

10 NSC

HIGHLIGHTS

Features

- Boat Traders and Vegetarians: Gender and Mobility in Guanyin Temple Nuns
- The Chingays of Old Singapore
- Toba's Super-Eruption and the Environmental History of a Future
- Java Sea Wreck Dating
- *Live Dig: Don't Feed the Archaeologists!* Investigations at the Singapore Art Museum

Upcoming Events

- Public Lecture



POSTCARD PHOTO OF A CHINGAY FLOAT ON A MOTOR VEHICLE IN PENANG, C. 1920S. (CREDIT: ANG YIK HAN)

NSC Highlights

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Contents

1 Editorial

2 Features

Boat Traders and Vegetarians: Gender and Mobility in Guanyin Temple Nuns

The Chingays of Old Singapore

Toba's Super-Eruption and the Environmental History of a Future

8 Centrefold

Ancient Money in Southeast Asia – Part 1

14 Features

Java Sea Wreck Dating

Live Dig: Don't Feed the Archaeologists!
Investigations at the Singapore Art Museum

18 Events

Why Was There No Singapore Before Raffles?

The Orang Laut and the Realm of the Straits (*Negara Selat*)

20 Correspondence

The NSC-NU Internship Programme

21 Recent Publications and Upcoming Events

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Editorial



VOLCANO IN TOBA. (CREDIT: FAIZAH ZAKARIA)

The articles in this issue offers varying perspectives on how historical evidence and narratives play a part in constructing ideas regarding culture, identity, and relational worth.

Show Ying Ruo's and Ang Yik Han's articles in this issue work focus on the ways in which an earlier group of Chinese migrants navigated their new Southeast Asian locales. Show Ying Ruo's "Boat Traders and Vegetarians: Gender and Mobility in Guanyin Temple Nuns" showcases circulatory networks for religion can be studied through a gendered perspective in Southeast Asia, and how they can give unique insights on how they helped to support both the local and regional communities. Ang Yik Han's "The Chingays of Old Singapore," on the other hand, shows how a Chinese tradition was transformed into something quite

different by the various diasporic communities, and had come back as a way in which to induce marvels.

Next, Faizah Zakaria's article on "Toba's Super-Eruption and the Environmental History of a Future" investigates how indigenous oral narratives might be re-interpreted as an alternative way to view the distant past. Given that much of Southeast Asia's earlier traditions were largely orally transmitted or in some specific circumstances, written on palm leaf manuscripts

(most of which does not survive until today), it is a thought-provoking piece that asks, "How far can we take it?"

What follows is this issue's centrefold on ancient Southeast Asian money - Part 1 by Foo Shu Tieng. The article introduces readers to the complex history of coinage in Southeast Asia and considers their use as temporal evidence and as a way to show intra-regional links.

Subsequently, we have two archaeology related contributions. The first, Michael Flecker's "Java Sea Wreck Dating," is an op-ed that speaks to the importance of archaeological research on a regional level, and is of global interest.

The recently published academic article in June 2018 he responds to, which looks into possible new dates for the wreck, was widely reported in publications such as *Archaeology*, *Ars Technica*, *CNN*, *The Independent*, *Reuters*, and *Xinhua* (among others), and Flecker's views as part of the original team excavating the site help to contextualise the new finds.

Chan Wai Peng's "Live Dig: Don't Feed the Archaeologists! Investigations at the Singapore Art Museum," on the other hand, shows how Singapore's archaeological evaluations is not only a research generating endeavour, but one which can inspire and educate the general public on the archaeological potential of the area.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and will look forward to our forthcoming issues.

Boat Traders and Vegetarians: Gender and Mobility in Guanyin Temple Nuns

BY SHOW YING RUO
NSC VISITING FELLOW

In the migrant history of Southeast Asia, it is often maintained that Chinese women had minimal roles as pioneers before the 20th century although some were recorded as having worked in mines or tended small shops (Heidhues 1996: 177). However, we need to reconsider this presumption in the face of vegetarian nuns who actively initiated social and religious connections across the South China Sea. In their sojourns, some vegetarian nuns worked as boat traders, or “water guests” (*shuikē* 水客), before settling down in Guanyin temples. Boat traders, apart from being individuals who actively participated in small-scale trades and courier services in villages, were also middlemen who arranged for their fellow villagers’ immigration. Though less well-recorded than their male counterparts, the tradition of female boat traders in Southeast Asia is not unheard of: Batak women traders known as *inang-inang* have long been travelling between Medan, Tanjung Pinang, and Jakarta for trade (Ng 1976: 63-64).

Cantonese domestic servants in Southeast Asia, popularly known in Singapore as “amah” (*majie* 媽姐), relied on these middlemen on all matters relating to emigration and employment (Gaw 1988: 81). Interestingly, since these celibate “amah” were often devout followers of Guanyin (a deity symbolising purity), quite a number of them chose vegetarian halls as their retirement home (Ooi 1992: 78-81; Lee 2015: 120-126). According to my interviews, a significant number of vegetarian nuns immigrated with the help of “water guests” as well.

A Guanyin temple named the Hall of Abundant Virtue (*Zhong Shan Tang* 眾善堂) in Kuching, Malaysia, whose founder was a boat trader between Guangdong, Borneo, and Singapore, functioned as a women’s self-help unit. This temple continues to maintain transnational relationships with other halls in Indonesia and their residents include Indonesian women (Zhongshantang 2012: 8-18).



A GUANYIN TEMPLE IN KAMPUNG BUGIS, SUNGAI LADI (KNOWN AS “PORT OF VEGETARIAN HALL”, ZHAITANG GANG 齋堂港), PULAU BINTAN. ONE HAS TO TAKE A BOAT TO REACH THIS TEMPLE. (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)

“The overlapping roles of Guanyin temple nuns - female explorers, boat traders and vegetarians - suggest wider implications for the potential mobility of these temple advocates, who have gone to different regions in Southeast Asia.”

The Halls of Guanyin (*Guanyin tang* 觀音堂) in Southeast Asia (also known as vegetarian halls) are embedded with multiple layers of religious and cultural meaning that make them unique locally. Widely regarded as Buddhist temples, they also function as housing for followers of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教; referring to Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism). One should note that these temples appear predominantly as feminised spaces - not only because the deities which are housed in the premises come in female forms (e.g. Avalokitesvara, C: Guanyin) is placed downstairs and the Eternal

Mother, upstairs) – but also because temple residents, donors, managers and visitors are comprised almost exclusively of women.

These temples exhibit lineage-based connections in active ways, by providing manpower during religious festivals or rituals, and in passive ways, such as when displaying epigraphic material and ancestral tablets. These Guanyin temples have also preserved practices handed down from the Great Way of Former Heaven (*xiantian dadao* 先天大道), an esoteric religion which evolved in China and expanded their religious network to Southeast Asia in the mid-19th century.

Although female piety in these Guanyin temples are encouraged (given that Guanyin temples are gender-neutral establishments), women in these spaces are given far greater autonomy to fulfil their religious pursuits and manage the daily affairs of the temples themselves. This is unlike their contemporaneous Chinese female counterparts, who are historically depicted as being more sequestered in their social lives. The relationship between women and the Guanyin temples across



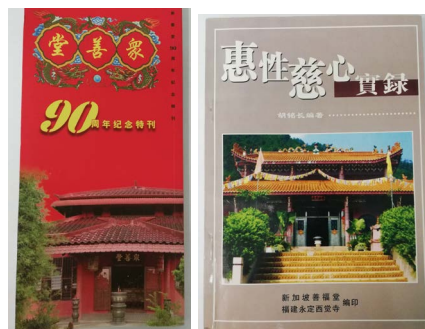
VEGETARIAN RESIDENTS IN A GUANYIN TEMPLE IN PENANG. (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)

in

Southeast Asia suggest that these spaces are socially accepted cultural exceptions that allow women to have more autonomous roles. For example, when a vegetarian nun in Malaysia passed away in the 1970s, the names of over a hundred female disciples appeared in her obituary (Seow 2013: 82).

These vegetarian nuns also initiated a series of charity works in the region, such as adopting orphans and the destitute, donating funds to early girls' schools and more importantly, creating safe spaces for female refugees. These refugees consisted of outcasts, such as child brides, abandoned women and women suffering from domestic violence - marginalised categories that usually received minimal social support. These vegetarian halls and the people therein therefore provided an important social function.

