A Newfound Pedalgogy

Singapore to Hanoi

Participants

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Who? What? When? Where? Please provide a 2-3 paragraph description of your project.

Our bike trip involves 4 intrepid travelers cycling from Singapore to Hanoi for 10 weeks beginning on May 15th. Our journey spans Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. We will elaborate on our route in the itinerary below.

We will conduct an ethnographic investigation into the status of the bicycle in Southeast Asia. We will ask questions like: Is the bicycle an archaic or an emergent technology? What place does it occupy within a modernizing world? What does the bicycle facilitate? What communities and energies surround the bicycle? What status do our bicycles have as compared to those we encounter? How does one’s access to spaces and places change if travelling by bicycle as compared to other forms of transport? Is the bicycle being replaced? Is the quintessential image of the bicycle an appropriate one for Southeast Asia?

As we are not proficient in any of the languages of the countries we will be passing through, our interactions will be primarily gestural, and our investigation will be primarily through observation. This considered, we will prioritize our impressions of places, and will use Geertz’ methods of Thick Description to record what we see, smell, hear, taste, and feel.

More informally, we each hope to develop personally throughout this journey. We will have ample space and time for silence and reflection, as we pedal through unfamiliar terrains, cultures,
languages, and experiences. We expect to experience the vulnerability of bicycle travel (as we are
dependent on strangers, natural forces, and luck for our well-being) and to contemplate our
identities as individuals and our place in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

There are several reasons that cycling is a necessary mode of travel for this trip. Firstly, by cycling
we embody the subject of our own investigation. When cycling through these spaces, we will
undoubtedly attract attention and curiosity that will in itself illuminate the status of cyclists and
bicycles. We hope to find cycling communities and share in their love for bicycles. Secondly,
whether it be cycling through quaint fishing towns along the Mekong, or cursing the undulating
hills of Northern Laos, travelling by bicycle will allow us to be intimately connected and
sensitized to the topographical changes we encounter. We hope to gain access to spaces and
people that we might have missed if travelling by bus or train.

**Desired outcomes:** Describe the key aims and learning outcomes of your journey.
How will your journey link to your academic and personal development? How does
it embody the qualities delineated above?

**Academic Learning Outcome**

To investigate the status of the bicycle in Southeast Asia. We hope to gain clarity about the
aforementioned questions, and to be exposed to the nuanced complexities of the issues therein.
- Is the bicycle an archaic or an emergent technology? What place does it occupy within a
  modernizing world?
- What does the bicycle facilitate? What communities and energies surround the bicycle?
- What status do our bicycles have as compared to those we encounter?
- How does one’s access to spaces and places change if travelling by bicycle as compared to other
  forms of transport?
- Is the bicycle being replaced? Is it still justified as the quintessential image of Southeast Asia?

We hope that, by travelling closely on and with the land, we can experience the status of the
bicycle firsthand, observing how it and we are regarded. We also hope to experience firsthand
how communities, technologies, and ideas have formed around the bicycle, or with the bicycle in
mind.

We also hope to learn about the power of photojournalism to illustrate complex and intricate
themes, issues, and relationships. We hope to gain technical and aesthetic knowledge surrounding
photography.
These academic learning outcomes will help us understand the place of the bicycle within the larger world of transport systems, and will expose many related themes therein. We hope to see the intricate connections, too, between socioeconomic classes, cultures, globalization, and urbanization through the lens of the bicycle and its status. We also hope to be able to better understand Singapore as a part of the greater region and its geographical and cultural truths.

Personal Learning Outcomes

1. To learn through introspection during our personal travel experiences, in order to better understand ourselves. The end product of this will be highly idiosyncratic, but we do anticipate some common themes such as: identity of Singapore, our individual identity, the link between consumption and happiness, spirituality as linked to vulnerability, solitude, home, the modern lifestyle and identity as linked to land, etc.

2. For the Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans alike, understanding Singapore is essential to understanding our home, and our place in it. One cannot possible see Singapore as isolated from the rest of southeast Asia. Indeed, its culture, people, religions, economy, and ideologies are all inextricably tied to the rest of the region. We hope that this trip will allow us to place Singapore, and consequentially ourselves in context.

Potential Personal Questions:
- a. To what extent should Singapore be considered a part of southeast Asia?
- b. Is there a distinct southeast Asian identity? How does it relate to the bicycle?
- c. How do the people we meet indirectly help us understand and contextualise Singapore, our home, and ourselves better?

Budget: Provide an itemized estimate of the budget for your journey and request a grant amount.

Please refer to Attachment 1

Itinerary: Provide an itinerary of the activities you will undertake/locations you will visit during your journey.

Below is a rough breakdown of our timeline thus far.
Malaysia - 1 week (Includes train from Singapore to Butterworth)  
Thailand - 5.5 weeks  
Laos - 2.5 weeks  
Vietnam - 2 weeks  

Please refer Attachment 2 for a map of our route. With help from Professors Heng, Johnson, and Ang, we have already mapped out parts of our route in great detail, and will continue to develop this further. Attachment 2 contains two maps: one depicts our entire route, and the other is an inset of our route in detail from Malaysia to southern Thailand.

