



# Cornell University Southeast Asia Program

Spring 2012 E-Bulletin



"I find it strange that in America puppets are often reserved for children. Puppets are powerful. I can't think of more accessible indirect allegory than puppetry. Everyday people pull the strings. Voice travels through the fingers of the voiceless and enters the minds of the audience. The separation between the performer and the form disguises controversial messages as entertainment. At the same time, it accentuates the beauty of the mundane." — Alicia Freedman



A shadow puppet performance at a Chinese Buddhist temple in Surat Thani, Southern Thailand. Just before the full moon in January 2011.

Inset: Backstage at the shadow puppet performance.

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**It has been a busy fall** for the Southeast Asia Program. In September SEAP helped to host the international cross-disciplinary symposium on “Rice and Language Across Asia.” See John Phan’s article on page 7 and accounts on pages 8-12 of the impact of the new course on this topic offered under the guidance of Magnus Fiskesjö.

Timed to coincide with the rice symposium, SEAP launched the social media elements of the Visibility Project. You can now follow SEAP on Facebook (and by extension Twitter) and get up-to-date insights into SEAP events such as brown bags, new book releases from SEAP publications, conferences, faculty blogs, exhibits and so much more.

We are delighted at how many SEAP alumni are participating in this new extension of the SEAP community and we look forward to including more graduate and undergraduate students in the coming months. We are striving to make SEAP’s Facebook page an interactive space to share reading/viewing suggestions related to Southeast Asia.

Don’t just “like” SEAP—please share your thoughts, comments and recommendations!

**<http://www.facebook.com/seapcornell#!/seapcornell>**

In addition to using social media to raise SEAP’s profile on campus and beyond, we are laying the groundwork for creating an online pressroom/media center to facilitate quick access to SEAP expertise on the region. SEAP faculty took part in a short media training in October and are participating in individual interviews to help us build online profiles for this project. Our aim is to use these tools as part of an effort to build connections between journalists and our faculty.

The spring promises to be very full as well. On January 9, Professors Marty Hatch, Eric Tagliacozzo, and Tom Pepinsky were in Jakarta with Alice Pell, Cornell Vice Provost for International Relations, to participate in the formal opening of the American Institute for Indonesian Studies (AIFIS) (see photo). The AIFIS website is up and running <http://aifis.org/> and we will be putting coverage of AIFIS on Facebook as information comes in. We hope to bring you more in-depth coverage on AIFIS in the fall SEAP bulletin.

You should also mark your calendar for the annual SEAP graduate student conference March 2-4. SEAP Director Tamara Loos is this year’s keynote speaker. The outstanding paper from last year’s conference by Chip Zuckerman (University of Michigan) is featured on pages 13-18.

In mid-March shadow drama master Ki Purbo Asmoro will have a residency at Cornell, including sessions with Chris Miller’s gamelan class and Kaja McGowan’s shadow puppet seminar (see their exhibit at the Johnson Museum), an outreach performance, and workshops with undergraduates. He will perform at Bailey Auditorium at 8pm on Wednesday March 14. For ticket information see <http://www.cornellconcertseries.com/>. Tell your friends and help us spread the word.

Warm wishes,

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# The Archaeology of Peninsular Siam Project

Wannasarn Noonsuk, Ph.D. candidate in history of art and archaeology

**As an archaeologist** with research interests in maritime trade, political economy, landscape archaeology, pottery analysis, and the emergence of states, I have excavated intensively in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Thailand. My field research focuses on the emergence of early kingdoms and their social landscapes in Peninsular Siam during the late centuries BCE to the first millennium CE. My dissertation is centered on these interests, but in the course of my field research, I became convinced that what was needed was a coordinated project focused on Peninsular Siam that could guide and promote archaeological exploration, publication, education and training, and heritage management. To this end I founded the Archaeology of Peninsular Siam Project (ArcPen Project) and am serving as the director for the first phase of the project.

Above: Excavating inside a 13th century terracotta well at Wat Suan Luang, Nakhon Si Thammarat, summer 2009



With Phra Maha Prathin (who has his M.A. in Thai Studies) while excavating together at Wat Suan Luang, summer 2009

Peninsular Siam is an improbably thin ribbon of land wedged between the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Siam. Defined by broad coastal plains on the east, a narrow strip of mountains in the middle, and riverine systems flowing to both sides, this geography allows for passage across the peninsula. It differs from the southern part of the Malay Peninsula which is very mountainous, densely forested, and almost impossible to cross. Situated in a strategic location between oceans, the isthmian tract had been a crossroads of civilizations between east and west. Occupied by humans since the Paleolithic Period, this land produced rich material cultures and remarkable artworks. Ancient Chinese, Indian, and Arabic accounts repeatedly mentioned the wealth of resources and prosperous ports, polities, and kingdoms in this area. Archaeological discoveries in the Isthmus of Kra, the narrowest part of the peninsula, reveal the existence of inter-regional trade goods and production sites from the late centuries BCE, before it gave way to the flowering of the isthmian kingdoms significant in the history of maritime Asia.

Despite its strategic importance, there has been relatively little archaeological research in this area. The ArcPen Project, therefore, will bring contemporary methods to the study of this ancient peninsula to improve the state of knowledge. It will also disseminate its results to scholars and the general public. The project is designed to work under a consortium of several universities and organizations, with Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Southern Thailand as the lead member and the Cornell Southeast Asia and Archaeology Programs as the initial participatory members. The representatives from SEAP to the ArcPen Project include Professor Stanley O'Connor, who is also serving as the Chair of the project's Advisory

Council, Professor Thak Chaloemtiarana, and Professor Tamara Loos. It is conceived as having several missions, which all members of the consortium will help work to achieve.

## MISSIONS

### 1. Archaeological Exploration

The project is intended to be a long-term archaeological exploration of Peninsular Siam and will be interdisciplinary in nature, using approaches, methods, and techniques from related fields of study, besides the unique archaeological methods of survey and excavation. It will encourage collaborative efforts to ask and answer questions seen from different angles to break new ground in our research. Members of the consortium will provide expertise and consultation to the project. Insights, knowledge, and skills learned in the field will be shared and a network of scholars formed.

This long-term exploration is expected to have many phases. For instance, the first phase will focus on the cultural geography and chronology of Nakhon Si Thammarat, while in the following years, the thematic or spatial focuses may change to the religious practices and constructions around the Bay of Bandon if we already have sufficient knowledge of Nakhon Si Thammarat since the isthmian tract is a large area to explore.

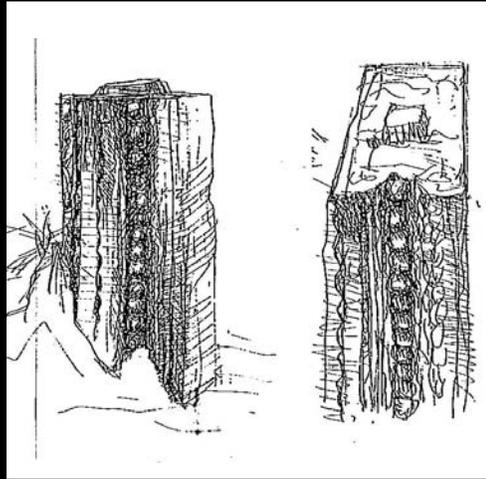
The project will promote cross-border research and sub-projects as well. Joint research projects between archaeologists from different countries to study ancient cultures across borders are envisioned since the Peninsula is a maritime crossroads. The project plans to also act as an umbrella under which many sub-projects can coexist. For example, the project can accommodate and facilitate both Paleolithic cultural research at Krabi and underwater archaeological research at Koh Samui. The project promotes research opportunities for all members in this area.

### 2. Publications

Making information accessible to the public is of high priority for the project. Survey and excavation reports, results of analyses, and research progress will be published regularly as the exploration advances. A project website will be established. Through information sharing, the project can enhance the degree to which its findings are made use of, in order to build up and carry the field forward.

### 3. Archaeological Education and Training

The project will offer education and training in archaeology and related fields. Thai and non-Thai students from consortium universities will be able to register for the project's regular *summer field school*. This will be the first formal



Left: A Kendi (spouted pot) from our excavation in 2009 at Wat Mahathat, Nakhon Si Thammarat

Right: Sketch of a granite door frame (c. 7th-8th century CE) of an already-disappeared Hindu temple at Wat Mahathat, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Wanchalerm Noonsuk

archaeological field school in Southern Thailand. The project will help design *academic courses* in archaeology both in Thai and English for Walailak University. These initial courses could pave the way for the establishment of the first degree program in archaeology in Southern Thailand if there are sufficient instructors in the field at Walailak University in the future. In the long run, we can also encourage young archaeologists to study abroad for more advanced degrees and to acquire specializations tremendously needed in modern archaeology, such as geoarchaeology, archaeobotany, zooarchaeology, physical anthropology, heritage management, conservation, etc. Southeast Asia still lacks archaeological specialists in these areas, but the lack can be remedied.

The project also plans to create an *electronic database* to organize the information of archaeological sites, architectures and artifacts found so far in Peninsular Siam. The database will store the data of the sites (text, map, drawing, picture, etc.) and the results of the archaeological work conducted on them. This database should prove extremely valuable to research in many academic fields and to sustainable development in the future. The database will be available for use by students and scholars in conjunction with a *study collection* of artifacts and other discoveries from the project's fieldwork. This collection will be established at Walailak University along with a small laboratory for archaeological sciences (e.g. petrography and palaeobotany). Dr. Brian Vincent, an honorary fellow of the Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology of the University of Otago, New Zealand, and a renowned petrographer in Southeast Asia has agreed to donate a microscope to the ArcPen Project to help found this lab.

In order to have an effective archaeological program, the university needs to have a good library for archaeology. The ArcPen Project will help establish such a library. The

**HOW YOU CAN HELP:** What the project really needs is books for its library and funding for fieldwork. To make a donation e-mail Wannasarn Noonsuk at [wn35@cornell.edu](mailto:wn35@cornell.edu). You can also write, or send/leave books (or checks) for the project in his mailbox at the Kahin Center, 640 Stewart Ave., Ithaca, New York 14850. The project's library needs books on archaeology, history, history of art, and anthropology of Southeast Asia or Asia in general.

project has received donations of books from several institutions and persons. Especially, the late Dr. Preecha Noonsuk donated his entire collection of books, collected over his lifetime to the project for future generations of archaeologists in Southern Thailand to use. The Cornell Department of History of Art has already donated books on East Asian Art to the project and the John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia of the Cornell Library has also agreed to donate duplicate books and journals to the project regularly. The project will continue to ask for donations and funding to acquire books for the library.

#### 4. Heritage management

The looting of archaeological sites is a serious problem in the peninsula. Although the project plans to have programs in public archaeology to educate people and convince them to protect the sites, heritage protection alone is probably not sufficient. It has to be accompanied with heritage management programs which allow local people and government to set up sustainable development projects at the sites according to archaeological principles. The ArcPen Project is determined to initiate such programs. In the initial phase, the project will help establish a heritage management club for students at Walailak University and provide funding for its activities. The students in the club will help protect the archaeological heritage by going out into the local communities and explaining the significance of the heritage to

the villagers. Camps and workshops on heritage management for community leaders and school children will also be organized from time to time by the club.

### **PLAN FOR 2013-2016**

The project will start its first seasons by focusing on Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, home of the project's base at the Archaeological Research Unit of Walailak University. There are two topics to be explored in 2013-2016.

1) Tha Sala and Sichon: The Pivotal Areas of Tambralinga: the Tambralinga Kingdom was a significant early state in maritime Southeast Asia from *circa* the 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Peninsular Siam occupies a strategic location between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and has long been considered an important area of social interaction between western and eastern civilizations. Tambralinga was a destination for foreign merchants and one of the most important political, economic, and cultural centers in maritime Southeast Asia. Its diverse art styles reflect almost every major Southeast Asian and Indian style. However, in the twelfth century CE, it was superseded in its dominant role on the isthmus by the Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom. Although scholars have appreciated the fame of the Tambralinga Kingdom in Southeast Asian history, its cultural geography, which links land and life, has not been adequately studied.

The evidence related to the Tambralinga Kingdom, including Brahmanical sculptures, architecture and archaeological sites of *circa* the 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, is concentrated in Tha Sala and Sichon District. It can be assumed that these areas were pivotal areas of the Tambralinga Kingdom. The project will conduct archaeological surveys, excavations, and ethnographic interviews in these areas, especially at the Mokkhalan, Khao Kha, and Wat Tanen sites and the areas around them, because the archaeological evidence from these sites suggest that they were cultural centers of Tambralinga. This should reveal more fully the chronology of habitation and social landscapes of these areas.

2) Behind the Sand Dune: In summer 2009, the pilot expedition for the ArcPen Project excavated 59 trenches in the sand dune of Nakhon Si Thammarat City and in the area behind the sand dune. While the excavations in the Nakhon Si Thammarat City yielded evidence of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, those behind the sand dune, between the sand dune and the mountains, gave evidence of much earlier dates. This area has also been known as rice and fruit producing land. Its resources undoubtedly supported the

emergence of the Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom. Two important sites in this area are Wat Phrang and Wat Phra Mongkut. Wat Phrang was the site where one of the earliest Vishnu images (c. the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE) in Southeast Asia was found. The excavations of 2009 discovered two brick structures. One of them has several brick floors on top of one another suggesting regular renewals of the structure's floors. The thermoluminescence dates of the second floor from the bottom are c. the early 8<sup>th</sup> century CE and the date of the earliest (lowest) floor is still to be revealed in the future. The excavations at Wat Phra Mongkut, on the other hand, do not demonstrate any early dates to match with the c. 7<sup>th</sup> century, beautifully decorated granite doorframes found on the ground. The earliest Chinese ceramics from the excavations are dated to the Northern Song Dynasty of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. However, there are other interesting ancient brick structures nearby the site that can be investigated in detail to unlock the enigma of the origin of the early doorframes.

