

UNESCO Constructs in Context: Official Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asian States and Communities

Single Session, 4 presenters

Conveners:

1. Rangga Dachlan
Universitas Gadjah Mada & University of Oxford
rdachlan@ugm.ac.id
2. Agung Wardana, PhD
Universitas Gadjah Mada & Max Planck Institute Heidelberg
made.wardana@ugm.ac.id

The near-universal acceptance of UNESCO's world heritage and intangible heritage conventions have recontextualised state-sponsored preservations of the past. Antiquities, archaeological resources, and living traditions become "cultural heritage" whose preservation symbolises not only the commitment to sanctifying the national identity, but also the assertion of sovereignty through international pageantry that is expected to boost domestic tourism. In their attempt to do so, states regularly come into conflict with local communities whose grassroots aspirations and concerns are often far removed from the nation building and cultural Disneyfication consequent from the implementation of these UNESCO constructs on the ground. How has this story, well-told elsewhere, played out in under-studied Southeast Asia?

This panel invites scholars on either side of this dynamic. We welcome papers that, on the one hand, explore how Southeast Asian states absorb and contextualise the heritage conventions into their respective laws and policies. What are the meanings instilled into cultural heritage as a domestic legal construct in Southeast Asian states? What are the uses envisioned from the preservation of official heritage and to what extent have they been achieved? On the other hand, we also seek to spotlight papers that delve into the various ways through which Southeast Asian communities, defined broadly, respond to the state's heritage ambitions or otherwise engage with these UNESCO constructs. How are Southeast Asian artists, businesses, and, more importantly, marginalised communities such as the indigenous peoples, affected by top-down heritage projects? What types of tension have emerged in the implementation of heritage laws and policies on the ground—and how does the state navigate this fraught relationship with the people in the preservation of the(ir) past?