



# ASIAN SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION

Under the Royal Patronage of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

Newsletter of the ASIA Fellows Program  
and the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program

June 2009

[www.asianscholarship.org](http://www.asianscholarship.org)

## **NORTHEASTERN EXPOSURE**

By Sampao Ngamchoie

Thailand's IFP alumni gathered at Nakhon Ratchasima from 23-25 October 2008 for their 5th IFP alumni meeting in Loong Chok Plantation, Klong Durian Village, Wang Num Kaew District. Fifteen participants graced the event, including a dozen alumni, two ASF staff, and a representative of the farmers' community school.

The gathering gave the alumni a platform for exchanging ideas and sharing experiences aimed at sealing their common commitment to Northeastern regional development. With this meeting, the alumni also wanted to trigger a learning process between them and the local communities on pressing issues such as the environment, public participation in community-based problem solving, and personal health care, among others. All this is part of their big project on participatory action research, called "Northeastern Identity Study for Sustainable Development".

First on the agenda, they trooped to Wang Num Kaew Organic Farming Group at Ban Num Sub. The field trip allowed the IFP alumni an insider's look at the farming group's working process—from internal organizing to promoting self-sufficiency through a balance between local wisdom and appropriate technology. They also observed closely how the group pursues cultural preservation and development as well as environmental conservation activities for their upstream communities.

Then, it was time to listen to Dr. Preecha Uitrugool, who shared his experiences on participatory action research (PAR). The fellows learned that community empowerment is at PAR's core, for these groups to acquire knowledge on their own and naturally embark on knowledge-based development.

(Continued on page 12)



Asian Sojourns & Flavors  
From the Journals of ASF Cohorts

**3**

**Under the Bodhi Tree**  
Wilasinee Chamsaard



Asian Sojourns & Flavors  
From the Journals of ASF Cohorts

**4**


**Boating For Beginners**  
S.M. Zabeed Ahmed



Asian Sojourns & Flavors  
From the Journals of ASF Cohorts

**5**

**The Drunken Masters**  
Deng Yingwen



Asian Sojourns & Flavors  
From the Journals of ASF Cohorts

**6**

**Teacher Tang Goes to China**  
Tang Keow Ngang



I'm Fulfilling Promises

**7**

**SAYS WHO?**



I'm Fulfilling Promises

**8**


**Trees for the World**  
Jaruwat Kiatiwongse



I'm Fulfilling Promises  
learning | leadership | commitment

**9**

**PADDIES OF GREEN**  
Pannee Samerpak



I'm Fulfilling Promises  
learning | leadership | commitment

**10**

**HEARTLAND OF CHANGE**  
Theerada Namhai



I'm Fulfilling Promises  
learning | leadership | commitment

**11**

**THE ISAN WAY**  
Sujin Sangwanmaneeent




Message

From the Executive Director

In this issue, allow us to take you by train to the northeast of Thailand. With our moving cameras, we're ready to cover exciting projects of our guys at the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program. For almost a decade now, the Ford Foundation has put a huge amount of its resources on these fellows—to send them abroad and to make them learned people. Now we must be curious to find out: *If at all, what has happened to these travelling scholars?*

The stories we've collected show uplifting results. But they really do begin with that unwritten chapter, when these fellows said yes to an opportunity that has since set them on remarkable journeys. Let's reel back to that fateful day, when these IFP alumni bought return tickets to their northeastern homeland, with the work of community development burning in their hearts.

After only a few years, these IFP alumni have scored successful community projects that extend encouraging prospects for revival and a better life for their northeastern folks. One fellow has opened a Farmer Community School. Another set up an Organic Agriculture Center. And yet another sees his art as that colorful screen meant to project his homeland's heritage before the world. For all of them, change comes by way of rallying their own local communities to take part in this collective dream of renewal and development. In Asia, where we pay due importance to the work of the hands, the heart, and the mind, these stories are admirable testimonies, bringing the work of development closer to fulfillment.

This issue also covers interesting dispatches from our ASIA Fellows in the 10th Cohort. Let's hear it from a Malaysian writing from China, a Thai who courier her field notes from India, and a Chinese transmitting her footages from Vietnam. Reading their stories, we are, in effect, poring over the colorful logbook of Asian cultural interaction.

Given today's worldwide economic slump, some of us are quick to lose heart, finding this kind of work quite slow—a costly investment that's poised to eat up all our resources. But that's as real as it gets—this business of changing life in the Asian region. You pick out one enthusiastic dreamer, allowing her to travel. You send her off on an adventurous year—to journey elsewhere, meeting new friends and experiencing new things all together. Abroad, you pay for her way to language school, buy her tons of books and all the helpful research gadgets. It's a costly deal, really. But in the end, with one life changed, we find prospects for the whole of Asia to change its present, its ways of seeing, its age-old manner of proceeding.

We don't have to be told twice that these are hard times for people everywhere. From Europe to the US and Asia, financial stocks and investments have plunged and forced people to despair and to go mad sometimes. But in our part of the world, we see that precious investments have not gone to waste, because here are amazing people of noble commitment, bold ideas, and the clear will to dream up changes for a better Asia. Do read their stories and tell us if, indeed, we have wrongly cast all our pearls before swine.

