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NSC

HIGHLIGHTS

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- Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre: Back to the Future
- Early Christianity and Asian Interactions
- Cultivating the Way in the Eastern Dragon Mountain
- Pulau Ubin Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat Battery: The Gun That Never Was
- Angkor World Heritage Management: Lessons Learned from Inception to Present

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IMAGE:
WALL PAINTING OF PALM SUNDAY (PROBABLY),
NESTORIAN TEMPLE (683-770 CE),
FROM GAOCHANG, XINJIANG, CHINA -
ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM, BERLIN.
(CREDIT: DADEROT / WIKIMEDIA)

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The ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

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The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC)

at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, pursues research on historical interactions among Asian societies and civilisations. It serves as a forum for the comprehensive study of the ways in which Asian polities and societies have interacted over time through religious, cultural, and economic exchanges, and diasporic networks. The Centre also offers innovative strategies for examining the manifestations of hybridity, convergence and mutual learning in a globalising Asia.

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Editorial



ISEAS - YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

2018 marks ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute’s 50th anniversary. Established in 1968, ISEAS was born into uncertain times. The Vietnam war was in full swing, Indonesia’s New Order regime had just begun, and Konfrontasi between Indonesia and Malaysia waged on. Singapore had just been expelled from Malaysia three years earlier.

Then Deputy Prime Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee realised that a small and vulnerable state had to better understand its neighbours for survival. Dr Goh observed that Singaporeans “knew more about Melbourne than Medan”. The need for ISEAS was clear.

On 7 June 1968 Parliament passed the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Act. This was highly significant because the birth of ISEAS bucked the trend of western centres of learning studying the region from afar. For the first time Southeast Asia had a research centre located in the region, dedicated to the study of the region.

Today, 50 years later, the regional landscape has changed dramatically but is no less challenging. The Institute has undoubtedly grown in capacity and ability, not least with the addition of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) in 2009. Incidentally, next year marks NSC’s 10th anniversary.

It is in this special year that NSC offers a revamped and refreshed NSC Highlights. Although new in look, NSC Highlights retains its original aim – to offer the work and research of scholars written in an accessible for the lay reader. And we certainly have our fair share of prominent experts in this issue. Kwa

Chong Guan’s article – ‘Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre: Back to the Future’ – is a contemplation of the Centre’s possible direction. The key point Kwa makes is that NSC should not only use the history to understand the present, but to show how the present appropriates history for its own interests.

Barbara Andaya’s ‘Early Christianity and Asian Interactions’ is a thoughtful piece that persuades us that investigations into historical Christianity in Southeast Asia must attempt to go beyond the era of colonialization. Earlier evidence of Christian transmission, Andaya suggests, would be found along the pathways of trade and commercial activities.

In ‘Cultivating the Way in the Eastern Dragon Mountain’, Show Ying Ruo demonstrates the complex and multiple uses of Vegetarian Halls. As Buddhist spaces, these Halls were de facto self-help sites for cultural networking and building of communal identities that had linkages to the mainland. Aaron Kao’s work on WWII archaeology is laid out in ‘Pulau Ubin Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat Battery’. He enhances our understanding of the British army’s coastal artillery defence and the evolutionary process of such military technology.

While different in topics and periods, the articles in this issue conveys three points that seem to characterise Southeast Asia. The first is that networks and links across the region animate local communities. The second is that external flows into the region were more disruptive than intra-regional flows, leaving Southeast Asia very diverse and highly absorbent of the foreign. And finally, these external flows, however disruptive, very quickly became localised and thus, over time, unique to Southeast Asia.

We hope you will enjoy this issue and join in our activities as we celebrate our Golden Jubilee.

Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre: Back to the Future

BY KWA CHONG GUAN
NSC ASSOCIATE FELLOW

The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC), established some forty years after ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute's founding, complements the latter's vision of generating knowledge to enhance our awareness and understanding of the region around us. NSC however works on a time zone far removed from ISEAS' concerns about contemporary trends and current issues.

How can NSC's work on state and social formations or the connected histories of the region a millennium or more earlier be relevant to ISEAS concerns about the stability of the state in the region today? The conventional answer is that NSC studies can illuminate the historicity and the deep cultural continuities that led to today's issues.

Vietnam's complex relations with China, for example, may be more comprehensible if viewed within the time frame of its millennium-long contested history of being a small southern neighbour of Imperial China. Deciding whether we are today on the upswing of a new cycle of globalisation may look rather different when framed within the long cycles of premodern economic interactions in the region, which NSC does look at.

The challenge for NSC then, is to go beyond this conventional answer of pointing to the deep cultural continuities and the wide historical connections underlying today's problems to be able to probe how the deep past might have been appropriated and adapted for political ends. The imagery of the Indic epics have been appropriated and adapted as metaphors and allegories for political messages, as the monumental sculptures of Arjuna in central Jakarta and Gatotkaca at Bali's Ngurah Rai Airport suggest. Deciphering the contested meanings and variant messages underpinning these monumental sculptures requires some understanding of the Old Javanese texts of the Indic epics which inspired the patrons and their sculptors of these monuments.

“The challenge for NSC then, is to go beyond this conventional answer of pointing to the deep cultural continuities and the wide historical connections underlying today's problems to be able to probe how the deep past might have been appropriated and adapted for political ends.”

Historic ruins in Southeast Asia such as the temple of Preah Vihear can be sites for contested heritage, spilling over into issues of national identity. These issues are often a consequence of divergent reconstructions of the deep history of these sites. Was Bagan and its successors down to Myanmar today Theravada Buddhist, or was there Mahayana and possibly even Vajrayana Buddhist worship at Bagan? The issue is central to Myanmar's Buddhist identity today.

Research coordinated by NSC into Buddhism's long history in Southeast Asia is revising popular perceptions that the region was essentially Mahayana until the 13th century conversion to the Theravada tradition. We are now recognising that there was an extensive network of Vajrayana Buddhist masters, texts and icons across Southeast Asia from the 7th to the 13th centuries. The “tantric” dimensions of not only Buddhism, but also Shaiva Hinduism shaped state formation in early southeast Asia, the legacies of which continues to influence perception of power and the practice of politics in modern Southeast Asia.

By providing a context for the mythologising of icons and narratives about the region's deep past, NSC's studies can also provide counter narratives to the political appropriation of the region's history. One of NSC's initial research focus was collating recent research into early interactions between Southeast and South Asia. The narrative emerging from this research challenged the dominant narrative that Southeast Asia was colonized by Indians in much the same way the region was later colonised by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and French.

But this dominant narrative of a “Greater India” reconstructed by Indian historians for a nationalist history of their nation persists and shapes Indian perceptions up today as they “Look East.”

This dominant Indian narrative of their subcontinent as the cultural heartland of the Indian Ocean region and its ports were the nodes of Indian Ocean trade for millennium counters an emerging Chinese narrative that China was the main driver of a “Maritime Silk Road” which has provided for the peace and prosperity of all communities along that Silk Road since the Han dynasty. China's grand strategy for “One-Belt and-One-Road” revives and continues this old Maritime Silk Road which China pioneered.

The role of the ports in the Mekong Delta, on the Isthmus of the Malay Peninsula, and along the Straits of Melaka have in enabling the development of a Maritime Silk Road has thus far been ignored. Providing a counter narrative to the Chinese and Indian narratives of the Maritime Silk Road and consequent claims to hegemony of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean is a challenge NSC may want to consider.

KWA CHONG GUAN IS AN AFFILIATE WITH THE NSC ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT AND EDITOR OF THE VOLUME “EARLY SOUTHEAST ASIA VIEWED FROM INDIA: AN ANTHOLOGY OF ARTICLES FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE GREATER INDIA SOCIETY” (2013; MANOHAR AND ISEAS PUBLISHING). HE HAS ALSO PUBLISHED TWO NSC WORKING PAPER SERIES, “THE MARITIME SILK ROAD: HISTORY OF AN IDEA” (2016) AND “LOCATING SINGAPORE ON THE MARITIME SILK ROAD: EVIDENCE FROM MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY, NINTH TO EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES” (2012), WHICH CAN BE FOUND AT THIS LINK: [HTTPS://WWW.ISEAS.EDU.SG/ARTICLES-COMMENTARIES/NSC-WORKING-PAPERS](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/nsc-working-papers). KWA IS ALSO AFFILIATED WITH THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE.

