On a warm, humid January day in Rangoon, Burma, Americans Clark and Arlene Neher walked down a barricaded street, past armed guards at a military check point, and into a fading, tile-roofed house where Burma's greatest hope for democracy resides under unofficial house arrest. She is Aung San Suu Kyi, political symbol and spiritual leader to 45 million people in one of the poorest and most isolated countries in the world.

It had not been easy to find this place. A byzantine path of secret messages, phone calls, and dead ends finally led to a note with a scribbled address. A nervous taxi driver stopped a mile short of the house, telling the Nehers that he would lose his job if he drove any closer. Neher, Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University, wondered if his decade of research on Suu Kyi's life would prepare him for meeting her in person. "Nothing could have prepared me," Neher later said. "The experience was transforming."

Like other Asian women who have risen to power — Corazon Aquino, Benazir Bhutto, Indira Gandhi — Suu Kyi initially gained power from her association with a man (in this case, her assassinated father, the war hero and statesman General Aung San). But Suu Kyi's influence now surpasses that of her father. Her quiet, dignified presence is mesmerizing, and followers talk about her in reverent tones. For them, she is not Suu Kyi. She is, simply, The Lady.

Clark Neher recently gave an interview about his experiences in Burma to the NIU Office of Public Affairs (OPA). The following are excerpts from that interview.

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OPA: Tell us a little about Aung San Suu Kyi — her place in Asian politics and the significance of her struggle.

CN: Aung San Suu Kyi was two years old when her father was assassinated. He had been a great military hero who led the fight for freedom from British colonialism and defended the nation against Japanese aggressors in World War II. When Aung San died, Suu Kyi's mother became Burma's ambassador to India. Suu Kyi and her siblings grew up in India, and Suu Kyi eventually studied at Oxford, where she met her husband, the British scholar Michael Aris. In 1988 Suu Kyi and her husband were busy raising two sons in England when she was called to her mother's bedside in Rangoon. At the same time, student uprisings erupted in Burma, causing the resignation of that country's military leader. The ensuing power struggle among old-line military leaders and the burgeoning democracy movement threw the country into turmoil. Suu Kyi, moved by a strong spiritual bond with her father, was drawn into the struggle of the Burmese democracy movement.

Almost immediately, Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as leader of Burma's freedom movement. She was named general secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 1988, but her charismatic leadership frightened the existing rulers who placed her under house arrest the following year. The NLD won an overwhelming victory in the 1990 election, but the military leadership overturned the results to stay in power. Aung San Suu Kyi remained under formal house arrest for five years, during which time she attracted international attention to her cause and was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. Though the current power structure in Burma claims that her incarceration was lifted in 1995, she is still not able to move freely, and those who associate with her are often punished.
Under such tenuous circumstances, why do you think Aung San Suu Kyi agreed to meet with you?

I know her husband, Michael, and I met her son on our campus. I was leading an NIU travel group through countries in Southeast Asia, and made several attempts to contact her using a phone number her husband had given me. I later learned that the military had cut the phone lines running to her house as part of their campaign of harassment. However, we were introduced to a woman who said she might be able to get a message to Aung San Suu Kyi, so I wrote her a letter telling her that I was in Rangoon, was acquainted with her family, greatly respected her work, and would be honored to meet with her. Several days later, I was handed a note that said, “ASSK will meet with you at 11 a.m. tomorrow.”

People have described Aung San Suu Kyi as having a very special presence. Can you describe what it was like to meet her?

I don’t know how to describe it except to say that I experienced a profound rush upon seeing her for the first time. She is physically quite petite, but in her presence, the aura that surrounds her is enormous. When you are with her, you feel that you are in the presence of a being with great compassion and virtue. You feel serene. It is also deeply affecting to approach her home, which was the home of her parents, and to see it surrounded by the red flags of the freedom movement. It is from the steps of that home that she used to give very moving addresses to gathered throngs, but that has been stopped by the government. Now her work is done in more subtle ways, through underground networks and with the help of supportive members of the international freedom movement.

It’s been a decade since her struggle began and still she is denied freedom of movement in her own country. Does Suu Kyi believe that any progress has been made toward the creation of a democracy in Burma?

