

K I T E THE DRACHEN FOUNDATION J O U R N A L



All
Asian
Issue

Paying Appropriate Tribute

What could be more apt? Before entering the Pasir Gudang city kite museum in Johor, Malaysia, viewers doff their footwear as a sign of respect. Besides being fun and educational, the museum inspires reverence. Kites are the country's national symbol. For more on the museum and the yearly kite festival held in an expansive field adjacent to it, which this year drew thousands of spectators, turn to Page 3.

A Happy Report From Manila

Power to the People, Philippines Style

A vast former military camp named Fort Bonifacio east of Manila was sold some years ago by the Philippine government to a private real estate conglomerate.

The Hong Kong-based corporation soon developed a portion of the land nearest the capital into the largest and most expensive real property holding in the whole country. A series of 50-story buildings were put up.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the huge holding continued as unoccupied, flat grassland, intersected by a network of concrete roads.

Led by its president, Orlando Ongkingco, the Kite Association of the Philippines saw the obvious kiteflying potential of the unused fields and noted enticing northeast monsoon winds blowing. After obtaining permission from the Philippine civil aeronautics board because an international airport is located five kilometers away and from the security-conscious corporation owning the land, the KAP obtained an okay to fly on weekends at the far reaches of the site.

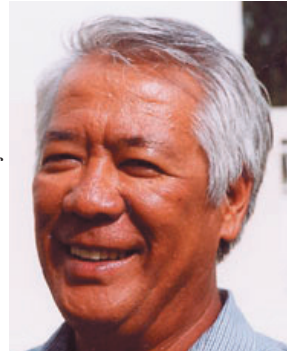
Ordinary citizens, noting the fun, quickly joined in the flying and the picnicking. Soon the area resembled a public park.

Trouble occurred. Private helicopters bringing businessmen into the high rise building area complained about potential danger from kites and succeeded in temporarily halting the sport. The citizens in turn threatened to boycott the investors' invitation to buy tracts of land, while others announced they would boycott restaurants, food chains, and stores in the developed strip.

The tract is so huge, in any event, that security guards found it difficult to police kiteflying carried on at the extremes of the property, far away from the buildings, heliopads and international airport.

Ongkingco and group moved in, suggested it would monitor the flying and keep kites far away from commercial activity. It agreed to bar kites from flying higher than 200 feet except for a 500-foot maximum altitude for special kites, and agreed to limit the flying to the far away area. It agreed to post this area with appropriate signs announcing rules and regulations.

"A while ago," says Ongkingco, "I saw the company CEO jogging around the area, with his bodyguards, and looking up at our big kites with a smile on his face. Now there's a happy ending."



Orlando Ongkingco

The Drachen Foundation:

Kite Archives, Science and Culture

The Drachen Foundation is devoted to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about kites worldwide. A 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation, Drachen views kites from the standpoint of art, culture, science and history. It uses an integrated program of exhibitions, education, research, collections management, and publications to promote learning about kites. The archive it maintains is freely open to the public for research.

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City of Pasir Gudang Shines

Malaysia Shows How It's Done With a Model Festival, Museum

By Ben Ruhe

Carved out of rubber and palm oil plantations and scrubland a quarter century ago, the industrial town of Pasir Gudang in peninsular Malaysia's Johor state, bordered on the south by Singapore, is a bit soulless. It has factories staffed by people from all over the country, plus a fair number of foreign workers. Sense of community is lacking.

Government officials, reacting to this, have over the years made a strong effort to introduce unifying cultural elements to the city of 200,000 to boost morale and evoke sense of *esprit*. Among the activities chosen was kiting, an unofficial national sport. The kite is globally associated with Malaysia via Air Malaysia, which uses an image of a Wau kite as its very eye-catching corporate symbol.

Pasir Gudang first promoted kiteflying by turning over a large mountaintop field to the sport, complete with annual international festival. Last spring's annual event marking the 25th anniversary of the city itself outdid itself with 10 days of workshops, demonstrations, contests, and other events. Attendance for the final weekend of some of the best global kite talent around: Lynn, Schimmelpfennig, Ongkingco, Modegi, Goodman, highlighted the celebration. Japan was represented by no less than four teams with a total of 34 fliers, China had a large delegation, and Indonesia, from the south, matched the Japanese with multiple teams representing a half dozen states including Kalimantan, Java, and Sumatra. Neighboring Singapore sent a substantial delegation.

With steady winds and hot weather guaranteed by the seasonal monsoon trade winds, the festival went off like clockwork. Spectators attended daily in the thousands, regaled not only by the flying but by the more than 75 commercial stands selling everything from basic kites to toys, ceramics, art work, clothing, and medicinals. Browsing and picnicking were the orders of the day.

On the penultimate night, the Saturday of the second weekend, the sultan of Johor and his entourage sat in the permanent viewing stand to witness the flying and meet the foreign guests. That night there was a sitdown dinner under tents for 2,500 and the event went like clockwork, complete with delicious food and prompt service. But there was no wine. Malaysia is a Moslem country.

After speeches by religious leaders and the sultan, the thousands ringing the field in the dark saw what they had waited two hours for-----a satisfyingly long and flashy display of fireworks. Hot air balloons flew and a dance concert was presented.

For many, the night was made memorable when the sultan, Buginda Tuank Iskandar, remained after the ceremonies to joined the swing band and croon torch songs into the microphone. "Croaked" them was more like it, since the sultan, said to be about 80 years old, repeatedly pointed to his throat as an explanation for the odd sounds emanating from it. Good fun for everybody, in any event.

Although it was now one year old, another major attraction during the week was the Pasir Gudang kite museum, sited at the top of kite hill. Still a working windmill producing enough electricity to power the building, the museum is a triumph of imagination and the sheer joy of kites. Perhaps better than any other kite museum, it conveys the innocent joy of kiteflying. It does this by cramming 500 kites into a relatively small, three-level

display space. What makes the exhibition so special is the quality of the kites themselves-----300 Waus from all 13 states of Malaysia, 200 kites from elsewhere around the world. The Waus in particular are many of them masterpiece examples of design and craftsmanship, some the product of painstaking weeks of work.

Along with all the kites, there were exhibits of kitemaking materials, tools, techniques, memorabilia such as photographs, pins, ceramics, stamps, and posters. There were in addition a museum shop, computer room, archive, and library. Some of the architectural detailing in the museum is superb-----ironwork on the staircases is shaped in the form of Wau kites, but each segment is different in detail and setting from the next. The effect is delightful.

Who built this wonderful museum? At meetings with director Ismail bin Mat Taib, an architect; Hussin Haron, president of the Johor Kite Association and apparently the man who conceived the museum in the first place (in his real job he and staff of 100 manage city rental properties), and the mayor, H. Asran, who talks of the museum as “bonding his constituency,” all deny individual achievement. This is a low-keyed, well-organized Muslim community and they all three agree, “We got it done because we all pull together.”

While most of the ideas expressed in the museum are clearly Malaysian, the three officials say they did due diligence, with a trip to the kite museum in Hamamatsu, Japan, as one of their study visits. Ismail points to large floor to ceiling pullout drawers in a storage area that are perfect for holding large kites. “We got that idea in Hamamatsu,” he says.

The museum charges a small admission fee and has drawn well so far. School groups predictably arrive in their hundreds. The museum is branching out by holding workshops. Traveling exhibitions are in the works.

All three officials agree the museum faces one problem in the fairly immediate future: preservation of all the wonderful kites. The issue is being studied as a priority matter.

Hussin Haron sums up: “The museum is our baby. It took a powerful effort to build. We dreamed a lot. We are very satisfied with the result. The museum shows off the country’s heritage, its roots. It projects the best possible image of Malaysia.”



Spectators line the kite field. Kiteflying being a highly popular sport, the crowd on some days numbered many thousands.



Pasir Gudang's Muzium Layang-Layang (Kite Museum) draws viewers in with a colorful flag-bedecked entrance. Still active as a windmill, the mechanical works generate enough electricity to supply the daily needs of the museum. The windmill is at the center of the structure, with kites surrounding the generating equipment on three floors.



An exhibit (top) at the Pasir Gudang museum shows how Wau kites are constructed. Left, the decorative “head” of a Wau kite. Right, a section of sail.