Early Christianity and Asian Interactions

BY BARBARA WATSON ANDAYA
NSC VISITING SENIOR FELLOW

Scholars associated with the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre have found the connections between trade and religious interaction to be a rewarding avenue of inquiry. Since the Centre's inception in 2009 successive conferences and publications have deepened our understanding of the early movement of religious ideas along Asian trading networks during the first millennium. In Southeast Asia Christianity is often omitted in these conversations because it is seen as arriving only in the 16th century, with the missionary enterprise directly linked to the expansion of Europe's economic ambitions. Yet the nexus between trade and Christianity in Asia has an older history that raises intriguing questions about the pathways of commercial exchanges and the degree to which these fostered religious change.

By the 5th century Christian influences were moving along the Central Asian trade routes that connected Syria and Persia to China, but the most vigorous and best established was the Church of the East, often known as Nestorian (Hunter 1996:130). Its formation can be traced to disagreements between the Greco-Roman hierarchy in Alexandria and the Syriac-speaking church centred at Antioch. Originally from Antioch, the patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius (ca. 381-451 CE) refused to accept the title of Theotokos, 'Mother of God' when referring to Mary, mother of Jesus. He and his followers were therefore condemned as heretics who did not believe that Christ was truly God. To escape persecution 'Nestorians' moved eastwards into Mesopotamia and Persia, where they formed close relations with local merchants (Gilman and Klimkeit 1999: 40, 116, 122).

Supported by its thriving jurisdictions along the Central Asian 'silk road', the Church of the East reached China, and the inscription on a stele found at Xi'an, dated to 781 and attributed to a Persian priest, describes the 635 CE reception of a Nestorian delegation at the Tang court. It notes that the 'Holy Scripture' of the 'luminous religion' (Jingjiao) was



KOTTAKKAVU MAR THOMA SYRO-MALABAR PILGRIM CHURCH IN KERALA, INDIA, WAS THE FIRST CHURCH IN INDIA AND ACCORDING TO TRADITION, ESTABLISHED IN 52 CE BY ST. THOMAS. (CREDIT: CHALLIYAN / CC BY-SA 3.0)

“...the nexus between trade and Christianity in Asia has an older history that raises intriguing questions about the pathways of commercial exchanges and the degree to which these fostered religious change.”

translated into Chinese and that the emperor, impressed with the 'rectitude and truth' of these teachings, gave special orders for their dissemination (Carus 1909: 13). A number of manuscripts composed in Chinese indicate the ease with which aspects of Buddhism and Daoism were incorporated into Nestorian teachings, and the Luoyang inscription found in 2006 testifies to its spread among ordinary people. Nevertheless, by the 10th century CE membership of the Church of the East in China had declined markedly, apparently as a result of hostility towards 'foreign religions' (Gilman and Klimkeit 1999: 14-16, 267-82).

It is not until the 13th century that references to Nestorians resurface, this time in the accounts of Franciscan priests visiting China in search of converts (Wiest 1993: 182). By this time the Mongol conquest of China and their control over much of Eurasia had led to a relative stability that allowed for increased travel

and commerce with Eastern Europe. Jingjiao churches were established in the major port cities and trading centres that linked Chinese merchants to the outside world (Howard 2012: 145). However, although a number of Jingjiao communities can still be identified through the 14th century, their numbers began to decline. As a result, Christianity did not succeed in establishing a permanent basis in Chinese society (Malek and Hofrichter 2006).

The situation was very different in India, where studies of early Christianity have focused primarily on the St Thomas Christians of Kerala. The apocryphal Acts of Thomas, written in the Syriac tradition and dating from the early 3rd century, explicitly endorse the trade-religion connection (Saint Laurent 2015: 17). Commissioned by Christ to missionise in the east, the Acts record that Thomas willingly accepts being sold to a merchant as a slave, and that the gospel is spread through commercial activities along



FIG. 2: ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES. (CREDIT: HISTORY BLUEPRINT ([HTTP://CHSSP.UCDAVIS.EDU](http://CHSSP.UCDAVIS.EDU)), REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS CAMPUS.)

trade routes (Saint Laurent 2015: 32). According to local traditions, Thomas arrived in Kerala around 52 CE, where he founded India's first Christian church. He then travelled across south India to Mylapore (near modern Chennai), but was eventually killed, purportedly by Brahmins jealous of his success. By the time of Marco Polo's visit in 1293 a cult surrounding St. Thomas was well established, and his tomb on St. Thomas Mount had become an important pilgrimage site (Neill 1984: 26-34).

The history of the Church of the East in India is less well documented. The account by the 6th century merchant and later monk, Cosmos Indicopleustus, is often cited in support of an early presence, but it is not certain that he ever visited India or even Sri Lanka, and the detail he provides may well have been gleaned from fellow travellers. It is believed that Nestorian communities had developed in India by the 6th century, but their relationship with St. Thomas Christians is unclear. It is thus noteworthy that both refused to acknowledge Mary as Mother of God, and that the Acts of Thomas contain many Persian loanwords (Saint Laurent 2015:31).

Establishing a firmer history for the Nestorian church in India and Sri Lanka is an important intervention for Southeast Asian scholars because one study suggests that the early Christians mentioned in Siam, Java and Pegu were probably Nestorians from Central Asia or Persia who had been forced out of China when the Mongol dynasty was overthrown in 1368 (Gilman and Klimkeit 1999: 313). However, previous Indian connections seem equally likely. In the 12th century an Armenian trader, Abu Salih, visited 'Fansur', which has been commonly identified as Barus, northwest Sumatra, since he records that 'it is from this place that camphor comes', and Barus was famed for its camphor [1]. Abu Salih reported seeing several

churches, noting that 'the Christians were all Nestorians' and that there was one church 'named after our Lady, the pure Virgin Mary' (Evetts 1895: 300).

Nonetheless, the evidence for a Christian presence in Southeast Asia during the first millennium is extremely limited. Despite reports of items now lost, there is no tangible proof like the Nestorian cross in the Anuradhapura museum in Sri Lanka, much less an inscription resembling that at Xi'an. Even for those who are convinced, the sources are 'tantalizing'. For instance, when a letter from a 7th century Patriarch of the Church of the East mentions churches that extend 'from the borders of the Persian Empire to the place they call Qalah, which is at a distance of 1200 [about 6500 kms.],' could Qalah be read as Kedah? (England 1996: 96; Duval 1905: 182). Can we see the 'Po-sse' (Persian) monk who helped develop trade with China in 714 as 'almost certainly Nestorian'? (Wang 1958: 100; England 1996: 95 fn. 9). Given the frequent interpolation of 'probable' and 'possible' in these discussions, a recent study concludes that between the 8th and 13th centuries 'Christian ideas perhaps found their way into Southeast Asia' but that 'secure roots' were not implanted until the arrival of European missionaries in three hundred years later (Alberts 2013: 5). One thing, however, seems certain. If further evidence of early Christian activities in Southeast Asia is uncovered, it will be directly related to the magnet of trade that has always provided the pathways along which religious ideas moved.

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(2015) (WITH LEONARD Y. ANDAYA), AND A THIRD EDITION OF "A HISTORY OF MALAYSIA" (2016).