She is a supremely optimistic person, and absolutely calm and serene. But she also recognizes the obstacles ahead. She noted that Burmese are unaccustomed to self-rule. The long colonial period and military dictatorship have left too few Burmese with a sense of political efficacy. Building a democracy in Burma, she said, is more difficult than in any other Asian society because there are so many Burmese values that are antithetical to democratic ways. For example, while Burmese culture places great importance on being respectful to those in authority, there is also a tendency to be jealous of them. This creates a great deal of factionalism, a great deal of struggle, because people who come into power become targets. Suu Kyi believes that **ahnadeh** — the Burmese tradition of deferring to the interests of others so as not to offend them — also brings about resentment, selfishness, and sometimes even vengefulness. People will say, “If only I had not been checked by my **ahnadeh**, this person wouldn’t have their power,” and that creates resentment. She believes this is a uniquely Burmese trait. In the rest of Southeast Asia there is a much greater sense of being satisfied with your lot in life.

How do those traits play out in Burmese politics?

Those in power tend not to want to share that power. Other Southeast Asian societies do a better job of sharing, she said. She believes that in Burma, the superiors are more self-oriented and not as concerned about helping their constituents. We talked a great deal about this. Several times she repeated the phrase, “Life is in the leaving.” I didn’t understand what she meant at first, but then she explained that political problems in Burma stem from the fact that leaders don’t know when to get off the stage, and transition from one set of leaders to the next is never smooth. “Life is in the leaving” is her way of explaining that leaders have a responsibility to exit gracefully and to set the stage for their successors. You cannot have a healthy democracy unless transitions work smoothly, and Burma has never been able to accomplish that goal. Aung San was murdered, Prime Minister U Nu was overthrown by the military, and when the military attempted to have an election, they could not make that work either. Other countries, such as Thailand, have handled such transitions much better, she said.

Under what circumstances might the struggle for democracy overcome these obstacles?

There are several scenarios that could play out. N. Win, the military strong man who rules the country from behind the scene, is 86 years old, and when he dies it may open the door to democracy. There is always a risk of civil war because the northern part of the country is largely inhabited by non-Burmese. Moreover, the country is in a state of economic collapse, which could cause the downfall of the government. Suu Kyi works every day with moderate democrats to discuss how to take advantage of changes in any of those areas.

There is a tremendous irony in the fact that the least educated people in Burma are leading the country, while the best educated and best prepared citizens are not allowed to serve their country. There is a history of this in Asian military dictatorships, of course: one has to think only of Pol Pot and the tremendous havoc he wreaked on Cambodia by attacking the intellectuals there. That is the worst example, but we’ve seen this anti-intellectualism at work in many recent power struggles in Asian countries — Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, China, and of course in Cambodia and Vietnam. China’s Mao Tse Tung said, “Learning can only take place behind the plow.” That is the mind set of those who are threatened by the educated, by the intellectuals in their society. Certainly Suu Kyi, with the elite legacy of her independence movement parents, her own Oxford education, and her perfect command...
Does Suu Kyi remain optimistic about the chances for democracy in Burma in her lifetime?

Aung San Suu Kyi has a serenity about her that comes from a strong sense of who she is and from her value of compassion. She refers to the word *mehta* as being a guiding force in her life — so much so that it is nearly impossible for her to think negatively about the future. She has to remain positive, or she would collapse, and she can’t collapse or the whole democracy movement would collapse.

The military would be happy to let her leave the country. She could lead a fine life at Oxford, but for her to leave would be tantamount to admitting that the country is not ready for democracy, so she perseveres. She can continue to do so because her international reputation is so great that she must be treated very carefully. Anybody other than Aung San Suu Kyi would have been put on an airplane and sent away, or executed. End of problem. However, in the Burmese culture there is always questioning, and she said that she is constantly questioning herself. Many of her closest colleagues have been arrested, even killed, by the military authorities, so her struggle has come at great cost. She has to think in terms of the long run and the goals she has for Burma — democracy and a society characterized by Buddhist values, not a clone of western society. Moreover, some of her compatriots have begun to question her leadership, wondering aloud if she is too inflexible. This questioning increases stress among the partisans of democracy.

You’ve described Suu Kyi’s resolute optimism and her serenity in the face of fairly frightening and appalling conditions. During the time you spent with her, did you ever see that optimism slip?

Not relative to the democratic struggle, but in a very personal way. As we prepared to leave, I offered to deliver a letter to her family. As she was writing a note, tears began to form in her eyes. It was impossible to not be affected by this scene. Her husband and sons are steadfastly supportive of her and her struggle: in fact, her sons accepted the Nobel prize on their mother’s behalf, and spoke very movingly about the family’s commitment to her work. Yet she is human, and she misses them terribly. It was a very touching moment.

Should the democratic movement succeed, what would be her role?

If democracy came tomorrow she would be swept into power, as Mandela was in South Africa. The Burmese view of her is overwhelmingly positive. They see her as personifying all of the best of what it means to be Burmese. However, she believes that her role is not to be the leader, but to be a catalyst for democracy and a role model for what it means to practice compassion, *mehta*, and the values needed for a democracy.

