modern and classical plays, now focuses on pop music so that other items receive less performing time if not eliminated altogether. There is no place to see spoken drama on any regular basis, and even the National Theatre in Yangon is now used mostly for music concerts and not dramatic performance. English language students sometimes get together to perform plays in English for a limited and select audience. Although free and open to the public, such was unfortunately the case for iUi #02, which was not able to attract many "ordinary" people, who might have been intimidated by the foreign venue. It was only because the festival was held on "foreign" ambassadorial grounds, however, that it could take place without censorship. Frustration at such restrictions was demonstrated in Nyan's own performance art piece, Waiting, a tableau vivant of a man ironing his head on a table; another peeping from behind a huge box; Nyan himself inching his way across the stage in micro-steps, occasionally shouting "Happy New Year"; two girls, huddled and morose, periodically screamed in English: "I can't take it

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anymore!", while a Burmese poet read the last words of people who had committed suicide. Most of the performances indirectly critiqued aspects of society, but this last piece symbolically represented a stalemate in the conflict between individual liberties and communal cohesion. Tellingly, during the joyous and creative collaborations in the workshops, such conflict was utterly absent.

All these festivals demonstrate the increase of Southeast Asian performing artists participating globally at international festivals as individuals, and their greater interest and mobility to come together regionally. Several of the festivals "suffered" growing pains because they attracted both returnees and new participants. In addition, some governments, initially suspicious of contemporary performance art and global popular culture, have found ways to incorporate them in their celebrations of national history and regional identity. Moreover, such festivals are opportunities to present contemporary and traditional arts side-by-side and allow practitioners to observe and learn how they can enrich each other. The workshops allow for free play and exploration in a given form. They provide an opportunity for the participants to bond even when they have little or no language in common by shifting the emphasis away from verbal communication to movement and visual expression. Less burdened with being national representatives of their cultures, the young performers are open to incorporating elements they see in others' work. At the same time, being recognized for their own accomplishments by their peers contributes to a sense of national pride.

As a result of such festivals, some Mekong dramatists are becoming more familiar with their counterparts in other countries than those within their national borders. At the Phnom Penh "Weaving Cultures" Festival, the director of Myanmar's Mandalay Marionettes, a troupe that frequently represents the country's traditional puppets at such festivals, Ma Ma Niang remarked: "I wish I could show the youth in my country how young artists are performing here. I think we need to change the performing arts in Myanmar. We cannot simply stick to the old traditional style." Little did she know that in Yangon, young Burmese dramatists at Beyond Pressure and iUi #02 were engaged in wildly imaginative experiments on the edge of global performance.

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### **Notes**

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  - http://laovoices.com/2010/01/25/first-hip-hop-international-dance-kicked-off
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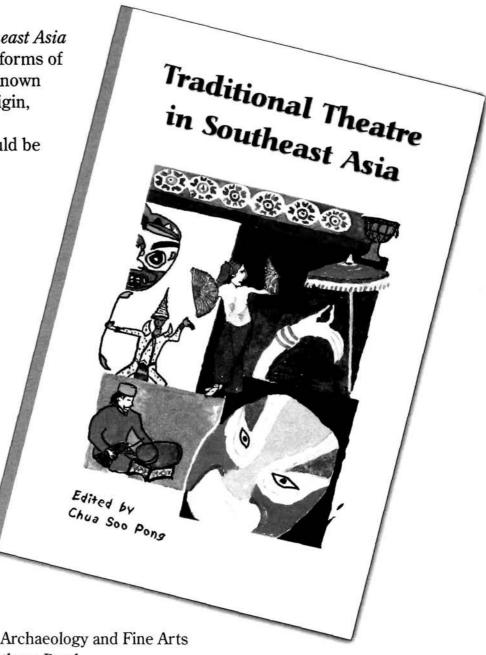
**Catherine Diamond** is a professor of theatre at Soochow University, Taiwan, and a theatre reporter in Southeast Asia.

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## Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

9 Euro / US\$10

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia focuses on many traditional forms of theatre that are not widely known outside their countries of origin, and provides analyses and discussions on how they could be revitalized.



SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts SPAFA Building, 81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road Samsen, Theves, Bangkok 10300 THAILAND Tel (662) 280 4022-9 ext 109 Fax (662) 280 4030 www.seameo-spafa.org spafa03@yahoo.com spafa@seameo-spafa.org

## Betel-chewing in mainland Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is the cradle of betel-chewing. Used as a stimulant and to treat minor ills, the custom spread from Southeast Asian islands to mainland Vietnam probably around the first millennium B.C.. Thailand seemingly received the practice from neighbouring countries to the west. These two main regional actors influenced Laos and Cambodia. Our decade-long research and observation, which intensified in 2002-04 and 2006-07, delved into this declining but storied tradition.

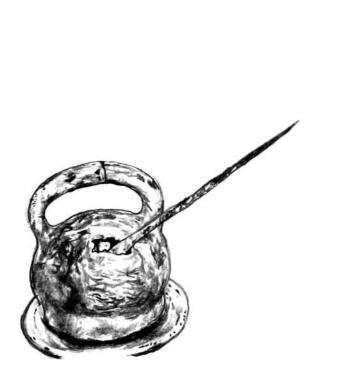
### Nguyễn Xuân Hiên and P. A. Reichart

etel-chewing goes way back. Areca nut and betel leaf are its two crucial components, born by the areca palm tree and betel vine, respectively. The areca palm tree was domesticated somewhere in the Malaysian archipelago. While excavations of ancient archaeological sites have never turned up betel vine or leaf remains, human skeletons bearing evidence of betel-chewing, dated to about 3,000 B.C., have been found in Duyong Cave in the Philippines. At Spirit Cave in north-west Thailand, C. F. Gorman found carbonised areca-like grains carbon-14-dated to 7,000-5,500 B.C. (1970: 98), but their domesticity needs to be scientifically confirmed (C. F. Gorman, personal communication to Hiên, 1978).

