

The New Asia

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By Tao Yuanming 陶渊明

#### Substance, Shadow and Spirit

The Spirit responds

The Great Potter cannot Intervene All creation thrives of itself. That Man ranks with Earth and Heaven, Is it not because of me? Though we belong to different orders, Being alive, I am joined to you. Bound together for good or ill I cannot refuse to tell you what I know: The Three August Ones were great saints But where are they living today? Though P'eng-tsu lasted a long time He still had to go before he was ready. Die old or die young, death is the same, Wise or stupid, there is no difference. Drunk, every day you may forget, But won't it shorten your life span? Doing good is always a joyous thing But no one has to praise you for it. Too much thinking harms my life; Just surrender to the cycle of things, Give yourself to the waves of the Great Change Neither happy nor yet afraid. And when it is time to go, then simply go

### 形影神三首

大钧无私力, 万理自森著。 人为三才中, 岂不以我故。 与君虽异物, 生而相依附。 结托既喜同, 安得不相语。 三皇大圣人, 今复在何处? 彭祖爱永年, 欲思无复数是。 老少同一死, 贤愚无复龄人。 老少同一死, 将非足龄汝善去的后生。 正宜委还不民数。。 甚念伤吾生, 正宜委还不恨。 应尽便须尽, 无复独多虑。

Published by SEHNSLICHTX on WordPress

TAO YUANMING, also known as Tao Chien (365–427 AD), is widely considered one of the greatest poets of the Six Dynasties Era (220–589 AD). In 405, after the death of his sister, he gave up his job as a government official and spent the rest of his life as a reclusive poet.



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IMAGE © ZIGOR ALDAMA

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BY MARTA KASZTELAN, THOMAS CRISTOFOLETTI

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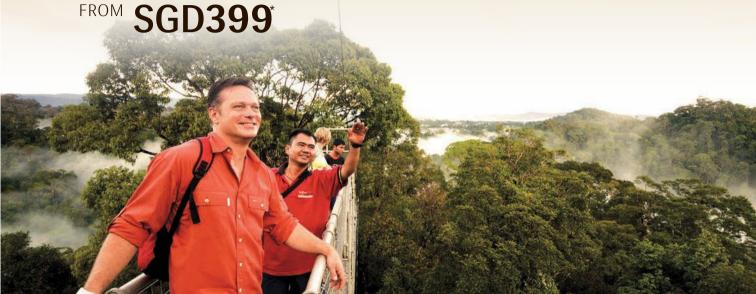
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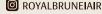
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Modernisation is emptying Mongolia's steppe. Are we seeing the last nomadic generation of herders?

BY ZIGOR ALDAMA, MIGUEL CANDELA

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#### { EDITOR'S NOTE }



#### "Culture is the arts elevated to a set of beliefs"

Thomas Wolfe

ulture defies any concrete definition – much like a play by Brecht, labouring in the pursuit of an identity, with multiple manifestations, interpretations and adaptations. This issue is an inquiry into these manifold complexities, articulated in art, music, film, religion, ritual, heritage and custom, belief and morality.

Within contemporary society, there is a tension between upholding tradition and embracing modernity. This tug-of-war is felt on the Mongolian steppe, where nomadic heritage is under threat of dying out owing to urbanisation (p66). The Hae-Nyeo divers of Jeju Island face a similar challenge, where the younger generation of women has migrated towards more lucrative opportunities (p76). New cultures rise, and old ones fade away – a trend that has ignited debate amongst Taiwan's minority aboriginal tribes (p84).

Contemporary culture is rarely without its share of controversy: Sounds are rising from the underground as punk finds its voice, and it is often one of dissent (p48). Disagreement with the status quo is often unwelcome, and in some parts of the region, it is punishable. In the Middle East, ISIS and their ilk advocate the destruction of ancient heritage sites in the name of antiidolatry (p38), but artists and NGOs are working to ensure that they are not consigned to tragic nostalgia.

China's film industry has set its sights on eclipsing Hollywood (p28) and, like any ambitious adolescent, it's not without its challenges. In Malaysia, a small Islamic organisation is propagating polygamy as a way of life, merging business and religion (p56). From East to West, cultural stereotypes are being challenged, from South Korean military men dancing in the DMZ, to women wushu warriors in Afghanistan (p12).

The region is undergoing a process of redefinition, expressed in new art forms, cultural revisions and reinventions. We are entering a dynamic new age of cultural evolution, and revolution, in Asia.

ALEX W. CAMPBELL

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**December** FATEHPUR SIKRI, INDIA

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Ashgabato

In December 2017, discover Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh, India. Once the capital of the Mughal Empire, it is home to one of the largest mosques in India, the Jama Masjid. An important stop for merchants navigating the routes across northern India, it showcases the significant architectural achievements of the Mughal Empire from the late 16th century.

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#### Kokand, Uzbekistan

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China











Kumul

C H I N A

Qarqan



ONGOLIA



Kashgar, Xinjiang, China



In June 2017, journey to Dunhuang in China, located to the west of the Hexi Corridor, a major stop on the Silk Road best known for the nearby Mogao Caves, before venturing along this iconic route with our experienced expeditions team.









# The New Frontier

CULTURAL STEREOTYPES ARE BEING CHALLENGED BY MEN AND WOMEN IN ASIA – FROM EAST TO WEST

Text Alex Campbell



AFGHANISTAN

#### THE WUSHU WARRIORS

a viral video clip reminiscent of a scene from Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, 20-year-old wushu teacher Sima Azimi, sporting a striking black and yellow satin *karategi*, leads her class of women trainees in their wushu workout on a snow-splattered hilltop outside Kabul in Afghanistan.

Donning pink uniforms – designed by a local tailor – with white hijabs, these young Hazara women, a mostly Shia group who speak Dari, are giving a roundhouse kick to gender stereotypes by practising this ancient form of kung fu, developed by the flying monks of the Shaolin Temple in northern China. This full-contact sport combines kick-boxing and sword fighting – with sabres and daggers.

Azimi is Afghanistan's first woman trainer in wushu, which she learnt while living as a refugee in Iran.
She has earned several medals in competitions, and aspires for her students to do the same: "My ambition is to see my students take part in international matches and win medals for their country," she told the BBC.

Azimi believes that girls can compete on an equal footing with boys.

But while martial arts have gained immense popularity in Afghanistan, women are still restricted from learning and practising them. "Some of my students' families had problems accepting their girls studying wushu," she says. "But I went to their homes and talked to their parents."

"There are people who might oppose women improving themselves. But I love to fight against such stupidity and train in wushu," she challenges.



SOUTH KOREA

#### DANCING IN THE DMZ

A group of South Korean soldiers in the army's 25th Division regularly swap their army boots for ballet shoes in order to unwind from their duty patrolling the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea.

The men don grey shorts, T-shirts and black ballet pumps, practising their plies and tendus - in order to relieve stress.

Every week, the 15 men gather for their ballet lesson, instructed by a ballet teacher from the Korean National Ballet company.

While most of the men had never danced before joining the programme, the initiative has been well supported, and has even produced a performance of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. Lieutenant Colonel Heo Tae-sun supports the programme, saying that in addition to allowing the men to relax, the regular dance training improves their strength and discipline: "Ballet requires a great amount of physical strength and is very good for strengthening muscle, increasing flexibility, and correcting posture," he told Reuters.

In an interview with the news agency, Kim Joo-hyeok, a 23-yearold sergeant, says that ballet has allowed him to de-stress in between guarding the border. "There's a lot of tension here since we live in the unit on the front line, which makes me feel insecure at times," he says. "But through ballet, I am able to stay calm and find balance as well as build friendships with my fellow soldiers." Kim says he intends to continue with his ballet lessons when he is discharged from the army. • AG

#### REVEALED

#### The Taste of Freedom

COMING OF AGE IN JAPAN HAS EVOLVED FROM AN ANCIENT RITE OF PASSAGE TO A RAUCOUS FESTIVAL

Text Alex Campbell

**Every** year, groups of young Japanese men clad in designer business suits and women donning traditional *furisode* (kimonos worn by single women) gather to celebrate their coming of age through a riotous – and opulent – day of celebration.

Held annually on the second Monday in January, the Coming of Age Day – also called Seijin-no-Hi – allows young adults who turned 20 in the previous year (or who will do so before March 31 in the current year) to celebrate as they are officially declared "adults", with the right to drink and smoke (and formerly, to vote, until the legislation was changed to age 18 in June 2016). The certified age marking adulthood has varied at different stages of Japanese history. During the Edo period (1603–1868), for example, boys became men in a ceremony called genpuku at age 15, and girls during the mogi ritual at age 13, marked by the

BELOW Japanese women wearing kimonos during the Coming of Age Day ceremony at an amusement park in Tokyo

BOTTOM RIGHT An archery competition at Sanjusangendo Temple in Kyoto forms part of the celebrations

change into adult clothing – and a new haircut. Twenty was declared the age standard marking adulthood for both genders in 1876.

Where once the formal coming-ofage ceremony was a very traditional rite of passage practised by ancient samurai families (rumoured to have been started by a young prince in 714 AD), today, Japanese youth welcome their newfound freedom with extravagant splurging.



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

Many Japanese women fork out over USD10.000 for their shimmering kimonos, and beauty treatments and hair appointments are booked up to a year in advance, adding an additional few hundred dollars to the lofty bill. Salons open for 24 hours, Hello Kitty designs dominate the accessories of choice. Japanese cities are a heady fog of hairspray and perfume.

Thousands of 20-year-olds flock to theme parks: Disneyland teems with selfie sticks and photo opportunities with Mickey Mouse, and over 4,000 people crowd Tokyo's Toshimaen amusement park, clustered into pods of pouting peace signs.

But while assembling in the popular theme parks to hang out with cartoon characters may seem like a rather childish way to celebrate newfound adult legality, the candy floss is soon traded in for harder tack as celebrants flock towards the strips of glittering parties, finally flashing their laminated identification cards and sailing past bouncers into the cities' heaving nightclubs.

That is not to say that custom has flown the coop completely in the contemporary practice: Many young adults still offer prayers at shrines across Japan over the holiday. Town halls host ceremonies, filled with families and friends.

#### IN THIS DAY AND AGE



Youth unemployment in Japan is at 4.9 percent in 2017



The annual birth rate dropped to below 1 million in 2017

MEN WOMEN 620,000 590,000

An estimated 1.21 million people came of age in January 2017



The number of 20-yearolds is expected to fall to 1.06 million bv 2025

**450,000** 2017 2016

In 2017, the number of new adults decreased by 50,000 compared to 2016



In 2017, the number of new adults is half of what it was at its peak -

2.46 million - in 1970

After attending a purification ceremony with a Shinto priest, many young men and women hang up ema small wooden plaques with inscribed prayers and wishes – at Shinto shrines in the hope of blessings from the kami (spirits) for their life ahead. Many Japanese use the time to reflect on their transformation into adulthood and the associated responsibilities that will separate them from their teenage years.

But amidst the glitz and glam and the fashion, there's a more sombre undertone coursing beneath the overt hedonism of the occasion:

#### **Hello Kitty designs** dominate the accessories of choice. Japanese cities are a heady fog of hairspray and perfume

Youth unemployment in Japan has increased, and 2017 saw the lowest number of new adults recorded since the government started keeping demographic statistics in 1968, decreasing by 50,000 compared to 2016's estimate. While that may be viewed in a positive light given the global overpopulation problem, the declining birth rate presents a problem for development, as Japan's society is dominated by an ageing population.

Still, on Seijin-no-Hi, the statistics are drowned out by the squeals of excitable women and the clinking of overflowing sake glasses. Speaking to Agence France Presse, 20-year-old Reiko Nakamura admits: "I did think 'Yikes, I'm an adult' when I turned 20. I have to think about my future so it's a little scary." However, caught up in the spirit of the occasion, she gushes: "But, for now, I just want to enjoy a night out drinking with friends." ◆ AG

























#### 01 INDONESIA

A young boy reveals his face beneath a *topeng* – an Indonesian traditional mask © Sofyan Efendi

#### 02

#### CHINA

Li women – mostly located on Hainan Island – began tattooing as a symbol of belonging; gradually, their tattoos came to signify beauty © Mattia Passarini

#### 03 INDIA

The Konyak are recognised by their tattoos. Previously known as "headhunters", they would take the heads of opposing warriors as trophies © Mattia Passarini

#### 04 SRI LANKA

At Sigiriya Rock, a young girl dressed in a headscarf engages the camera © Pasan Senevirathne

#### 7 asan senevilatin

#### MYANMAR

A Padaung woman of the Karen tribe peers through colourful fabric in Myanmar © Aung Kyi Wint

#### 06

#### BANGLADESH

A little boy clambers onto his father's back during Jumu'ah prayer at the second-largest Muslim congregation held in Bangladesh

© Md. Khalid Rayhan Shawon

#### BHUTAN

#### Backstage activity at the Thangbi Monastery in Bumthang Province

© Joyce Le Mesurier

#### 08 QATAR

During Ramadan, a young boy is held gently by his father during a canon firing, signalling that it is time to break fast © Ray Toh

#### 09

#### AFGHANISTAN

A wool spinner at work in Chelkand, a remote village in the Wakhan District

© Alick Warburton





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OPENING PAGE, TOP Workers prepare for a shoot at one of many spaces where companies rent out technical equipment BOTTOM (LEFT TO RIGHT) A man dressed as a security officer; Mi Wei. one of the 50,000 actors in Hengdian trying to break into the industry; a 17-year-old extra for the film War Against Bandits: actress ladie Lvnn on the set of The Punisher

TOP An artisan produces ancientlooking furniture at one of the 700 film industry companies in Hengdian

**ABOVE** A Victorian-era building replica is prepared for a film set in Hengdian

**Coming** from the ultra-modern megalopolis of Shanghai, nobody would believe that a four-hour bus ride through eight-lane expressways, followed by a bumpy, mostly unpaved road would lead to the Chinese version of Hollywood. Hengdian, a city of around 200,000 people in the eastern part of Zhejiang Province is where, astonishingly, around 20 percent of all Chinese movies and TV series are filmed.

"In the 20 years since filming activities started, some 1,800 titles have been produced here, including big hits such as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* and Hollywood's *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor,*" Hengdian Group's spokesman Zeng Yuling says. "At any given time, up to 40 stories can be taking shape in our hundreds of sets. Last year alone, 250 directors worked in the city, where more than 50,000 people are registered as actors."

It soon becomes clear that Hengdian is no ordinary city. In fact, its architecture seems tailor-made for movie sets. Its buildings form a collective of 5,000 years of Chinese history: palaces from every dynasty, which once allowed former emperors to entertain concubines without the interruption of anti-corruption campaigns; lavish European colonial-era mansions, which once harboured gangsters and libertine women; the cobblestone streets where Kuomintang flags were not banned, where atrocities committed by Japanese imperial

#### "Last year alone, 250 directors worked in the city, where more than 50,000 people are registered as actors"

soldiers were witnessed. Finally, there is the contemporary addition of Mao Zedong's portraits rising on "new" China's edifices. If that wasn't enough, a replica of Beijing's old Summer Palace has just been built. The city also plans to add a "traditional Shanghai" street and a European mini-city.

It may sound excessive, but it's never too much when it leads to burgeoning business. "Right now, there are 56 crews waiting to film here, and sometimes there are 12 waiting to shoot on a certain set," Zeng shares with pride.

China's audiovisual industry has entered a golden era. In 2016 – even though the growth in revenue declined from the 48.7 percent high recorded in 2015 – the box office still saw a 3.7 percent increase, and raked in a record RMB45.7 billion (USD6.6 billion). If growth keeps at this pace, it will overtake the United States' film industry in 2019. In fact, it has already done so in terms of the number of screens: 40,917 compared to 40,759. According to official statistics, TV dramas add RMB25 billion (USD3.6 billion) to the value of the Chinese market, an increase of 17 percent per year.



