Learning more about the praxis of archaeology and advocacy in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

In Southeast Asia, Public Archaeology was generally practiced within the framework of cultural heritage management. Interest and efforts to rescue and protect cultural sites of cultural significance stemmed from the popularity of cultural heritage tourism. For America, the UK, and Europe, the practice of Public Archaeology started out with the intention to garner general public and government support for archaeological research. Throughout decades, theories and practices in the discipline evolved into something more extensive as it has become a subfield in archaeology and its own academic discourse. Public archaeology also gave way to a more mindful practice and has been effective in affecting behavioural change and given a voice to marginalised groups and communities. In recent years, archaeologists working in Southeast Asia have started to actively participate in uplifting the socioeconomic status and well-being of communities nearby archaeological sites. Public Archaeology practiced as advocacy is an emerging field in Southeast Asia and it is important to gather more work related to this.

Keywords: public archaeology, community, social justice, advocacy

INTRODUCTION: How has archaeology evolved to "advocacy work"?

Public archaeology was first mentioned as a term in 1972 (Schadla-Hall 1999). It started out with the purpose to "encourage financial, political, and even volunteer support from the public" (Gould 2016: 5). Archaeologists in America, for example, wanted more national government involvement, stressing how archaeological heritage management needed state support and sponsorship (Schadla-Hall 1999). Both Schadla-Hall (1999) and Gould (2016) wrote that the beginnings of public archaeology were more directed towards preservation, receiving funding, and state legislation. Although government involvement through legislation was flourishing around the world, Schadla-Hall (1999) noted that when it came to decision-making, the general public was still not directly involved. Despite its aim to serve the public, it did not seem like the public – for whom archaeological heritage is being protected for – had a specific role in the process and until the late 1990s, it was the archaeologists' views and ideas that were deemed more important (Startin, cited in Schadla-Hall 1999).

In the late 1980s, scholars like N.J. Merriman wrote that, while majority of the general public see the value of archaeology, most people still did not see its relevance in their daily lives. In a national survey conducted by Merriman in the UK (1989, cited in Schadla-Hall 1999: 151), it was surmised that to "stimulate interest in the subject and care for the archaeological heritage," archaeologists themselves needed to educate the public. It was during this decade that some archaeologists learned the importance of effectively communicating with the non-academic/general public (Schadla-Hal, 1999).

In the late 1990s, a wariness toward enthusiasts practicing their own archaeology developed, nevertheless, other archaeologists continued to see the imperativeness of formally trained archaeologists conducting education and outreach toward the public (McManamon 2000). In the same publication, McManamon made a remarkable point on how all archaeologists are messengers. Every archaeologist has a role to play in the interpretation of data, making it tasteful for public digestion; "we must realise that the interpretation of the archaeological record for general audiences, as well as its protection, is simply too important to leave to others" (McManamon 2000: 6). Thus, we are all responsible for misinformation being spread, so it is optimal we actively data interpretation aimed toward the general public.

For Europe and North America, public archaeology seemed to be evolving every decade since the 1970s and it is possible to relate to the socio-political situation of their countries in their respective timelines (Richardson and Alamansa-Sánchez 2015). With this, public archaeology now means "something far broader than archaeology that is completed to comply with legal and regulatory requirements or paid for by public funds" (Little 2012: 2). By the 2000s, public archaeology started being more involved in community collaboration, heritage tourism and management, indigenous rights and nationalism, doing activities supporting education, social justice, peace, and civil society (Little 2012; Richardson and Alamansa-Sánchez 2015).

Public archaeology is now a subfield in archaeology; it has evolved as its own academic discourse since the 1990s. In general, 'public archaeology' is the "practice and scholarship where archaeology meets the world" (Moshenska 2017: 3). It is "any endeavor in which archaeologists interact with the public and any research (practical or theoretical) that examines or analyses the public dimensions of doing archaeology" (Bollwerk, Connolly and McDavid 2015: 179). Matsuda and Okamura (2011) mention that since the beginnings of archaeology, the discipline had always been involved with the

public or non-archaeologists, since others' lives are affected by its activities and the results of it. But some archaeologists overlooked the importance or role the public played in archaeological endeavors.