All over Asia, may these thousand pearls charm you with their brightness.

# Under the Bodhi Tree

Wilasinee Chamsaard, a cultural worker from Thailand's Ubon Ratchathani, was in India as an ASF Cohort 10 Fellow.

India is the dreamland of people who study Asian Archaeology and History. Its deep philosophy and rich culture impress people from all over the world. Thus, India is always swarming with travelers.

Here, ASF gave me the great opportunity to survey monuments that have some connection to Thailand's Dvaravati monuments. I found them in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, along routes that link the main Buddhist religious architectural activities from the 4th to the 10th century.

I arrived in Bodhgaya on the first week of December. It is one of four sacred places where Buddhists go on a sacred journey. The other three include Sarnath, Kushinagar, and Lumbini. Bodhgaya is the place where Buddha attained enlightenment under the sacred Bodhi tree.

My own pilgrimage there turned out to be both wonderful and strange. I was thrilled to see Hinayana monks from different countries like Burma, Cambodia, India, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

**The tireless chanting touched my heart, and for once, I knew that I could only feel these blessings in my soul.**

Together, they were chanting in harmony at the International Tripitaka Chanting Council. On our last day there, the big contingent of Tibetan monks prepared food packets to distribute among the people there.

Every year, people come to Bodhgaya to learn and practice Buddhist meditation. For any Buddhist, the journey's highlight is having that golden chance to sit down and to learn from the wise monks passing through. The pilgrimage hits its peak around January to February. A large number of Tibetans, Bhutanese, and Sikkimese come to Bodhgaya with their precious stones, Buddhist relics, and clothes. They sell these to pay for the food and accommodations, while visiting the four sacred places.

THAILAND

Indians live their life simply, following *Ashrama*, the four stages of Hindu life: Brahmachari (student), Grihastha (Householder), Vanaprastha (in semi-retirement), and Sanyasi (the recluse in full retirement). And everywhere, it seems that India's people live accordingly, following these four steps.

The way of life here is not extravagant. Since childhood, many of them have been trained to economize. Therefore, students go to school with less money. For lunch, not just boys in school but also anyone working outdoors brings tiffin boxes.

I stayed in Bodhgaya for two months. But despite that, I was in no rush to go home. Here, I found real pleasure in aspiring for



*dana* (charity), *sila* (character/behaviour), and *bhavana* (insights to nurture the mind). The tireless chanting touched my heart, with the sacred power of sweet voices. And for once, I knew that I could only feel these blessings in my soul.

I think that *Asianizing Asia* must have started here a long time ago, through the glories of Buddhist institutions from the Gupta to the Pala periods, persisting as viable spiritual centers. They have lured intrepid wayfarers, coming all the way from China, Indonesia, Korea, Sri Lanka, and Tibet.

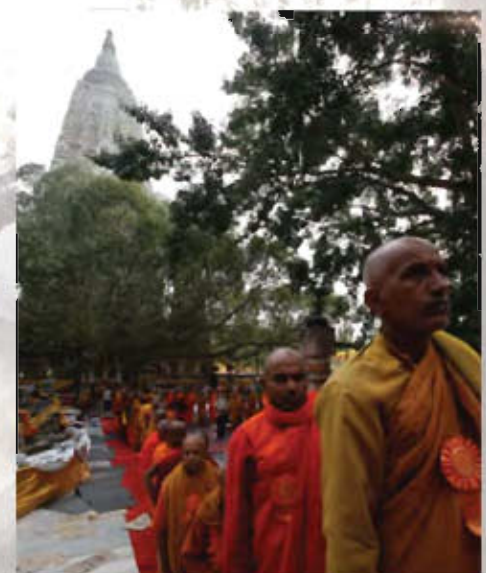
My personal anecdote concerns the Indian tradition where the 'guest is god'. Indians are always ready to extend their warm hospitality to foreign guests. Anyone

invited to an Indian home is sure to get pampered and served excellent food. But with their sincere heart, be prepared to answer personal questions. It didn't take me long to feel at home. I made sure to learn some Hindi, so I could really chat with the local people.

I also saw how Indians give honor and value to scholars. I attended two conferences in Orissa and Kolkata. The organizers impressed me for not fussing about the place or the decorations. Rather, they were quick to honor the scholars, especially the senior ones. The scholar is rewarded according to her works, as her books become the centerpiece of the big events. I think it was Dr. Rajendra Prasad, India's first president, who coined his country's noble adage: "simple living; high thinking".

Most Indians are vegetarian and here, it's a real joy to go shopping for fresh, affordable vegetables. Where meals are concerned, I think that Indian life is pretty consistent, whether the ones feasting are rich or poor. In fact, they spend money but only to look for simple pleasures. This austere lifestyle allows them to know the value of everything.

These days, the whole world is crawling out of the muck of a tough economic crunch. As for India, Indians won't probably have to sweat it out, because everyone here is at home with their simple, quiet lives. \*





# Boating For Beginners

S.M. Zabed Ahmed, ASF Cohort 10 Fellow from Bangladesh, teaches at the University of Dhaka's Department of Information Science and Library Management.

