

# NSC HIGHLIGHTS

News from the Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

#3

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*A Street-Wandering Muslim Ecstatic in Colonial Singapore*

*Dating Koh Ker: New Data from 10th century Angkorian capital*

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*Archaeology and Public Education in Singapore: Workshop with the Ministry of Education*

*Imagining Asia(s): Networks, Actors, Sites*

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An image of Bajang Ratu gate, East Java, Indonesia, taken during the Southeast Asian Art History and Summer Programme.  
(Credit: Terence Chong)



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### The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre

The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, pursues research on historical interactions among Asian societies and civilisations.

It serves as a forum for the comprehensive study of the ways in which Asian polities and societies have interacted over time through religious, cultural, and economic exchanges, and diasporic networks. The Centre also offers innovative strategies for examining the manifestations of hybridity, convergence and mutual learning in a globalising Asia. It sees the following as its main aims:

1. To develop the 'Nalanda idea' of building for contemporary Asia an appreciation of Asian achievements and mutual learning, as exemplified by the cosmopolitan Buddhist centre of learning in Nalanda, as well as the 'Sriwijaya idea' of Southeast Asia as a place of mediation and linkages among the great civilisations.
2. To encourage and develop skills needed to understand the civilisations of Asia and their interrelationships.
3. To build regional research capacities and infrastructure for the study of the historical interactions among the civilisations and societies of Asia.

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ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang 119614  
Tel: (65) 6870 4509  
Fax: (65) 6778 1735

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*Dusk at Mount Penanggungan, Trawas, East Java, Indonesia. (Photo Credit: Hadi Sidomulyo)*

## EDITORIAL

This issue is the final one for 2016. NSC has seen a slew of activities and events in 2016 which focused on the Southeast Asian region.

Beginning in March, 'The Heritage of Ancient and Urban Sites in Southeast Asia' workshop gathered heritage scholars and activists to present contemporary case studies of heritage dilemmas and challenges. The workshop was a crucial platform to understand the intersection of heritage politics, state interests, and developmental agenda. Also opening in March was the NSC Archaeology Unit Gallery in the ISEAS Library. The Gallery is dedicated to the artefacts excavated from various sites in Singapore by members of the Archaeology Unit over the last decade. We hope it will be a useful and attractive educational tool for students and visitors alike.

In July-August, NSC co-organised the Southeast Asian Art History and Conservation Summer Programme with SOAS and the University of Surabaya. The Summer Programme was held in Trawas, East Java, Indonesia and attracted students and professionals from around the world. The content of the programme focused on premodern Javanese art and religious history. Dr Acri and Dr Njoto's article in this issue provides a fuller account of the event.

NSC also sought to convey the appeal of archaeology to local schools. In August members of the Archaeology Unit were invited to speak to local teachers on the importance of archaeology and its use of material culture. As Michael Ng's account in this issue points out, it is hoped that such presentations can bridge the gap between contemporary research and mainstream education.

In October, NSC held the 'Imagining Asia(s): Networks, Actors, Sites' conference at ISEAS. 14 scholars from 9 countries converged to examine how the concept of 'Asia' had been constructed by empires and colonial powers. Dr Acri's piece in this issue offers more details.

Finally, 2016 closes with the NSC Archaeology Field School in Koh Ker, Cambodia. From 20 November to 15 December, over 14 students from East Asian Summit member countries will be exposed to the craft of archaeology, local heritage and museums both in Cambodia and Singapore.

We are sure 2017 will be an even more hectic and fulfilling year.



## FEATURE:

# Distant Tales: Maritime Contacts in the Highlands of Sumatra

*By Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz*

Visiting Fellow, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre

*Reconstruction of a community house next to a megalith in Kerinci, highland of Jambi, on Sumatra, 10th-14th century (Credit: Zámolyi Ferenc)*

Historians have long focused their attention on lowland polities like the Sriwijaya-Melayu Empire to aid their understanding of Sumatra. The empire, with its regional centre in Southeast Sumatra, lasted from the 7th to the 14th century. However,

less researched by scholars are the interactions between the highlands and lowlands, as well as the factors which have contributed to the unique cultural diversity found in the present day highlands. My work on the Tanah Datar seeks to show that

there is closer connectivity between highland communities in Sumatra and trade networks than previously thought.

The Barisan Mountain range in Sumatra is located between the wide plains of the east coast and the narrow strip of the west coast of the island. The mountain range and river systems allowed several diverse cultural communities to flourish more than 3,500 years ago. These communities saw the development of trade networks and the accumulation of a rich food supply.

One link between highland communities and trade networks lies in the founding myths of these communities. For example, the founding of many highland communities has links to trade-based or seafaring stories. A highland community's idea of prosperity may be that of a returning ship fully laden with merchandise. Its idea of leadership may be modelled on an exceptional ship captain who was thus honoured as its founder.



*Sumatra during the Srivijaya-Malayu Empire, 7-14th century (Credit: Tanah Datar Project)*

These sea-based leitmotifs suggest that the links between highland communities and sea trade are closer than previously assumed.

Beyond founding myths, tangible evidence of the trading networks of the Sriwijaya-Melayu Empire in the mountainous hinterland can be found in the erection of stone monuments such as megaliths. In the highlands of Jambi, for instance, these worked stones, some up to 4m in length, were placed close to spacious community houses and are considered outstanding archaeological features. They likely marked the centre of village federations during an early sedentary phase. Luxury goods such as glass beads and Chinese ceramics were introduced upriver, and Hindu-Buddhist motifs were found on the decoration of the megaliths during the 10th and 14th centuries. Glass beads came from afar, while the imported ceramics were more durable than locally made earthenware and thus highly esteemed.

Trade also stimulated state formation in West Sumatra. In the 14th century, King Ādiyavarman, the last Hindu-Buddhist ruler, was said to have established his kingdom in the highland area of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra. His name was found on stone inscriptions from ca. 1347-1375. The potential seat of his kingdom lies on a high mound overlooking a strategic valley pass. Today the site is called Bukit Gombak, which literally means rolling or undulating hill. Its ancient name is not known.

West Sumatra was especially well-known for its gold, metal goods, forest products and, later, cash-crops like pepper. The market for foreign goods was maintained in the highlands either via an integrated market system

or directly by Chinese tradesmen. Essential to Bukit Gombak's development as a trading centre were three main economic factors: the control of the trading network and access to gold resources; a surplus obtained by wet rice cultivation; and specialised crafts like metal working or weaving. In general, the objects found in the highlands were small sized ones which could be easily transported hundreds of kilometres. The quality of the objects varied and ranged from very rare fine examples to rather modest decorated trade ware.