[1] FROM HIS READING OF EARLY MAPS AND TEXTUAL REFERENCES, E. EDWARDS MCKINNON HAS CONCLUDED THAT FANSUR WAS CLOSER TO BANDAR ACEH, IN THE BAY OF PANCU. [HTTPS://WWW.ISEAS.EDU.SG/CENTRES/NALANDA-SRIWIJAYA-CENTRE/RESEARCH-TOOLS/RECORDED-LECTURES](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/centres/nalanda-sriwijaya-centre/research-tools/recorded-lectures)

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Cultivating the Way in the Eastern Dragon Mountain

BY SHOW YING RUO
NSC VISITING FELLOW



A TOMB BELONGING TO THE EASTERN DRAGON MOUNTAIN FOUND IN BUKIT BROWN CEMETERY, SINGAPORE. (CREDIT: RAYMOND GOH)

Several tombstones in Bukit Brown Cemetery belonging to the Vegetarian Halls (*zhai tang* 齋堂) of Eastern Dragon Mountain and Mountain of Boundless Longevity were recently rediscovered in Singapore. The Bukit Brown Cemetery (in operation between the years 1922-1973) was said to be the largest Chinese cemetery outside of China and was Singapore's first municipal Chinese cemetery (Tan 2011). Distinctively characterised by religious connotations, these tombstone artefacts afford us a unique glimpse into the early movements of secret Chinese religions and their spread across various regions of Southeast Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Although these Vegetarian Halls are often thought of as regular Buddhist temples, they were anything but regular. These Vegetarian Halls served a dual role of being both residential and religious establishments for the Former Heaven sect, in which members practiced sexual abstinence and followed vegetarian diets (Topley, 1963). Members cultivated the Way (*Xiu dao* 修道) according to sectarian teachings in order to achieve a higher position in the administrative hierarchy of the sect. Unlike other Chinese temples, Vegetarian Halls and the believers of the Former Heaven sect were not traditionally organised through dialect groups or familial clans,

but were established according to a strong religious lineage passed on from generation to generation after migration. Equally unique was the large proportion of female members residing in these Halls.

From these rediscovered tombs in Bukit Brown and the enshrined ancestral tablets in related Vegetarian Halls, we can find titles bequeathed to the departed, such as: "Disciple of Confucius in the Cultivation of the Way; "Protector of the Way," and "Salvation Messenger of Three Reincarnations". In a rare case, "Buddhist Lotus Society" was bequeathed as a title. Similar titles are not to be found in other tombstones. Also, names given to the departed were not their real ones but were religious which corresponded to their rank and lineage. For example, residents in the Vegetarian Hall of Eastern Dragon Mountain division would usually incorporate the word "*shan*" 善 (virtue, moral goodness) onto their religious names or to the title of their Vegetarian Halls. Therefore, these titles provided a method to trace their lineage, and to examine how these Halls infused the "Three Teachings" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) into their beliefs, and showcased the fluidity and highly diversified identities of sect-affiliated Chinese temples in Southeast Asia.

Over the years, Vegetarian Halls in Southeast Asia have emphasised their

Buddhist roots in an effort to secure their standing as an official religion and adapt to social changes. For example, in Indonesia, during the New Order era, the term "klenteng-klenteng Tionghoa", a mixed word for Guanyin temple, was officially replaced by "Vihara/Wihara", a Sanskrit rendition of the name, thus drawing the Halls closer to Buddhist social orientations as a form of legitimatisation (Salmon & Lombard 2003). In Singapore and Malaysia, Vegetarian Halls are ambiguously known as the Halls of Guanyin (*Guanyin tang*) with all the Buddhist and social connotations involved in the mentioning of the great Bodhisattva. The veneration of Avalokiteśvara in the Halls comes in the form of an eighteen-armed Cundhi Guanyin statue (not the common white-robed Guanyin as seen in other Chinese temples), placed parallel with the sect's hidden goddess, the Eternal Mother. Statues or paintings of Eternal Mother are often enshrined in a secluded area of the Halls and can only be worshipped by ranking members of the sect.

"Over the years, Vegetarian Halls in Southeast Asia have emphasised their Buddhist roots in an effort to secure their standing as an official religion and adapt to social changes."

While the subject of Vegetarian Halls remains largely understudied and shrouded in local complexities due to conflicting sources and its esoteric traditions, there are approximately 30-40 surviving Vegetarian Halls found in Singapore today, the majority being branches of the Waterloo Street Guanyin Temple (also known as The Hall of Heavenly Virtue) founded in 1884. The Eastern Dragon Mountain division of the sect is strongly influenced by authentic Southeast Asian traditions as it was locally formed and organised in the Tanglin area of Singapore. Patrons of their Vegetarian Halls were largely Peranakans,



EIGHTEEN-ARM CUNDHI BODHISATTVAS ARE FOUND IN VIHARA SANATA DHARMA, JAKARTA (LEFT) AND CHONG TUCK TONG TEMPLE (TOP), SINGAPORE (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)



a term referring to the descendants of Chinese immigrants who came to the Straits of Melaka during the 15th-17th century (or earlier), intermarried with locals, and came to practice a hybrid of local Southeast Asian and Chinese customs. A few abbesses of the *Kor Tai* level (gu tai, "Greatest Lady"- the highest rank female residents can obtain in the sect) were Peranakans as well, the most famous being Song Guat Neo, the widow of eminent member of the community Tan Jiak Kam (1865-1889) (brother of the philanthropist Tan Jiak Kim) (Tan and Tan 2002).



A SHRINE OF ETERNAL MOTHER FOUND IN PURPLE BAMBOO GROVE (ZI ZHULIN), PUDU, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA. (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)

During the Malayan Emergency, Vegetarian Halls asserted social clout in the Chinese New Village[1] settlements by taking in destitute elderly or helpless children as residents, distributing food to the needy, while printing and circulating scriptures to inculcate traditional Chinese moral values. As for the members of the sect who prided themselves as the "Disciple of Confucius in the Cultivation of the Way" (*ru men xiu dao* 儒門修道), being benevolent and righteous (*ren yi* 仁義) and being able to uphold moral justice (*dao yi* 道義) were part of their cultivation as well. The oral history interviews I have collected with residents of the Vegetarian Halls often invoked war memories of the Halls functioning as temporary refuge for local communities.

As part of the landscape of early Chinese community settlements in Southeast Asia, the international, cross-cultural religious networks of Vegetarian Halls cannot be underestimated. These locales are a microcosm of the multidirectional flows of economic, cultural, and religious



THE AUTHOR INTERVIEWING A VEGETARIAN NUN IN VIHARA SANATA DHARMA, JAKARTA, INDONESIA (CREDIT: SHOW Y.R.)

resources in the region. These Halls remind us never to undervalue the historical implications and functions of Chinese temples in Southeast Asia and the embedded religious and societal aspirations that animate this connectivity.

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).

[1] NEW VILLAGE WERE GUARDED SETTLEMENTS CREATED BY BRITISH IN THE 1950S UNDER THE "BRIGGS PLAN" TO DEFEAT AND ISOLATE MALAYAN COMMUNISTS. FROM 1950-54, ROUGHLY 480 NEW VILLAGES WAS ESTABLISHED IN MALAYA, OVER 500,000 PEASANTRY RESETTLED, MORE THAN 80% WERE CHINESE. REFER TO: COATES, J. (1992). SUPPRESSING INSURGENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY, 1948-1954. BOULDER: WESTVIEW PRESS.

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Pulau Ubin Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat Battery: The Gun That Never Was

BY AARON KAO
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER

The National Parks Board and the NSC Archaeology Unit recently launched a research collaboration to investigate the archaeological significance of Pulau Ubin island, located northeast of the main Singapore island. The archaeology team would conduct surveys and excavations on the island over a span of 18 months. In December 2017, the team completed its first field season by evaluating and recording the remains of the Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat (AMTB) military structures. While the documentation has been completed, archival research and analysis are still ongoing to interpret the past use of the site.

Kampong Bahru is a 21m knoll situated immediately west of Sungei Mamam creek along the central northern shoreline of Pulau Ubin. During the Second World War, it was the site of a coastal artillery emplacement designed for two twin 6-pounder guns. These guns were termed AMTB equipment, and typically emplaced near the entrance of harbours in two or one gun configuration. The Pulau Ubin AMTB battery formed part of the Changi Fire Command – a network of coast artillery batteries placed to protect the eastern part of Singapore; specifically, the waterway leading into the Royal Navy base at Sembawang.

The first production batch of twin 6-pounders at the Woolwich Ordnance Factory, UK, were sent to Singapore in 1937. They armed several emplacements in Changi, Pulau Tekong, and Keppel Harbour. However it is unclear whether the guns for Pulau Ubin arrived in time to see any action. As a result, the emplacements remain in relatively good condition as it did not suffer from direct enemy fire, and demolition by the retreating British Army. Part of the research at the Ubin AMTB was to examine whether any guns were ever emplaced at the battery.

