



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

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More Than Meets the Eye

By Sampao Ngamchoie

The Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Thailand Alumni Network (IFP- THAN) organized its first academic seminar on “Northeastern Local Community in the Current Changing World Society” last August 15, 2009. IFP’s willing institutional partner for the occasion was the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University.

ASF provided frontline support in organizing this seminar. Its aim was to understand the evolution of Isan in the light of the world’s fast-changing situation. It was also a timely opportunity for forging collaboration in sustainable development based on Northeastern identity. Approximately 150 participants took part in the event, including local community leaders, NGO networks, mass media, government officers, students, and academics. Activities included an exhibition prepared by IFP-THAN members and individual works of IFP fellows, promotion of books and local community products, and academic discussion of thought-provoking issues.

Among the invited speakers was Dr. Chayan Wattanaputi who traced the evolution of the Northeast and its local culture, in relation to the changing world society. The speaker offered contrasting perspectives, as seen through the eyes of both Thai and foreign researchers. He described the region as acquiring a multi-cultural lifestyle after hosting an American military base and due to its desire for economic profit, through the east-west corridor trade agreement in the Greater Mekhong Sub-region (GMS).

Dr. Chayan also noted that infrastructural development in the Northeast happened in several ways, including energy development through the construction of dams. Among the obvious consequences are economic competition and more consumption of natural resources. Therefore, the Northeast became more strongly linked with the region and the world,

(Continued on page 12)

I'm Fulfilling Promises 3

SAYS WHO?

I'm Fulfilling Promises 4

Weaving the Web of Life

Jaruwat Kiatiwongse

I'm Fulfilling Promises learning | leadership | commitment 5

THE WISE MAN'S MAP

Hatai Noisombut

Asian Sojourns & Flavors From the Journals of ASF Cohorts 6

Many Miles from Yesterday

Pratyush Om Shankar

Asian Sojourns & Flavors From the Journals of ASF Cohorts 7

Touring in Perfect Harmony

Liu Yuening

Asian Sojourns & Flavors The 9th ASIA Fellows Conference 8

Scholars and Royals

Novita Dewi

Asian Sojourns & Flavors From the Journals of ASF Cohorts 10

A Love to Last A Lifetime

Chona R. Echavez



Message

From the Senior Program Officer

Sawasdee, everyone!

Our latest edition has the 9th ASIA Fellows Conference for a colorful centerpiece. When our fellows revisited Bangkok last July, they did more than soak in the usual highbrow talk. This time, they were determined to push for common alumni initiatives.

Picking up organizational tips from our energetic fellows from India, we met and launched an alumni association that reflects regional interests. Without much goading, it was easy to single out work partners from South, East, and Southeast Asia, and to line up forthcoming projects on the group's impressive publication portfolios.

On another front, we're proud to share stories about the unwavering commitments of the International Fellowships Program in Thailand. For the IFP, the sudden global concern for environmental woes rings the clear signal - to see how the Northeast copes and moves with the rest of the world. This time around, hopes are on local knowledge, as a way of returning to the green world.

As our fellows continue to mark their significant passages across Asia, we wish to share with you profound stories of cultural discoveries. May these be our windows into the works and days, the life and dreams of our Asia.

Somkamol Yongkrittaya

Newsletter Staff

Executive Director
Dr. Lourdes G. Salvador

ASF Editor
Somkamol Yongkrittaya

Managing & Production Editor
Kunaporn Patthawaro

IFP Editor
Jaruwat Kiatiwongse

Editor-At-Large
Danilo Francisco M. Reyes



"These days, we all need information and communication technology (ICT) to do just anything, such as learning, living, and working. You see, blind people also yearn to do the same things like everyone else. For this reason, we also want to improve ourselves and be of help to our communities.

Once I'm done studying, I would like to run an ICT training center for the visually impaired. This way, people who have been

blinded by accident will have more chances of being useful. I think that ICT could help them much in relation to their lifestyle, studies, and work, especially those afflicted with blindness in my home, the Northeast. They neither have the means nor the expertise to learn ICT. But I would like to make it easy for them by adapting ICT knowledge to live in a society without barriers. I hope that my dream really comes true, where community and technology also have a place for the visually impaired."

PEERA PILARIT (Cohort 2008), visually-impaired IFP Fellow pursuing his Masters in Curriculum and Instruction at Khon Kaen University, speaking about equal opportunities for the blind.



"I was born in the Phuthai Renunakhon tribal community. All my life, I have felt deeply about Phuthai culture. I believe that its traditions are in my blood and soul.