Is there a moment from your visit with Aung San Suu Kyi that stands out above the rest?

I asked her who her heroes were. She laughed and said that a better question would be who has best expressed humanity. Then she answered her own question by saying Vaclav Havel, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. Those people, she said, have their strengths and frailties, but never lost the sense of their humanity, and never let their power undermine their basic humanity. That, I thought, is just the essence of Aung San Suu Kyi.

TRAVELING EXHIBITS by Leili Parts

“The Living Languages of Southeast Asia” is the first in a series of traveling exhibits jointly sponsored by the NIU Anthropology Museum and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Construction of the exhibit was recently completed and the exhibit made its debut at the Sycamore High School library. “Living Languages” demonstrates how Southeast Asian languages change through time, provides examples of the many scripts used in the region, and offers people the opportunity to listen to a short message in several languages. The exhibit is geared for teenagers and adults and will be traveling to area high schools and public libraries during the spring and fall of 1998.

Exhibit Team:
Project Director - Milt Deemer
Project Manager - Tyrone Siren
Project Coordinator - Leili Parts
Project Artist - Kim Reed

“The Arts of Mandalay Exhibitions” is a four-part traveling exhibit that will highlight Burmese art from the Mandalay Period (1752-1886). The first exhibition is scheduled for November 1998 at the Kishwaukee College Art Gallery. Both exhibits are funded by the U.S.D.E. Title VI National Resource Center grant.
Cambodians who live in Angkor Borei district of Takeo province claim their home is the place of origin of the Khmer people, the site of Kok Thlok. The district town is indeed an ancient settlement, perhaps one of the earliest cities in Southeast Asia. Carbon dating from archaeological research suggests that the city was occupied as far back as the 4th century BC. A system of canals, first noted on aerial photographs in the 1930s by French scholars, suggests that Angkor Borei was not a single settlement, but a network of communities—likely part of a polity in the Mekong Delta that Chinese texts refer to as “Funan”.

Modern Angkor Borei sits atop the ruins of the ancient site. Research was conducted there in the summers of 1995, 1996, and 1997 by an interdisciplinary team including archaeologists, a geographer, an art historian, and cultural anthropologists.\(^1\) Part of this research focused on contemporary land-use patterns and agricultural practices in the region. From this data we hope to be able to speculate about land-use over the past 2000 years. The work of writing up our findings is still in progress, but in general terms we have found the Angkor Borei area to be extremely successful economically. This article describes some of the components of that success and discusses problems looming on the horizon which may limit or curtail this economic expansion.

\textbf{Components of Economic Success}

\textbf{1. Flood Recession Rice}

Flood recession rice, grown in the dry season, produces higher yields than transplanted wet season rice. According to the District Agricultural Office in Angkor Borei, the average yield of flood recession rice (mostly IR66) in 1995 was three tons per hectare, while local varieties of wet season rice yielded one to one-and-a-half tons per hectare. The average rice yield of Cambodia is a little over one ton per hectare.

Farmers plow their fields in June after the first rains and then leave them until they are flooded. When the water is from half a metre to one metre deep, the farmers clear the fields of floating weeds. Seed beds are planted in December. In January, as the water recedes, the fields are planted. Farmers pump water into their fields from a range of man-made and natural water features throughout the three-month growing season. Harvesting usually occurs in March.

Flood recession rice is more productive, but it is also expensive in terms of inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides. Most farmers plow with oxen, though some now use motorized walk-behind plows. There are also two tractors in the district. One of the most expensive inputs in growing flood recession rice is labor. Most farmers hire labor at peak periods in the growing cycle for tasks such as transplanting and harvesting. Because of the short growing season, nearly all of the rice in the area ripens at the same time. This precludes traditional labor exchange patterns (\textit{provas dei}), where farmers will alternate transplanting in one another’s fields, exchanging labor until all the fields have been completed. Most laborers migrate in from other districts during this season.

Even given these expenses, the majority of households where we conducted interviews reported selling a surplus. Rice is sold up the canal to Takeo, by road to Phnom Penh, and down the river to Vietnam.

\textbf{2. Available Land}

Angkor Borei had an extremely low population density after the Khmer Rouge years. During the mid-1980s, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) sponsored a program to encourage people to move to the district by offering land and an allotment of tools and supplies. Villagers reported that the \textit{krom samaki} (solidarity group) system was only loosely organized in the area, and land was essentially privately farmed throughout the PRK period. Most fortunate were those families originally from the area who had stayed, or who had returned soon after 1979, and who had sufficient labor in their family to clear additional land. Anyone who could clear more land could farm it. Large families benefited the most, as they were able to clear and farm two, three, or more hectares of land.