Hailing from a time closer to ours, the Vietnamese folktale 'The Story of the Betel and the Areca Nut' is well known all over the world and quoted in publications on betel-chewing. Until 2004, it was believed that the folktale relating to betel-chewing is the only one in existence, with multiple versions adapted from its original source,  $L\acute{y}nh$  Nam chích quái liệt truyện (Collection of Extraordinary Tales from Lýnh Nam, hand-written version, 1695). But a careful screening of ancient and modern literature written in  $ch\tilde{u}$ , Nho,  $ch\tilde{u}$ ,  $Nôm^2$ ,  $ch\tilde{u}$ , Quô'c  $Ng\tilde{u}$ ,  $(ch\tilde{u}$ ,  $Việt)^3$ , French, English and German from the 11th century to the present led to a wonderful discovery: the tale is actually only one

of a series of six different types on the motif 'The Origin of the Betel Chewing Custom'. The five other types are less popular, and each one presents its characters differently. All are told by the Việt ethnic group, while seven other ethnicities (Dao, Tày and Tháy in the north, Co, Katu, Sedang in central Vietnam and the Khmer in the south) contribute their own folktales on the same motif.

Folktales about other motifs related to betel-chewing were also discovered, such as 'The Monk Turned into a Lime Pot', 'The Novice Turned into a Spittoon' and a tale about the specific way the Vietnamese prepare betel rolls, 'Why Do We Use a Tip-cut-off Betel Leaf?'. In addition, we found nine tale variants with details and/or episodes concerning the areca tree, betel-vine, betel quid and quid remains. All of the tales share the same clear impact of Buddhism, as their characters experience endless incarnation and enlightenment. Betel-chewing peoples are familiar with at least some of this rich folktale tradition.



Traditional lime pot from Vietnam



Traditional lime tube from Thailand

### **Betel basics**

Betel quid composition varies from place to place, but its three core components remain the same: the betel leaf, the areca nut and slaked lime. In northern Thailand, and to a lesser extent in Laos and Cambodia, dried areca grain is used in place of the fresh areca nut that is popular in other areas. White lime is popular in north and central Vietnam, while coloured (mainly pink) lime can be found in betelchewing areas throughout mainland Southeast Asia. Tobacco is sometimes added to betel quid and the geographic distribution of its use is supposedly linked to coloured lime use. The manufactured ready-to-chew variety (usually sold under the name pan masala) is unknown in Southeast Asia, but is known in southern China.

Every betel chewer has to use certain tools to prepare his betel quid: a cutter or knife to slice areca nut into quarters and a container for slaked lime. A complete betel service includes up to five components in Laos and Cambodia: areca cutter, lime tube, betel box, spittoon and betel mortar; and nine in Vietnam: areca knife, lime pot, bronze betel box, wooden betel box, spittoon, betel bag, lime tube, betel mortar, betel cloth/towel. Betel service style and materials differ largely from country to country. Handicraft skills, patterns, and decorative motifs depend on local history and culture.

Lime containers in mainland Southeast Asia can be divided into two types: lime tubes in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, were made of bronze or silver with a stupa-shaped lid, richly decorated and never taller than 15 cm; lime pots in Vietnam were made of ceramic or porcelain (or, very rarely, of bronze, silver or gold), shaped like the areca nut or a globe, and stylistically glazed. The latter type is divided into two sub-types: one has a curved handle (north and south Vietnam) and the other has a nodule-shaped handle (in central Vietnam, where Champa's influence still exists). A round spatula hole is also a main characteristic of Vietnamese lime pots, and some are decorated with calligraphic poems. Some Vietnamese lime pots were actually made in China or England.

The Buddhist sects strongly influenced lime container shape and design. In Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, where the Theravada sect attracted major followers, the tube lid was stupa-shaped. In Vietnam,

where the Mahayana sect was strongest and pagodas did not include a tower, the potters chose to make their products in the shape of the areca nut. Today, these once-popular lime containers have totally disappeared from daily life. Collectors seek out ancient lime tubes and pots, while fake pots are made with a modern design, and reserved for foreigners.

In Thailand, and to a lesser degree in Cambodia and Laos, areca cutters were developed in several forms and shapes, especially in royal courts and aristocratic families of dethroned dynasties. Nowadays, these highly decorated cutters have disappeared and been replaced by ordinary but sharp knives. In Vietnam, where areca cutters were unknown, areca knives became smaller and the blade thinner and sharper owing to technological advances.

In the Bangkok suburbs, the Sam Sen market is famous for different commodities from Vietnam. The market is located in the former *làng Gia Long* (Gia Long village), where at the end of the 18th century Prince Nguyễn Ánh (who later became King Gia Long) twice sought refuge; and local villagers are still called (pejoratively) *yuan Sam Sen*. The betel service there retains some Vietnamese characteristics, such as an areca knife in place of an areca cutter.

### Roll me a quid

Betel roll preparation was highly developed in traditional Vietnamese society. A. Landes has called it 'the great art' and said that 'not everyone can prepare a quid that meets all requirements, and only highly skilled ladies from *une bonne maison* can do it'.<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays, the casual quid is popular and chewers do not care about skillful preparation.

However, the special quid named *trâu cánh phu'ọ 'ng* (betel quid in the shape of phoenix wings) is highly appreciated in rituals, wedding ceremonies, religious festivities, and sometimes daily offerings to the ancestors altar or spirit house. This kind of betel can be prepared in multiple ways, and it is not easy to decide which is the most elegant and attractive. The ritual role of the betel quid in such ceremonies has

evolved to a level of such importance that even younger generations, whether living in the homelands or abroad, accept it.