Together with my father, I had been fortunate to put up the Ban Phuthai Cultural Center. The center serves as source of operations for many activities, presentations, and for essential information about Phuthai culture and other tribal groups on the Mekong River basin.

As soon as I graduate from Cultural Studies, I would like to launch many projects that could promote both my community and the Cultural Center. I am currently developing integrative and instructional media for knowledge, art, culture, and museum development. Hopefully, these will be a practical source of information on Phuthai tribes and cultures.

I am doing this to learn, preserve, and make sure that the younger generations will have something to inherit."

SIRIYAPORN SALEEPUN (Cohort 2006), enrolled for the Masters in Cultural Studies at Mahidol University, on fulfilling her dreams about heritage conservation

I'm Fulfilling Promises - Says Who? 3

SAYS WHO?

"Here in Thailand, we don't have a well-developed curriculum for special education. When I'm done studying, I would like to work on curriculum construction. I'd like to design a curriculum that is appropriate especially for blind students.

Nowadays, the standard curriculum used by sighted people doesn't seem to suit blind students. In order to have a curriculum fit for blind students, we need people who know and understand their activities. Additionally, we need a curriculum-construction specialist who feels strongly about special education in Thailand. I would like to be that person helping blind people to learn whatever they love, without creating a divide between blind and sighted people."

NUENGRUETHAI PHUANGPHET (Cohort 2007), visually-impaired IFP Fellow enrolled in Khon Kaen University for the Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, on reaching out through curriculum development.



"I'm doing my master's degree in Communication at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. Once I'm done with it, I will go back to Thailand and continue to work as a journalist.

For some reason, a lot of Ford Foundation scholars know me. I have been a journalist for the Nation Multimedia Group Company before enrolling for graduate work in Manila.

For my project, I have outlined a plan to narrow the gap between community and media, as the media plays a key role in resolving their problems by encouraging their participation and giving them voices on various issues and providing them with more reliable information.

I will establish a network connecting news media organizations and community organizations to enhance the cooperation between the two and help strengthen community organizations.



I believe that to ensure the sustainable development of communities, the media must set its own vision in supporting community development on the basis of win-win cooperation."

DUSADEE NGAMLUA (Cohort 2008), on study leave at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, on his commitments as a journalist



WEAVING THE WEB OF LIFE

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

Embarking on the IFP journey means bringing together emerging leaders who are committed to work for social justice. Its surest aim is to create dialogues and partnership in launching a movement for social change. Along the way, these fellows have made many friends and sealed life-long relationships, through the Pre-Academic Training program, their actual graduate stint, and the various reinforcements made through their respective alumni network.

In Thailand, this group answers to a new name: IFP Thailand Alumni Network (IFP-THAN).

A busy start

In May 2009, approximately 20 alumni of IFP-THAN had a get-together at the Provincial Public Health Office in Nakhon



For IFP, the goal is to create dialogues and partnership in launching a movement for social change.

Ratchasima Province. This first annual meeting was the sixth for IFP-THAN, after the very first one held in 2007.

Burning issues included organizational structure and collaborative works because this network is tremendously dynamic and diverse. But those who could not have the floor need not fret, as there will be more chances for shoptalk and action. IFP-THAN members will meet again in the middle of November 2009 in Ubon Ratchathani.

In June 2009, Dr. Mary S. Zurbuchen, Ms. Minh Kauffman, Dr. Lourdes G. Salvador, and Jaruwat Kiatiwongse attended a meeting at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand to explore further possible collaboration. The IFP team also met with active IFP fellows there. At present, there are IFP fellows at AIT from China, Nigeria, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Ticket to ride

In early August, more than 10 Thai IFP alumni and fellows from Cohort 2003 to 2008 found their way to Khon Kaen, to take part in the Orientation Program for the IFP Fellows-elect of Cohort 2009.

The orientation prepares new Fellows-elect to put on the "student hat" once again after having worked as career professionals for some time. It surely pays to extend some bonding time to both IFP veterans and newcomers for long-term networking. There are different components to the orientation activities, including ice-breakers, individual SWOT analysis, shared experiences of student life in various graduate study programs, learning basic computer skills, and basic essay writing.

The IFP program wants to train these new fellows to be ready for the tough challenges in their academic program. They will meet new friends from other countries who can inspire them to be open-minded and teach them to understand cross-cultural issues. The experiences that more than 3,800 fellows in 22 countries have received have trained them to tackle social issues head on as committed citizens of the local and global village.

