

NSC HIGHLIGHTS

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On Some Early Javanese Batiks

Sarsikyo - Tablet-Woven Dedicatory Ribbons of Myanmar

An Early Buddha Image from Buluh Cina Plantation, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra

The Decorated Earthenware from the National Gallery Singapore Site

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Javanese aid groups of the Company, by Jan Brandes
(Credit: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. NG-1985-7-2-65)



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NSC HIGHLIGHTS

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ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614
Tel: (65) 6778 0955
Fax: (65) 6778 1735



Detail of relief on Angkor Wat, taken during the NSC Archaeological Field School. (Credit: S. T. Foo)

EDITORIAL

In this issue of NSC Highlights, we focus heavily on material culture and investigate it within its societal context. Material culture can signify wealth, power, access to resources, as well as social and economic networks. The rarity and exclusivity of the materials from which the objects are made, and their inclusion in certain contexts, can be powerful projections of performed social and religious identity. Our first feature by Dr. H el ene Njoto, for example, examines how early Islamic period mausolea art from 15th-17th century Java fits into current debates on Islamicness, displays of power, and permanence. The co-opting of earlier Hindu-Buddhist iconography suggests an element of local agency. The first of two textile studies is by Mr. Peter Lee and is a succinct survey on early Javanese batiks that shows the importance and vibrancy of batik. The following work by Ms. Vanessa Chan is about the usefulness of the tablet-woven ribbons as mediums for rich art historical and historical information regarding the tradition, which is being revived.

Studies of artistic and decorative styles may also help date the materials more precisely than radiocarbon dating. Dr. E. Edwards McKinnon's article, for example, is on the exciting discovery of a Buddha image from the Buluh Cina plantation in North Sumatra which may bring forward dates for the Buddhist community for that area to the mid-to-late first millennium C.E. Mr. Aaron Kao, who looks the decorated earthenware from the excavations from the National Gallery Singapore in 2009 and 2010, and allows readers a peek into a study of style and the decorative preference of the past. The final feature article has Mr. Lim Chen Sian commenting on the current state of archiving archaeological materials in Singapore and how proper care and documentation could safeguard the collections for future generations to come.

This issue also features a summary of the 2017 season of the NSC Archaeological Field School by Dr. D. Kyle Latinis, where the discovery of statues in-situ at the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Angkor Park made global headlines. Dr. Andrea Acri, who gave a lecture on tantrism and state formation in Southeast Asia on 14th August 2017, discussed how the tantric magical practices and rituals empowered and legitimised pre-modern rulers.

This issue also features several initiatives by the Archaeology Unit. A Conservation for Archaeologists workshop hosted at NSC on the 22nd-24th August was the result of a collaboration between ISEAS and the Institute of Archaeology, University of College London. Furthermore, an article by Mr. Michael Ng documents the Archaeology Unit were invited to take part in Ubin Day, where they showcased excavated materials and information about archaeology in Singapore. Finally, Mr. Lim Chen Sian gives a post-mortem on Archiving Archaeological Materials in Singapore, an Archaeology Report Series (ARS) publication derived from a 2014 workshop of the same name.

During this period, Dr. Adrian Vickers graciously shared his thoughts on "The Temple Reliefs of Angkor Wat: Some Comparative Thoughts from Java and Bali" on a 25th September 2017 Brown Bag Dialogue held at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. Dr. Tana Li also gave a masterful lecture on the "Imperial Rice Transportation of Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)" on 1st November 2017. Please look out for more exciting content coming in the near future, as NSC Highlights will be gearing up for the 50th Anniversary celebrations of our parent institute, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, in 2018.

FEATURE:

What was Islamic about Javanese Art in the Early Islamic period (15th-17th century)?

By *Hélène Njoto*

Visiting Fellow, NSC

The Islamic character of zoomorphic figures produced in Java in the early Islamic period has seldom been addressed. The absence of this type of artworks from National Museums raises the question of their un-Islamicness or irreligiosity. A recent

publication by the late Ahmed Shahab *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press 2015) helps us reflect on how these artefacts could have made sense to the early Javanese Muslim communities in the 15th to the 17th century, despite their links to the Hindu-Buddhist period. To do so, we need to engage with Ahmed's concepts relating to Islamic figuration and aestheticisation as a mode of including difference.

The art that flourished on the Northern Coast of Java during the early centuries of Islamisation

(Pasisir art) is mainly found on Muslim saints' (*wali*) mausolea, and are mostly five centuries old. These mausolea are visited by millions of Muslim pilgrims throughout the year, and are known for their intricate floral motifs decor. They were depicted

on stone or wooden panels delicately carved in relief, some in openwork. However, the other main characteristic of Javanese Islamic art was the invention of zoomorphic figures in abstraction: they suggest elephants (Fig. 1), monkeys (Fig. 2) or bird silhouettes in stylised whorls, lotus rods, leaves and flower scrolls, reminiscent of

the way figurative calligraphy uses tracery to shape zoomorphic figures. These abstract patterns, that clearly address a ban on figuration, were found on almost all funeral sites of the nine saints reputed to have islamised the island of Java.

Aside from these reliefs, three

dimensional (in-the-round) abstract zoomorphic representations were also created mainly to depict guardian figures in the form of mythical animals: primarily the giant serpent of Indian mythology (*naga* or *ular*), feline or canine figures (*segawon* in Javanese) and to a lesser extent the Makara, a sea-creature of Indian mythology as well. One example of a serpent from the early Islamic period in abstraction can be found up the hill in Giri, East Java (Fig. 3). This pair of serpents



Fig. 1: Mantingan, elephant suggested in stylised lotus rods, leaves and flower scrolls, photo by J. J. de Vink (Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-60054170)



Fig. 2: Mantingan, A monkey in conversation with a crab, both suggested in whorls, photo by J. J. de Vink (Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-60054169)

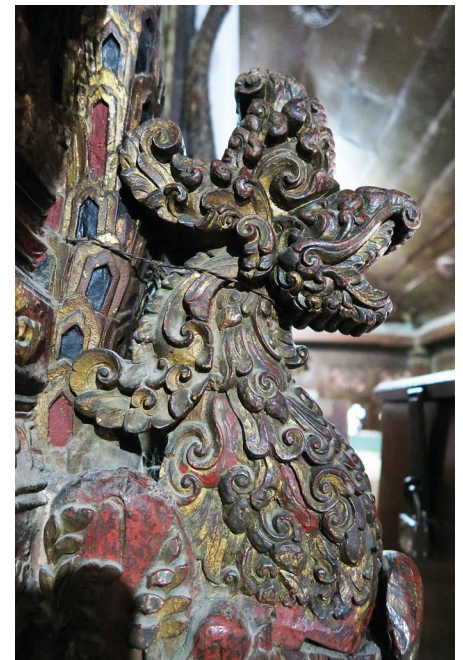


Fig. 3: Sunan Giri, abstract serpent figure guarding the mausoleum of the Saint (Credit: Hélène Njoto 2015)

is guarding the wooden pavilion that shelters the Giri Saint's tomb. Its head has a distinct stylised crown in two parts, a summit and a back part, like the one kept at the Trowulan museum.

Another pair of crowned Naga in abstraction can be found guarding the foot of a gate in another saint's mausoleum, Sunan Sendang Duwur. The site is located midway between the towns of Gresik and Tuban in East Java (Fig. 4). Although in abstraction, the crowned

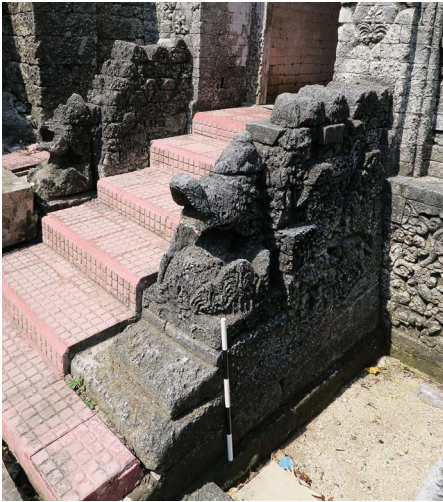


Fig. 4: Sendang Duwur, abstract crowned serpent with an undulating body guarding the winged gate of the Saint (Credit: H el ene Njoto 2015)

serpent figure was clearly inspired from Naga figures produced during the Indianised period in Java, as shown by the head kept at Trowulan Archaeology Museum (Fig. 5).