In mainland China, Hu-nan Province, the young generation has been influenced by the new Taiwanese custom of betel-chewing, and uses something similar to pan masala. This phenomenon occurs despite the fact that the Han majority group have not been chewing betel for centuries. On the other hand, in Yu-nan Province, near the Vietnam border, home to many people of the Tai ethnic group (Tai Hoa Yu branch), areca palm trees that once provided nuts for chewing are now used to make decorative objects because the chewing custom is disliked among the young.

The Vietnamese enclave of Jiang-bin District, in Kwuan-xi Province, is home to 19,000 Chinese- and Vietnamese-speaking inhabitants (as of 2004). According to a local folk song, they moved from the Đồ So'n area (which today is a commune in Hái Phòng City) to Jiang-bin



in 1511. While another age-old custom, the consumption of fish sauce  $(nu \cdot \delta \cdot c \ m \dot{a}m)$ , a typical Vietnamese sauce), has attained new popularity, betel-chewing is in decline. The elderly still chew it, but only in moderation.

## Forever or nevermore? Custom versus cancer

For centuries, people saw betel-chewing as a useful and elegant custom, as the following quotation attests: 'When betel is chewed, hunger and thirst are inhibited and energy-requiring activities decrease in energy consumption. It generates a pleasant, bittersweet taste and stimulates in mild fashion the mind and the spirit, being able to freshen and sweeten the breath and to cleanse the mouth' (Đỗ Thiện 1914: 243). But recent research reveals numerous high risks and side effects. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC 2004), in its *Betel-quid and Areca-nut Chewing*, states that there is sufficient evidence in humans of the carcinogenicity of betel quid without tobacco, which causes oral cancer, and of betel quid with tobacco, which causes oral cancer of the pharynx and oesophagus. Areca nut alone is also carcinogenic to humans.

Cancer-screening conducted by P. A. Reichart revealed many cases of oral cancer/pre-cancer in elderly chewers throughout the region. Risk prevalence among various age groups still must be determined.

Betel-chewing has declined by various degrees throughout the region, though no religion forbids its followers from chewing betel. At the beginning of the 20th century, 80-90% of the population practised it; today no more than 5% do. It appears betel-chewing prevalence in Vietnam is still higher than in neighbouring countries, as statistical data reveals a stable old guard of chewers, but only time will tell how long that will last. The presence of betel and areca in rituals, however, seemingly flourishes everywhere: among majority and minority ethnicities, from Vietnam in the east to Thailand in the west. Sustained

by religion, spirituality and fashion, and posing less of a health risk than tobacco, we hope that the ceremonial and ritual use of betel will endure.

**Prof.** Nguyễn Xuân Hiển (ret.) was Director of the Center for Vietnamese Studies, Amsterdam.

**Prof. P. A. Reichart** is the Director of the Department of Oral Surgery and Dental Radiology, Charite Campus, Berlin.

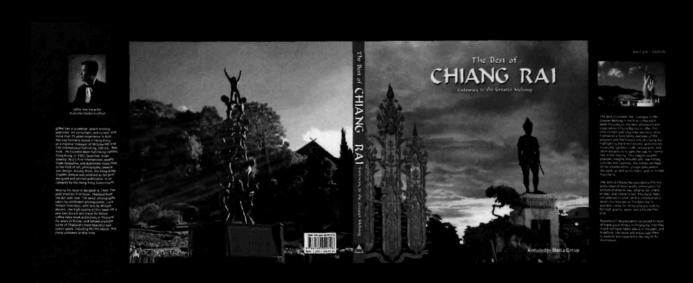
### **Notes**

- 1 Chũ Nho is an old Vietnamese script that uses Chinese characters but with different pronunciation, grammar and syntax; it is not a kind of 'WYW is WYS'.
- 2 Chũ Nôm is a Vietnamese script that was modified from the chũ Nho and represented the language of people on the street; it is a kind of 'WYW is WYS'.
- 3 Chũ Quốc Ngũ = Chũ Việt is the current script of the Vietnamese, based on Latin characters.
- 4 Landes, A. 1885. 'Contes et légendes annamites: Histoire de con Tâm et de con Cám'. Excursions et Reconnaissances 9-22:363.
- 5 Đỗ Thiên. 1914. La coutume de chique du bétel. Hanoi: F. H. Schneider.

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

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### **BOOK INFORMATION**

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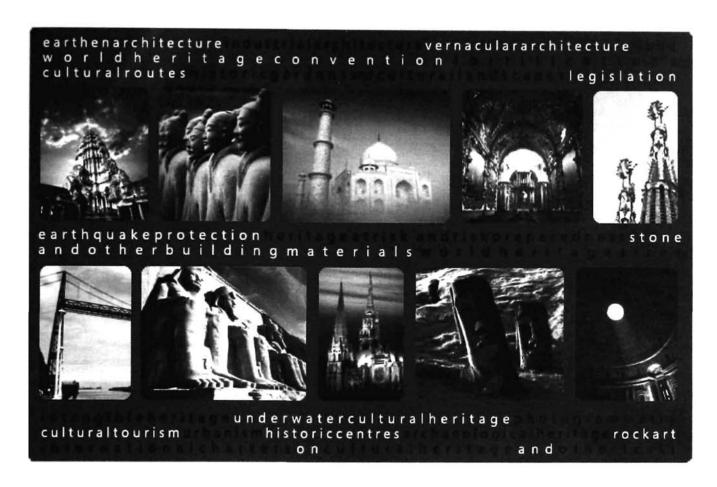
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The Best of CHIANG RAI: Gateway to the Greater Mekong is the first coffee-table book focusing on the best attractions and experiences Chiang Rai has to offer first-time visitors and long-time residents alike. It provides a fascinating overview of the province and the historic city of Chiang Rai; highlighting the finest resorts, golf courses, museums, galleries, cafés, restaurants, and other attractions. This elegant volume provides insights into the arts, the history, cultures and customs, the hidden heritage of the diverse ethnic groups who people this land, as well as its rivers, and its misted mountains.