The overlapping roles of Guanyin temple nuns - female explorers, boat traders and vegetarians - suggest wider implications for the potential mobility of these temple advocates, who have gone to different regions



TEMPLE HISTORY OF ZHONG SHAN TANG (KUCHING, MALAYSIA) AND SHAN FU TANG (SINGAPORE) RECORDED IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PUBLICATIONS. (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)

Southeast Asia. A prime example is the Hall of Virtue and Bliss (*Shan Fu Tang* 善福堂) in Singapore, which was founded in 1919 by a lone woman from Fujian. It now has more than ten vegetarian hall branches between Singapore and Malaysia (primarily in Johor and Kuching), and some of them still maintain close interactions with each other even after the separation of Singapore and Malaysia. This temple has also sustained connections to one of their affiliated temples back in Fujian via contributions, even though the founding nun had long

migrated to Singapore. Today, the portrait and ancestral tablet of the founder nun can still be seen enshrined in the temple.

In conclusion, the diversity of these women's experiences in Southeast Asia enables us to understand and delve further into these diasporic networks and the system of linkages. They can show the interconnections between religious and secular welfare, gender mobility, and migrant history.

SHOW YING RUO RECEIVED HER PHD IN CHINESE STUDIES FROM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE (2017) AND M.A FROM SOAS, LONDON (2010). HER PHD THESIS EXPLORES THE VERNACULAR EXPRESSION AND GENDERED NARRATIVE IN CHINESE RELIGIOUS CORPUS BAOJUAN (PRECIOUS SCROLLS). SHE IS INTERESTED IN THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF LAY BUDDHIST MOVEMENT AND LOCAL CONFIGURATIONS OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS, RITUAL PRACTICES, AND TEXTS. SHE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A MANUSCRIPT EXAMINING BUDDHIST LINKAGE AND TRANSREGIONAL RELIGIOUS NETWORK IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THROUGH THE STUDY OF A SPECIFIC KIND OF CHINESE TEMPLE, THE VEGETARIAN HALL (ZHAITANG).

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The Chingays of Old Singapore

BY ANG YIK HAN
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR



POSTCARD PHOTOS OF CHINGAY PROCESSIONS IN SINGAPORE, C. 20TH CENTURY. NOTE THE USE OF UMBRELLAS TO SHIELD THE PARTICIPATING CHILDREN FROM THE SUN. (CREDIT: ANG YIK HAN)

When the early Chinese came to Southeast Asia, they brought the Chingay, a processional artform, with them. “Chingay”, a transliteration of the noun 妝藝 (zhuāng yì) in the Zhangzhou variant of the Minnan dialect, literally means “decorated art”. It refers to the gaily decorated platforms on which are hoisted young children or maidens, dressed in medieval costumes based on characters from historical stories or legends. These young actors were meant to stay still and seemed to balance precariously in the air. The floats were also known as 臺閣 (tái gé, platform float). The processions which incorporated such floats were popular in different parts of China in the past. The archetype of these floats may have been the statues of Buddhist deities which were paraded on platforms during the Tang Dynasty.

Originally borne aloft by human labour, the floats evolved over time to make use of horse drawn carts and eventually motor vehicles as platforms. As these decorated floats were the highlights of the processions in which they participated, the processions came to be known as “Chingays” in 19th century Singapore and Malaya.

The earliest incidence of such usage was in 1879, when the Straits Times used a variant of this word (changay) when reporting a deity procession in Penang.

Two major chingays were celebrated in Singapore in the past. In addition to being a display of pomp and pageantry, they were also a means for the Hokkien and Teochews, which made up two major communities, to unify their respective communities and exert their influence.

The Hokkien community organised a triennial procession. Composed of two actual processions, the initial one set forth from Thian Hock Keng, the main Hokkien temple at Telok Ayer Street, to Heng San Teng, the oldest Hokkien cemetery in Singapore at Kampong Bahru, to fetch the deity of the temple, Tua Pek Kong (the earth deity), passing through streets where Hokkien businesses congregated on the way. On the way back to Thian Hock Keng, the procession would have picked up the patron deities of Kim Lan Beo and Hong San See, which were smaller Hokkien temples. At Thian Hock Keng, the guest deities were feted with wayang and offerings for about a month before another procession returned them to their own temples.

The Teochews had a similar arrangement for their annual Chingay; the Wak Hai Cheng Bio, the main Teochew temple at Phillip Street, was the point of gathering and departure for the procession, which proceeded to Tai San Teng (the Teochew cemetery which covered most of what is now Orchard Road) to invite the Tua Pek Kong there. Other than the Teochews, the Cantonese, Hakkas, and Hainanese were also involved in this Chingay, a reflection of the close ties between these communities as they presented a united front against the Hokkiens.

Riotous displays of sounds and colours, the Chingays brought the town to a standstill as the procession columns, sometimes up to a mile long, traversed the streets where Chinese businesses predominated. The massive scale of the processions were reflected in the fees levied by the police; they were the highest in the table of fees for organising street processions. The Governor and senior colonial officials were also invited to view the processions as they passed the Police Court at South Bridge Road.

The demise of Singapore’s old Chingays began during the beginning of the 20th



POSTCARD PHOTO OF A CHINGAY VARIANT KNOWN AS THE "CENTIPEDE FLOAT", C. EARLY 20TH CENTURY. A SIMILAR FLOAT IS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE ANNUAL CAP GO MEH PROCESSION IN PADANG, SUMATRA. THE POSTCARD'S CAPTION IS LIKELY TO BE ERRONEOUS; THIS SHOULD BE A SCENE FROM PENANG RATHER THAN SINGAPORE. (CREDIT: ANG YIK HAN)



POSTCARD PHOTO OF A CHINGAY FLOAT ON A MOTOR VEHICLE IN PENANG, C. 1920S. (CREDIT: ANG YIK HAN)

century and reflected the progressive social mores of the day. They were seen as ostentatious and extravagant by

“The demise of Singapore’s old Chingays began during the first half of the 20th century and reflected the progressive social mores of the day. They were seen as ostentatious and extravagant by the new Chinese community leaders, a resource expenditure which could be put to better use elsewhere.”

the new Chinese community leaders, a resource expenditure which could be put to better use elsewhere. Although the processions to convey the deities continued on a much reduced scale, the decorated platforms which were their main hallmark became a thing of the past.

Today, the word “Chingay” has taken on new meaning for overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Singapore’s annual Chingay Parade, which was first held in 1973, was mooted by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to enhance the festive atmosphere

of Lunar New Year after firecrackers were banned. Today’s Chingay Parade in Singapore has evolved into a multicultural celebration involving both local and foreign contingents. In Penang, Malaysia, Chingay is associated with participants balancing large poles on which immense flags would glide in the wind to the beat of drums. The annual Chingay of Johor Bahru is centred on the Johore Old Temple and the five deity statues. They are carried around in procession by the respective dialect group in charge of each statue.

In 2014, a contingent from Guangdong province paraded a traditional “Chingay” float during the Chingay Parade in Singapore, marking the first reappearance of the artform after the end of the old Chingay processions. In this age of technology and multimedia arts, it is amazing how a simple float still has the power to evoke wonder.

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Toba's Super-Eruption and the Environmental History of a Future

BY FAIZAH ZAKARIA

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VISITING FELLOW, CORNELL UNIVERSITY



LAKE TOBA. (CREDIT: FAIZAH ZAKARIA)

The Toba super-eruption, which occurred about 73,000 years ago in Sumatra, deposited about 2,800 km² of volcanic tuff that covered parts of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and South China Sea. The destructive force of the eruption was so strong that it likely resulted in a volcanic winter and caused a catastrophic period of cool temperatures with little rainfall for about two centuries. Some climate scientists think that this dramatic cooling is correlated to a “genetic bottleneck.” Biologists had discovered from DNA evidence that human populations had plunged to very low levels around the time of the eruption before recovering to its present levels. Recently, though, this super-catastrophe hypothesis has been challenged by the finding that parts of Africa appeared to be unaffected and even thrived after the eruption.

In order to fully understand its demographic impact, why and when some of the population in some places declined and others thrived, we need to examine the historical links between climate, soil and human activity at the local level, a task for historians. My research on the environmental history of the North

Sumatra highlands highlights how sources like genealogies, court chronicles and folklore might point to new answers as we probe a deeper past where time moves at a slower pace than that of human lifespans. The research also shows how the evidence from the sciences and humanities can build a complementary perspective of regional and world history. Scientific evidence often builds a world history through a certain lens, whereas the humanities can point towards ways of developing answers to questions that science might not be able to fully resolve.