The project, therefore, will focus on exploring these two sites and the area behind the sand dune in general. The archaeological sites in the mountain areas, such as those in Lan Ska District, will also be taken in to account. The exploration will involve surveys, excavations, and ethnographic interviews in the areas in question. The results of the fieldwork should reveal more fully the social landscapes in the past and illuminate how the Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom came into being.

### **INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS AND ADVISORS**

In addition to the founding consortium of Walailak University and the Cornell Southeast Asia and Archaeology Programs, several institutions have expressed their interests to join the project such as the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and Center for Chronological Research of Nagoya University. The project also plans to write a TOR (a long-term contract that allows us to work in the archaeological sites) with the Thailand Fine Arts Department. Besides the institutional participants, several renowned scholars in the field of Asian history and archaeology have agreed to help the project on an individual level as advisors, including Professor John Miksic (NUS, Nalanda-Srivijaya Center, and SEAP alumnus), Professor Himanshu Prabha Ray (JNU, India), Dr. Ichita Shimoda (Waseda University), and Dr. Sila Tripathi (Maritime Archaeology Centre, India). The project is truly indebted to these institutions and scholars and intends to continue to expand its network in the future. ☛

Wannasarn Noonsuk received a B.A. in archaeology (1<sup>st</sup> class honor) from Silpakorn University, Thailand and a M.A. in anthropology from the University of Hawaii. His research and training has been made possible by many fellowships and awards including the Anandamahidol Scholarship from the King of Siam and the Oliver Wolters Grant for Dissertation Writing from the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.



# ‘Rice & Language’ Symposium Explores Ancient Past from Interdisciplinary Perspectives



John Phan, Ph.D. candidate  
in East Asian Literature

The importance of rice cultivation to the societies of Southeast Asia is self-evident. Virtually all Southeast Asian agricultures are rice-based, and rice agriculture has spread even into high and inhospitable terrains, through the innovation of adaptive varieties and hillside irrigation techniques. And yet the origin of rice domestication—and the routes by which rice farming practices entered into Southeast Asia are still little understood. Modern domesticated Asian rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) is represented by five, well-differentiated subpopulations that all descend from a common wild ancestor (*Oryza rufipogon*), which occurs throughout tropical Asia. Scholars have generally agreed upon at least one site of domestication in the Yangzi River valley, but whether this

was the sole point of domestication for all varieties of *Oryza sativa*, and how domesticated varieties—and the technologies and practices that made them possible—spread across the continent remains one of the greatest mysteries of human prehistory.

Last September, geneticists, anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists from around the world gathered at Cornell University, in collaborative investigation of the origins and spread of rice agriculture. The three-day symposium, called “Rice & Language Across Asia: Crops, Movement & Social Change,” brought together cutting-edge research, methodologies, and experience from across the sciences and humanities in a groundbreaking example of interdisciplinary cross-fertilization. Catalyzed by

Top: Manjil Hazarika (Leiden University) explaining his poster to John Whitman (Cornell Linguistics, organizer), while Laurent Sagart (CRLAO-CNRS, organizer) examines another poster in the background

Middle: Participants gather for a group photo at the conclusion of the symposium

recent advances in both the sciences and humanities, “Rice & Language Across Asia” examined the hypothesis (spearheaded by symposium speaker, Peter Bellwood of Australian National University) that language spread in tandem with farming technology. Invited experts shared new evidence on the origin and spread of rice domestication from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives, ranging from agronomy, genetics and climatology, to linguistics, archaeobotany and cultural anthropology.

During the course of the symposium, experts tangled with the capacity for each discipline to contribute to a richer understanding of rice domestication in ancient Asia. Geneticists, including organizer Susan McCouch (Cornell University) and Ishii Takashige (Kobe University, Japan) presented new findings on the evolutionary history of domesticated rice varieties, partially based on newly

isolated domestication genes. This work on the genetic history of domesticated rice was coupled with linguistic research on the genealogies of rice and agricultural vocabulary across the five major language superfamilies of Asia. Linguists including David Bradley (La Trobe University, Australia) and organizer Laurent Sagart (CRLAO-CNRS, France) sought to establish the evolutionary history of these rice and grain-related vocabularies in much the same way geneticists were seeking to establish the evolutionary history of domesticated rice. Experts in both fields were struck by the many similarities between genetic and linguistic investigation, and grappled with subtle but defining differences in the ways language versus biological systems evolve. While both disciplines employ shared models of branching evolution, the ready capacity for language to evolve through contact with other languages introduces serious

differences in the application of those models. The nature of what each record (linguistic or genetic) reveals about human prehistory also became a focal point of the interdisciplinary conversation.

Linguistic and genetic findings were complemented by strong archaeobotanical work on early grain cultivation practices in ancient Asia. In particular, novel fieldwork on poorly described areas in Thailand and southwestern China provided new material evidence for the geographical scope of rice cultivation across the continent. These investigations of the genetic, linguistic, and material records were furthermore contextualized by anthropologists such as Peter Bellwood (mentioned above), who sought to uncover the cultural conditions under which exchanges of technological and linguistic material were transacted.

The symposium is noteworthy for having successfully established a new



## Annie Sheng Graduate student in anthropology

As a first year graduate student, I had never been to the Cornell Plantations before and when the opportunity arose after the Rice and Language Symposium, I was reeling with all these thoughts on rice movement and domestication that I could not clear my head to make a proper decision. I was tempted to join the tour, but thought perhaps I should do what I understood to be my graduate student duty and return home to do some reading instead. Perhaps if the weather was just slightly more gray, just a tad darker than the brilliant sunniness that graced the day, I may not have gone to Taiwan and participated in the International Symposium of Rice Functional Genomics (ISRFG) at Academia Sinica. At the time it seemed a waste to sit indoors on such a fine day when I could be exchanging ideas with brilliant minds while learning more about the gems of Cornell’s expansive campus.

It turned out to be a great decision, and it makes me wonder about how things come about in life, when the choice to join the walk was almost a whim then: it could have gone one way or the other. During the walk, I joined in on a conversation with the presenters from Academia Sinica in Taiwan and some biologists and geneticists from the RiceLab. One of the people I spoke with was Dr. Caroline Hsing, the head coordinator of the upcoming ISRFG. We chatted about rice, their lab in Academia Sinica, my research interests and aspirations, as well as her former time at Cornell, among other topics.

While we walked around Beebe Lake, I learned about the travel grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) to present. I had my doubts; as an anthropologist, I thought it might be a bit of a stretch to participate in a symposium focusing on functional genomics, but if the Rice and Language class and symposium taught me one thing (among others of course), it was that the merits of interdisciplinary research cannot be so easily dismissed. I had been churning thoughts about rice domestication all day. I had even commented during the symposium that I felt that the utilitarian notions (on rice as simply nutritional or foodstuff, without reflection) on which some (but not all) presenters had advertently or inadvertently based their models of rice spread were misguided in not paying enough attention to the cultural mediation humans place on the world around us. Instead, I suggest we look at the salient feature of the white pericarp (in

Annie Sheng  
in front of  
her poster at  
the ISRFG in  
Taiwan

cont. on page 9

discursive space, limited neither by discipline nor field, and defined not by methodology but by the nature and dimensions of the issue under investigation. The origins and spread of rice domestication across Asia represent an inter-disciplinary mystery that requires the collaboration of multiple perspectives and expertise to unravel. The bridging of such vastly different

fields, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks is no small task. While a great deal about the history and spread of rice domestication remains unresolved, the enthusiastic partnership of such a broad array of experts remains one of the symposium's greatest achievements. The collaborative mindset, cross-disciplinary education, and mutual learning that

characterized last September's meeting have set the stage—not only for major advances in our understanding of Rice & Language across Asia—but for truly substantive and impactful work across the disciplines on any topic. ☺

Left: Toshiki Osada from the Research Institute for Humanities and Nature, Kyoto, Japan presenting  
 Middle: Pittayawat Pittayaporn (Cornell Ph.D. '09) from Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand discussing his poster presentation on Tai languages  
 Right: Touring the Cornell Plantations after the closing panel of the symposium: Dr. Charles Chen (RiceLab), Annie Sheng, Yuan-ching Tsai (Academia Sinica), Caroline Yue-le Hsing (Academia Sinica), Chih-Wei Tung (RiceLab), and Magnus Fiskesjö (Cornell Anthropology, organizer)



cont. from page 8

the widespread 14 base pair deletion in the Rc gene) in domesticated rice framed as a question. Why and how did white rice become the marker for domestication? How did humans, as agents that shape and are shaped by culture, participate and intervene in the process? Even at Beebe Lake, I was already formulating an inchoate version of my poster presentation and final paper topic.

Through the encouragement of the scientists both at Academia Sinica and the RiceLab, who were adamant about the value of interdisciplinary cooperation, I decided to apply for the USDA-NIFA grant to the ISRFG and was grateful and happy to hear of the positive results.

The ISRFG in Taiwan was a great experience. Perhaps this speaks on the limitations of my own imagination, but I was impressed by the amount and variety of participants present—it was invigorating to be in the midst of so many scientists committed to furthering rice genetics in Asia. Although some of the jargon went over my head, the class had prepared me well to understand the gist of the presentations. One of the most interesting points is how complicated functional genomics is and the contention in interpreting data. The field of functional genomics puts out an immense amount of data; yet, gene functions and interactions are not as straightforward and clear

as easy algebra problems. Some presentations asked more questions than answered, and pointed to more issues for consideration rather than offering solutions. Yet, I contend that the recognition of problems that have yet to be tackled has its value.

I believe I was the only anthropologist, and likely social scientist, in the hall; although the International Rice Research Institute employs anthropologists, none seemed to be present. In light of this, I found that participants received my poster in different ways: some showed mild interest at the anthropological lens in which I approached rice domestication, which included using color and value theory as approaches to understanding human interaction with rice. Others were quite interested, asked questions and wondered about the role of color in rice spread. I talked to a plant breeder from Korea who had come by my poster and circled around again to return and converse with me at length about red rice, the importance of color and anthropological aspects in plant breeding, and ritual use of rice in Korea and other parts of Asia. I found that these posters facilitated more intimate and in depth conversation about rice use in Asia and its relevance when considering rice functional genomics.

Perhaps the best times for learning more about rice functional genomics and the

International Rice Research Institute in an informal manner were the long conversations during lunch. People let loose and I found myself enjoying the tales of researchers planting each grain of rice by each grain of rice in the fields, or the descriptions of the hyperbolically technological new devices for crop fertilizing and chemical application, such as fertilizers equipped with Global Positioning Systems.

As a whole, the class and symposium at Cornell has been a very rewarding experience. Not only did I learn much on campus, it also paved the way for discussions off-campus. It set the stage for the singular trip to Academia Sinica to exchange ideas about rice and learn about the diversity of ideas and angles to approach rice functional genomics. ☺

**A selection of articles from the symposium**, edited by Caroline Yue-le Hsing and Magnus Fiskesjö, will soon be published in the journal *Rice* vol. 4 no. 4 (ISSN 1939-8425). Some articles are appearing online first: <http://www.springer.com/life+sciences/plant+sciences/journal/12284>

Symposium program and abstracts available at: <http://conf.ling.cornell.edu/riceandlanguage/>



Kaja McGowan shows students objects associated with the Balinese rice goddess Dewi Sri



# Rice Across the Disciplines: Perspectives on the new Rice and Language Class

**In the spring of 2010** fifteen faculty and graduate students participated in an interdisciplinary one-credit reading course focused on the origins and spread of rice cultivation and domestication. Participants from Linguistics, Anthropology, Archaeology, Plant Breeding and Genetics, International Agriculture and Rural Development (IARD), and Applied Economics and Management (AEM) followed up on this initiative with an International Symposium at Cornell in September 2011 on “Rice and Language Across Asia.” The conference spanned three days and was packed with participants eager to present their findings to fellow researchers. In between panels, participants clustered around the poster sessions and discussions continued over meals.

Faculty, graduate students and researchers were not the only people in attendance—one might have been surprised to find a number of Cornell undergraduates among the

attendees. These undergraduates were all students from the new multi-disciplinary course, Rice and Language: Geography, Movement, and Exchange (ANTHR/ARKEO/IARD/LING 4495 and 7495). As one student said, “The symposium was a really interesting experience for me, not only to hear scholars speak whose works we would be reading throughout the semester, but also to see how these individuals were actively ‘creating knowledge,’ as one classmate put it, by discussing the issues right there in front of us. It was also an interesting experiment in interdisciplinary research.” (Mallory Matsumoto)

Led by anthropology professor Magnus Fiskesjö, the class was designed to connect with the symposium and the students had the opportunity to have a number of the symposium presenters as visiting instructors in the class over the course of the semester. Graduate student Perri Gerard-Little commented, “The symposium was a good way to get

a wider sampling of issues, as well as understand how all of the issues we were covering separately actually interact with each other. If there was no symposium I think the class would need to be significantly reorganized in order to provide the same kind of synthetic understanding. Another student, linguistics major Annie Bass noted, “I enjoyed learning from the different lecturers each week in the class. Combined with the conference it felt like a special opportunity to be in the middle of a developing field of research, but I definitely think a similar curriculum would work without a conference.”