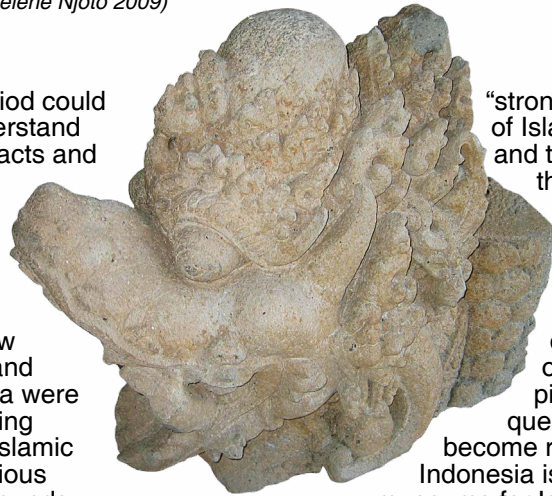
Despite the craftsmen's effort to disguise zoomorphic features, these figures were clearly reminiscent of the Hindu-Buddhist period iconography. Should we thus assume that these zoomorphic figures were seen as unIslamic? Ahmed tried to answer similar questions with examples from another part of the Islamic world at the centre of his research; the 'Balkans-to-Bengal' complex. Among the most fascinating artefacts illustrated in Ahmed's book is a collection of wine vessels from the early 17th century with Arabic inscriptions ordered by Moghul India Emperors and patrons. Ahmed's analysis of the inscription on Jahangir's wine cup (Fig. 6) showed that the rulers used this object as a statement of legitimate rulership in Islamic hermeneutics (interpretation of text): The ruler first declared his loyalty to the God of Islam, then identified himself as the protector of all Muslims ('warrior'), established a link to the Caliph succession to the Prophet, and finally, made a reference to the mythical divination wine cup from pre-Islamic Persian rulers. Such examples are regarded by Ahmed as among the "highest expression of rulers and their descendants of Islamic faith and power" (Ahmed, p. 53).

Can Ahmed's arguments apply to Java, where Pasisir mythical zoomorphic figures were also designed following pre-Islamic models? For Java, a study would be needed to know whether Javanese texts relating

"Could the building of such mosques or mausolea, with their zoomorphic guarding figures have functioned then as a way for rulers and their descendants to showcase and legitimise their power in Java? In other terms, could such Muslim burial sites be considered as a 'strong statement of Islamic faith', and the mausolea themselves as a 'statement of power' made by political orders still revered to this day by millions of Muslim pilgrims?"

Fig. 5: Crowned Naga head, Museum Trowulan (Credit: H el ene Njoto 2009)

to the same period could allow us to understand how these artefacts and sites engaged with Islamic hermeneutics. From a material culture point of view, we know that mausolea and mosques in Java were both built following ubiquitous pre-Islamic patterns of religious and royal compounds with their shrines, halls and rest-houses, some with multi-tiered roofs. Could the building of such mosques or mausolea, with their zoomorphic guardian figures have functioned then as a way for rulers and their descendants to showcase and legitimise their power in Java? In other words, could such Muslim burial sites be considered a



"strong statement of Islamic faith", and the mausolea themselves a "statement of power," made by political orders still revered to this day by millions of Muslim pilgrims? Such questions may become relevant as Indonesia is building new museums for Islamic art, and at the same time searching for its own Islamic identity now called Islam Nusantara.

This article is summarised from a work-in-progress paper presented at the 9th conference for the European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (EuroSEAS), held in Oxford (15-18th August 2017). Daniel Birchok and Ismail Alatas (org.) Panel: What Is Islam?: Reflections on the Late Shahab Ahmed's Challenge to Islamic Studies for Scholars of Southeast Asia. Presenters: Daniel Birchok, Ismail Alatas, Mulaika Hijjas and H el ene Njoto. Discussant: Prof. Michael Feener. The author would like to thank Prof. Peter Worsley for his precious comments.



Fig. 6: White jade wine-jug produced in Samarqand for Sultan Olug Beg in c. 1447-49. Acquired in 1613 by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the written inscription on the jug translates to, "God is the Most Great! (Allahu Akbar!) The King of the Seven Lands! The Emperor of Emperors who spread Justice! The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical! Abu-I-Muffazar Nur-ud-Din Jahangir, the King, son of Akbar, the King Muslim-Warrior!" (courtesy of Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal)

On Some Early Javanese Batiks

By Peter Lee

Independent Scholar

In 2009 UNESCO added Indonesian batik to their Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Although this recognition is a matter of deep national pride — most notably celebrated by the simultaneous launch of batik day on 2 October, and the institution of batik Fridays when everyone is encouraged to wear batik—the historical origins of batik in the country remain uncertain. Part of the problem lies in the fact that batik was produced in territories now

old resist-dyed cloths identified as Indian might in fact be Indonesian instead. This completely undermines the certainty of the origins of this type of textile, and suggests a different, transnational historical paradigm.

Batik techniques are known to have existed in Indonesia from an early date. 12th century Javanese manuscripts refer to local painted textiles (*tulis warnna*), which might suggest batik work (Wisseman Christie 1993, p. 16). The early 16th century *Siksakanda Karesyan* (The Hermit's Discipline, dated to 1518) has the earliest description of wax being applied to cloth thus far, and the term used for the process is also *tulis* (Rouffaer and Juynboll 1914, pp. 410–12, pl. 81). It is interesting that to date, the earliest reference to the term batik does not appear in a Javanese source, but in an entry in the *Dagregister* (daily records of the council) of Batavia in 1641 (Lombard 1996, vol. 2, p. 193).

The connections between Javanese and Indian versions of the textile seem to have become even closer in Dutch colonial texts of this period, where the term batik was used for both Indian and Javanese examples. The contexts in which the word is used suggest it might have in fact emerged from the multicultural milieu of regional port cities in the 17th century, rather than from the Javanese courts.

In Southern Sumatra, a report from the 1690s concerning such cloths indicated that Javanese producers made commercial batik for export (Isaac van Thije in Batavia, 22 June 1691; cited in Andaya 1989, pp. 40–41). One of the earliest references to

batik as well as to exported batik in Malay literature can also be found in texts from the 17th century. The *Hikayat Banjar* (1660s) makes several references to *kain batik* (batik cloth) in Banjarmasin, most probably produced in Java (Ras 1968, lines 1313, 1603, 2218, 2253, 3339).

The oldest known reference to the term batik in a Javanese text is rather late and comes from the *Babad Sangkala*, (c. 1739-1750) an account of events taking place some time between 1632 and 1633 during the reign of Sultan Agung of Mataram. The text refers to an *adodottan batik* (batik *dotot*, a double-width batik cloth) being worn at his court (Rouffaer and Juynboll 1914, p. 427). The prevalence of this type of batik in this period is suggested by an illustration by the Dutch traveller Jan Brandes, who portrayed a group of Javanese military officers dressed in blue and white *dotots*, which were very likely to have been locally-made batik



Fig. 1: Textile fragment (detail), possibly from Java, 18th-19th century, found in Southern Sumatra. Block printed on handwoven cotton. (Credit: Mr. and Mrs. Lee Kip Lee Collection.)

known as India and Indonesia for centuries. Prior to the 17th century, India was the prime source of fine resist-dyed cotton textiles for the Indonesian market, being the only region to possess the technology to produce colour-fast dyed and patterned cottons. By the middle of the 17th century Javanese imitations were so indistinguishable from the Indian examples that the Dutch colonial government in Batavia (now known as Jakarta) meted out harsh punishments for anyone involved in producing such counterfeits (Laarhoven 1994, p. 408). It is possible, then, that for museums across the world, some centuries-



Fig. 2a: Ceremonial patchwork robe. Textile: India, China, and Europe; tailored in Sumatra, Lampung, 18th-19th century. Handwoven cotton, silk, and wool. (Credit: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2011-00111. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Kip Lee.)

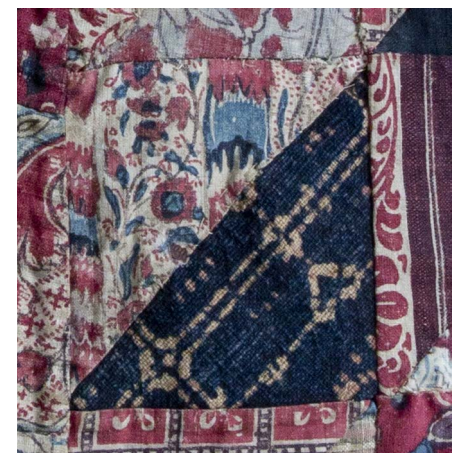


Fig. 2b: Detail of figure 2a, showing on lower right, a patchwork fragment made of indigo-dyed batik on handwoven cotton with a geometric design imitating an ikat pattern. Origin: Possibly Java, Indonesia, late 18th or early 19th century. Drawn batik, handwoven cotton.

cloths, during his travels in the Dutch East Indies in the late 18th century (see issue cover).

By the 18th century there were therefore probably three types of Javanese batik: batik for the royal courts, batik imitations of Indian trade cloths, and batik made for various regional export markets. It is also evident that batik was a multicultural endeavour involving local and migrant communities in Java, including the Dutch, Arabs, Indians and Chinese (for example, Lee, 2014, pp. 104-106).

The majority of the oldest Javanese batiks that have survived were made in the 19th century on imported European machine-made cotton. Extant batiks from the 17th and 18th centuries are scarce. Only a handful, all produced with natural dyes (indigo and possibly *mengkudu* red derived from *Morinda citrifolia*), can be found in some public and private collections around the world. Most of these examples, hand-woven in Java on narrower local looms, were exported to other parts of Indonesia. A recently published indigo-dyed cloth from a private collection had been collected in Palembang and radiocarbon-dated to the 17th century. With its refined geometric pattern and gold leaf decoration, it might represent the kind of batik commissioned by the royal courts (Barnes and Kahlenberg 2010, p. 124).