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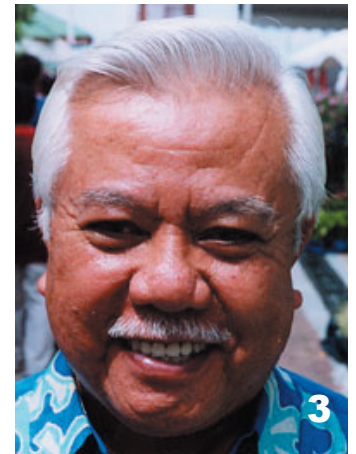


2

1. The enthusiastic crowd. 2. A kite is readied for flight by an Indonesian. Note the large bamboo whistles. The slits in the wood permit air to enter, thus creating a droning sound when the kite flies. 3. Dozens of stands sell inexpensive, colorful, excellent flying kites. Most of the stock comes from China, which undercuts other Asian countries on price.



1. After prayers, speeches and a sit-down dinner for 2,500 people, the sultan of Johore takes a turn crooning with the band. 2. Flora and fauna in the tropics can be unusually beautiful, as these palm stems illustrate. 3. H. Asran is mayor of Pasir Gudang and a great promoter of kiting in the city. "The museum and kiteflying support bonding by the citizenry," he says. 4. Hussin Haron was one of the key planners of the museum. An important city official, he also serves as president of the Johor Kite Association. 5. Sugar cane is one of the drinks offered for sale at a food stand. Note stalks in barrel, press for extracting juice behind. 6. The kite museum has some highly original detailing, including this stairway ironwork in the form of a Wau kite.





Top, kites, kites, kites and more kites in the museum. Bottom, more of the same. Altogether, delightful



1

1. Kiting is so important to Pasir Gudang that the immense field dedicated to flying has a permanent royal viewing facility. 2. Even though the temperature is in the middle-90s Fahrenheit, a young Muslim woman security guard wears a head scarf for reasons of modesty. 3. This small Brunei fighter kite on exhibition in the Pasir Gudang museum features the colors of the Brunei national flag, with royal emblem in center. 4. Pennants advertising the kite festival line the highways.



4



3

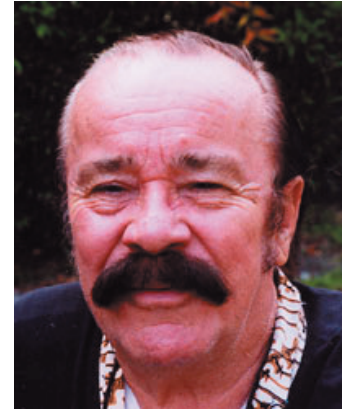


2

An Odd Problem for Singapore Enthusiasts

A Tight Little Island Thwarts Kiting

With anecdotes, tall tales, gossip, intelligent inside information and the occasional magic trick-----all commented on in a forceful, clipped British accent-----Shakib Gunn of Singapore is easily able to dominate a dinner table of 20. He did it one night on that tight little island at a gathering of the Singapore Kite Association, an organization he helped found and has led for many years. A heart ailment has recently cramped his traveling, but hardly his enthusiasm.



Shakib Gunn

An impressive group, the Singapore organization has one of the oddest problems confronting any kite club in the world. Singapore is so small and its population so dense, kilters literally have no place to fly their kites, not even low-tide beaches. Hard to believe but quite true. Fields can be rented by the hour, but the fees are stratospheric-----Singapore is after all first world nation. The association makes do with small, out of the way spots, but as to flying satisfyingly big kites, well that is only for dreaming.

Still, Malaysia is just across the causeway and the state of Johor there is very welcoming-----a kite is the country's unofficial symbol as well as being the insignia of the national airline-----and the Singapore gang, including den mother to foreign guests Gadis Widiyati, hangs in there and manages.

A famous figure in the global kite scene by sheer force of character, Shakib has not traveled that widely around the world, he reports sorrowfully. But he has reached out with good counsel to such as Valerie Govig of Kite Lines magazine and has been available for advice to kite groups in adjacent Asian nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Just having him on their side gives the Singaporeans a big moral boost.

Mr. Shakib, as he is often called, has had a most interesting life. Born in England of British parents, but named Shakib by a Turkish godfather, Gunn served as a military officer in Malaya-----as it was then known-----during the Communist insurgency there in the mid-1950s. He was a convert to the tropics. Returning home to be demobbed, he headed right back to Southeast Asia and joined an advertising agency.

He met Rabiah (nicknamed Teh), with a family tree that includes the sultans of Kedah, and also Tunku Abdul Rahman, first prime minister of Malaysia. "I met her in Kuala Lumpur when she was looking for a job," he says. Soon the family asked, "Are you asking for her hand?" Shakib responded: "I'm actually looking for some square meals." Marriage followed. A daughter, Fairuz, was born.

"Ever the activist," says Shakib, "during the period 1968-74 I worked for a non-governmental organization with outside interests; this got me gazetted and banned from Malaysia for life. I left for Singapore on the 10 p.m. mail train-----under escort." (The ban was lifted 15 years later, apparently through intercession by authorities in Johor state who were planning a kite festival and wanted Shakib to attend. "Is this an example of kite power?" he asks.)

Shakib set up in Singapore, while wife and daughter remained in Kuala Lumpur. For years they saw each other only on very occasional visits by Teh and Fairuz to Singapore. It wasn't until the late 1970s that the family was able to reunite. "Very hard years," says Shakib.

Meanwhile, Shakib had established himself in the advertising and graphic design business and taken out

Singaporean citizenship. Because daughter Fairuz chose to obtain her university education in Perth, the family bought a second residence in Australia. It was there that Shakib struck up an enduring friendship with the Indian-Australian kiter Michael Alvares, star of kite festivals around the world. Fairuz married and now has two children. She is the vice president of a stock brokerage. The family of six now occupies an airy two-story house in a posh section of Singapore, on a small plot of land. In choked Singapore, to even have your own lawn is a financial triumph. "But it's not my house, I rent it!" emphasizes Shakib. "I'm not a millionaire."

Attached to the house in the backyard are sheds storing Shakib's household gear, tools, books, kites and kite memorabilia and, more noticeably, pens for stray cats "saved from death by Teh and Fairuz," says Shakib. "But I am a respecter of all sentient beings." He is asked just how many cats the family is taking care of. "Forty-eight," he says. This is a family humane society with a vengeance.

As a younger man, Shakib went in for scuba diving, hydroplaning in Indonesian territorial waters where "confrontations" (Shakib's word) were possible, catamaran sailing, and paragliding. "For me, it was always wind and water." Now he settles for daily swims in the sea. "Yah, yah. I drift thro' fragments of life and thoughts of mortality. I like my warm-water beach-bumming."

Thanks From Royalty

"Dear Mr. Scott Skinner,

"Because of the ongoing work of the Government of Cambodia to nurture its traditional cultural traditions, such as dance and music and kiteflying, the Government's Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has made a particular effort to publish another important book on Khmer kites with the financial assistance of the Drachen Foundation of Seattle, Washington, U.S.A.

"On behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts I would like to express to the Drachen Foundation and you the very sincere thanks for your gracious help in financing this project.

"In this connection the Ministry has recently made a gift of 500 Khmer kite books to the Drachen Foundation. These books will also be used for diffusion purposes nationally and internationally.

"Because the Drachen Foundation is able to aid and foster the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in fulfilling its mandate to preserve permanently an ancient and vital Khmer folk and religious tradition, the people of Cambodia proudly make this gift to the people of the United States of America."



Sim Sarak, a high government official in Cambodia, and wife Cheang Yarin are co-authors of the important new book Khmer Kites, published in Khmer, French and English.

Prince Sisowath Panara Sirivuth
Secretary of State
Phnon Penh, Cambodia

Wow! What Waus

3 Craftsmen in Their Home Villages

The Wau kites of Malaysia are perhaps the most beautiful of all kites. They are the symbol of that progressive Southeast Asian country in general and of Air Malaysia in particular. Constructed by craftsmen all over the nation, they are identified most closely with the state of Kelantan in the far northeast. The heartland is the town of Kota Bahru.