Professor Fiskesjö described his position as not only the instructor for the course, but also as a “coordinator” of sorts for his students. Like the symposium, the course was highly interdisciplinary. Guest lecturers included

symposium organizers such as linguist Laurent Sagart, senior scientist at the Centre de Recherches Linguistiques sur l’Asie Orientale (at CRNS), who came from Paris, as well as John Whitman (linguistics) and John Phan (a Ph.D. candidate in Asian Literature). Several students reported that linguistics was one of the eye-opening topics in the course for them. According to Shelina Gautama, a Biological and Plant Sciences major, “One of the things we learnt in class was historical linguistics, a discipline that I didn’t even know existed before. It’s really interesting to see how languages are related to each other and how they change through time.” Perri Gerard-Little had a similar experience, “It was a helpful exposure to linguistics, which was the aspect of the course that I was personally the least familiar with at the start. From an archaeological perspective it covered a lot of ground that I was already familiar with, at least theoretically.”

For other students, the lectures by Susan McCouch, Plant Breeding and Genetics and later Charles Aquadro, Molecular Biology and Genetics, were the highlights of the interdisciplinary experience. Martha Austen, a linguistics major, said, “I really enjoyed learning about human/plant genetics—I think the fact that we can uncover ancient human (and plant) migrations through modern DNA is incredibly fascinating, and it’s really interested to see how

different populations are related and how they diverged. It’s also interesting how many similarities phylogenetics and historical linguistics share—historical linguistics seems to do the same thing, but with sounds and sound changes instead of genes and genetic mutations.”

Other guest lecturers covered archaeology—both human origins and the beginning of agriculture (Eric Cheyfitz, American Studies; Tom Volman, Anthropology; and Nerissa Russell, Anthropology), agro-history and socio-economic change (Randy Barker), and rice in art and culture (Kaja McGowan). Throughout the course Magnus Fiskesjö drew on his expertise on the history and cultures of the region, especially the intersections between ethnicity and patterns of agriculture. However Fiskesjö’s role went much deeper as he helped introduce the widely varied fields to

his students (including the different jargon associated with each discipline) and help them synthesize and make sense of the connections between each week’s topic.

In a recent interview with Professor Fiskesjö, he mentioned that the course revolved around several main questions: Why is rice so important? When did people first begin to cultivate wild rice, and how did it change the people and cultures involved? Why

and how do people rely on rice? With so many different approaches to discovering the answers to these questions, collaboration and a willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries are essential and that is what he hopes to convey to his students. Fiskesjö himself has experience crossing disciplinary boundaries. Originally from Sweden, he worked for many years as a translator and cultural attaché for the Swedish Foreign Service in Asia before he obtained his PhD in Anthropology and Asian studies at the University of Chicago. He then moved on to become the director the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm. Years later, he shifted back to academia and took a position in the anthropology department at Cornell. His research focuses on ethnic minorities in China, Burma, and Thailand, as well as tracing how spoken stories tell a deep history about a culture’s people. As he put it “narrating the past is one way of building an identity in the present. The stories of the



Randy Barker showing a rice sample to students

past are an important building block of [not only a] present identity, but into the future as well." In a sense, telling stories is a collaborative act of culture creation.

At the symposium students witnessed scholars actively creating knowledge and as they progressed through the course, they each found ways to participate in the process of knowledge creation. The final papers that the students wrote were as varied as the guest lecturers; each student had the chance to articulate his or her own synthesis and perspective on the emerging interdisciplinary conversations. Here is a sampling of student paper topics:

**Shelina Gautama:** *For my final paper I'm trying to piece together the origin of sticky rice from research in genetics and anthropology. Research on the gene responsible for the sticky characteristic suggests that sticky rice varieties arose in japonica in mainland Southeast Asia and were introgressed into other varieties. Anthropological research helps to answer the question why sticky rice varieties were selected for. They were probably initially selected for by the Tai people who migrated from China and were settling in the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia because sticky rice varieties are well suited to the local environment. Cultivation of sticky rice then spreads as cultural preference for sticky rice developed and the Tai people become politically dominant.*

**Annie Bass:** *My final paper explores possible explanations for the overlap in terminology for rice agriculture and human sexuality in Balinese. Though the topic/exposition is linguistically based, the possible explanations and evidences are more anthropological, art-history oriented, and religious-studies-ish in nature.*

**Martha Austen:** *I actually ended up writing about early alcoholic beverages in East Asia -- one of our guest speakers mentioned something about the world's first alcoholic beverage, which was found in China, and I was captivated. This early beverage was roughly contemporaneous with the domestication of rice, so I explored how the cultivation and domestication of rice might have been related to a desire to make fermented beverages for feasting and/or religious purposes. (The answer, for now, is inconclusive.)*

**Mallory Matsumoto:** *Largely inspired by a photograph of a pot sherd embedded with an ancient rice grain that was presented at the symposium, I chose to write my final paper about ancient ceramics containing rice husk temper. (Temper is usually incorporated into the clay by the potter to give the finished product*

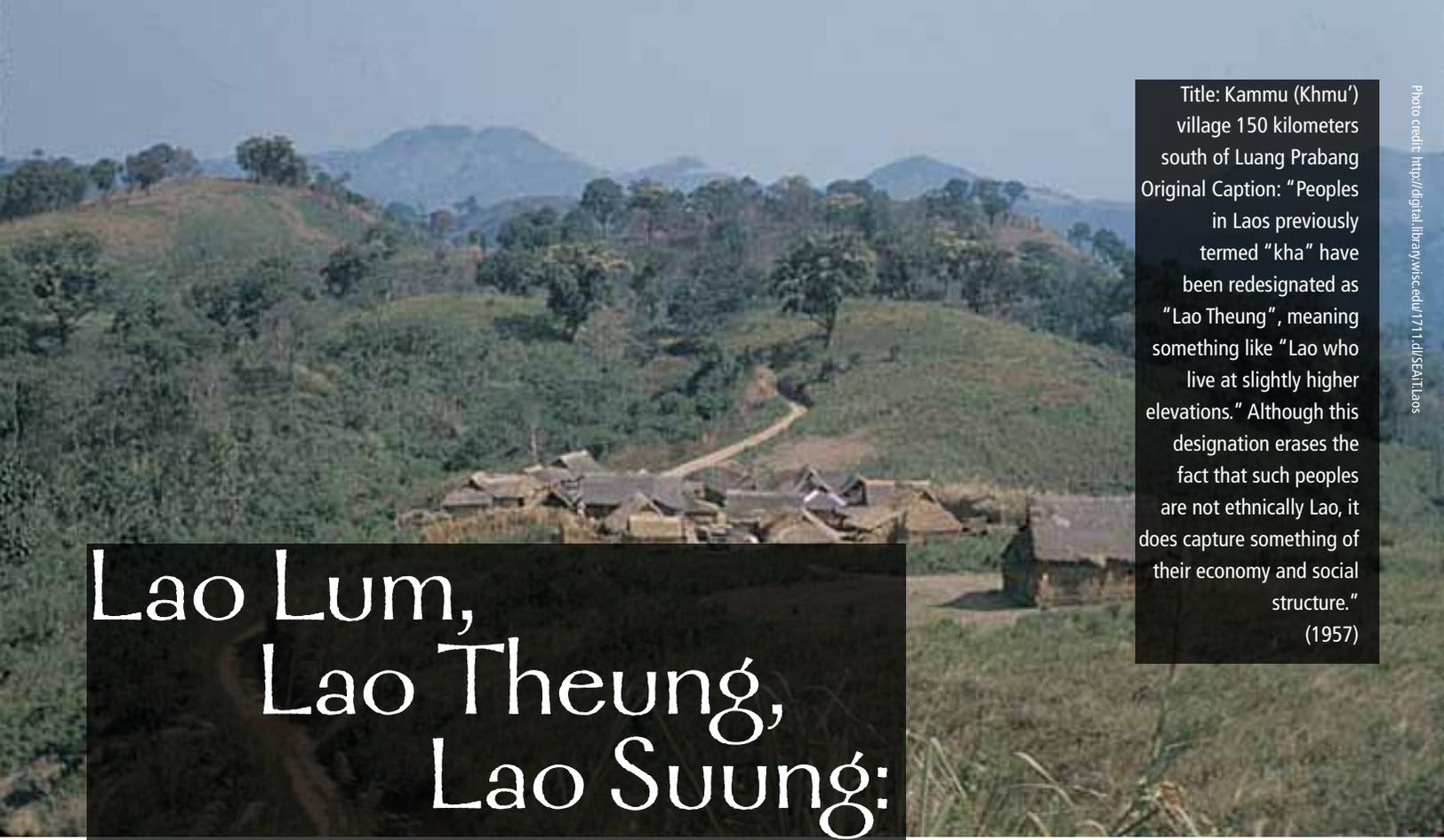
*certain qualities--in the case of organic materials like rice husk, for example, the temper makes the finished product more porous and thus better able to resist thermal shock, which would be an especially helpful characteristic for cooking pots.)*

**Perri Gerard-Little:** *My paper was about the way the spread of maize agriculture to the Northeastern United States has been researched and how it diverges significantly from research on the diffusion/spread of rice agriculture. I wrote the paper because it relates to my own dissertation research in the Northeast.*

When asked about his own opinion of the Rice and Language symposium, and by extension the new course, Fiskesjö said that he "felt that there was a new level in this whole big picture. We were able to stand back and look at the whole picture." Fiskesjö emphasized how seeing this "big picture" really showed him personally that this is a worthwhile project, and that it is worth continuing to pursue answers to these questions even though "there's a lot of grey areas that we may never know." He indicated that collaborative symposiums such as these "help us [as researchers] to put things together to reach a new level of understanding [...] it's quite exhilarating. All of [us] have pieces of a puzzle that all fit together, and the challenge now is how to put these different pieces together."

His thoughts were echoed by students. Mallory Matsumoto put it most succinctly, "I ... gained from the course insight into both the value and difficulty of reaching across disciplines in one's own research, as well as the infrequency with which this is done." But her classmate Martha Austen had a different and refreshing perspective, "I think people make a really big deal out of interdisciplinary classes/programs and seem to assume that most people are stuck firmly in their majors and uninterested in anything else (and that there is some huge cultural divide between the humanities and the sciences), but I don't think that's actually true. Most people, especially at a place like Cornell, have a variety of interests and enjoy learning about all sorts of different things. I don't think that interdisciplinary classes are particularly groundbreaking or are a way to bridge the (in my view) non-existent gap between different disciplines. They are, however, a lot of fun, and there should be more of them! Hopefully the Southeast Asia Program can continue to foster and support such fun and intellectually stimulating interdisciplinary courses. ♪

Special thanks to Magnus Fiskesjö, the students of "Rice and Language: Geography, Movement, and Exchange" and to SEAP Visibility Project Assistant David Afable for conducting and writing up the interview with Magnus Fiskesjö.



Title: Kammu (Khmu') village 150 kilometers south of Luang Prabang  
Original Caption: "Peoples in Laos previously termed "kha" have been redesignated as "Lao Theung", meaning something like "Lao who live at slightly higher elevations." Although this designation erases the fact that such peoples are not ethnically Lao, it does capture something of their economy and social structure."  
(1957)

# Lao Lum, Lao Theung, Lao Suung:

## A Few Reflections on Some Common Lao Ethnonyms

In Laos, there is a popular tripartite system of classifying ethnic groups. The system categorizes people by the altitude at which they live. There are three categories: "Lao Lum" (lowlanders), "Lao Theung" (mid-landers), and "Lao Suung" (highlanders).<sup>1</sup>



Charles Zuckerman, Ph.D.  
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Anthropology at the  
University of Michigan

Although once propagated by the revolutionary government, during the last three decades the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system has been formally replaced and critiqued by Lao political leaders. Instead of using it, they advise organizing and referring to the groups of Laos with ethnolinguistic categories. Academics also normally prefer these ethnolinguistic categories, regarding them as more exact and scientific (See Grant Evans's discussion of this: Evans 1999a; Evans 1999b). And yet, many academics and government workers still use the tripartite Lao-Lum-Theung-Suung system in writing and in speech. I have found that when I have asked some of these academics and government workers

about the system, they typically respond by perfunctorily dismissing it as oversimplifying, generalizing, and negligent of modern movements of people. And yet, they still use it. In fact, most people in Laos still use it and some insist on doing so. What is it about this system that makes it so lasting, not only among the Lao populace, but among academics? Is it compelling? Is it ingrained?

