



# **SPAFACON2021**

**Papers from the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FINE ARTS**

**13 - 17 December 2021**

**Editor: Noel Hidalgo Tan**

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# INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the extended abstracts from the papers presented at the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology and Fine Arts, which was held online from 13 to 17 December 2021. Also known as the SPAFACON2021, this conference was organised online due to the pandemic. Despite the disruption brought about by Covid-19 to our in-person events, training programmes and field research, it is heartening to see that archaeology and cultural heritage has continued under new modes of communication and collaboration.

This fourth iteration of the SPAFACON is also scheduled a year earlier than our usual triennial cycle to commemorate the 50th anniversary of SEAMEO initiating a centre dedicated towards archaeology and the fine arts. Over the past year, SPAFA has also been highlighting this legacy of international cooperation and capacity-building by sharing our photographic archives on our social media.

I am delighted by the high level of enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity brought by the participants to the conference. During our call for papers we received close to 90 submissions, but owing to the pressures of time and the online format, we were only able to accept 34 papers for the conference. The variety of papers present here, although a small set compared with our usual proceedings, reflects the breadth of the centre's ambit – covering not just archaeology, but also performing arts, visual arts, museum studies, and other aspects of Southeast Asian cultural heritage.

I would like to thank all the participants, without whom this conference would not be possible in its present form, in particular, our Governing Board members who represent every country in Southeast Asia, and to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand and the Ministry of Education, Thailand for their long-standing support of SEAMEO SPAFA and its activities.



Mrs Somlak Charoenpot

Centre Director

SEAMEO SPAFA



## Heritage Education in Myanmar – developing resilience and sustainability through community engagement

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏အမွေအနှစ်ဆိုင်ရာပညာရေး ( လူထုအားဖြင့် ကြံ့ခိုင်ရေးနှင့် ရေရှည်တည်တံ့နိုင်ရေး)

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### Abstract

Over the last decade Myanmar has experienced a strong increase in interest in Myanmar's heritage and a demand for local expertise in heritage management. However, in Myanmar there is no formal education in heritage studies. This is recognised as a significant gap in Myanmar's abilities to manage and develop world heritage sites, as well as national and local level heritage sites, to international standards. To address this gap a group of researchers are preparing models for Myanmar Heritage Education considering short, medium and long-term goals. The models consider local and national heritage management needs, and ways to up-skill local staff working in heritage fields so course content can be delivered by Myanmar experts and become self-sustaining. Formal government accredited courses of study will take some time to implement. In the current covid-19 environment there is opportunity to focus on the role of community groups in heritage management. This paper will discuss current activities undertaken by community

groups in heritage areas, and outline opportunities to engage community more fully in the long-term management of Myanmar’s cultural heritage. The aim is to develop local resources that are resilient and sustainable.