Coupled with large amounts of available land was the introduction of high-yield varieties of rice, including IR66—and HB66. From the late 1980s farmers were also able to buy fertilizers. With increased yields, farmers began first to rent and then to buy water pumps. In a ten-year period such pumps completely replaced traditional water-lifting devices in the area. With pumps, farmers could move water farther from the canals and reservoirs, and thus they were able to clear more land for cultivation. This upward spiral meant that some farmers came to own five hectares or more on which they could produce nearly three tons of rice per hectare.

This economic upturn was not uniform across the community, but it was significant enough to draw ne

\(^1\)Research team members come from the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the East-West Center, the University of Hawaii, and Northern Illinois University. The project involves training the next generation of Khmer archaeologists and anthropologists. More than a dozen students from RUFA have studied at the University of Hawaii/East-West Center and trained in field methods at Angkor Borei. Two are currently continuing their graduate studies at the University of Hawaii. Funding for this training and research has been made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation, the East-West Center, and the Asian Cultural Council.
migrants to the region as recently as 1997, particularly from other parts of Takeo province. This migration includes a significant number of people who come to Angkor Borei and lease land only for the growing season, and then head north out the district after the harvest. The town is full of new wooden houses, and many homes now have television sets.

3. Water Resources

Our research from the past three years shows that the farmers around Angkor Borei today are using a combination of natural water features, canals dug during the Khmer Rouge period, and features that are likely part of the ancient canal system that may date back to the BC/AD divide. Farmers pump water from trapeang or other natural water features, often double- or triple-pumping to reach their farthest fields. The Khmer Rouge grid system which criss-crosses the entire area has worked for some years, but is rapidly silting in.

4. Small Business Ventures

The central market in Angkor Borei has grown over the three years that we have been conducting research. The town is an important transfer point for goods traded between Cambodia and Vietnam. Boats that come upriver from Vietnam off-load to trucks bound for Phnom Penh and to other boats moving along the modern canal system that runs to the provincial capital of Takeo. During June 1997, students from Northern Illinois University and the Royal University of Fine Arts conducted interviews with 30 small business owners in the town. Of those interviewed, 11 were new migrants to the area, mostly from other districts of Takeo. Others were farmers who were combining rice production with business ventures—with start-up capital generated from their agricultural surplus. While most of those interviewed thought that combining farm income and business ventures was the most profitable and stable course, others were choosing to leave farming behind to focus their energies on business.

Business owners interviewed included seamstresses (two), bicycle and motorcycle repairers (two), furniture makers (one), small shop/drink shop owners (eight), tractor owners (one), battery rechargers (two), boat owners/traders (one), sawmill operators (one), butchers (one), noodle-makers (one), rice wine-makers (one), rice mill owners (one), firewood sellers (one), barbers (two), petrol station operators (one), ice mill operators (one) and pharmacists (one).

Those interviewed reported that with larger land holdings and increased production, they have the luxury of holding on to rice until the price goes up later in the year, thereby gaining extra cash to use as investment capital. Most people felt that their lives had improved significantly. Many expressed pleasure at being able to pay for an education for their children. The very nature of these businesses speaks to this new prosperity—people have enough money to pay for ice in their drinks, to buy new furniture, and to recharge batteries to watch their televisions each night; seamstresses are making people new clothing; someone is needed to repair motorbikes.

5. Tourism

Angkor Borei is only now beginning to be understood as an ancient site. Additional excavations and research are planned over the next three years. With funding from the European Union (EU), the district authorities have set up a small museum which houses reproductions of some of the famous works of Khmer art originally found in Angkor Borei district, and which are now on display at the National Museum in Phnom Penh. The EU project has also dug a canal from the river south of Angkor Borei in to the foot of Phnom Da. It is now possible for tourists to take a day-trip by boat out of Takeo town all the way to the foot of the mountain. Day-trippers can then climb up to see the ruins on the summit and perhaps stop for lunch and to see the museum at Angkor Borei before heading back. There is potential to develop the site into an important tourist destination.