●  
BANGLADESH

●  
THAILAND

**A**s an ASIA Fellow from Cohort 10, I'm currently studying rural community libraries in Thailand, where provisions have been truly innovative. Public libraries are essentially providing services in rural areas, extending these to village levels through community-learning and village-reading centers. Over the past twenty years, various forms of mobile and outreach library services have been introduced here to bring books and information to rural folk. But despite all these initiatives, like most Asian countries, Thailand continues to have limited access to library and information services in its rural areas.

We see community libraries throughout Thailand. They are located among urban, sub-urban, or remote districts. Community groups take charge of these libraries; they are located in public places such as schools, wat (temples), and community centers, for everyone's convenient access. Despite these, little effort has been put to evaluating the performance and impact of these libraries to

---

**Bang Parok's Boat Library has become a true example of how community libraries have transformed rural communities in Thailand.**

---

understand the relationship between patterns of service delivery and social characteristics of their targeted users. My ASF research focuses on evaluating the performance and impact of such community-led initiatives.

I have carried out field visits to several rural community libraries in Thailand. Most of these libraries are very small, having only a few hundred books and a handful of computers. Many libraries also organize informal education through literacy instruction, computer training, and extension activities. Overall, these libraries have been showing great promise in providing information services to rural areas in Thailand.

The data gathered so far suggest that small-scale, community-based library services have great potential in making a positive impact on the community's development.

I had my first field visit to Bang Parok community in Muang district (about 50 km from Bangkok). Pathum Thani. Under the shade of a banyan tree, the people here have built together a small Boat Library (made out of an old boat, indeed!) in order to promote community education. Since 2002, when it first opened, the Boat Library has been phenomenal. It has now become more than a small collection of books; it is a place where the community members gather, learn, and feel a sense of collective pride.

The Bang Parok Boat Library has also become a major tourist attraction in Pathum Thani. I was quite surprised to see community members packing to read in such a small space especially during weekends. Bang Parok dwellers also sell their own goods like souvenirs, handicraft items, and local delicacies to visitors and library users. The Boat Library is a true example of how community libraries have transformed rural communities in Thailand.

I've learned many new things from the Boat Library. There were no set rules for library users, as community members trust each other. Also, the library does not keep a record of its holdings, services, and activities. This made my research rather difficult but then, I've seen a different kind of librarianship where trust and solidarity are much more important than records and rules.

Public libraries are among the most extensively funded projects in Asia. Though they are providing valuable services, they have often been criticized for failing to deliver appropriate information services to rural dwellers. I came to realize that community libraries could be the solution to Asia's rural information poverty—a unique model for rural development in Asia. I hope that my ASF experience in Thailand would help me to undertake similar studies in Bangladesh. In turn, this could lead to some comparative studies in rural information provision between our two countries. \*



# The Drunken Masters

By Deng Yingwen

CHINA

VIETNAM

I think that scholars from China and Japan who are concerned with Vietnamese issues will find my research interesting. Besides, they will gain fruitful insights from my findings. At this point, not many researches have been done on Chinese communities in Vietnam. The main constraint is because researchers are not getting enough financial support. They simply can't afford to travel abroad for a long time. I think that my research can inspire Chinese scholars to go to Vietnam, to look more deeply at the condition of Chinese communities there.

In addition, I find that Japanese scholars also show a great interest on issues related to Chinese communities in Vietnam. Although they have all the funds, the Vietnamese language cramps them. To study the condition of Chinese communities in

**Whether the scholar comes from a big or small country, respect is what counts, and the sincerity and openness to embrace other cultures.**

Vietnam, one must not only speak the Vietnamese language but also the other languages spoken by Chinese communities in Vietnam, such as Cantonese. Since only a few Japanese scholars devote time to understanding both languages, normally they won't get satisfied with the results after completing their research.

This has been a very rewarding trip for me. Along the way, I changed my original angle of thinking about other cultures. While researching in Vietnam, I picked up a new way of understanding culture. Asia is a multi-cultural region. Whether the scholar comes from a big or small country, respect is what counts, and the sincerity and openness to embrace other cultures. Only then can we do well in our own research, promoting mutual understanding between Asia's many countries and many-colored cultures.

**Deng Yingwen**, ASF Cohort 10  
Fellow from Guangzhou,  
is Associate Professor at  
Jinan University's Institute  
of Southeast Asian Studies.