Serving the community

In mid-November, IFP-THAN will hold its seventh alumni meeting. This activity will coincide with the International Seminar on "Cultural Diversity of the Mekong River: Sharing Experiences from Japan and the Mekong Countries", hosted by the Mekhong Sub-region Social Research Center (MSSRC), Ubon Ratchathani University. Among the crucial roles that the IFP-THAN alumni will play in this seminar include interpretation and liaising for Thai participants from local community who are not proficient in English.

Last chance for IFP fellowships

In 2010, IFP Thailand will award IFP fellowships for the last time. Sixteen fellowships for a master's degree program study will be granted to applicants who are currently working in Northeast Thailand. The application deadline is March 15, 2010. Interested candidates may download the application form at www.asianscholarship.org

Who are IFP fellows from Thailand?

Alternative education teacher, architect, artist, child counselor, community development workers, elementary and high school teachers, environmentalist, journalist, librarian, local administrative officer, medical anthropologist, nurse, pharmacist, police officer, probation officer, psychologist, public health officer, the blind, and university professors. *



THE WISE MAN'S MAP

Hatai Noisombut belongs to Cohort 2005 of Thai IFP Fellows.



Aptitude Test) and now, PAT (Professional and Academic Aptitude Test). Some people disagree with changing the admission system while others support it because they see it as an expression of progress and improvement among Thai students and our educational system.

In the last few months, I have been working with leaders in six universities in Northeast Thailand, applying in-depth interview and focus group discussion to teachers, students and community leaders. After spending time with these leaders, I have found some interesting points of view about contemporary challenges for universities and communities.

In the last decade, the Thai government has put more emphasis on educational reform, to place Thai citizens well in the world of learning.

Education is important to a country's economic growth, giving students fundamentals for their future careers. In Thailand, we boast of a strong identity in terms of language, culture, and history. Not to mention that no another country has succeeded in colonizing us. Because of this, Thai citizens have been proud from generation to generation. Moreover, our high respect for the Thai King is the singlemost important reason to make our country secure in many aspects, including education.

Thai Education revolves primarily around two institutions. The first is religion, with Buddhist monks giving basic education to boys in classes set within monastery compounds. The second pertains to how royal children and those of noble descent were educated so they could serve in court and assist in governing the provinces. Starting with the 5th reign, many changes have taken place because of the visionary reforms of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V).

The 1871 decree of King Chulalongkorn states: "Once they have acquired a literate education, goodness, beauty and prosperity will be with them to the end of their days." As a result, the Thai education system was modernized and made more accessible to the general public. This is the first phase of Thai educational reform.

The reform has never ended, though. In the last decade, the Thai government has put more emphasis on education by reforming the curriculum to serve Thai citizens and to place them in the academic world.

As a former student, my experience of the changing Thai curriculum came mostly through new textbooks. Now, I have become a Thai teacher myself. Yet I see educational reform mainly through the changing systems of admission - from entrance examination to O-Net, A-Net, up to the most recent change in the admission system, previously called GAT (General

The more university-based the communities are, the more benefits the people stand to earn in those communities. However, leaders of universities and communities have to be effective, armed with a clear vision and the will to go beyond academics - to relevant practice in communities.

On the whole, how has leadership in higher-education institutions in marginalized contexts been useful to community and society? In Isan, educational leaders assist the communities by exercising leadership properly, with great regard for the context, resources, and tendencies of the economic world.

Leaders in higher-education institutions in marginalized contexts enhance the quality of education by producing quality students. They seriously want to enhance student competencies and essential skills for profession. All the leaders want to produce high-quality graduates - ready to work, with high capabilities in English, IT, and computer skills, with good social manners and a public mind. Moreover, most leaders have set basic and essential courses and have paved the way for tutorials in basic subjects such as Statistics or English, in order to produce standard graduates.

Some leaders focus on human-resource management by encouraging and supporting faculty members and staff to pursue higher degree programs and to conduct research. In many ways, research leads to academic excellence and to eventual academic progression. In the meantime, leaders have to establish partnership or networking with both the private and public sectors. They must also have the vision to establish a research center and connect effectively with nearby communities and neighboring countries, as well.

(Continued on page 12)

80%

study in international programs

60%

study in universities outside Thailand



Many Miles from Yesterday



Pratyush Om Shankar, of Ahmedabad, India stayed with his family shortly in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley, on the prospect of discovering the unique characteristics of Himalayan cities.

My ASIA Fellows grant brought me to Kathmandu, Nepal for a period of 9 months. I was there during historic times, as the people struggled to create a new country after years of conflict and war.