Although I am not going to answer these questions matter-of-factly here, the answers are surely related to the fact that those researching mainland Southeast Asia have long been intrigued by the patterning of altitude and ethnicity throughout the region (Moerman 1967; e.g., Leach 1954

and Scott 2009). Both in the cultures of these places themselves and in academic writing about them, divisions between lowland peoples and hill peoples are ubiquitous. As this tripartite system evinces, Laos is no exception. There is something about the affinity between kinds of space and kinds of people that makes intuitive sense (much like, for many people, there is something about the affinity between kinds of language and kinds of people that makes sense (Hymes 1967)). As Vatthana Pholsena writes, “Indeed, those who criticized the Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Sung stratification also recognized the logic of it” (Vatthana 2006: 155).

In other words, part of the “logic” of this system is that it charts a compelling and intelligible image of Laos. In his 1964 book, *Economy and Society of Laos*, Joel Halpern describes flying from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and looking down at the “sparse, scattered population and the mountainous terrain” from the plane window (Halpern 1964: 4). “Circling over Vientiane one sees the town stretched out along the Mekong, surrounded by rice fields with occasional small patches of forest. Leaving the Mekong plain the land abruptly changes to rugged mountains cut by narrow valleys. The observer looking closely at the settlement pattern below can discern almost a textbook illustration of ethnic stratification and economic-geographic adaptation to the land based on varying degrees of altitude” (Halpern 1964: 4-5). Halpern continues to explain that the people living at each of these geographic levels have official names. “The terms, however,” he writes, “are largely political and cannot erase the important cultural differences” (Halpern 1964: 5).

When I first read this passage, I found it compelling—even more so when I discovered a trove of Joel Halpern’s photographs.<sup>2</sup> After reading more about the history of the tripartite system, I now believe that its ubiquity



Title: “Air views of village and surrounding area”  
Original caption: “This is another village visited by Halpern and his traveling companions when they went to the Vang Vieng area. It is called Ban Done, meaning “Island Village.”” (1969)

and its appeal for academics and for me is partly a result of the conceptual power of its central metaphor of space (c.f., Jonsson 2010). I also argue that, beyond this metaphor, the system is powerful and productive because of its fuzzy logic. That is, it invites speakers to generalize. It is a good tool for speaking broadly and simply about a complex nation and complex people.

Below, I will briefly sketch the history of the system, with regard to its governmental implementation and its scholarly reception. I explore how it differed from preceding ways of classifying ethnic groups in Laos in three important respects, which made it an appealing system for the revolutionary government, the Pathet Lao: it foregrounded geography, euphemized ethnic slurs, and labeled all groups as “Lao.” What the system shared with earlier colonial systems of classifying ethnicity, and many ethnic classifications based on space or language, was a stark simplicity that allows for still starker generalizations about Laos. Because of this simplicity, the terms of the tripartite system are inexact. They do not refer to people with necessary

and sufficient characteristics, but generalized tendencies, united by “family resemblance.” I argue that the semantic blurriness, but not quite hollowness, of national ethnonyms, like the terms Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Suung, is, in part, responsible for their usefulness and, despite governmental and scholarly attempts, their continued presence in discussions about Laos.

## HISTORY OF THE LAO LUM, LAO THEUNG, LAO SUUNG SYSTEM

The tripartite system was vigorously promoted by the Lao revolutionary government as it came to power. As a result, many academics assume that the Pathet Lao created the system. But, the system’s roots are deeper insofar as it resembles earlier French colonial classifications of ethnic groups (Evans 1999b: 24) and insofar as its terms were in circulation before the Pathet Lao rose to power.<sup>3</sup>

The history of these terms comprising the system is murky. They emerged at different times from one another and were probably combined

in the mid-1940s by Toulia Lyfoung, brother of Touby Lyfoung (Proschan: Personal Communication; Batson 1991; Schneider 2000: 162). As the linguist William Smalley reported, “in Laos in 1952 and 1953, the terms were commonly used by expatriates and Lao government officials” (Proschan 404), nearly twenty-five years before the Pathet Lao officially gained power. The use of the word *theung*, in the specific sense of “people in the mountains” seems to have preceded its counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Frank Proschan provides a list of instances of it in European sources dating as far back as 1884 (Proschan 405-406).

While the modern tripartite system is in some ways quite similar to French colonial systems of classifying ethnic groups (Evans 1999b), it is distinct from them in three main respects, each of which appealed to the Pathet Lao: first, the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system foregrounds geographical criteria; second, it functions as a series of euphemisms for previous terms perceived as offensive; and third, it pointedly accompanies each ethnonym with the term “Lao.”

Taking these points one by one, first, the terms that comprise the modern tripartite system—i.e., Lum, Theung, and Suung—are adjectives describing vertical relationships.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although, geography is not the only organizing principle, it is the most prominent principle. For instance, Laurent Chazée, in *The Peoples of Laos: Rural and Ethnic Diversities*, describes the three ethnic groups by giving us the measurements of the altitudes at which they live: the “Lao Loum” are “generally situated at 200-400 meters altitude,” the “Lao Theung” at “between 300 and 900 meters altitude,” and the “Lao Soung” between 800 and 1,600 meters altitude” (Chazée 2002). The figures in these measurements vary among the scholars that cite them; in the Lao government’s own 2008 publication, they write that the Lao Theung live higher than 700 meters and the Lao Suung

live higher than 1,000 meters (LFNC (Lao Front for National Construction) ສູນກາງແນວລາວສ້າງຊາດ 2008: ຊ-ຢ, c-d).

Second, the geographic terms of the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system replaced ethnonyms considered derogatory by many. The system was an appealing euphemism for two terms particularly, Khaa and Meo. These terms were common in Laos when this system emerged (Stuart-Fox 1986: 135). As Proschan tells us in his paper “Who are the ‘Khaa?’”—Khaa is a term “usually employed to refer

That is, it pointedly included the word “Lao” in each term. Ing-Britt Trankell writes that the system was attractive for the Pathet Lao because “it implied a certain national unity—the inhabitants of Laos were all in some sense ‘Lao’—and that it thereby entailed a recognition of the efforts that all the different ethnic groups of the country had made in the common struggle for national liberation” (Trankell 1998: 47).<sup>8</sup>

In sum, the system was well suited for the Pathet Lao’s goals and it spread



Title: “Air view: Hmong (Meo) settlement”  
Original Caption: “A Hmong village nestled in the mountain tops of Luang Prabang district.” (1957)

to groups of people speaking Mon-Khmer languages...but in certain areas...[the term] may also encompass peoples speaking Tibeto Burman or Kadai languages (Proschan 1). Presently, the term also means slave ( ຊາ ) and is derogatory in most situations.<sup>6</sup> In Laos, “Meo” likewise is considered a derogatory term for Hmong people.<sup>7</sup> As the Hmong were perhaps the most salient Lao Suung group, the new system brought with it two forms of euphemism—Khaa was euphemized as Lao Theung and Meo as Lao Suung.

Third, the new classificatory system emphasized the unity of its three ethnic groups through a lexical parallelism.

widely during and after the government’s 1975 rise to power. Grant Evans, in discussing the system’s persistence, writes that “followers of the communists for many years had this essentially politically inspired schema drummed into them, and then it was drummed into the whole population for many years after 1975” (Evans 1999a: 190). Likewise, and shockingly, one Hmong refugee whom I interviewed in the United States told me that if someone used derogatory names for ethnic groups after the revolution, the government would make him or her go to “a seminar,” i.e., the infamous “re-education camps.” This story, whether true or exaggerated,

Photo credit: <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/SEAITLaos>

points to the fact that names were serious business for the Lao revolutionary government. This has had lasting effects.

In modern Laos, some people self-identify with these names casually to outsiders. Others insist on using them. For example, in 2009, I spoke with a “Lao Theung” man from Bokeo who when I asked if he was Kmhmu said he did not like that name, rather, he preferred Lao Theung or Lao Kmhmu. As a veteran of the revolution, he explained, he wanted to ensure that his Lao-ness was not forgotten.

Although the question as to why people identify in the way that they do when they do is fascinating—and a necessary one to ask so as to avoid reifying systems—unfortunately, I cannot deal with it here because I have not yet conducted sufficient ethnographic research and I do not have the proper space this topic deserves. It suffices to say that the situation is complicated, but when people refer to themselves, the tripartite ethnonyms are a popular means for doing so; that is, many Lao people still have these ethnonyms in their terminological tool-boxes, so to speak.

Although the system was once promoted heavily, by the early 1980s, the Lao government was less enthusiastic about it. This shift was partly a result of the presence of Vietnamese ethnographers in Laos (Evans 1999a), and according to Vatthana Pholsena, the Pathet Lao’s negative reaction to the system was severe. She writes, “The threefold categorization with the ‘Lao’ prefix was deemed to be anti-revolutionary and its use was abandoned in official documents, although this terminology is still widely used in Laos”<sup>9</sup> (Vatthana 2006: 159). However, I have found that the tripartite system still lingers within some official Lao documents and, in my experience, the system is not so much characterized as anti-revolutionary but rather inadequate to the present needs of the Lao nation.

Both Vatthana Pholsena and Grant Evans highlight Kaysone Phomvihane’s 1981 speech as the pivotal moment in the government’s ideological shift away from the tripartite ethnogeographic classificatory system and towards an ethnolinguistic one (Evans 1999a; Vatthana 2002; Vatthana 2006). In this speech, lengthily entitled “Reinforce and Expand the Basic Trust and Solidarity Between Various Ethnic Groups in the Lao National Family, and Strengthen Unity. Resolutely Uphold and Strengthen the Country and Build Socialism to its Completion” (ເຊີມຂະຫຍາຍມູນເຊື້ອແຫ່ງຄວາມສັມຄົງລະຫວ່າງຜູ້ຕ່າງໆ ໃນວົງຄະນາຍາດແຫ່ງຊາດລາວ ທີ່ເປັນເອກະພາບ, ເດັດດູ່ງວປົກປັກຮັກສາປະເທດຊາດໄວ້ໃຫຫມັ້ນຄົງແລະກໍ່ສ້າງສັງຄົມນິຍົມສຳເລັດຜົນ),<sup>10</sup> Kaysone, then Prime Minister of Laos, advised his countrymen and women to set aside these older political terms for more scientific ones.

In a 2008 government-produced volume, we can see that the terminological shift that Kaysone advocated has largely taken place—however, the tripartite system remains for the authors as a common sense touchstone. In the book, the Lao Front for National Construction, the authors list and discuss the forty-nine ethnic groups of Laos, categorized into four “Language Families:” The “Lao-Tai” (which has 8 ethnic groups), the “Mon-Khmer” (32 ethnic groups), The “Chine-Tibet” (7 ethnic groups), and the “Hmong-Iu Mien” (2 ethnic groups) (LFNC (Lao Front for National Construction) ສູນກາງແນວລາວສ້າງຊາດ 2008). These terms are introduced after a discussion of the “three main groups” of the past, the Lao Lum, Lao Theung and Lao Suung. Thus, in modern-day Laos, the government has officially adopted a classificatory system that prioritizes ethnolinguistic criteria. Still, however, the tripartite system remains present in government documents and profuse in many other contexts.

## THE LOGIC OF THE LAO LUM, LAO THEUNG, LAO SUUNG SYSTEM

While the tripartite system foregrounds geography, the geographic is not its only organizing principle. At times, linguistic features trump geographic ones (Chazée 2002; Trankell 1998: 46-47). According to Laurent Chazée, “In 1994, it was estimated that more than 80% of the Tai linguistic family’s populations had been grouped in the category of Lao Loum, more than 85% of the Austroasiatic populations in the Lao Theung group and at least 90% of the Miao-Yao and Tibeto-Burman populations in the Lao Soung” (Chazée 2002: 6). Therefore, while the government has been transitioning from an ostensibly ethnogeographic classificatory system to an ethnolinguistic one, this transition is made less drastic because language is already an implicit but important criterion within the tripartite system.

Beyond these geographic and linguistic criteria, academics and lay people commonly associate agricultural, religious and behavioral practices with the different terms of the tripartite system. The Lao Lum are assumed to be Buddhists and wet-rice cultivators who speak a Tai language. The Lao Theung and the Lao Suung are assumed to be animist swidden farmers. Each of these groups has a number of other features and stereotypes that cluster with it (e.g., Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Earth 2001).

Beyond the fact that there are individual people who have characteristics that violate each of these stereotypes—who, for example, might identify as Lao Theung, live in the lowlands, practice Buddhism, and speak Lao—there are also groups within each of these categories that violate each of these stereotypes: Buddhists in the highlands, swidden farmers in the lowlands.

In short, the system is riddled with internal inconsistency. Even in regards to geography, its most foregrounded aspect, it does not work in

any straightforward sense. Many of the so-called “tribal Tai” groups, for example, are classified as Lao Lum, while they live in the hills and do not practice Buddhism. Chazée provides a series of similar examples of groups that live in altitudes different than the system predicts (Chazée 2002). The three elements of the system are not clusters of necessary and sufficient features. Rather, they are clusters of common features, the “family resemblances” of the terms.

“Family resemblance” is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s term. It characterizes the logic of the tripartite system well. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces it through a discussion of the concept of “language”:

*Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I’m saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all—but there are many different kinds of affinity between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all ‘languages’ (Wittgenstein 2009: 35).<sup>11</sup>*

The affinities that unite these particular languages are “family resemblances.” Wittgenstein writes that he “can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and criss-cross in the same way” (Wittgenstein 2009: 36).