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ အမွေအနှစ်ထိန်းသိမ်းရေးလုပ်ငန်းများတွင် ဆယ်နှစ်အတွင်း စိတ်ဝင်စားမှု တိုးတက်လာပြီး ပြည်တွင်းကျွမ်းကျင်သူများစွာရှိရန် လိုအပ်လာပါသည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရှိ တက္ကသိုလ်များ တွင် ယခု အချိန် အထိ အမွေအနှစ် ထိန်းသိမ်းရေး ပညာရပ်အတွက် ဘွဲ့ပေးနိုင်သည့် အဆင့် ထိ သင်ကြားပေးနိုင်မှု မရှိသေးပါ။ ထို အချက်သည် ကမ္ဘာ့ အမွေအနှစ်၊ နိုင်ငံအမွေအနှစ်နှင့် ဒေသဆိုင်ရာ အမွေအနှစ်များကိုထိန်းသိမ်းစောင့်ရှောက်ရာတွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ ၏ အရေးတကြီးလိုအပ်လျက် ရှိသောကွက်လပ် အဖြစ်သတ်ပြုနိုင်ပါသည်။ ထိုကွက်လပ်ကို ဖြေရှင်းနိုင်ရန်အတွက် သုတေသနပညာရှင်တစ်စုသည် မြန်မာ့အမွေအနှစ်ထိန်းသိမ်းရေးပညာ အတွက် ကာလတို၊ အလယ်အလတ်နှင့် ကာလရှည် ရည်မှန်းချက်များချမှတ်ပြီး လုပ်ဆောင်နိုင်မည့်ပုံစံများကိုပြင်ဆင်နေပါသည်။ ထိုလုပ်ဆောင်နိုင်မည့်ပုံစံများတွင် ဒေသဆိုင်ရာနှင့် နိုင်ငံလုံးဆိုင်ရာ အမွေအနှစ်ထိန်းသိမ်းရေးလိုအပ်ချက်များ၊ နိုင်ငံတွင်းသက်ဆိုင်ရာ လုပ်ငန်းလုပ်ဆောင်နေသူများကို အရည် အသွေးမြှင့်တင်နိုင်မည့်နည်းလမ်းများကို စဉ်းစားထားပြီး၊ မြန်မာ ပညာရှင်များက ပို့ချ၍ ကိုယ်တိုင် ရပ်တည်နိုင်မည့် အခြေအနေကိုစဉ်းစားထားပါသည်။ အစိုးရမှ အသိအမှတ်ပြု သော ပုံမှန် (ဘွဲ့)သင်တန်းများဖွင့်လှစ်ရန် အချိန်ယူရမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ လတ်တလော Covid 19 ကူးစက်ပြန့်ပွားနေချိန်တွင် အမွေအနှစ်ထိန်းသိမ်းရေး အတွက် လူမှုအဖွဲ့အစည်း၏ပါဝင်မှု အခန်း ကဏ္ဍ ကိုအာရုံစိုက်ရန် အခွင့် အရေးပင်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဤစာတမ်းတွင် သက်ဆိုင်ရာ အမွေအနှစ်ဒေသ အသီးသီးမှ လူမှု အဖွဲ့များ၏ လှုပ်ရှားမှုများ၊ မြန်မာ့ယဉ်ကျေးမှု အမွေအနှစ်များရေရှည်ထိန်းသိမ်းမှုတွင် လူမှု အဖွဲ့အစည်းများမှ ပိုမိုပါဝင်နိုင်မည့် အခွင့်အလမ်းများ ချမှတ်ခြင်းတို့ပါဝင်ပါသည်။ ခံနိုင်ရည်ရှိသော၊ အနာဂတ်မျိုးဆက်အတွက်လက်ရှိ စွမ်းအားများကို အကောင်းအတိုင်းချန်ထားနိုင်သော ပြည်တွင်းစွမ်းအားစုများကို ပိုမို တိုးတက်လာအောင် ဆောင်ရွက်ရန်ရည်ရွယ်ပါသည်။

**Keywords**

Myanmar; heritage; community engagement

## Introduction

Myanmar has a rich and diverse heritage. Ancient fossil sites, two thousand years of Buddhist history, rich flora and fauna, traditional arts and crafts, and diverse cultural practices of many ethnic groups – all are recognised as part of contemporary Myanmar's heritage landscape. In recent years there has been a rapid increase in activities within the heritage sphere. Two sites have been listed on the UNESCO World Heritage register – 'Pyu Ancient Cities' in 2014 and 'Bagan' in 2019 - and there are fifteen sites on the Tentative List. These include ancient city sites, wooden monasteries and natural environments such as protected wildlife areas. While capacity building has taken place during the process of preparing the UNESCO nomination dossiers, there has been little time or resources to develop heritage management skills. To date, no formal training programs to develop best practice in heritage management have been established. In parallel with the formal programs, there is a need to provide training to local community groups who are showing rising interest in their own regional heritage. In this paper we address the history of Myanmar's heritage management, highlight challenges to safeguarding heritage and propose models for capacity building. As formal training through university studies or other accredited programs can take some years to implement, the role of community groups in safeguarding and managing local heritage takes on additional importance. Ways to expand community engagement are explored in this paper.