From the onset, my strategy was geared towards getting 'local' and slowly unraveling the layers of Nepalese society. On purpose, I avoided getting loads of data or hopping around the country like some tourist dying to take pictures. I got to know and understand the country a lot more by almost being a resident of Kathmandu valley. Coping with the daily eighteen-hour power cut certainly helped me to settle down really quick.

Though I was researching the issue of traditional cities and public places, my informal and chance encounters with people helped me to understand the subject's deeper meanings. My daughter, who is now five, attended a play school in our neighborhood. I was amongst the most vocal during Parents-Teachers meeting. In the process, I also got to understand people (especially paranoid parents of young children) much better!

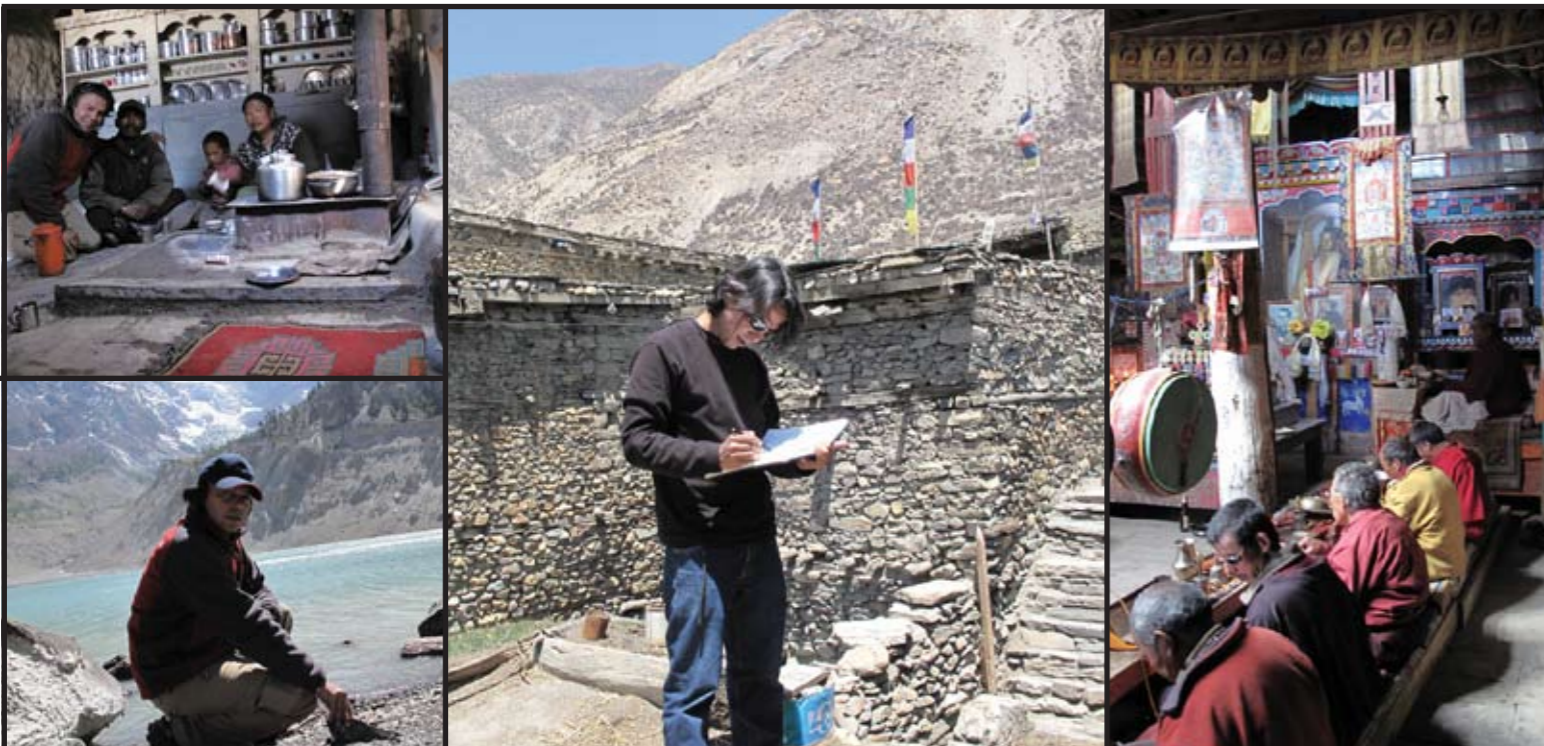
After 5 months, I had made friends with local mountain-biking enthusiasts and musicians and started exploring the city's recreational life. Biking also helped me reach and observe many

smaller settlements of historic significance around the valley's rim. The value of chance encounters should never be underestimated.