Likewise, there is no one feature that is necessary or sufficient to pick out all Lao Lum people, or all Lao Theung people, or all Lao Suung people: not geography, language, religion, or agricultural practice. Rather the logic of the system is that these groups *tend* to have these features (and certainly not physical features like those that unite Wittgenstein’s family). This tending, but not entailment, this blurriness of the categories, provides a space for play. It allows people to



Lao 1,000 Kip banknote featuring the tripartite. From left to right: a Lao Suung woman, a Lao Lum woman, and a Lao Theung woman. (Photo Retrieved from [http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/laos/LaosP35a-1000Kip-1998\\_f-550.jpg](http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/laos/LaosP35a-1000Kip-1998_f-550.jpg) on December 29th, 2011.)

generalize more than they would otherwise and digest contradictions with less consternation.<sup>12</sup>

In my future research, I hope to further investigate the way Lao men and women negotiate these contradictions. This paper is preliminary and primarily historical. It is the product of my reading and my brief experiences in Laos. To understand the Lao Lum, Lao Theung, Lao Suung system of ethnonyms fully, much more ethnography needs to be done. One would need to study how the system has been and is being used in a variety of situations, by a variety of different people. Here, however, I merely hope to have sketched aspects of this compelling system’s history and internal logic.

The system is simple, with only three terms. It is also oversimplifying. It purports to be describing where people live, but is really about so much more: language, religion, behavior, a way of life. In a similar way, ethnolinguistic groups are likewise never just about languages, but they make predictions about concomitant and emblematic cultural forms. That is, ethnolinguistic categorizations are only interesting for most of us insofar as a shared history of language seems to anticipate and capture other affinities. Perhaps, since the theories of Johann Herder took root in the ‘Western’ imagination, academics are prone

to see language as a natural basis of community (c.f., Evans 1999a; Evans 1999b).<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, in the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system, space, not language, is the centerpiece. Space ostensibly divides the nation into subgroups and unites the nation into a whole. But while geography and ecology are foregrounded in this tripartite system, and in part responsible for its conceptual power, the ethno-geographic system is in some ways quite similar to classifications based on language—they both erase differences and invite comparisons among groups that may otherwise seem far-fetched.

This older tripartite system is, in some ways, on its way out; as we speak, it is being replaced by more ostensibly “scientific” classifications based upon “ethno-linguistic” categorizations. Yet, by exploring it, I think that I have in part explored something about classificatory systems in general. The ones we use, returning here to Wittgenstein’s term, are often more familial than they seem. It is this blurriness that allows intellectual blunders, objectifications that erase difference, and the slipperiness and slippage of ethnonymic systems. But this blurriness, albeit dangerous, is not entirely bad or ‘unscientific.’ It allows us to talk about ourselves and the world: about language, space, and people. ♪

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> There are many variations in the transliterations of these terms. For this paper, I will be using the following forms: "Lao Lum" (laaw2 lum1; ລາວລຸມ), "Lao Theung" (Laaw2 Thuŋ1; ລາວເທິງ) and "Lao Suung" (laaw2 suuŋ3 ລາວສູງ). I have also represented them in parenthesis, using the International Phonetic Alphabet and Lao orthography. The numbers represent the lexical tone of the words, see Nick Enfield's *Grammar of Lao* (Enfield 2007) for further information.

<sup>2</sup> Paralleling Halpern's passage are his photographs of Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Suung villages. He has graciously donated his photographs from his time in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They are accessible online through the University of Wisconsin, Madison, website: <http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/SEAIT/Laos>. Halpern took two of these three photographs from an airplane, just the viewpoint he had described in the above quote.

<sup>3</sup> Vatthana Pholsena writes, "The 'Lao Lum', 'Lao Theung', and 'Lao Sung' categories referred exactly to the same major ethnic groups ('Lao and Tai', 'Kha' and Meo-Yao', respectively) defined by the colonial administrators" (Vatthana 2002: 180). C.f., Vatthana 2006: 153-154.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Grant Evans points to a passage in the 1953 writings of Katay Don Sasorith in which Katay refers to some minorities that have "shown their 'patriotism' by wishing to be called 'Lao Theung'", i.e., the "Bolovens" and the "Mèos" (Evans 1999b: 20).

<sup>5</sup> Although academics often translate the three terms that constitute the classificatory system—"Lao Lum,"

"Lao Theung," and "Lao Suung"—as "lowland Lao," "midland Lao," and "upland Lao," respectively, these translations hide a more complicated etymology. Once, during an interview with a Hmong man in the United States, the man and I both became confused as we tried to parse out if and why *suung* was higher than *theung*. In Lao, the words *lum* and *theung* are generally antonyms and are used for terms such as lower and upper lip (ສົບລຸມ: ສົບເທິງ). *Suung* (ສູງ; tall), on the other hand, is often thought of as the antonym of the word *tam* (ຕ້າ; short) and thus forms a strange third to the system (Trankell 1998: 48-49). Ing-Britt Trankell conjectures that the somewhat illogical nature of the three terms has encouraged Lao speakers to refer to Lao Theung as Lao "K'ang" (ກ້າງ), which means, "middle Lao." However, Frank Proschan points to some potentially more complicated reasons for why Lao K'ang may have become used as an ethnonym. K'ang, Proschan tells us, may here be a term meaning politically mediate, i.e., those supporting Kong Le who were between both the NLHX and the RLG (Proschan 406).

<sup>6</sup> These two meanings are probably etymologically related (Izikowitz 2001 [1951]: 28; Proschan 394).

<sup>7</sup> While conducting an interview with an ethnic Lao person in the United States, I was told that in the mid-1950's the Lao children in Vientiane would hiss "Meo, Meo,"—like a cat's meow and like the Lao word for cat—to the Hmong people that came to sell brooms in town.

<sup>8</sup> Many others have made similar observations. For example, Jan Ovesen writes that "The great attraction

of this scheme, apart from its simplicity, was for the non-Lao groups that, at least rhetorically, they could be recognized as equals of the Lao" (Ovesen 2002: 76). See also, (Postert 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Translation is Grant Evans's (Evans 1999a). Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain the original document.

<sup>11</sup> Some emphasis added, some original.

<sup>12</sup> A great example of this over-generalization, which was central to my presentation of this paper at the Cornell conference, is Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Barbara Earth's paper, "From the Forest to the Clinic: Changing Birth Practice among the Katang, Lao." The article, written in 2001, uses a combination of the tripartite system and other ethnonyms for individual Lao Theung "tribes" to argue that the majority of "Lao Theung births continue to take place in the forest, with a corresponding absence of any record of maternal deaths or other outcomes" (Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Earth 2001: 101).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Judith Irvine writes that, "To [Johann] Herder's heirs, scholarly and lay, it has seemed natural to suppose that language itself creates—or automatically reflects—community: that there is always some aggregate of people who could be said to 'share' a language and who must, by virtue of that fact alone, share a cultural tradition, feel that they 'belong' together, and participate jointly in a social formation of specifiable type—a people (or ethnic group, or nationality)" (Irvine 2006: 689).

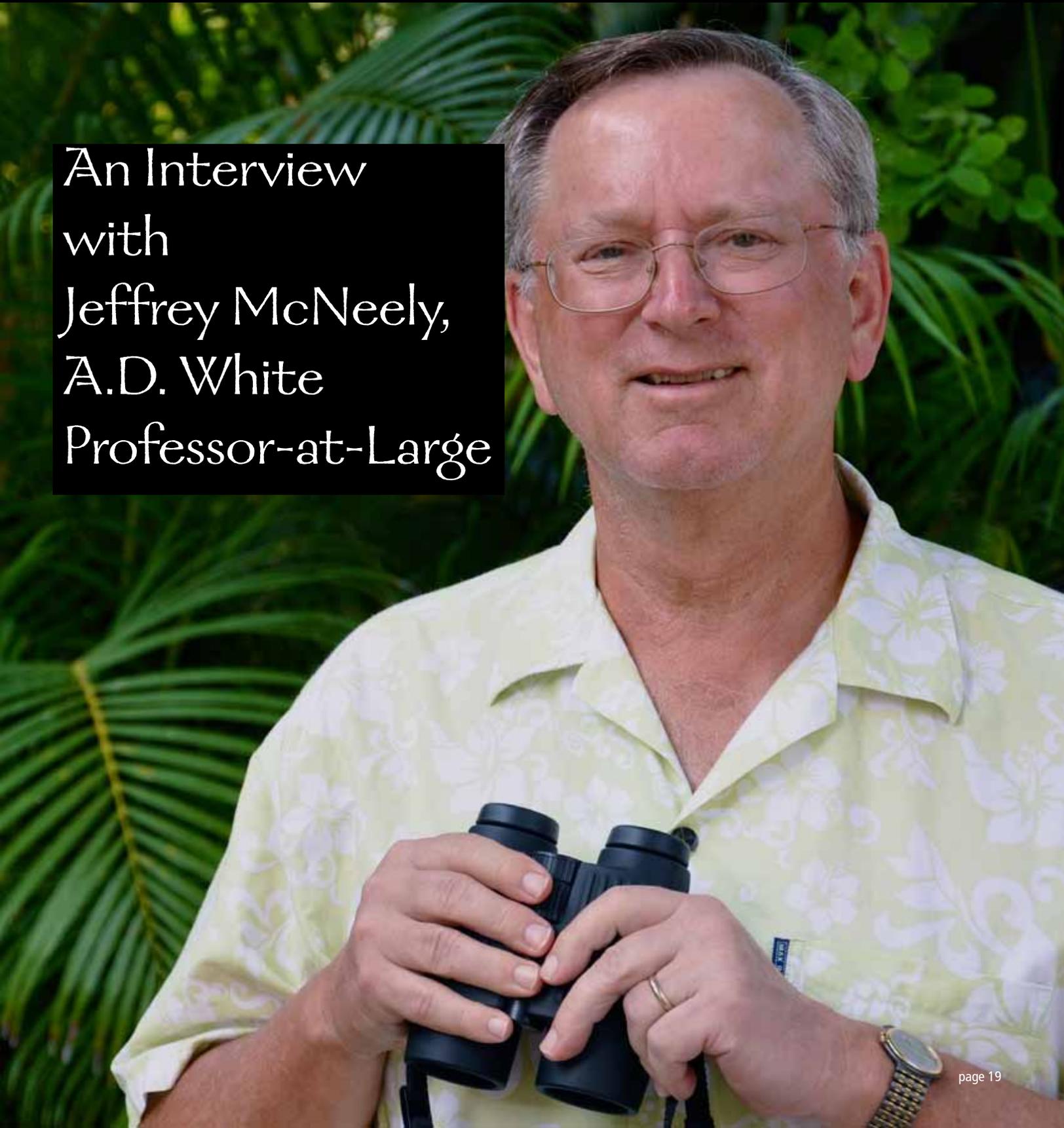
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Acknowledgements: An alternate version of this paper was presented at the SEASSI 2010 Graduate Student Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and to the Southeast Asian Research Group at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. In both of these forums, I received many helpful suggestions. While first struggling with this topic, Grant Evans, Judith Irvine, Frank Proschan, Guido Sprenger, Ajaan Jan and Ajaan Kit were all helpful in different ways. As the paper has begun to take shape, it has benefitted from the editorial assistance of Kimberly Ang, Phil Zuckerman and Ian Baird. Many thanks to Joel Halpern who has graciously let me reproduce his striking photographs and to the participants of the 13th Annual SEAP Graduate Student Conference, where I received a healthy dose of both critical feedback and encouragement. All mistakes are my own.

The *SEAP Bulletin* was recently in contact with Jeffrey McNeely, Cornell A.D. White Professor-at-Large and recently retired Senior Science Advisor for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Switzerland. Much of his early career was spent in Southeast Asia, in Thailand and Indonesia in particular.

An Interview  
with  
Jeffrey McNeely,  
A.D. White  
Professor-at-Large



**SEAP: How did you come to be an A.D. White Professor at Large? What was the draw for you and what do you hope to achieve by visiting Cornell intermittently through this program?**

**JM:** Jim Lassoie (Professor in Natural Resources), with whom I have shared a long-term interest in international conservation, and specifically conservation in Asia, nominated me for a six-year A.D. White Professor-at-Large professorship. I was delighted to accept, for several reasons. First, when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand in 1968-70, I was struck by the outstanding work being done by Cornell researchers in Southeast Asia, and was exploring the possibility of returning to graduate school to continue my studies there (I left UCLA after my first year in graduate school because I was drafted and it was carry an M-16 in the jungle, or find an alternative— which was much more peaceful even though I ended up working throughout Indochina during the war). Second, Cornell's work in agriculture, natural resource management, and anthropology appealed greatly to my own interests, and I knew several of the professors and graduate students. And third, I find interacting with a diverse group of intellectually curious people to be a tremendous stimulus for new ways of thinking about the relationship between people and the rest of nature, and Cornell has fit this bill extremely well.

**SEAP: Can you say a bit more about your interest in Southeast Asia and your connections to SEAP?**

**JM:** As I mentioned, I was very familiar with the Cornell Southeast Asia Program way back in the 1960s and 1970s; I lived in Asia for twelve years, and gained tremendous insight into the cultures of the region from various Cornell publications (both books and journal articles). I now live in Thailand for at least four months of the year, and would very much welcome the opportunity to relate more closely to SEAP. My visits to Cornell have given me an opportunity to meet with many of the faculty and alumni such as Kamala Tiyavanich (whose work on forest monks in Thailand I have long admired). But I have not had the opportunity to interact as much as I would have liked. I only wish I could come to Cornell every year...