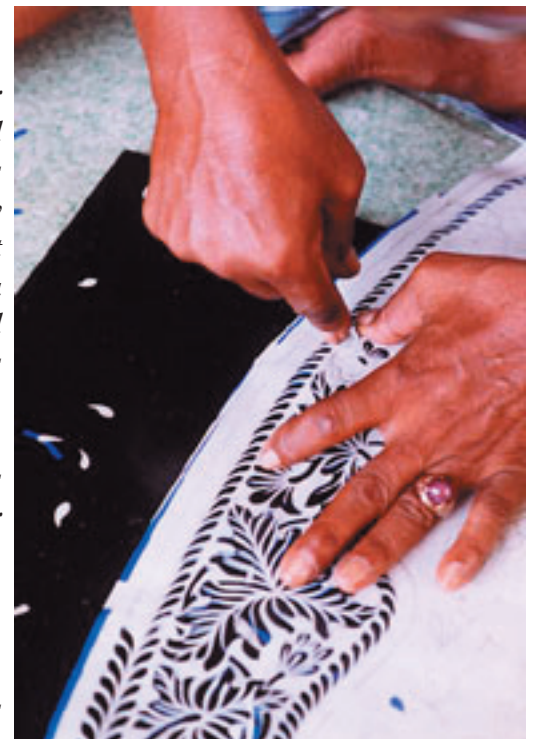
There are three foremost Wau (pronounced wow) makers in this back-of-beyond, rather impoverished area. Easiest to find is Ismail bin Jusoh (“either 78 or 79,” says a relative), who with his sons maintains a well-signed shop in the village of Kampong Kijang on the road to the nearby South China Sea. Ismail has been building kites since he was 12. The large store is jampacked with hundreds of kites, in varying sizes and quality, some for flying and some for wall display only, along with local crafts such as weavings (silk sarongs) and toys of bamboo and metal. Although Ismail is ailing, he is pleased to demonstrate his demanding craft of Wau-making to a stream of visitors, mostly countrymen. Clan members preside over shop sales. His 12-year-old granddaughter, a math wizard in school, does the shop billings.

Down the road is a rude shed holding the kites, some large, most rather battered from flying and age, of Sapie Yusof, another elder, who barely bothers himself with trying to sell his productions and largely ignores a visitor by sitting in his doorstep trimming lengths of bamboo for kite spars. Just in case he does get a sale, Sapie shows off one concession he has made to the rigid tradition of Wau-making. Some of his kites can be folded in half, for ease of packing and shipping.

The third grandmaster is Yasok bin Umat, the reigning star of Kelantan. He lives well away from the town and his house is down a hard-to-find dirt lane. His village of Kampong Gertak Sagu Panchor is located only after a taxi driver picks up a local boy as guide. Having traveled to kite festivals in Europe, Yasok has had numbers of Western kitemakers come study with him, one of them being Philippe Chataghat of St. Martin d’Heres, France. “He slept on a mat and ate rice for two weeks,” Yasok recalls.

Because his kites are so skillfully crafted and so jewel-like in their beauty with their intricate cut-paper designs, he is usually back-ordered and on the occasion of a recent visit by a writer he has only three kites to sell, not included undecorated ones hanging on the walls for everyday flying. Or maybe the three are for sale. The matter is broached but not negotiated because of the difficulties of shipping. One is a classic wau bulan or crescent moon kite, the other a wau kuching or cat kite, and the third a wau jalabudi or “fishnet of wisdom kite.” With their patterns taken from clouds, carved-wood architectural motifs, local vegetation, and the floral borders of batik fabrics, all three are obvious masterpieces. The asking price? Two hundred ringgits each, or about \$70-----this for a kite that can take two or three weeks of painstaking, skilled labor to create, not to mention an imaginative design and color sense.

Distinguished-looking, self-possessed, intelligent, Yasok, at age 54, is predictably unable to make a living as a kitemaker at such prices, so he supplements his income by performing with a folklore troupe as drummer, singer, and dancer. Like Malaysian Moslems in general, he exudes calm and control.



Ismail bin Jusoh cuts an intricate pattern into a kite sail.

The Malaysian climate being dry or wet, but always warm, Yasok works seated cross-legged on an open porch, stopping occasionally to handroll and smoke a cigarette. His constant company is a caged black cabao, a type of mynah bird, which by turn chirps, buzzes, croons and meows like a cat. Put your finger near his cage and he is instantly transformed from mimic to attack bird.

None of the three grandmaster kitemakers speaks English, and translators are hard to find in the area, but kites and kiting being a universal interest, communication flows easily enough.

Still excited by kites after six decades, Ismail bin Jusoh-----a juru tarik or master puller (flier)-----had been asked earlier, "Why do you create and fly kites?" He laughed softly. "They are beautiful, they are challenging to make and exciting to fly. They can even make an old man like me feel young once again."



Another grandmaster, Sapie Yusof, shows off one of his masterpiece Wau Bulans.



Ismail bin Jusoh unfurls a Wau sail he has cut out with a razor sharp homemade knife. This sail will be glued to a kite frame with plain sail already attached. Subsequent cuttings----up to as many as eight layers ----will establish intricate covers jewel-like in their beauty.





1. Yasok bin Umat is the reigning star of kitemaking and flying in the state of Kelantan, ground zero for the traditional Wau kites of Malaysia. 2. A spiky Kota Bahru plant is given an eye-catching adornment. 3. A math whiz in school, Noor Jaafar, aged 12, does billings for her grandfather Ismail bin Jusoh



A Dynamo on a Cultural Mission

Putting Taiwan on the Global Kite Map

Angela Wu, who owns her own small public relations firm in Taipei, became interested in kites when she was hired by a tourism group to promote a kite event. Fascinated by the sport and appreciating a business link for the future, she immersed herself in kiting to the extent she found herself in Jakarta in 2000 attending the annual festival there.

Angela's Hong Kong friend Alfred Lee told the Indonesian promoter of the festival, Sari Majid, of Wu's ambition to promote the sport in Taiwan and Majid, misinterpreting what she heard, announced at the festival that the next big kite event in Asia would be-----a festival in Taiwan. It was announced for September, just two months later.



Angela Wu

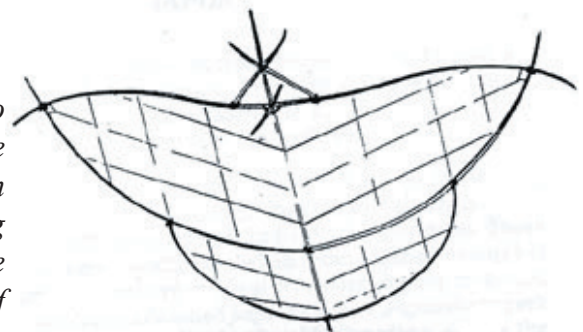
Wu was stunned. "I was very surprised. I thought it was a joke at first. Then I took it as a challenge. I felt proud. I decided almost immediately I'd hold the festival, as announced."

Returning home and with just two months to organize everything from scratch, the energetic Wu and staff, using her own money and helped a bit by the local government and a few corporations, found a beach site, invited leading kite figures from around the world as well as Taiwanese fliers, and pulled off a successful festival. More than 100 international fliers from 12 countries attended. Because the event was held in September, when the northeast monsoon produces absolutely predictable steady winds, the weekend went off swimmingly. "The Moon Festival was over, there was no typhoon, no rain. Nothing could go wrong, or did it," she recalls. The event ended

(continued on next page)

Fighters With Spikes

Continuing his study of kites in the Philippines, Orly Ongkingco has just issued a revised, expanded booklet titled The Philippine Kite. Covering the basics-----the invention of the kite, origin of the indigenous Philippine Gurion (swallow) kite, flying traditions in the Philippines, the role of monsoon winds and the rice harvest in the sport, kite fishing and bat catching with leaf kites, and so forth-----Ongkingco breaks some new ground. He shows how the Gurion links in with other similarly shaped Asian kites, the Tombi and Yakko of Japan, the Chula of Thailand, the Janggan of Indonesia, the Wau of Malaysia, the Tukkal of India, the Riu Vang of Vietnam, and the Swallow of China. Illustrations of these various types makes his point convincingly.



Gurion fighter

In a short section, he touches on the Gurion as a fighter kite, both using ground glass-coated line to slice others out of the sky, but in a unique tradition, the outfitting of the Gurion with protruding bamboo spikes meant to pierce and destroy the other kite in mid-air combat. This Visayan Islands fighting style, he says, is an absolutely unique form of aerial kite combat. (The Visayans are a large island group in the center of the country.)

Nicely and clearly written, the booklet runs 55 pages. To obtain a copy, contact Ongkingco at kiteasia@yahoo.com.

up as a tribute to Wu's energy, imagination, and contacts, not to mention her personal charm.

