

Current Trends and Future Directions in Indo-Pacific Archaeology

22nd Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association

6th-12th November 2022, Chiang Mai, Thailand

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I show my gratitude to British Museum, London for considering my application and providing me ITP conference support grant to attend the IPPA Congress 2022 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The congress lasted for six days, including (pre-registration commencing on the 6th of November) from the 7th-12th of November 2022. The 7th of November was dedicated to registration, the opening ceremony, plenary sessions, and the welcome banquet. The conference had 62 panels over the four days, run as six parallel sessions on the 8th, 9th, 11th, and 12th of November, along with 600+ research papers. I have attended a few sessions on Southeast Asian Museums and on Indian Archaeology. I found this conference as a huge hub of academia. Meeting and mingling with scholars from different countries, discussing during academic sessions, and attending workshops made my experience wonderful. The traditional mid-conference excursion destination was the Wiang Tha Kan ancient settlement. On the 6th November, IPPA organised and funded a student/ECR day-long workshop which was held in the National Museum, Chiang Mai. The workshop covered grant writing, publication and accessing and utilising the Southeast Asian bibliographic references website. The last day of the conference on dated 12 National Geographic Society organised a workshop on project grant writing.





Session 28, I chaired

I chaired an academic session in the conference on dated 8th November 2022 with co-chair by Dr. Arun Rao, Assistant Professor, Central University of Karnataka, Gulbarga, India. Implications of Global pandemic Covid-19 on Asian Museums: Redefining Access to Cultural Heritage (S 28) was the session theme. Since the spread of various Covid-19 aspects of socio-economic life, administrative functionaries and the movement of the public have been shaken and are finding it harder to get back to the 'New Normal'. Museology is one major field that is not exempted from this consequence and is looking to define the 'New Normal'. The socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the museum sector is severe but its long-term effects are still difficult to grasp. Besides reduced income and downsizing, the results of the pandemic on museums will also have significant consequences on working hours and operations, initiating new exhibitions and public outreach programmes leading to deprived access to cultural heritage, employment openings, research opportunities and various stakeholders. A massive shift to digital/virtual activities is assumed to be one of the solutions with raised questions about the future sustainability of such practices. This panel welcomed well-researched papers on various aspects, including but not limited to a) conservation and preservation assessment of the collections during the enduring/temporary lockdowns; b) start-up strategies for museum reopening and challenges with deficit museum capital/ revenues; c) introduction of novel methods and goals for museums to present themselves and access collections; d) functioning of various other departments in the museums such as security, public

relation offices, consultations, research & publications; e) digitisation of repositories/collections and virtual museums.

The session received 10 papers from Egypt, Bangladesh and India. It was successfully conducted with my presentation titled Covid-19 and digitization in Indian Museums. My papers explored the digital/online activities in the museums in India during the lockdown, emphasising the Bihar Museum, where I work. I also discussed the online activities in museums worldwide but in brief. After my research, I found a few positive sides of pandemic over on museums activities i.e now Indian museums conceived a new tool of digital/online activities along with the offline programmes which supports curators in some unexpected conditions. So rather than cancel an offline programme, they can convert it into a hybrid form or online.



Session 28 is in progress, on the 2nd day of the conference.

Chiang Mai, the city of lantern lights when I visited

Chiang Mai means 'New City' in the Thai language. It was founded by King Mangrai in 1296 AD, and this is the second-largest city in Thailand. The city is located on the bank of Ping River, a major tributary of the Chao Phraya River. Its proximity to major trading routes contributed to its historical importance. The ruins of defensive walls of forts, moats and other brick structures reflect the prosperity of this place in past.



Overview of the historical city Chiang Mai, Thailand

My excursions in Chiang Mai and its Thai culture

During lunch breaks and in the evenings, I could explore the city of Chiang Mai. The city's architecture of Buddhist temples, a special kind of engraving and golden polish over the structures are eye catchy. I was surprised by the offering to the Buddha from the disciples. Offerings were in the shape of cocks, cats, pigs, birds, and dogs, all those looked like toys, but perhaps some spiritual meaning might have been behind that. There is no doubt architecture is influenced by China. Still, I found a great combination of Buddhist and Hindu religious motives at temples. This is remarkable that due to trade relationships, the Indian methodology influenced the religion of Southeast Asia, including Thailand. Chiang Mai is famous for replicating the Bodhi temple of Bodhgaya, India. This tradition started when king Tilakraja built a Buddhist temple at his death memorial site in Chiang Mai and adopted the architectural elements of Bodhi temple. It shows the deep connection of this city with India.



Buddhist Temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand

During my stay in Chiang Mai on dated 8th and 9th, Lantern festival were getting celebrated, I got opportunity to attend this festival. Entire city was lighting up with scintillating lamps in the evening, though it was dark, but sky was dazzling with the colourful firecrackers. City Chiang Mai did not sleep that day. Lantern festival resembled me the Diwali festival of India. My eyes are still glittering, while I am writing this note on this festival.



Lantern festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Thailand is also famous for its food. I tried vegetarian food only; I remember to mention the bamboo veggie and pumpkin soup here, those were amazing. I noticed the variety of sea foods in conference's menu, though I am vegan but as per my colleagues from India, Thai non-veg foods have a different taste. Despite of less quantity of species, food was too delicious. Anyways! being a poor vegan person, I used to keep my eyes on desserts. I loved the cakes made my extracts of fruits and sometimes coca powder.



Delicious Thai cuisines

Colourful night markets are another alteration in Chiang Mai. I noticed that Thai people are very fond of using fresh flowers in their homes and in public places. The market was also full of various flowers, which impressed me a lot. I used to walk over the streets in the evening after my conference. Food stalls were eye catchy, and I tried sweets in markets which were made by rice flour and stuffed with a kind of cream, I also had coconut water which was quite different from Indian coconut water. Well! I found Indian coconut water better than Thai. Street were adorned with the indigenous art and craft items. Chiang Mai is also famous for elephants and that is the reason most of the craft items have elephant motifs. I also purchased few elephants crafted souvenirs.



Coffee mug from Chiang Mai at my office table



Night Market, Chiang Mai, Thailand

I could find time to visit Island Phi Phi too in the mid-conference tour. The beauty of this place has assimilated in my eyes, and the manifestation of the green atmosphere of Phi Phi will never be removed from my memories. I again pay thanks to British Museum, which helped me to avail this opportunity to attend the conference in Chiang Mai. I returned to my place with various academic endeavours, the glory of Thai culture and the sweetness of humble and hospitable Thai people in Chiang Mai.