The Best of Chiang Rai abundantly fills the acute need of more useful information for visitors of what to see, what to do, where to stay, and where to eat. This book does not attempt to cover all this information in detail, but focuses on the best that is available today for those who are looking for high quality, value, and a hassle-free visit.

Readers will be pleasantly surprised to learn of many good things in Chiang Rai that they might not have heard about in the past, and hopefully, this book will encourage them to explore and experience the region for themselves.



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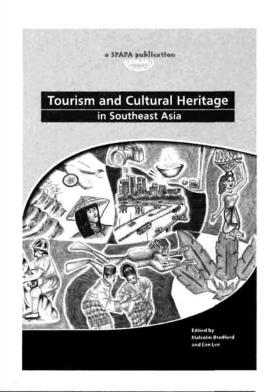
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## Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia



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Russell V. Keune, FAIA American Institute of Architects US\$10 9 Euro

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Published by SEAMEO-SPAFA

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

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THAILAND
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### Rampant looting of artefacts in Cambodia

Cambodian authorities are struggling to counter the illicit trafficking of artefacts, say Robert Carmichael in a *DPA* report.

He informed that a new booklet the 'Red List', produced by archaeologists, aims to guide police and border officials on what to look for.

Amidst widespread poverty in the country and poor law enforcement, the looting of ancient sites and temples is common and difficult to control.

A large number of monuments and sites is said to have been raided in the past few years by looters and traders hoping to exploit purchasers of Khmer statues and jewellery.

Ten years ago at Phum Snay, West Cambodia, road workers dug up a treasure trove of antiquities, Carmichael wrote, but no more than a year later, Phum Snay was robbed clean and destroyed, in terms of archaeological value.

The Red List describes artefacts that are most at risk of being stolen and trafficked.

It helps police, customs officers, border inspectors, tourists and those responsible for the protection of cultural heritage.

A previous list of a hundred stolen items had been made in 1993, resulting in the return of 10 of them which are now in the National Museum collection. Determining the scale of the problems, however, is close to impossible as trafficking is an underground activity.

The illegal trade in archaeological objects is dictated by the prices placed on antiquities, particularly bronze and stone heads. Carmichael said that, four years ago, a Heritage Watch researcher analysed over 300 Khmer artefacts auctioned at Sotheby's in New York, and revealed that the prices offered ranged from US\$7,500 to \$30,000 each.

### **Egypt exhibition in Singapore**

An exhibition in Singapore seeks to demonstrate ancient Egyptians' zest for life to counter the perception that they were obsessed with death.

'Quest for Immortality: The World of Ancient Egypt' displays about 230 artefacts chosen from the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Some of the exhibits are dated 4,000 BC, amongst them mummies, which include that of a young mother that was preserved together with the corpses of her two babies.

The show is sponsored by the government of Egypt, and its collection consists of artefacts discovered at Austrian archaeological excavations in Egypt.

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### Computer analysis identify fake art

Researchers of Dartmouth College in the US have revealed an easy way to determine imitations of original art works.

They demonstrated a method known as 'sparse coding' which constructs a virtual library of an artist's work, and reduces the visual elements to the simplest possible.

The approach reconstructs verifiable works of any particular artist by using varying proportions of those simple elements but would not be able to do so with fake works.

It is reported that the digital analysis of sparse coding can be applied to several issues relating to the study of art.

Authentication of art works is already a technical process that has wide appeal and application, as imitations and fakes continue to proliferate.

### Oldest primate fossils uncovered

Thai archaeologists, in collaboration with French and Swiss specialists, have verified that fossils found in southern Thailand belong to a primate that lived approximately 35 million years ago.

This makes the primate fossils the oldest ever to be discovered, and also suggest that primates originated in Asia rather than Africa. The find was made by the Mineral Resources Department 14 years ago in an abandoned coal mine in Krabi province.

The discovery included lower right molars and upper and left and right molars connected to the eye bone.

Anatomical Record, the scientific journal, published the confirmation of the age of the fossils in November 2009.

### Neanderthals used 'make-up'

Researchers believe that Neanderthals used "body paint" and cosmetics 50,000 years ago.

Shells containing pigment residues that scientists claimed were Neanderthal make-up containers were found at two archaeological sites in Murcia, south of Spain.



Were Neanderthals consumers of cosmetic make-up?

The scientists say that the lumps of yellow pigment discovered were possibly applied as a foundation.

Red powder blended with flecks of a glossy black mineral was also found.

A report on the finding has been published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

## Tomb to shed light on Maya's downfall

A 1,100-year-old tomb has been excavated at the Mayan Tonina archaeological site in Mexico's Chiapas state.

Mexican archaeologists hope that the tomb may help to answer questions about the Maya civilization.

The tomb and objects from another culture may indicate the identity of occupants of the Maya site of Tonina before the fall of the Maya civilization

Prominence has been given to the theories of conflicts between Mayan states or environmental degradation as causes of the decline of Maya around AD 820.

A stone sarcophagus was found inside the tomb, along with a pottery and bones that archaeologists suspect belong to a woman.

## Woman falls and damages Picasso painting



'The Actor' from Picasso's Rose period was painted in the winter of 1904-1905

A woman accidentally fell into a 105-year-old painting of Picasso, and damaged it while she was taking an art class at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

A vertical tear of some 15 cm was left in the lower right-hand base of the painting, 'The Actor'.

The museum announced that the "focal point of the composition" was not affected, and the

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art piece would be repaired in time for an exhibition this year.

The exhibition, 'Picasso in the Metropolitan Museum of Art' will display about 250 works from the museum's collection.

