

Announcements

IIAS is pleased to collaborate with the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) who have collected a number of highlights “fresh from Southeast Asia” presented on this page and the next. The coordinator for this content is Jayati Bhattacharya. We hope to provide a similar news service from other regions of Asia in future issues of the Newsletter.

Report on the conference Inter-Asian Connections II

FOLLOWING UP ON THE 2008 Inter-Asian Connections conference inaugurated in Dubai, Inter-Asian Connections II was held in Singapore from 8-10 December 2010. It will be followed by Inter-Asian Connections III in Hong Kong in 2012. The Singapore event sustained the excitement evinced in the first event of exploring new frontiers of research in the connections, convergences and comparisons among societies in Asia.

The organizers of the series are the Asia Research Institute (ARI) and The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Division (HSS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS), The Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (HKIHSS) at the University of Hong Kong, and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) of New York. Scholars came from Asia, Europe, Australia and America to present papers and discuss the continuities, discontinuities and new connections that increasingly traverse the region. The event was organized into five two-day workshops, with several plenary sessions including a keynote speech, presentation of workshop goals and findings, and a special session to honor the 80th birthday of Professor Wang Gungwu, doyen of China-Southeast Asia scholarship and Professor at NUS. The five workshops and their chairs were

- Regional Knowledge Hubs in Asia: the Social Sciences and Humanities in Science and Technology Human Capital – V.V. Krishna (NUS) and Tim Turpin (University of Western Sydney)
- Inter-Asian Temple and Trust Networks within and out of Southeast Asia – Kenneth Dean (McGill University)
- How Asia Became Territorial – Itty Abraham (University of Texas at Austin) and See Seng Tan (S. Rajarantnam School of International Studies)
- Reproduction Migration in Asia – Biao Xiang (University of Oxford) and Mika Toyota (NUS)
- Old Histories, New Geographies: Contrapuntal Mobilities of Trade in Asia – Eng seng Ho (Duke University) and Lakshmi Subramanian (Jamia Millia Islamia)

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Ackbar Abbas of the University of California, Irvine. He spoke on the topic of “‘Poor Theory’ and Asian Cultural Practices”, which addressed the relation in contemporary Asia between dislocated spaces – anachronisms, the confusion of progressive and retrograde, the dislocation of local and specific – and cultural practices like cinema, architecture, performances, and theory itself. Other plenary sessions dealt with ‘Electronic Media and Academic Interaction among Scholars in Asia’ with presentations by Paul H. Kratoska, NUS Press and Michael Duckworth, Hong Kong University Press, and a ‘Curriculum Development Workshop’ where workshop leaders Xiang Biao, Itty Abraham and Eng seng Ho discussed the curriculum they have developed and taught on Asian connections and convergences in their home institutions.

The conference was deemed very successful by the participants. One observed that when academic research is forced to ‘follow the model of the fast factory, such ...intellectually intensive event is particularly welcomed’. Another noted that ‘[T]he interdisciplinary mix in our own workshop [is] instructive and stimulating, bringing some new insights’. Indeed, several reports expressed the desire to take back insights gained from exchanges with participants in other workshops at the plenary sessions to further explore these problems in their own workshops. We are hopeful that these questions can be pursued in many subsequent events that register the re-emergence of an interdependent, transnational Asia.

Conference details are available at <http://www.ssrc.org/pages/conference-on-inter-asian-connections-iisingsapore-december-8-10-2010>

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Kerdomnel Khmer Group

Preservation and Conservation of Cambodian Culture and Heritage



ADOPTING THE SLOGAN ‘Together We Can Protect’, young Cambodian researchers and foreign colleagues who are passionate about Cambodian culture and heritage, formed a group called KDNK or *Kerdomnel Khmer* (Khmer Heritage) in 2009. The group’s main purpose is to spread information about Cambodian and Southeast Asian culture to Cambodians through various media such as the KDNK’s website, newsletter and magazine. The group aims to document all activities related to the preservation and conservation of Cambodian culture and heritage.

Kerdomnel Khmer – Magazine of Arts and Archaeology, is a result of the hard work of Cambodian students, professors, professional artists from the fields of arts, archeology, history, culture, tourism and journalism. KDNK intends to protect and spread Cambodian culture and civilization, which have had a long and glorious history, and to make them known both in Cambodia and abroad. KDNK especially encourages Cambodians to understand the value of their national cultural heritage and protect it in the spirit of three important slogans: ‘If culture fades away, the nation is destroyed’, ‘Destroying culture is destroying national identity’, and ‘Preserving culture is preserving the national soul’. With *Kerdomnel Khmer Magazine’s* first issue, KDNK received letters of appreciation from His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni, king of Cambodia, and Prime Minister Hun Sen, as well as His Excellency Him Chhem, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts.