BELOW One of Hengdian's impressive costume warehouses, where clothes from a range of periods can be rented for films



#### THE CHINA BOX OFFICE 2016



China's movie ticket revenue averaged a yearly growth of **35 percent** for more than a decade. However, in 2016, China's movie ticket revenue expanded just **3.7 percent** 

China clocked up

USD6.6
BILLION

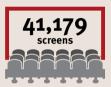
in movie ticket revenue in 2016

North America's box office grew **2.1 percent** to hit

USD11.36



In 2016, revenue for international movies in China was up **10.9 percent**  China built **1,612** new cinemas in 2016, bringing its total to



China now has the most cinemas in the world



China accounted for

18.8%

of worldwide movie ticket sales last year, compared to **7.5 percent** in 2012

in China i

34

China allows only **34** foreign films into the country every year Top five grossing films in China in 2016

- The Mermaid (China) 526,848,189 USD
- ★ Zootopia (US)

  235,591,257 USD
- ★ Warcraft (US)
  220,841,090 USD
- ★ Captain America: Civil War (US) 190,429,000 USD
- ★ The Monkey King 2 in 3D (China) 185,402,420 USD

Hengdian wants to cash in, and it has everything to succeed. "Three decades ago, this was just farmland where people even had trouble surviving," Zeng explains. "Then, the government decided to follow a different development path and chose to attract the booming film industry, rather than building manufacturing facilities. They created all the infrastructure and today, still charge no fees for shooting here, because the authorities believe that it creates jobs and brings revenue through taxes levied on the service industry."

Almost 300 studios have established representative offices in Hengdian, and around 700 companies make up the fabric of businesses supporting the industry. There are furniture manufacturing artisans, made-to-order imperial costume companies, vintage car collectors who rent out their vehicles, and huge warehouses specialising in all kinds of equipment.

Unsurprisingly, the business also attracts many young actors looking to make their fortune. Sadly, as the 2015 film *I Am Somebody* showed, most fail miserably. Zhang Yiguo knows that well. Himself an actor, he owns a representation agency in the centre of town, and receives scores of new applicants every day, with many leaving daily, too.

# "Three decades ago, this was just farmland where people even had trouble surviving"

The walls of his office are full of casting photographs showcasing men and women with broad smiles and dramatic frowns. "Most will barely survive as extras, because they can just hope for a character with a sentence or two," Yiguo says, explaining: "There are certain conditions to be met. First, you need to speak perfect Mandarin. Then, you better be beautiful or so ugly that nobody can take your part. Connections help a lot, and you must be patient. Most come from provinces where dialects give them a strong accent and they hardly know anyone in the industry."

Yao Shan is one such aspiring actress. She comes from the southern province of Guanxi and belongs to the Yao ethnic minority. "I started as an extra earning just the minimum of RMB70 [USD10] per day. It was hard to get by," she recalls.

Then she realised that the skills she attained while performing as a horse rider in a circus could work in her favour, and earn her a higher income as a stuntwoman. Now she earns three to four times her original wage as a stunt double in action scenes.

TOP RIGHT Director Li Yonghui runs through the scenes from *The* Punisher TV drama BOTTOM RIGHT

Stuntwoman Yao Shan (standing) waits with other actresses on the set of The Hypnotised Hypnotist







On the set of *The Hypnotised Hypnotist* (被催眠的催眠师) she gets ready for a knife fight. It's not an easy one; a colleague broke into tears after hurting herself in one of the takes. Outside the replica of a 1930s courtyard house, on a bitterly cold day with stubborn rain making everything more difficult, the unit director is losing his patience. The lead actress has just finished shooting her close-ups and the young stuntman who has to serve as her double (wearing a funny wig) can't get the strikes right.

Yao comes to the rescue as soon as she finishes getting dressed in her role as a peasant. One take is all she needs, and the film crew can move onto the next scene.

Not far from this set, yellow lighting bathes a Victorian-era building in an imitated sunrise. Inside, Jadie Lynn is enjoying a very different life. She's one of the lead characters in the TV drama *The Punisher* (制裁者联盟), which combines fantasy elements with a typical love story. At the age of 24, Lynn is already a success. She won a Sino-Korean TV talent competition for supermodels, and has starred in a movie. She is represented by the company owned by Jackie Chan.

"China is a very promising market, but also highly competitive, so I have to keep studying to stay ahead of the curve," she says. To do so, she trains in martial arts and has improved her acting skills through workshops in the US. In Hengdian, Lynn is one of the few professionals fluent in English – a pitfall that has become a problem for the city's

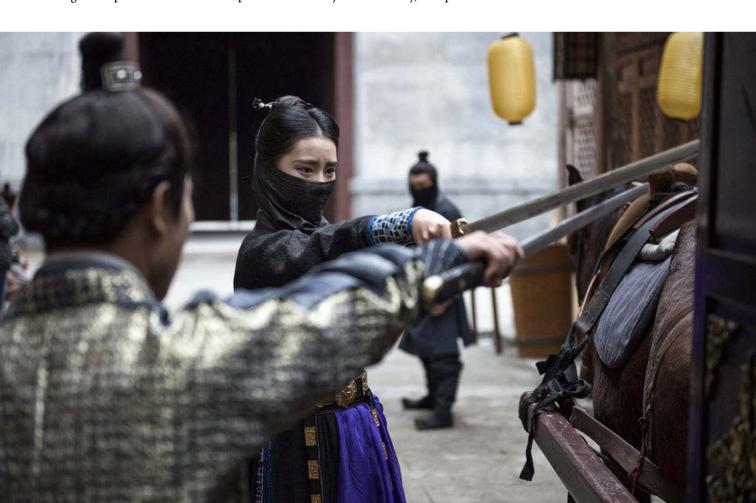
#### "The problem is that there are many bad stories, investors know nothing about storytelling, and the market has not yet matured"

**Fan Bingbing** 

international ambitions. "But opportunities are in China, where budgets for films and series are growing fast," says Lynn.

The set of War Against Bandits (打土匪) proves her point. Here, about 100 extras holding all kinds of guns wait for the narrow street to get filled with the explosives needed to replicate artillery shells for a scene in which they attack Communist forces during the Civil War. They've rehearsed twice already, and the unit director doesn't look happy, but the light is fading and there are other crews waiting to shoot at one of Hengdian's most sought-after stages.

The special effects staff are frantic. On a loudspeaker, the man in charge of the extras barks instructions: "It's an action scene! You need to look furious! Do not stop midway!" Four cameras, two still and another pair handheld, record everything from different angles. "There is no second chance today," an operator warns.







And ... action! The mayhem unfolds. A crowd of armed men storm the alleyway and an enormous ball of fire causes a flood of heat to rush into the set. The cameramen struggle to avoid being hit or burnt while focusing on the lead characters. Finally, everything goes according to plan.

And ... cut! Smiles break out among sweaty brows. There is some applause. "It has to look spectacular, because audiences are getting tired of stories set in this era," the unit director says. "We have to try to give them something they haven't seen before."

OPPOSITE The heroine of The Honour of the Tang Dynasty in a fight scene TOP LEFT Mai Tian, director of The Lonely Hero in the Desert, burns incense during a ceremony on the first day of shooting **BOTTOM LEFT** An extras manager prepares to shoot an action scene for *War Against Bandits* 

And therein lies one of the biggest problems of 21st-century films and TV dramas. Zhang Bingjiang, director of *North by Northwest*, explains: "There is a worrying lack of originality in the scripts. The industry has grown very rapidly, but also in a chaotic way. Investors only look for money, while censorship curtails creativity. There are so many red lines not to be crossed that many choose to stay safe and dull."

Audiences seem to agree. Even the highest grossing movie of all time, *The Mermaid*, has been bashed for its poor script, awful effects and even worse acting skills, coined "emojiacting". Zhang Yimou's latest movie, *The Great Wall*, which stars Matt Damon, scored a meagre five points on the popular film review website, Douban.

"The only reason why Chinese people watch Chinese movies is because the government restricts the number of foreign films – 34 at present – that are allowed to be shown in the country," Zhang admits.

Superstar Fan Bingbing agrees: "We are copying the American model, with a lot of money invested in some movies. Technical skills and resources are world class," the actress shares. "The problem is that there are many bad stories, investors know nothing about storytelling, and the market has not yet matured. Maybe that's also the reason why our films don't succeed abroad." Hengdian industry leaders are conscious of this and are trying to woo foreign filmmakers. "As it happened with the industry and technology, we can learn a lot from them," Zeng says.

Still, opportunities are limited because the city's sets are designed to stand as a backdrop for "classic" Chinese stories. For example, not far from where the Kuomintang forces finished their battle against the Communists, martial arts specialists fight in one of the scenes in the making of The Honour of the Tang Dynasty (大唐荣耀), set 1,400 years ago. Indoors, The Lonely Hero of the Desert (大漠孤侠) film starts to shoot with characters well-known to the genre: bloodthirsty emperors, foxy concubines, and conspiring eunuchs. But first, director Mai Tian and the cast perform a solemn Buddhist ceremony. He wants to drive away one of the facts Deloitte has pointed out: that 70 percent of all stories filmed in China never make it to the commercial "big" screen.

In that sense, the fate of much of the hard work done on set goes the same way as the many failed actors who slink back out of Hengdian, and into obscurity. • AG

ZIGOR ALDAMA is the Far East Asia correspondent for Vocento, Spain's largest media group. His work often revolves around social and cultural issues.



## Civilisations for Sale

· · · Cataloging the art casualties of war

Text Sa'eda K<u>ilani</u>



**Not** many people in the Middle East have the freedom to enjoy art and marvel at their cultural history. This fear has been cultivated by certain doctrines which state that the admiration of artistic work is heretical. There is a link in some Middle Eastern cultures between statues and the worship of idols; the appreciation of statues is therefore often construed as blasphemous in some religious sects.

The rampant looting of centuries-old artefacts and the ongoing destruction of thousands of years of antiquities have brought about a sense of deep loss and bewilderment for many people, in the Middle East, and abroad.

Beyond the horrors of war, the recent looting and destruction of important cultural sites such as the Assyrian city of Nimrud in Iraq and the oasis city of Palmyra in Syria has shocked and devastated the international archaeological community, as has the sight of sledgehammers breaking through statues in the Mosul Museum in Iraq (even if some of the pieces were not original, as it was later revealed after the initial reports). Surely nothing will compensate for the destruction of the 1,800-year-old Arch of Triumph in Palmyra in Syria at the hands of the Islamic State (ISIS), nor the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan, which were blasted away by the Taliban.

According to UNESCO's assessment of the extent of damage done to the World Heritage Site of the ancient city of Aleppo in Syria, some 60 percent of the old city has been severely damaged, with 30 percent totally destroyed.

In a video showing the destruction of the Mosul Museum, the militants state that their devastating actions served as a reminder of the Islamic teachings on the subject of statues: "These ruins that are behind me, they are idols and statues that people in the past used to worship instead of Allah. The so-called Assyrians and Akkadians and others looked to gods for war, agriculture and rain to whom they offered sacrifices... The Prophet Mohammed took down idols with his bare hands when he went into Mecca. We were ordered by our prophet to take down idols and destroy them, and the companions of the prophet did this after this time, when they conquered countries." From this, some believers have inferred that all statues are forbidden, regardless of their artistic, cultural or historic value.

Such warnings through brazen acts of destruction have reproduced aftershocks: According to this interpretation, anyone is allowed – moreover, encouraged – to break statues and works of sculpture, and destroy artefacts with impunity.

#### "Now is the time to say no to those who want to impose their dogma on us — to rediscover the thinking of Hussein and Al Maeir'i"

Osama al-Shariff

This thinking has permitted – indeed, advocated – that nothing is off-limits when it comes to vandalising statues and sculptures in the name of anti-idolatry. As a result, several statues of iconic figures in Arab history have been desecrated.

It's not only ancient statues that have been subjected to attacks backed by such dogma: The effigy of celebrated Egyptian singer Um Kalthoum was covered with a veil, and the statue of Taha Hussein – the first Arab author nominated



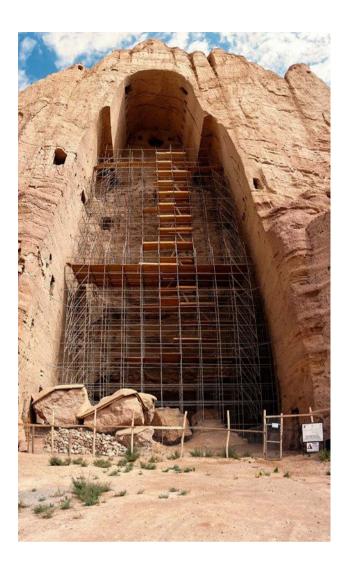
BELOW The ancient city of Palmyra in Syria before the Islamic State destroyed the heritage site in 2015 RIGHT The Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001

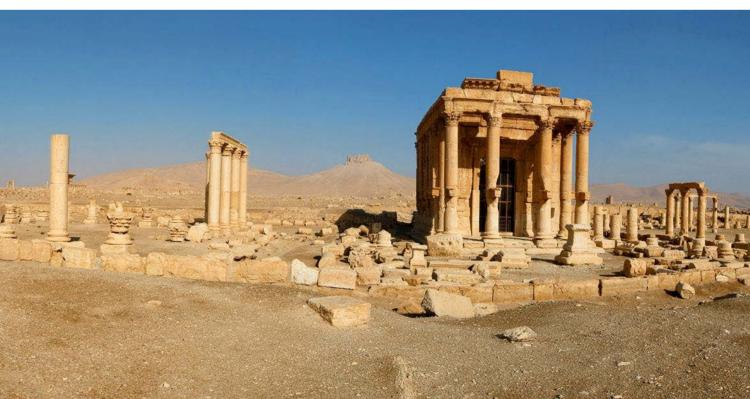
for the Nobel Prize – mysteriously disappeared. In the Syrian city of Idlib, the statue of the famous Muslim philosopher Abu Ala' Al Maer'i was destroyed. In Iraq, the statues of renowned Abbasid-era poet Abu Tammam and musician Abu Osman Al-Mosuli – as well as the famous "Spring Girl" monument – were obliterated. A bomb was used to destroy the statue of Abu Jaafar Al Mansour, the founder of the Abbasid Caliphate.

In Jordan, college art projects have also been targeted. One graduate went to collect her artwork from university, only to find that her sculpture project – along with 10 others – had been torn down.

It seems that the Arab Spring "has turned sour", writes journalist Osama al-Shariff, continuing: "Now is the time to say no to those who want to impose their dogma on us – to rediscover the thinking of Hussein and Al Maeir'i; to doubt and ask questions, and to celebrate our free thinkers, not join in the ritual defacing of their statues."

But in societies imbued with numerous cultural and religious taboos, this voice of reason can be drowned out. Despite the strong condemnation of such acts from the international community – as well as from many renowned Muslim clerics – acts of aggression taken out on heritage sites, and artwork in general, have accelerated.







### The demand for antiquities in Western art markets are fuelling the demand for looted artefacts from the Middle East

ABOVE "Ford 71" in Mahmoud Obaidi's exhibition Fragments shows a pickup with rossyrian, Babylonian and Sumerian cultures BELOW Obaidi's toppled statue of Saddam Hussein. He threaded a rope from the monument to stolen artefacts in order to tell the story of the destruction of Iraq

However, this destruction is not always driven by religious principles; it also has to do with lucrative business. Many valuable items from raided museums and heritage sites have been looted for smuggling into the art black market – and there are many willing buyers waiting in the wings. Art buyers are purchasing antiquities at depressed prices, with the pieces having passed through the hands of smugglers and middlemen, in turn spurring incentive to loot and fuelling demand. In a report published in the *Guardian*, US Customs noted that there was a 145 percent increase in imports of Syrian cultural property and a 61 percent increase in imports of Iraqi cultural property between 2011 and 2013.

The demand for antiquities in Western art markets is fuelling the demand for looted artefacts from the Middle East, while simultaneously providing an additional source of income for looting factions, such as ISIS. The group profits from selling the bounty, and regulates the black market.

The good news is that activists and experts have not sat back and lamented such damages without action. Numerous legislators are working to implement better laws and monitoring systems that aim to curb this influx of plundered artefacts. One means of doing so is to ensure that the objects traded without a clear record of source and previous ownership fetch lower prices. But, when trading is occurring outside the parameters of legal trading, there is little to stop the unprincipled buyer.



