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PATCHARAWEE TUNPRAWAT : MANAGING LIVING HERITAGE SITES IN
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In the 14th century A.D. after the decline of Angkor and the rise of Pagan and Ayutthaya, Theravada Buddhism, from Sri Lanka, became the most prominent religion and has been practiced in Mainland Southeast Asia in present-day Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar, while Mahayana Buddhism, spread from China, became popular in present-day Viet Nam. The Buddhist worldviews governed how the traditional population interacted with past material remains and differentiated the traditional worldviews from the Western worldviews which were based on Christianity. It was noted that the West perceived time as linear and the cult of the holy relics dictated that values were inherent in materials whereas in the East values were ascribed to materials.

The arrival of the Europeans in the late 19th century A.D. by way of Colonization greatly influenced the traditional worldviews. After France and England gained control of most parts of the region except Siam, they took it under their responsibilities to study the antiquities of the region which became the legacy of the colonizers. After WWII, the Wars of Independence that took place in many cities gradually made France and England relinquish their controls. Antiquities by then became icons for independence and nationalism for the natives. Though Siam was not colonized, its structure of heritage management was laid out by Westerners, which immersed Siam, which later became Thailand, in the Western concepts of conservation and heritage management. The Venice Charter launched in 1962 became the backbone of heritage conservation in many countries including Southeast Asia. The World Heritage Convention born in 1970s emphasized authenticity. This concept was later questioned and caused heritage professionals to revisit heritage management in their countries in order to move away from the fabric-based conservation, which is not applicable in all cases. During this period, looting has reached a new height, while the lack of awareness is a serious issue. Communities have been separated further from the heritage.

In order to find a practical context-based framework to manage heritage sites in Mainland Southeast Asia, there is a need to explore the current trends and approaches in heritage management which will provide a basis to form a regional framework. This framework will then be combined with results from the case studies in the region and the fundamental concept of heritage conservation and management so as to come up with a model as well as guidelines for heritage managers which are based on the traditional system, making the heritage 'living'.

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