**SEAP: Please describe how your career evolved and talk about the turning points that have led you towards or away from academia.**

**JM:** I was considering a return to academia back in the early 1970s, but then I started working with Dr. Boonsong Lekagul to write a book on *Mammals of Thailand*; that took about five years, during which time I also worked with

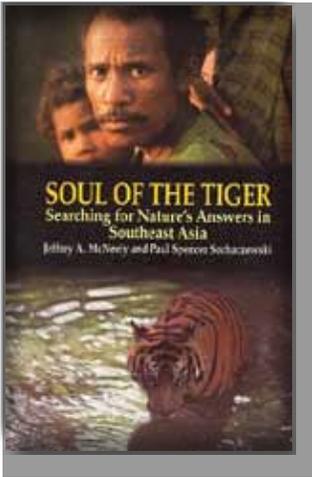


An orangutan in Tanjung Puting Nature Reserve in Indonesia

FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) to design a system of protected areas for the Lower Mekong Basin (during the latter years of the Indochina wars). I also took two years off to spend some time in the most remote part of Asia I could find (with a few of my colleagues), the Himalayas of eastern Nepal, with our base camp two weeks walk from the nearest road. Working, or perhaps enjoying the experience, in Nepal also put me in touch with other researchers on rhinos, tigers, and so forth, and others who were helping Nepal establish a national system of protected areas with support from FAO. These contacts led to my being offered a position to head a substantial program in Indonesia, funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (1977-1980). Then IUCN offered me a position as Executive Officer of its Commission on Protected Areas, based in Switzerland. Returning to academia simply did not seem as interesting as what I was doing, though I certainly have missed not having my union card, a Ph.D. But I have nonetheless been able to write many books and papers, almost as if I had studied, rather than lived, all of the stuff about which I have written.

**SEAP: Which publication of yours seems to be used most frequently in undergraduate or graduate courses? Are there any publications that you wish were being used but seem to be overlooked?**

**JM:** I am constantly surprised at which of my publications are used in academic courses, mostly because I do not promote them very much and just let nature take her course. Because I write about a wide range of topics, from agriculture to zoology, and serve on the editorial board of ten or so journals, I am always hopeful that my books and papers are being used and cited. *Soul of the Tiger* remains my favorite book, and one that remains in print 25 or so years after it was first written. I would be gratified if it



were used even more. These days, my two books with Sara Scherr on eco-agriculture seem to be getting the most attention. I have also done many books with IUCN, but its distribution system is fairly weak (though all of its publications are open access). *Conservation and the Future: Trends and Options Toward the Year 2025* is still interesting and my 2009 book with Sue Mainka, *Conservation*

*for a New Era* would be useful for undergraduates interested in global conservation. *Mammals of Thailand* remains a standard reference, though it seems like half the binomials have changed as taxonomists have had a field day in the museum at the genus level. Quite a few of my books about biodiversity remain timely, as do the ones on protected areas; at least they offer historical perspectives on the development of concepts about the relationship between people and the rest of nature.

**SEAP:** In your early work you emphasized the relationship between humans and nature and argued that local inhabitants and their culture had to be part of conservation efforts. Is this still what you believe? Has your focus shifted—and if so how and why?

**JM:** I have always been interested in the historical perspective about this relationship. The quadrupling of the human population in the 20th century, driven especially by the use of fossil fuels and associated industrialization/globalization, poses interesting new challenges. Environmental history has led me to look more carefully at the relationship between conflict, even war, and natural resources; climate change, for example, will change the distribution of rainfall and the human ecosystems that have become adapted to historical patterns, posing the threat of ethnic conflict between farmers and pastoralists (see, for example, Sudan and the Sahel). Oil is a significant lubricant of violent conflict, including World War II, Iraq, and many others, and perhaps others yet to come. Impacts on nature, ecosystem services, and so forth will be profound, but not easy to predict; this could be an area where conservation biologists could make a useful contribution, in collaboration with those working on security issues.

I have also been working more closely with the private sector, including on agriculture, energy, and water. Corporate interests are often well served by conservation, and seeking opportunities for a convergence of business and biodiversity can offer productive ways to move ahead

as human societies go through a period of very rapid change.

**SEAP:** SEAP is currently making an effort to build bridges with the sciences and the professional schools. Do you have any suggestions for how to pursue greater interdisciplinarity?

**JM:** I strongly support interdisciplinary work (what biologists might call “hybrid vigor”), and the most interesting meetings I attend are those where most of the participants are from fields other than conservation biology. I enjoy speaking to business people, government officials concerned about extreme natural events, the military, and others who bring new perspectives to old problems. While I remain the Chair of IUCN’s Red List Committee and the Global Policy Committee of the Society for Conservation Biology, I also serve on UNEP’s International Resource Panel (mostly economists and engineers) and the International Risk Governance Council (funded by governments and the insurance industry, with mostly engineers and business people on its Scientific and Technical Panel).

**SEAP:** Any final thoughts?

**JM:** Having returned to live in Thailand for at least part of the year, my fondness for this region has been renewed. I am doing some work for the Mekong Commission, travelling frequently to China, India, Korea, and Japan, revisiting Cambodia and Indonesia to see how things have changed, and seeking ways to contribute to the growing local efforts to conserve the amazing natural and cultural wealth of this fascinating part of the world. ♪

Jeffrey McNeely with a statue of his mentor Dr. Boonsong Lekagul in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand





**Jane M. Ferguson** is a 2008 graduate of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program and Anthropology department, and has spent the past three years teaching courses on Mainland Southeast Asia at the School of Culture, History and Language in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. Jane is delighted to be back at Cornell, joining the community at the Kahin Center, and making use of the extensive resources of the Echols Collection at the Kroch Library. Her current focus is on streamlining and re-writing her dissertation, *Rocking in Shanland*, so that it will be a book manuscript, as well as doing background research for her next major investigation on the politics of hydropower development in the Shan State of Burma.



**Jacqueline Hicks** has worked on Indonesia as a journalist, development consultant and academic. "Having lived in Indonesia for the last ten years, I've had plenty of opportunity for field research. In the last couple of years, the Southeast Asia Program has hosted me for a few months to turn some of that research into academic publication. Last year I made good use of the wonderful facilities here, with the kind support of Tom Pepinsky, to finish an article on the political and social role of Indonesia's two mass Islamic organizations: Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. With such a wide variety of talks and seminars on campus, I really felt part of an intellectual community and I enjoyed the experience so much that I came back this year too!

I'm now writing an article about the recent violence in Indonesia against an Islamic sect called Ahmadiyah, situating it in a wider historical and political context. I love the balance I've been able to achieve between keeping my research relevant to Indonesia's current situation and delving deeper behind those issues – something I wouldn't be able to do without SEAP's sponsorship. I must also say that the contemplative

quiet of little Ithaca provides a great complement to the chaos of Jakarta life!"



**Xiaoyuan Li** is a lecturer at the School of Asian and African Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University. Her research is about bird iconography in Southeast Asian traditional art, as found in textiles, sculptures, ceramics, and painting. "I was so lucky to have an office in the Kahin center as soon as I arrived in Ithaca, especially since my room faces Cayuga Lake and the forest. After listening to the series of brown bag lectures, I like to have a rest there and read books. It's such an amazing place. My favorite place is Olin library; I go there almost every day. Every time when I sit in the Kroch collection, my soul feels so quiet, and I can't help saying to myself: 'Yes, this is my place.' The rich resources of the Kroch collection help me do research for papers I am writing. Another wonderful resource is the Johnson Museum, which is where I took Professor Kaja McGowan's class. She is one of the most elegant women I have ever met. Gregory Green and his family were so kind to invite me to celebrate Thanksgiving together, and the friendly atmosphere and fabulous food impressed me so much. Gregory Green and Jeffrey W. Petersen have offered me a lot of helpful suggestions in searching for data as well as books."



**Nadi Tofighian** is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University. "Coming from a department in Sweden with film and media scholars, it was stimulating to be at the Kahin Center surrounded by cross-disciplinary expertise and conversations focusing on Southeast Asia. My research project *Circuit of Commerce, Circus and Cinema: Turn-of-the-century Amusements in Southeast Asia* is based

on archival research and assesses the transnational circulation of amusements in Southeast Asia and how its distribution followed the commercial trade paths. My two main purposes in coming to Cornell was to be in an environment with no distractions where I could finish writing parts of my dissertation (due in fall 2012); and complement my archival research with material from the collections at Kroch and Olin library. Unfortunately I barely achieved any new writing due to the abundance of new resources unavailable to me in Stockholm, from unpublished dissertations, books on Southeast Asia, government records to more colonial newspapers. I spent three very productive months at Cornell, and hope to be able to come back again."



**Ziyong Zhao** is a Professor of History in School of History and Culture, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China. During his stay at SEAP, his research concentrates on the historical process of Southeast Asia's industrialization (1950-2010). He writes, "It's a regret that I could stay here only for six months. The Echols Collection on Southeast Asia gives me unbelievable support for my research. Since the six-months here is just the beginning for the project, I am dreaming to come back someday in the future to complete it. Cornell is the dream place for the scholars of Southeast Asian studies all over the world. As an historian from China, I am also fascinated with the rise and growth of SEAP at Cornell. It was a success story of the academic community, the university and the government when the USA began to actively play an important role in the world stage, a similar scenario faced by China today."



The SEAP Graduate Student Committee co-chairs for 2011-2012 are Rebakah Daro Minarchek (development sociology), Becky Butler Thompson (linguistics), and Rebecca Townsend (history). They will be organizing the annual graduate student conference in early March and they have great speakers lined up for the spring brown bag lectures.

## SAVE THE DATES!

**March 2-4, 2012**

GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

Featuring Tamara Loos as keynote speaker

<http://seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/node/11230>

**Wednesday, April 18, 2012**

8 PM in Barnes Hall

MOMENTA QUARTET joins the Cornell Gamelan

Ensemble to present new works for gamelan and string quartet by graduate composers Taylan Cihan, Amit Gilutz, Jesse Jones, Chris Stark, and Charles Cacioppo. Funded in part by the Cornell Council for the Arts. Free admission.

**Sunday, May 6, 2012**

8 PM in Barnes Hall

SPRING GAMELAN CONCERT

Free admission.

### Shadow Puppets and Textiles at The Johnson Art Museum

The Johnson Museum of Art will install a special display of Indonesian shadow puppets and textiles from the permanent collection, concerning the theme of Arjuna's Meditation from the Mahabharata. Curated by Professor Kaja McGowan, Museum curatorial assistant Elizabeth Emrich, and students in Professor McGowan's Spring 2012 seminar "Shadowplay: Asian Art and Performance," this installation will coincide with Dalang Ki Purbo Asmoro's visit to Cornell. The installation opens Saturday, March 3, and an Art for Lunch discussion of the display will be held on April 12. <http://museum.cornell.edu/calendar/art-for-lunch-shadow-puppets.html>

## RESERVE YOUR TICKETS NOW!

*Purbo Asmoro presents Arjuna's Profound Meditation*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2012**

8 PM, in Bailey Hall

**An Evening of Javanese Shadow Drama and Gamelan**

Shadow drama master Purbo Asmoro presents the living classical drama and musical traditions of Java. The remarkable visual effects, to the sounds of a full gamelan ensemble, will be accompanied by projected English translations of the narrative.

For Tickets visit:

<http://www.cornellconcertseries.com/>

**Lecture by Ki Purbo Asmoro  
Wednesday, March 14, 2012, 2:30 PM  
Johnson Museum**





**New Building Manager Tim Gorman** is ready to help. Being the building manager of the Kahin Center requires a willingness to get out the ladder and problem solve when the quirks of the old Treman mansion require attention. Tim assists visiting fellows when they arrive, assigns offices, and keeps the Kahin event calendar up-to-date. We're glad to have Tim as the friendly point of contact for the building.



### Cornell hosts the 7th Biannual Northeast Conference on Indonesian Studies

The Cornell Indonesian Association (CIA) and the Yale Indonesia Forum (YIF) held the Susunan Acara Conference on October 22 at the Kahin Center. Topics included history, religion, literature, film and linguistics. Indonesian horror films, facebook usage, and popular novels were discussed along with issues of public health, social security, and religious intolerance.