Produced during Picasso's Rose period, 'The Actor' depicts an acrobat in an abstract background, painted on a 1.2 x 1.82 m canvas.

NYT News Service says that dealers rate paintings of this scale and period at over US\$100 million.

Conservators may also be inspecting the damaged canvas to see whether there is another painting underneath or on the reverse side of it.

Research recently shows that 'The Actor' was painted over the other side of a landscape work by another artist, whose old canvas Picasso used.

### Love and lust exhibition is a success

An exhibition dedicated to Eros, the whimsical Greek god, opened in Athens, Greece early this year, and scored a stunning success within a month that prompted the Louvre museum to consider bringing the show to Paris, the city of love.

A seductive statue of Eros and Psyche locked in a passionate kiss, an ancient brothel, vases and urns depicting graphic sexual scenes of erotic play and positions, and a marble phallus were past of the exhibition which tells the story of love and lust in antiquity.

The first major show on such a subject, it displayed 272 objects spanning a thousand years from 6 BC.

Organisers and researchers had prepared for 3 years before attracting 50 museums to collaborate with the museum of Cycladic Art in staging the stirring exhibition.

The show documented the evolving perceptions of Eros and the idea of love, and was structured in 9 sections, each related to a theme, i.e. the history of Eros, love in marriage and religion, and the status of women in ancient society, etc..

An inner sanctum hosted a reality-scale recreation of a Roman brothel, painted in ochre, which existed in Pompeii, Italy.

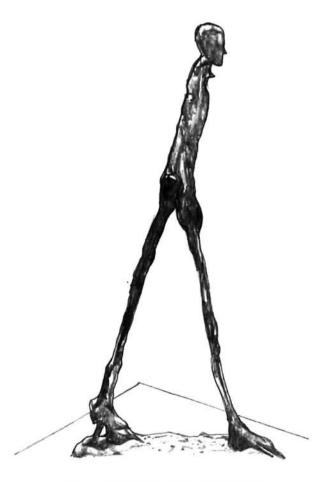
An outstanding revelation was the attitude that the ancient Greeks and Romans had towards prostitution, homosexuality and bestiality, suggesting an extremely tolerant society of openness and lack of guilt.

### Giacometti sculpture record sale

A sculpture has become the most expensive item ever auctioned, at £65,001,250.

'L' Homme Qui Marche I', a life-size bronze sculpture of a man by Alberto Giacometti,

required only 8 minutes after which an anonymous phone bidder secured the record sale at Sotheby's, London.



Giacometti's sculpture had been set to sell for between £12 m and £18 m

Considered one of the most significant works of Giacometti, a 20th Century Swiss artist, the sculptures was believed to be worth so highly because there were few Giacometti sculptures, and they were rarely put up for auction

The auction of the sculpture eclipsed Pablo Picasso's 'Garcon a la Pipe' which in 2004 claimed the record for an art work sold – at £58,520,830 – in New York.

Another Picasso masterpiece, meanwhile, which had been unseen for 43 years, has fetched £8.1 m at Christie's earlier this year.

Tete de Femme (Jacqueline)' is a 1963 portrait of the Spanish artist's second wife, whose neck was said to be short which Picasso often "humorously" exaggerated in portraits.

### Museum show on "pre-archaeology"

An exhibition focused on the political implications of turn-of-the-century archaeology, during the treasure-seeking era before it became an academic discipline, is being held at the Ruhr Museum in Essen, western part of Germany.

Entitled 'The Great Game: Archaeology and Politics in the Colonial Period', the show assembled 800 artefacts, films and photographs, some of which never before seen in public.

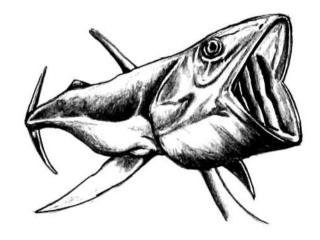
Archaeologists might also have been treasure hunters, explorers, defence attaches, missionaries, travellers and also spies during the colonialist era.

'Lawrence of Arabia' (T.E. Lawrence) supervised archaeological digs before he became part of British espionage in World War I.

Diplomat Max von Oppenheim, who led the Orient Intelligence Bureau in Berlin, directed a major excavation in Syria between 1911 and 1913

### Giant fish existed in dinosaur era

New fossil evidence indicates that large population of giant fish existed in the seas of prehistoric times, and they became extinct at the same time as the dinosaurs.



Bonnerichthys, another giant fish, grew up to 5 metres in prehistoric times

Fossils examined shows that the planktoneating fish lived between 66 and 172 million years ago.

The study by an international team started in Glasgow, Scotland, with an examination of the remains of leedsichthys, the giant Jurassic fish.

Many of the most significant new fossils were found in Kansas, U.S., and they all belong to the leedsichthys family.

## DNA tests suggest Tutankhamun died from malaria

Based on a 2-year scrutiny of the mummified remains of 'Tutankhamun', the boy king of Egypt, experts say he may have died of malaria.

They extracted the DNA of the 19-year-old pharaoh, and found traces of the malaria parasite in his blood.

Since archaeologist Howard Carter's sensational discovery of the intact tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings in 1922, there has been much speculation and conspiracy theories – including hereditary disease, murder, foul play and a fatal fall from his chariot – on the mysterious causes of the young king's death.

Egyptian archaeologists confirmed that the pharaoh had indications of a form of Kohler disease II, an inherited disease afflicting the foot and curvature of the spine.

Among artefacts that were the king's possessions were staves that scientists believe could have been used as walking canes.

They also point to the significance of a fractured leg leading to a rare bone disease that Tutankhamun suffered shortly before his death.

The bone did not heal, and expose the weakened young pharaoh to infection, including a bout of malaria that might have killed him.

Egyptian researchers announced the DNA tests and results in February this year.