I also did field work in the remote areas of Manang and Mustang during my stay in Nepal. These are areas rich in culture and arts, much steeped in history. My journeys brought me face to face with issues of heritage, tradition, and change. It also led to a realization about how important it is for us to express our opinion on the matter through research, writing, and advocacy.

Mere romanticizing the culture is not going to help. During one such fieldwork, I had taken my family along but on our way back all flights were cancelled. There were no vehicles to be found due to landslides. We walked through landslides and rain for three days with our two kids and luggage to reach the nearest road. I doubt if I can ever forget that journey or for that matter my nine months and fifteen days in Nepal. *

While I was looking at traditional cities, it was really my chance encounters with people that helped me to understand the subject's deeper meanings.



Touring in Perfect Harmony



I belong to the 10th cohort of ASIA Fellows. For about 7 months, I conducted my research work on India's musical culture at the Department of Music in Delhi University. I have been curiously looking at "Indian Music and Culture - Santoor and the main styles of India's Santoorists".

In China, santoor is what we call yangqin, which also happens to have different names and characteristics in different nations and regions. In the English-speaking world, the instrument is called a Hammered Dulcimer, played as a percussion instrument. In German, it is called Hackbrett and Tympanon in French. While in Italy and in Spain, it is played in pizzicato style and is known among musicians as the Salterio. In Central Europe, it is called Cimbalom or Cimbál. In Asia, it also has many names - santoor in India and Iran and qanun in Turkey.

Along the way, I found out that I've become a record-holder of sort. As fate would have it, I am the first ASIA Fellow in music performance. I carried out my work mainly in three areas - visiting santoorists in India and studying Indian santoor; learning Yoga; and getting acquainted with certain dance forms of Indian culture.

As the first Chinese musician in Delhi University, I gamely played the part of cultural ambassador, conducting a series of cultural exchange activities. I travelled many miles visiting Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kolkata, and Mumbai. For the record, I even held 8 concerts with the local musicians, which brought broad and good impact on the local community.

During my stay in India, I strongly felt the charm of Indian music and art. The country clearly manifests the idiom "A global nation". At the same time, my stint also allowed me to reflect deeply on the status of musical development in India. My

Along the way, I found out that I've become a record-holder of sort. As fate would have it, I am the first ASF Fellow in music performance.

strongest feeling is that their form of succession is sometimes a hindrance to the process of globalization.

Although I have already completed my research work in India, I still hope that with this new platform, I will soon be able to carry out cross-disciplinary research with collaborative parties. I think that, both ways, this will help in broadening our separate fields of study and vision and enhance friendship and mutual understanding. Therefore, every ASF fellows can play their respective role, drawing diverse advantages from this platform. *

Liu Yuening, who enjoyed a stint of musical discoveries in India, is professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China.





Scholar and Royals The 9th ASIA Fellows Conference

“In Bugis culture, the best way to treat guests is to make them feel at home as if they were the hosts,” says Andi Faisal Bakti, the delegate from Indonesia in his welcome remarks during the 9th ASIA Fellows Conference last July 17-18, 2009. Indeed, the 56 participants of the two-day conference were themselves honorable hosts as they gathered at Bangkok’s Montien Riverside Hotel on the banks of the famous Chao Phraya or “River of Kings”.

This year’s conference revolved around the theme “Forging Our Asian Commitment: Regional Perspectives on and Responses to the Global Crisis.” Its main feature is a fascinating collection of papers harvested from fieldwork done by almost all of Cohort 9 ASIA Fellows, including two from Cohort 8. The conference became an exciting forum to hear topics as varied as cultural heritage preservation, Asian literature for change, narratives of migration and conflict, regional eco-politics, and the more specific studies on China. Moreover, Asian scholars also enjoyed the sweet opportunity to meet new friends and reunite with old ones in a stately, scholastic atmosphere.

Giving the keynote address was Dr. Prasenjit Duara, distinguished historian currently attached to the National University of Singapore as its Research Director of Humanities and Social Sciences. His keynote highlighted the idea of soft borders and history’s negotiable and circulatory nature. Amid the global crisis, his ideas were crucial in tying up issues that many ASIA scholars have long been grappling with, in their effort to guide Asia towards a brighter and more empowering future.