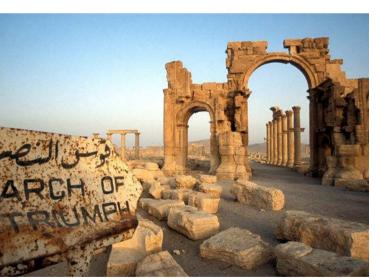
## The Destruction of Heritage Sites in Iraq and Syria

The Islamic State (ISIS) has destroyed and damaged numerous cultural sites in the region, claiming that their actions are religiously motivated in eliminating idolatry. The group's looting has been used to fund their military operations. Here are some of the sites they have destroyed so far









TOP RIGHT Iraqis stand near the destroyed statue of Abu Jaafar al-Mansour, which was blown up in an overnight explosion in Baghdad in 2005

TOP Workers from TorArt watch as the central part of the marble replica of Palmyra's Arch of Triumph is put into place near the caves of Carrara, Italy

ABOVE The Arch of Triumph of Palmyra in the east of Syria before its destruction

#### Several projects seeking to protect, preserve and archive threatened heritage sites and lost artefacts are working to ensure that history is not lost

Beyond improved legislation, activist groups have worked to come up with creative means of salvaging heritage sites. Several projects seeking to protect, preserve and archive threatened heritage sites and lost artefacts are working to ensure that history is not lost – or at best, can be recreated.

One such effort involved a projection of the lost Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan. Built in the 6th century, these ancient sandstone carvings were the world's tallest Buddha statues until they were destroyed by a bomb placed by the Taliban in 2001. Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar justified the deliberate destruction of the statues on religious grounds, saying that "These idols have been gods of the infidels". Recreating the Buddhas involved using threedimensional laser projection technology to recreate the statues as a hologram, filling the empty cavities in the cliffs with the projections. According to a report in The Atlantic, the holograms were the work of a Chinese couple who



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

had been struck by the destruction of the statues. Having experimented with their projections on a mountainside in China, they received approval from UNESCO and the Afghan government to bring their hologram projection of the statues to Afghanistan in 2015.

UNESCO is doing a lot of work to ensure the safeguarding of Syrian cultural heritage. One such measure is employing digitisation for organising the inventories and archives of cultural property in Syrian museums in order to simplify the identification and registration of missing artefacts.

A campaign called "Save Syria's History" was launched to raise awareness of the current looting of museums and illegal excavation of archaeological sites. UNESCO states that the initiative "serves to remind all Syrian people, regardless of their political allegiance, of the importance to protect their rich cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations". The campaign disseminated posters and audio-visual material across Syria to convey this message, and created a network of volunteers from local communities to come together all over the country. The project works to help museum staff move archaeological artefacts to safe and secure places, while also providing added security around archaeological sites at risk of being illegally excavated.



Organisation Iconem is working to preserve the knowledge of threatened heritage using digital technology, producing digital doubles of archaeological remains. Iconem sends specialists to support Syrian archaeologists and architects by providing them with advanced techniques to document their heritage, creating a digital database of Syrian monuments. To view their incredible digital reconstructions, visit www.syrianheritagerevival.org



# Despite efforts to salvage and recreate the remnants of ongoing cultural vandalism, the thinking that supports such demolitions has not dissipated

ABOVE A lamassu

– an Assyrian deity
comprised of a human's
head and a lion's body
with wings – from
Nimrud displayed in the
Metropolitan Museum
of Art in New York

TOP RIGHT Soldiers in Al Hatra, an ancient, now-ruined city southwest of Mosul in Iraq BOTTOM RIGHT The great colonnade at Apamea in Syria, which has been partially destroyed by the Islamic State Replicating the tombs, statues, temples and archaeological sites is happening even without the support of international organisations. Artists are reconstructing the past. In Iraq, Ninos Thabet, an 18-year-old who studied art at Mosul University, is putting his creativity to good use. He is working on creating miniature replicas of the statues destroyed in the 3,000-year-old Assyrian city of Nimrud, south of Mosul, when it was overrun. Thabet fled Mosul with his family to the Kurdish capital, Erbil, and has since created more than 50 miniatures of the now lost statues. In Jordan, Syrian artists in the Zaatari refugee camp came together for a special project aimed at reconstructing Syrian artefacts and cultural sites destroyed during the war.

Further afield in Italy, replicas of several masterpieces vandalised or destroyed in Syria and Iraq have been recreated. The replicas have been featured in a UNESCO-sponsored



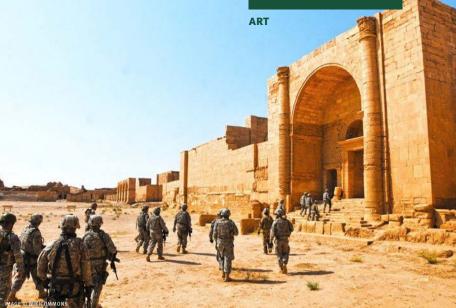




exhibit called "Rising from Destruction". One such replica is the life-size human-headed winged bull that once stood outside the palace at Nimrud – the former capital of the Assyrian Empire. The original was flattened by ISIS in 2015. Specially trained technicians copied the original works from photographs to create smaller models. The team then used 3D printers and layers of real stone to create the life-sized replicas. Such commendable efforts and rescue initiatives are giving rise to a new world of art.

Despite efforts to salvage and recreate the remnants of ongoing cultural vandalism, the thinking that supports such demolitions has not dissipated. Moreover, the black market for smuggled antiquities is flourishing. Efforts at promoting the abandonment of illegal artefacts trading on the grounds of moral impetus is weak where integrity is not considered a worthy bargaining chip.

In the end, it's not only valuable artefacts that are threatened: The cultural memory of these parts of the Middle East is under siege. Ultimately, understanding the crisis goes beyond an implementation of new legislature: Addressing and understanding the mentality that condones such acts is part of the process of seeking solutions. • AG

SA'EDA AL-KILANI is a Jordanian policy advisor and journalist focused on civil society and human rights. In addition to writing for several Arabic, English and French publications, she has worked as a correspondent for Reporters Without Borders and the Jordan Times. She also worked as the advocacy director for WAN-IFRA and as MENA Director for Article 19. She is the author of several books on anti-corruption and human rights.





OPENING PAGE

Myanmar punks attend an underground music show at the Thingyan water festival in Yangon RIGHT Yu Ziyang of D-Crash performing during the Beijing Punk Festival

**Punk** hardly needs an introduction. Music, fashion and lifestyle converge in this unique subculture, known for its wild Mohawk hairstyles, spikes and piercings, black leather and "emo" disposition.

In Asia, a continent whose many different cultures tend to share a deep-seated appreciation for cultural traditionalism, you would be forgiven for thinking that punk barely registers in the social strata in the more conservative parts of the region.

But it does – and not just in terms of fashion statements – although in fashionable areas such as Taipei's Zhongxiao-Dunhua and Tokyo's Harajuku, you can drop several hundred dollars to get the look of strung-out Sid Vicious, even if without the Sex Pistols' true grit.

But while punk culture comprises a very small segment of the population in Asia, there are several dedicated punk scenes stepping into the spotlight.

Music, fashion and lifestyle converge in this unique subculture, known for its wild Mohawk hairstyles, spikes and piercings, black leather and "emo" disposition

#### **PUNK REVOLUTION**

Myanmar was run by a ruthless military junta which crushed any voices of dissent for decades. Here, punk has remained in the underground for some 20 years, but it is finally emerging.

According to 36-year-old Thet Khaing – also known as "Skum" – a vocalist in Yangon's D-beat "crust" punk band Kultureshock, and a leading figure in the Burmese punk insurgence, Myanmar's punk scene started out as one of the city's fashion factions before it evolved into a fully-fledged music movement.

"It all started in the mid-1990s when a group of guys started to dress up like punks on festival days," he says. "Younger kids wanted to copy their style and began the practice of going out dressed up like punks. Eventually, that fashion punk scene evolved and became the punk music scene you see nowadays."





RIGHT Punk band members play games with children during a "Food Not Bombs" campaign BELOW Food and activities are organised for the community during "Food Not Bombs" events

One of the other well-known bands in the punk new wave in Myanmar is Rebel Riot. For 29-year-old singer and guitarist Kyaw Kyaw, his idea to start a band was instigated during his country's Saffron Revolution in the late summer and early autumn of 2007. Protests had kicked off in Yangon and spread around the country after the government removed fuel subsidies, causing the prices of petrol and natural gas to skyrocket.

"After [the revolution], we believed that people have the power to oppose the military system. That's why we became a punk band – to speak loud for justice," says Kyaw Kyaw.

From a fashion trend to a music underground movement, Burmese punk runs deep in a country where approximately one quarter of the population still lives below the poverty line – a rate that doubles in rural areas. Rebel Riot tackles this state of affairs with the lyrics of dissent of the variety that have defined the punk genre: "No fear! No indecision!/Rage against the system of the oppressors! We are poor, hungry and have no chance/Human rights don't apply to us/We are victims, victims, victims."







But rather than just sing about the challenges and changes of the socio-political system, Rebel Riot have been at the helm of Myanmar's "Food Not Bombs" chapter since 2012, distributing vegetarian meals to Yangon's needy.

In spite of their efforts to do something positive for the community, Kultureshock vocalist Khaing says that punks are still looked down on: "Still, punks are viewed as misfits and outsiders of society by the general public. In Yangon, people are getting used to seeing punks on the streets. But it's still not socially acceptable, for punks are considered hoodlums or petty criminals by most Burmese people."

#### **MUSIC WITH A MESSAGE**

For 16 years, Riz Farooqi, frontman of longstanding Hong Kong hardcore band King Ly Chee, and a revolving cast of musicians, have been the flag bearers for the Hong Kong punk scene. King Ly Chee has toured several countries in Asia, and made it to the US in 2016 for a series of gigs with American hardcore legends Sick of It All. As a result, they've won themselves a worldwide following.

International success notwithstanding, Farooqi has found that promoting the music he loves in his hometown has been an uphill slog. "There are only a small handful of bands within the world of hardcore and punk rock in Hong Kong. Because there's such a small number of groups, most of the bands are

pretty friendly with each other. There seems to be some sort of kinship, somehow, in finding that little group of people who are super into this music in a city of seven million," he says.

The small number of Hong Kongers who have embraced an interest in punk music have maintained this niche since the late 1980s, but development has been relatively non-existent, says Farooqi. "It's just what it's been like here for a couple of decades now," he laments. "There has been no growth whatsoever. Any time there seems to be some sort of a breakout band, it only lasts a few months."

## "We believed that people have the power to oppose the military system. That's why we became a punk band — to speak loud for justice"

Kyaw Kyaw

Nevertheless, Farooqi's passion is still going strong, and he continues to write new music and plot new courses for his band. The Chinese government's increased political meddling in public life has impacted the punk scene for over a decade. In 2004, King Ly Chee – a band that has never shied from expressing its dissenting views on the political system – was placed on a blacklist of bands banned from playing on the Chinese mainland.

This banishment, says Farooqi, has stopped King Ly Chee and similar bands from being able to take their music from a part-time passion to a full-time vocation. "In China, the money is all in the festivals. Bands can make a living from just doing the festival circuit because so many companies are dumping tonnes of money into those things. Since we're almost never allowed to play in those festivals, we don't get access to any of that cash which could go into further developing the band," he says.

An important part of keeping punk alive in Asia is passing on its message of perseverance. Farooqi, father to a young daughter, hopes that the lessons he learned through punk might be imparted to her: "I have no idea if my daughter will go the same route in playing music. But if she does – regardless of what music she plays – I hope she understands that being actively involved in something means going out and making things happen yourself. More so, the lesson is about respecting people from different backgrounds."

#### THE HOMEGROWN HOUSE

Another Southeast Asian stronghold of punk is located in the Muslim state of Malaysia. Since 2010, Rumah Api – which translates to "House of Fire" – a Kuala Lumpur punk space owned and operated by 37-year-old Man Beranak, has become the primary live venue for the local punk, metal, and hardcore music scene.



#### What punk has embodied, perhaps more than any other music form, is a freedom of expression, in cultures where dissent is often not welcome

Beranak has organised countless shows for both local and overseas bands. The former banker's journey into the punk labyrinth began at 13, when a friend made him a mix tape, not long after the Malaysian punk scene started out with bands like Carburetor Dung in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Beranak later mustered up the courage to leave banking and dedicate his life to creating a space for punk music. "I took much influence from 924 Gilman in the United States, Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen, and Köpi in Berlin," he says of his sources of inspiration.

Beranak says he has been committed to creating a space for punk that is opposed to any form of discrimination or violence in Malaysia. However, this has not stopped attacks on Rumah Api.

"We have been attacked by the cops two times, from Malay Power three or four times, and from the city council too many times," Beranak recalls.

Malaysia's extreme "Malay Power" group is an organisation similar in outlook to the neo-Nazi "white power" movements, complete with its own bands, brands and boots-and-braces sporting skinheads who aren't opposed to using violence and fear as an intimidation tool to target groups whom they feel are straying too far from so-called traditional Malay values. They actively campaign for the implementation of far-right nationalism that eliminates non-ethnic Malays and curbs immigration. This group identifies themselves as part

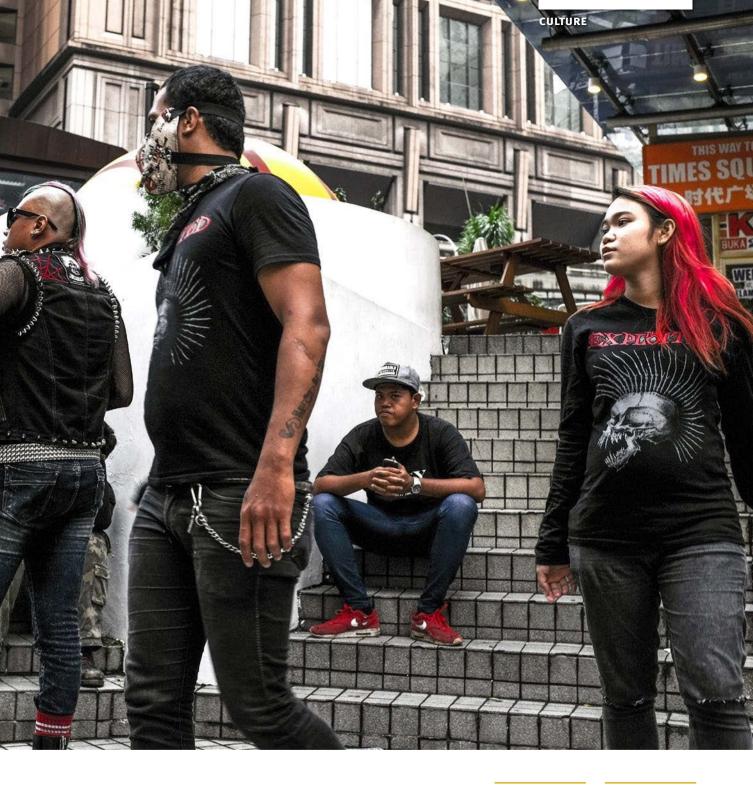


of the punk scene in Malaysia. Malay Power band Boot Axe's leader, "Mr Slay", told *Vice* that "all Malaysian neo-Nazis listen to punk and skinhead music" and that the anti-Nazi punks in Malaysia would "dare not openly oppose us. They are afraid to speak out."

Beranak stands in firm opposition to the association between punk and such brands of racism, however, seeing it as damaging to his efforts at destignatising punk. Despite continued threats of attacks from these different fronts,

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Rumah Api's doors remain defiantly open in the spirit of spreading the punk ethos of non-conformity and non-violence.