## SEAP Spring 2012 Brown Bag Lecture Series

**FEBRUARY 9:** Catherine Newell (Fulbright Fellow, Dept. of Religion, University of Pennsylvania), "Meditation in Contemporary Bangkok: understanding *dhammakaya* and *yogavacara* in the Thai historical context"

**FEBRUARY 16:** Allen Hicken (Associate Professor, Dept. of Political Science, University of Michigan), "Late to the Party: The Development of Partisanship in Thailand," co-sponsored by: Department of Government

**FEBRUARY 23:** David Biggs (Associate Professor, Dept. of History, University of California at Riverside), "Writing the History of a Wasteland: Militarization, Ecological Degradation and Contested Spaces in Central Vietnam," co-sponsored by: Department of History

**MARCH 1:** Michael Dadap (Artistic/Music Director and Conductor, The Children's Orchestra Society, New York NY), Title of talk to be announced, co-sponsored by: 14 Strings! Cornell Filipino Rondalla

**MARCH 2-4:** 14th Annual SEAP Graduate Student Symposium (Kahin Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY) Keynote speaker: Tamara Loos (Associate Professor, Department of History, Cornell University)

**MARCH 8:** Karen Strassler (Assistant Professor, Dept. of Anthropology, Queens College), "The Aura of Power: Ratu Kidul's Photographic Appearances," co-sponsored by: Department of Anthropology

**MARCH 15-18:** AAS Annual meeting (Toronto, Canada)

**MAR 17-25:** SPRING BREAK

**MARCH 29:** Celia Lowe (Associate Professor, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Washington), "Viral Clouds: Becoming H5N1 in Indonesia," co-sponsored by: Department of Anthropology

**APRIL 5:** Laura Harrington (Associate Professor, Department of Entomology, Cornell University), "Research on mosquito disease vectors in Thailand"

Kahin Center  
Thursdays at 12:15 PM

**APRIL 12:** Joe Errington (Professor, Department of Anthropology, Yale University), "In search of Middle Indonesian: language and nation in an out-of-the-way place," co-sponsored by: Department of Linguistics

**APRIL 19:** Tong Soon Lee (Associate Professor, Dept. of Music, Emory University), "Peranakan Music and Multiculturalism in Singapore," co-sponsored by: Department of Music

**APRIL 26:** Ben Kiernan (Whitney Griswold Professor of History, Professor of International and Area Studies, Director of Genocide Studies Program and Chair, Council on Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University), "The Global History and Documentation of Genocide: Integrating Southeast Asian Case Studies," co-sponsored by: Department of History



Photo credit: Nicole Koschmann



Photo credit: Nicole Koschmann

## Einaudi Center Celebrates 50 Years

SEAP director Tamara Loos led a strong showing of SEAP faculty, students, and staff at the conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell. Loos spoke on a panel focused on “Area studies and their relation to thematic studies” a topic introduced during Craig Calhoun’s (President, Social Science Research Council) keynote address on the first day. Calhoun singled out SEAP emeritus faculty member Benedict Anderson for special mention in his discussion of interdisciplinarity as one of the important trends in international studies. Calhoun said Anderson would be receiving the SSRC’s Hirschman Prize (see the fall SEAP bulletin for coverage). SEAP graduate student Tim Gorman also spoke on a panel. Along with Dick Feldman and others, he addressed language studies and their relationship to international studies.

## SEAP Scholars Support Asian Environmental Studies Initiative for Liberal Arts Colleges

Edmund Oh, a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Development Sociology at Cornell and a member of the Southeast Asia Program, gave an invited talk to the participants of a Curriculum Development Workshop on Asian Environmental Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. Part of a new Asian Environmental Studies Initiative supported by the Henry Luce Foundation, the two-day

workshop, held on October 10–11, brought together faculty members from liberal arts colleges around the country with the aim of strengthening instruction on environmental issues in East and Southeast Asia.

Besides sharing his own experiences working on issues of environmental governance in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia more broadly, Edmund also joined workshop participants in a series of breakout sessions, which focused on key themes and issue areas in Asian Environmental Studies, as well as on ways in which these issues can be integrated into undergraduate curricula. Accompanying Edmund to the workshop was fellow Cornell graduate student and SEAP member Tim Gorman, who shared these reflections on the experience: “Not only was this workshop a great way for Cornell graduate students to shape and inform instruction in Asian studies and environmental studies at liberal arts colleges around the country, but it also helped to strengthen ties between SEAP and liberal arts institutions, like Hobart and William Smith, that are right in our backyard.”



## Senior Receives SEAP's First Undergraduate Academic Year FLAS Fellowship

by Daniela Arias

Every year, a limited number of Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship awards are available through SEAP. FLAS Fellowships assist outstanding undergraduate and graduate students to carry out training in less commonly taught modern foreign languages and related area or international studies. The FLAS Fellowships program offers two types of fellowships: academic year and summer intensive.

This year, Emily Magaziner, a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences, received SEAP's first undergraduate Academic Year FLAS fellowship. Magaziner, a linguistics major who is in advanced-level Indonesian, has always had an interest in studying languages; her studies have included French, Spanish, Arabic, and Persian.

Prior to receiving a FLAS award, Magaziner was deeply invested in studying Indonesian. In the summer of 2010, Magaziner interned at the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI), where she tutored FSI's language instructors in English as a second language. During her one-on-one tutoring sessions, she met with one Indonesian instructor frequently who helped her gain a better understanding of the culture and language of Indonesia. Magaziner states, "Pak Irwan and my conversations with [him] inspired me to learn more about Indonesia while still at FSI by observing

courses for Foreign Service Officers, exploring resources at FSI's library, etc."

Pak Irwan inspired Magaziner to begin studying Indonesian at Cornell the next fall. On her instant love for the language, Magaziner explains, "I felt attached to the language from the very beginning—perhaps due to some combination of its beautiful intonation patterns and intriguing suffixation processes." She also was drawn to the small class size and "Bu Jolanda's excellent teaching methods." Emily was especially excited about her ability "to recognize the influence of Arabic on Indonesian."

In the summer of 2011, Magaziner studied in Malang, Indonesia for eight weeks through the Critical Language Scholarship program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. On her time spent in Indonesia, Magaziner describes, "It was a dream fulfilled to study the language full-time with a team of dedicated instructors and tutors—and to have the ever-present opportunity to experiment with my new knowledge beyond the classroom." Most importantly, Magaziner's summer in Indonesia granted her the opportunity to experience the peoples and their culture. Whether it was visiting nearby villages and rice fields, bargaining at traditional marketplaces, or snacking at local *warungs* (cafes), each experience helped deepen Magaziner's commitment to her



study of Indonesian.

Based on her positive experiences in Indonesia, Magaziner encourages other students to apply for FLAS. Magaziner states, "The FLAS provides a reason to feel even more connected...If you feel committed to a Southeast Asian language, and are interested in learning more about the region in which that language is spoken, it might be a good idea to apply for the FLAS." ☺



### Clara Golay Bradford

January 31, 1920–  
December 24, 2011

Clara Golay was the widow of the late Frank H. Golay, Professor of Economics and an early member of the Southeast Asia Program. She and her second husband, Ellis Bradford endowed the Frank H. Golay Memorial Lecture series which has brought many luminaries of Southeast Asian Studies to give lectures at Cornell. Frank H. Golay came to Cornell in 1953 as an assistant professor of Economics and Asian Studies. He became a full professor in 1962 and remained at Cornell until his retirement in 1981. He was chair of Cornell's Department of Economics from 1963 to 1967 and director of the University's Southeast Asia Program from 1970 to 1976. In the latter capacity, and as director of the Program's Philippine Project (1967-73) and London-Cornell Project (1968-70), he contributed much to strengthening Southeast Asian Studies at Cornell. He served as chairman of Philippines Council of the Asia Foundation (1964-67) and as the president of the Association for Asian Studies in 1984. Clara Golay was an important part of SEAP in the 1960s and 70s and she accompanied her husband on sabbaticals to Southeast Asia. To read her obituary see the Ithaca Journal: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/theithacajournal/obituary.aspx?n=clara-golay&pid=155256568>

# AWARDS

## Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Recipients Academic Year 2011-2012

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Language Studied</i>
Alice Beban	Development Sociology	Khmer
Rebakah Daro-Minarchek	Development Sociology	Indonesian
Hoa Duong	Government	Vietnamese
Jennifer Goodman	Asian Studies	Thai
Timothy Gorman	Development Sociology	Vietnamese
Yula Kapetanacos	Ecology & Environmental Biology	Khmer
Emily Magaziner	Linguistics *undergraduate*	Indonesian
Thane Maxwell	City and Regional Planning	Burmese
Rebecca Townsend	History	Tagalog

## Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Recipients Summer 2011

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Language Studied</i>
Melissa Green	Biometry and Statistics	Tagalog
Keenan McRoberts	Animal Science	Vietnamese
Andrew Orapallo	Asian Studies	Vietnamese
Rebecca Townsend	History	Tagalog
Peter Van Do	Asian Studies	Vietnamese

## Summer 2011 Southeast Asia Program Thesis Write-up Fellowships

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Named Award Received</i>
Lawrence Chua	History of Urbanism and Architecture/Thailand	Thak Chaloemtiarana
Samson Lim	History/Thailand	James T. Siegel
Wannasarn Noonsuk	Art History/Thailand	Oliver W. Wolters
John D. Phan	Asian Literature/Vietnam	John U. Wolff

## Summer 2011 Southeast Asia Program Foreign Research Fellowships

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline/Country</i>	<i>Named Award Received</i>
Sean Fear	History/Vietnam	Helen E. Swank
Diego Fossati	Government/Indonesia	Teresa M. Palmer
Thane Maxwell	City and Regional Planning/Myanmar	Margaret Aung-Thwin
Eileen Vo	Asian Studies/Vietnam	Ruchira Mendiones
Mirabelle Yang	Development Sociology/Cambodia	Oey Giok Po

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Country Traveled</i>
Benjamin Koffel	City and Regional Planning	Indonesia
Yulianto Moshin	Science and Technology Studies	Indonesia
Becky Thompson	Linguistics	Cambodia

## Summer 2011 Einaudi Center Travel Grants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Country Traveled</i>
Diego Fossati	Government	Indonesia
Jennifer Goodman	Asian Studies	Thailand
Thane Maxwell	City and Regional Planning	Myanmar
Keenan McRoberts	Animal Science	Vietnam
Ermita Soenarto*	History	Indonesia
Thuy Tranviet	Communications	Vietnam
Mirabelle Yang	Development Sociology	Cambodia



# OUTREACH



Top: SEAP introduces Indonesian shadow puppets at the NY State Fair

Bottom: Lawrence Chua's exhibit on the Suan Mokkh monastic complex at the Big Red Barn

**For the first time** SEAP Outreach had a booth at the New York State Fair in Syracuse. Nestled between exhibits of 4H clubs across the state and math and science demos from Cornell, SEAP outreach and other Einaudi programs brought international activities to the fairgoers. By the end of the day over one hundred kids had stopped to make shadow puppets of Rama, Sita, or Hanuman, while their parents looked on and examined the intricate designs of the Indonesian shadow puppets and batiks on display.

SEAP also broke new ground by teaming up with DeWitt Middle School teacher Patricia Forton to offer a Burmese club as part of the school's new weekly club program. Zin Htet Chan ('12) who has taught Burmese as part of the Afterschool Language Program led the club. It was one of the largest

clubs with 25 students participating in an exploration of Burmese puppetry, dress and textiles, music, and cuisine. Quite a few of the students involved are refugees from Burma and they developed newfound pride in their culture—sharing popular music from the region and after a session of club members trying on Burmese and Karen clothes, many of the boys started using traditional shoulder bags to carry their books. SEAP is also a community partner for the IPEI grant awarded to Andrea Volkmar who teaches social studies at DeWitt. SEAP organized class visits by several immigrants from Southeast Asia as well as presentations providing an overview of how the history of Southeast Asia shaped immigration to the US.

Other notable outreach in the fall included a full day of presentations



to middle school classes in Spencer-Van Etten on Vietnamese and French culinary intersections. Students put their hands, noses and taste buds to work making and eating Bahn Mi sandwiches to conclude the class. The fourth grade classes from Fall Creek Elementary school in Ithaca came to campus for hands-on workshops on the gamelan instruments and in the Johnson Museum's new Southeast Asia gallery. Using the Ramayana and shadow puppets to link the two sets of activities, students explored the varied religious and artistic traditions of Southeast Asia. SEAP graduate student Mirabelle Yang especially enchanted the students with the huge snake skin that helped them get a tactile sense of the enormous naga that surrounded the stone Buddha.

On campus SEAP reached out to new audiences by mounting Lawrence Chua's wonderful exhibit "Houses of Emptiness: Suan Mokkh and the Modern Thai Monastic Complex" in the Big Red Barn. In conjunction with this exhibit a collection of Nancy Loncto's photographs from Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam were also on display. SEAP Outreach also organized an earth arts style Loy Krathong event at the Big Red Barn with help from the Cornell Thai Association. The dried sunflower, pine cone and berry festooned krathongs were gorgeous as they floated on to Bebee Lake, but they were a bit more flammable in the strong winds than we anticipated. 🙏

Visit us at

<http://seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/outreach>

Or Friend us at



<http://www.facebook.com/seapcornell>

From top: Mirabelle Yang showing Fall Creek 4th graders how to sit in the meditation position of the Buddha under the Naga; Big Red Barn Director, Kris Corda, making a krathong; DeWitt ESL teacher Patricia Forton joins students in the Burmese club in dressing in Karen and Burmese clothing from the Burma explorer box; Cornell Thai Students Association member Tanapong Jiarathanakul show off his krathong; Krathongs set afloat at Bebee Lake need an extra push from Erick White and other participants



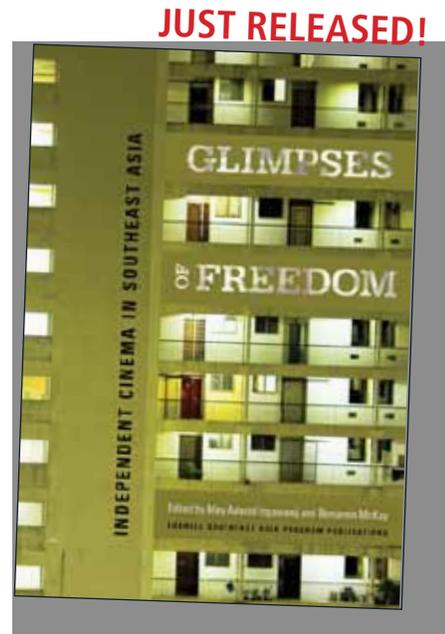
***Glimpses of Freedom:  
 Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia***  
 editors, May Adadol Ingawanij and Benjamin McKay

Since the late 1990s, a vivid new sphere of cinematic practice in Southeast Asia has emerged and been identified as *independent*. What exactly does this term mean in relation to the way films and videos are made, and the way they look? How do issues of festival circulation, piracy, technology, state and institutional power, and spectatorship apply to practices of independent cinema throughout the diverse region? The authors who speak in this volume—contemporary filmmakers, critics, curators, festival organizers—answer these questions. They describe and analyze the emerging field of Southeast Asian cinema, which they know firsthand and have helped create and foster.