Environmental history is generally concerned with mutual relations between human and non-human worlds. Arising partly out of concerns about climate change and other large-scale environmental perturbations, the field has sought to find and define ways in which we have shaped nature and how we, in turn, have been molded by it. In Southeast Asia, the field is underdeveloped, relative to political and social histories of the region. Still, important works that lead us to question conventional boundaries of space and time in the writing of history have emerged

since geological changes occur at a vastly different rate compared to human lifespans and environmental issues transcend nation-states. Most promisingly, the field collapses distinctions between nature and culture, bridging natural sciences and the humanities. This cross-fertilisation has been productive in allowing historians to draw on evidence from the natural sciences, and scientists to gain insight from the historical record.

As mentioned above, how human societies responded to such perturbations as the Toba super-eruption is still an open question. Historical sources can make a contribution to it in two ways. First, they can help refine the low resolution of physical evidence where dates are given in the range of thousands of years by anchoring the timeline to known historical events¹. In North Sumatra, Mahoney (1996) has used pollen analysis to examine the question of when rice agriculture was first introduced using sample soil cores derived from several sites near Lake Toba. These cores allowed him to compile a stratigraphic record of changes to the land over 18,000 years, where bottom layers consisted mostly of peat soil while top layers show significant amounts of microfossil charcoal (indicating fire) and grass pollen (indicating cleared forests). Intriguingly, this evidence of agriculture was not uniformly present in each sample site; in some sites, pollen and charcoal were present much lower down the core, showing that forest clearings occurred earlier in some areas than others. How do we interpret and date this data? How can we know which years each soil layer corresponds to? Here, genealogies of the Batak peoples in North Sumatra came in useful. Consistent with the pollen data, which found cleared forests occurred earliest in the Simamora Valley area in Toba, the Batak of Lintong ni Huta claimed a lineage to an ancestral village in the valley. Working from this intergenerational memory allows Maloney (1996) to align carbon dating with historical memory and posit that in-migration was an important factor to explain the variation in the intensity of vegetation disturbance where there appeared to be a first influx of humans 4,500 years

“In order to fully understand its demographic impact, why and when some the population in some places declined and others thrived, we need to examine the historical links between climate, soil and human activity at the local level, a task for historians.”

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¹The work on North Sumatra is still lacking but this approach has been employed fruitfully in other parts of the world. For instance, historical records helped Vickers et. al (2011) assemble a thousand year history of human impact on the vegetation of volcanic Iceland, which fossil and pollen evidence alone could not supply.

²Toba itself has not erupted since the super-eruption but the ongoing resurgence of its caldera leaves the ground subject to reactivated faults, forming periodic earthquakes and localised eruptions of other smaller volcanoes in the area.

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ago followed by another in-migration about 1,000 years later. More work can be done in this direction: Maloney (1996) stated that there is insufficient sample resolution at the top of the core, roughly 1,000 years before present and here, historical knowledge of human movement and activity has the potential to fine-tune scientific methods of dating.

A second contribution from historians comes from the discipline’s quest to understand how a human society perceives the world and organises itself over time in a way scientific climate evidence cannot access. Often this means re-reading existing, and imperfect historical sources in new ways in the light of environmental questions. In Southeast Asia more broadly, Reid (2016) has demonstrated that the myths around sea goddesses Nyai Loro Kidul in the Javanese kingdom of Mataram embed an explicit warning of tsunami danger and strongly point towards the possibility that a hitherto unknown tsunami had hit the Javanese coast in 1618. From the 17th century, Nyai Loro Kidul became an important legitimising agent of the Mataram dynasty that unprecedentedly united Javanese speaking peoples under the reign of Sultan Agung (1613-46). Separately, Andaya (2017) highlights how water gods in the cosmology of early modern Malaya helped to domesticate environmental risks of travelling over water and culturally entrench the association of water with maternal care. Both historians thus show how Southeast Asian notions of gender shaped responses to environmental stimuli and vice-versa; responses that cannot be predicted through science alone.

What are the implications of such approaches to the Toba super-eruption and its long, ongoing aftermath?² Written historical records from the Toba region are lacking but its folklore is suggestive. An origin myth from the Batak peoples living in the area tells of a daughter of the gods who fell from the heavens and found herself trapped on the peak of a large rock with the ground roiling underneath because of the thrashing of a serpent in the underworld that churns water and soil together. Through magic, she shackled the serpent’s head and stilled it. However,

she was still unable to return to the heavens and her father instead sent down aid in the form of knowledge on how to cultivate the land after which human life exponentially multiplied. Embedded within this story of the gods is a keen awareness of defining moments of human movement into the area. The first is the formation of land bridges uncovered by the declining sea levels during the last glacial period allowing migration across the Sunda shelf. Next, a period of unstable ground whose shaking had to be quieted before human and animal life could reproduce. Third, the coming of agriculture heralds an explosive growth in human life. These transformations, taking place over many human lifespans, is solidified in folklore neither as memory nor history but a collective explanation for how the world came to be born. However, it points us towards a possible direction to resolve the controversy over the impact of the Toba super-eruption - suggesting that the answer to the question of demographic thriving and decline lay in how, where and when early agriculture developed and the way societies adapted its practice to the unstable ground.

Interest in this debate about the impact of the Toba eruption and other environmental crises on human populations is more than merely academic. Recently, scientists have announced a geo-engineering project that aims to combat global warming through large-scale emission of sulphurous particles that blocks heat from the earth’s surface. In effect, they aim to simulate a volcanic winter. Will such cooling be a sufficient answer to our present environmental crisis? The likely response of human societies to such changes - simulated or natural - cannot just be measured in aggregate. For such a solution to be feasible, we would not only need scientific capability but also a deeper and diverse understanding of humanity’s past record of such entanglements with environmental change and how societies organised itself around these challenges in order to assess how different communities around the world could potentially react to such stimuli. Not simply a means of understanding our present, the interdisciplinarity of environmental history can also allow us to glimpse the history of a future.

Ancient Money in Southeast Asia – Part 1

–BY FOO SHU TIENG (NSC RESEARCH OFFICER)



PIGGY BANK FROM EAST JAVA, 14TH-16TH CENTURY. H 16.0CM X W 13.0 CM X D 17.3 CM. (CREDIT: RIJKSMUSEUM [AK-RAK-1988-18](#))

The history of money is an important subject that has been studied since antiquity. Many people today collect ancient coins and forms of cash as a serious hobby and investment, and despite many experts who conduct numismatic research, very few studies truly target ancient money in Southeast Asia. This article looks at some interesting facts, discusses some less obvious implications, and suggests future directions for further research.

It is important to explicitly define money, as money means different things to

different people, and its meaning and use can change with time. Money is used as a medium of exchange, a store of value, a unit of account or standard of value, and a method of payment (Nelms & Maurer 2014: 38). Money can show the extent and flows of trading communities and may become important markers for time, particularly when discovered at archaeological sites, but their extreme portability and longevity can also be a limitation.

Metal based currencies were initially thought to solve a value-storage problem

for commodities; they had an inherent value, and were heritable (ibid.: 40). Studies on how money affected social relations, particularly between market participants and between the state and its citizens placed money's origins in "barter and emphasising its functions as a medium of exchange (in theory) and store of value (in policy)" (ibid.: 40). The terms "general purpose" money and "special purpose" money were coined by K. Polanyi to differentiate the Western unitary concept of money, which was thought to be more abstract and impersonal, and the non-Western



SILVER RISING SUN / SRIVATSA COIN, SAID TO BE MINTED IN HALIN. DIAMETER: 30MM. (© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM; 1983.0118.10)

“[Southeast Asia]’s idea of coinage might have been inspired by South Asian trade either with South India, Sri Lanka, or Bengal.”

concept of money, which was plural, and embedded in a complex web of social relationships (ibid.: 43). D. Graeber found that money arises from a virtual credit system and positioned the invention of cash as something that transformed person-to-person moral obligations to a more generalised and transferable form; metallic based currencies were also distinguishable from credit arrangements in that they could be stolen (Elvin 2015: XI).