Recent archaeological fieldwork from the Tanah Datar project in the highland regions of Sumatra has revealed signs of vital commercial interactions between the highland and maritime regions since the 14th century. The excavation unearthed cultural remains and what are suspected to be post holes from a stilt house. It is likely that the site was used as a place of residence because Song and Ming period porcelain and Indo-Pacific beads were found there, and are likely dated to a site occupation between the 14th and 17th centuries. The finds show that this highland region was also part of a global maritime economic network.

In the first millennium CE the highland trade with the coastal ports led to the development of highland settlements. The coastal trade significantly impacted the cultural and socio-economic conditions in the highlands by transferring new goods, technology, and knowledge. Newly discovered settlement sites in the highlands of West Sumatra were found to have maintained trading connections to both the west and east coasts of Sumatra and this is significant as two different maritime

routes in the Indian-Pacific trade could be served.

In the 15th century, when the socio-political entities in the highlands consolidated, there was an increase in the international trade of goods. The highlanders' surplus wealth was invested in trade goods and foreign luxury items were consumed to a much greater extent. This can be demonstrated by the fact that ceramics from China, mainland Southeast Asia, and even West Asia found their way into archaeological record of this period. Before then, only a few Chinese ware types from previous centuries were found. The existence of trade-based founding myths also underscores the fact that commerce played a prominent role in the early formative stages of the highland political systems.

The excavation shows that the Minangkabau polity at that time was not a forgotten "Kingdom of Words", as viewed by the early modern period, but one of the few internationally recognised Sumatran highland communities of the 14th century. The lack of locally written sources for early Southeast Asia allows archaeologists to fill the knowledge gaps. We only have to unfold the distant tales of the highlands.

**This article is from a forthcoming book entitled "Tanah Datar: Early Settlement Archaeology and History in the Highlands of West Sumatra, Indonesia" (ISEAS Publishing).**



Excavation in West Sumatra, postholes of a stilt house, 14-17th century (Credit: Tanah Datar Project).



Megalith in the highland of Jambi, 10-14th century, decorated by human figures and concentric circles (Credit: Kerinci Project)



Nuh's mausoleum. (Credit: Teren Sevea)

## A Street-Wandering Muslim Ecstatic in Colonial Singapore

By Teren Sevea

Visiting Fellow, Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

An early 19th century traveller to Singapore would have spotted a breed of Muslim saints, ecstasies and miracle-workers amongst the broader community of merchants, labourers and convicts on the island. One of the most prominent Muslim ecstasies (antinomian *unruly friends of God*) of that time was the miracle-worker or *keramat*, and patrilineal descendant of Prophet Muhammad (sayyid), Nuh Al-Habshi ('Sayyid Nuh').

A microhistory, or microscopic examination, of the life of Sayyid Nuh helps us recount a history of early colonial Singapore and its port at the time when it was an Islamic hub attracting Muslim settlers, pilgrims, merchants and Sufis. Far from being 'mystical' or 'esoteric', Sufis and ecstasies like Sayyid Nuh were plugged into religious economies of the Indian Ocean. He circulated the Bay of Bengal



An illustration of Sayyid Nuh preserved by his descendants at Pulau Penyegat. (Credit: Teren Sevea)

regularly, protected cosmopolitan merchants in their seafaring and trade, and settled Muslims into the port city of Singapore.

Sayyid Nuh's prominence was recorded in the earliest Tamil book printed in Singapore (1872), which celebrated the miracles of the *keramat* who was buried in Tanjung Pagar six years earlier. Similarly, *Singapore Free Press* articles reported on how Sayyid Nuh was 'reckoned as a prophet by the Mohammedans' of Singapore from 1819 to 1866, how he won over European converts to 'Islamism', and how he was a notorious shoplifter (who robbed the rich to help the poor)!

Being an ecstatic and non-literate, Sayyid Nuh left no books, students, institutions or mosques. Nevertheless, his grave in Tanjung Pagar continues to draw pilgrims

“He could teleport himself to ghost-infested junctures of the Ocean to help distraught merchants, lascars and fishermen. On Fridays he could routinely teleport himself to meet fellow Sufi saints in Mecca.”

from various parts of the Indian Ocean. Pilgrims visit the buried *keramat* to beg for his intermediary powers. For believers, Sayyid Nuh continues to live in 2016, 150 years after his physiological death.

Historical traditions of Sayyid Nuh's life in colonial Singapore, however, have been regularly transmitted and remembered by his devotees. Elders of Sufi orders in Southeast Asia, as well as his descendants and grave custodians, have often taken up the responsibility of remembering historical traditions of the *keramat* and of documenting 'correct', 'Islamic' anecdotes from his glorious life, in hagiographies (saintly biographies).

According to these Malay and Tamil hagiographies, Sayyid Nuh migrated from the northernmost Straits Settlement of Penang to Singapore, upon its foundation in 1819, only to devote his life to performing public miracles, being in states of ecstasy, and to dumbfounding European legal authority. He was a *keramat* of the street and docks, who sheltered urban laborers, fishermen and carriages of a British port that was plagued by poverty, crime, and lack of basic health services.

Hagiographies of Sayyid Nuh are replete with traditions of an omnipotent Muslim saint who roamed the streets and docks to heal victims of epidemics and ill children, to make rain, to battle 'real' muggers, to rob the rich and feed the poor, and to enjoy the Chinese *wayang*.

Beyond a messiah of subalterns in Singapore, Sayyid Nuh also protected south Indian and Arab merchants in their travels across the Indian Ocean through his miracles. Even after his physiological death, new migrants such as Muslim weavers and small-scale brokers who had migrated to Singapore upon the decline of the handloom industry in southern Tamilnadu, relied upon his miracles to cross the Bay of Bengal and to settle in their new home.



A framed genealogy of the "Hadrami Sayyid."  
(Credit: Teren Sevea)

As hagiographies of Sayyid Nuh and a European ethnographic account reveal, devotees of Sayyid Nuh were well-aware of the fact that crossing (or teleporting across) the waters of the Indian Ocean was child's play for the *keramat*. He could teleport himself to ghost-infested junctures of the Ocean to help distraught merchants, lascars and fishermen. On Fridays he could routinely teleport himself to meet fellow Sufi saints in Mecca.

Some of his most elaborate teleportation exercises, however, pertain to his encounters with European authorities and episodes when he was incarcerated in prisons and asylums for nakedness and 'madness'.

Even today, most devotees are able to meticulously recollect anecdotes of Sayyid Nuh's encounters with the founder of colonial Singapore and the first British Residents of Singapore. According to these anecdotal histories, European rulers regularly attempted to jail Sayyid Nuh who roamed the streets in a state of ecstasy and nakedness, under charges of 'madness', vagrancy and 'religious excitement'. Nevertheless, these rulers were always left baffled

by the *keramat* who at times, literally, turned them on their heads. Upon 'successfully' locking up Sayyid Nuh for charges of religious excitement and lunacy, the *keramat*'s jailers were invariably stupefied by his escape from cells and shackles.