Reuters reported that the experts say the teenage king was born of an incestuous marriage, indicating the cause of his (club foot) limp, genetic defects and other deformities.

Incestuous wed-locks among Egyptian royalty were common practice, and the identity of Tutankhamun's mother would need many more months of investigation even though Akhenaten has been named by scientists as the father.

Akenaten's first wife was Nefertiti who did not bear him a son, compelling him to marry his sister so as to produce a male child.

### Hindu temple excavated in Java

An intact 9<sup>th</sup> Century Hindu temple has recently been discovered on the grounds of the Islamic University of Indonesia in Yogyakarta.

The finding highlights Indonesia's varied religious history as interest brought Buddhist monks to the site near a mosque from which the muezzin calls the faithful to sunset prayer.

The country has the largest Muslim population in the world, where three major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, maintain their influences, particularly in Java.

According to Norimitsu Onishi in the New York Times, about 90 percent of Indonesians are

Muslim, with only pockets of Buddhists and Hindus left. "Hinduism and Buddhism, Java's dominant religions for a much longer period, permeate the society and contribute to Indonesia's traditionally moderate form of Islam." It is reported that the university will build a library in a half-circle around the Hindu temple.

Late last year, construction workers unearthed what could be the best preserved ancient monument ever found, experts say.

Yogyakarta's Archaeological Office assigned its staff to excavate the site for 35 days, and uncovered two 1,100-year-old small temples.

A statue of the elephant-headed deity, Ganesha, was found in pristine condition within the main temple.

Linggams, the symbol of worship in the form of a phallus, were also exhumed, along with altars, a statue of Nandi, the sacred bull that Hindu god Shiva rode on, and other artefacts.

Researchers believed that the monuments were buried in a volcanic eruption at Mount Merapi about a thousand years ago, which left them well preserved because the lava covered a river close by before flowing over the temples.

A researcher reported that the walls and statues of the monuments displayed fine relief, and the most valuable objects, including the Ganesha statues, have been moved to the archaeological office.

## Iraq's antiquities may outshine Egypt's

The antiquities of ancient Egypt could someday be eclipsed by the glory of the buried antiquities of Ur, one of the cradles of civilization and biblical birthplace of Abraham, archaeologists and researchers believe.

War and the current strife in Iraq have held back the excavations in Ur, but experts say that treasures from the site will be comparable to those of Egypt, particularly since the tombs at Ur are over a thousand years older.

The most stunning discovery at Ur has been the ziggurat, a stepped platform, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC.

It was part of a Sumerian temple complex at a site which remains largely - 80% - unexcavated.

American archaeologist Charles Woolley sensationally uncovered 16 tombs in the early 1900s, finding some of the greatest treasures of antiquity, including the gold head-dress of a Sumerian Queen, an intricately-carved golden statue of a ram, a lyre decorated with a bull's head, and a golden dagger encrusted with lapis lazuli.

### Fossil of snake-eating dinosaur found

A 67-million-year-old fossil is reported by researchers to belong to a snake that ate dinosaur eggs.

The 3.5m skeleton was discovered in a dinosaur nest, wrapped around a baby Titanosaur (adult Titanosaurs weighed up to 100 tonnes).

First unearthed in India in 1987, it was only in 2001 that scientists identified a snake among the dinosaur eggshells.

They think that the ancient snake was caught in a natural disaster such as a storm, and was preserved in time while it was attacking a hatchling from the egg.

### Home of Jesus-era found

Archaeologists in Israel reported the finding of a dwelling in Nazareth that may date to the time of Jesus Christ.

The site offers glimpses of life during the period Jesus is believed to be growing up there, Israeli authorities said.

Remnants of a wall, a hideout, and a cistern for collecting rain water were discovered.

It is believed that a "simple Jewish family" lived in the small building containing two rooms and a courtyard.

The find was made when construction workers excavated the courtyard of a former convent that would be replaced by a new Christian centre.

### Nefertiti stays in Berlin

Queen Nefertiti's ancient bust will remain in Berlin after German authorities refused to send it back to Egypt.

They explained that the antiquity is too fragile to be transported, and insisted that it was legally acquired about a hundred years ago by the Prussian state.

The 3,300-year-old limestone and plaster bust, which was found at Tell al-Amarna during an excavation financed by Germans in 1912, is the top attraction among the Egyptian collection at the Neues Museum in Berlin.

Queen Nefertiti was the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaton (who introduced a new religion that embraced worship of the sun), and is celebrated as one of the great beauties in ancient history.

Egypt has been requesting the return of the artefact since 1930, with claims that the object was smuggled out of Egypt in 1913, but has been refused by successive German governments.

Berlin says that Egypt has never officially confirmed its claim, even though the Egyptians have been campaigning for the return of antiquities.

In 2009, the Louvre Museum in Paris returned five ancient paintings from a 3,200-year-old tomb near Luxor.

The Egyptian artefacts are believed to be 3,500 years old.

## More Egyptian artefacts and sites found

A giant red granite head of Amenhotep III, one of Egypt's most well-known kings, has been dug up in Luxor.

The 3,000-year-old head was unearthed in the ruins of the mortuary temple of Amenhotep II, grandfather of Tutankhamun.



The head was part of a gigantic statue of Amenhotep III

Illustrated by Ariya Kongwong

Researchers say that the 2.5m head is part of a colossal statue which was discovered many years ago, and that it will be reconstructed.

Archaeologists also found a 2,000-year-old temple in Alexandria that was dedicated to a cat goddess.

The discovery confirms the Greek dynasty of Egyptians persisted in the worship of animal gods.

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### Fan Lee



Statue of Bastet, a domesticated cat which evolved from a lion-headed goddess

Excavated in the Kom el-Dekkah area of the city, the temple is said to belong to Queen Berenike II, wife of Ptolemy III who was king of Egypt in 3 BC.