In 2010, KDNK started a new project, *The recording of the past ...throughout the French Protectorate Building in Cambodia*, providing research opportunities to both local and foreign students of archaeology and art history. Ten young archaeological students have been volunteering with KDNK. The group plans to organize conferences on Cambodian culture, history, epigraphy, arts, music, photography, architecture, tourism and other related areas. These activities will be held in selected local institutions and organizations in cooperation with the Royal University of Fine-Arts, Bophana Centre and IT Center. KDNK cooperates with both local and international institutes such as IT Center, Bophana Center, Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, University of Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III and Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre (ISEAS). In 2011, the group established the KDNK Foundation to promote the preservation and conservation of Khmer culture and heritage.

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‘Heritage’ and Singapore

THE RAPIDLY CHANGING SKYLINE of Singapore and its ever-increasing – and somewhat intimidating – concrete towers, apparently speak little of the nation’s tryst with the ideas of ‘heritage’. Though archaeological finds near Fort Canning reveal a fourteenth-century kingdom of Temasek, it is widely held that modern Singapore was the product of Sir Stamford Raffles establishing a port there in 1819. As a result, the heritage issues of Singapore revolve around the historical imprints of colonial times and various intangibles associated with events, ideas and memories of those times.

The cost of the rapid pace of its development and the visual effects of frequent alterations of lived spaces often leave the resident population in Singapore groping for images and objects which manifest and sensitise their sense of belonging to the land. The government, in spite of undertaking massive developmental plans, has in recent years been active in creating awareness among its people of the island’s past and its cultures. Singapore may now boast of having the largest number of well-maintained museums in Southeast Asia. The National Heritage Board of Singapore also encourages historical consciousness by promoting a series of historic sites, organising tours along ‘heritage trails’ as well as exhibitions on diverse aspects of cultural vibrancy and other related aspects.

The latest addition in this venture is a privately-owned but government endorsed enterprise: the state of the art ‘ArtScience Museum’ at Marina Bay Sands Casino which was opened by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 17 February 2011. The following day, the Foreign Minister of Singapore and patron of the exhibition, George Yeo inaugurated a stunning display of Tang treasures acquired from the Belitung shipwreck entitled “*Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds*”. The fascinating collection of artefacts, including magnificent ceramics, brought to light historically significant cross-cultural exchanges dating back to ninth century C.E. Almost concurrently, two other exhibitions, “*Travelling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World*” and “*Genghis Khan: The Exhibition*”, were opened to the public.

In its recent efforts to promote an increasing number of museums, Singapore has seen highly profitable enterprises such as the two new casinos making efforts to demonstrate social commitment by establishing museums. This ties in well with the government’s desire to promote the concept of ‘heritage’ and historical consciousness among Singaporeans. The soon-to-be opened Maritime Xperiential Museum at Sentosa is another example of this trend. With the gathering momentum of ‘heritage tourism’, the need for ecological sustainability and a good number of World heritage sites in its vicinity, Singapore is taking this opportunity to promote both its tourism sector and its aspirations towards becoming a heritage city.

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The ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands

NUMBER 16 NOW AVAILABLE

MOUSSONS

Social Science Research on Southeast Asia
Recherche en sciences humaines sur l’Asie du Sud-Est



Un ensemble de / A set of

7 articles
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1 note
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George Town: A historic urban landscape in Southeast Asia

George Town, the capital of Penang, Malaysia, is now a World Heritage Site. How it was built and the way it should be conserved or developed are issues constantly contested as part of a discussion on the extent to which it is possible to acknowledge the contributions of diverse peoples, mostly migrants. The 'Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca', comprising the former British Straits Settlements ports of George Town and Melaka, were jointly listed by UNESCO in July 2008. Melaka dates from 1400 and has seen Portuguese, Dutch and British rule, whereas George Town, Penang, dates from 1786 and flourished in the era of British expansionism. Both cities illustrate the co-evolution of Asian family business and the shop-house form in Southeast Asia. The attainment of world heritage status for George Town was partly due to long-term, bottom-up lobbying by the Penang Heritage Trust and the arts education group Arts-Ed, as well as private conservation efforts. The listing is now celebrated with a month-long George Town Festival in July.



Nagore Sufi-shrine dating from 1801



Dragon dance in front of the Teochew Temple



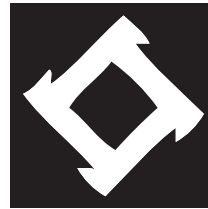
Cultural tourism at Armenian Street

Conservation is a challenge in a city that is under-regulated and hungry for private investment. At least now, the state leadership accepts that the city's 'Outstanding Universal Values' have to be protected. The first OUV is the city's built heritage or townscape consisting of several thousand double-storey shop-houses, studded with an East India Company fort, religious monuments, townhouses and bungalows, public buildings and mercantile offices. A special area plan for the two sites was drawn up in fulfilment of UNESCO requirements, but the semi-government George Town World Heritage Incorporated has lasting difficulty in employing architectural heritage expertise at local salaries to carry out monitoring and advisory functions. Furthermore, lax urban management has resulted in the proliferation of illegal swift-breeding, a threat that has depopulated entire historic towns across Southeast Asia.