“ASF Through the Years,” a nostalgic screen presentation followed Dr. Duara’s keynote and a quick introduction of the Association of ASIA Scholars (AAS) by the Secretary General, Dr. Reena Marwah (Cohort 4). AAS President, Dr. Swaran Singh (Cohort 2) gave a speech, paving the way for launching the ASF Alumni Association Across Asia.

The general assembly that followed also managed to discuss plans for future projects, with the keen view to collect and publish papers by ASIA scholars. After lunch, four parallel sessions opened concurrently. But the venues proved seemingly small, given the enthusiasm shown by the participants as they flocked to presentations of their own choice.

On the evening of day one, ASF treated everyone to a delectable dinner before the much-awaited cultural presentation. Dubbing the night “Asian Swine Flu Cultural Night”, Mr. Danilo Francisco Reyes (Cohort 8) enticed everyone to have some fun as he hosted the fellowship program. Dr. Mohammad Zulkifli, alumni fellow from Malaysia, performed two classical dance pieces, half-teasing the crowd by taking off part of his colorful costume on stage. This is how he probably convinced the jury to give him the award for best-dressed scholar!

To seal bonds of friendship, the IFP Fellows glided all over the ballroom wrapped in their colorful national costumes. The Thai IFP Fellows gave out bamboo straws for everyone to enjoy a sip of their native *arak*. Yet another gig was “My Family Got Talent,” where delegates proudly presented various talents of their family members but not their own! But the brightest star that shone that night was Helen Xu Xiangyang’s trumpet-player son who huffed out a fanfare, as Dr. Lourdes Salvador marched up the stage, to deliver her moving speech at the conclusion of the evening program.

The next day, two more parallel sessions were held, followed by the presentation of discussion papers by eminent ASF alumni scholars. Unlike the famous four-female-discussants of the previous year’s conference, only one of the goddesses descended this time, Dr. Reena Marwah, joined by three other male panelists: Drs. Allan B. I. Bernardo, Swaran Singh, and Zhang Guihong (Cohort 5) who, likewise, gave erudite comments on all 20 completed research reports. Dr. Judy C. Ick of Cohort 7 served as moderator for this stimulating discussion.

The day concluded with closing remarks from India’s T. G. Suresh, representing all of ASIA Fellows Cohort 9, and one last chance to say goodbye to each other over a sumptuous lunch at the hotel restaurant. To complete the details of this year’s conference, we heap well-deserved credits to the ASF staff, for their hard work and perseverance in preparing the conference and getting all participants in the mood for the event – to feel like royal guests and hosts alike. *



Novita Dewi, who studied in Singapore and researched in Sri Lanka, teaches at Yogyakarta’s Sanata Dharma University, within touring distance from Indonesia’s majestic Prambanan & Borobudur temple sites.





A Love to Last A Lifetime

PHILIPPINES

CAMBODIA

Chona R. Echavez, explored peace and peace-building ideas with the Cambodian youth. She is a researcher from the southern city of Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines.

“Nine months and a lifetime” are the words that I will describe of my stay in Cambodia. I have learned lessons and gained friends that will last a lifetime. The stars must have aligned or I must have done something right in my past life, or I have a great God that brought me to this country and specifically to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS).

CPCS provided me with an enabling environment to learn more about the country and its people. It also brought the learning a notch higher to the level of reflection and dialogue in the arena of peace, peace building, and reconciliation. I hasten to say that the organization an ASIA fellow finds is an important factor in making the entire course of her stay meaningful.

For a number of months before my arrival in Phnom Penh, I have been trying to contact organizations to facilitate my research. Then, lo and behold, the contacts were just there at my fingertips. I was relieved to find out that they were only a call away.

CPCS has its network of individuals and organizations working in the area of peace and reconciliation. Emma Leslie, the CPCS Director linked me to people. Our first meeting was the briefing and overview of my research and that of CPCS and then came the listing of individuals and organizations. As an affiliate, I got my own desk and enjoyed the same privileges as that of the CPCS staff. I had office supplies and an SIM card to connect me within and outside Cambodia. Furthermore, CPCS offered a rich cache of materials in its library as well as a good way to start the interviews with the people connected to the place.

While in Cambodia, I enjoyed the best of both worlds - having my grounding with academic research (CPCS offers a Master's Programme in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies and Peace Research Methodology Course) and, at the same time, the wealth of experience that exists on the ground because I was with practitioners. From time to time, I could bounce my ideas and reflections with them.