Wu has held the festival ever since, this year being the fourth annual. Extending to 10 days, the dates this year are Sept. 20-28. The opening days will be devoted to local events such as a press conference, competitions, school visits, demonstrations, seminars, indoor flying, workshops. The international phase starts on the 27th and embraces the whole range of the sport-----single and stunt flying, board surfing, ballet flying, indoor and night flying, workshops, seminars. A distinguished array of global stars will participate.

Eldest child in a family of four, Wu was born in Taiwan in 1964. Her father is an educator, her mother a city council member. In addition to several Chinese languages, Wu learned fluent English in school. Married to a university instructor and with a 12-year-old son, Wu helped established the Taiwan Kitefliers Association last year to integrate all the kite teams and kitemakers scattered across the island. Easy to predict, she became its secretary general.

Wu makes it a point to keep commercialization out of the festival, although discreet corporate and governmental support is forthcoming. She herself has been surveying the world kite scene, both out of personal interest and to garner ideas for the Taiwan event. In addition to Jakarta, Wu has been to Dieppe, Bali, Weifang, Malaysia, Denmark, Japan, even Wildwood, N.J., in the U.S. "I was invited," she says of the last festival, "so I went. It was wonderful."

Promoting kiting has become something of a cultural mission for Wu. When the Nationalists left China and took over Taiwan after World War II, they failed in their haste to flee to bring more than scraps of the centuries old Chinese kiting tradition with them. Wu wants to introduce this powerful tradition to the country of her birth.

She points to aspects of a kiting rebirth in Taiwan. Fellow countryman Wen-Xiang Lai has an exceptional collection of kites, mostly traditional Chinese examples, in his private museum. And Buteo Huang is a young, contemporary kitemaker making exceptional creative designs, she says. He has already won several international prizes for his work.

Booklet on the Kites of India

What with the war in Iraq and the severe acute respiratory syndrome scare, travel agent Ajay Prakash of Bombay found himself with time on his hands. His response? Write a booklet about the kites of India.

Literate, direct, not too complex, the small volume fits a need in the subcontinent, he notes, since "there is such a dearth of any kind of organized kite material in India. A lot of school kids in the big cities really have no kite knowledge at all." The booklet has been issued under the aegis of the Nomad Heritage Trust, a foundation dedicated to "the preservation of all things uniquely Indian." Prakash is a Nomad trustee.

The book deals with the *Patang*, or Indian fighter kite, diamond-shaped but with subtle variations. Flying these kites is a huge sport in India. On *Makar Sankranti*, January 14, the great traditional Indian kite festival day, millions-----literally millions-----of people crowd the rooftops in such cities as Jaipur and Ahmedabad to fly kites, picnic, and generally have fun. The kites are supplied with cutting line-----ground glass applied to the line with a paste-----and the object is to slice other kites out of the sky. This fighting is so enthusiastic and so skillful fallen kites give some trees the appearance of Christmas trees.

Prakash's booklet, with many attractive illustrations, discusses materials, types of kites, decorations on the kites, bridling techniques, the all-important cutting line, reels, and the aerodynamics of this simple looking but actually quite complex little flying machine.

Erotic Dancing in the Bangkok Sky: A 700-Year Thai Cultural Tradition

Every afternoon in March at 3 p.m., kite teams assemble on the 700-yard kite field next to the royal palace in Bangkok to do aerial battle. In a centuries-old tradition unlike any other in the world, the sky fighting take place between two very different types of kites----the large and aggressive male Chula and the small and flirty female Pakpao. It's an erotic dance in the sky.

The seven-foot Chula is equipped with barbs on its line; the Pakpao uses a lasso and a long tail to ensnare its opponent. Whichever gains the upper hand and drags its opponent to the ground gains points. The high total at the end of the month of flying becomes the winner for the year. The Chula team accumulates points for each Pakpao it catches and dominates, and vice versa. It's unique in that the male kite teams are competing against other male teams, not against their female opponents. At the end of the month when the points are tallied, there will be one champion Chula team and one champion Pakpao team.

The fighting starts at 4 because like clockwork a steady monsoon trade wind from the south called the lam wao (kite wind) builds up and gently sweeps over the field, guaranteeing optimum flying conditions. The breeze continues steadily until dark, dropping right on schedule at 7. With that, the teams pack up and go home-----to savor victories and mull defeats, to repair damaged kites, and to plot strategy for the next day's competitions.

The teams compete because it's a traditional thing to do, handed down from grandfather to father to son. Teams typically represent a neighborhood. They receive limited compensation-----colored team shirts, transportation, limited food-----from banks or from companies selling beer, tinned sardines, watertanks, and such. Sponsors get to have their names written on the kites.

Once it gets going, fighting is intense, with three or four Chula teams taking on at least twice that number of Pakpao groups. The Chula squads run to 30 people and when a catch is made there is extreme excitement-----a siren blares, a captain directs his team by blowing a whistle, team members shout excitedly as they race headlong to reel in line, observers squeal in terror as they scurry to get out of the way of the runners. Meanwhile, off in a corner dozens of men-----no women at all-----gather and use mysterious hand signals to bet the outcome of individual catches.

Chulas and Pakpaos are neatly readied in stacks on the ground. As fast as one catch is made, a new kite is launched and the erotic dance in the sky continues.

This competition is very traditional. It has been going on for some 700 years. As the location of the field implies, the sport receives royal support and even kingly participation. Kiteflying in Bangkok is viewed as a cultural tradition just as meaningful to the national heritage as dance or music or literature. A number of photographs show the present ruler, the revered King Bumiphol, flying kites himself as a young man.

A team of 30? Why are so many people needed to fly just one Chula? (Pakpao teams are much smaller, only three people.) It takes close observation to sort out all the roles being filled. There are kite launchers, line handlers, line retrievers, a preliminary flier who gets the Chula into position in the sky and then hands over to the captain who makes the actual aerial attacks. Then there are the pulley wielders plus the runners-----mostly athletic teenagers-----who drag the line. A hand-held pulley is used initially, with a six to eight boys running downfield at speed, arms linked for leverage, pulling the line. Spectators clear the way with great alacrity. A stool with pulleys



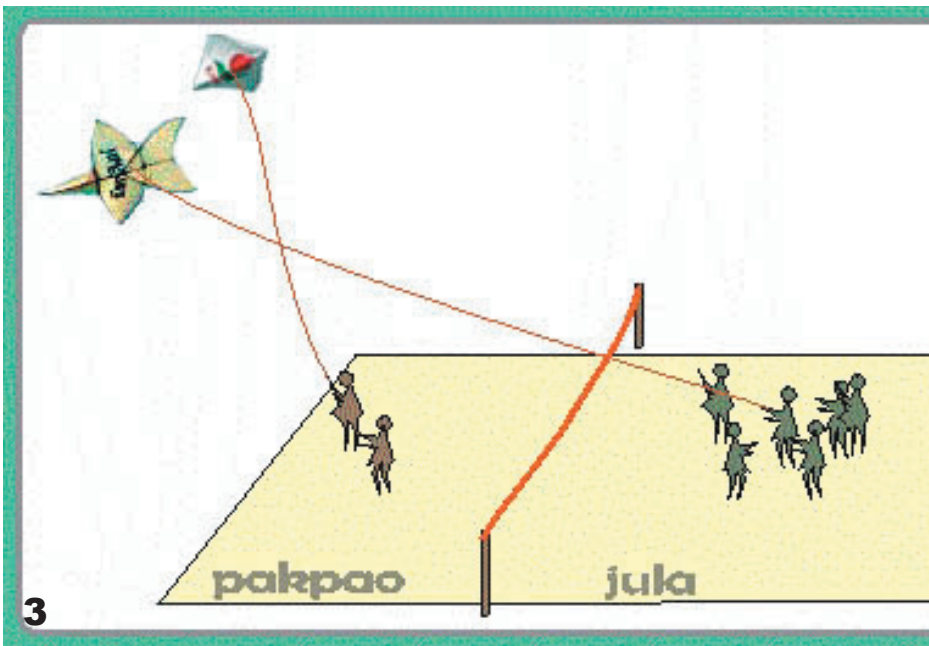
The ceremony opening the annual flying season on the immense royal kite field in Bangkok draws thousands of participants and spectators. In the back is the royal palace and its many associated temples. An exciting scene.

underneath is now put into position and the line is run under this, but going the opposite direction. A second squad of runners grabs the line one by one and drags it in the opposite direction. What with the powerful young men and the added impetus of the pulley system, a kite team can exert enormous pull on the opposing kite, which however is itself being manfully dragged in the opposite direction. Meanwhile, the entangled kites writhe, twist and struggle to either hold their catch or escape, whichever the case may be, in a life or death struggle as they plunge downward to earth.