By the 2000s, public archaeology worked around affecting behavioural change and giving a voice to marginalised groups and communities (Acabado and Martin 2020; McGuire 2008). Most practitioners seek social justice and reform through the collaboration and knowledge co-production in archaeological research (Acabado and Martin 2020; Little 2012; McGuire 2008; Richardson and Alamansa-Sánchez 2015).

In Southeast Asia, public archaeology has been generally practiced within the framework of cultural heritage management. Interest and efforts to rescue and protect cultural sites of cultural significance stemmed from the popularity of cultural heritage tourism (Shooncongdej 2011). Recently however, archaeologists working in Southeast Asia have started to actively participate in uplifting the socioeconomic status and well-being of communities close to archaeological sites (Danluan and Ledesma 2020; Kintanar and Barretto-Tesoro 2020; Nguyen 2020; Stark 2020). Public Archaeology practiced as advocacy is an emerging field in Southeast Asia, thus it is important to gather practitioners and advocates of this subfield. The subfield is still evolving, and we have a small but growing literature of this kind of public archaeology work in Southeast Asia (Stark 2020). This is why my colleague, Kate Lim, and I decided to host a Session at the 2022 IPPA Congress held in Chiang Mai. We wanted to gather public archaeologists in Southeast Asia, who push for political action and advocacy with the archaeological work that they do.

An excerpt of our Session abstract reads:

> Beyond local exhibits, and hiring local staff during fieldwork, what exactly does it mean to undertake community engagement? Beyond the presentation of archaeological data, how is it interpreted for the public audience? How is the 'community' involved in the interpretation of this data or what is their role in amplifying the significance of the archaeological data? How does this contribute to the daily lives of the community that archaeologists work with? We encourage fellow archaeologists working in Southeast Asia to share their experiences, methods, and reflections behind the praxis that exhibit political action and advocacy in their archaeological work.

Our session consisted of 12 presentations. There were around three more abstract submissions, however we had to decline as we were only given two one-hour blocks. This tells us that more scholars are identifying their work as advocacy and we should continue the discourse.

DISCUSSION: Examples of archaeology practised as advocacy

Social media and/or new media has given the space and opportunity for the non-academic public to share their opinions and knowledge about history, art, archaeology, and many other fields. Two paper presenters in our session discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this new avenue.

Pipad Krajaejun shared a few examples of pages or sites in Thailand where "new narratives and interpretations are broadcasted, reshaping understanding and perceptions of the past in and to society" (Krajaejun 2022). The page Prasat Hin Nai Dindaen Thai educates Isan people about their cultural heritage. The blogger, Archaeologeek, contributes a new archaeological approach, particularly, pop

culture in archaeology. Critical Archaeology, created by the author in 2014, aims to criticize social issues regarding archaeology and history. The YouTube channel Seang Saton Chak A-deed attempts to revise mainstream art history. Through these social media platforms, the general public landscape of archaeology and art history are changing in Thailand. They are decentralizing archaeological information by revealing more diverse information and perspectives. It has since become a source of alternative narratives. Krajaejun mentioned that the Thailand Fine Arts Department has recently adapted to using social media for information dissemination, however they still remain conservative in language and format. In his presentation, Krajaejun highlights the need for centers of information to somehow work like bloggers and popular websites, to reach a wider audience.

Igal Jada P. San Andres, on the other hand, presented a paper on television utilized as an educational tool in the Philippines. Although more than half of the Philippine population is reported to be using the internet, there is still a considerable 32 percent with no access to steady internet (Kemp 2022). For that 32 percent, television and radio are still the source of information for them. For instance, during the COVID -19 global pandemic, rural communities have had to resort to using television for their children's education modules, as the Office of the Undersecretary for Administration of the Department of Education launched "DepEd TV" in October 2020 to help the dissemination of students' modules ("DepEd TV: Schedule, Episodes, Timeslot, and Where to Watch," 2021).

