



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

Australia ICOMOS Conference
5-8 November 2015
Adelaide Australia



Adam Mornement

Adam Mornement is a Senior Associate with Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants. His work covers strategic planning, policy development and heritage advice to a range of public and private sector clients. Adam specialises in the preparation of Conservation Management Plans; he is also actively involved in the development and implementation of interpretation strategies for heritage sites.

Prior to joining Lovell Chen, Adam was on the editorial staff of a number of architecture and urban studies journals in Britain. He is the author of, *Corrugated Iron - Building on the Frontier* (Frances Lincoln, London and W W Norton, New York, 2008), *Infill - New City Homes* (Laurence King, London, 2009) and *Extensions* (Laurence King, London, 2007). In 2014 he completed research into contested heritages sites in Myanmar while studying for a Masters of Cultural Heritage at Deakin University.

The role of heritage in Myanmar today

Paper Abstract

Since 2011, Myanmar has been administered by an ostensibly civilian government, which has stated its intention to lead the country towards liberal democracy and a diverse economic base. The shift from authoritarian rule has created a dynamic environment characterised by social change, economic development and a re-engagement with the international community. Consequences for the local heritage discourse include the nomination of places for inscription in the World Heritage List, and the emergence of Yangon's colonial-era urban core as a focus of the international conservation industry. Over the past four years a multitude of external agencies and practitioners have sought to shape and influence the heritage debate in the former Myanmar capital.

This paper asks, how can experience in Australia and the west be brought to bear in the development of a sustainable, locally owned heritage industry that responds to local cultural practice? It also considers: what can be learned from the experiences of other states where political change has precipitated a realignment of concepts of national identity; and does heritage have a 'healing' role in countries emerging from a traumatic episode?

An emphasis of the paper will be on understanding and sustaining the memory of contested sites in Myanmar generally, and the site of the former student union at the University of Yangon's Kamayut campus specifically. This site has been associated with political struggle and resistance since the 1930s. For much of that period, following the demolition of the student union in 1962, it has been vacant. The site's symbolic resonance has been invoked at critical moments over the past 50 years, most recently in 2012 by the economic advisor to the president who wrote in an open letter that the reconstruction of the student union would, 'fill a void that has been in our hearts for some time'.