**Mileage Stops:**

Because of time constraints, we will only stay one night at most of the places we stop. We have planned our route in order to go through specific towns, so as to stay on track. However, we hope that many of these ‘mileage stops’ will be determined as we go. We will decide where to sleep each night based on distance covered, time of the day, and availability of lodging while allowing ample leeway for spontaneity. While we hope to glimpse the character of each place, these ‘mileage stops’ will be for one night only, and thus our understanding of the place will be quite surface-level.

**Recharge Stops:**

Because we do not know the nature of many of the places through which we will be travelling, we will have identified large(ish) cities/towns at regular intervals along our route, where we know we will be able to find a bike shop, and restock any supplies that small villages/ rural areas might not have. In these towns/cities we will have access to ATMs and internet cafe’s where we will be able to send more elaborate updates to CIPE, our families, etc. See below for a list of these potential Recharge Stops already identified:

**Malaysia**
- Butterworth
- Sungai Petani
- Alor Setar
- Perlis

**Thailand**
- Songkhla
- Takua Pa/ Ko Phra Thong
- Kanchanaburi
- Mae Sot
- Lampang
- Chiang Mai
- Chiang Rai

Laos
- Luang Namtha (Muang Sing)
- Luang Prabang

Vietnam
- Hoa Lu
- Ha Noi
- Tam Coc
- Mai Chau

Detailed Route

Below is the route that we will be taking, barring small detours, or variability in schedule.

Start: May 15th
End: July 25th

Map of first part: https://goo.gl/maps/Uz4MU
Map of second part: https://goo.gl/maps/9KgMU

Day 1 (May 14th) Rest and preparation

Day 2 (May 15th)
Leave by bicycle in the morning.
Cycle to Johor Bahru, Malaysia and catch train to Butterworth, Malaysia.

Days 3, 4, 5, 6 (May 16th to May 19th)
in Butterworth
waiting for bicycles to arrive by separate cargo train

Day 7 (May 20th) Butterworth to Bujang Valley 55km - 1 day

Day 8 (May 21st) Bujang Valley to Perlis 110km - 2 days

Day 10 (May 23rd)
Perlis, Malaysia to Songkhla, Thailand (border crossing involved) 108km - 2 days
Day 12 (May 25th)
Songkhla to Mueang Nam 195km - 2 days

Day 14 (May 27th)
Mueang Nam to Surat Thani 152km - 2 days

Day 16 (May 29th)
Surat Thani to Takua Pa 160km - 2 days

Day 18 (May 31st)
Takua Pa to Kanchanburi 845km - 10 days

Day 28 (June 10th)
Kanchanaburi to Mae Sot 500km - 6 days

Day 34 (June 16th)
Mae Sot to Lampang 268km - 3 days

Day 37 (June 19th)
Lampang to Chiang Mai 99km - 1 day

Day 38 (June 20th)
Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai 185km - 3 days

Day 41 (June 23rd)
Chiang Rai, Thailand to Huay Xai, Laos (border crossing involved) 176km - 2 days

Day 43 (June 25th)
Huay Xai to Luang Namtha 68km - 1 day

Day 44 (June 26th)
Luang Namtha to Muang Sing 370km - 5 days

Day 49 (July 1st)
Muang Sing to Luang Prabang 984km - 12 days

Day 61 (July 13th)
Luang Prabang to Sam Nuea 341km - 4 days

Day 65 (July 17th)
Sam Nuea, Laos to Hanoi, Vietnam (border crossing involved) 326km - 4 days

Days 69, 70, 71, 72, 73 (July 21st to July 25th) in Hanoi?
or Hanoi-Singapore (2195km, 1 day)
**Risks: What are the challenges in what you propose? Show us that you’ve considered the risks involved and, where appropriate, proposed ways to mitigate them.**

**Injury/accidents**
There have been reported cases of touring cyclists involved in accidents on the highways of SEA. Though infrequent, these are definitely a major concern. To avoid possible accidents, we have scrutinised the different routes available and chosen those that were least dangerous. These decisions were made after consulting the following:

- Prof. Andrew Johnson, Prof. Claudine Ang, and Prof. Derek Heng - all of whom have expertise in the region
- DF David Sze who has cycled up to China from Singapore
- Cyclists who have recently cycled through the region
- Travellogues by other cyclists
- Various forums

In the case of an actual injury, we will have an emergency contact number for every country we enter. These numbers will be in a list that every one of us carries around at all times. We will also have a First Aid kit with us for any minor injury.

**Bicycle Problems**
Our bicycles will be our primary mode of transport travelling between towns. Though most of these roads are highways and should be well-maintained, some roads will definitely be of questionable quality. Regardless of how careful we are, there will definitely be incidents of flat tyres, gearing problems etc. To prepare for these, we have arranged with DF David Sze and Wain Khoo to conduct a course for us on bicycle maintenance. Also, we will use our Recharge Stops to resupply any bicycle components whenever we are running out.