The sources of patterns on Indian trade cloths and Javanese batik shed further light on the early development of these two types of textiles and their relationship. One of the earliest pattern sources were ikat cloths, which were produced both in island Southeast Asia and India since antiquity. One example of early Javanese batik evidently attempts to imitate the famed double ikat patola silk cloths from Patan, Gujarat (Fig. 1). Another fragment, part of a patchwork robe, has a geometric pattern that attempts to mimic a simpler single ikat cloth (Fig. 2). Both these textiles were acquired in southern Sumatra. There is another group of early batiks that imitate the unique *gringsing* ikats of Tenganan in Bali. Such cloths can be found in the collections of the National Gallery



Fig. 3: Ceremonial cloth (detail). Origin: Possibly Java, 18th or early 19th century. Drawn batik on handwoven cotton. (Credit: Fukoka Art Museum, 14-Hd-312)

of Australia (1987.1932, Maxwell 2003, pp. 172-173), the Fukuoka Arts Museum (Fig. 3), and the Mary Kahlenberg collection in Santa Fe (Barnes and Kahlenberg 2010, plate 31). In the same era, Indian producers also created mordant and resist-dyed copies of woven patolas as well as the *gringsing* ikats of Bali.

Many specimens of these Indian versions have been published (for example, Guy 1998, pp. 12-13).

“By the 18th century there were therefore probably three types of Javanese batik: batik for the royal courts, batik imitations of Indian trade cloths, and batik made for various regional export markets.”

One unique and possibly early batik, dyed with indigo patterns on a fine, white handspun cotton, is currently on display in the museum next to the tomb of Sunan Drajat, one of the mystical founders of Islam in Java (in Paciran village, eastern Java). Its design combines mythical feline figures, possibly modelled after Chinese or Vietnamese prototypes, with abstract motifs (perhaps caves or mountains) (see Njoto, *NSC Highlights* Issue 4). The staggered outlines of these abstract motifs, which clearly imitate ikat work, is one remarkable feature of this textile. This kind of stepped or staggered design effect can be found on another fragment of a batik, probably made in Java, but discovered in Sulawesi. This example also combines different stylistic influences, especially ikat-like effects and what the local Toraja

communities refer to as the *daun bolu* or sirih leaf pattern, which can be found on Indian trade textiles found from as far afield as Fostat (in Egypt) and Sulawesi.

This very brief survey of the small inventory of early Javanese batiks reveals a marked diversity in style, pattern, markets and cultural influences, and suggests that

batik-making was a remarkably heterogeneous enterprise, evolving along an international trade nexus of creative and competitive enterprise. Batik, as much as it is an Indonesian intangible heritage, has an evolutionary history that stretches far beyond its borders.

Peter Lee is a collector of textiles and the author of “*Sarong Kebaya: Peranakan Fashion In An Interconnected World 1500-1950*” (2014), published by the Asian Civilisations Museum.

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Sarsikyo - Tablet-Woven Dedicatory Ribbons of Myanmar

By Vanessa Chan
Independent Scholar

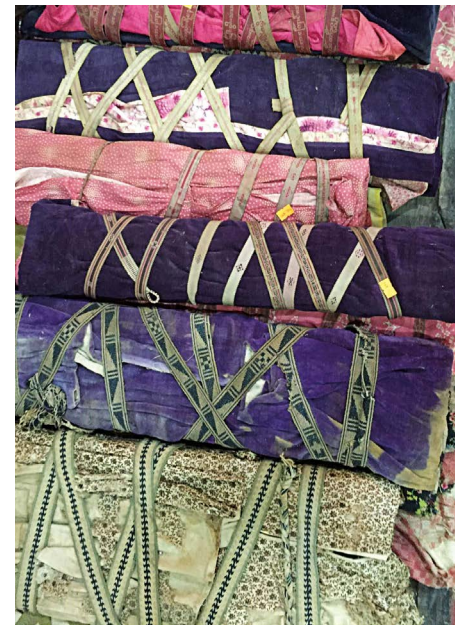
“Mandalay-style” sarsikyo (second from top) that is typically characterised by being narrow with multi-coloured longitudinal stripes, small letters and dense ornamentation. (Credit: Vanessa Chan)

Sarsikyo (also known as Sazigyo) are long, tablet-woven ribbons woven in Myanmar. They were originally used to tie up bundles of palm-leaf manuscripts (*pe-sar*) of the Buddhist Scriptures, when the latter were donated to monasteries as works of merit. It is not known when the practice of weaving *sarsikyo* began in Myanmar, or where it originated. After the beginning of the 20th century CE, palm-leaves stopped being used in Myanmar as a writing medium. *Sarsikyo* were then woven to tie up *kammawa*, (also known as *kammavaca*), extracts from the Pitakas for ceremonial use, written on ornate, lacquered sheets. The primary interest of *sarsikyo* is the inclusion of extensive text and ornament in the weaving, which often contain information about the

donors, the contents of the donation, and its circumstances. Being both textiles and religious and historical texts, *sarsikyo* are complex objects, the study of which would require an interdisciplinary approach.

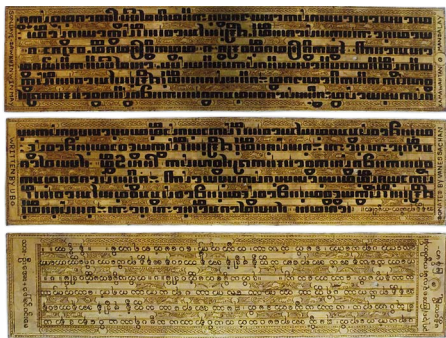
ones. This may reflect an explicit iconographic programme, or simply the development of an “industry standard” within the weaving profession.

Sarsikyo were almost all woven in Burmese script, though some were in the Mon and Rakhine languages. As far as is known, they were used exclusively to accompany donations of scripture or commentaries on Pali texts, and never used in a non-religious context. The texts themselves are always of a religious nature – poems of praise to the Buddha, expressions of desire to achieve Nibbana /Nirvana or to gain and share merit, or to have favourable future existences. Many name the donors, and sometimes contain information about their locations and careers (particularly those commissioned by high-ranking individuals). These can provide valuable historical information, and some are poems in their own right. The non-textual ornamentation is highly varied, being both geometrical and figural. Common images include the earth-goddess, the *tagondaing* or temple flag-pole, the sacred *hinthar* bird, *sun-ok* or offering-bowls, flowering stems and specific animals such as *chinthe* or mythical lions, stags, dogs, birds and fish. It seems clear that the animals have religious significance as well. The later, ‘Mandalay-style’ *sarsikyo* have a much more standardised sequence of ornamentation than earlier



Sarsikyo in use. Zaykabar Museum Collection, Yangon. (Credit: E. Moore)

Few *sarsikyo* incorporate dates in their text. Calendrical dates are only seen in *sarsikyo* woven after the arrival of the British into Myanmar; some earlier specimens name the King in whose reign they were woven. *Sarsikyo* were accessories to a donation, not the donation itself, and do not appear to have been



An example of the *kammawa*, extracts from the Pitakas for ceremonial use, written on ornate, lacquered sheets. The *kammawa* would then be wrapped in a cloth and tied with the *sarsikyo*. They are still being produced, but without the *sarsikyo*. (Credit: Vanessa Chan)



Two sarsikyo weavers using the tablet weaving technique. (Credit: Mai Ni Ni Aung)

particularly valued in themselves (the author observed *sarsikyo* without text being used as a laundry-line, and an ornamental belt; one with text had been marked at the back at one-foot intervals, clearly for use as a tape-measure). Little if any effort appears to have been made to keep them together with the *pe-sar* with which they were donated; even if a *pe-sar* is dated, it is unlikely that this will be helpful in dating the *sarsikyo* that happens to be tying it together. Dating of undated *sarsikyo* relies on internal evidence from the text and, possibly, on analysis of the fibre, dyes and stylistic features of the *sarsikyo* as a whole. Much further research needs to be done, especially on the latter.

The earliest *sarsikyo* were woven from hand-spun cotton thread, and were mostly blue, with the text in white. From the middle of the 19th century CE imported machine-spun cotton thread became available, and *sarsikyo* became narrower and text and ornaments more intricate. In this period, the *sarsikyo* were most commonly red, with the text and ornaments in white. The earliest *sarsikyo* were also most probably dyed with natural dyes,



"May you have victory" woven on new sarsikyo. (Credit: Mai Ni Ni Aung)

such as indigo, but as imported synthetic dyes were introduced, they began to predominate, due to their superior colour-fastness, colour variety, and ease of use. Late-period *sarsikyo*, woven mostly from the early 20th century (known among dealers as the "Mandalay" style),

were typically narrow with multi-coloured longitudinal stripes, small letters and dense ornamentation. There was considerable temporal overlap of styles; the last generation

"The primary interest of Sarsikyo is the inclusion of extensive text and ornament in the weaving, which often contain information about the donors, the contents of the donation, and its circumstances. Being both textiles and religious and historical texts, *sarsikyo* are complex objects, the study of which would require an interdisciplinary approach."

of weavers wove on commission from the *kammawa*-producing businesses, according to the aesthetic preferences of their clients.