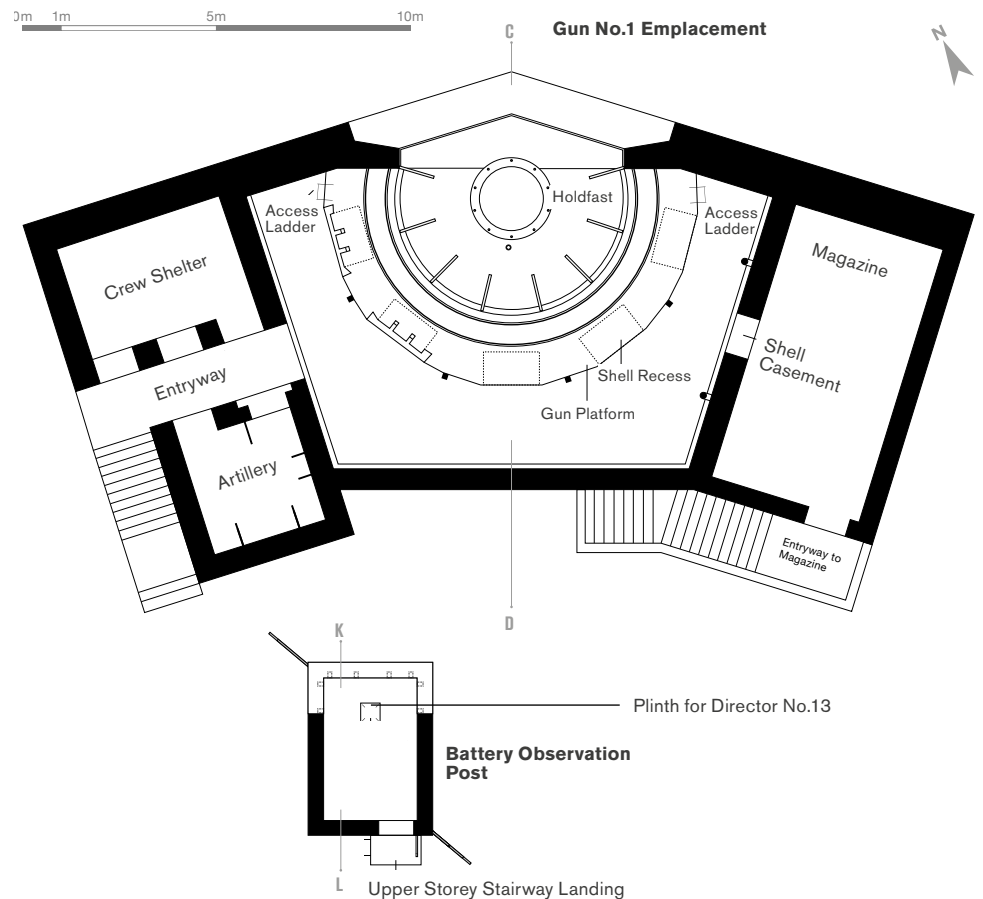


FIG. 1: PLAN VIEW CROSS SECTION OF PULAU UBIN AMTB BATTERY GUN NO. 1. (CREDIT: AARON KAO)

“...it is unclear whether the guns for Pulau Ubin arrived in time to see any action. As a result, the emplacements remain in relatively good condition as it did not suffer from direct enemy fire...”

The two gun emplacements of the AMTB were similar in layout (see figs. 1 and 2). The central gun floor area was flanked on the east side by the magazine, and on the west side by a crew shelter and artillery store. Both emplacements were built eight meters apart in a staggered formation on a terraced slope approximately mid-way on the knoll, and facing northeast. Gun no. 1 (see fig. 3) was the first emplacement from the east. Entry into the emplacement was on the west via a corridor situated between the crew shelter and artillery store. Behind each emplacement, stood a two storey (gun no.1) and three storey (gun no. 2) battery observation post (BOP) tower. This structure housed equipment and men to command the guns, engines, and searchlights.

In addition to the gun emplacements, the battery also consisted of ancillary

buildings such as the barracks, toilets, cookhouse, engine room, oil store, storerooms, water pumping station, and searchlight emplacements. They were all built in a compact location on the knoll. A jetty located west of the gun emplacements also served the establishment. The barracks, toilets, and cookhouse have since been demolished. The engine room and oil store were located together on the south-eastern foot of the knoll, out of view from an attacking enemy ship. Both were simple rectangle concrete structures with flat roofs. Approximately 300m downhill from the northeast corner of gun number one, and at the water's edge, were three DEL (defence electric light) emplacements (see fig. 4). These concrete structures house fixed beam electric searchlights powerful enough to light up a section of the waterway. These would have

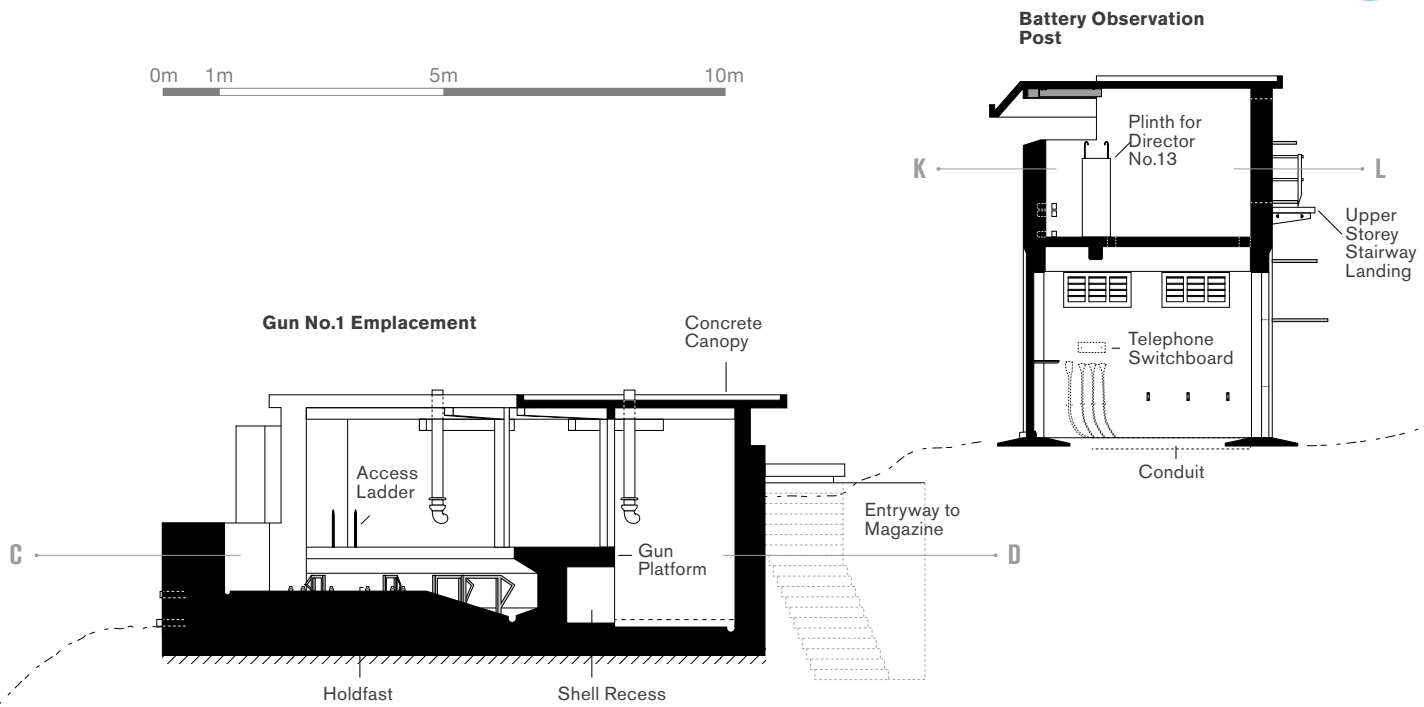


FIG. 2: WEST ELEVATION CROSS SECTION OF PULAU UBIN AMTB BATTERY GUN NO. 1. (CREDIT: AARON KAO)

“The substantial remains of the Ubin battery make the site rare as many other coastal artillery gun batteries were destroyed during the war or demolished to make way for development.”



