

WCC-APR

REPORT FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

BY

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INTRODUCTION

It has been a year since the current Presidency of the WCC-APR of Dr Ghada Hijjawi Qaddumi has taken office.

Within that period, much has been happening in the arena of Crafts within the South East Asia ie nationally; regionally and internationally.

National Activities:

Amongst the 10 ASEAN nations ie Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam; each celebrated their National Crafts Day or Festival in various manners.

Hari Kraf Kebangsaan (HKK) in Malaysia was held from 27 Feb-11 March at the Craft Complex with craft vendors displaying and marketing their products. It also hosted several textile craft artisans from Philippines, China, India etc.

INAKRAF in Jakarta (24-28 April) was once again a hugely successful expo for Indonesian craft producers and vendors. It was participated by over 1,800 small and medium businesses in approximately 1,222 booths covering a total area of 24,080 square meters. The event was divided into 2 segments: Trade Days which focus on the Business to Business aspect, and Public Days which is an open trade fair for the public.

The Vietnam Craft Village Exhibition Fair 2013 was held from April 26th to May 1st in Hue city, kicking off a series of activities of “The quintessence of Vietnamese crafts” Festival. The event attracted more than 150 booths introducing traditional handicrafts and craft villages from cities and provinces nationwide.

The Hanoi Gift Show 2013 held from 27th to 30th October had 550 booths of over 200 exhibitors from Hanoi and other provinces nation-wide. Major products at the Fair included: Home Décor & Handicraft; Indoor and Outdoor Furniture; Home textiles and Embroidery; Gifts and Ethnic items; Personal Accessories

The LifeStyle Vietnam 2014 Home Decor & Gifts Fair held from 18-21 April at Ho Chi Minh city had over 1,000 booths from 400 Vietnamese and overseas exhibitors in order to meet the requirements of international buyers who are increasingly sourcing for Vietnamese home decor and gift products.

The Bangkok International Gifts Fair (BIG) had approximately 600 companies and 1,600 booths from both domestic and overseas with the following products: Artificial Flowers/Plants and Potpourri; Christmas Decorative Items and Candles; Gifts, Decorative

Items and Handicrafts; Home Textile and Fabric Decorative Items; Household Products; Toys and Games; Stationery and Green and Eco Friendly Products.

Manila FAME International, the Philippines' Design and Lifestyle Event was held twice a year; on March 14-17, and October 17-20, 2013. This is a very well established Fair especially for foreign buyers from America and Europe as some of Philippines' top designers launch their latest designs at the event!

Regional Activities:

The South East Asian region is fortunate that there is a regional entity such as AHPADA (ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association). With the current presidency of Thailand under Dr Supanee Chayaputra, the emphasis has been on developing Craft SMEs and on joint marketing.

AHPADA has been pivotal in initiating the UNESCO-AHPADA Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts for South East Asia in 2001, which then was adopted by UNESCO as their main Crafts program and was expanded to other regions ie South Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Latin America etc.

In Bangkok, the 2nd International Innovative Crafts Fair (ICF) was held from 2-5 May at BITEC. Several of the ASEAN member countries were allocated booths to show their innovative craft designs and an international section featured crafts from India, Bhutan, Pakistan, China, Japan etc.

Another initiative spearheaded by Thailand is the setting up of the ASEAN Silk Association under the Queen Sirikit Institute of Sericulture under the Department of Agriculture, who also organized a regional working group meeting in Khon Kaen in December..

The ASEAN Traditional Textiles Collaboration was first initiated in Jakarta Indonesia by Wastraprema; then carried on in Manila, Philippines. In 2012 a conference was held in Kuala Trengganu, Malaysia; and the venue was Vietnam in 2013.

International Activities:

The products under the ASEAN / UNESCO Award of Excellence for Crafts were once again showcased at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market alongside the booths for South Asia; Central Asia and East Asia. The coordinators were Manjari Nirula, Dinara Chochunbaeva, Chen Jing and Edric Ong. Sales as usual were good for these booths.