Statues of Bastet, which the Pharaohs believed was a lion-headed goddess, were discovered.

In a departure from usual finding of tombs belonging to the royalty and elite, Egyptian archaeologists recently discovered tombs of labourers who constructed the great pyramids.

The discovery shows the way of life of the workers over 4,000 years ago.

It is believed that the thousands of men worked 3-month shifts, ate meat regularly, were paid labourers rather than slaves, and were buried in mud brick tombs in the shadow of the sacred pyramids they built.

The tombs date to the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (2575 BC to 2467 BC), and yielded evidence that provides glimpses of typical ancient Egyptian society.

### Swiss watches made with dino poo

A Swiss watch designer has created a timepiece, featuring fossilized dinosaur excrement, with the price tag of approximately US\$11,400.

Yuan Arpa, whose watch creations included the use of moon dust and rust from the Titanic, has now turned to coprolite, fossilized faeces or ancient animal droppings.



Calling it "a unique work that contains a piece of history," Arpa told AFP that the material originated from an herbivore, and investigations into the dinosaur species are underway.

He runs his label Artya, which is based in Vesenaz, Geneva, and described his approach as "very close to contemporary art," and also the "dark side of watch-making."

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His colleague, Jean-Marie Schaller, also apply dinosaur parts in his watch-making, producing a limited edition that contained bone fragments from an herbivore of about 150 million years old which was found in North America.

Schaller said that the dinosaur-bone watch retails at about US\$295,470 and comes with a certificate authenticating the antiquity.

### Natural causes led to Angkor's fall

Drought, rain and flooding over a sustained period of time contributed to the demise of Angkor in 1431, an international team of researchers concluded.

Studying the ring patterns of ancient trees, they discovered that the former capital of the Khmer empire was susceptible to natural events that threatened its water and food supply.

Angkor's predicament was compounded by its resultant vulnerability to infrastructural, economic and geopolitical pressures during the 14th-15th centuries.

For decades, extremely dry periods in Angkor were met by sudden deluges and floods that damaged infrastructure, weakening an empire already in decline.

The scientists examined the rare cypress tree, Fokienia Nodginsii, at two sites in the highlands of Bidoup Nui Ba National Park, Vietnam, to reconstruct 759 years of monsoon and drought data.

### Machu Picchu due to re-open

After closing for 2 months, Peru's most significant archaeological site, Machu Picchu, will be re-opened.

Landslides and heavy rain earlier this year forced the monument to be closed because rail access to the most popular site in Latin America was destroyed.

Ninety percent of Peru's tourism income is derived from the Cuzco region, where the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Inca ruins lost 60,000 visitors, and revenue estimated at US\$1m each day during the closure.

Over fifty percent of Cuzco's population is involved either directly or indirectly in the tourism industry, the local chamber says.

The closure of Peru's most visited site has demonstrated its profound importance to the country's economy.

### Stolen Paul Klee work recovered

A stolen Paul Klee painting has been turned over to US authorities by a Montreal gallery owner who became suspicious after a Florida art dealer attempted to sell it to him.

The 1930 painting, 'Portrait in the Garden', depicts a woman surrounded by flowers, and had been stolen from the Marlborough Gallery.

US authorities have passed the art work to the London-based Art Loss Register, which

monitors stolen art, and operates a database listing 350,000 items.

The painting by the neo-impressionist Swiss artist, who was influenced by German Expressionists and Picasso's Cubism, is valued at US\$100,000.

### Pompeii's victims on display

An extraordinary exhibition on the skeletal remains of victims of the catastrophic volcanic eruption in Pompeii is being held at the Antiquarium de Boscoreale, a short distance from Pompeii.

When Mount Vesuvius exploded, spewing forth a mass of volcanic debris on 24 August, AD79, two cities – Pompeii and Herculaneum – were completely destroyed.

Between 10,000 and 25,000 are estimated to have died.



Figure exhibit of a dog in a contorted position

Pompeii seemed to have been frozen as a vast amount of volcanic rock and dust swiftly consumed its inhabitants and livestock, killing many on the spot.

The exhibition focuses on these victims who have been preserved under a thin layer of plaster.

Digging up the bones, and maintaining them in plaster has been carried out since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when archaeologists started to unearth Pompeii's buried existence.

The exhibits are displayed as archaeologists have found them buried in ash, including a victim clasping a step; a man with his arm over his mouth; and a family probably trying to "fend off the calamity that was engulfing them," BBC News says.

Over a hundred figures have been preserved in plaster, but not all are on show.

A total of 1,150 dead have been found in Pompeii; however, a third of the city is still not excavated.

### Separate human species evolve

A team of scientists reported finding human's tools on Indonesia's Flores island which suggests that human-like creatures might have colonized the area long before a 'hobbit' human species existed there.

The scientists have dated the pre-'hobbit' humans to no less than a million years ago







A variety of stone flakes were unearthed Illustrated by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya

Tools discovered at the Mata Menge site, Sao Basin, central-west Flores, have been dated to 880,000 years ago.

Wolo Sege site yielded over 40 stone flakes, hand tools and other artefacts in deeper sediments which are even older.

Many of the recovered items had been buried, and capped by a layer of volcanic ash which has been dated precisely to over a million years ago.

The idea of Flores having a very long history of occupation will intensify the debate over the origins of the hobbit, Homo florensiensis, found on the island in 2003.

One theory holds that the hobbit, which evolved from the bigger Homo erectus, gradually became smaller in size and isolated.

Another has it that the features in the hobbit's body, e.g. its length and shape of shoulder girdle, are primitive and unlikely to belong to a dwarfed H. erectus.

These researchers propose that the hobbit may have evolved from older creatures who migrated from Africa to inhabit Asia even before H. erectus.