Limits to Growth

While all the above makes Angkor Borei sound like an economic boomtown, there are signs that such growth and prosperity may not be sustainable. First, it is no longer possible to continue clearing new land. Most of the arable land in the district is already under cultivation. Areas of scrub woodland that remain uncleared are now protected by the Department of Fisheries as breeding areas for fish during the flood season. Local farmers seem unclear as to the exact nature of these regulations, but do know that they are not allowed to clear new land or to farm land adjacent to the canals. Some fear that in the future they may even lose the land they already farm.
Second, the water sources which have served Angkor Borei farmers for 2,000 years were sufficient when limited areas of farmland were watered with traditional water-lifting devices. Now, using modern pumps to cultivate much larger tracts of land, farmers are pumping water sources dry during a single growing season—water sources that old men say they have never seen run dry before in their lives. With the Pol Pot canals silting in, and the natural water sources being over-pumped, the farmers are pushing the water resources to their limits.

As more people move into the area, and as land is inherited by children and divided into smaller parcels, the large land holdings will begin to shrink over time. This could reduce income per household. The already high cost of fertilizer, petrol and pesticides means that farmers are also susceptible to input price fluctuations.

**Looting the Archaeological Site**

People who live in Angkor Borei have, over the years, regularly dug for treasure inside their town. Occasionally someone will find something and will set off a new frenzy of digging. But most of the site has already been looted for valuables, and looting by the general population seems to have declined over the three years that we have conducted research.

However, a new problem has developed. During the dry seasons of 1996 and 1997, district officials brought in machinery to dig up old brick structures for use in road construction projects. The profit from the sale of this brick is minuscule, reported to be 5,000 riel ($2) per cubic metre of brick. During this destruction in 1996, the backhoe struck and damaged a stone image. Two more images were subsequently unearthed and offered by local residents to Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. Hun Sen had them placed in the National Museum. We thought, mistakenly, that local officials would thereafter see the danger of such digging. However, when we returned to the site in June 1997, the archaeologists were horrified to see that the digging had continued and that two large brick structures, most likely ancient temples, had been completely destroyed. If this destruction continues at the current rate, the archaeological site will be destroyed, with disastrous consequences. Long-term development for tourism, and the protection of an important national heritage site, may be sacrificed for the short-term gain of selling crushed brick for road fill.

For the moment though, each of these looming problems still lies in the future. Angkor Borei in 1997 is a prosperous town, perhaps a faint echo of its glory days early in the first millennium AD when it may have served as the breadbasket for a larger Khmer polity in the delta.

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**NEW CENTER OUTREACH**

Center outreach activities are off to a fast and exciting start. It is a pleasure for me to be back at NIU and the Center after a fifteen-year absence. As the new Outreach Coordinator for the Center and also as the new Coordinator for Liberal Arts and Sciences External Programming, I have been furiously learning the intricacies of both positions since my start in mid-November.

"Hello, Asia!" the collaborative grant from the Asia Society between the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and Clinton Rosette Middle School here in DeKalb has had four very successful teacher training seminars in the new year. More than 25 local K-12 teachers have participated in the seminars with rave comments on all activities and speakers. We have had wonderful presentations from Center, university, and community individuals. The first seminar held on February 7 focused on Asia in general and featured presentations by graduate students David Oldfield and Rey Ty; Dr. Han and his students; and community members Evelina Jose Cichy and Yung Cong-Huyen. Our second seminar held on February 21 focused on Southeast Asia and featured presentations by Dr. Judy Ledgerwood; graduate student Cheanrity Men; and NIU librarian May Kyi Win. Seminar participants spent a wonderful afternoon at NIU with Dr. Han in the Music Building; with May Kyi Win in the SEA library collection; and with Leilip Parts in the Burma Art Gallery. South Asia was the focus of the seminar held on March 7 and included guest speakers Shiraz Tata from India and Jaya Gajanayake from Sri Lanka. The afternoon session included hands-on puppet making and Internet resources. The final session on March 21 focused on East Asia. Prof. Shi-Ruei (Taiwan) and Prof. Taylor Atkins (Japan), both from NIU, were guest speakers at the morning sessions. The afternoon session once again featured Dr. Han and his music students. I heartily thank everyone for their assistance in making Asia come alive for the seminar participants.

Other outreach activities underway are the planning for the *Asia Sampler* Elderhostel to be held the last week of April and the ongoing development of K-12 curricular resources on Southeast Asia. Any suggestions on resources for resource development are welcome.
RON PROVENCHER: REFLECTIONS ON A CAREER

Sue Russell, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Northern Illinois University, interviewed Professor Ronald Provencher on the occasion of his imminent retirement in August 1998. A graduate of the University of Missouri (B.A.), University of New Mexico, and the University of California, Berkeley (Ph.D.), Ron joined NIU's faculty of anthropology in 1974. He chaired his academic department and then became Director of NIU's Center for Southeast Asian Studies from 1981 to 1987 and in 1995-96. He was also appointed Interim Director of the University Libraries from 1992 to 1993. He is a specialist on Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, and has academic interests in the anthropology of complex societies, folklore, popular culture, medical anthropology, psychological anthropology, and cultural histories. Ron is a leading scholar of Malay studies.

