

NATIONS IN THEIR INFANCY

Archaeologists gather next month to compare notes on Southeast Asia's early politics and culture

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SPECIAL TO THE NATION

Southeast Asia's early states – and its original music – are among topics to be covered at an archaeology conference in Chonburi next month.

The first International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology from May 7 to 10 at Burapha University's Tao-Thong Hotel Operation Centre is being organised by the Seameo Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (Spafa), whose director, Dr MR Rujaya Abhakorn, says 120 academics will present more than 70 papers.

Seameo is the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation.

"There's been a good response from outside the region," he says, "but many in the region who would also like to participate are restricted by lack of funding."

Silpakorn University Professor Emeritus Phasook Indrawooth, one of the keynote speakers, will discuss "Early State Formation in Southeast Asia", while the other, Professor Charles Higham of Otago University, will examine "Social Change During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Northeast Thailand".

Other papers include "The Archaeological Records from the 13th to the 16th Centuries in the Context of a History of Music in Southeast Asia" by Dr Nicolas Arsenio of Mahasarakham University. He will show how a "new music" arose in Asia after the introduction of bronze drums and gongs, forming a legacy shared across modern Asia.

Dr Edmund Edwards Mackinnon of Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies will speak about "The Rape of Puteri Hijau", which he describes as "a case of cultural-heritage-policy failure" in North Sumatra after decentralisation of

power in Indonesia. Benteng Puteri Hijau translates as "the Fort of the Green Princess".

Other speakers will discuss theory, research, the science involved, cultural conservation, maritime and underwater studies and "Perspectives for the Future: Trans-border Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia".

"Spafa has as its mission the compiling of knowledge related to cultural heritage through archaeology and studies of Southeast Asian arts," Dr Rujaya explains. "We could rightly claim that we were pioneers in the kind of Southeast Asian studies now offered at some universities.

"Networking remains our chief method of information gathering, sharing and dissemination, by conducting consultative meetings, seminars, workshops, training and fora. We hope to highlight both the cultural diversity and uniqueness of the region so that we can understand each other better and work together for a better collective knowledge and a better quality of life.

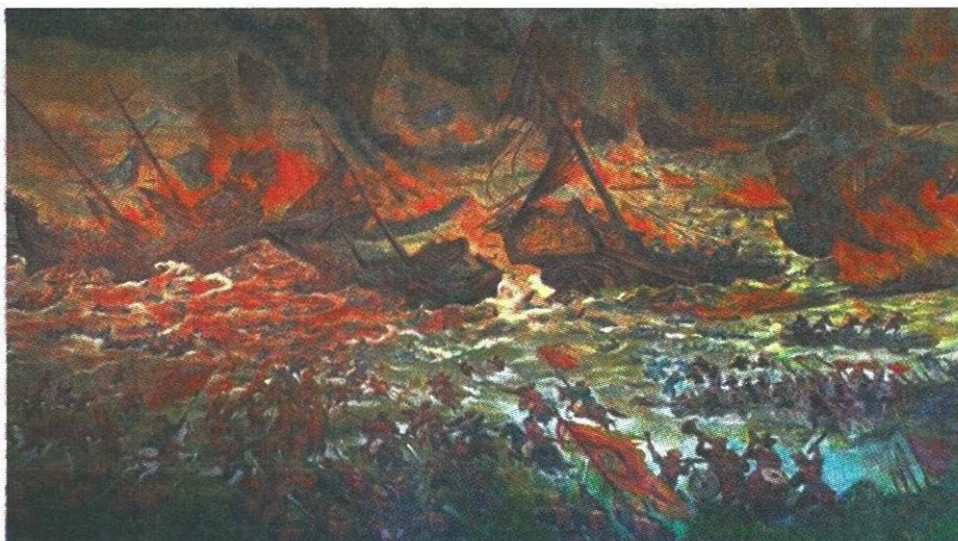
"In other words, we should try to make the work of Spafa more relevant and meaningful to the people in the region and contribute to the wellbeing and meaningful dialogues in the Asean Community."

Rujaya notes that, while Spafa conducts its work mainly in English, "the Thai public is usually reluctant to use it", so websites have been established in Thai and other regional languages.





A UNIVERSITY of London researcher will look at the diversity in the stone jars of Laos' Plain of Jars.



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RESULTS of an underwater survey of a 1288 naval battle in which a Vietnamese general sank a Mongol trading fleet will be revealed.



DR MR Rujaya Abhakorn

PRESENTATIONS

■ Dr Elizabeth Howard Moore of Kyoto University will on May 8 discuss the "Inter-regional Archaeology of Dawei" in Myanmar, tracing developments from the arrival of Buddhism to the present day. The walled sites of Dawei have revealed its links to Pyu and Bagan further north, with Dvaravati sites in Kanchanaburi and ultimately with the Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin dynasties.

■ Lia Genovese, a PhD candidate at the University of London, will on May 8 explain "Documented and Undocumented Diversity at the Plain of Jars" in Laos. Among the diversity in the stone jars of Xieng Khouang are reduced cavities, pairs of apertures and different lip rims.

■ Dr Jun Kimura of Murdoch University and Dr John Pollack of Texas A&M University will on May 9 share underwater findings from Vietnam in "Lost Post and Lost Fleet". They surveyed the scene of a naval battle at Van Don and its relation to a battle on the Bach Dang River in 1288, when Vietnamese General Tran Khanh Du destroyed a Mongol supply fleet.

■ Find out more about the conference at (02) 280 4022-9 or www.Seamo-Spafa.org.



HISTORIC SITES such as Indonesia's Puteri Hijau, 'the Fort of the Green Princess', are under threat by rampant development.



URNS and a coin from Dawei in Myanmar, which have cultural links with sites in Kanchanaburi and ultimately with the Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin dynasties.