Skull comparison: the hobbit (left) and modern human Illustrated by Ariya Kongwong

The discovery of H. floresiensis was astounding because it indicated that a separate human species with features not seen for millions of years existed at the same time as our ancestors some 18,000 years ago.

It challenges the long-held understanding of the evolution of humans, and raises questions about Africa's central role.

Critics from the line of argument that the hobbit, 1m-tall with a brain the size of a baby's, was a deformed human, explained that various genetic disorders might have caused its body and brain to shrink, and to develop odd features.

### Ancient human relatives discovered

The fossils of two ancient human-like creatures have been uncovered in South Africa.

Found in cave deposits at Malapa in 2008, the remarkable remains of a female adult and a juvenile male are close to 2 million years old.

Scientists believe that the finds contain important information for the period between older hominids and the modern Homo species, while some researchers argue that they may belong to the Homo species.

The Malapa creatures were excavated from the well-known Cradle of Humankind world heritage site where large number of fine fossils have been found over the years.

In the same year, archaeologists found a fossil finger in Siberia (Altai Mountains, Denisova Cave) that analysis indicates belong to a previously unknown hominin.

Different from Neanderthals and early modern humans, this heavily muscled Homo species cohabited with Homo sapiens in the area about 30,000 to 50,000 years ago.

The study carried out by the Max Planck Institute suggests that early modern humans, Neanderthals and a completely distinct humanlike creature had contacts in the region.

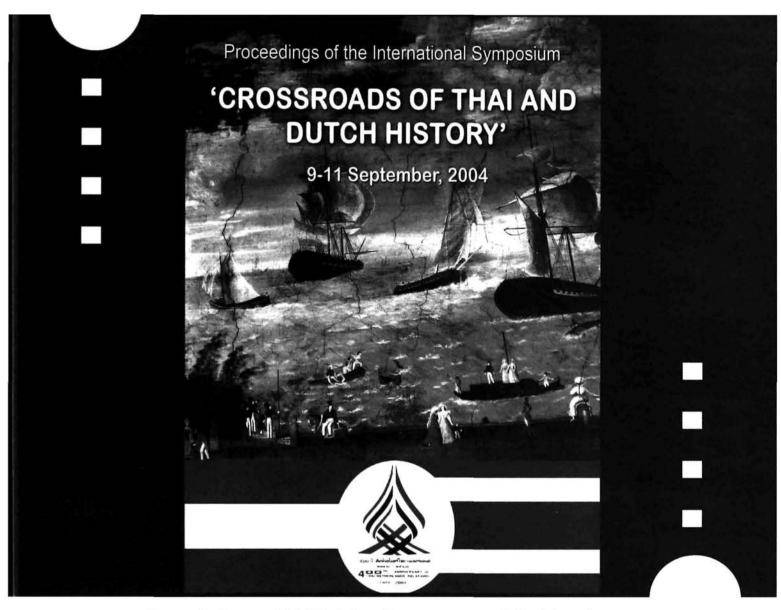
It has held for a long time that modern humans co-existed with Neanderthals in Europe for over 10,000 years, but the discovery of a dwarf human species, 'the hobbit' on the Flores island of Indonesia, introduces new considerations.

More evidences are emerging to challenge the conventional view of human evolutionary lineage, and many unknown hominin fossils may yet be found.

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya except those on pages 37 and 41

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## **CROSSROADS OF THAI AND DUTCH HISTORY**



Re-exploring and highlighting the process and the historic development of Dutch-Thai relations, along with a re-examination of the underlying circumstances and surrounding contexts.

This volume of the proceedings of the international symposium, 'Crossroads of Thai and Dutch History', has been published by SEAMEO-SPAFA.

The papers were presented at the symposium by scholars of Thailand and the Netherlands, as well as others of international repute. They discuss new evidence, explore new channels of research, and also provide new interpretations of known sources.

Some of these papers are splendidly finished results of long-term research, while others are new and fresh, even challenging presentations prepared specially for this symposium.

### To obtain copies, contact:

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts SPAFA Building, 81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road Samsen, Theves, Bangkok 10300 THAILAND Tel (662) 280 4022-9 ext 109 Fax (662) 280 4030 www.seameo-spafa.org spafa@seameo-spafa.org E-mail: seameo-spafa.org

spafa03@yahoo.com

### **SEAMEO-SPAFA Staff**

Contacts for information and enquiries:

Director

Pisit Charoenwongsa

pisit@seameo-spafa.org

Advisors

Pradech Phayakvichien Vishnu Aimpraneetra spafa@seameo-spafa.org spafa@seameo-spafa.org

Administration

Wilasinee Thabuengkarn Vassana Kerdsupap Girard Bonotan Jittipha Jaiboon Soros Jenjai wilin@seameo-spafa.org vassana@seameo-spafa.org girard@seameo-spafa.org jittipha@seameo-spafa.org spafa@seameo-spafa.org

**Finance** 

Supa Thanasakulprasert

supa@seameo-spafa.org

**Project Development** 

Kevin Charles Kettle Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayuddhaya kevin@seameo-spafa.org sakulchat@seameo-spafa.org

**Publication & Computer** 

Ean Lee Ratchaporn Tesjeeb ean@seameo-spafa.org ratchy@seameo-spafa.org

Research

Nyunt Han
Patcharawee Tunprawat
Patsri Tippayaprapai
Patcharee Kunasarn
Alongkorn Jutagate

uhan@seameo-spafa.org patchy@seameo-spafa.org patsri@seameo-spafa.org patcharee@seameo-spafa.org alongkorn@seameo-spafa.org

Audio-Visual

Nipon Sud-Ngam

nipon@seameo-spafa.org

Library

Wanpen Koogpoon Nawarat Saeng-wat wanpen@seameo-spafa.org nawarat@seameo-spafa.org