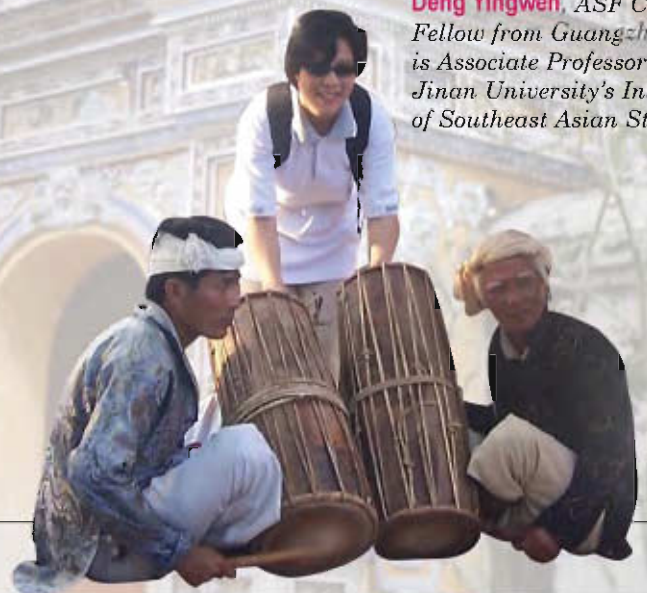
**T**his year, I'm living in Hanoi, to research on Chinese Buddhists and Catholics. I want to look at the impact of religion among the Chinese in Vietnam. How does Buddhist belief influence forms of economic behaviour and the daily lives of people? In their social activities, how do Chinese Catholics co-exist with Buddhists in Vietnam? I believe that this is the first Chinese research to explore these questions.

So far, I have done three important things: 1) I have collected historical data from various book references. 2) I have also done fieldwork, interviewing some of the Chinese families in Hanoi about their daily life and religious activities. 3) I can now speak the language of southern Vietnam, while speaking English at the same time. Owing to my interest in Chinese communities in Saigon and the nearby districts, I'd like to visit the southern part of Vietnam before the end of my research project.

Vietnam is a multi-racial, multi-cultural country. Its culture is varied and rich. Besides Chinese influences, Indian culture is also present everywhere. However, some are fiercely protective of their heritage. On the religious front, aside from Buddhists, there are Catholics, aboriginal peoples and their ancient belief, Gaodai, Hoa Hao, and other religions. Before coming to Vietnam, I've always thought that Chinese culture alone runs deep in Vietnam's blood. Yet now, I have a totally different mindset about Vietnam.

The culture of Vietnam's central district is awesome, since it is full of Indian cultural buildings, dances, and music. I am so touched and surprised by their arts. Staying here, I've come to realize that every country has its own attractive culture, no matter what its size is. And since each country is unique, all of these countries put together make for a rich and varied Asia.

But you have to hear about the funny liquor culture of Vietnam's northern ethnic group. They fill a big tank with liquor and use a stick to drink it. And they drink like a fish! If you want to become their friend, you must show them that you can guzzle up a lot, too. As a woman, my jaw simply dropped at their drinking skills. However they have been very friendly and they have always treated me well. After a while, I became their best friend. And now, I can also drink liquor using their stick. That makes me feel very funny and cute.





# Teacher Tang Goes to China

**Tang Keow Ngang**, ASF Cohort 10 Fellow from Kedah, is with the School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

**T**he Asian Scholarship Foundation allowed me to carry out an exciting research project in Wuhan, China on “Development of Teacher Leadership Style in Creating Special Education Classroom Culture between China and Malaysia” at Huazhong Normal University’s College of Education.

At this moment, I am surveying the leadership style of special education teachers in elementary schools, along with observation and some interviews. So far, most special education teachers follow the Balanced Leadership Style. It’s student-centered but it recognizes that students need guidelines to feel comfortable.

Yet, we’re talking here of only 80 percent of the total schools that I have to cover. Where I’ve gone, the learning culture is quite positive in most of the classrooms. Students feel comfortable, non-threatened, stimulated, challenged, and valued. Certainly, most of the teachers make their classrooms lively by constantly challenging the students’ intellectual abilities.

The one-child policy is China’s population control policy. This means that every student in the classroom is the only child in his/her family. Yet China’s ideal “4-2-1” family frame of four grandparents, two parents, and one child has also become a burden. The one-child policy has led to a generation of “little

**The Chinese people are proud of their heritage, and there is always an awareness of “Old China” within people’s habits and tastes.**

emperors”—only children who bear and receive the majority of their parents’ focus and energies, to often negative consequences.

These only children are sometimes stereotyped as spoiled and socially maladjusted. Because they’re over-pampered at home, most of them don’t possess those basic skills such as sharpening pencils, wiping the classroom windows, sweeping the floor, cleaning the blackboard, opening umbrellas, or boiling water (for science experiments), and so on.

With each generation of only children, the number of cousins and other extended family members decrease, so that social interaction among peers also decreases. The students seem to communicate better with adults (teachers) rather than with children their age.

One day, after video shooting a Standard Four science-teaching session, one of the students came up to me, asking my opinion about his teacher’s performance. I was shocked and could barely reply: “Well, what do you think?” He shot back: “You should be able to give your own point of view. I want to know because you’re from somewhere else. I want to see if there’s any difference between your views and mine.” Surely, this shows that his communication abilities are way beyond that of a 10-year old child.

Chinese culture is ancient, one of the world’s oldest actually. These days, China is a vibrant modern society, with unique pop

culture, fashion, arts, tastes, and habits. Chinese people are proud of their heritage, and there is always an awareness of “Old China” within people’s habits and tastes. Chinese cities are being built at an astounding rate: every city in China is currently a dazzling scene of infrastructure change—new roads and flyovers, new skyscrapers, new stadiums, new hotels and resorts, and of course, ostentatious government buildings.