Although many types of money existed in ancient Southeast Asia (SEA), this article focuses on coins that existed prior to colonial era as they are the most readily identifiable item for metallic exchanges, and as coins are in use as a form of small money even today. As this article will not discuss coin production, I have provided a preliminary use-life flow chart for this type of metal-based currency (see centrefold), which illustrates aspects of production, supply chain, and the socio-political and logistics networks that are involved in it. It should be noted, however, that barter did not disappear when coins were introduced; these systems coexisted for quite a long time (Singh 2009: 52). According to Christie (1996), the study of coins in SEA has lagged behind that of China and India as they often lacked royal names or dates, making it difficult for academics to reliably use them as a dating method. Some coins which have inscriptions give unit names or place names; those that have place names are often used by scholars to corroborate other historical references, such as the existence of a polity named Lavapura (presently Lopburi, in Thailand) (Wicks 1992: 164-165; Boeles 1967) or the existence of a kingdom called Dvaravati (Boeles 1964).

The study of coins in the SEA region

largely began in the 19th century (see Marsden 1825, Chaudoir 1842, Millies 1871) and was focused on small collections from a particular area. As “Southeast Asia” rose as a term of convenience only in WW2, it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that publications used the term as a unit of analysis (see Cresswell 1974, Gutman 1978, Wicks 1985). Of the studies that came out on Southeast Asian money, it was Wicks’ (1992) *Money, Markets, and Trade in Early SEA* that gained the most traction, even though it has its limitations (Miksic 1994). Recent publications on the subject (eg: Krisadaolarn 2016) continue to refine the available data on the existence of coins in certain parts of SEA but are often decontextualised catalogues. Similarly, although coin finds may be reported in archaeological excavation reports, studies at a larger regional scale are often lacking, and this means the field of numismatic archaeology in SEA continues to be a burgeoning one.

India and China’s historical trajectories in using coinage as money may reveal insights for looking at SEA’s trajectory. According to Singh (2009: 51), the earliest archaeological evidence for coinage in South Asia dates from the 6th to 5th centuries BCE, where mostly silver (and some copper) punch-marked coins were found. Unsubscribed cast coins made of copper alloy, using clay or bronze moulds, were also found at the same archaeological level as punch-marked coins, and this indicates that their use overlapped (ibid.: 52). By the 1st century BCE, Indo-Greek coins, which were mostly made of silver, were produced using the die-struck method. These coins bore the name and portrait of the issuing ruler on the obverse side, and had religious symbols on the reverse side and can thus be an important source for

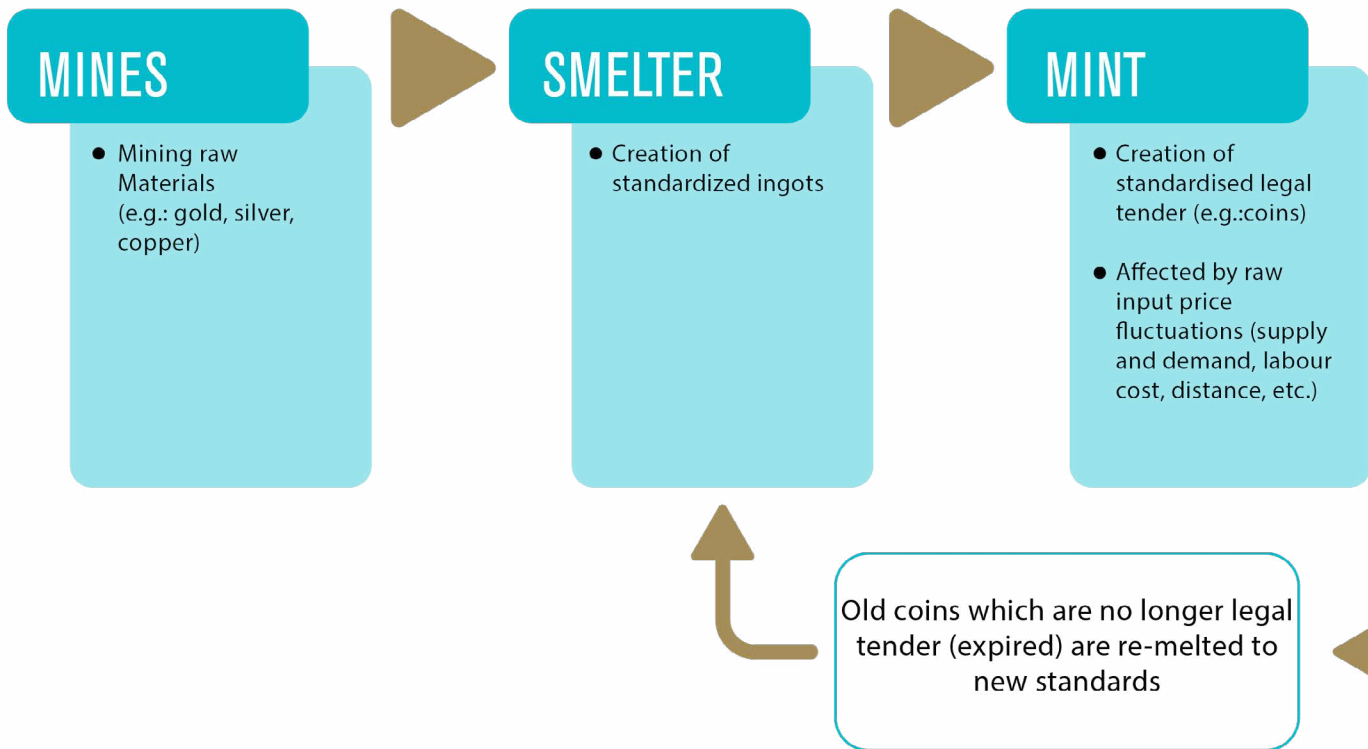
political history, as the coins mention the kings’ names, and can also provide clues regarding the religious preferences of the elite (ibid.: 55, 57). Ratti beans (*Abrus precatorius*) were used as the standard base weight in northern India, while in the south, the standard base weight of coins was calculated either using the manjadi (*Odenathera pavonina*) or the kalanju (*Caesalpinia bonduc*) beans (ibid.: 51-52).

According to Zhou (2005: 95), the way Chinese coins were made differed from the western method, in which coins were struck with dies and were made of gold, silver, and bronze. Instead, Chinese coins were cast in moulds and bronze coins were primarily used in its currency tradition. One of the earliest pieces of archaeological evidence for bronze coin-making can be found as early as 600 BCE at the site of Houma, Shanxi province, where money shaped similarly to spades, the moulds for making such spades, and the bronze remains of the casting process were discovered (Zhou 2005: 95). From the 3rd century BCE until the 1920s, however, the main official form of currency in China was the standard copper alloy coin (Cribb 2005: 1). Chinese coins were steadily exported “from the 7th century to Eastern Turkestan, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, India, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa, [and] has also provided these regions with a supply of copper alloy” (ibid. 2005: 1).