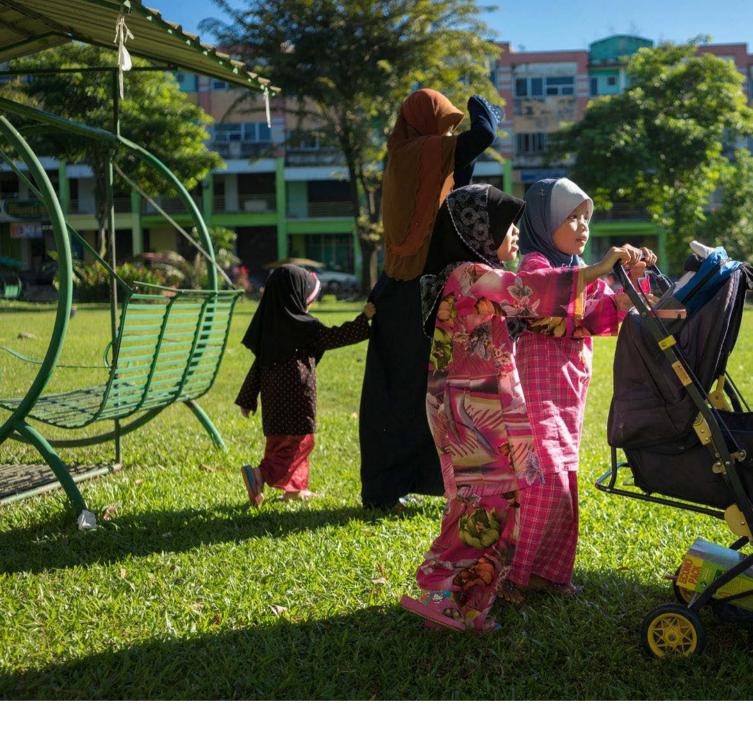
What punk has embodied, perhaps more than any other music form, is a freedom of expression, in cultures where dissent is often not welcome. Beneath this subculture's opposition to the mainstream is a quiet power in the form of social commentary that is becoming increasingly relevant as it emerges from the underground, and finds a voice. • AG

ABOVE LEFT A man shows off some unusual punk-style accessories in Kuala Lumpur ABOVE A group of teenagers dressed in punk gear in Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur

JOE HENLEY is a freelance writer, author, and musician. Based in Taipei, his second novel, set in the Taipei punk scene, is due out in early 2017.







**Driving** through the streets of the commuter town of Rawang, 30 kilometres north of Malaysia's capital city Kuala Lumpur, Azlina Jamaluddin is more than eager to challenge any criticism of polygamous marriage.

A born-again Muslim and self-proclaimed "working woman", the 48-year-old dentist ascribes her professional success and personal growth to polygamy.

"I can work, I have more time for myself and I don't need to take care of my children all the time, as the other wives share the childrearing responsibilities with me," she shares.

Azlina wasn't always supportive of the practice, however – like many people in Malaysia. Although legal, polygamy is still

largely frowned upon in the country. She only considered asking her husband to take another wife after she was introduced to the religious teachings of Global Ikhwan – the "Islamic business" she has been working for since 2001.

Contrary to the commonly held belief that it is mostly men who pursue polygamous relationships, she was the spouse convincing her husband to seek out a second wife. He now also works for the same company as Azlina, and has three wives, having adopted the new lifestyle.

"Initially, he wouldn't have married another woman. He's just not that kind of guy," the manager of one of the company's health clinics explains. Azlina admits that in the



"I can work, I have more time for myself and I don't need to take care of my children all the time, as the other wives share the childrearing responsibilities with me"

Azlina Jamaluddin

ABOVE Two girls push a stroller inside the Global Ikhwan compound

RIGHT A young student prays at the Sekolah Menengah Islam Global Ikhwan school early days, she too had doubts about where her newfound faith had brought her. But her love for God and religion took priority over her weariness.

"My friends and my mother told me, 'You are going to join this movement and your husband will marry another woman.' It worried me for a while. I didn't know which way to go. I wasn't in the movement at full blast. But I really loved God and I loved the movement."

Today, Azlina cannot imagine her life without the company, which is often referred to by the employees of Global Ikhwan ("Global Brother" in Malay), herself included, as a "movement".

It is the fusion of the corporate with the religious that has been raising many eyebrows over the years, as well as the historical links between the business and a banned Islamic sect called Al-Argam – a reference that Azlina dismisses.

"We are a group learning about Islam. And in life you need to eat and you need to live, so for that we have a company. You can call it a movement, you can call it a company." However, she adds, "You cannot separate the company from the religion."

Founded in the 1960s by Ashaari Mohammad, who had 40 children with his four wives – the maximum number allowed under Malaysian law – Al-Arqam owned a number of businesses and had strict rules regarding Islamic dress codes and behaviour.

The sect was banned by the Malaysian religious authorities in 1994, with five members arrested and detained under the Internal Security Act. At the time, the authorities asserted that the teachings of Ashaari were deviant because they alluded to supernatural powers and promoted unorthodox views about communicating with the Prophet.

In the wake of the ban, Ashaari set up an "Islamic business" called Rufaqa, which became Syarikat Global Ikhwan, and was shortened to Global Ikhwan in May 2013.







When Ashaari passed away in 2010, one of his widows, Hatijah Aam, took over his empire, but didn't manage to keep it out of the limelight for long. In May 2013, she was arrested when returning from Saudi Arabia on charges of trying to resurrect the sect through the company.

Hatijah presided over the infamous Obedient Wives Club – an initiative launched by the female employees of Global Ikhwan – which called on women to "be obedient and act like first-class prostitutes" to keep their husbands from straying. The club attracted widespread condemnation domestically and internationally, with human rights watchdogs accusing it of promoting polygamy that was detrimental to women.

However, those days of controversy are over, according to current Global Ikhwan CEO, Lokman Hakim, who proudly shows off pictures of his 27 children on his smartphone – 15 from his first wife, eight from the second, one from the third, and three from the fourth.

Following the outrage, he and a few hundred other Global Ikhwan employees attended 500 hours of "rehabilitation courses", conducted by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department, and, in a public ceremony in October 2013, renounced their beliefs.

"We have no more problems with the authorities. You can see my photos with everyone – politicians, businessmen,

#### "Here we encourage women to work, because they have to contribute to the society"

Global Ikhwan CEO Lokman Hakim

the prime minister, even with the religious authorities," the 49-year-old Malay man says, visibly content as he navigates his big Mercedes through the Global Ikhwan estate.

Tucked away in a residential area of Rawang, painted with the Ikhwan signature colour of grass green, the company's premises resemble a self-sufficient commune.

The estate features a prayer room, cafés, a bakery, restaurants, a health clinic – with a maternity ward – a travel agent, a clothing store, a small hotel and a recording studio, where Ikhwan's entertainment-minded employees produce music and television dramas. Among the company's core businesses is the production of halal food, which it sells in its supermarkets.

Although Global Ikhwan officially rejected the "deviant" teachings of Al-Arqam, Lokman says, it maintains the Islamic business ethics of the original movement, which focus on the premise of community obligations – "fardu kifayah". Consequently, the company charges unusually flexible rates for the services it provides.





LEFT Azlina Jamaluddin (right) visits friend Nik Raihana, 27, who delivered a baby at the Global Ikhwan clinic ABOVE Lokman Hakim has lunch with his four wives and three of his 27 children in a Chinese restaurant in Rawang

In the company clinic, for example, clients pay as much as they can afford – those with little means pay nothing.

The goal is not to make a profit; rather it is to adhere to good Islamic practices, according to the CEO. "A good Muslim is not simply a person who stays in the mosque or is fasting. A good Muslim is the person who benefits other people," Lokman explains.

Walking around the facilities, one cannot help but notice the ubiquity of colourful headscarves. "Here we encourage women to work, because they have to contribute to the society. One quarter of the employees are men," says the chief executive. "The rest are women."

His wives are no different. Linked to the original Al-Arqam sect in one way or another, all of them work or have previously worked for the company. They also attended Global Ikhwan schools or pursued higher education at company-approved universities.

#### **POLYGAMY IN NUMBERS**

#### REJECT POLYGAMY



Polygamy was rejected by 61 percent of all males and by 85 percent of all female young Malaysians between 15 and 25



The number of polygamous marriages in Malaysia is around five percent but is increasing marginally from year to year



60%

Up to 60 percent of the children of first wives demonstrated negative emotions towards their fathers marrying again



Under Malaysian law, it's legal for Muslim men to marry up to four wives, although they must obtain permission from a Shariah court



LEFT Students pray at the Sekolah Menengah Islam Global Ikhwan school in Puchong BOTTOM LEFT Puan Wan Nur Fauziah (centre) at the Sekolah Menengah Islam Global Ikhwan school in Puchong BELOW Aisyah Yob supervises three students during a cooking lesson at the Global Ikhwan school



Lokman explains that children of Global Ikhwan employees usually go to "normal schools" from the age of seven to 12 and then, depending on their parents' wishes, further their education in Malaysia or Egypt, concentrating on Islamic studies.

In Malaysia, the company runs 50 educational establishments for children and young adults – all registered with the authorities. Students sit the same exams as those taken at government faith schools, in addition to studying the movement's religious curriculum.

For girls aged 13 and over, the Sekolah Menengah Islam Global Ikhwan is located in Puchong, in the southern suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. Here, daughters of company employees attend classes with orphans or students from families with limited means. The education is free, in keeping with the company's ideology of "doing good deeds and spreading love".

"For us at Global Ikhwan, it is so scary to watch the youngsters' morale degrading so fast in today's world," says Wan Nor Fauziah Meor Mohammad, the school administrator. "As Muslims, we need to prepare them, so they can choose between hell and heaven. It is our responsibility."

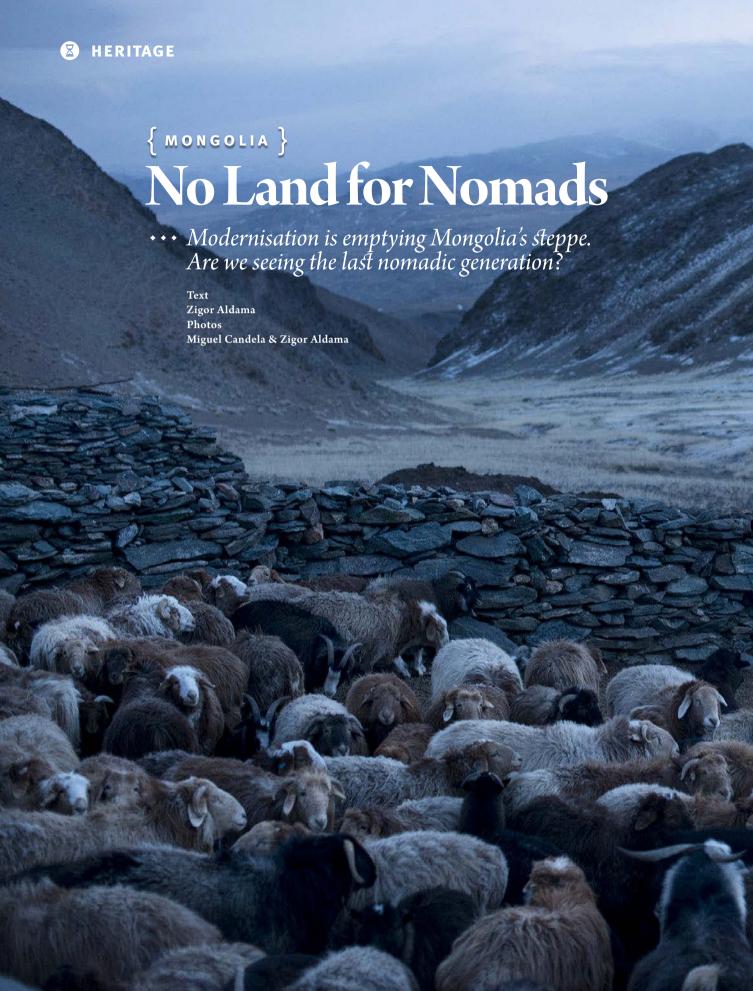
Accordingly, the students' lives revolve around prayer and religious studies, Arabic, maths and vocational training that mirrors the corporate activities of Global Ikhwan.

The girls can choose whether they want to pursue gardening or work at a café, a laundrette, a second-hand shop or the nursery, which cares for the infants of school staff during work hours. They also learn how to cook and clean. This, says Lokman, prepares them for employment by Ikhwan, and facilitates intermarriage within its worldwide network of employees.

"We are trying really hard to remain a religious business," Lokman explains. The only means of truly achieving this, he says, is the intermarriage of company employees, who today number 4,000. They come from countries where the business operates: Saudi Arabia – where most of its profits reportedly come from – Egypt, Indonesia, the UAE, Turkey, Jordan, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, Germany and Britain, to name a few. He adds: "It's easier because we have the same principles and understanding." • AG

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**THOMAS CRISTOFOLETTI** works in Southeast Asia as a humanitarian photographer and videographer.







**It'S** seven in the morning, but the frosty Mongolian steppe is still pitch black. With a thick blanket of clouds covering the starry sky, darkness is pierced by the hundreds of eerie lights emanating from the eyes of a large sheep herd. They stare at whoever dares to come out of the *ger* – the nomads' traditional yurt – into the icy open air, some 35°C below zero. Their woolly faces are covered in ice. They have survived these bitter temperatures by staying very close to one another; this morning, they are huddled behind a wooden enclosure in the middle of nowhere.

But Shuukhaz, a lean 17-year-old, is not afraid of the cold. Wearing just a thin jacket and no gloves, he brandishes a flashlight and starts the daily routine in the barn where the family's cows and horses spend the winter nights. The eldest

of the family's two daughters, Margad Erdene, soon joins him to milk the animals.

With the first lazy sun rays splintering through the clouds, a spectacular landscape takes shape. Arid mountains become imposing shadows on the horizon, a white carpet rolling up to them. There is nothing else to interrupt the stark vastness.

"The closest family we know of is about 30 kilometres away," says Damb Batnasan, the children's father. His wife, Batsuren Tsetsegmaa, is making soup for breakfast in the rudimentary kitchen, burning dung to heat the *ger*. "We are also the youngest couple around," she adds. The couple will turn 30 soon, but Damb is not optimistic about their way of life: "I believe nomads will disappear with our generation."



"We are always worried about winter. A very cold season could kill many of our sheep and make it difficult for us to survive"

ABOVE Damb Batnasan tries to calm his horse before riding the grassland roads to the nearest village RIGHT While eager to find a better education for their children, many nomads are not prepared for the drastic change in lifestyle in Ulaanbaatar He points to his daughters. The youngest is just two years old, but she already knows how to slide her forefinger along the screen of a smartphone with surprising dexterity. The oldest, aged seven, is glued to a TV series and longs to get back to the closest city, Zaamar, after the school holidays are over. "I want to go to the school with other kids. Staying here is boring," she laments. "It's also hard," her father adds.

The family owns 30 horses, a dozen cows, and a herd of 500 cattle – just enough to get by. "We are always worried about the winter. A very cold season could kill many of our sheep and make it difficult for us to survive," Damb says.

The family have changed locations four times in search of better pastures, which proves problematic for the kids' education. "Right now, they go to school and live in Zaamar city during term-time. So we just meet during their holidays," their mother explains. They are celebrating the lunar new year, and some friends have come to visit.

"My dream is to become a mechanic and buy an apartment in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, where I can have more freedom and find a girl who suits me, and not the one my parents want me to marry," Shuukhaz says with a grin.

Still, Damb won't give up. "We were born on the steppe and we love to be in contact with Nature. I'm an avid horse rider and I wouldn't fit in the city. But I know my daughters won't follow our steps. We will grow old alone," he says, unable to conceal his sadness.





TOP LEFT The daughter of Hairathan Sernehan collects cow dung for the kitchen fire. She has moved to the city but visits her parents during winter to help out

BELOW LEFT
Bayarshaikhan hugs
her daughter inside
her ger in Ulaanbaatar.
The government has
subsidised families with
newer, cleaner stoves

TOP RIGHT A nomad family based in the desert takes care of its camels **BELOW RIGHT** A family builds a *ger* in their 0.7 hectares of land that they have been entitled by law to occupy

Eagle hunter Hairathan Sernehan is a case example of what comes next. The five children of the 52-year-old flew the nest a while ago. He now manages the cattle alone. "Now, they just come to visit from time to time. And only because they worry that my wife and I are getting too old to take care of the animals. They enjoy their new life in Olgii – the capital of Bayan-Ölgii Province. So I guess that, when the time comes, they will sell the cattle and take care of us in the city."

Even if Genghis Khan's portrait is the main feature in Hairathan's winter hut, he does not care much about the dawn of the nomadic life that has characterised Mongolian culture for thousands of years. He pities the fact that many of the traditions that make the country proud may also die with his generation: "Eagle hunting, for example. You just need to see our age. We are all well over 50. And even though there are some youngsters still interested in learning, their numbers are decreasing fast."