This 32 percent are also the audience of television segments that are "stereotypical" (San Andres 2022). In her presentation she mentioned that "it is in some television segments that 'alternative representations of archaeological themes and ideas in popular culture continue to present a challenge'" (San Andres 2022). Some programs put the commercial value of unearthed cultural properties in the spotlight, rather than their archaeological significance. Her paper analyses public reactions elicited by a specific TV segment, "Fossils for Sale" of *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho* (One at Heart, Jessica Soho). It is a highly rated, weekly news-magazine television program. The study of San Andres is a starting point for developing a better understanding of the Filipino public's understanding and perceptions of Philippine archaeology, and the perceptions they hold about the value of cultural heritage. In this case, the study holds relevance since fears of misrepresentation of fossils and artefacts are expressed verbally and in writing (San Andres 2022). It is possible that it would directly contribute to treasure hunting and looting of sites. How does media depiction shape or reinforce alternative ideas about the valuation and stewardship of cultural properties? To better address this, San Andres proposes to do a more extensive study on popular representations of archaeology in local media.

Three presentations, namely: Ivan Cultura and Ame Garong's "You Are Not Forgotten: The Role of Indigenous Peoples in the Recovery of WW2 American MIA in the Philippines;" Atina Winaya et al.'s, "Engaging Community in Ancient Sculpture Research and Preservation: Digitizing the Collection amidst Local Communities in Central Java;" and "Conservation of Archaeological Remains in the Middle of Hindu-Balinese Communities: The Strengths and Weaknesses" of Ni Putu Eka Juliawati, all discuss the value of connecting with members of the local community or the indigenous people of the research area. For Cultura and Garong, the merging of forensic archaeology and ethnoarchaeology became effective tools in the recovery and identification of the American WW2 Missing in Action (MIAs) in the Philippines. They emphasized that active involvement of indigenous communities heavily contributed to the success of recovery missions. Additionally, this gave insight into the indigenous people's narrative of the Second World War.

In Central Java, Atina Winaya and colleagues taught some community members about digitization and its benefits in recording and preserving heritage. The digitization outcomes include the ancient sculptures in digital three-dimensional form, a print-out, and a web-based catalog in progress. It is hoped that the community's access to the digitized collection will be used for preservation, education, and other purposes.

In Ni Putu Eka Juliawati's project, Hindu-Balinese holy shrines are a subject of debate between stakeholders of different sectors. It is one of the many cases wherein living heritage is in conflict with conventional heritage management efforts. Juliawati mentioned that while the local community members do not intentionally damage the artifacts, as it is their custom that the artifacts are a legacy from their ancestors, living heritage still has its weaknesses. In order to strike a balance, a resolution favorable to all sectors can only be met with constant and proper collaboration among themselves.

Norhidayahti Mohamad Muztaza *et al*., agree with the notion that the purpose of archaeology transcends reconstructing the past and sharing information about it. During the panel discussion, Muztaza stressed the vital role archaeology plays "in many aspects of contemporary society such as nation-building, economic development (museum and archaeo-tourism) and education (support critical thinking) to name a few." Here, Muztaza also highlighted museums as significant and powerful institutions for public construction of the past and involvement in archaeology. In her study, even though almost all museums in Malaysia have a dedicated space for archaeological exhibition, the involvement of the public in the interpretation and research of archaeology in the museum sector, is still relatively limited to date. Their team tapped schools to join some excavations, so that students could learn the basic research methods in archaeology. Feedback from that activity shows that it increased the public's general knowledge about Malaysian archaeology.

A bit similar to this method of reaching the public not trained in archaeology is a study I did with Maria Kathryn Purnell. Purnell presented our work as Tuklas Pilipinas Society (Tuklas) – a non-government organization (NGO) composed of volunteer archaeologists and students at the University of the Philippines School of Archaeology. The NGO conducts activities like ArchaeoTrails and Sandbox Archaeology to encourage awareness and appreciation of our past leading us to where we are today. Tuklas' Sandbox Archaeology allows people to experience field methods of an archaeological excavation. Although the pandemic globally forced a halt, it provided an opportunity to reimagine how activities like Sandbox Archaeology could recontinue – migrating to online workshops with customized kits. In the past two years, Tuklas produced several virtual sandbox archaeology activities for children aged 3 to 12 years old. Participants were reportedly enthralled by the cookie excavation and pottery reconstruction activities, but admittedly it has been a challenge assessing how effective the workshops are in building interest among the children to explore more about archaeology afterwards.