Sue Russell: A lot of your interests have spanned diverse areas of anthropology, most especially pre-history and ethnology in addition to different areas of the Malay world in Southeast Asia. How did you first become interested in anthropology?

Ron Provencher: Originally when I started college, I was interested in zoology. Not until after being in the army did I discover anthropology. I was attracted to anthropology after reading Leslie Spier's Klamath ethnography. I wanted to pursue my graduate career in anthropology as an oceanic specialist but just couldn't seem to stay on track. I went to the University of Missouri and then New Mexico where the department had me busy working as an archeologist in the Southwest.

I left New Mexico because I felt that I was being pushed in directions that I didn't want to go, and I got a fellowship at Berkeley for the Ph.D. program. They accepted me even though I hadn't finished my masters. I met Paul Wheatley who at that time was the director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Berkeley, and I was impressed by him as an intellectual. He spoke a number of different languages and read them. He was an old-fashioned historian who did field work. He was trained as a geographer as well and had a deep interest in the anthropology of Southeast Asia.

The second thing that happened was that Lauriston Sharp came to Berkeley as a visiting professor from Cornell. He was a dynamic teacher, a very interesting and pleasant man who spent a lot of time with students. I took a Peoples and Cultures of Southeast Asia course from him at a graduate level and did a paper for him that he didn't like. It came out of the fact that he had that older view of Southeast Asia as a place where the idea of states came entirely from India and China.

Southeast Asia was not a place of early cultural origins. At Berkeley, I started my dissertation field research on immigration into Jakarta. It won me a SSRC grant for doctoral research in Indonesia. My research proposal gave me some money to go to Cornell so that I could get into certain Indonesian parts of their library. What came along in the meantime was something called Konfrontasi. The semi-warfare between Indonesia and Malaysia occurred in 1963-64 at a time when I was preparing to go, and it was impossible to get permission to go into Jakarta. I was at Cornell and I communicated with the SSRC about the problem and they wrote back and said, "Well, you won your grant fair and square. Why don't you just figure out something that you could do in another country in Southeast Asia." So, I chose Malaysia on the theory that it would be something like Indonesia. But this was really a false assumption. What I ended up doing was a comparison of historically related urban rural communities. That started my career as a Malaysianist.

When you first went to Malaysia what was anthropology like there?

There really wasn't much in the way of anthropology. The main focus at the University of Malaya was then the social sciences department of Malay Studies. It was a place where they provided degrees for people who would become district officers and later would reach higher positions in the civil service. When I came back to Malaysia in 1971, some of those students had earned graduate degrees in Australia, Europe, or the United States. These young faculty members were employed by the University of Malaya, where a rebellion began over language issues. These were nationalists who wanted a Malay language university. They created Universiti Malaysia, the National University of Malaysia, where I was the first visiting professor in the College of Social Sciences.
How would you compare the approaches and interests of European and American anthropologists working in Malaysia with those of indigenous Malay anthropologists today?

Malay anthropologists study things Malay more than they study things Chinese or even Aboriginal. How many Malay anthropologists study Chinese society or look into the details of the Indian community in Malaysia? Not many. I think that is a problem because it makes Malay anthropology more like sociology in the sense that the researchers are not crossing into cultures that are different from their own. I think that is really what makes American cultural anthropology what it is. We have always looked at systems of knowledge and not just social forms.

What are some of the things you would like to see happen with anthropology in Malaysia?

I think that the most serious thing is that Malaysian anthropologists have not contributed nearly enough to the study of people outside of Malaysia. I think that they should come to exotic places like Mexico or the United States or go to Germany or into Africa and do more studies in these cultures that are very different from their own. They would bring new perspectives and tendencies which could add to the field of anthropology; but this is a very hard thing to get them to do because so many of them end up in Malaysian government service.

What kinds of things are you working on right now? And what are your specific interests as an anthropologist?

I have two on-going projects. One of them is a study of the suburbanization of Malay fishing communities in the Pattani area of southern Thailand. It is a study of people who are being drawn physically into the edges of that city. I am looking at progress in the sense of the community’s use of different kinds of technology and the impact that it has on the economic and religious aspects of their lives and where it puts them politically vis-à-vis the Thai establishment. It is basically about suburbanization and the impact of that on culture.

