

Cultural Heritage Preservation and Management in Southeast Asia
Association for Asian Studies Conference 2015

Fri, March 27, 10:45am to 12:45pm, Chicago Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Level 4,
Sheraton Ballroom II

Session Organizers:

John Miksic, National University of Singapore

Alison Carter, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sponsored by AAS Southeast Asia Council (SEAC)

Session Abstract

The study of cultural heritage preservation and management in Southeast Asia requires an interdisciplinary approach. This panel will bring together representatives from the USA (who will speak about Thailand and Laos), Cambodia, the Philippines, and Singapore (who will speak about Myanmar). Speakers in this panel range from senior to junior scholars. Cultural heritage preservation and management are closely related to economic development, tourism, preservation, and commodification. One of the ultimate goals of heritage management is sustainable development. Conflicts between short-term versus long-term priorities, local versus global stakeholders, and restoration versus regeneration, are perennial sources of conflict. The subject of landscape preservation is a growing sub-discipline of this field. Southeast Asian cultures are under intense pressure on many fronts. Many cultural resources in the region are in critical condition; their future existence depends on rapid formulation and implementation of effective management strategies. Southeast Asia has been a crossroads of long-distance trade, transport, and communication for over 2,000 years, but economic development in Southeast Asia is currently proceeding at a greater speed than ever before. In this context, the cultural landscape of the region is experiencing increasing pressure to change. The richly variegated cultures of this region constitute a contested territory where nation building and localized constructions of identity intersect with trans-national economic policies and cultural paradigms driven by global civil society.

Is Heritage Preservation a Colonialist Agenda?

Joyce White, University of Pennsylvania Museum

Archaeologists from western nations studying Asia's past often experience ambivalence about their role in the region's heritage issues. Does our interest in another region's deep past stem from colonialist attitudes? How can we make our passion and expertise to the advantage of the host country? How can we get support for heritage preservation activities from western sources of funding for archaeology that usually only support "scientific research"? Can we fulfill the needs to conduct scholarly archaeological research (in order to be funded and get and keep jobs) and effectively support heritage preservation that is meaningful and of value to the host country? This paper offers no

final or easy answers to these questions. Rather the ambiguities will be illustrated from the author's experiences in Thailand and Laos over the past few decades.

Anawrahta's and Kyanzittha's Palace Artifacts and Myanmar Cultural and Historical Heritage

Geok Yian Goh, Nanyang Technological University

One issue which takes on central importance following an archaeological excavation is: what to do with these objects once the analysis stage is completed? Some of the artifacts, especially relatively complete pieces, will find their way into the main museum and/or site museum, but to a large extent, one ends up with tons of broken sherds which have little appeal even to the most stalwart archaeologists. These sherds take up a lot of space and may be plain and relatively uninteresting. This paper looks at my preliminary study of the artifacts, especially ceramics, from the Anawrahta and Kyanzittha palace excavations. I will discuss ways in which these artifacts, including the largely plain and uninteresting sherds, can be used to inform our understanding of the kinds of activities carried out in the palace sites and how space is utilized in the complex. Other types of information which can be potentially gained from further analysis of these artifacts, in conjunction with artifacts found outside the palace grounds, is an understanding of the material and socio-economic differences between the inhabitants of the palaces and those who lived outside them. Furthermore, the range of artifacts can also shed light on the industries and technology utilized in and around the palace areas, since the palace sites were continuously used for at least 300 years. In the process, I will also suggest ways in which these tons of artifacts can be incorporated into current archaeological displays in the complex and the Bagan Museum.

Conserving the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras: Community-Led Initiatives and the Ifugao Archaeological Project

Stephen B. Acabado, University of California, Los Angeles

Marlon Martin, Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement, Inc

The Ifugao Archaeological Project (IAP) is a collaborative research between the Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement, Inc. (SITMo), the University of California-Los Angeles, the University of the Philippines, the National Museum of the Philippines, and the Local Government Units of Ifugao. The IAP is community-led through SITMo's active engagement; the community provided inputs on the goals of the research project. SITMo is a local grassroots NGO whose primary goal is to develop conservation programs for the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras (RTPC), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The RTPC was enshrined in the World Heritage list in 1991, but the listing did not result in any significant research on the long-history of this human-made landscape. SITMo and the IAP understand that a nuanced awareness of the archaeology of the RTPC will contribute to a more rounded conservation program for the World Heritage Site. This collaboration has also found that the construction of rice terraces is much younger than previously thought – a finding that has important implications in the conservation of the World Heritage Site. This paper presents the

findings of the 2012, 2013, and 2014 field seasons of the IAP and how they inform conservation programs in the region.

Preservation of Cambodian Archaeological Sites: An Ideational Clash and the Hierarchy of Archaeological Sites

Piphal Heng, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

This presentation attempts to highlight the on-going issues facing archaeological site preservation in Cambodia. Beside the Angkor Complex where most of the preservation and heritage law is being enforced, other archaeological sites do not enjoy the same prestige. Smaller temples and under-research prehistoric sites have been plundered for sculptures and precious goods to be traded into a complex antiquity trade network. Archaeologists working in these smaller sites have jump-started multiple initiatives such as site museums, heritage education campaigns, and alternative farming practices. Based on lessons learnt from multiple examples across Cambodia, I argue that, in most cases, these initiatives have failed to accomplish the original goals of generating local income, heritage education, and site protection. I maintain that these initiatives lack other functions such as: community social space (park and local community gathering place) and places of worship. Both of these aspects form parts of the original value of these smaller archaeological sites, thus, providing them another chance to co-exist within a modern society.