The challenge was that there was no steady pool of facilitators or teachers. Although we were able to surmise that creating a regular pacing of the workshops could eventually stabilize the program as we continue revising it. We would like a more in-depth analysis of feedback and evaluation forms to see if this activity is truly enticing archaeology to a young audience. Here, Purnell and I explored this as an advocacy initiative, or a way we can promote awareness and appreciation of the discipline inside and outside the classroom.

Still in the education sector, Arturo Tablan III shared his experience in "Teaching Teachers: Dissemination of Archaeological Information to K-12 Teachers in the Philippines." WhileTablan showed the literature that recognizes the discipline of archaeology recently taking a larger and more inclusive stance when it comes to accessibility of information, there is still, however, a large disparity between archaeological discoveries and what is taught in classrooms in the Philippines. In 2021, the *Kapisanan ng mga Arkeologist sa Pilipinas, Inc.* (KAPI) - the official guild of archaeologists in the Philippines - attempted to bridge this divide through an online lecture series aimed towards educating primary school teachers. The 3-day webinar series included lectures by archaeologists. It provided downloadable teaching modules that inform on the most recent archaeological findings. In his presentation, Tablan discussed the KAPI K-12 webinar program from the planning stages to daily execution, and post-event assessments. Based on the post-event surveys, Tablan found that interest in archaeology is high as a form of identity building, despite the lack of specific and updated information on Philippine archaeology. However, the participants were overwhelmed by the breadth of information shared by the archaeologists. With this, Tablan recommends consistent information dissemination to encourage archaeological appreciation in educators for more effective knowledge transfer to students. It is Tablan's hope that the K-12 lecture series is seen and replicated by other public archaeologists, as a vehicle for information dissemination and possibly to encourage greater community engagement in a classroom setting.

As mentioned earlier, museums play a vital role in educating the public. In his presentation, Rodolfo M. Dela Cruz discusses his experience in building a community museum. "A community museum is defined as a specialized museum that exhibits and gathers for specific identity groups and/or geographic areas" (Dela Cruz 2022). Most community museums in the Philippines are found inside an old house, an institution, or a *barangay* (a small territorial and administrative district forming the most local level of government). Dela Cruz revealed that the emergence of community museums in the Philippines may be directly connected to social movements noting that their heritage was largely absent from the national context. "The lack of social representation from these places urged them to open small and locally focused museums" (Dela Cruz 2022). A vital factor to consider is how local museums are now acknowledged by mainstream museums as an avenue to reach locals through partnerships and programs developed. Dela Cruz notes that presently, "these museums are developing as dynamic and inclusive spaces for preserving diverse and multi-layered cultural heritage, and exhibiting popular histories." Truly a practice of advocacy work, these museums, developed by local communities, "are freely reachable to all and play a major role in safeguarding and promoting their vanishing heritage, making them relevant in today's changing world" (Dela Cruz 2022).

Two speakers were unique from the rest of the panelists, as they presented intriguing insights and methods. Hermine Xhauflair *et al*. worked with a Filipino migrant community in Barcelona, Spain. Xhauflair explained that migrants constitute a category of society rarely exposed to new data generated by archaeology. In addition to that, "when they are exposed to archaeological and ethnographic data from their country of origin, migrants living in countries such as those in Europe and the Americas, are presented with information on their heritage by museums whose curators have sometimes never even set foot in the country they are portraying" (Xhauflair *et al*. 2022). Migrants around the world have denounced this practice and they seek platforms to speak about their mixed heritage. In Chiang Mai, Xhauflair presented results from a joint project called "Pamana: Voices of Philippine Heritage," conjointly conducted by researchers and members of the Philippine community in Barcelona.