The Chinese are ultimately loyal to their parents, and will routinely save and send home large proportions of their pay. Here, you can also find dog meat restaurants everywhere. People flock to these restaurants and really enjoy eating it in winter. Modern city folks also eat pizza, burgers, spaghetti, sandwiches, and chocolate, with a real taste for international cuisine. The Chinese government is actually much less centralized than in most other countries, with an amazing amount of power in the hands of provincial or city-level governing bodies.

I realized from my research that being Asian means establishing a multi-national network among my Asian peers. This makes it a good thing to explore the rest of Asia in order to broaden our experience. Traveling also allows us certain opportunities to conduct cross-cultural research with other Asian institutions.

My work hopes to illuminate how teacher leadership creates a classroom culture in China. The data I’ve gathered can provide useful information that may enhance the usefulness of the leadership-training module for Chinese and Malaysian special education teachers. This is especially with regard to the best teacher leadership practices, beliefs, and values of classroom culture, as well as the problems and issues that school leaders and teachers face in both countries.

I hope that my research also provides a better understanding of leadership styles among special education teachers in other Asian countries. This stint allowed me to engage in individual and collaborative research to the advantage of both universities—that of my host and home institutions, not to mention my personal research profile. I hope that my findings will offer some updates on significant developments in my academic discipline, particularly on teacher leadership in Asian countries. Finally, I

*Continued on page 12*





# SAYS WHO?

"In Arkansas, I met a lot of new friends at the Spring International Language Center (SILC). We learned a great deal from each other's culture. For example, we all dressed differently and never cooked the same meals. So, we brought all our stuff to the international banquet and even exhibited some of our paintings. Each one had an interesting story to tell, from the past to the present, about their country's development, economy, politics, and changing environment. Our sharing included expectations and suggested directions for achieving national development goals. I also had the good fortune of sitting down with people who had learning disabilities. I learned much from them and from the way their caregivers are handling the situation.

Because of the language challenge, we both had fun and some really tough times. But it has been quite memorable for me. The staff really took care of us, with their great friendship. We came from 10 different countries but we just simply accepted the differences and created bonding opportunities by taking part gamely in the activities both inside and out of the classroom."



**RUNGWICHIT KHAM-NGAM**  
(Cohort 3), on his 9-week IFP stint in the U.S.A.



"There are always stretches to cross and rooms to explore when one goes for a new language. Of course, hip gadgets and the new technology could help. But the student will never make it big if she is not hungry to learn at all.

I will forever be a student in the life-long process of learning English. My principle is that there's no *superlative* form, just the *comparative*. As a student of a foreign language, I don't expect to be excellent in that language. But everyday, I make up my mind to be better and better, for I'm simply hungry to know more about it.

A Buddhist proverb says, 'When the student is ready, the master will appear.' Thank God, I wake up each morning seeing masters everywhere."

**PARADEE TUNGTANG** (Cohort 2), on teaching English and inspiring a positive learning outlook among her students



"In the northeast, many poor people have not gone to school at all. When they find out that their children are impaired or quite slow, they don't know how to handle the situation. Some parents refuse to care for their handicapped children, thinking that they're here to bring bad luck. Some leave them alone

because they think that it's simply the child's destiny; things can't be changed at all.

A pre-school inclusive program for children with special needs must take into account all these ideas. They reflect the cultural and socio-economic background of the children's families.

I believe that the pre-school inclusive program is an effective form of early intervention. It's a practical need of our Thai school system. If we can put it in place everywhere, those Thai children with special needs will have more opportunities to live, learn, and develop themselves, becoming our society's highly valuable human resources."

**KITTISAK KETUNUTI** (Cohort 3), on helping children with disabilities

"Does Thailand have any clear vision or mission for Education? The economic crisis and the current state of our politics—all these relate to Thai education. We have reformed the system so many times. But we can't succeed without good, capable, and effective educational leaders.

Working on my dissertation for almost two months, I have interviewed administrators of six universities in the northeast. They share one idea in common. They feel that, right now, Thailand needs a leader who is capable of good governance, morality, and justice.

This leader should have a clear grasp of the university's context, too, where there's always the need to reach certain compromises. So the leader must connect effectively with both local and global society. But moving from opinion to practice, we need cooperation and participation at every level in the educational ladder."

**HATAI NOISOMBUT**  
(Cohort 3), on educational reforms and the search for ideal education leaders



# TREES FOR THE WORLD



**Jaruwat Kiatiwongse**, who shuttles every so often between Bangkok and the northeast, is the IFP Program Officer for Thailand.

**A**lmost a decade ago, the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) was launched with hopes that the seeds that it would plant in 22 countries, through investments in higher education, will grow as big trees—with sturdy roots, a strong core and bark, and branches that reach out to create more shade for this world.

Now these trees are taller, stronger, and greener.

To date, IFP has granted some 3,300 fellowships around the world. One thousand five hundred fellows, who have obtained



their advanced degrees and now proudly wearing the badge *IFP Alumni*, have returned home to pursue community work and promote social change.