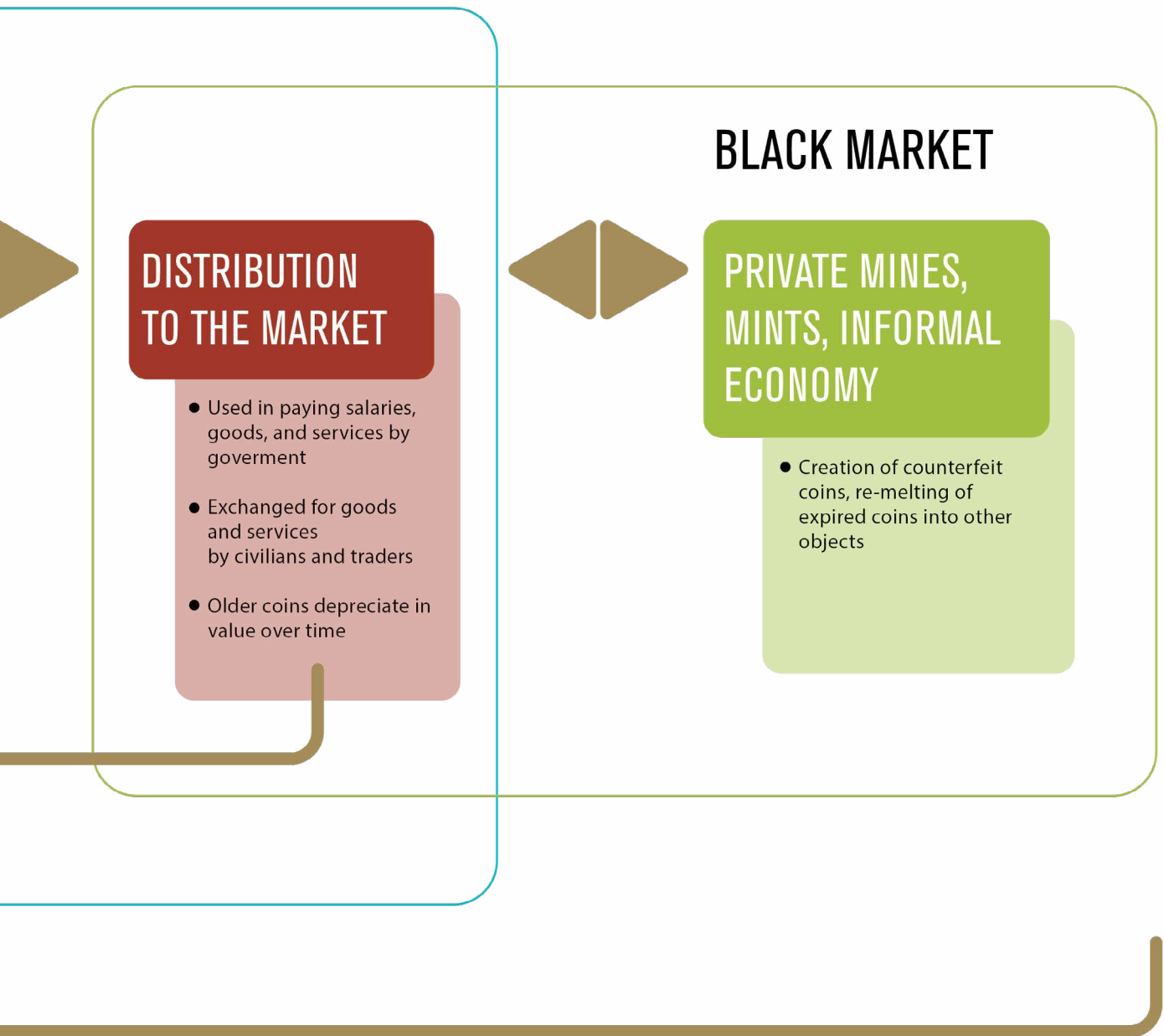
So how did coins come to be used in SEA? Currently, scholars (such as Wicks 1992) believe that the earliest use of coinage on the SEA mainland was found to be in the Mon settlement areas of lower Myanmar and Thailand, and the idea of coinage might have been inspired by South Asian trade either with South India, Sri Lanka, or Bengal, as “the local coinage [used] religious symbols surrounded by bead borders, rather than anthropomorphic deities and identifying inscriptions, as was the norm among North-Indian coins” (Hall 1999: 443). Although there is still no evidence that Indian currency was ever used in SEA, the Javanese, for example, did borrow from the Indian system of

Use-life flow chart for coins

CENTRALISED STATE CONTROL



As coins circulate, they may also leave the ground in a context where archaeologists find them (e.g. special purpose, as part of mortuary goods, abandonment)



... network at any time and be deposited ...
... This deposition can be deliberate ...
... (goods) or accidental (e.g. loss, disposal, ...
... ent, etc.).



MAGIC COIN FROM JAVA FIRST REPORTED BY RAFFLES, ATTRIBUTED TO THE 15TH-16TH CENTURIES IN THE MAJAPAHIT PERIOD. DIAMETER: 35.5MM. (© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, [CH.651](#))

weights and measures (Miksic 2000: 111; Christie 1996: 244). According to Miksic (personal communication, 13 September 2018), 12th and 13th-century Sri Lankan coins were found at Kota Cina and Singapore, and some Persian coins were found in Kedah and southern Thailand. Coins were not the first metal currency used, with several types of “special-purpose” currency used for ritual contexts such as temple offerings and ceremonial gifts, such as iron bar bundles and gold rings with auspicious inscriptions (Christie 1996: 248).

In Mainland SEA, silver was the preferred metal for minting coins, with gold and copper rarely used (Hall 1999: 444). An early widespread coinage design was the Conch / Srivatsa coin, mostly reported in Pegu (Wicks 1992: 112-113). The most widespread motif for coins in Mainland SEA was the rising sun type, which may have been associated with the Pyu as well as the Mon (*ibid.*: 116-118). Some states in mainland SEA also moved away from earlier coinage traditions; Bagan (9th-13th century) and the Khmer empire (9th-15th century) did not use coins. In Bagan, silver bars called *klyap* were given for wages in the 13th-14th centuries (*ibid.*: 306-30). In Angkor, the government regulated taxation and the redistribution of currency, for example, where rice fields were valued in units of silver or cloth but where taxation could be paid in paddy (Miksic & Goh 2017: 358; Wicks 1992: 301, 303). Earlier, scholars such as P. Gutman (1978: 9) had theorised that it might have been political and economic destabilisation which led to their disuse, as “the last Arakan coinage hoards date to the 9th-10th centuries, as do coins from Mon sites.” However, Wicks (1992) gave evidence to show that there were other market exchange goods whose standardised values could be used as a substitute.

Ingots-type currencies or bracelet money were also used as substitutes for coins in other mainland SEA kingdoms such as Lan Na (Krisadaolarn 2016: 54-89).

Coins were not minted in insular SEA until the late 1st millennium CE, later than on the mainland and those that were produced in insular SEA were not produced elsewhere in Asia (Christie 1996: 244-245). Christie mentions two types whose prototype seems to have been produced in the late 8th to mid-9th century by the kingdom of Mataram, central Java: (1) dice-like or globular gold “*piloncito*” coins, and (2) round coins with a stamped “sandalwood flower” type pattern on the reverse made of gold, electrum, silver, or silver alloy. These types of coins spread to East Java and Bali by the 10th century (*ibid.*: 246). The *piloncito* type seems to have spread to Luzon but the sandalwood type seems to have been used as a prototype to produce coins in Sumatra (*ibid.*: 247). By the 14th century, north Sumatra was using Islamic coins, tin coins were struck in the Malacca Straits, and most of insular SEA was affected by the spread of Chinese copper coinage and locally cast copies (*ibid.*: 247, see Heng 2006 for the role of Chinese coins in the Straits of Melaka).

The Kota Cina site (11th-13th century) on the NE coast of Sumatra was the oldest known site in SEA where Chinese cash was used as a medium of exchange, as hundreds of these coins were found there (Miksic 2000: 111; 2013: 125). Chinese coins also became the standard currency for the Majapahit kingdom sometime between 1296 to 1350 CE, with Chinese reports, Javanese inscriptions, and the Laws of Majapahit (Kutaramanawa) requiring that it be used to pay for taxes, fines, irrigation fees, and debts (Amelia S. 1995: 100). The Kutaramanawa for example, stated a 40,000 copper

fine for murder (Wicks 1986: 59). As a consequence of this high usage of coins, artisans in the Majapahit kingdom also produced earthenware coin banks ranging from the size of tennis balls to basketballs, and possibly one of the world’s earliest pig-shaped coin bank (Rahardjo 1990). Furthermore, the large exportation of Chinese copper coins to SEA eventually led to a shortage of copper and copper coins in China itself, with the first export ban policy proclaimed during the early 13th century in the Song dynasty; substitute goods such as silk, porcelain and lacquer had to be used for official trade (Li 2007).

It should be noted that imported foreign coins could take on new meanings that did not exist in its place of origin. Chinese coins in East Java were duplicated locally during the Majapahit and then were adapted to meet local needs (Aelst 1995, Cribb 1999). Recent studies in Bali suggest that some localised coins, similar in shape to the Chinese-alloy coins but with adorned with local motifs, are still used for rituals and considered to be auspicious and have mystical powers (Arisanti 2017: 167). For example, by imbuing coins with magic through a specific ritual, the owner of coins which have the Arjuna wayang character depicted (*pis rejuna*) were thought to possess the ability to attract women to his heart’s desire (*ibid.*: 168).

In conclusion, the study of coins can give insights into the networks of trade within and between SEA and its neighbours. From the evidence given above, it’s clear that SEA’s adoption of coins was not uniform – it was the states and communities that held the power to accept certain currencies as legal tender for market transactions. As the field of numismatic archaeology is one that is still relatively new, many questions still remain.



JAVANESE GOLD COIN, ATTRIBUTED TO 9TH CENTURY. OBVERSE: CUBE WITH NAGARI LETTER 'TA' DENOTING 'TAHIL.' 'IF' IN KAWI, IT MAY DENOTE 'NA' (ANDREA ACRI, PERSONAL COMMUNICATION, 14 SEPTEMBER 2018). REVERSE: SQUARE INCUSE MARK SUBDIVIDED BY POINTED VERTICAL LINE WITH DOT ON EITHER SIDE. 7X6.5X5MM. (© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, [GH.399](#))

It is hoped that with further research, these questions can be answered.