FIG. 3: GUN FLOOR CONSISTING OF OVERHEAD CONCRETE CANOPY, GUNNER'S PLATFORM, AND HOLDFAST BOLTS FOR A TWIN 6-POUNDER GUN. (CREDIT: YOUNG WEI PING)



FIG. 4: ONE OF THE DEL EMPLACEMENTS FEATURING STEEL REINFORCED SHUTTERED CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION TO PROTECT THE SEARCHLIGHT EQUIPMENT AND CREW. (CREDIT: AARON KAO)

allowed the guns to engage intruders at night or in low light conditions.

Although it is unclear if the guns were installed in time for the Japanese invasion, it is evident that the battery was used to some extent. Electrical fittings and other debris observed in one DEL emplacement seem to suggest the occupation of equipment. A telephone communication switchboard was probably installed in gun no.1's BOP as marks and fittings on the wall indicated so. An engine was in use for a period of time as the ceilings of the engine room were heavily covered in soot. It may be possible that a temporary arrangement was placed pending the arrival of the guns. More research is now being conducted to establish the activities of the site. This AMTB battery was significant within both local and national context. It marked

the technological evolution of coastal artillery in the British Army that started in the 16th century in Britain, and early 19th century in Singapore. If we were to discount British association, the nearby 17th century Johor Lama kingdom located along Sungei Johore just across the straits had fought coastal battles with the Portuguese and Acehnese by employing a wide array of coastal artillery as a part of its defences. The Ubin battery serves as an interesting evolutionary study in this related field of warfare and coastal defences in Southeast Asia. The substantial remains of the Ubin battery make the site rare as many other coastal artillery gun batteries were destroyed during the war or demolished to make way for development. This surviving specimen remains relatively intact and legible. The battery also formed the larger military landscape of fixed

defences that was unique to Southeast Asia. Singapore was after all the most heavily armed colony within the British Empire in terms of coastal artillery. At a local level, the Pulau Ubin documentation project would complement available information regarding the subsistence and lifeways at Kampong Bahru. It would help to answer questions such as whether the militarisation of Kampong Bahru affected or benefited the local community. Despite the shortcomings of the British Army in 1942, the coastal batteries did deter a Japanese seaborne assault, and fulfilled the role it was designed to do.

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Ancient Southeast Asian Polities: A Primer

BY FOO SHU TIENG
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER



FIG. 1: PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPT CONCERNING MEDICINE, CHAO PHYA ABHAIBHUBEJHR BUILDING, PRACHINBURI, THAILAND. (CREDIT: S. T. FOO)

Much of what we know about ancient Southeast Asian (SEA) polities comes through historical sources and legacies. According to Chinese sources, the earliest known polity in SEA was thought to be Funan (1st-6th/7th century CE), based in the Mekong delta in parts of what is now southern Cambodia and Vietnam (Vickery 2003).

Although not many local written sources have survived the test of time from prior to the 16th century (these are largely stone inscriptions or through palm-leaf manuscripts), near-contemporaneous documents from India, China, and the Arab world can provide a rich testimony as to the atmosphere and lives of the people living in SEA at the time, and also provide a glimpse into how

important international events might have affected the course of SEA history. These foreign documents were either in the form of traveller tales, concerned trade goods for merchants, and even diplomatic missions to/from SEA.

According to Arabic sources, ships from the Islamic world had once sailed the entire length between the Persian Gulf and China, trading ivory, frankincense, cast copper, sea shells, and turtle shells, in exchange for items such as gold, silver, pearls, brocade and silk (Park 2015: 67, 70). According to *The Chain of Histories*, the Huang Chao Rebellion in 875-884CE during the Tang dynasty likely caused major disruptions to trade, as major cities important to trade such as Guangzhou was plundered and many

foreign merchants killed (Park 2015: 70, Sen 2009: 63). According to al-Mas'udi, an Arabic historian and geographer, after the rebellion, the Islamic traders from the Arab world began to meet the Chinese halfway in Kalah (possibly Kedah, Malaysia) in SEA and Sino-Islamic sea trade with China being conducted through SEA ports like Sriwijaya (known in Chinese records as Sanfoqi (三佛齊) (Wang 2007)) became the norm by the late 9th century (Park 2015: 70).

Archaeological investigations in the region have complemented the rich historical data by providing physical evidence of what was left behind at certain sites. Researchers have largely focused their attentions on the large monumental architecture, economic history by studying of the routes and value chains of trade wares (see Qin 2016 for ceramics), and the big ticket questions relating to the rise and fall of empires.

Advancements by employing certain technologies in the last decade—such as LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) in Cambodia, have advanced the study urbanism and settlement in such a manner that more refined questions can now be asked (see Belényesy 2017).

Ancient SEA polities, particularly those in mainland SEA and western parts of insular SEA, are often thought as having Indian influence. Many of these Indian influences likely came through international trading networks of merchants and guild associations which had a local presence in SEA—Tamil merchants left a number of inscriptions in Aceh and Kedah, for example (Karashima and Subbarayalu 2009). Although earlier scholarship attributed many traditional SEA writing systems to being Pallava-based (a reference to the Pallava Dynasty of Southern India which came to power in the 4th century CE), Griffiths (2014) argued that the available inscriptional evidence in SEA showed a much more complex picture, with several phases of waves of influence and development, and prefers the use of “Late Southern Brahmi” and “Late Northern Brahmi” to show the origins of the cultural influence.

However, some (see Sutherland 2005) would argue that the Indic influence was not a simple copy and paste of ideas. Instead there was a process of filtering, where some elements were made more prominent, and certain elements were discarded. That led to a localisation of ideas which suited the local conditions. It was also not as if older animist traditions,

Ancient Southeast Asian Centres and Its Neighbours





Shuri (Ryukyu)
X



SOUTH CHINA SEA

PACIFIC OCEAN

JAVA SEA

SOURCES: "ANCIENT SOUTHEAST ASIA" (MIKSIC & GOH 2017), "NAGAPATTINAM TO SUVARNADWIPA" (KULKE, KESAVAPANY, & SAKHUJA 2009), "LAND OF IRON" (BULBECK & CALDWELL 2000), AND "THE 'BIRTH OF BRUNEI'" (DRUCE 2016).

“...the introduction of a rice variety attributed to Champa during the Song dynasty to Fujian province in China, allowed for huge increases in production [...] and allowed areas such as Quanzhou to support a larger population than they would have had otherwise...”

such as the belief in spirits which inhabit and protect certain environments, did not continue (they still do, even until today).

Scholars are also increasingly aware that the sociopolitical and economic influences went both ways. According to Chinese historical documents the introduction of a rice variety attributed to Champa during the Song dynasty to Fujian province in China, allowed for huge increases in production (from one harvest a year to two or three), and allowed areas such as Quanzhou to support a larger population than they would have had otherwise (Clark 1991).

A number of prominent scholars (see Christie 1995) have proposed and summarised these polities' theoretical formation, growth, and structures. One of the key theoretical features which differentiated these SEA polities from that of the kingdoms in the West was the idea of a mandala-system (see Wolters 1999), where territory could be had without fixed borders, as the centres of power could be mobile, and where the kings had much more of a ritual and symbolic authority rather than administrative role to play. Patron-client relationships, where clients would provide services in exchange for protection by the patron, helped to explain how power might be consolidated (see Miksic and Goh 2017: 247).

In some areas that are now known as Indonesia and the Philippines, a number of these polities were also impacted by the growth of Islam, as their rulers began to convert to Islam from approximately the 13th century (some examples: the kingdom of Samudra-Pasai in Sumatra and the founder of the Melaka sultanate who had left Temasek), with the apex of their power being in the 15th century.

In Mainland SEA, the largest and most expansive empire was that of the Khmer empire, which was said to have been established in the 8th century in the city of Mahendraparvata at Phnom Kulen, Cambodia. Best known for its capital city of Angkor and the state temple of Angkor Wat (UNESCO world heritage site near present-day Siem Reap, Cambodia), its apex is said to have been reached in the 14th

century; it survived until the supposed fall of Angkor in the 15th century.

In Insular SEA, it was the Majapahit Empire (13th-16th century) which had the most extensive reach. Its capital of Majapahit was located in the current-day village of Trowulan in East Java, Indonesia, and much of what is known about the kingdom is based on the Nagarakertagama, a 14th century palm-leaf manuscript eulogy by Mpu Prapanca about one of the kings of the kingdom, Hayam Wuruk.