Higher education, believed to be one of the most powerful tools to promote gained experience and the analytical thought of social agents, is not the only mechanism that IFP extends to create this resourceful community. Other supports include regular meetings and local or regional capacity-building activities. For instance, IFP offers trainings and workshops like the *Global Leadership for Social Justice (GLSJF)* and the *University-Based Fellows Meeting (UFM)*.

After its successful implementation, the IFP global program has strategically shifted these capacity-building activities to be more regionally focused. This is to reinforce capabilities and tighten IFP networks personally and professionally. IFP hopes that this form of regionalization and partnership would be sought in the course of more in-depth discussions.

On 18-21 January 2009, Dr. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Director for Asia/Russia), together with 10 representatives from six International Partners, joined the *Mini-Regional Meeting* in Phuket, Thailand to discuss the implementation, challenges, and future plans for the final phase of the IFP program.

The ideas that came out of this meeting confirm the significance of expanding partnership with private and public agencies that promote social justice. These tie-ups hope to maximize the application of human resources not only within the IFP alumni network. Just the same, network forms will vary, based on the relevant conditions in each country. Fundamental considerations include geographical and professional diversity. The forum also discussed suitable communication platforms for IFP alumni networks.

---

**IFP alumni are posted in various fields and in different locations, truly fit to lead because of their academic qualifications and fieldwork experiences.**

---

Through the years, the remarkable aspects that make the IFP network powerful have depended not only on the learning, leadership, and commitment of fellows to their home community. More importantly, IFP alumni are also posted in various fields and in different locations, truly fit to lead because of their academic qualifications and fieldwork experiences.

In 2008, IFP Thailand paved the way for one blind educator to join the fellowship. Other fellows in this cohort include an alternative education developer, biology, chemistry, and language teachers, an environmentalist, news reporter, nurse, public health worker, and a pharmacist.

By 2014, the IFP program expects to greet more than 4,000 alumni who will be making a difference in their community. Do read some of our alumni success stories at [www.fordifp.org](http://www.fordifp.org). This website will also take you to individual IFP websites in 22 countries for relevant information and timely updates. \*

# PADDIES OF GREEN

Ey Pannee Samerpak

**A**fter 14 years in Yasothorn, the Earth Net Foundation (ENF) has grown bigger by setting up the Organic Agriculture Center (OAC). In January 2007, the center opened its doors at Ban Don Mayang, Amphoe Kam Kheuan Kaew. Its mind is on promoting organic farming and the organic way of life. It's also determined to take the lead in research, development, and dissemination of knowledge.

To do this, OAC has been offering trainings in the basics of organic agriculture. Its grand dream is to be the model for an environment-friendly lifestyle. Village life, it believes, must be sustainable for farmers and other eager partners in the region. So, OAC is working fast to set up a model community, with alternative strategies for self-sustainability.

Right now, OAC's big project is *Adaptation to Climate Change of Organic Jasmine Rice Farmers in Yasothorn Province, Northeast*

The women have also been wiser to plant greens along with rice, or as an alternative after the rice harvest. They know that this could ease the woes of farmers who failed to plant rice this year.

So, for the first time, awareness is quite high and people's capacities strong. And they're prepared to adapt their farming practice to climate change. They also found out that organic soil is moist, compared to paddies that were previously salted with chemicals.

And now, other villagers are paying attention, too. Suddenly, they're interested in addressing climate change head on. Project results also show that organic rice can stand the drought better than chemical rice. Not to mention that diversifying the food crop means sure money and, come what may, food in the simmering pot. \*

**For the first time in Yasothorn, awareness is quite high and people's capacities strong.**

*Thailand.* The project looks at how climate change is affecting farmers. To jumpstart, the center is promoting consultation with targeted beneficiaries by providing knowledge on the impact of climate change. It is getting villagers to take part in decision-making about possible mitigation strategies. No small wonder that OAC got an eager number of Yasothorn's men, women, and children to sign up for the project.

Current activities include designing on-farm water management systems, with a lot of thought on their own farms, energy saving, and household labor force. And, over and over, OAC has stressed that something must be done to make life more convenient for women and children, who happen to be key labor sources for jasmine rice farming and vegetable gardening.

From the shoptalk, villagers are beginning to make sense of how climate change works. For the first time, they're all eyes on the hazy future, which could be better or worse than what they saw recently. Last year, Yasothorn's farmers were stunned by a long dry spell in the middle of the rainy season, even as they swam their way through massive flooding. This plunged the crop yields. Farmers went broke, too, because of lower farming incomes, and food security was all shaken up. Such events have also hit the women quite hard, who must work more each time to save their starving brood.

Under this OAC project, 57 families of 509 certified organic farms have joined the full-scale adaptation process. Among the techniques that they are exploring are on-farm water management, diversification of food crops (fruit/vegetable), and animal husbandry.



**Pannee Samerpak,** proudly of IFP Cohort 1, is Director of Yasothorn's Organic Agriculture Center (OAC).





## HEARTLAND OF CHANGE

**Theerada Namhai** of IFP Cohort I, is Director of Maharashtra's first Farmer Community Institution.

**W**hatever moves in this world affects individuals, groups, and communities. Where different parts of the world are linked, so are different cultures diffused everywhere. Now and then, such diffusions could harm local wisdom. Without much thinking, people are sometimes swept along by life's big changes. As a result, they're drawn into a bleak sea of changes before it's too late to swim back to shore.