Another project seems very narrow, because it involves comic books. One of the things I discovered when I first went to Malaysia was that Malays love comic books. At that time they were very interested in the American comic book Mad. Everyday of their lives, they practice a joking kind of ridicule of each other that goes on interminably. They eventually invented their own magazine, Gila Gila, which means “mad about Mad.” It sells the most copies of any magazine in Malaysia. It publishes not only cartoons and cartoon scripts but also funny short stories, sayings, make-believe political columns, and advice columns. All of this is making fun of both modern and traditional contexts in Malaysia. I am into old-fashioned study of Malay culture in terms of a particular medium. In fact what I do is cultural interpretations. One of the things that the Malaysians have enjoyed about my publications is that I interpret the cartoons—try to explain what’s so funny and interesting about them from Malay perspectives. I was drawn into this from a grant that originally was supposed to start me into a restudy of a “traditional” urban Malay community. I had to figure out a special way to relate to teenage boys because I was an older man. They would see this old white guy show up and they would all run. But when I showed up at their coffee shop with new issues of Malay comic books and asked them “what does this mean, what does that mean,” they became interested in me. They discovered that I was a human being. I discovered not only do teenage boys read comics, but old men read them, women read them. Over the years there has been more and more content about female roles. So this is an instructive place to see something about Malay concepts of gender both from male and female sides. It is an aspect of my interest in complex society and modernity.

What was the most interesting period of your field work in Malaysia in terms of other scholars?

James Scott came to one of the places I worked. I got to know him and Louise, and my wife Barbara and I saw them regularly. He was doing some work on Malay civil servants. We used to get together and argue about things and talk about our own research and each critique the other one. We had some outrageously good arguments and argued about other things like John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway, and about Marxism. It was a very interesting, thick kind of relationship. Actually we’ve kept it up through the years. One of the things that happened in his career was that he came more and more into anthropology over time. I’m not sure that I influenced him in that direction however.

Robert McKinley at Michigan State also came looking for me in Malaysia. He was a very funny guy. It started for both of us as a life-long dialogue about the nature of Malay culture. He is the one professional I know who has the same intense interest in the meaning of the Malay systems of knowledge that I have. He certainly spurred me on to deeper investigation of Malay culture as a system of meaning.

What are the most significant social or cultural changes you have seen over the years in Malaysia?

I would say the most significant was the change that was signaled by the riots in 1969, the change in the political consciousness of the Malays as the majority ethnic group in the country. It developed gradually. The riots in ’69 were not the first time of serious fighting between the ethnic groups. At the end of World War II, for example, there was serious ethnic conflict. But in the early British colonial period, different
Coalitions of Malays and Chinese were at war with each other. Later in the colonial period, the British succeeded in doing what they did everywhere in their colonies, which is to get the different ethnic factions at war with each other, making it easier for the colonial machinery to operate. Ethnic strife now is really about class structure and the fairness of the economic system. The Malays make that their issue even though there are outrageously rich Malays as well as poor Indians and Chinese.

One of the things that happened over the years is that religion has been brought into this matter. I think that is always a dangerous thing. The old Malay culture in fact took account of other peoples' customs. Many Malays still comment on the terrible thing that has happened: they really don't have those good relationships with Chinese and Indians that they once had, and they miss it.

How do you compare the situation for Malays in southern Thailand with the ethnic complexity of Malaysia today?

One of the obvious things is that in southern Thailand the Malays are the outsiders. What you have now is a Thai government that is aggressively involved in developing the Peninsula. Malays believe Thais are destroying their lands. Many young Malays have migrated. Local Chinese and Thais have bought much Malay land one plot at a time. In 1997, the Malays discovered that the rice land had been sold to several real estate agents who staked out a new suburb for wealthy Thais and Chinese. This “progress” has occurred over several decades and it affects different ethnic communities differently.

SEASITE: INSTRUCTION ON THE WEB by George Henry

The Center's World Wide Web Project for instruction and information on Southeast Asian languages and cultures (dubbed SEASite) is off to a good start.

This project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Security Education Program, will make learning resources for Thai, Indonesian, Tagalog, Burmese, and Vietnamese available to anyone with access to the Internet and a PC. The resources for the various languages will include copious audio (playable with minimal delay even through a modem connection), pictures, lessons with interactive exercises, and dictionaries to help learners work through on-screen readings.

Some content is already available at: [http://www.seasite.niu.edu](http://www.seasite.niu.edu) including Indonesian readings with dictionary support, Thai alphabet and reading lessons, and some Tagalog content. Additional material is being added constantly by almost a dozen graduate and undergraduate assistants working under the direction of Center faculty.