Myanmar's experience of heritage in a global context has been limited. During the colonial period (1886-1948) when Myanmar was governed as a province of India, British archaeological research approaches were introduced. Local staff were trained in British methods of research and the research systems still draw on these fundamental methodologies. The term 'antiquities' was the usual name given to historic objects. The British had instituted laws governing the movement of objects of antiquity in 1878 (The Indian Treasure Trove Act) and 1904 (The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act) and both were applied to Myanmar. These Acts enshrined objects of 'value' as being those of monetary worth or of aesthetic merit (as assessed by western art hierarchies) rather than considering local cultural significance. This approach became standardised in Myanmar, and most of the population's own local heritage and cultural traditions were not included in official heritage activities.

However, this changed quickly in the post-Independence period. Myanmar has always been home to many different ethnic groups. In 1952, four short years after independence, Myanmar's Ministry of Culture was established. The stated mission was 'To love and cherish the country and the people by taking pride in its own good tradition as well as

preserving, exposing and propagating Myanmar cultural heritage' (Than Shwe 2014). The statement places Myanmar's culture at the centre of the country's general well-being and future development. The Ministry had responsibility for public education about Myanmar's heritage and how to preserve and maintain it. This was to be achieved through a Department of Archaeology and National Museum, a Department of Fine Arts and a Department of Historical Research and National Library. Specific reference is made to study and preservation of Myanmar's traditional arts and crafts, and 'national races's traditional dance and music'. The Department of Archaeology and National Museum was responsible for 'the preservation and presentation of Myanmar Cultural heritage and studying the culture and customs of the nationalities' as well as excavations and site management (Than Swe 2014).

Great progress was made in the following decade, with capacity building across all areas. Myanmar worked with UNESCO to provide training in museum management and conservation. Archaeological excavations and research flourished with international collaboration (Galloway 2021: 172-174). The 'value' of heritage shifted to 'significance' value, and this was an important step to regain Myanmar's national identity after decades of colonial rule. Myanmar was well connected to the international community and the scholarly community were well informed of the latest world-wide trends in the heritage field.

From 1962 – early 2000s engagement with the international community was greatly restricted and those working in cultural heritage areas had few opportunities to participate in international developments. Education in archaeology and museum management changed very little and there was no expansion in these sectors although the Department of Archaeology was founded at Yangon University in 1996. That there was a strong demand for such engagement became very evident from 2010 when international collaborations became much more easily arranged. In the following decade Myanmar re-engaged with the international heritage community at the highest levels. World Heritage status was successfully obtained for the Pyu Ancient Cities (2014) and Bagan (2019), and a third nomination was submitted in 2020, to inscribe Mrauk-U on the world heritage register (UNESCO 2014, 2019). Since 2013 Myanmar has achieved four listings on the UNESCO Memory of the World register, joined ICOM in 2016, and established an ICOMOS chapter in 2018. ICH workshops have been held and handbooks translated into Burmese for local communities. The museum sector has expanded, with the modernisation of displays at the National Museum Yangon, and the opening of the new National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw in 2015. Regional cultural centres have opened, and community groups are organising

themselves to help support these activities and help educate people about their regional heritage.

Throughout, capacity building has occurred. Many ministry staff (now the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, MORAC) have had opportunities to travel overseas for training in museums and heritage, and to experience first-hand how heritage sites are managed. Collaborations with international colleagues have strengthened Myanmar's expertise across many aspects of the heritage area. However, to date there has been no time for Myanmar heritage personnel to train others. Rather, their time is spent on day-to-day management of museums and sites, and other regular tasks. There is an immediate need to expand the resources for managing heritage sites, engage with the community and further expand heritage activities broadly.