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Java Sea Wreck Dating

BY MICHAEL FLECKER
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FIGURE 1: BRONZE ARTEFACT FROM THE JSW DEPICTING A PRINCESS RIDING A MAKARA, FROM THE JAVANESE EPIC SRI TANJUNG, DATING TO THE MAJAPAHIT OR PRE-MAJAPAHIT PERIOD. (CREDIT: PACIFIC SEA RESOURCES INC.)

In 1996, I had the privilege of excavating the Java Sea Wreck (JSW) on behalf of private company, Pacific Sea Resources Inc. (PSR), under a license issued by the Indonesian government. After two years of conservation, research and documentation, PSR donated its half of the recovered cargo to the Field Museum in Chicago, USA. The other half was retained by Indonesia, where most of the artefacts would seem to have been sold.

In the archaeological report published in 1997, Roxanna Brown, Prof. John Miksic, and I contend that the JSW dates mid to late 13th century based on the stylistic analysis of ceramics and on the radiometric dating of a resin sample (95% confidence interval: 1215 to 1405 CE). The latest contention,

which can be found in the recently published article, “Revisiting the date of the Java Sea Shipwreck from Indonesia” (Niziolek et al. 2018), is that the wreck may be up to a century older. As accurate dating is fundamental to determining a shipwreck’s historical context, the new publication is a welcome addition to the research on this important site.

The reasoning for the new dates is based on an inscription on the base of two covered boxes, a comparison with contemporaneous shipwrecks, and new accelerated mass spectrometry (AMS) analysis. The inscription dating is derived from a wonderful piece of detective work, where an inscribed place name, Jianning Fu, changes twice in recorded history. This provides the bracketing dates

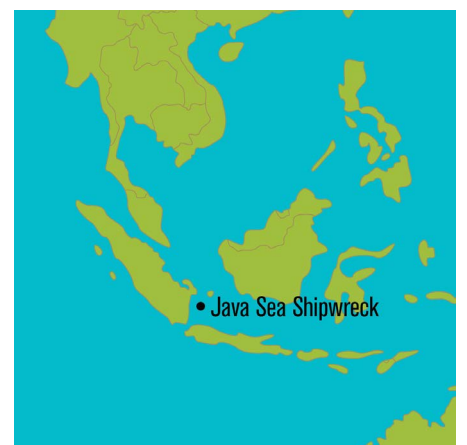


FIGURE 2: LOCATION OF THE JAVA SEA WRECK. (CREDIT: M. FLECKER)

of 1162 to 1278. However, the comparative wreck evidence is relatively weak, as the researched dates have typically been derived from less evidence than provided on the JSW, and the ranges tend to be very broad, such as 'Southern Song' (1127 to 1279). Indeed, the article places undue emphasis on dynastic disparity with the initial dating of the JSW being touted as Yuan (1279 to 1368) or transitional when mid to late 13th century is actually more aligned with the late Southern Song. Much of the comparative evidence is therefore not conflicting.

At the core of the article is the AMS analysis, which is theoretically more precise than the original radiometric dating. Resin samples were sent to two laboratories in the USA, DirectAMS and Beta Analytic, the latter having performed the 1997 analysis. For good measure an ivory sample was also sent to DirectAMS. The results of this solid scientific work are remarkably and inexplicably inconclusive.

"The new Beta Analytic results for resin provide a date range of 1048 to 1261. This is indeed considerably older than the original 1215 to 1405, but there is a 46-year overlap in the mid-13th century."

As the geographical origin of both the resin and the ivory remains uncertain, both northern and southern hemisphere calibration algorithms have been used to determine date ranges. Perhaps it would have been worth determining the origin of these key materials prior to the AMS analysis for they may both be equatorial, where a transitional algorithm would be more appropriate. As it stands, the northern hemisphere results are consistently further from the covered box inscription dates and are therefore dismissed here to simplify discussion. In the same vein, I will only use 95% confidence interval dates for comparison.

The new Beta Analytic results for resin provide a date range of 1048 to 1261. This is indeed considerably older than the original 1215 to 1405, but there is a 46-year overlap in the mid-13th century. The new DirectAMS resin results give a range of 986 to 1135, which is much

older still and impossible for a wrecking date given the inscription range. The resin sample was professionally extracted from the one artefact and then divided into two for the two labs, and yet there is no discussion on the huge discrepancy in results. Potential sample contamination is suggested as a reason for the older date. It is also possible that the resin may have been collected from the forest floor, rather than directly from a tree, and therefore could predate the wreck. The latter suggestion may explain the difference between the old and new Beta Analytic results, but not the discrepancy between the two labs.

The ivory provides a date range of 991 to 1158 CE. Had the resin and ivory samples only been sent to DirectAMS, the closely matching results would have been powerful evidence for a much earlier wreck date, although the inscription date would have thrown a big spanner in the works. Ivory suffers physical and chemical alteration when exposed to seawater over a prolonged period, which can affect AMS results. So it would seem that this close correlation is coincidental.

While the original radiometric analysis is old technology, it is well proven and certainly cannot be dismissed. If resin samples may have been harvested directly and therefore been of similar age to the wreck, or collected from the forest floor and been older, the earliest date of the most recent sample should provide a terminus post quem (earliest possible date), which is 1215 in the case of the JSW.

There are other potential avenues of investigation. Bronze statuary from the JSW wreck is suggestive of Majapahit (1293 to c.1500) or pre-Majapahit influence. In a thorough comparative study, "Gongs, Bells, and Cymbals: The Archaeological Record in Maritime Asia from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries", Arsenio Nicolas concludes that Chinese gongs exported to Southeast Asia are flat until at least 1231 (this date is from an inscription on the rim of a flat gong), and thereafter incorporate a central boss. Bronze gongs from the JSW wreck have a central boss.

The Field Museum team is continuing with important research work. I very much look forward to learning from their future findings, when discussion on the port of lading and alternative destinations may be more valid. In the meantime, I consider the date of the JSW revisited but not revised. I'm still happy with the mid-13th century, or perhaps a bit earlier.

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'The 95% confidence interval is a probability measurement of two standard-deviations, meaning that there is a 95% certainty that the range of dates covers the true age of the tested material.'

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Live Dig: Don't Feed the Archaeologists! Investigations at the Singapore Art Museum

BY CHAN WAI PENG
NSC AU RESEARCH ASSISTANT



MR. BAEY YAM KENG (SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY, AND YOUTH) WITH THE NSC AU ARCHAEOLOGY TEAM.
(CREDIT: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM, TAN SHIR EE)

Live Dig: Don't Feed the Archaeologist!, which consisted of an archaeological evaluation and exhibition, was held at the front yard of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) by NSC Archaeology Unit (AU) in collaboration with SAM and the National Heritage Board (NHB). Held as part of the 2018 Singapore Heritage Festival, the archaeological excavations were open to public from 6th April to 22nd April.

The AU's investigation at SAM was held in order to evaluate the site for its archaeological potential, as SAM would be undergoing a major revamp to link the existing building to its 8Q contemporary art extension along Queen Street. The site evaluation and test excavation conducted at SAM

are forms of impact assessments. These impact assessments can determine and record the presence of any prehistoric or historical materials that would be destroyed in the process of development, and in turn help building owners and policy makers to see whether the site is of sufficient historical value to necessitate further preservation by recording.

The SAM building is firmly rooted in Singapore's colonial past. According to Tan (2000), it was the site of the first Roman Catholic chapel in Singapore, which was built in 1833. It was replaced in 1852 by the Saint Joseph Institute, a missionary boys' school which was completed in 1867 by Father Jean-Marie Beurel (who also

established the Cathedral of Good Shepherd across the road in 1843). After the school was completed, various additions and modifications were made to the building. In 1988, the school moved to Malcolm Road. The building was accorded national monument status in 1992 and reopened as SAM in 1996.

The exhibition and evaluation (which consisted of six units) was funded by the NHB and SAM. Artefacts recovered from the archaeological evaluation were comprised mainly of colonial building materials such as brick and tile fragments, road fill (bitumen), rocks (granite), and pottery fragments. A complete mid-19th century inkpot was also found on site.