While gathering data and in between my focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs), I had the chance to attend skill-building activities and workshops, namely Storytelling as a Technique in Peace Research, and Healing Anxiety through Meditation (facilitated by John McDonnell, the author himself of Leadership Retreat, Leading from Within: A retreat for practitioners facilitating development). I also went to



The youth can be actively engaged in decision-making. They must participate in processes that have a powerful impact in their lives.

the 4th Peace Conference of Angkor 2009, attended by more than 200 participants, primarily youth who are working in the field of peace and reconciliation, together with their elders (teachers, district, commune and village leaders, villagers, achars, and monks) from the various provinces of Cambodia.

I am humbled and I bow with deep respect for the people who opened themselves and that of their organizations to me so that I could gather my data. I enjoyed such warm welcome to peoples' hearth and homes when I visited the villages. They accepted me as I am, with no questions asked. I often make it a point to introduce myself and my project, but there were times when I got carried away. In the end, after sharing their stories, people would ask me shyly, “What is this for?”



I get flabbergasted for not having given my repertoire and I respond immediately with “Somto nah! (I'm very sorry!) And I go back to explain what my research is all about.

As to my research, children and young people are not usually perceived as key actors in the arena of decision-making; they are much less considered as peace builders. However, the young usually determines the success or failure of any development, specifically peace building initiatives in conflict and post-conflict areas. Cambodia has a young population. Of the 13.8 million people in the Kingdom, 38.8% are below age 15, and 61% below age 25 (Provisional Population Totals 2008).

Understanding young peoples' views, attitudes and conception of peace and unpeace, and the amount of time that they invest on initiatives that contribute to peace building give us a view on how they use various avenues for engagement in development processes.

My study answers the following questions: How do the youth in Cambodia (aged 14 to 27) conceptualize peace and unpeace? Do they live in peaceful communities? What is their vision of a peaceful country? Do they think that the youth have a role in peace building? So far, what are the peace building activities that they have engaged in? What are their dreams and aspirations? Although the Cambodian youth of today have not witnessed the atrocities and civil wars that their elders experienced, it is interesting to note how the “conspiracy of silence” during and after the KR Regime influenced the dreams and aspirations of the youth as well as their concept of peace.

The youth have varied ideas and concepts of peace. They range from fulfillment of basic needs (access to good roads for them to be able to go to school and availability of jobs to have food on their table) to good governance and enjoying basic freedom (such as being able to express themselves without fear of being sanctioned). For others, it is the absence of war and settling border disputes with neighboring countries while others emphasize “inner peace.” It is interesting how the answers vary as one takes a closer look at their economic status and involvement in youth and peace organizations.

The young dream big and aspire for more; however, answers also vary as they are tempered by present realities as well as their exposure to grounded programs and environment that nurture such dreams and aspirations.

The youth can be actively engaged in decision-making. They are the backbone of society's human resource. Whether in the family, school, or community, they can participate in the processes that have powerful impact in their lives. By doing so, they earn respect, exhibit leadership skills, and shed branding stereotypes that they cannot contribute to peace building and development and are mere troublemakers.

When exploring mechanisms to engage and educate the youth effectively in peace building activities, it helps to develop grounded, relevant, and meaningful cross sector policies. We can use them as guiding principles for programs and projects that will be implemented by institutions and organizations, or by the

youth themselves - for the bigger community and society. This way, the youth could serve as actors of development and not mere targets of programs and projects as they unravel what happened in the past, to understand the present and chart a future with their elders.

As I reflect each day on my stay in this country, this comes to my mind. In this land of gentle people, Cambodia does not have a gentle past. For the past 50 years, its people have experienced violence. Up to this day, the process of healing continues. I was struck with their need to tell stories and to rely on the power of storytelling.

I thought that there is so much written and said about the Khmer peoples' past experience, only to find out that the venue to talk in a climate of trust and confidence is still much needed. I read that so much tears have been shed, that they are bereft of tears, or that they have hardened their hearts from crying. But in the village dialogues, co-participants found and re-discovered that they can cry to empathize with what a neighbor, a friend, or a co-villager experienced. In the process, this has helped them to reflect upon the experience of their elders. In turn, the avenue for healing and reconciliation is opened.

I would like to re-echo Fr. Tony de Castro's quote on Richard Kearney's point regarding the significance of narratives as Kearney examined Paul Ricoer's philosophy: “...we tell stories to realize our debt to the historical past, to respect the rival claims of memory and forgetfulness, to cultivate a notion of self-identity, and to persuade and evaluate action.” Fr. de Castro adapted story telling to recount Mindanao as a Jesuit Frontier. True indeed, each one of us is a story and a storyteller and for healing and reconciliation and bridging gaps between generations, storytelling is a powerful tool.