A duel may be touch and go for as much as two or three minutes. All the while, tension is extreme, noise deafening, emotions raw. In the tropic heat, teams work up a real sweat. In a culture where showing strong emotion is considered bad form, fighters are excused their wild excitement.

Big and powerful as they are, Chulas surprisingly lose more often than they win in their battles with the crafty, nimble, two-foot Pakpaos. If there is a battle-of-sexes lesson to be learned from all this, it is left unstated by the Thais.

While organized kite fighting is going on in the center of vast Sanam Luang, the kite field, smiling Bangkok families in their thousands-----literally-----fly small, basic kites bought from 50 or more stands, wander around, watch kick-boxing demonstrations, play a game the object of which is to kick a rattan ball into a small hoop basket mounted 18 feet in the air, do group exercises, view Thai costumed dancing, fly balloons, and lounge on the grass on rented mats. Mainly, what they do is eat and drink. They either bring their own picnics or buy snacks from the impromptu food stands that dot the field-----barbecue charcoal grills glowing. In this Land of Smiles, as Thailand is called, the atmosphere is relaxed and gentle. Smiles are to be seen everywhere. Daily flying in Bangkok in the spring on royal Sanam Luang is quite simply one of the visual wonders of the kite world.



1. A Chula team member stows his line pulley, pending aerial combat. 2. Barbs on the Chula line are designed to snare the opposition Pakpao kites. 3. The kiteflying competition is diagrammed: Note that because of the prevailing monsoon wind, Chulas always fly well downwind to engage Pakpaos. (Chula is here spelled Jula.)



1. A line divides the kite field. Chulas are stacked there ready for a quick launch into combat. The object of the fight is to snare and then wrestle the opponent out of control. Although much smaller and lighter, the Pakpaos win more than half of their engagements with the Chulas. 2. These seven-foot Chulas ready for quick launch have been selected for the current condition of the wind. 3. A female Pakpao (top) flirts with a male Chula in an erotic sky dance that will end in an exciting but fatal embrace for one of them. 4. When reeling in line, the Chula team gains additional traction by running the line under this stool equipped with several pulleys.



When combat begins, a Chula team (top) drags in line by racing down the field. Spectators scatter before the mad dash. Note that the team member at left is using a small pulley to increase the strength of the pull. During combat, assembled bettors (bottom) signal their wagers.



Grandmasters Boontham and Vinai

Boontham Himsakun and Vinai Phomitong have been flying kites together for 40 years and constitute the best kite competition team in Bangkok today.

A superb flier and Thailand's master kite craftsman, Boontham, 62, is now pretty much restricted to building and repairing the Chula kites his team flies, because of a heart ailment. Vinai, 70, and his partner for a half century, now does the flying, backed up by a team of 30 people, including two of his sons. One, Siriwat, a lawyer, "never takes a case after 3 p.m. so he can fly," says expatriate Ron Spaulding, a close observer of the Thai kite scene.

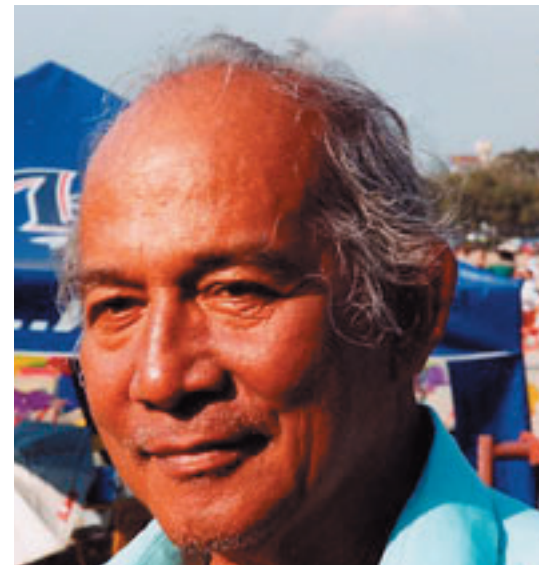
In the tradition of their forebears, both Thais have always made and flown only the male Chula, a seven-foot bamboo and paper creation with five points, roughly resembling the human body. Creating a bamboo and paper Chula that has perfect balance takes great skill. Even the line is handmade of the bark of the mulberry bush. Such line is extremely tough and has no stretch, and thus creates an instant response, vital in a fast moving kite competition like this.

Like Vinai, Boontham has a son, Ek, who is an expert kitemaker determined to carry on his father's traditions.

The well-known Indian Patang fighter kite with its ground glass cutting line, used in many countries of the world, goes in the direction it is pointed when its line is tugged, thus creating dihedral. The Thai Chula, on the other hand, heads not in the direction it is pointed but rather in the direction its flying balance indicates. This is a highly subtle matter and it takes years of experience to master the nuances. Not many are able to do so. But Boontham and Vinai, both with great natural aptitude and after years of intense practice, are past masters of this unusual skill.

An imposing, handsome man, Boontham is pleased to recount that his talent with kites and his personal charm have over the years taken him around the world. He has participated in invitational kite festivals in New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, China, England, Japan, Indonesia, Germany, Italy, Holland, Taiwan and the United States. He has been to Dieppe in France no less than seven times. He is both a proud ambassador of his country and a true master of an ancient art.

"He knows how to put on a show," says Ron Spaulding, who has traveled with him as his translator. "In Dieppe one year, his demonstration was over and



Boontham Himsakun



The hands of a master kitemaker.

he was flying just for fun. A lot of people were watching. He had 500 meters of cord in his line basket and he spotted a construction crane 450 meters away. It was well over the city. Boontham flew his kite all the way over the city, to the crane, dropped it down behind, made the kite fly in circles, brought it back up over the crane, then flew it back home. The crowd was astonished at such control. He dared to do it because he knew his kite so well.”

Boontham brings one thing unusual in Thai kiting to his and Vinai’s team-----his beautiful wife Jiamjai. Not to be left out of the fun, she sees to some of the team management and attends to the important matter of line handling. It’s a background job but crucial to the success of the team and she obviously does it well.



Vinai Phomitong

Plucking a Kite From Thin Air

A foreign observer at the royal kitefighting tournament in Bangkok recently found himself participant instead of observer. Standing in the middle of a dense crowd observing the action overhead, he watched as a Chula engaged in mortal combat with a Pakpao. A siren was sounding loudly, whistles blowing, spectators shouting in excitement. Suddenly there was a swishing sound just overhead and a plummeting kite slammed painfully into the shoulder of the farang (Westerner). In a reflex move learned from playing baseball as a boy, he made an instinctive grab and pulled off a neat two-handed catch of the two-foot Pakpao. Shouts and laughter from the surprised crowd.

A team member came charging up to claim his kite and when he got his hands on it noted with surprise it was undamaged. Merriment continued over the farang’s mysterious plucking of the kite from thin air. The kite was now handed back to the visitor to hold aloft for victory photographs.

An authoritative Thai man arrived, positioned himself directly in front of the visitor, and did an enthusiastic double thumbs up. More cheers. LOS-----Land of Smiles.

Commenting on the incident later, Ron Spaulding, an American expatriate who is a great expert on Thai kite culture, said: “Maybe that second guy was praising you for making the catch with grace. More probably he was thinking, ‘It’s a good thing the kite didn’t kill that dumb farang, then my team would probably have been sued.’”

Mikio Toki an International Star

Carrying on the Edo Tradition

When master kitemaker Teizo Hashimoto died 13 years ago, there was no one to carry on the ancient tradition of Edo kitemaking. Edo is the old word for Tokyo.

Masaaki Modegi, dean of Japanese kite collectors with his own museum in Tokyo, urged Mikio Toki to take up where Hashimoto had left off and Toki agreed to do it.

Now almost a decade and a half later, after half a dozen trips annually to festivals around the world and a suitable amount of global publicity because of his stunningly beautiful kites, Toki has fulfilled the promise seen in him. More than one international kite expert feels that Toki is headed for living national treasure status in Japan, a great honor conferred on craftsmen by the government. Such a title also tends to bestow financial independence, since the worker's output rises sharply in demand and value.