This lack of resources, both in skilled personnel and financial support is well recognised, yet there has simply been no time to develop the strategies necessary to make heritage education a field of study in the higher education space. This is a long-term goal and will ensure that Myanmar can independently support heritage management into the future. While a skilled professional workforce is an ideal future goal, in parallel it is essential that there is broader community education and training. Without community support, the goals of heritage conservation and preservation will not be achieved. Yet achieving meaningful and equitable community engagement in developing countries can be challenging (Chirikure et al 2010, O'Reilly 2014, Carter et al 2015, Lertcharnrit 2017, Lu et al 2019). There is strong evidence to show that in Myanmar communities are interested in their heritage, as evidenced by the growing number of community groups that have organised themselves since government activities in the heritage space have increased. Even so, there is still a low level of understanding within communities about what 'heritage' means, what its significance is, and how they can participate in its safeguarding.

### **Types of Community Organisations**

To determine how best to support these groups, we have asked informally how some have formed, the type of people who have joined the groups, and what their goals are. We have also asked about their perceived needs and pressing issues. In response we have considered how they can be supported to upskill their abilities in local site preservation, to work in tandem with an already resource stretched MORAC staff.

Informal survey indicates there are different types of community groups. These are grouped in the table and some examples given. This is not a comprehensive listing.

Regional ‘town’ heritage groups	Most have developed with international support/expertise and relate to local heritage and tourism eg. the Kalaw Tourism Organisation, the Katha Heritage Trust, etc
Urban heritage organisations	Developed with international support and local funding, e.g Yangon Heritage Trust (2012). Mandalay Heritage Society (2019) – similar aims, to safeguard and protect urban heritage as well as to ensure community participation in heritage management.
Community heritage trusts established in connection with listed and potential world heritage site	Examples: Halin Heritage Trust (2013) Beikthano Heritage Trust (2013) Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust (2013) Bagan Heritage Trust (2014) Mrauk-U Heritage Trust (2014)
Ethnic-Based Cultural Heritage groups	Examples: Ethnic groups Literature and Culture Associations such as –Shan Literature and Culture Associations – supports Shan cultural diversity (started in 1947, re-activated c.2010s), similar associations also in Jing Phwa, Rawan to Mon, Kayin, Dawei, etc, some with main organizations in Yangon, Mandalay and branches in universities, states and regions
Professional Groups (nationally registered)	Examples: Myanmar Architects Association (2001), Myanmar Archaeology Association (2013) (Soe Win Naing 2016) and ICOMOS Myanmar (2018), Myanmar Engineering Society (1995)
Potential Attribute/Product Based Cultural/Intangible Groups	Example: Myanmar Tea Association

Some groups have proven to be more effective than others. Characteristics for effective community engagement in heritage organisations and longevity of the groups are:

- Established independently from official government organisations and with effective group-government liaison
- Financial support – internal and external to Myanmar
- Engagement with international/local heritage experts to determine goals and objectives, and deliver training to ensure groups can be self-sustaining
- Relationships are established with local administration, to establish mutual understanding and cooperation

Most importantly, there is a degree of mutual trust and respect between the community groups and official administration.

*EXAMPLE: Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust (SKHT)*

The Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust was formed in 2013, during the nomination process for *The Pyu Ancient Cities*, Myanmar's first World Heritage site (inscribed 2014). It was registered as an organisation, has an executive committee and around 500 members. From the beginning, the group established guidelines for activities and collaboration with the MORAC and Field School of Archaeology (FSA) at Pyay. Members of the Executive Committee included those who were trustees of the local Shwe Phone Pwint Library and Museum, founded in 1931 (Win Kyaing 2014). Factors that have contributed to the ongoing success of the SKHT include an already established relationship between the local DANM staff at the FSA and the Shwe Phone Pwint committee of trustees. The Shwe Phone Pwint museum has long been a repository for archaeological finds across the region. Located within the temple complex, the objects in the museum are mostly for the Pyu period, and link to the World Heritage site of nearby Sri Ksetra. The Shwe Phone Pwint library and museum have been sustained through local donations and is open to the public. Public events are held annually, such as author talks. Shwe Phone Pwint is well known and well regarded by the local community. The aims of SKHT are broad. It aims to:

- follow the rules and regulations of UNESCO and participate in the safeguarding of cultural heritage, through collaboration with any NGO, organisation and institution.
- Protect cultural heritage from loss and decay
- Prepare a memorial publication about the World Heritage nomination process for the Pyu Ancient Cities

The connection between Shwe Phone Pwint trustees and the SKHT facilitated community support for the world heritage listing. The SKHT members talk with school children about their heritage and organise many tours of the heritage site. Most people in Pyay did not know of Sri Ksetra's significance to the world. Through the SKHT there have been many opportunities to hold public meetings and arrange events to educate the community about the importance of Sri Ksetra and why it must be well managed. Ongoing donations to Shwe Phone Pwint help support some of the activities – the museum collection providing a strong link to site activities.

SKHT is an example of how government and community can work well together. The FSA has been established for many years and has strong community links, and Shwe Phone Pwint has a well-regarded community organisation. Shwe Phone Pwint and the FSA had already established a respectful collaborative relationship. Both groups worked collaboratively to form the SKHT and were able to communicate the role of the SKHT to the broader community. In this case, education about heritage focused on understanding what world heritage is, what it means for the community and what should be done to preserve and maintain it. Through community knowledge, correct behaviours within the heritage zone were encouraged, and the 'value' of preserving heritage could be explained.

*EXAMPLE: Pyu Heritage Trust (PHT) and Myanmar Culture Heritage Trust (MCHT)*

The Pyu Heritage Trust was formed in 2014 with 15 executive committee members, to provide an over-arching and coordinating body for the Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust, Beikthano Heritage Trust and Halin Heritage Trust to ensure effective, collective activities at the three Pyu Ancient Cities. MCHT was formed in 2016 to focus on tangible as well as intangible cultural heritage of all ethnic groups. In the aftermath of the 2016 Bagan earthquake, PHT and MCHT jointly contributed labour and funds for historic building conservation. In 2017 the groups, through fundraising donations, provided ambulances, health care and disaster risk management facilities at all three Pyu Ancient Cities (2017). Site infrastructure was improved with donated funds used for building small bridges and upgrading laneways in Sri Ksetra (2017 and 2019). Funds raised also supported a school in Sri Ksetra (2018),

Two areas where community heritage organisations have been less successful are:

- Heritage committees that have been formed by local/regional/central government, even though the intent has been to support community engagement in local heritage.
- Local groups forming heritage committees, but members do not have appropriate skills and the aims of the group do not align well with local heritage needs



- Heritage groups forming in large complex sites with competing interest groups

*EXAMPLE: Bagan*

The obvious example of challenges facing a complex site is the Bagan World Heritage zone, where the one thousand year old cultural landscape has suffered from development pressures especially tourism related business and interests. Site management involves multiple regional and national government departments, and local and commercial interests. While a site management plan is in place, in practice it is not effective as the working relationships and responsibilities of each entity is not fully understood. The conservation of over three thousand monuments is still challenging due to the limited expertise, inadequate number of staff, financial resources and weak law enforcement which sees unlawful building and monument renovations occur. Subsurface archaeology, important to learn more of Bagan's habitation history, has not been investigated but spreading housing and hotel development is threatening this important future research. Natural disaster is another major risk threatening Bagan, especially heavy rain and floods in the monsoons. In addition, the significant cultural practice of merit making is unintentionally negatively affecting heritage values. When funds are donated for temple repairs or building of monasteries, pagoda trustees and monks often commission work without the appropriate expertise, resulting in poor conservation work and even destruction of intrinsic heritage values.