Performing one of his final miracles in 1866, Sayyid Nuh broke out of a rudimentary asylum on St. John's Island. There he was confined for 'hysteria', only to walk back to Singapore over the water!

Like his 19th century devotees who were disgusted by the colonial incarceration of their *keramat*, devotees of Sayyid Nuh in contemporary Singapore emphasise that his regular states of ecstasy were not to be perceived as 'madness'.

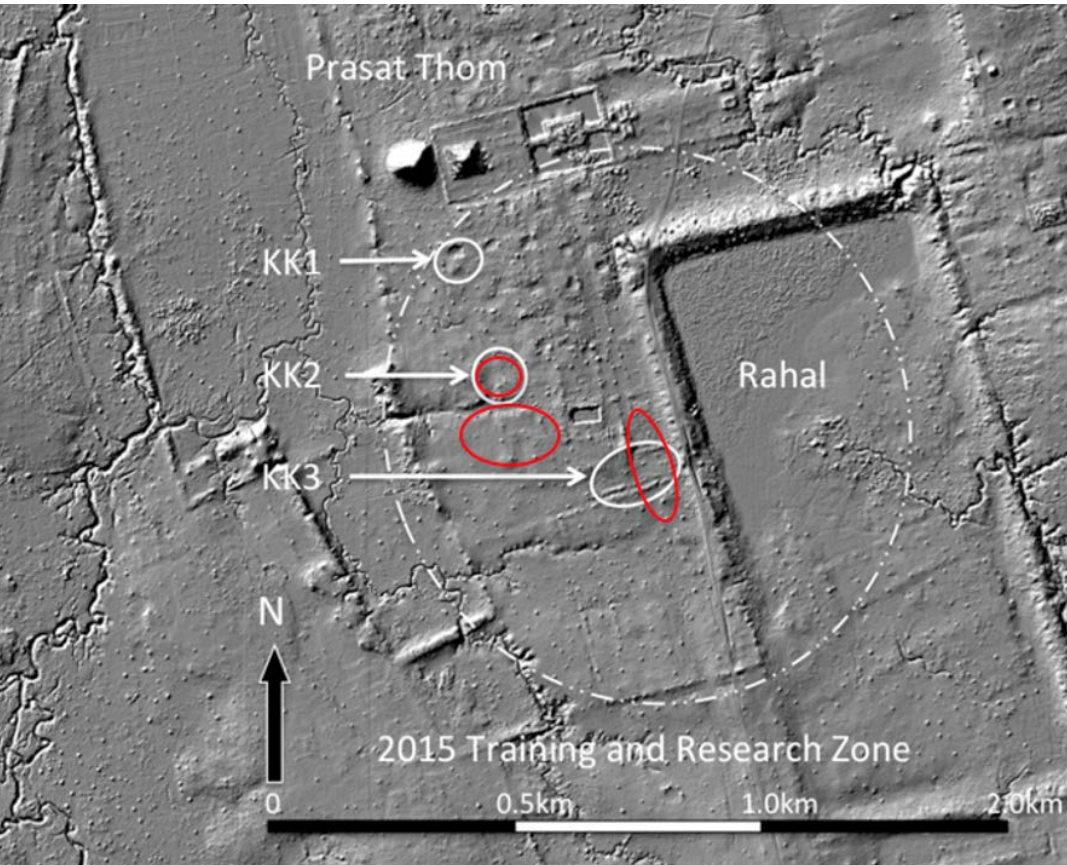
In a global city where Sufi shrines and the histories of *keramats* have disappeared from the landscape and absent from notions of Islamic 'reform', devotees of Sayyid Nuh argue that he was an unrivaled friend of God who was put into in a perpetual state of ecstasy by God Himself. As the most comprehensive Malay hagiography of Sayyid Nuh argued, it was in colonial Singapore that he developed into a *majzub* (an ecstatic in a state of intense attraction to the Divine) and into a Islamic saint whose stature surpassed that of prophets.



An Image of Nuh's younger brother, Arrifin bin Muhammad al-Habshi (Credit: Teren Sevea)

# Dating Koh Ker: New Data from 10th century Angkorian capital

*By David Kyle Latinis*  
Visiting Fellow, Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre



2015 training and research zone at Koh Ker. The red indicates research zones in 2016. (Credit: D. Kyle Latinis, APSARA Authority)

Radiocarbon samples were carefully selected. (Photo: David Kyle Latinis)

Scientific dating of Koh Ker – the 10th century capital of the Angkorian Empire – indicates that significant settlement and activity in the urban core began at least by the 7th/8th centuries; hundreds of years earlier than expected.

Five radiocarbon samples obtained from the lowermost cultural levels at two habitation sites consistently fall within a 7th/8th century range. Two additional dates at lower levels span the 9th/10th centuries, and may derive from intrusive features and repurposed site use during the 10th century construction boom heyday of then King, Jayavarman IV. Although 10th to 13th century thermoluminescence dates have been obtained by the Hungarian team working at Prasat Krachap (Sipos et al 2011), these are the first radiocarbon dates from

systematically excavated settlement sites at Koh Ker.

The consistent occurrence of early dates in similar cultural layers at two separate sites (KK1 and KK2) gives stronger validity to the dating and indicates that a sizeable early settlement was present. However, it also generates many new questions.

Sub-surface and surface ceramics indicate a lengthier span of activities ranging from pre-Angkor to post-Angkor eras; coarsely estimated from possibly the 5th to 15th centuries and beyond. This implies perhaps over 1,000 years of settlement and use.

It remains unknown if the dates, stratigraphy, and cultural remains represent continual settlement and activities or periodic re-purposing.

Artefact densities from cultural layers indicate a substantial amount of activity throughout. We would expect various high and low periods of popularity and population density changes over time, some of which may have been more abrupt and rapid for various reasons.

Despite its remoteness, it is unlikely that Koh Ker was a distant and isolated 'closed-system' phenomenon. This hypothesis is further supported by the identification and recovery of Khmer glazed pottery produced in other parts of the kingdom as well as a sufficient amount of exotic artefacts such as Chinese and possibly Persian ceramics.