Born in 1950, the son of a journalist, Toki liked kites from childhood. Studying graphic design in school, he taught kitemaking and other toy traditions----- bamboo objects, origami, paper tops. He designed his own toys and made them of cane, boxes, handmade washi paper.

Meeting Katsuhisa Ota, a maker of traditional Edo kites, Toki learned all about Edos, a rectangular kite with elaborately painted sail and multiple bridle lines. Japan has many rectangular kites but Edos are typically narrower, in a 6 by 10 width to length relationship. Living near a river, Toki had the wind needed to fly these heavy kites ranging in size from two to six meters high and requiring a team of up to 20 to fly. The images painted on them typically come from the traditional "floating world" of the pleasure quarters of centuries ago. Scowling soldiers from traditional stories and famous Kabuki actors are often depicted.

Toki also made Yakko kites, the traditional servant image, and even fighters, equipped with razors to cut the line of other kites.

"Since kiteflying in Tokyo is particularly associated with the New Year," says Toki, "Edo flying is done in December and January, rather than in May as in other parts of the country. The wind is from the north and very cold, but since flying involves a lot of exercise it keeps the fliers warm." January 1 is particularly important for flying, Toki notes. This is the day residents pray for a happy year ahead.

When he became a full time kitemaker, Toki evolved a routine. Working months ahead, he makes 300 kites for each New Year, using the image of the animal appropriate to the year ahead-----cow, tiger, rat, rabbit, donkey, hen, dog, boar. These kites are sent to the kite museum in Tokyo and sold there. Toki also makes other Edos with traditional martial arts themes for sale and he does many corporate commissions, some quite expensive. During his busy season, he is helped by his family-----school teacher wife, two children, now 22 and 17, even his mother.

"I make about 400 kites a year," says Toki. "I use only old bamboo that has been smoked to kill insects inside the wood, handmade washi paper of mulberry bark, and for the most part natural dyes. These dyes permit light to shine through the kite when flying, like a stained glass window in a church."

"I'm a purist. I don't copy anybody. Although the changes may be subtle, and I do sometimes work in series, every single kite I do is an original."

With the quality of his painting steadily improving, according to the connoisseurs, Toki's future as a kitemaker seems well assured. "I love kites and I love flying. And very important, in my mind, is the need to keep the Edo kite tradition, more than 400 years old now, alive and well."

An outgoing guest at international kite flies, and always strikingly garbed as a traditional Japanese flier (good for TV interview purposes), Toki with his fluent English, big smile and infectious laugh makes it a point to have a good time day and night on his global travels. He did have one tense moment at a recent international festival in Bedford, England, where he had large, masterpiece Edos staked down on the ground awaiting sufficient wind to fly them.

When another flier miscalculated his candy drop, the parachute-borne "lollies," as the Aussie flier called them, headed directly for the international fliers. Suddenly, from all directions, and urged on by the public address announcer, boys and girls, even teenagers, came running madly to claim the candies. As Toki watched horrified, his hand clutching his heart, he saw children actually vaulting his large Edos, each worth \$5,000 or more. Being well mannered British children, they caused no serious damage. But it was a heart stopping moment for Toki.

Mikio Toki and one of his gorgeous Edos.



Plain Talk From Down Under

Editor's note: The author of the following essays is a noted kite designer and international exhibition flier. He lives in Ashburton, New Zealand.

By Peter Lynn

Recovering a Hijacked Kite

Here's a bit of a snigger. Clyde Cook, Volker Hoberg and I were at the Pasir Gudang kite festival in Malaysia last spring. Volker, on his way back to Europe after spending six months with us in New Zealand, had made himself a four-meter pilot kite which was flying on the Thursday of the festival when it was, unfortunately, cut away. Fortunately by a fellow German----I'm sure you'll agree that the odd spot of domestic violence is preferable to an international incident.

I was in hot pursuit as it floated over the countryside, but, on puffing up to where it appeared to land, found it missing, err, that is, didn't find it. Volker was not so happy, especially after having lost a micro-bar kite through incapacity.

Just before starting to pull down and pack on Sunday afternoon, the last day of the festival, we were idly looking at a decorated Parafoil flying quite high directly above our base camp. It had been there all weekend and, on close inspection, looked very like one of our pilots. Out came the binoculars and it was indeed Volker's missing pilot, now displaying, writ large, the name of a local motorcycle club.

Collecting up some of our local friends, we moved upwind and quietly melted out of the crowd so as to surround the flier and his associates. After an inconclusive discussion, we walked the line down and repossessed the kite, tying a one-dollar note to the loose line end so the recently dispossessed flier wouldn't go home totally empty handed-----or maybe so that some of the large number of the children in the crowd would really irk him by pouncing on his line as he wound it in.

Anyway, a very satisfactory conclusion. Volker's proud of his now uniquely decorated kite, and he should get to enjoy it, unless these motorcycle groups have international connections, that is.



Peter Lynn flies large kites having such an immense pull the Pasir Gudang kite festival organizers supply him with earth-moving equipment as anchors.

Obsessional About Kitesailing

There have been many times in the 175 years since George Pocock gave kite traction its modern foundation that kitesailing has seemed about to become mainstream, but maybe it really is going to happen this time. Currently generating impetus is the work that Dean Jordan and Dave Culp did for the Oracle syndicate in the recent America's Cup challenge. Time was ultimately against them for this regatta, but they were successful in developing a kite that qualified under the rules as a spinnaker and that many believe was faster.

The publicity that this generated has significantly raised kitesailing's profile with mainstream sailors. Coincidentally, Peter Lynn Ltd. Also put some development work in on kites for an America's Cup boat, Team New Zealand, naturally, and it was frustrating, now that the need for secrecy is passed, to compare experiences with Dave and Dean.

Ironically, early in the process, I had received a suspicious phone call, in a West Coast American accent, obviously pumping for information as to whether we were working on kites for Team New Zealand. My natural reaction was to mislead-----successfully, so I have since been told.

Possibly this was the biggest mistake I could have made, as if I had left the impression that we were on the case, the accelerator would have been pushed to the floor on Oracle's efforts and kitesailing might even now be a mainstream reality. Damn! Oh well, at worst just another lost opportunity.

Fano, Nah, Nahdi, Nah, Nah

Fano's weather was not good, one nice day out of five we had, but somehow this doesn't matter here in Denmark. On Friday, the wind was vicious. I creased our (fortunately rental) car's door when it was ripped from my hand as it opened. Amassing sufficient further damage to get value from the insurance excess then became a challenge. Eventually a few line burns and ramming it with a buggy did the trick. We had only one kite flying that day-----a quilt (now called our "Gucci"). As far as I could see through the windblown sand, it was the only large kite flying all day, which is possibly some comment on other fliers' good sense rather than our own skills.

Sunday was glorious, kites flying in numbers that can only be compared with stars on a clear, moonless night, and no chance at all to visit even ten percent of the fliers on the beach.

On Monday evening, the day of the summer solstice, there was a bonfire on the beach. It's a celebration whose origins are lost in the mists of time but which involves burning an effigy and local maidens throwing off their clothing and rushing into the surf. We unaccountably missed the actual event on account of that evening's *essen und trinken*.

Wrong Business

I've been hiding away in my head thinking focused thoughts for quite a while-----a new design is in the offing, and one that may be a surprise. I've finished basic design and testing and it's at the patent attorney's now; this is when I write the patent application completely myself, then get a \$5,000 bill for "drafting." I'm definitely in the wrong business.

‘Mr. Ha’ a Chinese Kite Tycoon

Four Generations of Artistry in Beijing

Small, boyish-looking, ever-smiling, Ha Yi Qi (pronounced Ha Ee-chee), of Beijing, hardly presents as a tycoon, but that is exactly what the renowned kitemaker is. A fourth generation craftsman, “Mr. Ha,” as he is widely known in the West, runs a factory employing well over 100 people and brings in serious money to his country from his exports to a dozen countries, mainly the U.S. and Japan. He travels widely and finds obtaining an exit visa from his country much easier than most, a tribute to his economic contribution.

Famous for his kites, those his factory turns out and particularly those he himself makes, paints, and signs, particularly the swallows that are the traditional kite of the capital city of China, his factory also turns out a run of goods mostly of the tourist variety----- paintings, lanterns, weavings, objects of bamboo. Right now, business is booming.