At Bagan, many small independent groups have organised themselves. Activities are fragmented, for example, one group is focusing only on the removal of plastics. The Hotel and Tourism Association and Bagan Development Trust have formed but the aims and objectives of these groups are not yet well known to the public. The nationally registered Myanmar Archaeology Association (MAA) is developing, at the request of Magwe authorities, a heritage management plan. ICOMOS Myanmar, another nationally registered professional organisation, has up until the last several months, advised on some site management cases.

The Bagan Heritage Trust (BHT) was organised officially in 2014 when work on the world heritage nomination started. Funding sources include donations from individuals, both local and international, and some funds from UNESCO for specific projects. Members have strong technical expertise in monument conservation, but the trust does not have sufficient multidisciplinary expertise for long-term heritage management strategies. Its work overlaps that of Bagan's official site managers, the Department of Archaeology and National Museum (DANM), and coordination between groups usually only occurs

when the BHT had funds for identified activities. For example, the trust undertook the conservation of 17 stupas and temples jointly with DANM staff in 2020-2021 with government funds. However, today there is an urgent need for collaboration to manage environmental issues at Bagan regardless of funding, to share specialist expertise. There is no formal structure in place to facilitate this.

With so many diverse groups it is difficult to see clearly how they interact with each other. Within the DANM Bagan office there is no staff position responsible for community liaison. The DANM has reached out in recent months however, to knowledgeable individuals within regional or local heritage organisations, so dialogues are ongoing. Nonetheless, a specific liaison position would greatly help with the coordination and active engagement of the community in Bagan's overall management.

*EXAMPLE: Mrauk-U*

One of the most active community groups is the Mrauk-U Heritage Trust whose members have been drawing attention to the development pressures at the site since 2014. The group has taken part in drafting the World Heritage nomination dossier for Mrauk-U, submitted in 2020. Awareness raising programs had to stop in 2019 due to internal security issues. Most recently the group is calling for urgent monitoring and intervention at Mrauk-U as there has been a lot of unauthorised development at the site affecting the palace areas, moats and hills (ta taing) as refugees including monks set up temporary homes and monasteries. However, without well-established links or a history of coordination between the trust and government, both local and national, the group has no authority to take any actions themselves.

### **Factors Inhibiting Effective and Long-term Community Engagement**

Three main factors that restrict effective community engagement have been identified:

1. Lack of knowledge of heritage best practices and the benefits good heritage management can bring to community
2. Lack of funding
3. Poor coordination between community and official groups

By far the most common issue is a lack of knowledge about contemporary best practice for heritage management amongst community members. Even where there is initial interest, groups often lose members. This is in part because there appears little benefit in continuing work as there appears no tangible benefit and/or effective tying in of heritage preservation to employment and boosting local economies. Where there is strong interest in gaining

skills, trainers are not available. Even if some were, groups would need to raise funds for the training. Lack of financial support also inhibits group activities. Without money, the best materials for undertaking building maintenance might not be used, creating additional problems longer term. The poor communication structures between community volunteers and site employees have already been flagged as a problem. There is also frustration among some community groups who see the authorities as being ineffective in enforcing local heritage laws. This is very evident in the many unauthorised developments that occur within Myanmar's heritage areas. It is very discouraging for community groups to see this happen. Another issue is the lack of connection between voluntary participation and the benefits gained for the broader community. Considering these factors, what can be done to resolve these problems?

### **Action Plans**

In the current pandemic environment, global travel restrictions are likely to continue for some time and the return of tourists to Myanmar will be slow. We propose that this is a very good time to address some of these problems.

In the absence of many tourists, there should be more time for strong engagement between government staff with heritage expertise, and community groups. Training activities, including basic monument maintenance, and documentation can occur. A community group liaison officer should be identified in all heritage areas. Their duties would include group coordination, and training. A nationally registered professional organisation such as ICOMOS Myanmar or the Myanmar Archaeology Association (MAA) could provide a coordinating mechanism, helping to draw the different liaison officers together.