# Unemployment is at around 60 percent in these new settlements, which in turn instigates other issues, such as alcoholism and crime

Only the traditional wrestling and horse-riding customs are thriving, and that's mainly because the athletes can also compete in similar modalities recognised abroad. "It's not because of tradition, but for money," Hairathan says, critically. "Many think of wrestling because they want to become sumo stars in Japan."

As many other elders do, Hairathan blames TV and the Internet for the change, but his children refute this claim: "Times have changed. We see the world now. And we just want to live more comfortably," his daughter, Aikejan, says.

Other members of the younger generation also mention the need to get a good education in order to achieve satisfactory personal development – something that only cities can offer. "I like to live in Nature and be very close to the family. But I also want to be independent, become a professional in a technical field, and marry whoever I want, not just the girl in the closest *ger*," Jariber Bimolda, 18, says. He feels the mining industry has good opportunities, and he knows there is a need for skilled personnel, not labourers.

According to statistics from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), around 900,000 of the three million inhabitants of Mongolia still roam a territory





that is three times the size of France, but NGOs estimate that around 40,000 people settle down every year. Most settle on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, a burgeoning city where the surrounding mountain slopes are now full of *gers* and small wooden houses.

With rapid urbanisation, social problems have proliferated. Unemployment is at around 60 percent in these new settlements, which in turn instigates other issues, such as alcoholism and crime.

Certainly, life in the city is not even close to what Erden Bat dreamt of. "We didn't have enough cattle to lead a good life, so we decided to sell [them] and requested the 0.7 hectares of land we are entitled to by law in Ulaanbaatar," he explains. The government allocated the family a plot about 10 kilometres east of the city centre, where they built their ger.







#### THE CHANGING TIMES

The younger generation of Mongolians feels increasingly disconnected to their parents' nomadic way of living, which has been practised for thousands of years. With increasing migration to the capital but a lack of infrastructure to accommodate the surge of people, many social problems are proliferating.



#### **Pastoral Traditions**

Mongolians have followed a pastoral way of living for 3,000 years. Mongolian nomadic people move two to four times a year



#### **Seeking Greener Pastures**

In the 1950s, only about 20 percent of Mongolians lived in urban areas. In 2014, 68 percent of the population lived in cities and towns



#### A Livestock Livelihood

Mongolia has over 55.9 million livestock. There are more sheep than people in Mongolia: 12 sheep per person



#### **Burgeoning Numbers**

Mongolia's population has been increasing at an annual rate of more than four percent since 2000 The rate of urbanisation annually is 2.78 percent



#### **Modern Challenges**

Unemployment rate in 2016 was at 10.4 percent, while economic growth was at 3.1 percent



# "Once you've sold your herd, there is no return. Hope dies in the city until only survival is left"

Sukhtogoo

"It was supposed to be a temporary home. But, with prices for apartments starting at around 2.5 million tugrik (around USD1,000) per square metre, there is no way we will move soon," he says. His two children, Maral, 17, and Gankhoyag, 20, have received an education, but can't find work, and spend most of the day watching TV and playing on their phones.

"My father just does odd jobs, and my mother gets some money as a tailor, but nothing steady," Maral shares. "At least, in the countryside, there is always something to do and something to eat," her brother adds. But neither of them would be willing to return to the steppe. "We've become lazy," he says bluntly.

The Mongolian government is aware of the challenges ahead. In a 2009 report from the World Bank, it cited climate change as one of the main threats to nomadic life.



PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT Living in isolation on the frozen steppe is difficult, particularly for the youth. Once they have a taste of modern life, they don't want to continue the nomadic lifesyle; a nomadic family in their two-room winter house

PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT Falconer Hairathan Sernehan lives in Bayan-Ölgii, which is home to the Kazakh ethnic group; a boy plays with his toys in Bayan-Ölgii Province in the western part of Mongolia

LEFT Damb Batnasan and his wife watch TV and drink local vodka. With temperatures reaching -35°C, there is little outdoor activity during the winter season

Since 1940, temperatures have risen 2.14°C, and rain has become unpredictable – more abundant in winter and scarce in summer; the Gobi Desert has expanded about 150 kilometres north.

The Ministry of the Environment expects temperatures to keep rising throughout the century, with extreme weather set to become a more common occurrence. The consequences of this could be a decline in crop yields, and a threat to livestock on which many nomads rely.

"Without animals, it's impossible to live in the countryside," Ankhtsetseg Bardal confirms. "And you need at least a herd of 500 heads to make a decent living." Since her family couldn't afford a herd that large, they decided to journey the 400 kilometres to Ulaanbaatar a few years ago. With them, the young couple took their newborn baby girl, and Bardal's husband's 89-year-old grandmother. "She has a hard time adjusting to the city. But we thought we would be able to offer her a better life here," Bardal says.

Bardal is pregnant again and her husband struggles to find construction work due to the crisis that has halted Mongolia's economic growth, plummeting from 17.5 percent in 2011 to 0.1 percent in 2016, according to the World Bank. Their future looks bleak, made more so by the many other stories that point to a loss of nomadic culture in exchange for urban survival.

Such was the case for Sukhtogoo. He left the mountains in the far west in 1965, and he regrets it to this day. He still calls a *ger* home in Ulaanbaatar, but this is one of the few remaining aspects of his former life and heritage. "Once you've sold your herd, there is no return. Hope dies in the city until only survival is left. People arrive full of dreams, but life turns them into a nightmare. You can't blame them for drinking, hitting their wives, or stealing. Mongolians have always been free and can't live behind fences. But we learn that now, when it's too late already." • AG

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MIGUEL CANDELA is a photographer currently based in Hong Kong, specialising in social features across Asia. He won Best New Talent at the 2012 Prix de la Photographie (Px3) Paris competition.









**FOr** well over a century, women of the South Korean island province of Jeju – "the Land of Women" – have made their living by freediving – ill-equipped – to the depths of the ocean to harvest seaweed and shellfish. Reaching depths of over 10 metres in chilly waters, and lasting between two to three minutes on a single gulp of air, over 100 times a day, the Hae-Nyeo, or "sea women", are often seen as myth-like mermaids. For as long as South Koreans can remember, the Hae-Nyeo have dived the waters surrounding Jeju, and have become emblematic of the very characteristics of the society that inhabits the far-flung island, reflecting the independent spirit, iron will and determination of its people.

The semi-matriarchal family structure of the island, where women are the main "breadwinners" of each household, has made Jeju a distant outlier from mainland Korea's traditionally patriarchal society. As diving is a job reserved for the resident women, and drives the main source of income, they have become the heads of the household. On Jeju and the surrounding islands, men look after the children and care

ABOVE LEFT Hae-Nyeo visit Haesindang Shrine to pray for safety and an abundant harvest

ABOVE Mulsojungi dive suits had side openings so that they were easy to put on – even for pregnant women **BELOW** A Hae-Nyeo diver in a modern rubber diving suit – which were distributed in the 1970s – carrying her harpoon







IMAGES © SEO JAE CHUL / HAE-NYEO MUSEUM

for the family, while the women bring home the money from their diving and farming. This tradition has advanced the status of women on the island, and simultaneously fostered a message of environmental consciousness, promoting sustainable fishing practices.

Today, the Hae-Nyeo are celebrated as one of Jeju's most valued cultural treasures, and the Korean government shows its appreciation for their unique contributions to Jeju's culture by subsidising their gear and granting exclusive rights to trade in fresh seafood, which they sell to the small restaurants dotted around the fringes of the island. However, this local diving industry has fallen victim to industrialisation and rising pollution in the surrounding waters.

Traditionally, from the age of 11, when girls of similar ages in other countries would be at school, the island's girls would begin to train to become Hae-Nyeo. Beginning in the shallows, trainees gradually worked their way up to more challenging depths of over 10 metres.

It takes seven years of training almost every day before a girl can be considered a fully qualified Hae-Nyeo, and from that moment she becomes a hardworking "mermaid" for life, spending every day diving under the eye of the early morning sun. In the afternoon, she ventures back to land to farm crops. It's a lifetime fully dedicated to husbandry, and it is vital to the island's survival. The women dive daily, through their pregnancies, and even into their mid-90s.

The divers are categorised into three groups depending on their level of experience: *hagun*, *junggun* and *sanggun*. The latter is the most experienced, offering advice and guidance to the younger divers.

Before they begin their dive, there's a prayer for safety and a wealthy catch. The Haesindang Shrine is a holy place where

# The women dive daily, through their pregnancies, and even into their mid-90s

Hae-Nyeo pray to Yeongdeung, the dragon god who controls the sea, and dances such as Jamsugut and Yowanggut are performed as rituals to pray for a good harvest.

Previously, the women dived in the freezing waters wearing loose cotton swimsuits called *mulot*, which consisted of three pieces: *mulsojungi* (pants), *muljeoksam* (jacket) and *mulsugun* (hair tie). They dived for up to two hours at a time.

The women finally began using proper wetsuits, subsidised by the government, in the 1970s. This meant that they could maintain their body heat for longer, and increase time spent in the water. They no longer had to sit by a fire for three to four hours to dry off their cotton clothing before jumping back in.

Today, while wearing headlight-shaped scuba masks and lead weights strapped around their waists to help them to sink faster, they still stick to the same techniques to collect seafood. A round flotation device called a *tewak*, – the size of



**ABOVE** Hae-Nyeo used to wear traditional cotton dive suits called *mulot* 

ABOVE RIGHT A bitchang

– a tool for picking
abalones off rocks –
and a set of flippers

RIGHT Four Hae-Nyeo women warm thmselves by a fire after a dive. The women dive up to 10 metres deep in the chilly waters



a basketball – sits at the surface of the water with a net called a *mangsari* hanging beneath it to collect the divers' harvest. Sharp tools called *bitchangs* and *kakuri* are used to remove abalones, sea urchins, conches and octopuses from the ocean floor.

After a dive, the Hae-Nyeo breach the water's surface and can be heard whistling – an ancient technique used to expel carbon dioxide from the lungs. Scrambling out of the ocean, tired and breathless, they reveal a human fragility that is imperceptible when they're gliding underwater. The danger of the job – navigating the line between life and death every day to sustain their families and the island – is manifested in the engraved folds and crease lines on their faces in their later years.

In the 1960s, the Korean government forged a plan to jump-start the country's economy in every province. Concluding that Jeju was not a practical place to build factories, officials decided to turn it into an exporter of mandarin oranges. By 1969, the majority of rural workers had joined this new industry. About two percent of all land in Jeju was dedicated to farming the fruit, which had a

ABOVE The Hae-Nyeo weigh and sell their catch to local markets, harvesting abalone, sea urchins and octopuses

#### After a dive, the Hae-Nyeo breach the water's surface and can be heard whistling – an ancient technique to expel carbon dioxide from the lungs

significant impact on the numbers of Hae-Nyeo. Between 1965 and 1970, numbers dropped from over 20,000 to under 15,000, increasing pressure on sustaining the Hae-Nyeo way of life.

UNESCO placed Hae-Nyeo on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2016, but these unique diving traditions are no longer being passed down to the younger generation.

Today, the vast majority of Hae-Nyeo are well into middle age – but against all the odds, the practices of these tenacious divers continue to endure. • AG

**OLIVER JARVIS** is the editor of UW360 based in Singapore. This article first appeared on the website.

Y.ZIN KIM is an underwater photographer based in South Korea. She is currently preparing for an underwater documentary as the very first female cave diver in Asia. She will be attending ADEX 2017 in Singapore.





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## Honouring Hae-Nyeo Heritage

THE HAE-NYEO WERE LISTED ON UNESCO'S LIST FOR INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AFTER THE ASIA DIVE EXPO (ADEX) IN 2016

Hae-Nyeo divers Kim Jae Youn and Kim Ok Ja travelled to ADEX Singapore in 2016, accompanying photographer Y.Zin Kim. In an ADEX interview, Kim Ok Ja offers a snippet of her life as a Hae-Nyeo.

"I went to school when I was nine years old, and by the time I graduated,

I was 15. Things were different then. At that time, we didn't sell fish to the market. We just ate what we caught. By the time I turned 18, I went inland to make some money, and came back three years later. After that, we could sell what we caught at the market. Back then, seaweed was the best thing to sell. So we earned some money like that, and each village did the same thing. We only ate barley rice with soup. I saved money by working as a Hae-Nyeo to raise my kids. They all got married and now live in Jeju.

"I go into the water once a day now, but when I was young, I went in three or four times a day. The [modern] diving suit came out about 30 years ago, but [before then], we only wore traditional suits, which are now displayed at the museum. [In the old suits] we could only be in the water for an hour maximum, because it was too cold. Now that we have this new diving suit, we go into the water at least once a day, working for five hours on average, because this suit maintains my body temperature. I could hold my breath underwater for around two minutes when I was younger, but now, only one minute or so.

"This [motioning to the buoy basket] is the most important thing. I put every fish I catch into this net to carry. My swimming goggles [are] also very important. Without these goggles, I can't see anything in the water.









#### "I am healthy because I am Hae-Nyeo, because your whole body works in the water"

When I go further and deeper into the water, my life depends on these things.

"We have beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Those who are more experienced go deeper, while the beginners work in shallow water. If you have a good technique, you can go deeper into the sea, and catch the expensive fish. Expert Hae-Nyeo can earn about 10 times more than beginner Hae-Nyeo in terms of money.

"I am healthy because I am Hae-Nyeo, because your whole body works in the water. If you are physically weak, you cannot be a Hae-Nyeo because when you go into the sea, it is totally different compared to when you are on land. Whether you catch many fish or not is up to you, but your mind set is essential – to tell [yourself] 'you can do it.'"

Watch the full ADEX interview conducted by photographer Y.Zin Kim here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tkiRak9pfc

Y.Zin Kim will be back at ADEX Singapore, running from April 7–9, 2017. Get all the details on the longest-running and largest dive expo in Asia, celebrating its 22nd year at: www.adex.asia



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

#### **RECOGNISED BY UNESCO**

The Hae-Nyeo were placed on the list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 2016. The divers' eco-friendly business operations and their tradition of passing on their knowledge to future generations were key criteria that lead them to be honoured by UNESCO.







AS the sun sets, a vanguard of boys enters the ceremonial grounds, shouldering large V-shaped objects covered in colourful plastic streamers and bells. They bounce up and down to set a beat while seated onlookers look towards the line of approaching Saisiyat tribespeople. As they begin to flood into the grounds, rocking their bodies as they step in time with the jangling bells, their haunting singing – energetic, but mournful – rises in volume.

The line of people is connected by intertwined arms – each hand crosses the body of the person adjacent to them to grasp the hand of the next person. They are dressed in the traditional blood-red clothing of the Saisiyat tribe with matching headbands. The end of the line is brought up by men and women whose backs are adorned with mirrors and rows of metal tubes, which clink together as they sway.



#### The Saisiyat

The Saisiyat are a Taiwanese ethnic group who live in the northwestern area of Taiwan in and around the cities of Miaoli and Hsinchu. There are only about 7,000 Saisiyat today; many were absorbed into Han Chinese culture. They are comprised of around 17 clans. Pasta'ay is the most important traditional rite of the Saisiyat tribe, a sacred ritual held once every two years deep in the mountains of Wufeng, with a large one held every 10 years. The ritual is in remembrance of the passing of a Taiwanese pygmy "short black people" whom the Saisivat exterminated. The festival is held around the 15th day of the 10th lunar month, at the end of the harvest season, and lasts over four days and three nights.

As they circle the ceremonial grounds, the repetitive dance becomes hypnotic. This is part of the Taiwanese Saisiyat tribe's performance of the rare Pasta'ay ritual, which commemorates the Ta'ay, a mythical pygmy race of "short black people" that died at the hands of the Saisiyat hundreds of years ago. It is performed every two years, but 2016 marked the "grand ceremony", which happens only once every decade.

The ritual can last up to a month, but there are only a few nights where outsiders are invited in to observe and join their dance of remembrance. Joined hand-in-hand, the dancers form alternating concentric circles which unexpectedly stop, speed up, and change direction from sundown to sunrise. Joining in the ritual, one can experience undeniably powerful camaraderie, which lasts for 12 continuous hours.