The pre-Angkorian pottery is similar to finds from Sambor Prei Kuk and may suggest a strong social and



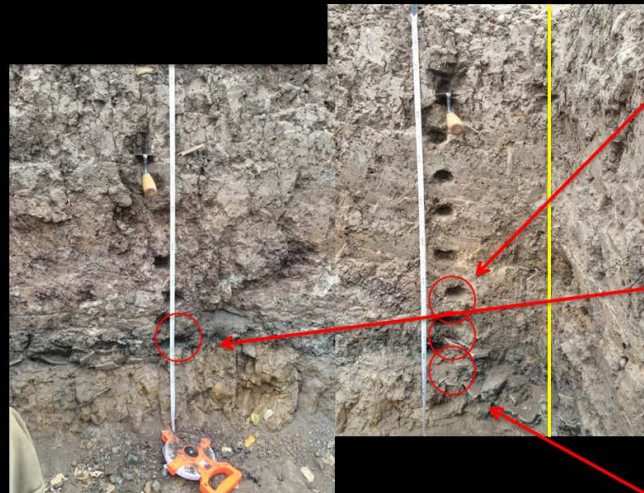
## What is radiocarbon dating and how does it work?

Radiocarbon dating ( $^{14}\text{C}$  dating) allows researchers to determine when a particular living organism died.  $^{14}\text{C}$ , a radioactive isotope of carbon, is generated in the Earth's atmosphere by cosmic rays and nitrogen. It is taken in by plants as  $\text{CO}_2$ . Animals then take it in by eating the plants. When the animal or plant dies, it stops exchanging carbon with the environment. The  $^{14}\text{C}$  will then start to decay (decrease in number) - so that after approximately 5,730 years, the amount of  $^{14}\text{C}$  will be halved (this is its half-life). The amount of  $^{14}\text{C}$  can be compared with a non-radioactive isotope, such as  $^{13}\text{C}$ , and calibrated for accuracy to give a calibration curve. The limit of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating is generally between 50,000 to 60,000 years. For samples older than 60,000 years old, different dating methods can be used, such as Uranium-Thorium (U-Th) dating which looks at coral and speleothem.



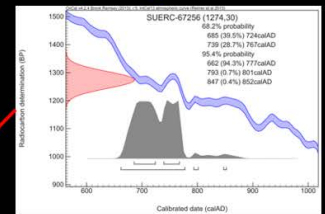
Photo Credit: D. Kyle Latinis)

### Radiocarbon results: KK2 (Q49): 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries

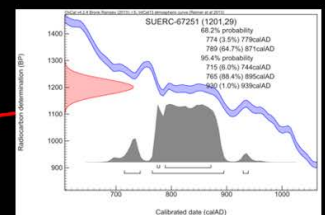


Location of radiocarbon date samples and the dates. (Image Credit: D. Kyle Latinis)

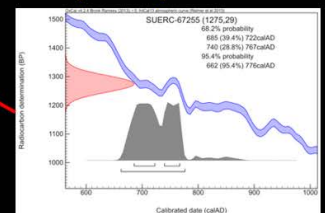
#### 662 (94.3%) 777 cal AD



#### 765 (88.4%) 895 cal AD



#### 662 (95.4%) 776 cal AD



economic connection during the 7th/8th century Chenla period. The bio-geographic transition zone around Koh Ker (floodplains to hilled forest) may have provided a unique niche for exploitation of key resources such as timber and forest products; possibly also providing trans-shipment and other services. Furthermore, LIDAR imaging (Evans 2015; 2016) reveals a more complex mosaic than previously imagined – one that hardly suggests a “single urbanization event” characterised by a remote jungle city that was rapidly conceived, carved out, and abandoned in half a century or less.

Details regarding these research results were presented at the 26th Technical Session meeting of the ICC-Angkor (23 June 2016) in Siem Reap, Cambodia; the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) in Kyoto, Japan (30th August 2016); and ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (07 October 2016). A peer-reviewed paper will be published soon (currently in review).

The radiocarbon samples, obtained during the NSC Archaeological Field School season in December 2015, were sent to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC) for testing. The 2015 Field School was the result of a joint cooperation project between NSC and APSARA Authority and was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore.

NSC will continue its partnership with APSARA Authority and the National Authority for Preah Vihear to conduct another field season at Koh Ker in November to December 2016 as part of the NSC Archaeological Field School.

### Related Links

Latinis, David Kyle. (2016). “Historical Ecology in Southeast Asia: Understanding Analytical Paradigms in Relation to Research Problems and Methodology.” [WAC presentation.] [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David\\_Latinis/publications](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Latinis/publications)

Latinis, David Kyle. (2016). “Koh Ker: 2015 NSC-APSARA (Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre and APSARA National Authority) Field School & Training: Design, Impacts and Results 23 JUNE 2016; ICC-Angkor.” [ICC-Angkor presentation.] [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David\\_Latinis/publications](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Latinis/publications)

**The 2017 NSC Archaeological Field School is slated to take place in the summer of 2017. Please see the NSC website for details on the application process.**



EVENTS:

## The Southeast Asian Art History and Conservation Summer Programme: Towards New Partnerships With Indonesian Academic Institutions

*By Andrea Acri and H el ene Njoto*

Associate Fellow and Visiting Fellow, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre

This Summer Programme was the first international programme dedicated to art history and conservation in the region. It was organised by the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Center (NSC), in collaboration with the Southeast Asian Art Alphawood Programme (SAAAP) of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the University of Surabaya (UBAYA).

Envisaged as the first in a series of academic events, the Summer Programme aims to foster the study of art history in Southeast Asia. The focus of this year's programme was premodern Javanese art from the Central Javanese 'Hindu-Buddhist' period to the East Javanese (Singhasari and Majapahit) and Early Islamic period (ca. 8th– early 17th century).

Art history education and training are often overlooked in Indonesia and broader Southeast Asia. Hence

this programme was received with global enthusiasm. No less than 71 international applications were received with only 20 accepted.

Eight countries were represented namely Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Cambodia, USA, France (partially funded by EFEO), India (including from Nalanda University) and the Netherlands. Participants were selected according to grades, proficiency in English, and the programme's relevance to their study or occupation. All of them had to be engaged with art history, archaeology, history, museology, conservation, or religious studies of pre-modern Java or related region in Southeast Asia and Asia.

Students came from western universities such as Yale, Harvard, UCLA, and Berkeley (USA); Concordia (Canada); Sydney (Australia); EFEO/EPHE/Sorbonne (France); Leiden (The Netherlands);

SOAS and UCL (United Kingdom). Southeast Asian universities included ITB, UGM, University of Malang (Indonesia); and the Royal University of Fine Arts (Cambodia).

Meanwhile, non-students came from relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and the Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore); the Smithsonian (USA); the Borobudur Youth Programme and UNESCO Jakarta, and the BKKI-Committee of the Collaboration for Arts and Culture (Indonesia).