For 36 years, I also lived in the same mobilizing world, sharing the same lifestyle with everyone else. However, I was luckier after finding the chance to redefine my lifestyle. I won a scholarship for higher education. Although it was such a confusing time in my life, my affiliation with the Ford Foundation's IFP Program exposed me to learn more about the wider world. Absorbed in my studies, I could feel love, warmth, and sincerity from IFP fellows with whom I shared that stint. Unavoidably, I also experienced selfishness, shrewd talk, and competition during this time. Then it hit me: there's nothing absolutely good and nothing totally bad. What's more important is for us to balance those positive and negative energies. Next, I had to wrestle with a challenging question: *How can we survive in an unbalanced world?*

For me, the answer lies where people understand the "simplicity of life." My studies came to a close when the educational program ended. But something else was starting in my life: learning about the spiritual world, that heartland of the self hidden within. It felt like I was going on a life trip where knowledge and faith were emerging and tapping roots of wisdom within. To navigate the way, to bring my community and me to the destination, I felt that I should turn the concepts into practice.

I launched a Farmer Community Institution and opened a Farmer Community School. The school aims to change people's attitudes about their way of life. To do so, the school forms a developmental team, gathering local leaders and promoting our philosophy by studying "Farmer wisdoms that we have." Our learning process advocates self-learning and learning from the outside world. We later extend these processes to people from

---

**The moment I discovered the power hidden inside me, I came to see changing oneself as an important tool for changing all else.**

---

both within and outside our community. These days, we've reached a conclusion that life changes accordingly, along with the changing world.

Learning the meaning of "life" means making self-discoveries. Whatever faith takes root within us can either nurture or demean the "self". If we want to deepen our spirituality, we can either let

go of the self or get too attached to it. All this is possible if we are "conscious"—of that awareness that allows us to be enlightened. This bright moment gives us self-understanding, enough for us to realize intimate links among the things that surround us.

If we can understand others, then we're closer to understanding our confused world. When we practice detachment, it allows us to pay more attention to others. It gives us the chance to find out more about them, where they're coming from, and to embrace them on their own terms. Only with such understanding can we draw people to take part in the creative changes that we wish to make.

Because of this, I found a standpoint that's firmly based on our own local 'identity.' I have been more inspired to learn, to balance, even to develop my community.



From my own experiences, what matters most now is recognizing this faith: my belief that human beings can. Today I stand on the firm support that comes from my family, my friends, and the people in my community. I count on their help to create some creative changes for the community. What I'm trying to do today is to disseminate the things I've learned to people around me. It's my way of bringing the community to generate better, more positive movements.

But let me be quick to add: I'm not some fantastic hero with magic or supernatural powers. Whatever power I have comes from learning about the "self," the world, and others. The moment I discovered the power hidden inside me, I came to see changing oneself as an important tool for changing all else. That and the gentle acceptance, too, that whether we like it or not, change simply happens. \*

# THE ISAN WAY



**Sujin Sangwanmaneeet**, bold and passionate visual artist, belongs to Cohort 3 of IFP Fellows.

**F**rom September to December 2008, the Isan Artists Group brought its Contemporary Art Exhibition to four provinces, including Bangkok and Buriram. Our works showcase the “Isan Way” both individually and together. One of our surest aims is to promote art’s important role in demonstrating the life, folkways, and traditions of both Isan and the country at large.

This year’s exhibit unfolded in various media: print, painting, photography, mixed media, sculpture, poetry, music, and literature. This “Isan Way” includes drawings from nature reflecting artistic inspiration, as well as traditional and contemporary art styles.

The group first came together in 1983 and has gone a long way since. We have presented our works in various formats, including

for *local knowledge*—for enduring folkways that assure us, come what may, that the “Isan Way” will prevail.

Many of our exhibit pieces project the life of highland peoples. Our social surroundings play a big part in allowing us to mature. Our works reflect many qualities of the highland peoples, including their education, society, folk sciences, ways of seeing,

**For every artwork we shape, our hope is to inspire a social heritage that’s evocative of the highland region.**

their material culture, fashion, the way globalization and politics have caught up with their lifestyle, the environmental crisis, and so much more. For every artwork we shape, our hope is to inspire a social heritage that’s evocative of the highland region. In some of these pieces, we see alternative images that offer a harsh counterpoint to the consumerist passion that destroys the traditional Isan values.

Long ago, the Isan Artist Group declared its strong intention to stand up alongside of our homeland, by reflecting its images through the works of local and contemporary arts. Today, our homeland lives, immortal in our art. \*



exhibitions, meetings, musical galas, poetry readings, and other artistic events held in the central, as well as in the outlying regions of Thailand. Some of these art events have even crossed over into our neighboring countries. Our most recent gig included portraying legends that hold timely lessons for contemporary society. It has allowed us to celebrate Isan identity—a heritage that we hope will endure forever, even as we turn it into art.