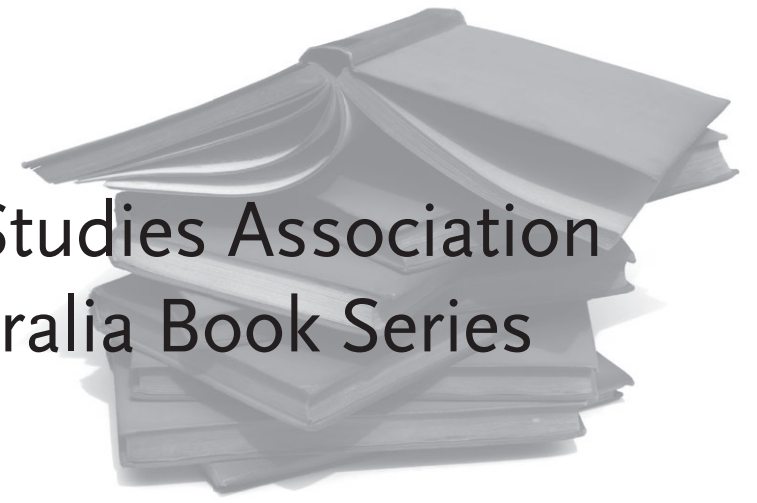
The second OUV is the city's living heritage. Thousands of people live and work in George Town, and continue to observe their traditions and festivals. Recognising the importance of the local community, heritage NGOs have started to address the 'intangibles'. Revitalization of the local economy is the key to sustaining conservation efforts and community livelihoods. Another OUV is the multi-layered and plural history of Penang's trading port. Churches, mosques, as well as Hindu, Buddhist and Chinese temples clustered around an axis dubbed the 'Street of Harmony', illustrate the cultural diversity. Indeed, the long-term interaction between Nanyang (South Seas) Chinese and Indian Ocean diasporas is rich fodder for regional historians.

The historic urban landscape of George Town, with its extensive coastline and living streets, goes beyond the Western paradigm of preserving built heritage. Prof. Ken Taylor, member of AusHeritage rightly perceives that, 'The concept of cultural landscape in Asia [is] ...manifested in rural and urban settings and the inextricable role of intangible values in the relationship between people, place and identity'.

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Local History, from the Outside

The overarching theme of the workshop "Local History, From the Outside: Using Foreign Sources in Asian History" held by the University of Tokyo from 11-12 December 2010, was to explore the possibilities of using European language sources for writing Asian history from a local perspective. It envisaged opening new approaches in the conventional historiography on Japan as practiced by domestic historians. Bringing together scholars from different countries and various fields of research, Matsukata Fuyuko (Historiographical Institute, University of Tokyo) spearheaded the workshop.

Three sessions were chaired by Patrizia Carioti (L'Orientale, University of Naples). The first session dealt with trade and exchange in South and Southeast Asia. Ilioka Naoko (ISEAS, Singapore) explored trading environment in northern Vietnam during the mid-17th century. Wada Ikuko (Kyoto University) looked at the Dutch East India Company's slave trade and local slave market in India during the 17th and 18th centuries, while Shimada Ryuto (Seinan Gakuin University, Fukuoka)

examined the economics of gift exchange between the Dutch East India Company and the court of Ayutthaya. Eric Tagliacozzo (Cornell University) discussed the narcotics trade in insular Southeast Asia through the 'long nineteenth century'.

The second session focused on Japan in the Late-Edo period. Here, Ueno Akiko (Kitakyushu Museum of Natural History and Human History) and Kiri Paramore (University of Leiden) discussed the Tokugawa state's efforts to institutionalize knowledge. Fukuoka Mariko (University of Tokyo) described how nationals of non-treaty nations, such as Germans and Chinese, took advantage of their non-treaty status to conduct business at Japanese treaty ports.

In the third session, Martha Chalkin (University of Pittsburg) discussed the ivory trade and its long-term influence on ecology, economy and material culture throughout the world, and also the usefulness of rich European archives for the study of this trade. Robert Hellyer (Lake Forest University) introduced

British and American archives and analyzed Japan's nineteenth-century foreign trade in the context of a larger transpacific commerce. Adam Clulow (Monash University) compared Dutch encounters with two powerful Asian states, Mughal India and Tokugawa Japan during the early 17th century.

Although those papers most often relied on conventional Eurocentric views and European and American archival materials, the researchers also intended to look at reactions and transformations of local societies from a global perspective. Leonard Blussé (Leiden University) summed up the workshop and Haneda Masashi, Director of the Institute of Oriental Culture (University of Tokyo) pointed out the importance of Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian archives and encouraged a follow-up meeting in the near future.

For workshop details, see <http://haneda.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/english/eurasia/local-history-from-the-outside.html>.

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