Tablet-weaving is a globally-distributed skill, but the ribbons woven in Myanmar are probably unique for their length (from 3 to 7 metres) and their density of text and ornament. It is likely that basic tablet weaving for utilitarian purposes has been known in Myanmar for a long time. Plain ribbons without text, for use as monks' girdles (*kabankyo*) and carrying-straps for monks' bowls (*thabeikyo*) were woven until at least 2011 in the village of Shwe Yin Mar in Sagaing Region. In the past, they were also reportedly used for reins and (during World War II, for Japanese officers) sword-belts.

The basic technique for weaving square letters is a natural extension of the technique for weaving geometric patterns, and to the author's personal knowledge, has been independently re-invented at least once. The more sophisticated technique for weaving round letters as found in *sarsikyo*, and the technique for weaving figures and other ornaments, were effectively lost after the death of the last known independent professional weaver of *sarsikyo*, Daw Nyein, in 1994. However, the Saunders Weaving School of Amarapura retained academic knowledge of the basic techniques, without weaving *sarsikyo* itself. A Chin social enterprise has revived the technique, and is presently trying to recreate the market for these unique objects. It will be opening a shop in Yangon in 2017.

Vanessa Chan is an independent scholar who has been doing research on sarsikyo since 2009. A more in-depth article on sarsikyo will appear in an upcoming NSC Working Paper Series issue.

An Early Buddha Image from Buluh Cina Plantation, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra

By E. Edwards McKinnon

Associate Fellow, NSC

In August 2017, D-Phil Ichwan Azhari, Head of the Social Science Faculty at *Universitas Negeri Medan*, advised the writer of several interesting archaeological recoveries from a previously unrecorded location in the Buluh Cina plantation, close to the boundary with the village of Kota Rentang, in Hamparan Perak sub-district of Deli-Serdang Regency in North Sumatra.

Kota Rentang is located at the edge of higher ground where the former tobacco plantation landscape transforms into low-lying tidal swamp lands and was first recognized as an early settlement site in 1974. It lies some six kilometres inland of an important mediaeval harbour settlement now known as Kota Cina and both sites were formerly linked by riverine channels. Prior to the rise of the Deli sultanate in the late 18th or early 19th centuries, this area would have been part of the so-called Karo *dusun*, the sub-montane region between the coast bordering the *Selat Melaka* and the Bukit Barisan range which forms

the mountainous spine of Sumatra occupied by lowland elements of the Karo ethnic group.

Due to the swampy nature of the terrain in and around Kota Rentang, this area was of little interest to Dutch colonial planters. It transpires, however, that this very neglect has preserved one of the most interesting pre-Islamic and early Islamic sites in the Medan area. Kota Rentang may be associated with the former piratical polity of Aru, known from 16th century Portuguese and Malay sources. Aru is mentioned by Ma Huan in his *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* (瀛涯勝覽) as a small country visited

and subjugated by Aceh in the early 16th century but briefly regained independence with assistance from Johor. It finally disappeared completely in about 1618, following another Acehnese attack.

In co-operation with the National Research Centre for Archaeology, Jakarta, a surface survey and controlled excavations were undertaken by the ISEAS Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre at Kota Rentang in 2011 with interesting results. At the time, several large, well-made bricks were found at scattered



(Left) - Fig. 1: Standing Buddha, 38.5 cm in height. (Top) - Fig. 2: Miniature bronze Ganesha. (Credit: E. Edwards McKinnon)

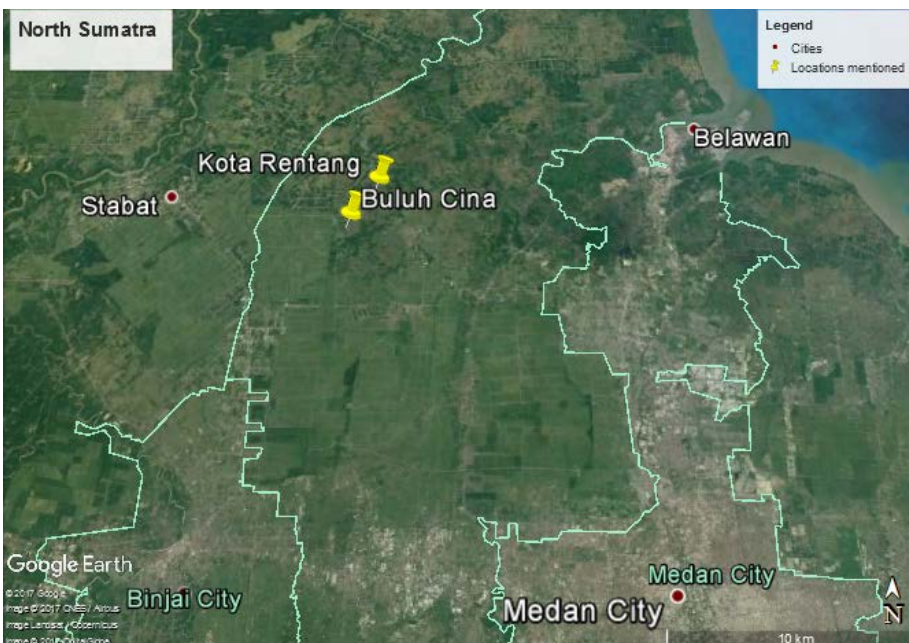


Fig. 3: Location map of sites mentioned (Credit: E. Edwards McKinnon. Base map: Google Earth)



Fig. 4: Find spot beside a track leading to Paya Ambul hamlet in Kota Rentang village adjacent to the Buluh Cina sugar cane plantation. (Credit: E. Edwards McKinnon)

locations over the site, finds which suggest that a brick-built candi or temple had formerly existed at an as yet undiscovered location as, in mediaeval times in Sumatra, brick was used only for sacral construction (Edwards McKinnon et al. 2012).

In 2012, local farmers recovered a number of bronze images in a recently ploughed sugar cane field at Buluh Cina, adjacent to Kota Rentang. The most important of these images can be found in Fig. 1. It is a slightly damaged standing Buddha, 38.5 cm in height, of South Asian inspiration. This image, being hollow cast, is a technique which disappears in later Pallava and Cōla images (Guy 2004), and may be dated to between the 7th and 9th centuries C.E. The head of the image is covered in tight curls with a prominent pointed *usnisha* or raised part of the top of the coiffure. The ears are elongated and there are two folds on the neck. The hairline unusually, is slightly heart-shaped and may reflect Thai Dvaravati influence. A pleated robe covers the left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder exposed and extends down to just above the ankles. This in art-historical terms is known as the 'open-mode'. The rear is plain and undecorated. The right arm is broken off just below the shoulder and the left arm is missing altogether. A separate hand which appears to relate to this image has also been recovered.

The rear of the image, although apparently undecorated, suggests that a nimbus or halo may have been attached to the statue and that formerly it may, in turn, have been attached to some form of back support. Stylistically this may thus be linked to southern India or Sri Lanka but fits in to what is often called 'The Art of Srivijaya', applicable to certain Southeast Asian imagery created between the 7th and 13th centuries. The Kota Rentang area would have been within the sphere of influence of the erstwhile polity of Srivijaya which is thought to have extended to Aceh at the north-western tip of Sumatra, and to Kedah on the Malay Peninsula during the period under discussion.

Comparable images are known from several locations in Southeast Asia. The recovery of several fragmentary images, together with an earlier recovery of an eight-armed Amoghapaśa bronze in south Indian style, and the presence of large, well-made bricks at the Kota Rentang site would suggest that prior to the arrival of Islam in

about the 14th century, there was a flourishing indigenous community in which there were adherents of a form of Buddhism. Skilling (2012), in pointing out the importance of relics and images in relation to Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia, notes that these may only reflect the origins, the ritual and ideological inspiration of the religion which may well have come from elsewhere. It is thus not possible to state precisely what form of Buddhism was actually practiced at any one location.

The recoveries at Buluh Cina display some distinct characteristics which may or may not be linked to a

“The Buluh Cina recoveries suggest that there was an established indigenous community of Buddhist adherents flourishing in and around the Kota Rentang area by the mid/late first millennium C.E., and that there were by that time already established links to South Asia, Kedah and to Srivijaya Jambi, if not Palembang.”

locally-developed art style. As more discoveries are made, it seems likely that sites in Sumatra which, prior to the advent of Islam, was predominantly an area of Buddhist influence (Miksic 2016), produced numerous images in distinct, often hybrid styles and, in all probability, were from a variety of sources. The style of the Buddha images, however, may infer linkages to southern India. A fragment, possibly that of a seated Manjusri image, and stamped baked clay sealings, offer possible links to Bengal, and early Avalokitesvara images suggests links to elsewhere in Sumatra or Southeast Asia.