Finally, it should be noted that Southeast Asia's eastern regions of the Philippines and eastern Indonesia were not cut off from the rest of the region. Available studies (such as Hall 2011, Scott 1989) seem to suggest that those regions were actively engaged with the western Southeast Asian ports. They were in formal trade contact with China since at least the 11th century, for example, and it is quite likely that their products and activities were likely masked by the availability of their goods in ports to their west which they traded to.

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Angkor World Heritage Management: Lessons Learned from Inception to Present

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APSARA AUTHORITY



2017 NSC ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL AT ANGKOR WAT TEMPLE, 12TH CENTURY (CREDIT: EA DARITH)

Although Angkor's road to world heritage enlistment was unique, many of its management experiences as a UNESCO World Heritage Site can be shared with other countries that wish to nominate their own cultural heritage sites. In this article, I outline Cambodia's experiences with enlisting Angkor, before discussing APSARA's role in managing Angkor. In 1989, the conflict parties in Cambodia had a national reconciliation and after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, King Norodom Sihanouk and Federico Mayer, the Director General of UNESCO jointly launched an appeal from "to the international community to support the Cambodian people in their efforts to save Angkor symbol of national unity for the Cambodian people and heritage of humanity as a whole" (UNESCO 1993). Thereafter, "Saving Angkor" became an important mission and UNESCO encouraged Cambodia to prepare for the inscription of Angkor on the World Heritage List.

Nominated as a World Heritage Site on 14 December 1992, Angkor covers

an area of approximately 401 square km, consisting of three groups: Angkor, Roluos, and Banteay Srey. Cambodia was given three years (1993-95) to study the Angkor site and establish an authority to take charge of the protection and conservation of the site. To this end, an International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor (ICC) was formed at a 1993 conference in Tokyo. The ICC had two co-chairs, France and Japan, and UNESCO acted as its standing secretariat. Since then, the ICC has provided the Cambodian government international assistance for Angkor and Siem Reap.

A series of Royal Decrees and regulations empowered Cambodians with the authority to regulate and manage the area. Firstly, in May 1994, a Royal Decree (001/NS) establishing Protected Cultural Zones in Siem Reap/Angkor Region and the Guidelines for their Management was promulgated. It which offered a framework of protection and development for Siem Reap/Angkor Region (Ang Ch.

et al. 1995). Secondly, in 1995, a national protection agency called APSARA Authority was established by a Royal Decree (NS/RKT/0295/12). Thirdly, the establishment of APSARA Authority was accompanied by the establishment in 1997 by a Heritage Police (60/ANKR/PK), who were trained by the French to protect the monuments and sites from illegal digging, destruction, and theft of artefacts. Fourthly, in 1996, the Law of Protection of Cultural Heritage was promulgated for protecting the cultural heritage in Cambodia. One measure of success with these regulations might be Cambodia's successful repatriation of looted artefacts (see Xinhua 2015).

The following section will highlight the missions of APSARA Authority and the international teams involved in research activities as well as conservation, restoration, and development efforts at the Angkor World Heritage Site. APSARA Authority's mission is to protect and improve the value of the environment and history of the Angkor region. Moreover, the Authority is empowered to refine and



SRAH SRANG ROYAL POOL, LATE 12TH/EARLY 13TH CENTURY. (CREDIT: EA DARITH)



JAYADAKA (NORTHERN BARAY), LATE 12TH/EARLY 13TH CENTURY. (CREDIT: EA DARITH)

“One measure of success with these regulations might be Cambodia’s successful repatriation of looted artefacts.”



ANGKOR WAT TEMPLE (CREDIT: EA DARITH)

apply master plans on tourist development and take action against deforestation as well as the illegal occupation of territory in the Siem Reap-Angkor region.

The first phase of the mission started from 1992 to 2004. In this phase, APSARA Authority focused its efforts on conservation, restoration, maintenance, and safeguarding work as well as the training of technical staff. From 1999 to 2002, in collaboration with international teams and UNESCO, APSARA Authority trained 20-25 staff (from different fields: archaeologists, architects, engineers, tourism, and administrators) yearly through the Ta Nai Training Programme. The programme provided advanced on-site training to national technicians with the mindset to develop a core professional team for site management. After training, most trainees were employed in areas related to tourism development, urban development, administration, conservation, maintenance, landscape, archaeology, and social studies.

Angkor was initially listed as a World Heritage Site in danger as many of the temples and structures were unstable and were about to collapse, and due to looting activity. With the strong efforts from APSARA Authority and its international partners, Angkor was shifted from being listed as a World Heritage Site in danger to a normal World Heritage Site in 2004, and is lauded by UNESCO (2017) as a case study for successful restoration as the temple structures were supported and conserved and looting was halted. In 2004, Angkor also received an ISO 14001 Management System Certificate from Japan Quality Assurance Organization (JQA) for raising its Environment Management System to international standards. This achievement allowed APSARA Authority to move to the second phase of its mission.

The second phase of the mission started from 2004 to present and focused on sustainable development linked with conservation. With the national and international efforts and UNESCO advice, remarkable achievements have

been made in many areas; such as the conservation and restoration of temples and sites, the archaeological research projects and training programmes, tourist management plan, infrastructure in the Angkor Park, community development, land use and management of construction inside Angkor Park, heritage education programme and creation of culture and tourist city.

After 25 years of inscription as the World Heritage Site, APSARA Authority has gained considerable experience in the field of conservation, restoration, research, training, community development, and tourist management. In 2007 it led a project in the North Baray (Jayatadaka) to re-flood the 16th century dried up reservoir in order to restore the ancient landscape and maintain the hydraulic balance necessary for stabilising the area’s monuments. In 2009 APSARA embarked on a project to strengthen and restore the Srah Srang complex by consolidating the jetty of the Srah Srang pond for tourist development. By this time, some temples have been restored and conserved by the APSARA Authority staff.

Training programmes were jointly conducted by APSARA Authority and international teams. In particular, the APSARA Authority and ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute have collaborated on the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) Archaeological Field School between 2012 to 2017. The NSC Field School has so far trained 62 students from the East Asian Summit countries and the curriculum of the Field School has included lectures, sites visit, conservation, restoration, excavation, and laboratory training. In Cambodia, the students visited and analysed Khmer polities, from Funan (1st-6th Century CE), Chenla (7th-8th Century CE), Angkor (9th-15th Century CE), Post-Angkor (16th-19th Century CE), and studied the Khmer and Chinese ceramics excavated from Angkor. In Singapore, the students visited historical sites (such as Fort Canning) and other urban excavation sites in the Civic District, the National Museum of Singapore, the Asian Civilisations Museum, and the

NUS Museum, as well as ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and prepared a public presentation based on their experiences.

Finally, I would like to thank the Singapore government, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, which selected Cambodia as a site for the NSC Archaeological Field School, as it trains and builds up the cultural networks in our region. I also would like to take this opportunity to wish long life and good collaboration to both our institutions during the 50th anniversary of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and the 25th anniversary of the inscription of Angkor as the World Heritage Site.

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Imperial Rice Transportation of Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)

—
BY FOO SHU TIENG
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER

Wednesday, 1 November 2017 –

Dr. Tana Li, Visiting Senior Fellow at the Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre, argued in her lecture on “Imperial Rice Transportation of Nguyen Vietnam” that the imperial system of rice transportation was a great lens in which to examine state control and power. Dr. Li also considered how Vietnam’s geography, ecology, and economic market forces factored in the maintenance of that power base. Dr. Li framed the talk by looking at why the imperial system was implemented, what went wrong, and what was the effect of the policy in the north.

The imperial rice transportation system, which was the largest logistical state operation in pre-modern Vietnam and involved tens of thousands of people and up to 650 ships, went between Hue and Nam Dinh to cover court official salaries and to support the imperial court. The system was implemented to try to reduce prior regional divisions, but the south, which had built its strength on exporting commodities such as betel nut, pepper, and sugar, suffered greatly as global commodity prices for those items were depressed during the turn of 19th century.