In a recent interview at the Sunderland kite festival in England’s Tyne and Wear area in the northeast area of the country, near Newcastle, with a Mandarin-speaking translator bridging the language barrier, Mr. Ha said that the family business was begun in the mid-19th century by a great-grandfather. In typical Chinese fashion, the business was passed down to male heirs, with Mr. Ha taking over when his father, Ha Kuiming, died in 1993 at age 79. The present Mr. Ha is 49. His wife helps him run the company, Beijing Yimeng Tourism Products Co.



Ha Yi Qi

Mr. Ha became well known in the Western kite world when a thick book he and his father collaborated on was published in English in 1990 by China Books and Periodicals, of San Francisco, as part of a culture and art of China series out of Hong Kong. Still in print and available from kite book retailers, *Chinese Artistic Kites*, as the volume is titled, shows the stunning range of Chinese kites produced by the Ha clan, some 250 individual designs. In addition to many color illustrations and detailed drawings, the book covers the history of kites, evolution and basic structure of kites, construction and artistic characteristics, construction methods, and techniques of flying.

Mr. Ha says he began his apprenticeship in making kites at age 5 and at age 10 took up the painting of their sails, which is his particular skill. His kites range from very small to more than three yards high and are expensive. Iqbal Husain, of Geneva, who is one of his collectors, says his medium-sized productions typically sell in the \$1,000 range, larger models can command \$5,000 and more. All Ha kites fly very well, reports Husain.

Mr. Ha uses only traditional materials-----bamboo, silk, natural dyes. “He’s a very talented artist,” says Husain. “His pencil drawings are beautiful.”

When asked where he rates in the modern day pantheon of Chinese kitemakers, Mr. Ha replies with perfect Oriental tact: “I compete only with myself.” Similarly, when queried about his family’s life during the Cultural Revolution starting in 1966, when Red Guards trashed traditional businesses just like that of the family Ha, he answers carefully, “Yes, my mother saw trouble coming, and she destroyed family business records. Our family adopted a low profile. As to the family collection of kites, 20 of the masterpieces were lent out to friends who were unlikely to be targets-----of these kites the family has now recovered 10. All the rest of the large collection was destroyed.” All this is said in a perfectly detached manner.

Mr. Ha is proud to point out that an 11th old family kite survives, in a San Francisco museum. It was made by his father, and won a major prize at an international kite festival in that city. “I have seen it on display myself,” he says.

In Mr. Ha’s future is another book on kites, this consisting of paintings he has done. “I have 200 to choose from,” he says. Because friends have seen some of these works, word has gotten out about them. “Publishers are queuing up to issue the book,” he says. He hopes it will be issued within five years.

As the father of only one child, a daughter, aged 12, Mr. Ha is now apparently faced with a dilemma. Since females do not ordinarily learn the necessary skills or take the reins of a family craft business such as Mr. Ha runs, the issue of his successor arises. Since this is modern China where only one child per family is permitted, the tradition may be reversed if his daughter shows interest. Or she may wed a possible candidate for the job. Or Mr. Ha may in time appoint a successor from his staff of experts. For the time being, he calmly awaits developments.



A popular kite to fly during Chinese New Year, this 40-inch Ha family sand swallow is decorated with 13 bats, symbols of honesty and integrity.

Historic Buildings Put to New Use

Museum Honors Indonesian Kite Tradition

Endang W. Puspooyo of Jakarta, Indonesia, was attracted to kites by their beauty many years ago. She soon began making and flying her own, then took to collecting them. She helped organize the first international festival in Jakarta in 1993, and has been a force in Indonesian kiting ever since.

With a powerful cabinet minister husband supporting her, she has now opened her own museum, actually a complex of found old buildings and new construction.

The museum is 15 miles from downtown Jakarta

Endang conceived of the museum just two years ago, but being a woman of action made her dream of showing off her kites to the public come true in short order. Because she and friends travel a lot, she was able to locate a classic old teak house in east Java which she purchased from the occupant, a woman 100 years old. (Now 102, the woman lives with relatives who can care for her.) Endang had the house disassembled and trucked to Jakarta where it was reconstructed piece by piece. The structure is accurately dated to 1859, just before the American Civil War, from a coin found imbedded in the sill to propitiate spirits.



Endang W. Puspooyo

Finding a lovely old rice barn in Bali, Endang bought it too, had it taken apart, trucked to her property, and reassembled. It has become a gazebo.

Adjacent to these two structures she had a museum shop constructed, as well as a workshop for teaching kitemaking to school children. Another part of the annex is devoted to the manufacture of kites. Proceeds from the sale of these kites will be used to defray museum costs.

She does not have a flying field but hopes to buy a nearby property to meet this need.

The museum had a gala grand opening last spring, with several high-ranked Indonesian government officials in attendance. A Balinese dance group performed.

As an Indonesian Cabinet minister, Endang Puspooyo's husband Widjanarko reports directly to the prime minister of Indonesia. His job is an important one. He sees to the price stabilization and distribution of rice throughout the country, where it is the single most important food. Since Indonesia, fourth most populous nation in the world, spans one-eighth of the globe and has 17,000 islands, the complexity and importance of Widjanarko Puspooyo's job is clear.

A graduate of New York University, he speaks excellent English as does his wife. In fact, one of their three children was born in the United States. A youthful looking beauty, although she's in fact a grandmother, Endang pronounces, "I am still 25." Big smile. She is a charmer.

Endang says her museum role will be supervisory only. As her curator, she chose Zainal (Eddie) Effendi, an ex-United Nations aide in New York and Israel. Effendi is an electrical engineer by training. After ending his U.N. service, he returned to his home country of Indonesia, became interested in kites, and soon was teaching kitemaking at the International School in Jakarta. Endang discovered him there.



Top, a panorama of the Jakarta museum complex. Left, the museum with its reception area in front, display area to the rear. Above, Zainal Effendi, museum director.

Endang says her motive for opening the museum was not only to show her large, wonderful collection, supplemented this year by the purchase of a giant Peter Lynn Megabite, but to help preserve the kiteflying traditions of Indonesia, where kites may have been invented and where kiting remains a highly popular sport. Kitefighting with cutting line is widely practiced and Indonesian fliers rank with Asian Indians, Hong Kong Chinese and Koreans as kings of this demanding sport.

She points out that her collection includes not only modern kites but also leaf kites used for sport flying and on various islands to catch shy garfish. Leaf kites are also used to catch flying bats. Fishhooks are attached to the line and kites are flown in the flight path of fruit bats, also known as flying foxes; when one of these giants is hooked it is hauled down and sold as a delicacy to eat. Such hunting for bats is now widely banned, but still illegally practiced, mainly by young boys.

As a complement to her tribute to the kite tradition, Endang Puspooyo has had a field on her property planted with 120 species of trees and plants well known in Indonesian folk lore for their medicinal and cosmetic efficacy. She hopes thereby to promote the study of these ancient health remedies and beauty aids for future generations of her countrymen.

Orlando Ongkingco of Manila, who is promoting the formation of a Southeast Asian kite federation, points out that establishment of the Jakarta museum is the latest step in the resurgence of kiting as a traditional cultural practice in the tropic Pacific rim. Museums have already been established in Malaysia at Pasir Gudang, Johor state, and in Cambodia in the capital Phnom Penh. Kiteflying as a sport, hobby and religious practice is widely practiced elsewhere in the area, including the Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam and Taiwan. "It adds up to an exciting rebirth of the kite in this strategically important and economically vibrant part of the world," Ongkingco says.



Entrance to the kite compound (top), with an appropriately symbolic pattern of bricks. Below, the store and workshop.



Top, the gazebo, a former Balinese rice barn. Below, a multipurpose building consisting of residence, guest quarters and extra workshop space.

An Ambassador to the Global Kite World

Meeting Mr. Be, Vietnamese Grandmaster

By Ben Ruhe

The most renowned Vietnamese kitemaker, based among other reasons on the number of overseas festivals he has attended (nine in France alone), is Nguyen Van Be (pronounced N'whin Van Bay).

Mr. Be, as his is widely known, lives in the ancient capital of Hue, halfway between Hanoi on the north and Saigon on the south. Most Westerners remember Hue from the Tet offensive in early 1968 when 10,000 were killed, including 500 U.S. Marines.