The Buluh Cina recoveries may thus suggest that there was an established indigenous community of Buddhist adherents flourishing in and around the Kota Rentang area by the mid/late first millennium C.E., and that there were by that time already established commercial and religious links to South Asia, Kedah (also known as Kataha—only a day's sail to the north, and a place where Buddhism is known to have flourished at the turn of the

first millennium C.E.), and also to Srivijaya Jambi, if not Palembang. This community may have been the gateway for access to valuable resources of the interior which included gold, benzoin, camphor, bees wax and honey that appear in later sources relating to this area. This, in turn, may explain why Tamil merchants, seeking to exploit the rich natural resources of northern Sumatra following the weakening of Srivijaya after the Tamil raid of 1025, established a trading settlement at nearby Kota Cina in the mid/late 11th century C.E.

Dr. E. Edwards McKinnon is an Associate Fellow at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. He discovered the mediaeval harbour site of Kota Cina near Belawan, Deli in 1972 and since then has been involved in archaeological and art historical research in Sumatra. He has been involved in excavation work at Kota Cina and Kota Rentang in north Sumatra; in Palembang and Batujaya with the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), at Cot Me near Ladang; and at Lhok Cut, Lamreh, Aceh Besar regency with the Earth Observatory of Singapore, helping to recover evidence of historical tsunamis in the Aceh region.

The author is grateful to various experts who have advised on aspects of Buddhist influence and art in Southeast Asia. Any errors are the author's own.

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The Decorated Earthenware from the National Gallery Singapore Site

By *Aaron Kao*

Research Officer, NSC Archaeology Unit

Earthenware decorations are underexplored in Southeast Asia. There have been few specialized studies on the production and application of decorative motifs (Bacus 2003: 39 – 51, Bulbeck and Clune 2003: 80 – 102). These low-fired (400 to 900 degrees Celsius) clay vessels likely served as utilitarian receptacles for cooking and storage purposes, and some possibly as religious paraphernalia. Found mainly in the 14th century CE Temasek occupational context, their widespread distribution at nine other nearby sites suggests that they played an important role in day-to-day activities.

One primary goal of my research is to form a classification typology. This is useful as a data set for inter-site comparisons which enable archaeologists to examine the evolution of pottery making cultures, and how it relates to socio-cultural interactions. Four attributes were used to form this classification typology. The first - “Surface treatment” describes the physical qualities of the ornamentation and the type of intervention carried out by the potter on the surface of the clay (Rice 2015: 154). Within the archaeological context, decorations on earthenware are forms of “surface enhancements” applied to the surface of the pottery during various stages of its production (Rice 2015: 154). This is done to amplify the appearance or functionality of the pot. To archaeologists, these can be important indicators of individual or group behavioral patterns such as artistic expression, cultural identity and beliefs, or simply as a form of maker’s mark or ergonomic feature (Mourer 1984: 33).

Earthenware weighing a total mass of 7,818 grammes form the second largest category within the ceramic assemblage (41,341 grammes) excavated at the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) site in 2009 and 2010 (Lim 2017: 55). By identifying



Fig. 1. Impressed decoration displaying signs of clay penetration and displacement. (Credit: Aaron Kao)



Fig. 2. Dentate-tool incised decoration. Different types of rotary action and accidental tool marks can be seen on the surface of this potsherd. (Credit: Aaron Kao)

the different categories of decoration, possible production techniques, and discussing their possible socio-cultural representations, these material remains can provide archaeologists with some evidence to make inferences into the lifeways of these ancient inhabitants.

A sample set of 585 pieces weighing 2,564 grammes was analyzed. The sample size mass is approximately 8% of the total earthenware assemblage. At NGS, an overwhelming 88% of the earthenware decorations were physically recessed. In other words, the majority of techniques used

involved a degree of penetration and displacement of the moist clay (Fig. 1). The remainder portion consisted of relief features created by adding (appliqué) and shaping the clay by hand. These are considered rare.

“Operational action”, the second attribute, investigates the random tool or finger marks left behind by the potter(s). These physical gestures indicate the type of motor performance associated with production techniques (Fig. 2). At NGS, impressing and incising were the most common action at 52% and 38% respectively. They were also responsible for all recessed decorations.

The third attribute, “decoration,” is a description of the tool used and its related “operational action”. For example, out of a total of 23 types of decorations identified, carved-paddle-impressing (Fig. 4) accounted for 46%. This particular tool is a hand held wooden paddle with a carved design on its working surface(s). It is struck repetitively around the surface of the pot, in unison with a supporting anvil held within the vessel. A textured imprint is normally produced (Fig. 1). The second most numerous type of decoration is broadly incised concentric grooves found on the rims of the vessels. These range from one to five groove configurations.

“The distribution of archaeological materials at NGS suggested that small households probably occupied the site (Lim 2017: 67). This would indicate the type of domestic environment in which this heterogeneous assemblage of decorations would have high visibility.”

The remaining decorations are varied and uncommon. These included different forms of impressing, such as paddles that were bound with a variety of textured organic materials, stamping with an intricately carved tool (Fig. 3), and puncture marks created with a single-point or dentate-tipped implement. These tools resembling a comb were also used to incise parallel lines (Fig. 2).

The fourth attribute, “motif,” describes the primary visual elements of a decoration (Shepard 1956: 266-267). A diverse assemblage of 75 motifs was identified at NGS, with most of these occurring as complex or simple geometric designs within the carved-paddle-impressed category. Common visual elements used consist of triangles, squares, zigzag and curvilinear lines, circles, and parallel dashes (Fig. 4). Complex geometric designs are composed of hachured triangles laid in an alternating or linear configuration, herringbone pattern, and repetitive rectilinear spirals. Variations within these motifs are evident, which indicate that some potters might have shared a non-rigid expression of similar beliefs. Incised decorations are less elaborate, featuring borderlines, or unidentifiable curvilinear patterns. Appliqué designs are mostly plain bands going around the vessel but rare organic forms were also encountered.



Fig. 3. Intricately stamped curvilinear scroll motif. (Credit: Aaron Kao)



Fig. 4. This complex carved-paddle-impressed decoration is composed of a variety of visual elements. (Credit: Aaron Kao)

The distribution of archaeological materials at NGS suggested that small households probably occupied the site (Lim 2017: 67). This would indicate the type of domestic environment in which this heterogeneous assemblage of decorations would have high visibility. The high frequency of geometric motifs produced by carve-paddle-impressing appears to place the pottery tradition found at NGS in context with the Bau-Malay pottery tradition hypothesised by Wilhelm G Solheim II (Solheim 1990: 26). Solheim believed that this tradition could have formed as early as 1000 BCE (Solheim 1964: 376), with strong similarities

with the geometric pottery found in Southeastern China (Solheim 1990: 26). It is believed that this particular pottery tradition occurred as early as 3,000 to 2,500 BCE (Meacham 1979: 127). Although it is not clear if these decorations share the same meanings as those found at NGS, the antiquity of this form of aesthetic expression is apparent.

The above is an extract from the author's research on NGS earthenware decorations. The paper will be published in the proceedings of the 2nd SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology in Bangkok.

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Archiving Archaeological Materials: Whose Responsibility is it?

By *Lim Chen Sian*

Associate Fellow, NSC Archaeology Unit

Archaeologists are portrayed in popular imagination as individuals with dirt-caked brows, hunched over in a trench, patiently digging away the sediments, revealing marvels from the past. While true to an extent, excavation is nonetheless only one characteristic of the discipline. Beyond the excavation is a long-drawn sequence of processes that archaeologists grapple with behind-the-scenes – cleaning, sorting, conserving, illustrating, photographing, cataloging and studying the finds. As a custodian of the past, the archaeologist bears a heavy responsibility in caring for and maintaining archaeological collections. However, the archiving and curatorship of archaeological artefacts is a frequently overlooked aspect of the archaeological progress.

In the UK, archaeologists have the ethical and professional duty to ensure that the archaeological collection is looked after for posterity (ClifA 2014). In Singapore, the ownership of archaeological finds is unclear. There is no law addressing any antiquities recovered from either archaeological excavations or by chance (Lee 2004; Lee 2013). As such, there is no agency or institution in Singapore that serves as a central depository for archaeological materials. While select museums under the National Heritage Board (NHB) may occasionally accession a few items for exhibition purposes, these institutions hesitate over receiving the complete archaeological assemblage from an excavation project. Understandably, these institutions also do not have the necessary archaeological staff to handle and curate the collection. All these present a conundrum for archaeologists in the country, as for the last three decades archaeologists have taken upon themselves to look after the excavated materials, and this archive has grown over the years. Presently, the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) has in custody of approximately 6 tons of artefacts from excavations dating back to 2004. Separately, another principal

collection is held at the National University of Singapore.

In an attempt to answer the query of “whose responsibility,” a dialogue on the future of the archaeological collection commenced with an ISEAS-NHB workshop on Archiving Archaeological Materials in late 2014, where heritage practitioners and archaeology



Artefact storage at the NSC Archaeology Unit, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. (Credit: Aaron Kao)

specialists from the UK and Singapore debated and discussed the need for an archaeological archive. The workshop surmised that archaeologists and heritage institutions in Singapore all have a role to play in determining the fate of the archaeological collection or archive. In the immediate future, archaeologists as domain specialists will need to lead the way to develop the archiving protocols for Singapore. In the longer term, legislation addressing the ownership of antiquities, and the delegation of responsibility for their upkeep and care will need to be determined.