Community organisations need some financial support to ensure they are sustainable. This funding can come from private companies, businesses and individuals. Ideally there would be a small community grant program, whereby community groups can apply for funds to support a heritage-related activity. In this circumstance there must be a demonstrable benefit. This would focus community group activities and encourage them to see the long-term benefits. It is critical that cooperation occurs between the authorised site managers and community groups. Priorities for heritage activities should be developed, and resources targeted effectively.

While these actions are not 'new' to many, they are new to Myanmar. Myanmar has some specific challenges to overcome. First is the complex hierarchical structure that exists within government administration. Staff are routinely transferred from post to

post inhibiting the development of local skills and knowledge. Relationship-building between community and authorities is difficult to maintain. Staff are usually promoted due to seniority rather than professional expertise. This is common across Myanmar's administration and has a negative impact on skill development. There is no history of government support for community groups or models for effectively integrating them into local and regional heritage management.

Second is the complex issue of management of Buddhist sites, whether contemporary or ancient. When money is donated to repair a temple, it is often the local monks, *sangha*, who support the project – the relationship between the authority of the *sangha* and the authority of the government in heritage areas is unclear. Renovation and building is often undertaken without consultation with local authorities. The *sangha* has an important role to play in ensuring that local donations and merit-making actions are undertaken in an appropriate way. For this to happen, effort must be made to educate the *sangha* about heritage best practice and its benefits, and the *sangha* can then help educate community groups. These efforts need to be dovetailed with recognition of the primary religious and social roles of the *sangha* within and between communities (Moore and Win Maung (Tampawaddy) 2016).

Linking heritage management to sustainability is also a new challenge. With widespread economic hardship due to the lack of tourism likely to continue, ideas for creating alternative income sources are essential. Projects that link community to heritage site management and economic benefits are possible but require significant creative thinking. At present, Bagan would benefit from engaging local communities in site repair and maintenance. There is much work to be done. If the community can be convinced that repairing the site now and making it ready for the return of tourists is beneficial, then this would be a great achievement, and way of linking community with local authorities in a sustainable way.

In order to effectively manage this broad living heritage landscape public contribution is essential but also requires knowledge of heritage conservation methods and approaches. Education about basic conservation and monitoring needs to be widely shared across the broad community and also between the management authority and community.

A good example of the importance of the heritage education in the Bagan world heritage site is the cleaning of the debris of the recent collapse of the southern part of the main structure of the monument no. 801 on 31st August 2021, which was done by the local volunteers and authorities, but they did not follow the ICOM guidelines properly. Site photographs and initial assessment was not well documented, nor was the process undertaken. Guidelines exist but are not well known amongst the community.

## Conclusion

Myanmar has much to offer the world in terms of its heritage. Tourism has been on the rise over the last decade, but the general lack of knowledge amongst communities about the significance of their own heritage, and lack of skills needed to convey what is special about Myanmar has meant that global knowledge of Myanmar remains limited. In the 2021 ‘Overall Best Countries Ranking’ survey report (US News in partnership with BAVGroup and Wharton University) Myanmar ranked 62 in ‘heritage’ (compared with India at 6, and Thailand at 7). The survey asks for opinions about food, cultural attractions, a country’s rich history and cultural and geographical attractions and the results demonstrate how little Myanmar’s heritage assets are known globally. It is through community that most tourists, foreign and local, experience Myanmar. Equipping community groups with the skills needed to engage with local heritage and communicate the significance of their heritage to others is the best way to ensure that heritage assets remain protected, nurtured, and allowed to thrive.

Achieving sustainable community engagement requires understanding the ‘value’ of heritage to the local community, and to Myanmar culture broadly. The full potential for successful site management can only be achieved when there are strong relationships between authorities and community groups. This must be inclusive and consider the diverse needs of the community and the heritage site itself. Long-term, it is necessary to have formal training and qualifications for heritage professionals in Myanmar. In the short-term, there is an opportunity to raise community awareness of heritage management, a crucial step in developing sustainability and resilience for Myanmar’s rich cultural heritage.

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