Five days of lectures were held at the Ubaya Training Centre in the mountain town of Trawas, East-Java. The centre was at the Southern foot of Mount Penanggungan, identified from the earliest times, with the holy Mount Mahameru of the Hindus and Buddhists. The venue was chosen to meet specific requirements such as the relevance to art history in Java



**Left to Right (Clockwise):** Group photo in front of the Penanggungan Information Centre, Ubaya Training Centre, Trawas (Credit: H  l  ne Njoto). Aaron Kao and Leang Sirang during the drawing class at the Penataran temple, Blitar (Credit: H  l  ne Njoto). Group photo with the hiking group in front of Candi Guru, mount Penanggungan (Credit: D. Kyle Latinis). Dr Tran Ky Phuong's lecture on Champa and Java in the main classroom, Trawas Campus (Credit: D. Kyle Latinis)

(nearby temples, ruins, and a campus museum with an art and photographic collection) and the proximity to Mount Penanggungan, the spiritual centre of the Majapahit Empire.

Additionally, the simple but comfortable accommodation (wooden stilt cottages) at the training centre contributed to the choice of the location. Three days of tour visits to East Javanese temples and museums were scheduled in the middle of the week. It included Trowulan, the actual site of Majapahit's former capital, the Panataran temple in Blitar, and Majapahit State's temple dating from the 15th century. On the last day participants chose between a hike up the Penanggungan to visit mountain temples and hermitages from the late 15th-early 16th centuries or a visit of Singhasari temples complex near Malang (10th century).

The programme provided high quality lectures on pre-modern Javanese

art history, religious history and conservation by an international group of regional experts (Marijke Klokke, Nigel Bullough, Peter Sharrock, Lutfi Ismail, Swati Chemburkar, Soedarmadji Damais, Hanna Szczepanowska, Sylvia Haliman, Andrea Aciri, and H  l  ne Njoto).

This choice of international lecturers from disparate academic backgrounds created a synergy and diversity of perspectives that was much enjoyed by the participants. The topics of the lectures spanned the interpretation of Javanese temple reliefs in the light of Old Javanese and Sanskrit texts; the cult of the Buddhist goddesses Praj  n  p  ramit   and Mah  pratisar  ; the comparison of Javanese and Cam art; the Indian 'prototypes' of the Central Javanese Borobudur monument; the religious dimension of performing arts in Java, Cambodia, and India; architecture history from Central and East Java; arts from the late Hindu-Buddhist and early

Islamic period; and much more. PhD candidate participants also had the opportunity to present their research in dedicated evening slots. Drawing sessions, led by Aaron Kao, were carried out in the classroom and on site.

Lastly the Summer Programme also helped establish ties with the Heritage Conservation Centre in Singapore and the Universities of Surabaya and Malang in Indonesia. Future editions of the programme will further strengthen the partnership with Indonesian institutions, and foster the study, preservation and valorisation of the rich artistic and architectural heritage of the region.

# Archaeology and Public Education in Singapore: Workshop with the Ministry of Education

*By the Archaeology Unit*

Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

What's happening in Singapore archaeology? What are the latest finds and methods? What kinds of research questions are being asked? How are they answered? Are the historical narratives of Singapore and the region changing? How can these issues benefit young students?

Lloyd Yeo, a Master Teacher in History, from the Ministry of Education (MOE) attended "The Heritage of Ancient and Urban Sites" workshop organised by NSC in March 2016. Impressed with the presentations and poster displays by the Archaeology Unit, Mr. Yeo and his colleagues invited the Unit's researchers to conduct a one-day workshop in order to help raise teacher awareness of local and regional archaeology. The workshop's aim was to enhance secondary school history education in Singapore, which had begun to incorporate the knowledge and data from several archaeological excavations over the island.

Prof. John Miksic (National University of Singapore), Dr. Kyle Latinis (Visiting Fellow, NSC), and Mr. Aaron Kao (Research Officer, NSC) were invited to deliver presentations on 23 August 2016 at CHIJ (Toa Payoh). The event, entitled "History Subject Chapter Outreach - Singapore and Southeast Asia: Controversies and Continuity", was well attended and garnered

positive feedback.

Discussions ranged from ghost stories, rare finds, myth-busting, validating obscure historical references with facts gleaned from new archaeological discoveries, and the large amount of artefacts recovered from Singaporean sites dating to the 14th century. Singaporean archaeologists are now analysing thousands of artefacts. This will offer a significantly enriched understanding of life patterns on the island and global connectedness for over 700 years.

There has been an increased interest in recent years in the professional practices of local archaeology as well as the narrative of Singapore's regional and extra-regional position. Hence, the significance of this MOE workshop went beyond merely presenting "historical trivia" to students. Instead, the workshop helped instructors to teach students to ask new questions with unique data sets, use different methodologies and analytical approaches.

One point that was stressed during the workshop was that archaeology was not a field which proved or disproved history. Rather, the discipline is considered a historical science that focuses on the material remains and long-term impact of past societies. In short, archaeology provides a material perspective to

complement history.

Many of the approaches utilised in archaeology can also be applied to fields such as human geography, economics, social sciences, physics, digital imaging and computer graphics, and even educational games.

NSC looks forward to further contributions to MOE and exploring means to convey archaeological findings and material culture in interesting and relevant ways to Singaporean students. This will ensure a sustained interest in local history amongst the younger generation.

## Related Links

Latinis, D. Kyle. (2016). "Archaeology - Southeast Asia - Singapore - Education". [Complete PowerPoint for MOE event.] <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David-Latinis/>

Peterson, Jane A. (2014). "In New Textbook, the Story of Singapore Begins 500 Years Earlier" (New York Times, May 11) <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/world/asia/in-new-textbook-the-story-of-singapore-begins-500-years-earlier.html>



(Credit: D. Kyle Latinis)

# The Homeschoolers' Hands-on Experience

*By Michael Ng*

Research Officer, Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

For approximately three months, from June to early September 2016, homeschoolers were a common sight at NSC. They were here to help with post-excavation work and to learn about the island's past through hands-on activities, discussion sessions, and field trips.

These homeschoolers helped to clean artefacts found at the 2015 Empress Place excavations. This experience allowed them to learn about the past by handling artefacts that were hundreds of years old. After all, some earthenware sherds have intricate designs that are only revealed after the gentle use of a toothbrush and water. The glimmer of excitement in their eyes was noticeable when the homeschoolers saw exquisite designs emerge for the first time from a newly cleaned porcelain sherd dating back more than 700 years.

The homeschoolers' archaeology programme began in 2015 and is

one of the many public archaeology outreach programmes organised by the Archaeology Unit. Field trips were organised to Fort Canning, National Museum Singapore, the Civic District, the Asian Civilisation Museum and the NUS Museum. These field trips differed from the usual docent-guided museum tours as they emphasised the archaeological perspective when looking at displayed material culture. In addition, they gave the homeschoolers an idea of the cleaning, sorting and curating process that an artefact undergoes after excavation. The artefacts are thus seen as vital objects in a broader narrative.