Although he speaks no English, Mr. Be has an efficient translator in Nguyen Huu Thai, a young government cultural affairs officer, and it is Mr. Thai who takes visiting Westerners to see the kitemaker in his rather impoverished home, beside the Perfume River that bisects the city.

In an interview in a local teahouse, Mr. Be, 76, says his parents were glassmakers and having six children were able to educate him only to the age of 13. After that, he took up traditional music, playing a traditional Viet one-stringed violin and the flute. Earning a meager living playing at weddings and other ceremonies, he took up portrait painting to supplement his income and was good enough to eventually find himself a university preparatory and teaching position. Meanwhile, he married and had 12 children, 10 of whom are alive and most of them pursuing civil service, art and educational careers. "Although I am a poor man, I was able to educate all of my children," he says with pride.

Having learned about kites, a popular but not well organized sport in Vietnam, from grandfather and father at age 7, Mr. Be thought of kitemaking and kiteflying as a family tradition as well as a prestigious national cultural tradition and pursued this hobby from childhood on. Retiring from teaching and painting in the 1980s, he took up



The indigenous Flute kite of Vietnam, here only partly assembled, with its set of bamboo flutes sitting on top.

professional kitemaking as a vocation in 1990 and has made his living from crafting and flying kites, and teaching the sport ever since. He also serves as manager of the Hue kite club, with headquarters in a government cultural building a mile from his house. Founded 20 years ago, the club has 50 members representing a variety of professions. It stages periodic exhibits and demonstrations. There are no women members. "Women don't like to play kites," pronounces Mr. Be. The club meets monthly, he says, to discuss kitemaking----how to improve existing models, how to craft new types-----and upcoming events such as workshops for children, exhibits, demonstrations.

While Vietnam is well suited to kiteflying with its long expanses of beaches reaching from the far north to the far south, Mr. Be says flying is not much organized. "There are five small kite clubs in



Master Vietnamese kitemaker Nguyen Van Be of Hue shows off a female figure that adorns one of his large kites.

Hanoi, just one club in Saigon that I know about,” he says.

The best season for flying is the summer. It is hot and windy and children are out of school. Because it is inland, flying in Hue takes place in parks and squares. “In the villages, children fly in the fields,” he says.

Introduced to the global kite community at the international kite festival in Dieppe, France, Mr. Be found himself being invited to make the global rounds to show off his art. In addition to his nine visits to France, he has been to Indonesia, Belgium, Thailand, Malaysia. “Even Reunion Island in the mid-Atlantic Ocean,” he adds with a modest smile.

Since Vietnam for years now has drawn substantial tourism, Westerners interested in kites have tended to make the pilgrimage to meet Mr. Be on his home turf. Tom Jeckel and Anke Sauer of Germany, Malcolm Goodman of England, and Philippe Cotteceau of France have been visitors. Cotteceau spent two weeks studying under him, “two hours in the morning, two hours in the afternoon,” recalls Mr. Be.

“I love to travel,” he says. “I feel rich. I live like a kite-----free. When I fly I forget who I am. I forget richness and poorness, sadness and happiness. I forget everything except the flying.”

In his rather disorganized workshop, part of which is outdoors with a roof overhead to keep out the wet, Mr. Be shows off his kites, many in the shape of birds. They are made from bamboo and silk----both components light, strong, cheap, readily available. There is an octopus, several centipedes, a square kite with chrysanthemum motif, a butterfly, a bat. “I make 26 different types of kites,” he says, “some of them copied from examples I’ve seen on my travels.”



Young women on an outing pose in Vietnam’s lovely national costume for females, the ao dai. Straw hats and sandals complete the ensemble.

Asked if there is an indigenous Vietnamese kite, he says yes and brings out eight ovoid wings attached as a train, plus five bamboo flutes in graduated sizes, these to be mounted atop the train to make a pleasing drone when the kite is flying. “I call this the flute kite,” he says. “In the north, it’s known as the oval kite. In the south, it’s the ship kite, because it rather looks like a small ship with several sails.”

The traditional word for kite in Vietnamese is “diều,” with two accent marks over the “e.” The flute kite becomes “diều sao, or diều o (the o pronounced aah). Both descriptive endings are intended to reproduce the humming sound made by the flutes.

One of Mr. Be’s sons, Nguyen Van Hoang, is an excellent kitemaker and works with his father. Mr. Be has taught the art to other sons as well.

Mr. Thai, adept translator and government cultural officer, thinks Mr. Be is something of a living national treasure, in the Japanese tradition of honoring traditional folk culture grandmasters. “He not only has preserved traditional Vietnamese kitemaking techniques, he has presented this art to kitemakers and the public around the world.”

Although a septuagenarian, Mr. Be says he is in good health and ready and willing to travel. “All good offers accepted,” he says, in Mr. Thai’s rather racy translation.

The interviewer gets up his nerve and finally asks a political question: Where was Mr. Hue when the raging Tet offensive battles of 1968 occurred only a mile or so from where he lived? “Oh, I was at home in my village 25 miles away, painting.” Bland smiles from both Mr. Be and Mr. Thai.



5



1



4



2

1. An octopus kite, by Nguyen Van Be. The eyes rotate in the wind. 2. Thinking grave thoughts at The Citadel in Hue, site of the bloodiest battle of the Tet offensive in 1968. Ten thousand were killed, including 500 Americans. 3. So destructive was the Vietnam War bombing and shelling in Hue that few tiles survived unbroken. Here a few that did are assembled into a makeshift floor. 4. Mr. Be's songbird, which went on the attack at the slightest provocation. 5. One of Nguyen Van Be's 12 children, Nguyen Van Hoang, works with his father making kites and giving flying demonstrations.



3



Rush hour traffic in downtown Hue (top) involves mostly bicycles and low power motorcycles. Autos and trucks are few and far between. Dogs are free to stroll the streets. The usual pollution of Southeast Asian cities is noticeably absent. It's all something of a time warp. Below, Nguyen Van Be's kite skills have gotten him invitations to show off his art around the globe. His trophy room (above) documents his travels.

About Our Contributor



Inventor **Peter Lynn** is a roving ambassador for kite traction sports. He remains king of kite festivals round the globe, with his imposing array of giant kites that tend to shrink beaches (Page 28).

The Journal Staff

Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation, is a former pilot instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He has been a kite enthusiast for two decades—designing, making, flying, collecting, and teaching about kites.



Ali Fujino is the administrator of Drachen. A museum specialist since age 19 when she began work at the Smithsonian Institution, she has long been fascinated with anything that could become airborne. Fujino has recently been elected a member of the prestigious Explorers Club of New York City in recognition of her 25 years of cultural work in Third World countries.

Editor of the Drachen Journal, well traveled **Ben Ruhe** regularly contributes articles to special interest publications on subjects as diverse as boomerangs, tribal art and flint-knapping.



Anthem for Kitefliers

Yes, but stillness after all, of any kind, is impossible. Our earth is not at rest. And the sun and all the stars and all the bodies of the universe. Everyone, everything is flying.

----Jose Marie Yturralde

Note to readers: Articles in this issue of the Drachen Foundation Journal not bylined were written by editor Ben Ruhe.

Illustration Credits

Ben Ruhe----Cover, Page 2, 4, 5, 6 (bottom left and right), 7, 8 (Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (top), 22 (No. 4), 23 (bottom), 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41 (Lynn, Skinner, Fujino), 42. Anuar Abd Ghanji----6 (top), 9. Orlando Ongkingco----8 (No. 1), 17 (bottom). Tom Jeckel---20, 21, 22 (Nos. 1,2,3), 23 (top). Ha Yi Qi----31. Zainal Effendi----33, 34, 35. Malcolm Goodman----41 (Ruhe).

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Contest, Contest, Contest

Who is the cutest Thai kiteflier? Send us an email with your choice. The two most charming nomination messages will receive prizes from the Drachen Foundation. There will be a first place award of a sweatshirt and a runnerup prize of a tee-shirt, both decorated with Drachen logos. Enclose size in your message, viz. small, medium, large, extra large. The judge for the contest will be the editor of the Drachen Foundation Journal. Address: guru.ben@verizon.net Please submit entries soonest. Winning messages will be published in a subsequent issue of the Drachen Foundation Journal. (Editor's note: The little girl in photograph No. 1 was told by her mother to hand over her kite string so she could do a respectful *wai* to the visiting photographer. Seconds later, she had the string back in her hot little hands and was happily flying again.)