ARCHAEOLOGIST AT WORK. (CREDIT: UNG RUEY LOON)



MEET AND GREET WITH AN ARCHAEOLOGIST SESSION. (CREDIT: TAN SHIR EE)

“In one of the test units, a rare timber feature with a length of over 3m was discovered at the depth of 160cm below the surface. Organic materials of such scale are rarely recovered in archaeological contexts in Singapore as they tend to decompose quite quickly.”

The excavated materials were typical finds expected from the area; it used to be a swampy area situated next to Sungei Bras Basah or modern day Stamford Canal. The developers and municipal authorities would have had to level the marshy land in order to create a solid foundation and build on top of it. In SAM's case, construction fill was used; it made up the majority of the artefacts recovered in the archaeological excavation.

In one of the test units, a rare timber feature with a length of over 3m was discovered at the depth of 160cm below the surface. Organic materials of such scale are rarely recovered in archaeological contexts in Singapore as they tend to decompose quite quickly. However, the timber was deposited in a riverine silt layer, a dense clay layer which had an anaerobic environment. This would help to preserve the timber. Currently, the purpose of the timber is unknown. Samples of the wood were retrieved and it is hoped that it can



DIORAMA UNIT. (CREDIT: UNG RUEY LOON)

be carbon dated and further analysis can be conducted on it in the near future.

In addition to being an evaluation, the *live dig* had three diorama units in the front lawn of SAM, which were accompanied by display boards explaining the process of an archaeological excavation. Various excavation tools to excavate and record archaeological sites were placed into the units to mimic an archaeological excavation. Furthermore, an exhibition of past excavations in Singapore was held at the SAM Curve gallery. This exhibition displayed artefacts found at the Victoria Concert Hall, Empress Place, and Sultan Gate sites.

To further engage the public, Meet and Greet an Archaeologist sessions were held every Saturday. Visitors could handle real artefacts, chat with the archaeologists about them, and learn more about the archaeological processes. Specialists in related fields such as history and architecture also conducted talks on archaeology and the history of the site. These public lectures were given by Mr. Lim Chen Sian, Dr. John Kwok, and Dr. Imran Tajudeen in the Glass Hall of the SAM.

The AU team were heartened to hear from old Josephians—former students of the St. Joseph school—who shared their stories of the building, and by other visitors who reminisced on their memories of the area. The AU team were also honoured when Parliamentary Secretary Mr Baey Yam Keng paid a visit to the site on 19th April and expressed his interest in Singapore archaeology. He toured the excavation and exhibition, and enthusiastically took to the opportunity to wash some of the artefacts.

CHAN WAI PENG IS AN NSC AU RESEARCH ASSISTANT. SHE WAS A PARTICIPANT IN THE 2017 NSC ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL AT TONLE SNGUOT AND HELPED TO EXCAVATE SEVERAL SINGAPORE SITES.

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Why Was There No Singapore Before Raffles?

SPECIAL NSC LECTURE SERIES: '1819 AND BEFORE: SINGAPORE'S PASTS'

BY PEARLYN Y. PANG

ISEAS - YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE RESEARCH ASSOCIATE



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PROFESSOR LEO SURYADINATA, MODERATOR OF THE SESSION, AND MR KWA CHONG GUAN. (CREDIT: ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE)

Wednesday, 18 July 2018 – In commemoration of the bicentennial of Stamford Raffles's establishment of an East India Company settlement on Singapore in 2019, the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC), at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, has organised a special lecture series entitled '1819 and Before: Singapore's Pasts'. This seminar series aims to introduce the premodern and early history of Singapore, and to locate it in the broader region.

The inaugural seminar was given by Mr Kwa Chong Guan, an Associate Fellow of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Adjunct Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore Department of History, and the lead author of the book 'Singapore: A 700-Year History'. His talk drew a large audience of over 115, comprising diplomatic corps, students and faculty members from institutions of higher learning, public and civil servants, and members of the public.

Although Singapore's history dates back 700 years, not many are aware or convinced of the importance of its pre-Raffles history. To many, Singapore's history begins in 1819 when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles founded Singapore as a fishing village. Professor Leo Suryadinata, moderator of the session, invited Professor Kwa to shed light on the question - Why was there no Singapore before Raffles?

Mr Kwa began by explaining that the popular idea of Singapore as only 200 years old stems from Mr S. Rajaratnam's declaration in 1984 and 1987 that "this island never really had a history worth remembering (before 1819)". Mr Kwa addressed (1) how Mr S. Rajaratnam came to this conclusion,

(2) the assumptions underlying this view and (3) how this view of Singapore's past was changing. He shared that there were records of both Raffles and Dr John Crawfurd demonstrating their awareness of earlier settlements on Singapore. However, they concluded that these earlier settlements were abandoned at the time Raffles landed. While it is without doubt that Singapore was founded as a depopulated fishing village, Mr Kwa highlighted a paradox: Why was an island with "a peculiarly admirable geographical position" - as Raffles claimed - found to be deserted and depopulated? He also questioned why Raffles Professor of History, K.G. Tregonning, assumed that knowledge and work on early Singapore by notable figures like Dr Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill and Professor Paul Wheatley "is of antiquarian interest only"; of no relevance to the present modern Singapore.

Perpetuating the idea that there was not much worth remembering before 1819 was historian C.M. Turnbull who, until 2009, was unable to connect precolonial Singapore to other settlements of the world. Turnbull remained convinced that "nothing of significance took place on the island until Raffles' party landed in 1819". Mr Kwa asserted that more work can be done to uncover the paradox and assumptions of why and how Singapore did not flourish as a trading port before the nineteenth century.

To do so, this special seminar series will host presentations to help us understand Singapore's pre-1819 past and how Singapore was connected with others across space and time. The seminar series will include presentations from Professor Leonard Andaya, Dr Andrea Aciri,

Professor Peter Borschberg, and Dr Michael Flecker, among others. Mr Kwa concluded the session with a thought-provoking statement. Although the narrative of post-1819 has served Singapore's nation building well, considering Singapore today, is it time to re-write our history to re-write Singapore's position as a global city?

The enthusiastic audience asked many questions including (1) the need to seek connectedness and continuity in Singapore's precolonial past to modern Singapore. (2) The factors that influenced discontinuities in Singapore's history, such as climate change in the fourteenth century. And (3) the multiple alternative perspectives Singapore's history can be (re)written from, such as a Malay, Dutch, Spanish or Sino-centric perspective.

PEARLYN Y. PANG IS A RESEARCH ASSOCIATE AT ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE. SHE HOLDS A MSc. IN APPLIED GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, WHICH SHE PURSUED WITH THE ISEAS' K.S. SANDHU GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP. SHE ALSO RECEIVED HER B.SOC.SC (HONS) IN GEOGRAPHY FROM THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE. HER CURRENT RESEARCH INTERESTS BROADLY INCLUDE GIS AND REMOTE SENSING APPLICATIONS IN CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE, ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY, AND COASTAL AND MARINE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

The Orang Laut and the Realm of the Straits (*Negara Selat*)

SPECIAL NSC LECTURE SERIES: '1819 AND BEFORE: SINGAPORE'S PASTS'

BY EVELYN TAN
ISEAS - YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE RESEARCH OFFICER



PROFESSOR LEONARD ANDAYA DURING HIS PRESENTATION. (CREDIT: ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE)

Wednesday, 25 July 2018 - Prof Leonard Andaya, the inaugural Yusof Ishak Chair in the Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore and Professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Hawai'i, delivered a lecture titled "Orang Laut and the Realm of the Straits (*Negara Selat*)". It was the second in the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre's special series of lectures, "1819 and Before: Singapore's Pasts", to commemorate Singapore's upcoming bicentennial anniversary. Using close analysis of crucial historical accounts, he argued that the Orang Laut's (Sea People) marginal position in history should be reconsidered because, Prof Andaya argued, they were key actors along the Straits of Melaka up until the nineteenth century. His lecture attracted more than 120 participants from diplomatic corps, local and foreign tertiary institutions, museums, government organisations, and members of the public.