Meanwhile, at the NSC Archaeology Unit, the future is in the making. Since 2014, there have been post-excavation and collection management initiatives to demonstrate that archaeological archives are vital for both academic research and to safeguard a national collection for future researchers. With the provision of adequate resources and funding, the Archaeology Unit has plans

to catalogue and care for the materials from excavations at the National Gallery Singapore, Victoria Concert Hall, Empress Place and other sites by 2024. This ambition is coupled with the production of useful research from the collection, including rolling out the publication of site reports as part of the documentary archive (Kao in press; Lim 2017; Lim forthcoming).

All this is contingent on the availability of adequate resources and funding. ISEAS looks forward to working closely with heritage agencies to collectively preserve the country's archaeological collection.

Papers from the 2014 ISEAS-NHB workshop Archiving Archaeological Materials are now published and available for download on <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/nsc-au-archaeology-report-series> as NSC Archaeology Unit 'Archaeology Report Series No. 7'.

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EVENTS: Ubin Day

By Michael Ng

Research Officer
NSC Archaeology Unit

On 16th July 2017, the NSC Archaeology Unit (AU) was invited to participate in Ubin Day to highlight the archaeological potential of Pulau Ubin to the public.

Ubin Day was the grand finale of Pesta Ubin (Pesta means festival in Malay), between 10th May to 16th July. First organised in 2002 and revived in 2014, this year's Ubin Day drew 14 interest groups who were devoted to the conservation of Pulau Ubin's natural and historical heritage to showcase their work and their love of the island. The event was hosted by Mr. Desmond Lee, Minister at Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Home Affairs & Second Minister for National Development and had the Minister for Education, Mr. Ng Chee Meng as the Guest of Honour.

The AU's booth showcased some of the activities they conducted over

the years, such as excavations, the NSC Archaeological Field School, and various outreach projects. The team also displayed artefacts excavated from various sites in Singapore for visitors to handle so as to enable a more tactile experience. During the event, AU also highlighted about the archaeological potential of Pulau Ubin. Although some of these sites may have been destroyed by natural erosion and development, there still remains evidence of mineral extraction and plantation activities from the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as World War II military installations. These sites offer the opportunity to research the material culture from the colonial period.



The AU team with Minister Desmond Lee (first from right) at the archaeology booth. (Credit: Lim Chen Sian)

The event saw several hundred people visiting the AU stand. They expressed amazement at the richness of Singapore's archaeology, history and heritage. Ubin Day also provided an opportunity for AU to engage with other Ubin Day participants, such as the Singapore Heritage Society, the Singapore Nature Society, National Parks, and many others. Experiences were shared and further cooperation will certainly contribute to the continuing efforts in preserving Singapore's last *kampung*.

Tantrism and State Formation in Southeast Asia

By Nicholas Chan

Research Officer, NSC

Monday, 14 August 2017 – Dr Andrea Acri, Associate Fellow at the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) and Maitre de conférences at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), discussed the important socio-religious phenomenon of tantrism and state-formation processes in premodern Southeast Asia in an NSC lecture entitled "Tantrism and State Formation in Southeast Asia". Covering a period from the 6th to 15th century and beyond with examples from medieval mandala polities in Sumatra, Java, and Cambodia, the lecture explored the indissoluble links between State and Tantric ideologies and ritual systems.



Dr Andrea Acri giving his lecture on Tantrism and State Formation in Southeast Asia (Credit: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute)

Borrowing from historian Oliver Wolters's 'man of prowess' theory, Dr Acri articulated a paradigm that can help to analyse state formation and statecraft in premodern Southeast Asia. Tantrism was located within such a paradigm where the political and religious elements, as well as the supernatural domain and the personal charisma of rulers, were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Pointing

out the overlap of political and religious/ritual terminologies such as mandala, mantrin and cakravartin, he illustrated how this paradigm was shaped by political and religious competition and mutual influence, bringing to attention the Sanskrit continuum that enabled the hybridisation between premodern states and Indic cultures, religions,

and rituals across South- and Southeast Asia.

Without excluding the social and economic dimensions, Dr Acri explained that resorting to magical practices to fulfil aims of realpolitik is, in fact, a cliché in many Saiva and Buddha Tantras, and even in Brahmanical Sanskrit normative texts. To demonstrate this, he raised the example of the overlap of royal-focused tantric ideologies and rituals and expansionist states from the 12th century onwards, such as in the case of Singhasari and Yuan China. Interestingly, even as Southeast Asia is populated by modern postcolonial states today, remnants of tantric magic within politics can still be found.

The lecture drew an attendance of about 50 people, including many participants from this year's NSC Archaeological Field School.

A Conversation With Conservation: *Workshop on Conservation for Archaeologists 22-24 August 2017*

By Natalie Khoo

Research Assistant, NSC Archaeology Unit

“Bam! Ping! Pong!” - Flower pots were placed in a bag and smashed with a hammer, reduced to smithereens in a few seconds. The next hour was spent painstakingly reconstructing the pots to their former glory using paraloid B-72 adhesive, under the careful watch of conservators. Over the course of the 3-day workshop “Conservation for Archaeologists”, hands-on activities like this primed the participants in conservation strategies and techniques.

The NSC Archaeology Unit hosted conservators Dean Sully and Clare Lim from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL), and Liu Man-Yee of Norfolk Museums Service, to conduct a 3-day conservation workshop at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore.

At the workshop, everything from theoretical currents in archaeological conservation to field lifting techniques were discussed. Participants consisting of archaeologists, conservators and historians engaged in a dialogue on conservation and how it can inform the care, research and cultural understanding of artefacts in a Singaporean context.

In Dr. Dean Sully’s opening lecture on the role of conservation in the archaeological process, he stressed the need to adopt a critical view of conservation. Conservation is a non-neutral process of narrative-making, where the conservator engages in a particular curation of change through the management of material objects. The choices a conservator makes, whether to polish an object

“Conservation is a non-neutral process of narrative-making, where the conservator engages in a particular curation of change through the management of material objects.”



Dr. Dean Sully demonstrates proper cleaning and care for waterlogged wood artefacts on a plank from the Empress Place Site, Singapore. (Credit: Aaron Kao)



UCL archaeology student Young Wei Ping, Research Office Michael Ng, and Conservator Angie Liow (left to right) smashing flower pots for the ceramics practical (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

to a bright and sparkly condition or to leave residue traces of dust and dirt, for example, is a crucial transformation of things from the past into the present in both a material and immaterial manner. It is not only a material change the object



Research Officer Aaron Kao arranging pot sherds for ceramic reconstruction. (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

undergoes, but a specific re-telling of its history and biography that occurs with the choice to preserve or omit certain material constituents.

Dr. Sully is quick to point out that conservation treatments need not follow a ‘cookbook’ prescription, but proposes a contextually informed three-prong approach to conservation - materials-based, values-based and peoples-based. Here, conservation as part of a colonial practice is over-turned, as



(Left to Right): Chan Wai Peng and Michael Ng, participants in the workshop, practice delicately handling artefacts. (Credit: Kyle Latinis)

people and communities looking after their own past is prioritized and engaged with first to inform how materials are treated.

With this theoretical foregrounding in mind, participants were then introduced to the technical elements of conservation. In the materials-based aspect of the conservation process, materials must be identified, in order to gain a better understanding of its agents of deterioration, storage best practices and appropriate treatments.

In order to develop a more fine-grained appreciation for materials, participants were exposed to 30 material samples, which included porcupine quills, papyrus, tortoise shell, ferrous metal, and highly fired earthenware. Participants were later given a quiz on 24 random objects, including a high quality Assyrian ivory replica from the UCL collection and World War II finds from Adam Park, Singapore. Certain materials more locally relevant were later delved into, such as ceramics, metals and marine materials. For instance, ceramics, a mainstay of archaeological assemblages in Singapore, was focused on through learning the basics of ceramic reconstruction (in the aforementioned example of the smashed flowerpots) and lifting delicate objects in the field.

In the latter, field conditions were simulated in basins, where weatibax and digestive biscuit “artefacts” were buried in garden soil. Different techniques, such as using bandage support or block lifting employing



Conservator Liu Man-Yee demonstrating the hallmarks of a well-reconstructed pot. (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

polyurethane foam, were examples of specialized lifting operations that ensure a fragile object such as ceramics can be removed from the ground safely. Other on-site first-aid can be conducted through consolidating fragments with acrylic emulsions, that participants got a hand at preparing and treating the edible artefacts with.

A dialogue between UCL conservators and local archaeologists was further established through sharing knowledge and contextual information that was cross-culturally relevant. The corrosion removal of metals was first introduced by Clare Lim through a case study on an archaeological iron object at UCL, after which the key tenets and conservation methods then used to compare and apply to Adam Park ferrous material. Participants had a chance to work on corroded local material, such as bullets and militaria brooches from the battle, on which concretions were carefully peeled

away using microscopy, mechanical cleaning and the application of dilute acids.