The ancient ceremony is not devoid of modern influence: Aboriginal youth donning traditional clothing and joining in the ancient dance flash branded shoes and the newest smartphones,

LEFT Participants dance at the Grand Pasta'ay festival, memorialising the Ta'ay, a race of "short black people" that died at the hands of the Saisiyat hundreds of years ago

BELOW The dancers join hands to form alternating concentric circles, which unexpectedly stop, speed up, and change direction, surrounded by onlookers in Hsinchu County



# Aboriginal youth donning traditional clothing and joining in the ancient dance flash branded shoes and the newest smartphones

contemporary Taiwanese street food is sold alongside the traditional indigenous wine, and plastic streamers, feathers and metal chimes intermingle where Japanese bullet casings and bamboo were once worn instead.

This inclusion of the modern does not seem sacrilegious – it appears to be a necessary adaptation in the face of cultural erasure. Taiwan was previously colonised by the Dutch, various Chinese groups, and the Japanese, and several indigenous groups disappeared as a result of subsequent violence, displacement, cultural assimilation, and capitalist pressures. Some have survived. Pasta'ay, while remaining true to its original form, is evolving, displaying the Saisiyat's cultural survival. and revival.

#### **APOLOGY THROUGH REMEMBRANCE**

Pasta'ay is also a form of apology to the now extinct Ta'ay – but it is not only the Saisiyat doing the apologising. Remembering the cultural marginalisation of indigenous groups has recently re-surfaced as a priority of the Taiwanese government.

In August 2016, Taiwanese president Tsai Ying-wen made an unprecedented speech in August 2016 in which she apologised to Taiwan's aboriginal people for "four centuries of pain and mistreatment". Significantly, her speech touched on the importance of remembrance.

She apologised for the way history has been written to ignore Taiwan's indigenous people, and for the banning of indigenous languages by the Japanese and early Taiwanese government. She made an oath to rectify these injustices.

Speaking about truth and reconciliation, she said: "In the Atayal language, truth is called *balay*, and reconciliation is called *sbalay*, so you simply add an 'S' sound to *balay*. Truth and reconciliation are, in fact, two related concepts. In other words, only by facing the truth sincerely can reconciliation be attained."

The event was accompanied by solidarity from indigenous representatives, but was also met with protest at what was seen as a meagre attempt to appease indigenous groups. Some expressed cynicism for both sides: "The president doesn't need to apologise to us," said 35-year-old Yeqin (葉芩) outside her home in the half-Saisiyat, half-Atayal village of Qingquan, near the site of Pasta'ay. "Why did she tell aborigines to sit out in the sun and line up in hot clothes for an apology? It isn't right. Saying sorry to us has no use. The damage is already done."

Yeqin says that she still encounters negative stereotypes about aboriginal groups – like whether aborigines drink all the time. The problem, in Yeqin's view, runs much deeper than a word of apology from the president.

Yeqin and her 6o-year-old mother-in-law, Jinying (金英) — who also goes by the Atayal name, Jiwas — do most of the talking as Yeqin's husband and their family gather in the yard to shell "tree beans", which is part of an annual tradition. The black beans sell for a high price and are a "must-have" dish over the festive season.

Compared to her daughter-in-law, Jiwas has a positive view of the current government. She talks about the hard days of her youth, when she had to wake in the early hours and walk for hours to farm vegetables. Now, she is impressed with the infrastructure in the area. The roads that wind through the steep mountains to Qingquan regularly experience landslides, but the government's repairs are quick and efficient, she feels.

Jiwas does not miss the old days, saying that children now have the opportunity to get educated. During her childhood, they were punished for speaking their native language.

Still, she laments the fact that it's difficult for today's youth to learn their mother tongue. Her daughter-in-law agrees that the Atayal language and culture are important, but she has to rely on speaking Chinese because it is central to earning a living.





#### **SELLING OUT - OR GETTING BY?**

Money seems to be at the heart of controversy for the small village.
Tourism is a strong influence shaping modern Qingquan, since it is near the location of Pasta'ay, as well as an aboriginal street market, hot springs, and the Zhang Xueliang (張學良) residence, which has been converted into a museum. Money is being poured into the latter, partially

due to increasing tourism from mainland China.

This growth in tourism in the area alarms some local residents, however. In mid-November in 2016, white banners were strung all around the town in protest of aboriginal culture being "sold out" in favour of commercialisation.

"Don't pay attention to that," says Bidai (比黛), a 52-year-old woman who sells *xiaomijiu* (a sweet indigenous wine). She explains that some members of the community are dissatisfied with the construction going on to make the small village more welcoming for tourists.

But it is clear that Bidai's business benefits from the development, as her livelihood is largely dependent on tourism. Producing and selling xiaomijiu isn't a family business, but a product of the recent tourist

Jiwas does not miss the old days, saying that children now have the opportunity to get educated



ABOVE LEFT A girl during Pasta'ay in Hsinchu; a man is adorned with a leaf symbolising peace at Pasta'ay; teenage girls in traditional clothes also sport the latest phones

BELOW RIGHT 52-year-old Bidai sells aboriginal rice wine at her stall in Qingquan – a livelihood that depends on tourism

ABOVE Jiwas, 60, shells tree beans, a local delicacy. She has spent her life in Qingquan, and thinks that life has improved since her youth

interest in the area, and its indigenous wine. Referring back to her childhood, Bidai says: "Back then, nobody bought xiaomijiu."

Today, as Bidai sees it, the word is out that "traditional aboriginal wine is a delicious drink". *Xiaomijiu* is easily the most popular product sold at Pasta'ay, as it's hugely popular among local tourists from Taiwan, mainland China, and even with the "foreigners" – the Taiwanese label for Caucasians.

Like Jiwas, Bidai prefers the modern world. "We were so poor we didn't have shoes," she recalls of her youth. "It was so cold in the winter. My mom got bark from trees and made shoes for herself."

#### **DAMAGES AND COMPROMISE**

On the other hand, there are indigenous people who have not benefitted from modernisation,

facing a growing economic gap and disparities in access to health services and political participation. There are also more direct violations, such as the dumping of nuclear waste in the Yami tribe's territory on Orchid Island. These problems were mentioned in Tsai Ying-wen's public apology, but how to move forward remains unclear.

It's a paradoxical situation:
In pursuing development, tourism improves financial gain and education in communities, but at the cost of losing aspects of indigenous culture. Bidai has reached a compromise, proudly sharing her culture with outsiders, despite dissent that vilifies her as "selling out". But these grievances seem irrelevant to her: "We don't expect much. We're easily satisfied. We just need three meals a day – a full stomach. We don't talk

badly about anyone. And aboriginal children are very kind-hearted."

Pasta'ay represents a similar compromise in the face of this predicament – the push and pull between loss, remembrance, and adaptation. In remembering and honouring a bygone culture, the ritual simultaneously preserves and celebrates that which has survived, and endures. • AG

NIC BARKDULL is a freelance writer and doctoral student in Social Research and Cultural Studies in Taiwan.

PAUL RATJE is a photojournalist based in Taiwan. His images have appeared in The Washington Post, The Guardian and The South China Morning Post, among others.



## One Book at a Time

ON THE FRONTLINE OF COMBATING GLOBAL ILLITERACY IS THE AWARD-WINNING ORGANISATION ROOM TO READ, FOUNDED IN 2000 BY FORMER MICROSOFT EXECUTIVE, JOHN WOOD, ERIN GANJU AND DINESH SHRESTHA

It is difficult to imagine where we would be without basic literacy. As a foundational skill, it improves our reasoning, creativity, and allows for further education and career opportunities. For many of us, it is perhaps too easy to become complacent about the ability to read and write.

And yet, according to UNESCO's statistics on literacy, nearly 17 percent of the world's adult population, some 775 million people, are illiterate, and a further 122 million youth cannot read or write, with as many as two-thirds of them being women or girls. Without this basic education, denied to them by the accident of their birth, most

Text Hastings Forman Photos Room to Read

illiterate people are doomed by default to remain in poverty, unable to better themselves, their families and their local communities.

#### **ROOM TO READ**

In 1998, while trekking in Nepal, John Wood visited a primary school of around 450 children. The absence



**BOTTOM** Children participate in literacy instruction activities in Bangladesh. Room to Read has worked extensively in rural areas in the country

RIGHT Children reading together in India. Room to Read India launched in 2003 and it is now their largest operating region

"What we are all about is making sure that kids everywhere... are given an opportunity to gain the lifelong gift of education"

John Wood





of children's books struck Wood profoundly, particularly after the explanation from the school's headmaster, who said: "In Nepal we are too poor to afford education, but until we have education we will always be poor." It was a cruel catch-22: an inescapable cycle of poverty that echoed what Wood had seen in other underdeveloped countries.

This experience prompted the beginnings of Room to Read. A year later, Wood returned to the school with 3,000 books on the back of six rented donkeys, much to the delight of the children and headmaster. He would later give up his job at Microsoft and commit full time to the cause of fighting global illiteracy. Recalling this in an interview, he said, "Too much of philanthropy is done through hobbies... the business person in me thought, if I'm going to scale this and make a difference, ten or a hundred libraries won't be enough." Bringing in a focus and efficiency acquired through his background in business, Wood and his other co-founders rapidly expanded Room to Read in size and reach. Since that first library was opened in Nepal, the organisation has helped establish 18,700 across Asia and Africa.

#### THEIR AIM

Describing the aim of the organisation, Wood said, "At its heart, what we are all about is making sure that kids everywhere, regardless of the circumstances of their birth, are given an opportunity to gain the lifelong gift of education." To this ambitious end, the organisation has two core focuses.

The first is to develop literacy skills among primary school children, enabling them to progress into further education, and to nurture their habit of reading, which instils a desire to learn and to pursue a brighter future. This is done through the implementation of the Literacy Programme which includes training local teachers, the provision of quality reading materials for children in their own languages, and the establishment of child-friendly classrooms and libraries within government schools.

The second objective is to educate girls, thereby improving gender equality. Considering that two-thirds of children out of school are girls, Wood identified this as an issue to be specifically confronted: "Education allows a woman to grow in self-confidence, to earn an income, to take care of her family, and as we

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can volunteer at one of Room to Read's fundraising chapters (there are four in Asia Pacific – in Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo and Sydney) or attend one of their fundraising events. You can also opt to raise funds in creative ways of your own choosing. Some of their events to date include:





#### **HOST A READ-A-THON**

Read books to raise money. Ask family, friends and neighbours to support your reading goal through pledges – all while improving your own reading skills



#### **BOOK SWAP**

Give-a-book, take-a-book. This can be organised just about anywhere. Guests pay a small entry fee, socialise and discuss their favourite book, and then each person chooses a book to take home



#### **BEERS FOR BOOKS**

Choose a venue and host a happy hour

know, educated women have healthier families and take a role in society as leaders." With their Girls' Education Programme, girls are supported to complete secondary school, they are introduced to women mentors who guide and inspire them, and they are taught to develop themselves in lifeskills workshops.

#### THEIR APPROACH

According to Wood, "It's a part of our founding DNA to make sure we are empowering the local people and communities as much as possible.

An organisation that arrives in an area for a few months, tells everyone what to

do and then leaves is not going to make long-term and sustainable change."

Room to Read works with local families, schools, communities, and governments. They prioritise the employment of locals (88 percent of their employees worldwide are local nationals) who know their area and community. Room to Read teaches them the skills to become leaders and empowers them in their responsibility to design and implement projects. They also get the entire community involved, as people give up their time to work on projects, such as painting the walls of a library. These kind of activities may seem comparatively minor within the

"It's a part of our founding DNA to make sure we are empowering the local people and communities as much as possible"

John Wood

bigger scheme of the organisation's agenda, but each one has a significant effect in that the communities have a sense of ownership of their school or library. This kind of engagement ensures that the literacy and gender equality programmes are sustainable in the long run.







children's book published by Room to Read in Nepal, Room to Read is the only organisation in the country that focuses on literacy and gender equality in education

LEFT A teacher reads aloud from a

"I learned about Room to Read at school and was so inspired that on my 17th birthday I used my birthday money to send a girl to school."

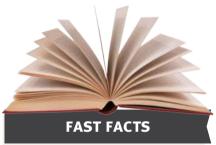
- BRENNA W. (HONG KONG)

"I love reading stories! My favourite is Chek Check Wants to Get Married."

- REASKSA, STUDENT (CAMBODIA)

"'I love going through Room to Read's workbooks and completing the activities.

- SITHIKA, STUDENT (SRI LANKA)



#### USD1

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CAN TEACH 50 CHILDREN TO READ AND WRITE FOR ONE YEAR

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For more information: www.roomtoread.org/take-action

Room to Read requires the host governments to support their projects, and so they actively work with education ministries to promote widespread policy and curriculum changes which allow the organisation to effectively address illiteracy and gender inequality on a national scale.

Having achieved its initial aim of supporting the education of 10 million children, the next goal is to reach 15 million by 2020. Wood affirms that Room to Read has to keep up its strong mission focus and financial efficiency (83 percent of all its proceeds go into new or existing projects): "The main thing we've got to do is

not be complacent – we want to keep growing our impact both quantitatively and qualitatively."

As of the beginning of 2017, Room to Read is growing rapidly in Indonesia, and is also being launched in Jordan and Rwanda through a technical assistance arm called Room to Read Accelerator. Nevertheless, there is much work still to be done, and it is this understanding that continues to drive Room to Read to improve and expand.

On a parting note, Wood says: "You don't have to be a millionaire like Bill Gates to change the world." Whether it is the people on the ground improving literacy in their communities or the generous individuals around the world investing in a child's education through donating time or money to Room to Read, this organisation is "a classic case of ordinary people doing extraordinary things." + AG

The effect of illiteracy is far-reaching: Correlations have been drawn between illiteracy and criminality, child marriage and declines in countries' GDPs



Worldwide, there are 10 countries in which the number of illiterate adults exceeds 10 million – half of which are in Asia



Studies show that if every girl across Southwest Asia completed secondary school, the number of girls married by age 15 would fall by more than 60% Illiteracy costs the global economy about USD1.19 trillion

a year. A country cannot sustain continuous economic growth if adult literacy is not above 40%



Almost 17% of the world's adult population cannot read or write

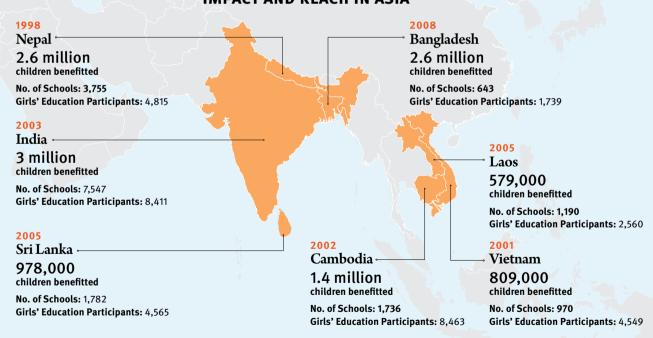


775 million adults are illiterate



122 million youth are illiterate

# Room to Read



#### **ROOM TO READ'S INFLUENCE**



18,696 Literacy Programme Partner Schools



11.5 million children benefitted from the Literacy Programme and Girls' Education Programme



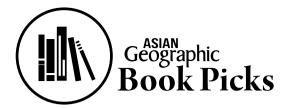
9,232 teachers and librarians trained



18 million



9.5 books checked out per student



#### The Boat to Redemption (China, 2009, 2010) By Su Tong

A political satire that follows the story of a dishonoured father and son, and a feral girl with a bourgeois attitude. Providing insights into China's culture and recent history, it is a tragic story of people consumed by their own desires and needs.

#### The White Tiger (India, 2009)

By Aravind Adiga

A poor Indian villager journeys from servitude to success as a prosperous businessman. The character is a representation of what India could become, shedding its history of poverty and caste conflict.

#### The Corpse Washer (Iraq, 2010)

By Sinan Antoon

This book reveals the lives of the people in Iraq, through Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, the 2003 invasion and occupation.

#### 1Q83 (Japan, 2009)

By Haruki Murukami

A distopian novel in the spirit of 1984, this book takes us on a twisted and surreal journey that centres around a mysterious cult and two lovers drawn into a parallel existence.