Those wishing to try SEASite should have access to a Windows 95 computer, running Version 3 or greater of Internet Explorer or Netscape. (Other computing platforms may show some SEASite functionality, but have not been tested.) Special fonts (Thai and Burmese, for Win 95 only) and software for audio are available via links provided by SEASite.

NIU EXCHANGE WITH CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY by Manfred Thullen

In January 1998 a delegation from NIU traveled to Thailand for one principal and several collateral purposes. The primary purpose was to participate in the “Chiang Mai University (CMU) Northern Illinois University (NIU) International Workshop on the Future Cooperation Among the Mekong Riparian States” that was held on the campus of Chiang Mai University January 13-15, 1998. This jointly planned workshop involving CMU and NIU was the direct result of an academic linkage agreement that was developed and signed late in 1995. It was to be the first of several workshops that would explore the substance, structure, and process for developing a new Masters of Science in International Public Affairs in the Department of Political Science at Chiang Mai University, a department that has a number of NIU alumni as faculty members.

Attending this workshop from NIU were Clark Neher, Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies; Fred Kitterle, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; David Graf, Dean of the College of Business; and Manfred Thullen, Executive Director of International Programs. There were also participants from Cambodia, Vietnam, Yunnan, China, Chulalongkorn University, and several Thai ministries, in addition to a large number of CMU faculty and administrators. The presentations explored social, political, economic, and environmental conditions in the Mekong riparian region as background for discussing a possible masters program in international public affairs. Clark Neher was one of the keynote speakers.

The secondary purpose for the delegation's trip to Thailand was for Deans Kitterle and Graf to become better acquainted with the partner university in Chiang Mai. Dean Graf was especially interested in the possibilities for developing faculty and student exchanges that would involve his college and the
Faculty of Business Administration at CMU. In addition, Dean Graf took the opportunity of being in Thailand to visit with officials at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (in Bangkok), with which the NIU College of Business has a student and faculty exchange agreement. Through this visit new ideas were developed as to how the exchange agreement can be strengthened.

In sum, this was a valuable trip, one that served to strengthen and expand the "ties" to Thailand.

FACULTY NEWS


K. H. Han hosted a Gamelan Concert held at the Social Education Hall, Taipei, Taiwan, on May 7, 1997. This was a specially invited event, since Prof. Han established the gamelan program for Taiwan several years ago. Prof. Han performed with guests from Indonesia and students from the National Institute of the Arts.


Dwight King traveled to Indonesia for two weeks in January 1997. He served as a consultant to the World Bank on strengthening budgetary and management systems for provision of basic education.


Grant Olson was general editor of Modern Southeast Asian Literature in Translation: A Resource for Teaching, published by Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Tempe, AZ, 1997.


Saw Tun was invited to Italy in late March to participate in a conference on "Rebuilding a Democratic Burma" sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation in collaboration with the Open Society Institute. He also published "The Development of Political Themes in Minthuwun's Poetry" in The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 1, pp. 107-127, 1997.


With the support of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and through a collection development grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, May Kyi Win purchased 850 titles, 29 videos, and 1 CD for NIU's Southeast Asia library collection. She also received nearly 1,100 titles as gifts from the University of Central Library (UCL) in Burma.

Edwin Zehner gave a lecture on "Dhammakaya, Pentecostalism, and the Thai Middle Class," at Harvard University, October 24, 1997.
books

Swettenham 
by H. S. Barlow

The first full biography of Sir Frank Swettenham, Resident-General of the Federated Malay States at the turn of the twentieth century. Based on contemporary newspaper accounts, official records, Swettenham’s personal papers, and other unpublished materials. 12 maps, 94 illustrations, bibliography, index. Published by Southdene Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia.

1995. 783pp. Hard cover only. ISBN 983-9915-1-5 $50.00

The Rama Jataka in Laos: A Study in the Phra Lak Phra Lam
Translated, Edited, and with an Introduction by Sachchidanand Sahai

The first full translation and critical commentary on the Laotian palm-leaf manuscript which ranks next only to the Jounal of Burma Studies, Volume 2

A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Works by Sun Lai Chen

Sun Lai Chen’s unique and valuable bibliography includes (1) an annotated list of 135 Chinese primary sources on Burma from the pre-Tang through the Qing periods, (2) an introductory discussion of the availability and recent uses of these sources, (3) a list of introductions and collections of Chinese historical sources on Southeast Asia, and (4) a list of Burmese, Chinese, English, French, and Japanese historical works on Burma that utilize the Chinese primary sources.

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