Away from my country, I have realized that I have a home away from home. There are differences but there are so many similarities. A significant Khmer celebration, the Pchum Ben is similar to the Philippines' All Souls' Day celebration. In as much as I was welcomed in the Cambodian homes, the monks welcomed me in their Wat. I have learned to drive a vehicle and become more disciplined in my yoga sessions. I am always mistaken to be a Cambodian national and people speak to me in Khmer. As the preface of Becker's (1998: xvi) book noted:

For despite their rulers and despite the travesties they have suffered from foreign nations, the Cambodians remain an unforgettable people, endowed with a culture that at its best is symbolized by the awesome yet sensitive beauty of the famous Angkor temples.

As Cambodians have survived and continue to smile despite what happened ... as young and old try to understand the past, confront present issues to positively shape the future, it is both a pleasure and a privilege to be mistaken as a Khmer or welcomed as a Filipino and a fellow Asian. Indeed, my stay in Cambodia is but nine months and a lifetime. *



More Than Meets the Eye

(Continued from page 1)

through such countries as Australia, Japan, Korea, America, and the United States - all of these countries playing a pivotal role in transforming the region's economic face.

But these encounters also spurred on significant gains and losses that the region must reckon with. One clear issue is access to resources because whenever new things come in, no obvious community benefits are visible. More so, this entire venture encouraged capitalism. One consequence is the quick draining away of community resources, for use in industrialization, which also created social inequality.

For his part, Ubol Uwaha, an agricultural activist, talked about "The Northeast and Food Sovereignty". He explored a possible food - shortage scenario, testing it against

food sustainability in the Northeast, even as Thailand continues to be one of the top ten countries exporting rice to the world. He also noted how, lately, Thailand has been promoting the substitution of traditional farm products with jute, sugarcane, and cassava, causing the invasion of food plant areas. The construction of water - saving dams has also triggered violence among local communities. This disregard for local culture destroyed the foundation of community food resources. Moreover, the excessive use of chemicals pollutes community rivers, killing aquatic life.

In "Global Warming and Sustainable Resource Management", Pannee Samerpak (IFP Cohort 2003) posed the question "How do farmers prepare for global warming, making it possible for their family, community, and themselves to survive?" More and more, climate change has caused drastic effects on farmer food production. The present

situation has already seen the temperature rising at the rate of 1 degree Celsius every year.

For example, rice production in Yasothorn province decreased by 40% because it did not rain on time and certainly much less than it did in the past 10 years. Farmers are bound to directly experience the effect because of insufficient information. Therefore, with global climate changes gradually taking place, a food crisis seems to be looming. In the next 11 years (2020, that is), the production of Thai rice could decrease, triggering a food crisis.

Chatchawan Tongdeelert presented the last topic, "Alternative Study for Northeastern Freedom." The talk surveyed educational reforms from the past to the present. For him, the important question is "How can we design education to be part of human development, with an eye for both the past and the present?" The session considered tough questions such as "Does education relate to real life? Does education affect social capital?" Our parents had farms but the younger generations had other ideas aside from planting rice. And so, they sold the land that no one wanted to inherit. Moreover, these farmers' children have also moved away from the village, eventually forgetting their local culture.

The seminar provided public space for promoting further dialogue and expanding networks for local communities, academicians, NGOs, government sectors, and the IFP-THAN. It also served as a stepping-stone for members of IFP-THAN to exercise their leadership and commitment to the region by using what they have learned in their respective graduate degree programs. *



SAMPAO NGAMCHOIE (Cohort 2004), 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.

The Wise Man's Map

(Continued from page 5)

As a result, educational leaders face various challenges. One such challenge is aspiring to be an independent university by separating from the hub or combining with other institutions like Rajamangala University of Technology and Rajabhat University. Another challenge is for leaders to transform the university by operating new study programs. However, part of the risk is that the government will not support these new programs.

Still another kind of challenge is where leaders find the need to build a new identity for one university with totally different backgrounds for each campus, as

in the case of Nakhon Phanom University. Besides, leaders of local universities must face up to the important challenge of solving poverty in the community, as well.

Therefore, leaders in higher-education institutions have to adopt a leadership style for self-regulation and expand institutional autonomy. In the future, this will be a big help for sustaining efficiency, even in the face of scarce resources. The value that any university decides to lay down to the public is important, as it strives to prove that, indeed, the university understands and serves society's most pressing needs. *