Together, they organised guided tours and workshops at the Museum of World Cultures in Barcelona and created an exhibition linking the past to the present through the theme of migrations, "Movements and Trajectories of the Philippine Identity." Their team closely collaborated with other scholars and the Philippine community, wherein activities and content were "designed to integrate the voice of Filipino migrants in the discourse on heritage of their country of origin, as well as the voices of researchers, members of ethnic minorities, artists, officials, and Filipino researchers" (Xhauflair *et al*. 2022).

Fascinating observation done by Xhauflair's team, during discussions with members of the Filipino community in Barcelona a repeated commentary is that they felt like second-class citizens. "At the same time, despite the fact that the archipelago was once a Spanish colony, it became increasingly clear that Catalan people were largely ignorant of Filipino past and present cultures" (Xhauflair *et al*. 2022). The project's aim was to empower, to encourage a feeling of pride in members of the immigrated community and stimulate a reflection about its members' identity(ies). This reflects an advocacy towards empowerment and hopefully the integration of people of Filipino origin in Europe.

Lastly, another unique approach is Anna Karlström's exploration of the resistance to engage or collaborate and how this could be translated as protection of Cultural Heritage. In her presentation, Karlström contends that "community engagement is not only about including the local community in the interpretation of the past," and the resistance of a community itself should be taken into context. A good example of this is among living heritage sites wherein contemporary uses of sites and objects might conflict with the official heritage discourse and its aim to protect and preserve. In her years of work, Karlström observed "non-violent and more subtle forms of resistance in relation to heritage protection," i.e. "resistance by marginalised groups and local communities who intentionally choose to remain on the fringes," developing other possible strategies for "heritage protection and temporary stewardship that are not accepted within conventional and official heritage management" (Karlström 2022). This presentation urges archaeologists and heritage practitioners to see "heritage protection through resisting protection" that we passionately work toward (Karlström 2022). An example Karlström presented is how World Heritage designation implies protection of certain conventional, often material heritage values, "whereas communities resisting World Heritage designation can also lead to protection of other heritage values, embedded in, for example, living and religious heritage."

CONCLUSION: Moving forward

PPA Session 17, "The Praxis of Archaeology and Advocacy in Southeast Asia" proved to be a valuable addition to the growing discourse of archaeology as social and political action, thus transcending as advocacy work. Our call for presentations was a challenge to all scholars working on public archaeology to show what it means to undertake community engagement. It was a challenge to reflect on how we interpret for the public audience. It was also a challenge to expose how the 'community' was actually involved in the interpretation of this data.

Krajaejun and San Andres showed how popular culture and mass media are able to connect with the general public and therefore captivate the audience with their language and way of presenting. The academically trained archaeologists must then devise a strategy to communicate using this language and medium. Cultura and Garong, and Winaya *et al.*, recognize that listening to indigenous and local communities can actually lead to the success of better data collection and thus interpretation of results. Ni Putu Eka Juliawati's Hindu-Balinese monuments predicament can only be solved through amicable

balance among all stakeholders. Muztaza *et al.*, Purnell and Kintanar, and Tablan demonstrated the importance of hands-on activities and interactive methods so that archaeologists can be aligned with the education sector. More learning occurs when students and educators experience it themselves. Dela Cruz presented that alternative ways to exhibit contribute to a more valuable museum, where it is the effort of the community that bonds the structure. Xhauflair *et al.*, offered a platform to a Filipino migrant community seeking representation with their mixed heritage. Karlström ties the whole assemblage by reminding us that sometimes resistance or no response from a community might actually be their way of preserving their archaeology, heritage, or culture.

Part of being a good researcher, or in this case, archaeologist, is also being able to truly listen to the people you collaborate with. If advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions, then it is our responsibility to respect and understand the perspectives of the different sectors we continue to work with. Archaeology after all is part of the humanities (or social sciences, depending on where you study). Archaeology as advocacy must then be more sensitive to the needs and wants of the community we are visiting for archaeological research.

The session may have been dominated by work in the Philippines, but it may be attributed to the session organizers being Filipinos. However the representation of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia also shows how this is a discourse that should be continued and made more widespread. For the discipline of archaeology to survive, we must work to stay relevant to present times. The public archaeology that we practice must also be relevant to the context and situation of the communities we work with.

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