Although the programme has been running for two years, improvements were made in 2016 by introducing afternoon topical discussions on a variety of archaeological topics. Older homeschoolers also embarked on a research project of their choice as interns. Many of

them were curious and enthusiastic, and asked many questions.

Although their topics varied, each intern was asked to tackle a certain aspect of Singapore's past whilst being mentored by a member of the Archaeology Unit. Their research project culminated in a presentation and a research paper. Despite having limited time, they were able to produce interesting and inspired research ideas.

Public outreach programmes like these are vital to public archaeology. A public archaeology programme must not only provide relevant information but also cater to audiences of different age groups and different interests. While the main intention of the programme is to benefit the homeschoolers and expose them to the world of archaeology, it was also an enriching experience for the mentors and supervisors involved.



Fieldtrip to NUS Museum. (Credit: S. T. Foo)

Intern presentations. (Credit: Michael Ng)

Field trip to Fort Canning. (Credit: Kay)

Washing artifacts. (Credit: Kay)



## Imagining Asia(s): Networks, Actors, Sites

*By Andrea Acri*

Associate Fellow, Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

NSC and Nalanda University (India) jointly organised the conference “Imagining Asia(s): Networks, Actors, Sites” on 10–11 October 2016. Held at ISEAS, it was convened by Andrea Acri (NU and NSC), Kashshaf Ghani (NU), Murari K. Jha (NU), and Sraman Mukherjee (NU), and constituted a landmark collaboration between the two institutions.

14 scholars from nine countries convened to explore Asian societies as interconnected formations through the trajectories/networks of circulation of people, ideas, and objects in the *longue durée*. Moving beyond the divides of old Area Studies scholarship and the arbitrary borders set by late colonial empires and the rise of post-colonial nation states, this conference mapped critically the configuration of contact zones in which mobile bodies, minds, and cultures interact to foster new images, identities, and imaginations of Asia.

After the opening remarks by ISEAS Director Tan Chin Tiong and Nalanda University Vice-Chancellor Gopa Sabharwal, Prof. Farish Noor (NTU) delivered the keynote speech “Locating Asia, Arresting Asia: Grappling with ‘The Epistemology that Kills’”. The keynote successfully set the stage as it problematised today’s political boundaries drawn in the 19th century and appropriated by post-colonial states, and unpacked

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the issues of naming, identity, modernity, and postmodern global capitalism in the context of framing and imagining Asia(s).

Panel I grouped three papers exploring past and present conceptualisations of the region, namely the idea of Asia set forth at the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 in Delhi (Gopa Sabharwal), the geo-environmental metaphors of Monsoon Asia and Maritime Asia as alternative histories and geographies for the study of intra-Asian religious networks (Andrea Acri), and the idea of Asia in British Romantic poetics (Anjana Sharma).

Panel II was devoted to trans-local phenomena in the domain of material culture and architecture across Asia. The three panelists focused on early maritime trade networks across the Indo-Pacific area (Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz), Javanese participation in early pan-Asian trends for masonry architecture from the 16th to the early 19th century (Hélène Njoto), and the transmission of architectural knowledge between South India and Sri Lanka (Sujatha Meegama).

The second day opened with a panel on knowledge production and transfer across the Indian Ocean, including a paper on Theosophical and Indic knowledge networks in India and Indonesia from 1900s to 1990s (Marieke Bloembergen), and a paper on François Valentijn and

the Dutch networks of knowledge transfer in the Bay of Bengal (Murari K. Jha).

Panel IV focused on the histories, geographies, and politics of pilgrimage. The first panelist (Sraman Mukherjee) revisited the geographies, transmissions, and reconstitutions of Buddha relics in South and Southeast Asia, while the second panelist (Kashshaf Ghani) explored the reception of Hajj among South Asian Muslims in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The last panel was devoted to trans-local dynamics and intra-Asian connections across space and time. The first paper by Iain Sinclair described the construction of Sanskritic Buddhism across mediaeval Asia as a “principled Asian transnationalism”. The second paper by Federica Broilo unveiled the interconnectedness and mobility of Islamic architecture from West to East Asia in the middle ages and nowadays. The final paper by Vu Duc Liem problematised the construct of Nguyen Cochinchina, relocating it between East and Southeast Asia in the 16th–18th centuries.

The conference was closed by a short roundtable, in which the conveners discussed the issues of (trans)locality, mobility, and imagination in Asian contexts.

The actual corridor of student rooms in Monastery No. 01 at the ancient site of Nalanda. (Credit: Iwan Pranoto)

## IN THE NEWS:

# In Search of Sriwijaya's Curriculum

By Iwan Pranoto

Education and Cultural Attache, Indonesian Embassy, New Delhi, India  
Mathematics Professor, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia

### An Asian History of Sciences

The history of science in Indonesia, and Southeast Asia in general, prior to the arrival of Europeans, has not been adequately studied. Pre-colonial Southeast Asian societies are thus regarded as "underdeveloped". This unfortunate image is, however, not steeped in fact.

The most complete record on academic life in ancient Nalanda and Sriwijaya was written by the Chinese scholar Yijing (or I Ching), some 1300 years ago. This Buddhist monk had studied in the two nodes in the knowledge network during the Asian golden age.

According to Yijing, the curriculum and the depth of learning in Nalanda and Sriwijaya were not very different. He argued that rather than going to Nalanda, students could learn in Sriwijaya. Moreover, studies in Nalanda would be incomplete if one did not also study in Sriwijaya.

### Ancient Nalanda

In its heyday Nalanda ("giving out liberally" in Sanskrit) did not only teach theology but subjects like mathematics, logic, language, art, astronomy, and medicine. Eastern and Greek philosophies were taught as well.

There were 11 colleges in ancient Nalanda, each having its own quarters for students and lecturers who accompanied the students daily. It can be inferred that education in Nalanda (and perhaps also in Sriwijaya) nurtured each student holistically. In Europe, such an education model is popularly referred to as a liberal arts education.

The operation of ancient Nalanda, with 10,000 students and 2000 teachers, relied on public support. The surrounding villages supported Nalanda through the donation of surpluses from their farms so that students and teachers could focus on learning and teaching. This is why there are storage rooms at the large kitchen at the site.

### Evidence of Science in Ancient Sumatra?

If education in Sumatra was as advanced as Nalanda, why has textual evidence of its achievements not been found? According to Dr. Andrea Acri there are several possibilities.

Firstly, evidence of scientific achievement may not be found in manuscripts but contained in other forms of tangible and intangible heritage such as in temples or preserved as ideas expressed through art and religion. One must thus examine existing heritage to unlock scientific secrets.