In highlighting the historical importance of the Straits of Melaka and Orang Laut's roles, Prof Andaya organised his lecture into three interrelated parts. Firstly, he explained that as the Straits was the primary thoroughfare for the lucrative east-west international maritime trade, a conducive environment was created in which the Orang Laut, who inhabited the Straits, became indispensable to the Malays in *Negara Selat*. As the trade brought ships to the strategically-located Straits of Melaka, the Orang Laut guided the traders through the treacherous seas and navigated them to the Malay inland trade ports, many of which could only be accessed with the Orang Laut's help in entering through specific river mouths. As economic activities in the Malay communities grew in vibrancy, the Orang Laut became more deeply entrenched

in the livelihood of these communities. Secondly, using evidence from the Malay Annals and historical records from the Chinese, Arabs, and the Dutch, Prof Andaya argued that the Straits was not regarded as an uninhabited area, but an essential part of *Negara Selat*'s spatial configuration. The resource-rich seas were considered as important as the land in the land-water continuum. Thirdly, he spoke of the important roles that the Orang Laut played as guardians of the trade lanes. A non-monolithic group of people, the Orang Laut functioned within their own specific water territories as smaller units with their own leaders. In fact, some groups were so distinctive they were deemed more prestigious than others, such as the Orang Suku Bintan. As independent units, they formed different allegiances to land kingdoms of the *Negara Selat*, becoming trusted crucial allies of the Malay rulers. They provided fighting ship forces and protected their allies from attacks from the sea. In sum, the Orang Laut were crucial to the success of various entrepots along the Straits of Melaka, in which the Malays were the beneficiaries.

However, Orang Laut started to lose their strategic position in *Negara Selat* as the victory of Bendahara dynasty saw the Bugis displacing the Orang Laut. Moreover, technological advancement in shipping and weaponry, and the prioritisation of land-based economic activities over maritime trade, heralded a new era in which the Orang Laut's expertise lost its relevance. Prof Andaya elaborated that, in fact, the European and Malay gaze began to popularise the notion that the Orang Laut's lifestyle was uncivilised. In

time, the socio-economic position of the Orang Laut was further undermined as *Negara Selat*'s communities became increasingly landlocked and less able to comprehend their maritime lifestyle.

The lively conversation following the lecture brought several salient points to the fore. Prof Andaya highlighted how Malay rulers gained the Orang Laut's loyalty through marriages and by bestowing them with important titles. He also mentioned how the Orang Laut earned their livelihood from collecting sea products that were profitable for trade, as well as piracy in collaboration with their Malay allies. The discussion also revealed an ongoing research on the Orang Seletar in Johor Bahru, a community who used to reside along Singapore's Seletar river and participate in the trade activities at entrepots along the Straits in the past. Most importantly, Prof Andaya underlined the importance of rewriting Singapore's history before 1819, which could provide a chance to undo the selective historical recording by the ethnic group in power that had left out the Orang Laut's important historical role, and to restore it to its rightful place.

EVELYN TAN IS A RESEARCH OFFICER AT THE REGIONAL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, ISEAS - YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE. SHE RECEIVED HER BA IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES FROM THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE (NUS). SHE IS CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH THEMATIC GRANT PROJECT ON CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: COMPARATIVE GROWTH, POLITICS, AND NETWORKS IN URBAN CENTRES.

The NSC-NU Internship Programme

BY SHALINI CHAUHAN

GRADUATE STUDENT, SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES,
NALANDA UNIVERSITY



SHALINI AT THE ISEAS LIBRARY DURING HER NSC-NU INTERNSHIP. (CREDIT: MARK HENG)

As someone who is interested in the history of the spice trade and the trade routes from India to Southeast Asia, I was honoured to have been selected as an intern for the third session of the NSC-NU Internship, the intellectual collaboration programme between Nalanda University and Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, which began in July 2016. NU students who fostered a deep interest in historical intra-Asian links between South and Southeast Asia such as myself have developed their MA Thesis here. As an intern I was able to visit Singapore to take advantage of library resources at ISEAS before going on to write my MA Thesis. During the internship, I was privileged to work with experts in the field such as Professor Leonard Andaya, whose suggestions gave new directions for my research, and Dr Tai Yew Seng, who advised me on various resources.

My research interest lies in spice trade from Maluku to South Asia. From my readings I narrowed down my research focus to Melaka and the Kingdom of Johore as these were the parts

of the straits where Indian merchants were directly involved in the trade in spices from Maluku and Banda and textiles from India. Indian textiles were the primary commodity of exchange for Southeast goods and forest products. The texts on Maluku spices and Western archipelago suggest that spices and Sumatran pepper first reached Aceh and Melaka from the Spice Islands and then it was traded with Indian merchants. From Maluku, Muslim merchants were the ones trading on behalf of the Sultans of Tidore and Ternate. Through my research I will try to aggregate the picture of Indian merchants who were involved in the procurement of spices from Maluku and Banda and Sumatran pepper in Aceh and Melaka, how they provided textiles in return, while competing with European interests.

Aside from library resources in ISEAS, I was also able to participate in events at ISEAS on Southeast Asia. Seminars gave me insights on geography, economics, politics and lot more. As an outsider looking in, they helped me to understand

the region and its myriad of culture in a deeper way. The seminars also gave me a platform to interact with other researchers working in different fields of Southeast Asian studies. The interaction with scholars working on archaeology helped me to understand the importance of material culture, such as when considering evidence from shipwrecks.

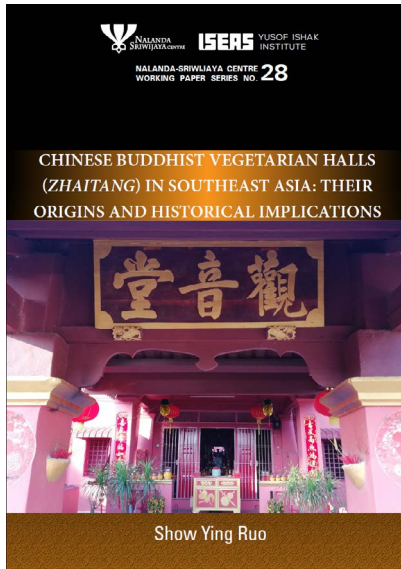
The NSC-NU Internship has galvanised my interest in Southeast Asian studies. I strongly believe that the internship will have a positive impact on my career path in the near future. In this one month journey to Singapore I have grown both academically and personally and I hope to contribute something to Indo-Southeast Asian studies. This experience will remain etched in my memory.

SHALINI IS AN MA CANDIDATE IN NALANDA UNIVERSITY. HER RESEARCH INTEREST INCLUDES THE TRADE ROUTES IN INDIAN OCEAN IN PRE-MODERN TIMES, THE INTERACTION AMONG DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THROUGH TRADE EXCHANGES, AND THE RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA IN PRE-MODERN TIMES.

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Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Halls (*zhaitang*) in Southeast Asia: Their Origins and Historical Implications



AUTHOR: SHOW YING RUO

Abstract: Halls of Guanyin are vegetarian halls that were established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the group's respective Great Masters or resident-members. Although Masters were largely males, those halls were usually maintained by women.

This working paper, intended as a preliminary investigation into the historical and social conditions of Chinese Buddhist vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia, will focus on their religious pursuits within

the Three Teachings tradition, the gender dimension, and their texts.

The intersection of religiosity and secular welfare, gendered patterns, and immigrant history presented in this historical account of vegetarian halls are ways to understand Chinese temples in Southeast Asia in their various functions and vicissitudes.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

“Portuguese and Dutch Records for Singapore before 1819” by A/P Peter Borschberg

Part of the “1819 and Before: Singapore’s Pasts” special series of lectures commemorating Singapore’s bicentennial anniversary

In the mid-1950s, Ian MacGregor embarked on an ambitious project to research the history of pre-1800 Singapore and Malaya by using Portuguese documents. His findings were published in three articles but his untimely death abruptly ended a promising trajectory in writing the history of Singapore and the region. For the past two decades, research on early European sources touching on the region in the 16th and 17th centuries has intensified and, thanks to modern access to archival materials worldwide, the question has resurfaced as to what the value of the Portuguese sources has for identifying important events in Singapore’s pre-modern history. This seminar will critically engage with the different types of materials at hand, compares them with other period European sources, and reviews some of the different materials that have been published in recent years.

Date: 09 October 2018, 10:00-11:30 am

Venue: Seminar Room 2, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute

“The Localisation of Buddhism in the Wider Landscape of Bagan” by Dr. Elizabeth H. Moore

The influence of the eleventh to thirteen centuries CE Bagan empire included much of present day Myanmar. Documentation of more than 4000 structures there has meant little study of the relationship of the city wall to the network of villages within the immediate environs and virtually none to the wider landscape. Drawing on a database of circa 600 points, the talk reaches into these spaces to trace out a network of tangible and intangible heritage that is an essential part of understanding the significance of village communities to the past formation of state and its future should Bagan be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Date: 30 October 2018, 10:00-11:30 am

Venue: Seminar Room 2, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute



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