Dr. Li showed how the rice transportation system functioned as a way to meet the rice demands of the capital in Hue. But this came at great cost as the ships were forced to sail during seasons with high inclement weather in order to make it in time for the harvest period, and some were lost. Dr. Li also showed how the rice transportation had the effect of weakening the court’s potential opponents in northern Vietnam by taxing the region heavily and also instigating a rice ban. She emphasised the way rice was used by Nguyen Anh to trade for western arms in the 18th century. The 60 minute lecture was attended by an



DR TANA LI, VISITING SENIOR FELLOW AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE, SHARING ABOUT HOW GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES PLAY A ROLE IN INTEGRATING COUNTRIES (CREDIT: ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE).

Dr. Li also showed how the rice transportation had the effect of weakening the court’s potential opponents in northern Vietnam by taxing the region heavily and also instigating a rice ban.

audience of 28 people, including research scholars, students, and members of the public. It was followed by a lively 30 minute Q&A session in which Dr. Li answered questions over whether the failure of imperial rice transportation had more to do with logistics or political integration; if trade routes through the mountains were considered; the nature

of the 47 rebellions in North Vietnam during the study period; if Gia Long’s Vinh Te and Vinh An canals was an attempt to solve logistical issues; the nature of the rice transportation system, ship technology, and weather pattern knowledge during the period; and the role of the Chams as shipbuilders and sailors.

Calligrams in Islamic Southeast Asia

BY MARK HENG
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER

Tuesday, 5 December 2017 –

Dr Farouk Yahya, Leverhulme Research Assistant in Islamic Art and Culture at the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, delivered a lecture entitled "Calligrams in Islamic Southeast Asia" at ISEAS on 5 December 2017. The lecture investigated calligrams, their forms and uses and situated them within the context of the region and the Islamic world. Dr Yahya has a PhD degree from SOAS and researches illustrated and illuminated manuscripts from Southeast Asia and the Islamic world, particularly those relating to magic and divination. 45 participants from foreign embassies, statutory boards, non-profit societies, private firms, art institutions, the press, publishing houses, research institutes, local universities, and the public attended this lecture.

Dr Yahya began with an introduction to calligrams – figurative or pictorial calligraphy where texts are formed into images. These can be found across the world, and can be of any kind of script; in the Islamic world, calligrams tend to be used for devotional and talismanic purposes. Studying calligrams in Islamic Southeast Asia sheds light on the use of images in the region, for instance why certain motifs travel, and why particular images tend to be more prominent in certain areas.

Although there are many types of calligrams in Southeast Asia, those in Arabic script (usually composed of religious phrases and Qur'anic verses) are more characteristic of the region's Muslim societies. Dr Yahya focused on two prominent ones in particular. The first takes the form of a large feline, which in the Islamic tradition is referred to as the 'Lion of 'Ali' ('Ali was the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, who was also known as the 'Lion of God').



DR FAROUK YAHYA WITH DR HÉLÈNE NJOTO, WHO CHAIRED THE LECTURE (CREDIT: ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE).

In Southeast Asia, this type of calligram is typically used on royal banners and as talismans for protection and strength. The second takes the form of ships, which have spiritual connotations in Southeast Asia. One version is composed of the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (it is believed that writing their names on a ship can prevent it from sinking). Other versions are found at the beginning of books and letters, where the opening phrases (e.g. the *basmala*) were fashioned into the form of a ship.

Dr Yahya posited that Southeast Asian calligrams were derived from other parts of the Islamic world, such as the Ottoman and Persian traditions, but would also have fit in with local beliefs. For example, he notes the conflation between the lion and the tiger in the region, which explains why the Lion of 'Ali calligram is known as the Tiger of 'Ali here. He also shared examples of calligrams in other Southeast Asian scripts, such as Javanese and Shan, which indicates that calligrams were a widespread tradition, and he hoped to find more.

A lively Q&A session followed the lecture, which allowed Dr Yahya to share his thoughts on a number of issues, such as the significance of what is often seen as a Shia Muslim motif (the Lion of 'Ali) in a region where Sunni Islam dominates, the centres of representation of particular images, the military connotations of certain calligrams (e.g. those with "victory from God"), and how the study of magic and divination can help shed light on contacts between Southeast Asia and other parts of the Islamic world.

In response to other questions from the audience, Dr Yahya also discussed the production of calligrams, the perceived source of the power of talismanic calligrams, and the relation between the image and text (or the lack thereof). He also mentioned the difficulty of finding earlier examples from Southeast Asia, how most of the calligrams are composed of statements of faith rather than literary texts, and the Southeast Asian specificity of calligrams in relation to the Islamic world, being more talismanic in nature here.



AN AU TEAM MEMBER EXPLAINING THE ARTEFACTS DISPLAYED TO A YOUNG MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC. (CREDIT: MICHAEL NG)

Heritage Plan Roadshow

—
BY MICHAEL NG
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER

“One of the objectives of the heritage plan would be to safeguard archaeological heritage and nurture an interest in heritage amongst Singaporeans.”

On the evening of 28th January 2018, the NSC Archaeology Unit (AU) set up an archaeology exhibition booth in Lot 1 Shopping Centre in conjunction with the National Heritage Board’s (NHB) Heritage Plan Roadshow. The Roadshow was a traveling exhibition which would inform and gather feedback from the public on the upcoming heritage plan. This heritage plan would create a national blueprint for the heritage sector and aimed to highlight the importance of heritage and its relevance to Singaporeans over the next five years and beyond.

During the event, an inquisitive crowd gathered around the booth to ask questions about the displayed artifacts (which consisted of ceramic sherds, old coins and building materials), and regarding archaeology in Singapore. The public were able to engage with the

AU team and learn information from the exhibited posters. They marvelled at the ongoing archaeological work conducted in Singapore for the past 30 years and how despite the artifacts’ unassuming appearance, they may have represented a significant part of Singapore’s history.

One of the objectives of the heritage plan would be to safeguard archaeological heritage and nurture an interest in heritage amongst Singaporeans. Therefore, archaeologists would be taking on a more active role to inform members of the public regarding what they have found and to encourage a greater appreciation of archaeology and heritage through such events. In addition, the NSC AU archaeology team would be working in close partnership with the NHB to develop the archaeological aspects of the heritage plan.

Classical Javanese Figurative Sculpture: Examining ornament and style

BY MARK HENG
NSC RESEARCH OFFICER

Tuesday, 30 January 2018 –

Dr Lesley S Pullen, Post-Doctoral Research Associate in Art History at SOAS University of London, delivered the year's first NSC lecture at ISEAS titled, "Classical Javanese Figurative Sculpture: Examining ornament and style". The lecture examined a corpus of free-standing Hindu-Buddhist statues made in Java from the 9th to 14th centuries in detail, particularly the textile patterns in their elaborate dress, to highlight the interactions between foreign influences and local techniques. Dr Pullen received her PhD in Asian Art from SOAS in 2017 and is researching how the textiles and ornament of India, Central Asia, and China are reflected in Southeast Asian material art. More than 48 participants from local and foreign universities, tertiary institutions, non-profit societies, museums, publishing houses, private consulting/investment firms, research institutes, and the public attended this lecture.

Drawing from a vast range of examples from within and beyond Indonesia and considering supporting evidence from other regions of Asia, Dr Pullen explored the origins of the medieval textiles depicted on these sculptures, or *arca*, and identified the various types being represented, which marked Central Javanese achievement in statuary. Statues came in two sizes: larger ones meant for temples and smaller ones that could be moved around as objects of reverence and veneration and transported from one country to another. Dr Pullen suggested that this was how styles were shared between Java and empires elsewhere, indicating mutual cultural exchange and echoing Hermann Kulke's hypothesis of cultural convergence between South and Southeast Asia, and that monetisation was key to the preservation



DR LESLEY S. PULLEN GIVING HER LECTURE ON FREE STANDING FIGURATIVE SCULPTURES IN JAVA IN THE 9TH TO 14TH CENTURIES. (CREDIT: ISEAS - YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE)

and circulation of statuary and the production of icons, typically involving personal rather than state money. Dr Pullen also analysed specific motifs, such as those on Saiva Buddha sculptures representing tantric iconography, and the impact of the 'Pala Style' from northeast India on the sculpture of Classical Java. She opined that the famous monk Atiśa could have played a role in cultural transfer when he travelled from that region (Nalanda's location) to the Sriwijaya Empire and back. Many of the motifs in textiles have a longer global history with links to other civilisations, such as the Sasanian Empire and Yuan Dynasty. The use of the *pucuk rebung* or *tumpal* motif on *patola* fabric also indicates that Indonesians went to Western India with knowledge of their market and ideas for patterns, requesting craftsmen there to incorporate these designs into the pieces to bring home. She posited that many of the statues could be templates for the textile patterns that remain in use today; their history extends further than conventionally assumed.