#### The Ghost Bride (Malaysia, 2013)

By Yangsze Choo

Set in 1890s' Malacca, this book combines romance and the supernatural, navigating the reader through the intrigues and complications of this life and the next.

#### **Ilustrado** (Philippines, 2010)

By Miguel Syjuco

The body of Crispin Salvador is pulled from the Hudson River. An investigation takes us through 150 years of Philippines' history and introduces us to a conflicted society caught between decay and progress.

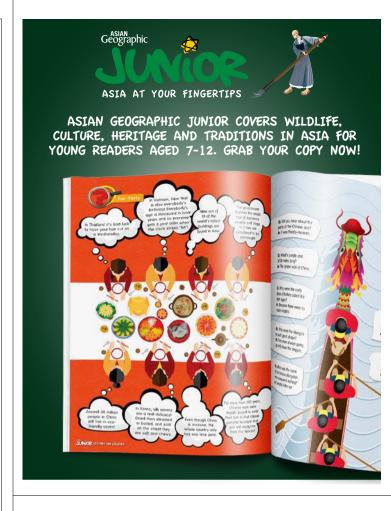
#### Ministry of Moral Panic (Singapore, 2013)

By Amanda Lee Koe

Introducing the reader to a series of fictional characters, this book takes us into a world of anxiety, sexual frankness, relativism and human relationships - a revelatory and unconventional exploration of Singaporeans.

#### The Vegetarian (South Korea, 2007)

By Han Kang, Translated by Deborah Smith Yeong-hye's decision to stop eating meat is a profound act of subversion in a society where norms must be obeyed. This book deals with desire, shame and empathy as people around her fail to understand her motives and new identity in becoming, ecstatically, a tree.



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ASIAN Geographic has a consistent editorial focus aimed at showcasing the best of Asia to the world. From culture and heritage to environmental issues and social trends, we are proud to bring you Asia in all its beauty and complexity.

AG PASSPORT magazine is now incorporated into the flagship title, ASIAN Geographic as a travel section. However, we continue to produce a special issue every year, dedicated to covering the best of travel in the region.



AG JUNIOR is a magazine for youngsters growing up in Asia. This bi-monthly title is the only magazine that showcases Asia and opens an infinite world of possibilities for youths aged 7 to 13. The biggest supporters of the magazine, however, are the parents who welcome new ideas and activities that keep their children occupied and stimulated.

Geographic S























#### FORTHCOMING EVENTS



#### THE QUIZ OF ASIA

The ASIAN Geographic Hot Soup Challenge returns for another year to put Singapore's kids in the quiz hot seat and challenge their general knowledge about Asia. The school challenge will run in April 2017 under the theme of Climate Change. Students will have the opportunity to study up on relevant issues through the January edition, which will address issues relating to global warming. This year's challenge will also dovetail with the Asia Dive Expo, which runs at Suntec from 7–9 April. The contest is broken down into three categories:

- Junior (age 7-12)
- Students (age 12–18)
- Open Category (age 18 and above)

#### OCTOBER



## PHOTO COMPETITION LIVE JUDGING & WORKSHOPS

Organised by ASIAN Geographic, Asia's leading geographic title and a source of inspiration for professional photographers, photography enthusiasts and avid travellers, enter your best images to be considered for the following coveted titles:

- People Photographer of the Year
- Street Photographer of the Year
- Architecture/Landscape Photographer of the Year
- · Wildlife Photographer of the Year
- Environmental Photographer of the Year
- Young Photographer of the Year

Submission deadline: August 1, 2017 Entry fee: Up to 3 images free submission for subscribers; \$10 per image entry for non-subscribers

#### DECEMBER

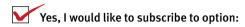
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Asia offers some of the world's greatest manmade and natural wonders, which is why *Asian Geographic* will be tailormaking travel expeditions to uncover the hidden gems of this diverse, amazing continent. Joining up with some of the most intrepid explorers in the region, we journey to key destinations on the historic Silk Road. Partnering with the XA Travel Group, make the journey with us to China, Uzbekistan and India in 2017.

- Dunhuang, China (June 4-7)
- Samarkand and Bukhara, Uzbekistan (September)
- Fatehpur Sikri, India (December)

Visit www.asiangeo.com for information on our latest expeditions!



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MALAYSIA	1 year (6 issues)	2 years (12 issues)	1 year (4 issues) □ SGD16	2 years (8 issues)	1 year (10 issues) □ SGD48	2 years (20 issues)
SOUTH EAST ASIA (BRUNEI, INDIA, INDONESIA, TAIWAN, PHILIPPINES, HONG KONG, THAILAND)	1 year (6 issues)	2 years (12 issues) □ SGD95	1 year (4 issues) □ SGD22	2 years (8 issues)	1 year (10 issues) □ SGD72	2 years (20 issues)
REST OF ASIA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND	1 year (6 issues)	2 years [12 issues]   SGD105	1 year (4 issues) SGD25	2 years (8 issues)	1 year (10 issues) □ SGD80	2 years (20 issues)
REST OF THE WORLD	1 year (6 issues) □ SGD65	2 years (12 issues) □ SGD130	1 year (4 issues) □ SGD28	2 years (8 issues)	1 year (10 issues) □ SGD93	2 years (20 issues) □ SGD184
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#### THE CITY OF WATERWHEELS

Our eight-day journey started in Lanzhou – the capital and largest city of Gansu Province. Lanzhou linked the ancient capital Xi'an with Central Asia and the Roman Empire via the famed Silk Road.

The Yellow River forms a labyrinth in the city, compartmentalising it into different districts. The river is so named because of its jaundiced colour. The channels of water in this old city are home to many waterwheels – invented by Duan Xu during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) – which were once used for extensive irrigation, transporting the river water into the neighbouring farmlands.

But where once there were over 250 waterwheels along this river, earning Lanzhou the nickname "City of Waterwheels", today the modern Waterwheel Garden, built in 1994, serves as one of the few reminders of this rich history.

#### Lanzhou linked the ancient capital Xi'an with Central Asia and the Roman Empire via the famed Silk Road

One of the most interesting activities in Lanzhou is the tradition of raft making – from sheepskin. These rafts are still used to ferry goods and people, and daring visitors can make the journey across the river in the rudimentary vessels. However, the strong current necessitates that trips can only be made one way.

LEFT The Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park in Dunhuang resembles a multicoloured layer cake, consisting of strata of different coloured sandstone and minerals



**ABOVE** Be amazed by the ancient technique of raft making, which began around 300 BC when Chinese troops used inflated sheepskins to make rafts to cross the Yellow River

**BOTTOM** The Chaka Salt Lake is situated at the base of the magnificent Qilian Mountains

**RIGHT** The impressive Kumbum, or Ta'er, Monastery, which consists of nine temples

After overnighting in Lanzhou, we made our way to Qinghai Lake, stopping at the Kumbum, or Ta'er, Monastery, about 27 kilometres outside of Xining. The huge monastery is still home to 400 monks of the Gelugpa sect, and is one of the two most important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in existence. Built in 1577, the history behind the

monastery began with the birth of the famous Buddhist teacher, Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa sect. His mother built a small temple at the site of his birthplace, which today stands as the Grand Hall of Golden Tiles (大金瓦殿; Dàjīnwǎ Diàn), featuring an 11 metre-high stupa, or chorten.

The original temple grew to become the impressive monastery that it is today, consisting of nine temples, each with its own distinctive features. The yak butter sculptures (酥油画馆; Sūyóuhuà Guǎn) are particularly impressive.

We headed to Qinghai Lake, arriving in the early evening. As the sun sets quite late in Gansu Province – at around 8pm, when we were there – we had quite a wait for the sun to go down. As the weather was overcast, there was no chance of any spectacular sunset photos, but the panoramic view of Qinghai Lake was still a sight to behold. It was blissfully cool, owing to the high altitude – 2,800 metres above sea level. A moon rose, banishing the mediocre sunset from memory.





#### MIRRORING THE SKY

Early the next morning, we began our journey west to the Chaka Salt Lake, passing by vast grass fields leading up to the foot of the magnificent Qilian Mountains. "Chaka" actually means "salt lake" in Tibetan, rendering the English name redundant.

The lake covers an area of 105 square kilometres, with enough saline to meet the world's salt needs for more than 160 years. It forms a perfect mirror, so much so that it's difficult to tell where the landscape ends and the sky begins.

With bare, salt-crusted feet, we clambered back into the vehicle to make our way to the majestic Qilian Mountains in the winding journey to Dunhuang, breaking the trip up with an overnight rest.

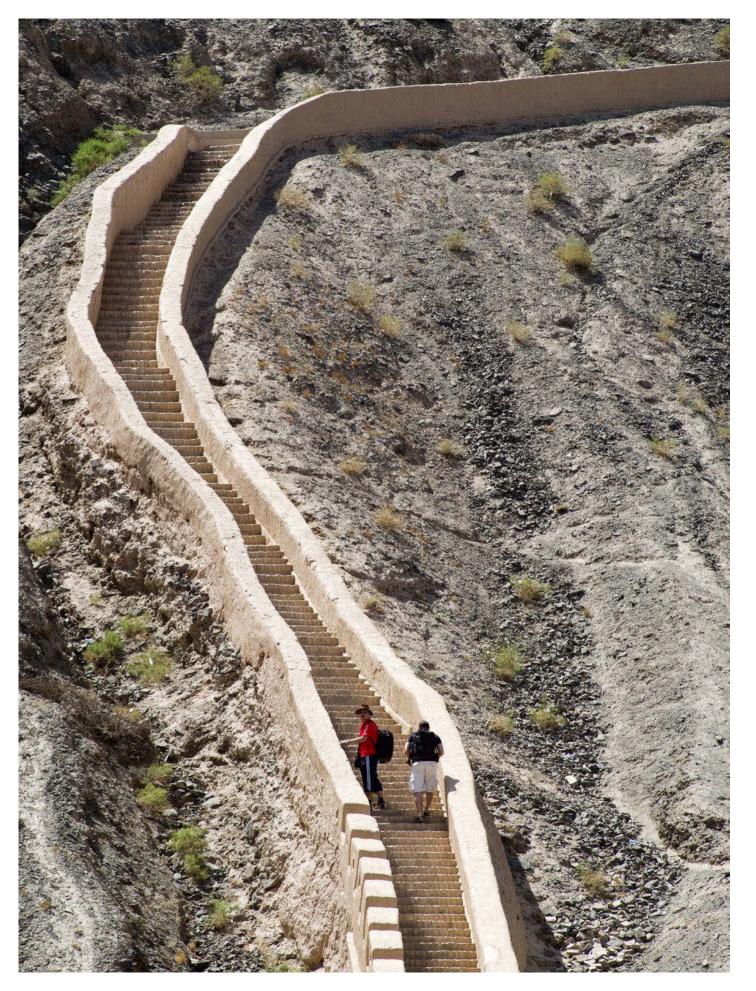
Arriving in Dunhuang – a location of strategic importance, at the juncture of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network – our first stop was the Dunhuang Yardang National Geopark, an eerie landscape of geological landforms dispersed

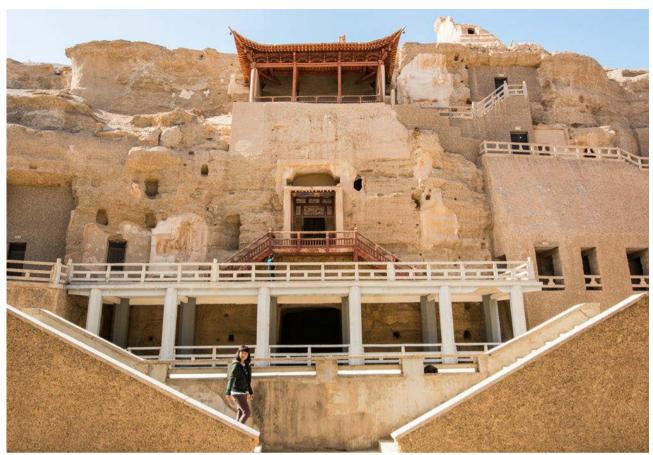
# The lake covers an area of 105 square kilometres, with enough saline to meet the world's salt needs for more than 160 years



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK







MAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

across the arid desert. At 38°C, it was the hottest day of the year when we visited, but a gentle wind – the same force responsible for the gradual erosion of rock into the remarkable geological structures – swept through the park, and provided a welcome relief from the oppressive heat.

We then ventured to the Yumen Pass, also known as the Jade Gate. This gateway once provided passage for travellers along the Silk Road, connecting Central Asia and China.

The "library cave" houses 40,000 scrolls that have provided historians with a richer understanding of the Silk Road

#### A LABYRINTH OF HISTORY

The Mogao Caves (莫高窟) – also sometimes referred to as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas (千佛洞) – consist of a network of 492 temples, with some 2,100 coloured statues and 45,000 square metres of murals.

The "library cave" houses 40,000 scrolls that have provided historians with a richer understanding of the Silk Road. UNESCO reports that the first caves were founded in 366 AD by Buddhist monks, establishing Dunhuang as an epicentre for Buddhist learning, attracting many pilgrims to the city via the Silk Road. Photography is not allowed so as to preserve the caves, which house artworks contributed by the Turks, ancient Tibetans and other Chinese ethnic minorities. Sadly, some of the murals and scriptures originally found were illegally excavated and transported to museums abroad.

**LEFT** Tourists climb the series of steep steps along the "Overhanging Great Wall" in Jiayuguan

ABOVE The Mogao Caves – also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas – a system of 492 temples housing hundreds of years of Silk Road history

#### THE SINGING SAND

We then visited the Echoing Sand Mountain, a series of the Gobi Desert's sand dunes that tower around Crescent Lake. The name of the former is derived from the echoes that can be heard as the wind whistles across the dunes, often called the "singing sand" phenomenon; the latter's name is derived from the shape of the oasis.

The Chinese government has developed tourism in this area, and plenty of activities are on offer, including camel rides, paragliding and buggy rides. We clambered up the sand dunes to get to a better vantage point



from which to watch the sunset drench the basin in shades of orange.

Following an early start and a detour via the White Horse Pagoda, we made our way to Xuan Bi Chang Cheng (悬壁长城), translating to "Overhanging Great Wall", which was thought to have been built during the Ming Dynasty between 1539 and 1540 by commander Li Han in order to strengthen the Jiayu Pass defence. It formed the entry pass at the western end of the Great Wall of China.

#### THE RAINBOW RANGE

The next morning, we arrived at the first pier of the Great Wall. Built along the cliffs surrounding the Beida River, this area once played host to several military camps. By the afternoon, we were headed east towards the Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park. The landforms here resemble a multicoloured layer cake, consisting of strata of different coloured sandstone and minerals, forged over the course of 24 million years.

Marked as a UNESCO World
Heritage Site since 2010, it is thought
that at one time, the area was
completely submerged underwater.
Over the years, the landscape emerged,
shaped by the movement of tectonic
plates and the onslaught of wind and
rain, carving out the cliffs and ravines
that we find today. This was a highlight
of the trip – and a good note to end on.

We began the journey home, driving the long road back to Lanzhou from Zhangye, passing by mysterious Tibetan *mani* stones and golden rapeseed plantations – some of the largest in the world – before arriving in Lanzhou for our respective flights out.

Having been to the first pass of the Great Wall in the west, I hope to make the journey to the first pass of the Great Wall in the east. Personally, this trip was one of the best I've experienced in my lifetime. It was an eye-opening journey that allowed me to learn more about Chinese art, heritage and culture, and the fascinating history of the Silk Road. • AGP

ABOVE The 1,096-kilometre journey from Lanzhou to Dunhuang is made by travelling past the Qilian Mountains and along the Hexi Corridor

## EXPEDITION INFORMATION

#### WHE

ASIAN Geographic's first Silk Road expedition to China will run from June 4–10, 2017

#### WHERE

All participants are responsible for their own international airfares to and from Shanghai's Pudong Airport. The trip will include domestic travel from Shanghai to Lanzhou to begin the trip, and return from Dunhuang to Lanzhou, return to Lanzhou and to Shanghai

#### HOW

Book your place through the Asian Geographic website. The cost per person is SGD2,488, and includes domestic transport, insurance, accommodation and meals (excluding alcoholic drinks). Fly to Pudong Airport from Singapore (5 hours 15 minutes), Bangkok (4 hours 20 minutes) and Manila (2 hours 45 minutes)

ROBERT YEO travelled to China with Michael Lee of XA Travel, who are official partners with Asian Geographic Expeditions 2017 EXPLORE • EDUCATE • ESCAPE



# Discover the Silk Road





THE KALIGANGA RIVER AS SEEN FROM THE TORA BRIDGE IN MANIKGANJ, DHAKA. DURING THE RAINY SEASON, PEOPLE ARE OFTEN SEEN FISHING AND TRANSPORTING GOODS UP THE RIVER, BUT IN WINTER, THE SCENE IS TRANSFORMED, AS THE RIVER DRIES UP, FORMING A VAST, GREY LANDSCAPE. PEOPLE WALK ACROSS THE RIVERBED, FARM HERE, AND CHILDREN ARE OFTEN SEEN PLAYING IN THE SAND.