Rapid changes in society have had a major impact on Isan communities. Because of this, the group’s chief priority has been to speak for the “Isan Way”. For us, the challenge is to watch closely and to portray finely, with much thought for our homeland. This 11th Exhibition of Contemporary Art was part of the Isan Biennale. This time, we gave it the title *Chiantong-O-Sarao-Aeng*. In the Thai-Khmer dialect, this stands



## Newsletter Staff

**Executive Director**  
Dr. Lourdes G. Salvador

**ASF Editor**  
Somkamol Yongkrittaya

**IFP Editor**  
Jaruwat Kiatiwongse

**Managing & Production Editor**  
Kunaporn Patthawaro

**Editor-At-Large**  
Danilo Francisco M. Reyes

## ASF Partner Institutions

**Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Republic of Maldives**

University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India (UPIASI)

India Habitat Centre,  
Core 5A, 1st Fl., Lodi Rd.  
New Delhi 110003, India  
Tel (91-11) 2460-4127  
Fax: (91-11) 2460-4126  
E-mail: upiasi@del2.vsnl.net.in

**Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand**

Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF)  
Under the Royal Patronage of H.R.H. Princess  
Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

29 Vanissa Bldg., 4th Fl., Chidlom,  
Ploenchit Rd., Pathumwan,  
Bangkok 10330, Thailand  
Tel (66) 2655-1615 to 7  
Fax: (66) 2655- 7977  
E-mail: info@asianscholarship.org

### Indonesia

Indonesian International  
Education Foundation (IIEF)

Menara Imperium, 28th Fl., Suite B  
Metropolitan Kuningan Superblok Kav. 1  
Jl. H. R. Rasuna Said, Kuningan  
Jakarta 12980, Indonesia  
Tel: (62-21) 831-7330  
Fax: (62-21) 831-7331  
E-mail: iief@indo.net.id

### People's Republic of China

Institute of International Education (IIE)

Huatong Bldg. A, Room 439  
Che Gong Zhuang Xi Rd., No.19A  
Beijing 100048, China  
Tel: (86-10) 6848-6213  
Fax: (86-10) 6848-6215  
E-mail: jiyn@iiebeijing.org

### Philippines

Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC)

Commonwealth Avenue, Diliman,  
Quezon City 1101, Philippines  
Tel: (63-2) 929-2671  
Fax: (63-2) 924-4178  
E-mail: projects@pssc.org.ph

### Vietnam

Center for Educational Exchange with  
Vietnam (CEEVN)

So 6, Ngo 52, Pho Giang Van Minh  
Quan Ba Dinh, Hanoi, Vietnam  
Tel: (84-4) 3723-6825  
Fax: (84-4) 3723-6827  
E-mail: ASF@ceevn.org

## Northeastern Exposure

(Continued from page 1)

PAR also gives communities the opportunity to realize their rich potentials for self-sufficiency. It helps local people to learn about themselves, their communities, and the greater world. The ultimate target is to assist them in realizing their identities, roots, wisdom, and local resources. The approach prepares them to look deeply at their material and environmental circumstances. Eventually, PAR helps them to recognize their problems and needs and to identify existing capitals.

This way, communities are able to formulate local solutions without leaning too much on external assistance. Without meaning to turn down external assistance, these communities are keen about being proactive in securing benefits for the whole community.

Besides learning from others, the IFP alumni also played out activities that would help them to learn from each other. In this meeting, the fellows had their eyes on putting confidence in human potentials. "To do this, each of us had to

**SAMPAO NGAMCHOIE** (Cohort 2), who has returned to community development work in Nakhon Ratchasima, holds the Master of Science degree in Rural and Regional Development Planning from the Asian Institute of Technology.



empty our own glass," one fellow remarked.

The assembly allowed participants to gain fresh thoughts, new knowledge, and supple skills for project planning. Whenever and wherever they meet next, these enthusiastic northerners are sure to pick up new and practical techniques for knowledge-based development. \*

## Teacher Tang Goes to China

(Continued from page 6)

think assisting teachers and teacher trainees from both Malaysia and China will benefit from my present research.

The output that I'm working on is a leadership-training module in creating the ideal classroom culture for special education. It comes two ways: as a monograph and as interactive computer software. This training module can assist elementary teachers to build their leadership styles while managing classroom culture. Lecturers can also use it to prepare teacher trainees in colleges and universities. On the other hand, the interactive computer software is for assisting teachers from both countries to study at home.

To live up to challenging expectations, ASF has given me the opportunity to discover the world outside of Malaysia, as well as many new skills. Away from my country, I realized how important it is to understand other languages and cultures so that I can fully accommodate new people in my life. Language is one such important hurdle to cross. For instance, it



helps that we get important addresses written in Chinese so that we don't have any problems in finding our way.

Do you know that previous to my stint, my host institution has not accepted any visiting scholars at all? They were entirely clueless as to what host institutions can do. The early stage seemed a bit rough for me, trying to make them understand that I'm here to share knowledge and to do some cultural exchange.

Today, as an ASIA Fellow, I know that I have this great responsibility to share the knowledge and experiences with others. I was very fortunate to enjoy ample resources, constant field support, and encouragement abroad. ASF gave me that special, first-hand chance to study and understand the world of Asian culture. And what a singular honor it is, indeed. \*