Secondly the ancient manuscripts from Lombok to Sumatra were made from Lontar leaves (Siwalan, in East Java). Considering the fragility of the material, the humidity of the tropics, it is understandable that only few ancient manuscripts remain today.

Now, in spite of the lack of written records on the history of ancient knowledge, many experts believe that the sciences, which developed in the archipelago from Lombok to Sumatra, were very sophisticated for their time.

Borobudur with its magnificent dimensions is an excellent example. This temple is complex in its construction and connected to the positions of the celestial bodies. Therefore, Dr. Acri argues that the people who designed it possessed a strong mathematics and natural science background. Thus, it is a challenge for historians to uncover the scientific knowledge encoded in various tangible and intangible heritages.

This is an excerpt of an article from the Indonesian newspaper Kompas published 4 October 2016, entitled "Mencari Kurikulum Sriwijaya".

Original: [https://iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/Iwan-Pranoto\\_Sriwijaya\\_KompasOct2016.pdf](https://iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/Iwan-Pranoto_Sriwijaya_KompasOct2016.pdf)

English translation by Ten Leu-Jiun: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/InSearchforSriwijayanCurriculum.pdf>



Nalanda University Interim Campus. (Credit: Andrea Acri)

## CORRESPONDENCE: Notes from Nalanda University

*By Andrea Acri*

Associate Fellow, Nalanda–Sriwijaya Centre

The past few months have been laden with exciting news for Nalanda University (NU).

In August 2016, NU celebrated the opening of the School of Buddhist Studies, Philosophy, and Comparative Religions. The School is the first of its kind in India, where no established tradition of academic study of religion currently exist. It aims at fostering critical thinking and exploring the wider cultural and historical context of Buddhism and other Indic religions in different regions of Asia, as well as providing students with the theory and methods of the study of religious and philosophical traditions.

The School has enrolled more than 20 MA students from several countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vietnam, China, Korea, Japan, Brazil, and Peru. Its international faculty body consists of experts in Asian religious traditions and classical languages (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali, and Chinese) of different disciplinary backgrounds (Religious Studies, Philology, Area

Studies, and Archaeology).

I contributed to the didactic portfolio by teaching modules on Indian Philosophy, Introduction to Buddhist Studies, Introduction to Religious Studies, and Sanskrit. I have been impressed by the commitment and thirst for knowledge of the students, who come from widely different backgrounds—from Buddhist monastics exposed to a traditional learning curriculum to Physics and Engineering graduates. Teaching at Nalanda has, once again, proven to be a highly stimulating and rewarding experience.

On 27 August, the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, visited NU for its first Convocation ceremony. After delivering an inspiring speech, the President conferred the MA degrees to the pioneering batch of students who had enrolled in 2014, and laid the Foundation Stone of the new campus. The ceremony, widely covered by the national media, was attended by several members of NU's Governing Board, including Prof. Amartya Sen, Chancellor George

Yeo, and top government officials of Bihar. On 8 September the Vice President of India, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, visited NU to open a film festival. An interactive session with students and faculty was held during the ceremony, in which some of the pressing issues of our time like environmental protection, education, and international conflict resolution, were discussed.

Nalanda was on the spotlight earlier in July when the remains of the ancient Nalanda Mahāvihāra were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. NU was instrumental in putting together the application dossier in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India. These developments promise to further raise the international profile of NU and attract global interest in its history-laden surroundings.



### Did you know?

This is the central stupa at the ancient ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara. Some of the most famous stories about Nalanda, one of the oldest known institutions of higher learning in the world, comes from the 7th century travelogues of Chinese monks who studied there, such as Xuanzang and Yijing. Such student monks were known to have brought Buddhist texts back to China.

While Xuanzang travelled via the Silk Road and inspired literary works such as the ever popular "Journey to the West," Yijing was a Chinese monk who studied Sanskrit in the kingdom of Sriwijaya (possibly the site of Muara Jambi in South Sumatra) prior to arriving in Nalanda. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, Temasek (ancient Singapore) was also part of Sriwijaya in the 14th century. The current Nalanda University, located in Bihar state, is a modern-day attempt to revive the glory of the ancient university.

(Photo Credit: Andrea Acri)



## The NSC-NU Internship Experience

By Azad Hind Gulshan Nanda

Graduate Student, School of Historical Studies,  
Nalanda University

'Nalanda' and 'Sriwijaya' represents two ancient learning centres. In order to celebrate their shared cultural past, NSC and Nalanda University (NU) in India inaugurated an internship programme in 2016. This programme provides an opportunity for NU students to carry out an eight-week internship at NSC, mainly to contribute to NSC and Archaeology Unit (AU) work, and to make use of the library collection at ISEAS.

The programme is especially aimed at students with a specific research interest in intra-Asian connections, and in the cultural links between South and Southeast Asia.

I was honoured to be selected as the pioneering intern under the programme. At NU, I pursue an M.A. in historical studies, with a focus on comparing South and Southeast Asian cultural and religious history. During my five-week internship, I contributed to the indexing of the upcoming volume entitled "Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons", edited by Dr Andrea Acri. I made use of the ISEAS library to gather sources related to my

master thesis proposal, and carried out work at AU.

The indexing work gave me an opportunity to read the volume on esoteric Buddhism before it was even published, while the repeated proof-reading of the manuscript also enhanced my critical close reading skills. The well-stocked ISEAS library was a valuable resource which carried the latest research in the field of Southeast Asian studies. At AU, I had the chance to wash excavated artefacts. This taught me to handle ancient ceramics and their significance for research.

I was able to work with global researchers at ISEAS and participated in workshops and lectures at ISEAS and the National University of Singapore. This gave me a first-hand experience of current scholarly trends. Field visits in Singapore under the guidance of my internship supervisors Dr. Andrea Acri and Dr. Hélène Njoto gave me an insight on Southeast Asian culture and history. It was exciting to experience the multicultural and multiethnic society of Singapore, which is the outcome of hundreds of