#### Congratulations to Apu Jaman

His image of the Kaliganga River has been selected as our Photo of the Month! The winning Photo of the Month is published on our Postcard page in ASIAN Geographic magazine and is also featured on our social media pages. The Photo of the Month winner will receive an annual subscription to the magazine.



#### In our next issue...

We take a look at Asia's great journeys and expeditions, from palaeontological exploration in Siberia, to the historical significance of China, Uzbekistan and India as part of Asian Geographic's Expeditions in 2017, and the great contemporary explorers making their way across the continent by motorbike, train, truck – and on foot. Pack a sense of adventure!

## **A Cultural Legacy**

THE TRADITIONS OF TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India, is rich in ancient heritage, ruled by different dynasties over centuries. There are about 74 million Tamil people today. An ethnic group with a history dating back to the Sangam era (400 BC to 300 AD), Tamils belong to either the Saivites or Vaishnavites group of Hindu pantheists. Tamils all over the world are deeply invested in safeguarding their cultural traditions, which include a wide array of rituals and ceremonies.

Temple architecture showcases the Dravidian style: towering *gopurams* (temple towers) in which statues of gods and goddesses are engraved, with various filigree designs carved into towering edifices. Particularly notable architectural gems include the Meenakshi Amman Temple in

Madurai and the Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur, but there are countless others scattered throughout the state, serving the beliefs of the predominantly Hindu population.

While temples are replete with sculptural marvels, there are several monuments and buildings that also offer a glimpse of the architectural finesse of the seafaring Pallava rulers (275 BC to 897 AD), who were also known patrons of the fine arts.

Tamil is recognised as a classical language by the Indian government. Like the other languages of South India, Tamil is a Dravidian language, unrelated to the Indo-European languages of northern India, although it has some influences from Sanskrit. However, unlike Sanskrit, the language

Courtesy of the India Tourism Board

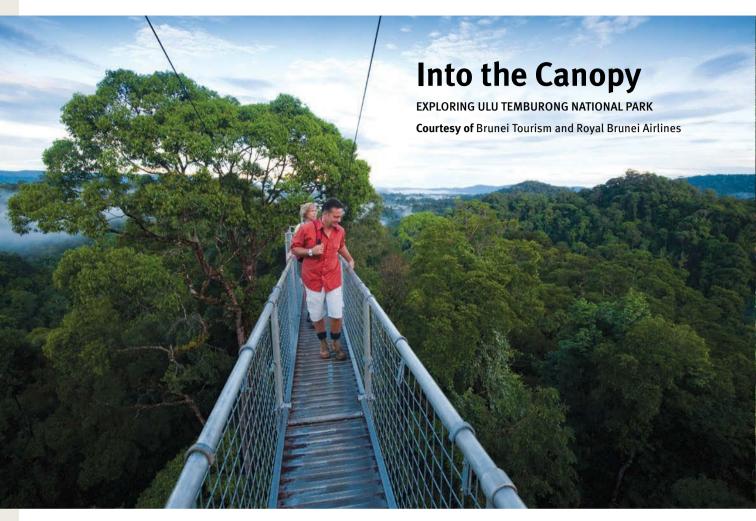
has continued to expand, adopting new words and phrases from other languages in the region.

Classic Tamil literature ranges from lyric poetry to works of philosophy, and represents the oldest body of secular literature in South Asia. One of the earliest texts is *Tolkaapiyam*, written around 500 BC, which established a grammatical system for Tamil. Other notable works include *Thirukkural* by the Tamil savant Thiruvalluvar, *Silapathikaaram*, *Manimegalai* and *Tamilannai*, or "the Tamil mother", all of which have been central to the Tamil identity.

Fly to Chennai and explore the rich traditions of Tamil Nadu – India's centre of language, dance, poetry and Hindu religion in the deep south.



#### HIGHLIGHTS



The Temburong District in the eastern part of Brunei is the country's greenest, hilliest and least populated area, and is considered one of Borneo's most pristine rainforest environments, host to a range of ecological research and ecotourism activities.

Ulu Temburong National Park covers about 500 square kilometres of largely undisturbed forest, boasting extensive visitor facilities and resort-style accommodation. The park houses several suspension bridges, boardwalks, treehouses, wildlife observation points and a canopy walkway – rising some 50 metres above the forest floor.

From this bird's view vantage point, you can admire undisturbed Nature. Snakes often glide through

the treetops, such as the striking, and venomous, Wagler's pit viper. Lizards are easier to spot than snakes, and with luck, you may catch glimpses of the five-lined flying lizard (*Draco quinquefasciatus*) and Peter's bent-toed gecko (*Gonydactylus consobrinus*). Ulu Temburong is also home to various amphibians, such as Wallace's flying frog (*Rhacophorus nigropalmatus*), which glides from tree to tree.

By some estimates, there may be as many as 400 species of butterfly in the park. However, many of these inhabit areas not easily accessible to the casual visitor. Other insects to look out for include forest centipedes, giant forest ants (*Camponotus gigas*), lantern bugs and mounds of ravenous termites.

Higher vertebrates are harder to spot. The bushy crested hornbill (Anorrhinus galeritus) can sometimes be seen near the park's accommodation chalets, but rarer species such as the rhinoceros hornbill (Buceros rhinoceros) are more likely to be heard than seen. The black and yellow broadbill (Eurylaimus ochromalus) can often be found foraging for food, and fast-flying swiftlets can be seen hunting for insects along the river.

The primate "king" of Borneo, the majestic orangutan, is not found in Ulu Temburong; rather, his little cousin, the Bornean gibbon (*Hylobates muelleri*) rules the treetops here, bellowing his loud call across the rainforest early each morning. This grey-brown, tailless species is completely arboreal, only



occasionally descending to the forest's mid-canopy. Further down on the forest floor, the plain pygmy squirrel (Exilisciurus exilis) scampers around near the chalets, foraging for food. The forest floor is also home to a wealth of flora, such as gingers, begonias, gesneriads and aroids, and varieties of rattan and the Ixora genus. Palms, ferns, moss and lichen line the river's edge and rocky gullies.

You do not have to be a botanist or zoologist to appreciate the diversity of Ulu Temburong's flora and fauna. All you need is a keen eye and a good pair of walking boots to enjoy the incredible life forms and structures that have evolved over millennia to produce the diverse forest home we find in Brunei today.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Accommodation options in Temburong include hotels, tents and lodges, inside the town and outside the park. The only accommodation located in Ulu Temburong National Park itself is Ulu Ulu Rainforest Resort, which offers a boutique overnight experience in the rainforest.

Bookings can be made through travel agents in the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan; some agents can be found online. Packages often cover boat and road transfers.

Groups can book into the Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre, just one kilometre upriver from the park's headquarters. Permits must be obtained from Universiti Brunei Darussalam's biology department.

#### **GETTING THERE**

Ulu Temburong is only accessible by boat. From Bandar Seri Begawan, water taxis take about an hour to get to the main town of Bangar, allowing visitors a glimpse of the mangrove forests which line the muddy delta of the Limbang River. From Bangar, it's a 20-minute bus ride to Batang Duri, the embarkation point for Temuai longboats, steered by agile Iban men and women. The park's headquarters can be reached in an hour, depending on the water level.

#### PACK YOUR BAGS FOR AN ADVENTURE!

Royal Brunei Airlines flies to Bandar Seri Begawan twice daily from Singapore: Visit www.flyroyalbrunei.com or call the Royal Brunei Singapore office on +65 6235 4672

# **A Dying Tradition**

THE CLANGING OF HAMMERS ON METAL, ECHOING THROUGH THE BACK ALLEYS OF BANGKOK, SOUNDS OUT A FADING TRADITION

**Text** Hastings Forman

In the face of globalisation, numerous traditional arts are at risk of disappearing. In Thailand, one craft on the brink of extinction is the making of monks' alms bowls – by hand. It is common to see Buddhist monks wandering through the country with

these bowls, collecting offerings from devotees – a custom that dates back thousands of years. The tradition of handcrafting alms bowls is just as old.

However, now that most bowls are mass-produced in factories, these niche craft communities have died out...

save one: Bangkok's Ban Bat (the "Monk's Bowl Village" – bàht is the Thai word for a monk's bowl; ban for community). A group of craftsmen from Ayutthaya settled in Ban Bat in 1783 during the reign of King Rama I, and began making alms



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

**RIGHT** The finished bowl is placed over a burning fire for five minutes to protect the metal from rust. It is then washed and coated with varnish mixed with black colouring

**BELOW** An elderly couple makes traditional Buddhist alms bowls before Khao Pansa in Bangkok

#### Five families of artisans live here, and continue to make alms bowls in the traditional way





IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

bowls for a living. Today, five families of artisans live here, and continue to make alms bowls in the traditional way, maintaining this tradition (although unlike their ancestors, they may have a bit of help from a blowtorch). The workshops echo with the earpiercing clangs of hammers hitting metal, making watching television and chatting a little difficult for the neighbours. Many of the alms bowl makers wear earplugs.

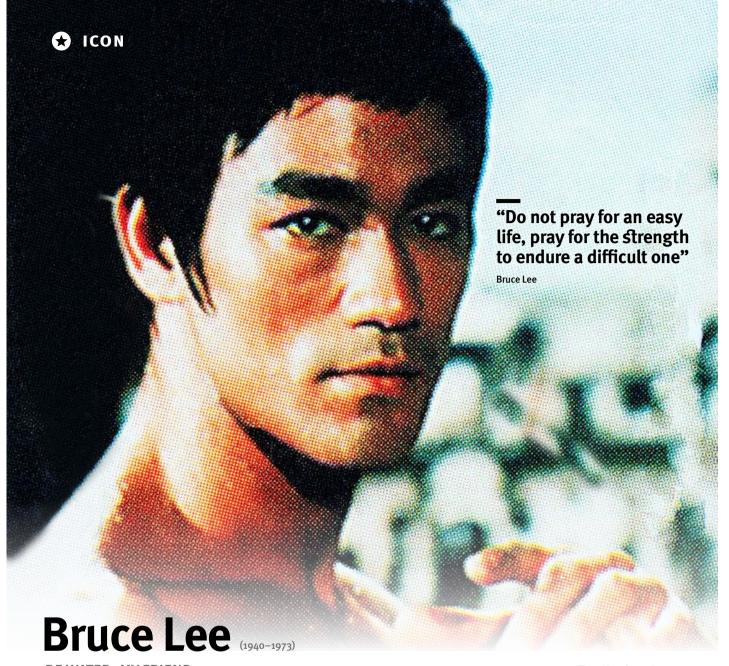
When a monk orders a bowl, the families come out in full force to produce it. Each family has a different responsibility during the process: First, the steel rim of the bowl is wrought into a circle. A cross-shaped frame is then attached to the rim, and the gaps are filled with white steel. Finally, the bowl is hammered into shape, and polished and glazed to make it waterproof.

It is a lengthy process that takes days, and the final product – which differs in style and shape – can weigh up to two kilograms. Needless to say, strong men and women work here! The work itself is also imbued with religious

significance, particularly the phase of creating the cross-shaped frame. In Buddhist folklore, upon achieving enlightenment, the Buddha received alms bowls from the guardians of the four cardinal points (North, South, East and West). The Buddha, not favouring any guardian in particular, combined the four into one: The cross symbolises these four points and their respective guardians; the eight separate pieces of steel that make up the bowl are said to represent the Buddha's eightfold path.

While the community receives much-needed support from foreigners, who buy the bowls as souvenirs, and from the many monks who insist on only using handcrafted bowls in virtue of tradition and their finer quality, it seems that this time-worn skill will eventually die out.

Traditional crafts are sustained by family and communal custom, but the children of these crafters, as well as other young people, are increasingly disinterested in the work. As the older generation passes on, so may the knowledge of how to handcraft these sacred bowls. • AG



BE WATER, MY FRIEND

**Text** Hastings Forman

**AS** a revered martial artist, an insightful philosopher, and a famous filmmaker and actor, Bruce Lee became a pop culture icon, listed by *Time* as one of the most influential people of the 20th century.

Born on November 27, 1940 in San Francisco, Lee was raised in Hong Kong, where he appeared in more than 20 films as a child actor, training in Wing Chun Gung Fu under renowned master Ip Man (prompted after he lost several fights to rival gang members!).

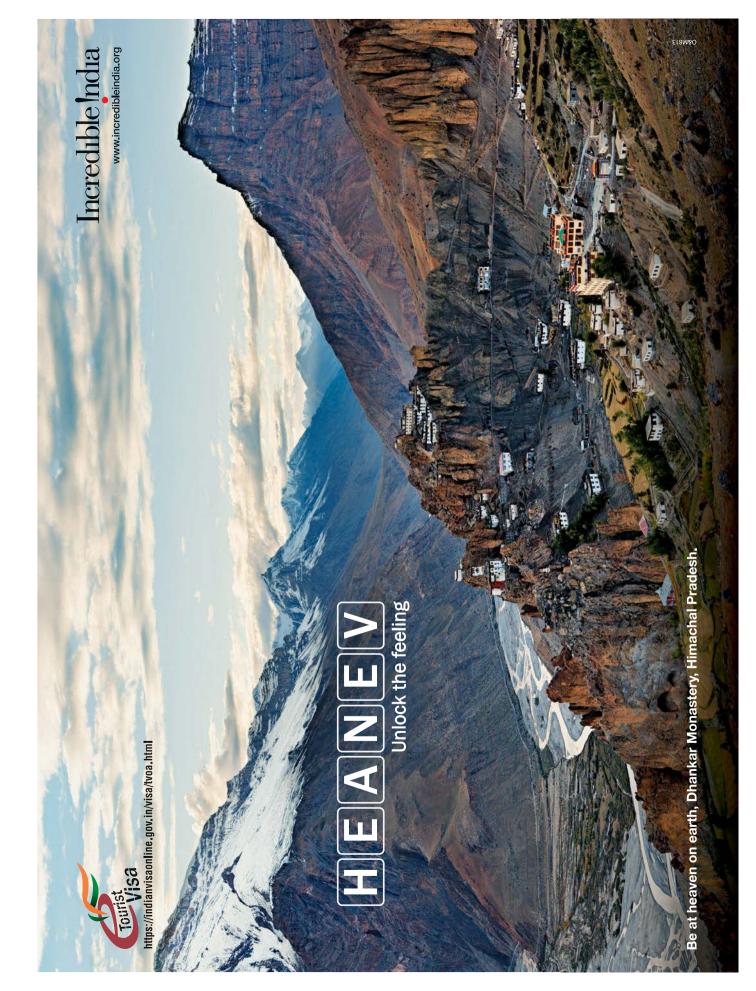
At 18, he returned to the US, where he taught martial arts and developed his own style called Jeet Kune Do ("the art of intercepting fist"). A star in both the East and the West, Lee came to fame with movies such as Fists of Fury (1971) and Enter the Dragon (1973), in which he mesmerised audiences with his charisma, charm, stunning athleticism and explosive strength. He died suddenly on July 20, 1973, from a brain oedema.

His philosophy of self-cultivation and harmony inspired a generation of people seeking meaning and purpose, and his success in Hollywood paved the way for other Asian actors.

He kick-started a new genre of martial arts films that would later feature action actors such as Chuck Norris and Jackie Chan.

The world lost an inspirational figure, but his appeal and ethos remain timeless, and his legacy endures to this day. • AG

IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK



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