*Glimpses of Freedom* is the outcome of a project collaboratively conceived by a new generation of scholars of cinema in Southeast Asia, inspired by the growing domestic and international visibility of notable films and videos from the region. Contributors include internationally esteemed independent filmmakers, critics, and curators based in Southeast Asia, such as Hassan Abd Muthalib, Alexis A. Tioseco, Chris Chong Chan Fui, and John Torres. International scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Benjamin McKay, May Adadol Ingawanij, and Gaik Cheng Khoo contextualize and theorize Southeast Asia’s “independent film cultures.” The interaction between practitioners and critics in this volume illuminates a contemporary artistic field, clarifying its particular character and its vital contributions to cinema worldwide.

*For the past decade, I have been trying to understand the region’s cinema and decide whether it has unique traits or if it’s in a perpetual identity crisis. Was there really a new movement around here? “Independence” seems like a utopian word amid the economic and political struggles in Southeast Asia, but many of us practice independence, partly out of necessity. This book is a significant contribution in both answering my questions about the cinema around me and revealing to me a glimpse of the future.*

—Apichatpong Weerasethakul, filmmaker and winner of the 2010 Palme d’Or,  
 Cannes International Film Festival (*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*)



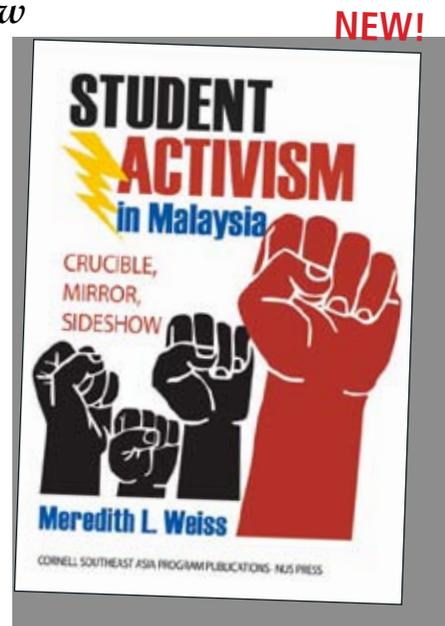
***Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow***  
 by Meredith Weiss

This work traces the early rise and subsequent decline of politically effective student activism in Malaysia. During the 1970s, the state embarked on a project of “intellectual containment” that both suppressed ongoing mobilization of university students and delegitimized further activism. That project has been notably successful in curbing student protest, erasing a legacy of past engagement, and stemming the production of potentially subversive new ideas. Innovative student proposals for reform that were once sanctioned and even welcomed (within bounds) are now illicit and discouraged, reflecting not only changes in Malaysia’s political regime, but changes in the political culture overall. This incisive study sheds new light on the dynamics of mobilization and on the key role of students and universities in postcolonial political development.

This analysis is based on extensive research, including interviews with dozens of past and present student activists and a close study of history archives, government reports, firsthand accounts, and student publications extending over decades. *Student Activism in Malaysia* traces the influence of higher education on group activism, beginning with the start of tertiary education in early twentieth-century Singapore and extending to present-day Malaysia. In the process, Weiss calls into question the conventional wisdom that Malaysian students—and Malaysians overall—have become “apathetic.” The author demonstrates that this apparent state of apathy is not inevitable, cultural, or natural, but is the outcome of a sustained project of pacification and depoliticization carried out by an ambitiously developmental state.

*Because cohorts of university students come and go, their experiences and memories are readily lost to history. This loss is especially acute when the state seeks to constrain student political life, as it has in Malaysia. Meredith Weiss’s book works against such generational amnesia and intellectual containment by analyzing the issues and struggles that have concerned Malaysia’s student activists over the last fifty years. She examines the myriad forces that have made Malaysian campuses places of both political ferment and apathy. This work not only reclaims the history of student activism in Malaysia, it illuminates how university students perform a peculiar and vital social function internationally.*

—Thomas Williamson, Department of Anthropology, St. Olaf College



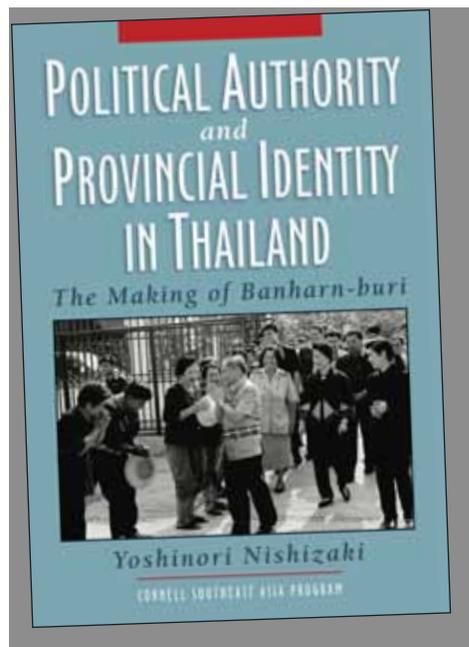
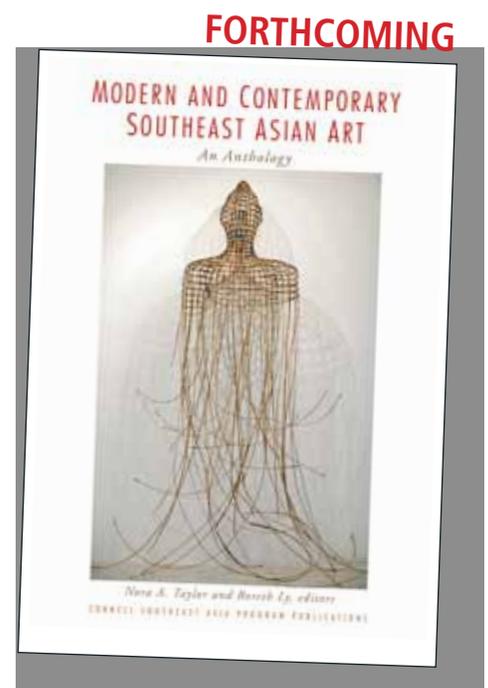
## Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology

ed. Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly

This anthology explores artistic practices and works from a diverse and vibrant region. Scholars, critics, and curators offer their perspectives on Southeast Asian art and artists, aiming not to define the field but to illuminate its changing nature and its interactions with creative endeavors and histories originating elsewhere. These essays examine a range of new and modern work, from sculptures that invoke post-conflict trauma in Cambodia to Thai art installations that invite audience participation and thereby challenge traditional definitions of the “art object.” In this way, the authors not only provide a lively study of regional art, but challenge and expand broad debates about international and transnational art.

*This collection of brilliant, multi-disciplinary essays offers entry points and perspectives from which we can begin to appreciate the shared attributes and histories of Southeast Asian art. Rich with information, these essays and their multi-faceted views of art practices, curatorship, ideologies, and infrastructures will be indispensable for an in-depth understanding of the ASEAN Community.*

—Professor Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, Deputy Secretary-General, Ministry of Culture, Thailand



Read Craig Reynold’s recent review of  
***Political Authority and Provincial  
 Identity in Thailand:  
 The Making of Banharn-buri***  
 by Yoshinori Nishizaki

[http://anu.academia.edu/CraigReynolds/  
 Papers/1190935/Review of Nishizaki Political Authority  
 and Provincial Identity in Thailand 2011](http://anu.academia.edu/CraigReynolds/Papers/1190935/Review_of_Nishizaki_Political_Authority_and_Provincial_Identity_in_Thailand_2011)

**The *Indonesia* journal** will be posted through JSTOR beginning in 2012. We expect that JSTOR will make *Indonesia* more widely available worldwide and substantially increase its reach. *Indonesia* has again received the highest possible grade—A Star (A\*) in the Australian Research Council’s extensive, international ranking of humanities journals for 2010. Only about 5 percent of all journals assessed receive A\*. See the list of ranked journals at [http://www.arc.gov.au/era/era\\_2010/archive/era\\_journal\\_list.htm#1](http://www.arc.gov.au/era/era_2010/archive/era_journal_list.htm#1)

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# Echols Updates



## 2CUL

The 2CUL partnership between the libraries at Cornell and Columbia Universities involving Southeast Asia has been moving steadily forward this past semester following a formal agreement signed earlier this year. <http://2cul.org/node/1> Under the agreement, the Southeast Asia librarians at Cornell assist the South Asia librarian at Columbia, who also covers Southeast Asia, in duties relating to collection development and reference. Up to this point, 2CUL work has had a minimal effect on the daily routine of the Echols staff due to the limited interest in Southeast Asia at Columbia. Indeed, the agreement estimates only 5% of the librarians' time will be used for 2CUL work this year and so far that looks to be accurate. Next semester we will be increasing outreach efforts to those interested in Southeast Asia at Columbia to let them know we are available to assist with their reference needs. (See the Cornell Chronicle for more details <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/June11/LIB2cul.html>)

## Echols Budget

The Echols Collection budget is still experiencing shortfalls due to the drop in the value of the dollar, increases in publishing output and publication prices, and several years where collection funds have either stayed flat or even decreased. In response to the overall library budget difficulties, the University Librarian and the Provost have decided to release money from reserves in order to bolster the collections budget. In response to the release, the Echols librarians have submitted requests for both onetime, large purchase funding and ongoing funds for regular purchases. While reserve releases over the coming years promise to bring some relief, the amount is unlikely to make up for lost ground. As a result, the Echols librarians will need to be more selective in purchases for the collection, especially when committing to subscriptions for new serials. At the same time the library administration is embarking on a fundraising campaign for the entire collections budget, with the Echols Collection a top priority. Your suggestions for purchases are always welcome and, indeed, more important than ever when difficult choices must be made as to what should or should not be purchased for the collection.

## Annex Move

The shared space for the Asia Collections in Kroch Library is once again bursting at the seams. If you have recently taken a walk through the B1 level of the Kroch stacks, the books carefully stacked on the floor are adequate evidence of this issue. In response to our urgent need to create space in the stacks for the roughly 30,000 books the Asia Collections add every year, the library has approved an Annex move for books that are older than ten years and have not circulated in the past ten years. We are currently reviewing a long list of publications that fit the criteria for the Annex move in

order to select those that, despite age and lack of circulation, should still remain in Kroch library. With the percentage of the library's collection housed at the Annex increasing each year, the library is continuously working to improve Annex delivery service and welcomes your comments. The library is also working on establishing a virtual shelf browser that will allow you to view the library's holdings in a virtual environment as if the books were all shelved next to each other.

## Services

We would also like to remind you of some other services that we provide. We keep a new book section in the Asia reading room where a substantial portion of the books we receive are kept for two weeks. They are organized by country (and then by call number) and can be checked out. Hopefully this will provide a good opportunity to browse and keep up with the latest material. There are two other methods to help you keep up with the latest Echols receipts. First, on the Echols collection website (<http://asia.library.cornell.edu/ac/Echols/Accession-Lists>) we list our new acquisitions monthly in pdf format. Second, the library provides a new books virtual browsing tool (<http://supportingcast.mannlib.cornell.edu/newbooks/>) where you can search through the new arrivals using a number of different search limiters.

We also encourage everyone to make use of our Kroch Asia website, which has a section devoted to the Echols collection (<http://asia.library.cornell.edu/>). We are in the process of improving this site, so please don't hesitate to give us frank feedback. There are some resources listed there, such as bibliographies and databases that include information on articles and other sources that would be hard to find otherwise. Knowing how to use these databases is very important for scholarship, yet we often find that people are unaware of the resources out there. So we will be improving our lists and trying to do a better job of informing everyone of what is available. Along those lines, we would

like to announce that we are subscribing to a new database specific to the Philippines (CIPPA). There are also databases available that are devoted to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Southeast Asia in general, plus other country specific resources. And don't forget Echols' very own Southeast Asia Book Chapter Bibliography; a new installment (#4) is out. Take a look at this or the complete list for items that you might have missed (<http://asia.library.cornell.edu/ac/Echols/SEA-book-chapters>). Please contact us for more information about these resources. We really welcome opportunities to hear from users of the library, so please send us an e-mail or drop by our offices. ☺

Greg Green (Curator, [ghg4@cornell.edu](mailto:ghg4@cornell.edu))

Jeff Petersen (Southeast Asia Librarian, [jwp42@cornell.edu](mailto:jwp42@cornell.edu))