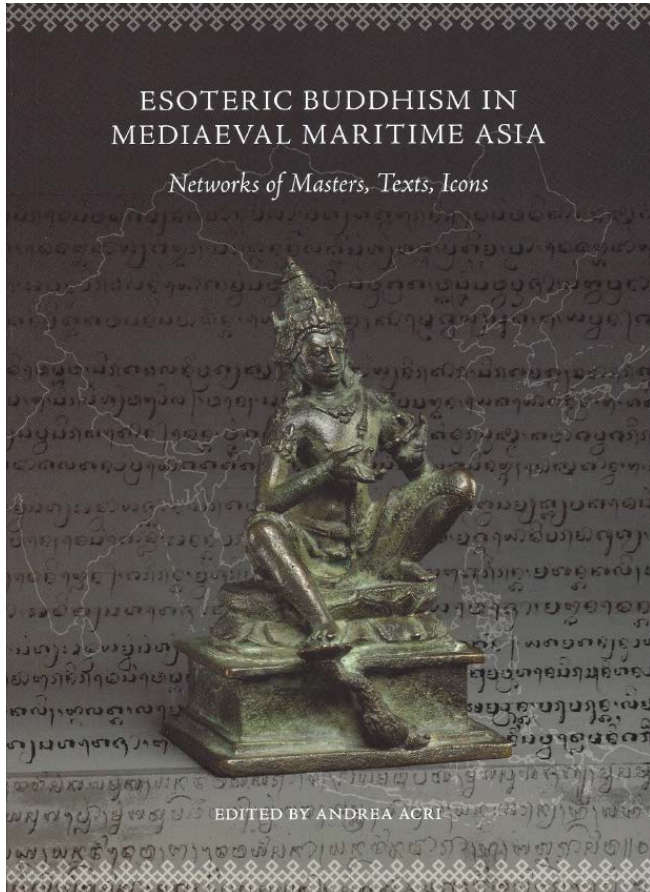
years of Asian interconnections.

Overall, my internship at NSC was a great experience. It has inspired me to establish a Southeast Asian Students' Society at NU to encourage academic and personal exchanges between students focusing on Southeast Asian studies, and/or between students coming from Southeast Asia.

*Azad holds a BSc in Physics from Patna University and is currently a 1st year Master's student in the School of Historical Studies at Nalanda University, Bihar, India. His research interests include the comparative religious and cultural history of South and Southeast Asia. He has been active in various public awareness campaigns for heritage conservation. During his internship at NSC he designed a research proposal focused on Southeast Asian festivals for his Master thesis. Azad was the first NSC-NU intern and was with the NSC in 20 June - 22 July 2016.*

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

### *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons (2016)*



*Editor: Andrea Acri*

*Publisher: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak institute*

*Pages: 468*

*ISBN (Soft Cover): 978-981-4695-08-4*

*Price: US\$79.90 / S\$89.90*

This volume advocates a trans-regional, and maritime-focused, approach to studying the genesis, development and circulation of Esoteric (or Tantric) Buddhism across Maritime Asia from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries AD. The book lays emphasis on the mobile networks of human agents ('Masters'), textual sources ('Texts') and images ('Icons') through which Esoteric Buddhist traditions spread.

Capitalising on recent research and making use of both disciplinary and area-focused perspectives, this book highlights the role played by Esoteric Buddhist maritime networks in shaping intra-Asian connectivity. In doing so, it reveals the limits of a historiography that is premised on land-based transmission of Buddhism from a South Asian 'homeland', and advances an alternative historical narrative that overturns the popular perception regarding Southeast Asia as a 'periphery' that passively received overseas influences. Thus, a strong point is made for the appreciation of the region as both a crossroads and rightful terminus of Buddhist cults, and for the re-evaluation of the creative and transformative force of Southeast Asian agents in the transmission of Esoteric Buddhism across mediaeval Asia.

For more information:

<https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/publication/2182>

## OPPORTUNITIES:

### *Visiting Fellowship Positions at NSC*

NSC is now accepting applications for Visiting Fellowship positions from scholars at all ranks who wish to undertake resesarch and writing in two areas:

- 1. Premodern maritime history of Southeast Asia** - Research to focus on trade routes in the Southeast Asian region or maritime economic linkages to China or India.
- 2. Buddhist history in Asia** - Research to focus on premodern Buddhist links and networks between Southeast Asia or Buddhist material culture and art.

Review of applications began 31 October and will continue until appointments are made.

For more details, please see:

<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/about-us/opportunities>

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### Events at ISEAS

#### **Seminar - The Social Relations of Hanoi's Reproduction Art Market**

**Speaker:** Dr. Ben Loh

**Date:** 21 December 2016

**Time:** 3pm-4:30pm

**Location:** Seminar Room 2, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

#### **Workshop: National Imaginations in Southeast Asian Art**

**Dates:** 20 January 2017

**Location:** ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

**Info:** <https://iseas.edu.sg/events/upcoming-events/item/3745-call-for-papers-workshop-national-imaginings-in-southeast-asian-art-deadline-for-abstract-31-oct-2016>

#### **Workshop - Circulating the Bay of Bengal, Miraculously: Translating Wonder and Travel in Southeast Asia**

**Date:** 7 February 2017

**Venue:** ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

This workshop aims to collect histories of travel, enchantment and wonder across the longue durée, in Southeast Asia. It will bring together historians whose work spans the geographic and temporal scope of history of Muslim societies from the medieval era to the early modern period, with a focus on 'magical' connections between Southeast Asia and South Asia. The geographic and temporal scales of this conference are deliberately broad in large part because these are concepts and phenomena that traverse the length and breadth of religious history and experience. This workshop also aims to collect materials essential for writing histories of 'Islamicate' Southeast Asia, and the interweaving histories of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.

**Info:** Please check our Facebook and mailing list for more details!

### External Events

#### **December 2016**

#### **China-Arabia, Encounters and Engagements**

**Dates:** 15-16 December 2016

**Location:** Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore

**Info:** <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Event/Detail/fa7f6be3-f3f6-4f2a-bb2f-813704d58782>

#### **January 2017**

#### **Talk: The Mon Cities and Myanmar Cultural Heritage**

**Speaker:** Dr. Elizabeth Howard Moore

**Date and Time:** 13 January 2017, 7pm

**Location:** Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

**Info:** For the 'Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar Exhibit.'

#### **February 2017**

#### **Gender Perspectives on Colonial Inter- Asian Labour Migration**

**Dates:** 9-10 February 2017

**Location:** Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore

**Info:** <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Event/Detail/d1b1f601-5f51-4893-a646-0eaaedafbbaa>

#### **Mapping Wider Bagan: The Role of Andagu**

**Speakers:** Dr. Elizabeth Howard Moore and Dr. Htwe Htwe Win

**Dates:** 10-11 February 2017

**Location:** Yale-NUS, NUS Museum, and Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

**Info:** Prof. P. Chirapravati's seminar at Yale-NUS in conjunction with two exhibits on Myanmar: Asian Civilizations Museum (Curator Stephen Murphy) "Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar;" and NUS Museum's "Burmese Ceramics."

## IN THE NEWS:

### **Crossroads of the Past, Hope for the Future**

By Jason Salim, ASEANFocus, issue 4 (Aug-Sept), 2016

The NSC was mentioned in the article as a research institutional link between EAS member countries. The article highlights the potential of Nalanda University as an example of collaboration between countries of the East Asia Summit. More information: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ASEANFocusAugSep16.pdf>



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ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang 119614  
Tel: (65) 6870 4509  
Fax: (65) 6778 1735