**Illnesses**
We are moving through areas with possible low hygiene levels and eating the local food of each region, there is of course risk of illness and contracting diseases. We will have taken the necessary precautionary vaccinations before embarking on our trip. We will also be bringing along medication for food poisoning and other sicknesses that are common. Lastly, we will be drinking bottled water, stockpiling it when necessary.

Dehydration is also a concern when cycling between towns/villages. This in mind, we will always ensure that we have sufficient supply of water.
Going off the Grid
Throughout the trip, we will be carrying at least one cell phone which we will use to regularly text CIPE to update. However, there may be times that we will be unable to make contact with the school/CIPE when we are moving through the less developed areas. If so, we will use our Recharge Stops to give more elaborate information on our whereabouts/progress, and to preempt such areas.

Unavailability of daily necessities
Similarly, we might find ourselves short of food and water when we travel through these less developed areas. To pre-empt this, we will be overstocking on non-perishable foods everytime we pass through a Recharge Stop.

Ripple Effect: How will you share your learning and your journey with others? What can you share about the experience and insights you’ve gleaned with your peers at Yale-NUS?

We intend to share both the aforementioned academic and personal insights we will discover on our journey. This will be done in two ways. First, we intend to keep a blog that will be updated as we frequent internet cafes along our journey. This blog will record our reflections regarding our academic enquiry, as well as insights from our nightly “reflection sharing circle”. We will also use the blog to share musings from our personal introspection. We will also share some of our favorite photos/videos of our journey, although this is dependent of the state of the internet cafes.

Second, at the end of our journey, we will present our experiences and insights to the Yale-NUS community. Although we are uncertain of the exact format it will take, the presentation will include a photo exhibition of sorts, as well as a sharing of our stories. We hope to reflect, and present in retrospect, our findings regarding the the status of the bicycle in Southeast Asia. In addition, we will each share our personal impressions and our largest takeaway points.

Deliverables: What kind of report are you planning to produce after your journey to share your learning and journey with others. This could take the form of any media or art form. Be as creative as you can!

- Consistently updated blog as we travel
Progress So far:

Since the beginning of this semester, we have taken several steps in preparing for this trip:
- We have been taking weekly Thai/Lao lessons with Professor Andrew Johnson, in preparation for the substantial length of time that we will be spending in Thailand and Laos.
- We have made contact with (at least) 3 other cyclists/ groups who have significant experience cycling through Southeast Asia. We plan to send them our potential route, and ask for recommendations on roads, stops, etc.
- We have been reading blogs/ websites to gather information from cyclists who have done similar routes
- We have met with Professor Derek Heng several times regarding the Malaysia and Southern Thailand portions of our trip, in order to get his recommendations on both the academic and logistical aspects.
- We have been in regular contact with Dean’s Fellow David Sze, getting his recommendations.
- We have contacted Professors Ang, McAdoo, Johnson, Maniates, Jacobs, and Heng who have agreed to help us in different ways: advising us on Points Of Interest in specific countries, giving us any relevant contacts that they might have, pointing us in the direction of helpful readings/ secondary research for our Points Of Interest, advising us on travel writing techniques, etc.
- We have received vaccinations against Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Tetanus, Influenza, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Typhoid, Japanese Ecephilitis, Rabies and Malaria.
- We have had a personal telephonic meeting with a senior official of International SOS, during which we went over our entire itinerary in great detail, and discussed safety concerns during our trip. We know which areas to avoid and where to seek help.
- We have participated in a personal profiling examination called Big 5, which provided a quantitative analysis of our stability, extraversion, originality, accommodation, and consolidation skills. This helped us to understand our strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as a team.
- We have taken an intensive three-day first-aid and first-responder training course with St. Johns’ Ambulance Services Singapore. This involved theory lessons, practical lessons, and an examination. We are now equipped to deal with many common ailments and injuries, and to prevent further deterioration until help can be found.
- We have taken a CPR-AED course with Singapore Heart Foundation. This covered the basics of cardiovascular first aid, and taught us how to help a person who is having either a heart attack or any other cardiovascular ailment. We are now all certified to provide CPR and AED.
- We have participated in two photography courses: one with Professor Jay Garfield, and one with Mr. Anthony Soo.
- We have participated in a course that taught us the finer points of blogging, led by Mr. Ken Panko.
- We have received an intensive, hands-on bicycle maintenance course from Mr. S. K. Tan, who is an avid bicyclist and a promoter of long-haul cycling. We are now equipped to dismantle our bikes completely, to fix punctures, leaks, etc., and to make fine adjustments to optimize the performance of our bicycles.
- We have simulated an average day of cycling, by waking up at 4 am and cycling around Singapore for four hours while “fully loaded” with panniers, water, and equipment. We covered the same distance that we would expect to cover on an average day of the trip, and found that we worked very well as a team.