At the workshop, AU Research officers Aaron Kao and Michael Ng shared how marine materials were being treated. Ceramics encrusted with calcereous deposits of marine origin were treated using a combination of dental tools, chemical processes, and desalination techniques. These processes were further fine-tuned and discussed with the conservation experts. Another application of conservation to local material involved planks of waterlogged wood found at the Empress Place site. Under the careful supervision of the archaeological conservators, the practical involved all the participants cleaning and scrubbing the waterlogged surface gently, a standard cleaning procedure in the proper care of delicate wood artefacts.

Workshop participants also visited the National Heritage Board’s Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC) where locally based conservators working on various materials such as textiles, paper, and artworks to be exhibited at local museums were seen at work. Conservation investigation methods and techniques were shared among the HCC and workshop participants. In all, this workshop allowed archaeologists, conservators and historians alike to engage in a holistic discussion on how to conserve, why we conserve, and who we conserve for; providing additional tools in our local archaeologists’ tool kit for protecting and narrating Singapore’s past.

This workshop is second in the series of the planned ISEAS-UCL training workshops for NSC Archaeology Unit, following the successful Archaeological Science module by Professor Marcos Martinon-Torres and Dr. Patrick Quinn in 2016.



Angkorian Hospitals and the 2017 NSC-APSARA Archaeological Field School

Sunlight or Moonlight Boddhisatva, often associated with Bhaisajayaguru, recovered from excavations at Tonle Snguot, north of Angkor Thom, Siem Reap, Cambodia. (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

By D. Kyle Latinis

Visiting Fellow, NSC Archaeology Unit

The 2017 NSC Archaeological Field School was catapulted into the international spotlight with the discovery of an ancient 1.9-metre sandstone Dvarapala statue (temple guardian). It was only the second day of field operations. Things could not appear better for the launch of an archaeological campaign in Cambodia.

Good fortune prevailed. The 12th/13th century Bayon-style Dvarapala statue was the tip of the iceberg. Several rare Buddha statues were unearthed in the following weeks alongside a rich archaeological assemblage. Once analysed, the data will yield groundbreaking information on settlement and specialised activities at the site.

This season's archaeological and art historical research explored Angkorian urban dynamics and medical industries at the 800-year-old Tonle Snguot hospital site. The Field School supports an NSC and APSARA Authority research project with the dual aim of training East Asia Summit (EAS) participants sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs (MFA).

The EAS participants were able to actively contribute to notable discoveries during their training. "Working on a big-discovery site is truly amazing... I never imagined it would be so exciting!" said one of the participants. "Besides basic excavation and field skills, we're learning a lot about how to deal with rare discoveries, including protection and conservation needs... also, the media attention and visitors", the participant continued with a wry nod to the party of cameramen and VIPs in the background.

Tonle Snguot is located outside the northern gate of the famed Angkor Thom city ruled by Buddhist King Jayavarman VII (1181-1218 CE). It is one of four major hospitals near each cardinal gate. A similar pattern exists at the famed Banteay Chhmar site (Sharrock 2017) where NSC's Dr. H el ene Njoto was able to conduct art history training for the participants and staff.

According to inscriptional evidence, Jayavarman VII sanctioned 102

hospitals accessible by all social classes to be built along major road systems and cities throughout the Angkorian kingdom following a period of warfare (Coedes 1940; Finot 1903; Sharrock 2011; Sharrock and Jauques 2017). Although the number may be symbolic (Chhem 2005:10), several ancient hospital sites have been identified over a vast area reaffirming this was no myth. Numerous hospitals were indeed erected making a bold statement about ancient state-sponsored public healthcare. Healthcare was holistic and covered physical, mental and spiritual ailments. This also allowed Jayavarman VII and others to gain substantial merit.

Although art and architecture at hospital sites have been studied, only one other site has been archaeologically tested – Prasat Tromoung, at the west gate of Angkor Thom (Pottier and Chhem 2006). Despite efforts, we still know very little about hospital sites from an archaeological perspective. Hospital compounds and treatments are depicted on carved reliefs at major temples, such as the Bayon



Ceremony before removing the Dvarapala statue. (Credit: Ea Darith)



Excavating the buddhist statuary in situ. Note: The Bhaijsajara guru (torso missing) is the second from the left, holding the medicine fruit or jarlet in his hands. (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

at Angkor Thom. Scenes yield clues pertaining to the types of facilities, site furniture, tools, and activities. Sharrock (2017) interprets a scene at Banteay Chhmar as a “medical blessing ceremony.” The EAS participants and staff visited the Bayon and Banteay Chhmar where they assessed panels to assist interpretations.

Most hospitals have a standard layout consisting of a formal gate/entrance, walls, walkways, a formal pond (perhaps sacred with healing properties), a central shrine (chapel) and a library. The chapel and respective religious specialists served the needs of people praying for the sick, injured and fatigued in addition to facilitating spiritual and mental treatments for patients.

The location of hospital sites just outside the gates of major urban sites may have also served as

checkpoints to assure healthy and sane people entered the city. Furthermore, hospitals in urban areas and along road networks ramped up military and commercial logistics and services.

The Say Fong inscription lists the composition of 98 hospital staff from doctors to assistants, support staff, religious experts, sacrificers and astronomers among others (Finot 1903; Sharrock and Jaques 2017; Watson 2017). Watson (2017) notes that the Surin hospital inscription only lists 50 staff - hypothesizing it may have served a smaller community. Watson (2017) also indicates there are some standardised elements to hospital inscriptions (perhaps produced in a



One of the unique statue heads recovered from Tonle Snguot. (Credit: Natalie Khoo)

centralised workshop) and sections which vary (e.g., number of staff).

Treatment halls for patients probably existed within the compounds. There must have been residential areas for doctors and staff. Structures were likely made of organic material such as wood and thatch which would have rotted away over the centuries. Stone perimeters, foundations or floorings along with post-holes, ceramic roof tiles, and rubbish areas may be the only remaining indicators. The team recovered an abundance of roof tiles, pottery, faunal remains (bones) and metal artefacts lending support to our hypotheses.

In addition to treatment and residential areas, it is reasonable to speculate the existence of rehabilitation areas, gardens (rehabilitation and medicinal), baths similar medical facilities. One of the site features includes a more formally constructed stone-butressed pond. The site libraries – built of stone – were probably dedicated to housing important medical texts, probably inscribed in palm leaf books or other perishable material.

The medical industry during Jayavarman VII's reign has received attention over the years (Dagens 1991; Chakravarti 1979; Chhem 2005; Coedes 1940; Finot 1906; Jaques 1968; Sharrock 2011; Sharrock and Jaques 2017). However, few people “considered questions like medical practices beyond herbal medicine and leprosy” (Chhem 2005:7). The team hopes to test soils from the site and residue

from ceramics to determine if there were medical gardens indicated in the pollen or medicinal ingredients detectable in containers.

The Statuary

It was rather surprising that rare statuary still exist in the shallow cultural deposits at Tonle Snguot. These are extremely high-value items. Statues frequently end up in black markets because of rampant looting.

In addition to the Dvarapala statue, six large statuary fragments from five Buddha effigies were recovered near the main entrance.

One Buddha statue fragment represents an exceptionally rare find. It is a Bhaiṣajyaguru: the Medicine or Healing Buddha. Only the lower half was recovered. The Buddha is seated atop a coiled naga on a lugged pedestal. Although Bhaiṣajyaguru statues have been recovered at other types of sites, this is the first Bhaiṣajyaguru archaeologically recovered in-situ from an actual hospital complex. Another complete Buddha statue is seated atop a lotus is probably a Suryavairocana (Sunlight) or Candravairocana (Moonlight) Bodhisattva (Sharrock 2011). The typical trilogy associated with Bhaiṣajyaguru often depicts the Bhaiṣajyaguru in the middle of two accompanying Bodhisattvas - Suryavairocana and Candravairocana (Finot 1906: 29; Sharrock 2011). Flanking entities frequently hold similar objects such as a fruit, bowl, cylinder or jarlet.

Lastly, a small stone statue of an elephant carved in the round was recovered along with other fragments unaffiliated with those listed above. The possibility of more statuary at the site remains high. Protective measures have been implemented by APSARA Authority.

The Bigger Picture

LIDAR analysis and ground surveys reveal a very complex history of large landscape modifications, urban planning, and water engineering throughout Angkor. However, most sites near Tonle Snguot date to the late Angkorian period. Evidence from the Tonle Snguot excavations hints at a slightly longer time-span of settlement and use, but not necessarily hospital operations.

Pottery can be dated from the 9th-17th centuries. Glazed stoneware ceramics, for example, include 9th-10th century Khmer green-glazed; 11th-14th century Khmer brown-glazed; and Chinese pottery dating between the 11th and 14th centuries.



Brick conservation workshop at the 9th century Bakong temple. (Credit: Chan Wai Peng)



Assessing a 13th century hospital chapel along the ancient Angkorian road led by Mr. Im Sokrithy. (Credit: Ea Darith)



Art history exercise led by Dr. Helene Njoto, Dr. Károly Belényesy, and Mr. Im Sokrithy at Banteay Chhmar, 13th century temple complex. (Credit: Chan Wai Peng).