In Singapore, at a prestigious department store TANGS, a special 2-week exhibition of selected products of the UNESCO Award of Excellence for Handicrafts from South East Asia, South Asia and East Asia was held in October with a special sales area for several of the products. Mr Wang Shan, President of World Crafts Council was the Guest of Honour. There was a lot of press and TV coverage for the event.

The World Eco-Fiber and Textile (WEFT) Art Exhibition was held at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), London from 17 January -23 March 2013. It was endorsed by UNESCO, World Crafts Council, World Crafts Council Asia-Pacific, China Arts and Crafts Association, Crafts Council of India and the ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association; and organized by Society Atelier Sarawak Malaysia (curated by Edric Ong).

A 2-day Symposium on “Endangered Textile Traditions” was also organized in conjunction with the WEFT Art Exhibition at the SOAS Lecture Hall.

The participating artists’ works came from over 35 countries, many of whom have received the UNESCO/AHPADA Seal of Excellence for their textile work.

The aim of the exhibition was to show and promote the use of natural yarns and natural dyestuffs as artistic media. The natural fibres are cotton, silk, ramie, abaca, pina, hemp and bark, and colours deriving from natural dyestuffs from plant roots, leaves, flowers, fruits, insects and mollusks.

During the duration of the exhibition, there were special country promotions and demonstrations by the artists. Eg Iban ‘pua kumbu’ weavers of Sarawak, Malaysia at the Exhibition launch; Asif Shaikh (India) showcasing embroideries of India in February; and in the final week, 3 master embroidery artists from Suzhou.

An Inter-regional crafts study tour was also organized for a delegation of CACSA(Central Asian Crafts Support Organisation) crafts women leaders led by Dinara Chochunbaeva to Malaysia(Kuala Lumpur) and Thailand (Bangkok) and coordinated by Edric Ong.

Among the highlights of the tour was a day workshop/demo by four Central Asian ladies on nuno-felt making to lecturers and students of the Malaysian National Craft Institute ; a day sales of their products at the National Textile Museum and a visit to the Royal Selangor Pewter Center.

In Bangkok, they visited the Queen Sirikit Textile Museum, Jim Thompson Thai Silk and a day trip to Ayutthya. Over 3 days the Central Asian ladies also had a sales area for their crafts at the Amarin Plaza organized through Mdm Surapee Rojanavongse (Imm.Past President WCC-APR).

Branding and Authentication:

The UNESCO award of Excellence for Handicrafts has proved to be a success and a useful manner of branding and giving authentication for the best of Crafts according to the stringent criteria set out in the program.

National branding and protection for traditional handicrafts has seen an upsurge in the region. The issue and awareness of Intellectual property right is now increasing.

“Vietcraft Value” is the national brand for Vietnam handicraft sector. This is a part of National Brands, validated by the National Branding Program.

The core value of the national brand for Vietnam handicraft sector is based on the sustainability of economy, social, culture and environment that meets the basic requirements of international standards as well as requirements of importers.

Thailand now has a “Peacock” Seal of quality for the Thai Silk; and has also embarked on obtaining ‘Geographical Indicators’ for several of their hand-woven textiles!

Bhutan has also set up a “Bhutan Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts” as a national initiative based primarily on the model of the UNESCO program.

The ASEAN Network and the future

The Regional Network of the ASEAN countries in opening up the regional market signed the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 to increase the ASEAN region’s competitive advantage as a production base geared for the world market. A vital step in this direction is the liberalization of trade through the elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers among the ASEAN members.

The Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Agreement for AFTA requires that tariff rates levied on a wide range of products traded within the region are reduced to 0-5% including crafts. Thus the future of the inter-ASEAN trade in crafts will very much also depend on any change in implementation or in governmental policy.

The biggest problem faced by traditional craftsmen in the region is the diminishing supply of ready natural raw materials from the forests; and the increase of imported raw materials esp in price of cotton and silk.

Labour cost ie wages of crafts persons vary from country to country within the ASEAN region which is then reflected in the cost of the finished craft product offered in the market.

The competition from outside the ASEAN region has been India and China with their cheaper products, but even as these countries face rising labour costs resulting in higher prices of their products, perhaps the ASEAN countries with bigger work force (ie Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand) will have a better competitive edge in exporting their craft products.