With a discerning eye for layers of often elusive detail in the textile patterns and their subtle variations between different statues, Dr Pullen traced their evolution within a relatively short period, some motifs appearing once then disappearing in Java. Such rich material and sharp analysis led to a convivial question-and-answer session. Dr Pullen elaborated further on the Sumatran contribution to Javanese *songket* brocade and

how Chinese imports showed that the Javanese had the comb-on-the-loom technology for this. After the rise of the Majapahit Empire and subsequent Islamisation, *songket* became ubiquitous in Malay courts, where previously this type of patterning had appeared to have fallen out of favour, even though Singhasari sculptures in the 13th century bore such designs, albeit with external influences. The discussion also drew possible links with Kalimantan due to similar designs and Hindu-Buddhist activity found among indigenous peoples there in their tattoos, carvings, and fabrics.

The conversation highlighted some lessons. Firstly, the importance of not underestimating the cultural influence of the Javanese themselves before the Hindu-Buddhist period. Dr Pullen suggested possible Javanese influences from Chola murals, bronzes, and sculptures, and block-printing and woven textiles coming before more complex Coromandel Coast ones. Secondly, that the Javanese took what they liked from what came their way and made it their own, such as the rosette that appears in Chinese Buddhist iconography before this period. Such rich motifs, which even priests or kings would not up, had to be copied from textile models. Lastly, the danger of adopting a singular narrative about the political economy of knowledge production and circulation, so one had to look more closely and carefully: how did Javanese sculptures get such remarkable textile patterns? Where is the inspiration for these designs?

Reflections Upon The Nalanda- Sriwijaya Centre-Nalanda University Internship

BY SANJIVNI

GRADUATE STUDENT, SCHOOL OF BUDDHIST STUDIES,
COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS, AND PHILOSOPHY,
NALANDA UNIVERSITY

It was my good fortune to be selected for the second NSC-Nalanda University internship program which occurred from 15 December 2017 to 15 January 2018. The goal of this internship is to promote the study and research of issues concerning South, Southeast Asia and East Asia, and to help NU students nurture their MA thesis.

For my thesis I am researching the topic of tantric kingdoms. The textual basis for the model of kingship in these kingdoms suggests that there were strong interconnections between tantric religious practices and the state. These connections paved the way for exponential growth in the power of the king. It was primarily this promise of immense power that made this model a widespread phenomenon across many South and Southeast Asian kingdoms, including Java and Cambodia during the medieval period. The study of this tantric paradigm is also relevant for the understanding of the contemporary global world as it nurtures the understanding of the workings of power, its "supernatural" dimension as well as its application in the real world. This opportunity gave me access to the rich library resources at ISEAS which has been a boon for my research as I was able to read extensively about topics that are relevant for my research. I was able to find plenty of useful material under the guidance of my academic supervisor Dr. Andrea Acri, whose comments have given a new direction to my research and helped me improve my research methods significantly.



SANJIVNI AT THE ISEAS LIBRARY DURING HER NSC-NU INTERNSHIP. (CREDIT: ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE)

Every day spent in the library was a nourishing experience for me as I came across new materials for my research on a daily basis. This was both exciting and challenging for me as a young scholar. I was able to conduct my study seamlessly thanks to various facilities available in the library and the study rooms. I was lucky to be one of the first users of this facility, which was also instrumental in increasing my productivity tremendously.

I also had the chance to attend several seminars and conferences which were enriching and helped me to take notes of the skills required to give effective presentation. I also attended the ISEAS Regional Outlook Forum, which broadened my awareness about issues concerning Southeast Asia and gave me good ideas for my future research projects. Furthermore, the interactions I had with the NSC fellows and staff were enriching and

they gave me valuable suggestions to help enhance my research methods.

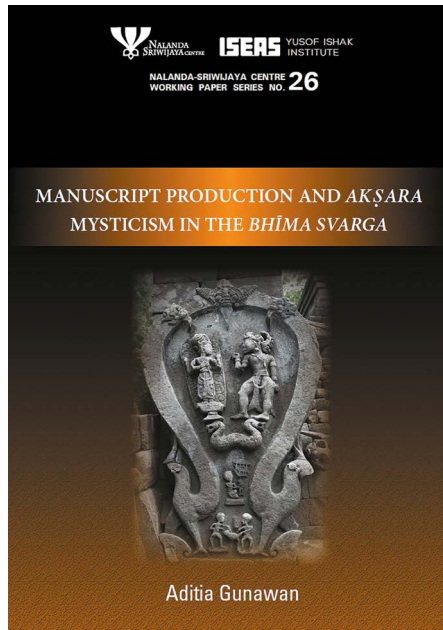
Although it was my first time in Singapore but thanks to the constant support and guidance of the NSC staff, I was able to complete my internship smoothly. I was also able to explore the best of Singapore's cultural heritage on the weekends. It's important to mention here that this internship has helped me to refine my research methods and broaden my knowledge about various contemporary issues. I am thankful for this intellectually stimulating and culturally nourishing experience.

SANJIVNI IS UNDERTAKING A MASTER'S PROGRAM IN THE SCHOOL OF BUDDHIST STUDIES FROM NALANDA UNIVERSITY, INDIA. HER RESEARCH INTERESTS INCLUDE RELIGION AND STATE IN MEDIEVAL TANTRIC KINGDOMS AND THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN RITUALS, VIOLENCE, IMPURITY AND POWER.

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Manuscript Production and Akṣara Mysticism in the *Bhīma Svarga*



AUTHOR: ADITIA GUNAWAN

Abstract: As in other parts of Asia, the figure of Bhīma was made the subject of cult worship in Java. The popularity of this character is documented in numerous archaeological remains, such as inscriptions, statues, and reliefs, as well as textual documents that have Bhīma as the main character. The appearance of Bhīma as the main character in various texts, such as the Navaruci, Deva Ruci, and Bhīma Svarga, often pertained to his role as a semi-divine warrior figure who was able to master the true essence of all esoteric knowledge (Tattvajñāna).

The Bhīma Svarga is one of many versions and may be the oldest one. Written before the 16th century, this text includes a dialogue between Bhaṭṭāra Guru and Bhīma, who wishes to save his father, Pāṇḍu, from hell. The paper introduces the manuscript sources which contain the text of the Bhīma Svarga from a West Javanese scriptorium, and examines the sections of the manuscript pertaining to manuscript production and 'akṣara mysticism'. The data in the text will explain how manuscripts were produced and the significance of akṣara during that period.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Public Lecture in Commemoration of ISEAS' 50th Anniversary (By Invitation Only)

ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly known as the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is commemorating its golden jubilee milestone in 2018 with a series of special events, one of which will be a special Public Lecture by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

This event, which will be held at the Orchard Hotel, will comprise of two parts: the first will involve the Prime Minister's lecture. The second part will be an exhibition of panels which showcases ISEAS' history, its various research projects and trajectories, and the various people who have contributed to its legacy.

Date: 13 March 2018, 4:30-6:00pm
Venue: The Orchard Hotel

"Demystifying Chinese Vegetarian Halls: The Esoteric Tradition of Sino-Southeast Asian Religion" by Dr. Show Ying Ruo

Few people associate the Halls of Guanyin (*Guanyin tang*) in Southeast Asia with the esoteric and secret Chinese religious sect known as the Former Heaven sect (or a broader term, the Azure Lotus sect). More often than not, the Halls of Guanyin are Vegetarian Halls that were established in the late 19th to early 20th century by the sect's respective Great Masters or resident-members. This public seminar will explore the religious network of Chinese Vegetarian Halls in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia by focusing on their lineage, the gender divide and texts. It will seek to link this group of Vegetarian Halls and temples to the larger landscape of the early Chinese community in Southeast Asia.

Date: 23 April 2018, 10:00-11:30am
Venue: Seminar Room 2, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute



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INSTITUTE



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