Data recording at potential residential mound. (Credit: S. T. Foo)



Mr. Aaron Kao (foreground) conducts archaeological illustration training session while Mr. Michael Ng (background) conducts mapping exercise. (Credit: Chan Wai Peng)

Exotic pottery, particularly Chinese celadon and Qingbai, is typical of many Angkorian sites and provides a larger understanding of value/supply chains, networks, and possibly social stratification (wealth differentiation). There is no indication that pre-Angkorian or earlier habitation occurred at Tonle Snguot.

The larger area adjacent to the road, canal, gate, and hospital may have presented an ideal opportunity for various service entrepreneurs. Business may have died after the demise of Angkorian cities. Furthermore, the end of Jayavarman VII's reign may have marked the end of state support for the hospitals.

On the other hand, we still are not clear if the staff, facilities, supplies, and treatments were fully state-subsidised or patients had to pay - though by what means is unknown as the Angkorian society did not have or use coinage/cash. We do know

the King built, staffed and provided medicines to hospitals from his own storehouses (Sharrock and Jaques 2017) and it is possible hospitals and patients were largely dependent on these. Without support following Jayavarman VII's demise, hospital operations probably ceased.

Other Field School Highlights

Beyond magnificent finds, other highlights of the Field School included site trips and field workshops at the Angkorian sites of Banteay Chhmar and Ta Mean on the Cambodia-Thai border, and the 7th-8th century Chenla capital of Isanapura at Sambor Prei Kuk; local rituals and ethnographic experiences; and a brilliant conservation workshop at the early Angkorian Bakong site conducted by the APSARA teams led by Mr. Tann Sophal. The Field School concluded with a trip to Singapore for museum visits and lectures. Participant teams conducted

mini-research projects on their experiences and the newly recovered data. Presentations were held at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute.

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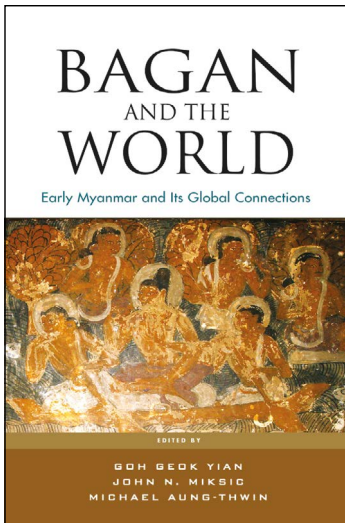
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ACM curator Dr. Stephen Murphy discussing museology in Singapore. (Credit: Chan Wai Peng)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

Bagan and the World: Early Myanmar and Its Global Connections (2017)



Editors: Goh Geok Yian, John N. Miksic, and Michael Aung-Thwin

Publisher: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Pages: 240

ISBN (Soft Cover): 978-981-4786-02-7

Price: US\$29.90

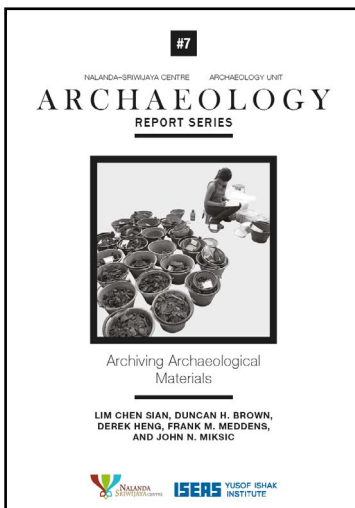
The archaeological site of Bagan and the kingdom which bore its name contains one of the greatest concentrations of ancient architecture and art in Asia. Much of what is visible today consists of ruins of Buddhist monasteries. While these monuments are a major tourist attraction, recent advances in archaeology and textual history have added considerable new understanding of this kingdom, which flourished between the 11th and 14th centuries. Bagan was not an isolated monastic site; its inhabitants participated actively in networks of Buddhist religious activity and commerce, abetted by the sites location near the junction where South Asia, China and Southeast Asia meet.

This volume presents the result of recent research by scholars from around the world, including indigenous Myanmar people, whose work deserves to be known among the international community. The perspective on Myanmar's role as an integral part of the intellectual, artistic and economic framework found in this volume yields a glimpse of new themes which future studies of Asian history will no doubt explore.

For more information:

<https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/publication/2278>

NSC AU Archaeology Report Series



The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Archaeology Unit (NSC AU) Archaeology Report Series was established to publish and disseminate archaeological and related research conducted or presented within the Centre. This also includes research conducted in partnership with the Centre as well as outside submissions from fields of enquiry relevant to the Centre's goals.

NSC AU Archaeology Report No. 7

Archiving Archaeological Materials

Authors: Lim Chen Sian, Duncan H. Brown, Derek Heng, Frank M. Meddens, and John N. Miksic

Abstract: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and the National Heritage Board, Singapore conducted a workshop on Archiving Archaeological Materials in 2014. Heritage practitioners and archaeology specialists from the United Kingdom and Singapore were invited to discuss the need to develop an archaeological archive. Related issues in handling archaeological remains were also discussed. Archaeological remains are non-renewable heritage assets. They need to be removed, processed, catalogued, stored and archived properly for future generations of researchers, educators, the public and many other global stakeholders. The papers in this volume compile a range of perspectives, approaches and possible solutions.

The complete set of the NSC AU Archaeological Report Series can be accessed via:

<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/nsc-archaeological-reports>

PEOPLE:

New Visiting Researcher

This section profiles the new visiting researchers and their research projects at the centre.



Barbara Watson ANDAYA (Visiting Senior Fellow)

Professor Barbara Watson Andaya (BA and Diploma of Education, Sydney; MA Hawai'i, Ph.D. Cornell) is Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i.

Between 2003 and 2010 she was Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and in 2005-06 she was President of the American Association of Asian Studies. In 2000 she received a John Simon Guggenheim Award, and in 2010 she received the University of Hawai'i Regents Medal for Excellence in Research. She has lived and taught in Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the United States. Her specific area of expertise is the western Malay-Indonesia archipelago, on which she has published widely, but she maintains an active teaching and research interest across all Southeast Asia. Her publications include *Perak, The Abode of Grace: A Study of an Eighteenth Century Malay State* (1979), *Tuhfat al-Nafis (The Precious Gift)* (1982) (as co-editor), *To Live as Brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1993); *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (2006); *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (2015) (with Leonard Y. Andaya), and a third edition of *A History of Malaysia* (2016). At the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute she will be working on research projects for the Malaysia and Indonesia Studies Programmes and the Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre. She also has a joint appointment at Yale-NUS, where she teaches a course on Gender in Southeast Asia and another on Globalization in Southeast Asia.

Research Period at ISEAS: 2 August 2017 – 1 August 2018

Research Interests: History, Anthropology

Research Topic: Recent developments in the Riau Islands and Perak (or Kedah), and the historical development of the Kingdom of Johor.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Lecture: Calligrams in Islamic Southeast Asia by Dr. Farouk Yahya

Date: 5th December 2017, 3:00pm-4:30pm

Venue: ISEAS Library Demo Room (Level B1)

Info: Calligrams, or figurative calligraphy, are texts that have been shaped into images and may represent inanimate objects or living beings. In Southeast Asia, calligrams are also used as talismanic devices across various media such as manuscripts, woodwork and textiles. This lecture will focus on the forms and uses of two types of calligrams that are found in the region and place them within the broader context of Southeast Asia and the Islamic world.

Lecture: Classical Javanese Figurative Sculpture - Examining Ornament and Style

by Dr. Lesley S. Pullen

Date: 30th January 2018, 3:00pm-4:30pm

Venue: ISEAS Seminar Room 2

Info: This lecture examines a corpus of free standing figurative sculpture produced in Java in the 9th to 14th century period whose elaborate dress displays textiles with detailed patterns. It explores the origins of the medieval textiles depicted on these sculptures, and identifies the types of textiles being represented, and provides some analysis of specific motifs.

ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute 50th Anniversary Public Lecture: Developments in the Scholarship on Southeast Asia by Prof. Leonard Y. Andaya

Date and Venue: TBA

Info: Since the formal beginning of the “region” of Southeast Asia as a field of study in the late 1950s in the US, there has been a proliferation of studies employing methods from the traditional disciplines as well as new interdisciplinary approaches. Prof. Andaya will review the earlier interests in Southeast Asia dominated by foreign scholars, and show how these interests have shifted over the decades in part because of global concerns but primarily because of the involvement of Southeast Asians themselves in studying their own nation and region.

2018 NSC-EAS Field School

Date: Q3 of 2018 (TBA)

Location: Indonesia

Info: We are pleased to announce that NSC will be conducting the 2018 NSC-EAS Field School (Archaeology and Art History). The Field School will be held in Indonesia during Q3 of 2018. Full details will be released on the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute website and the NSC Facebook once they are finalised.



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ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614
Tel: (65) 6778 0955
Fax: (65) 6778 1735