

Authenticity in an Indigenous Australian Context

A Living Cultural Concept

Dr Matthew Whincop
ICOMOS-ICAHM Secretary General

Six Descent Woman Aboriginal Site



ICOMOS **ICAHM**
International Committee
on Archaeological
Heritage Management

Australia

50,000 + years

Troubled colonial history

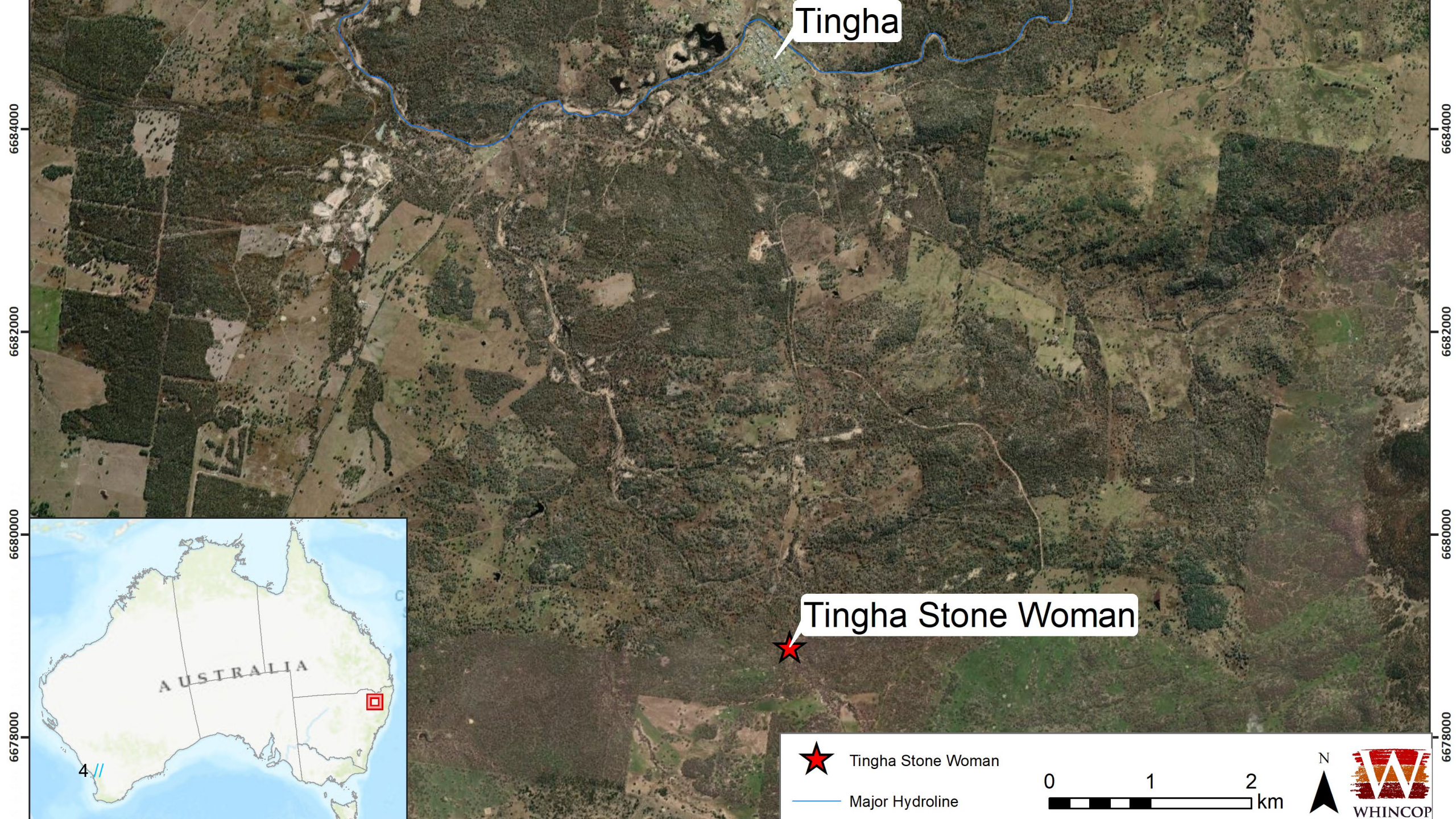
Living Culture

- Ceremony,
- Traditional knowledge
- Connection to country
- Continuity of culture
- Culture-Nature



Tingha Stone Woman





Tingha

Tingha Stone Woman

A U S T R A L I A

★ Tingha Stone Woman

— Major Hydroline



Tingha



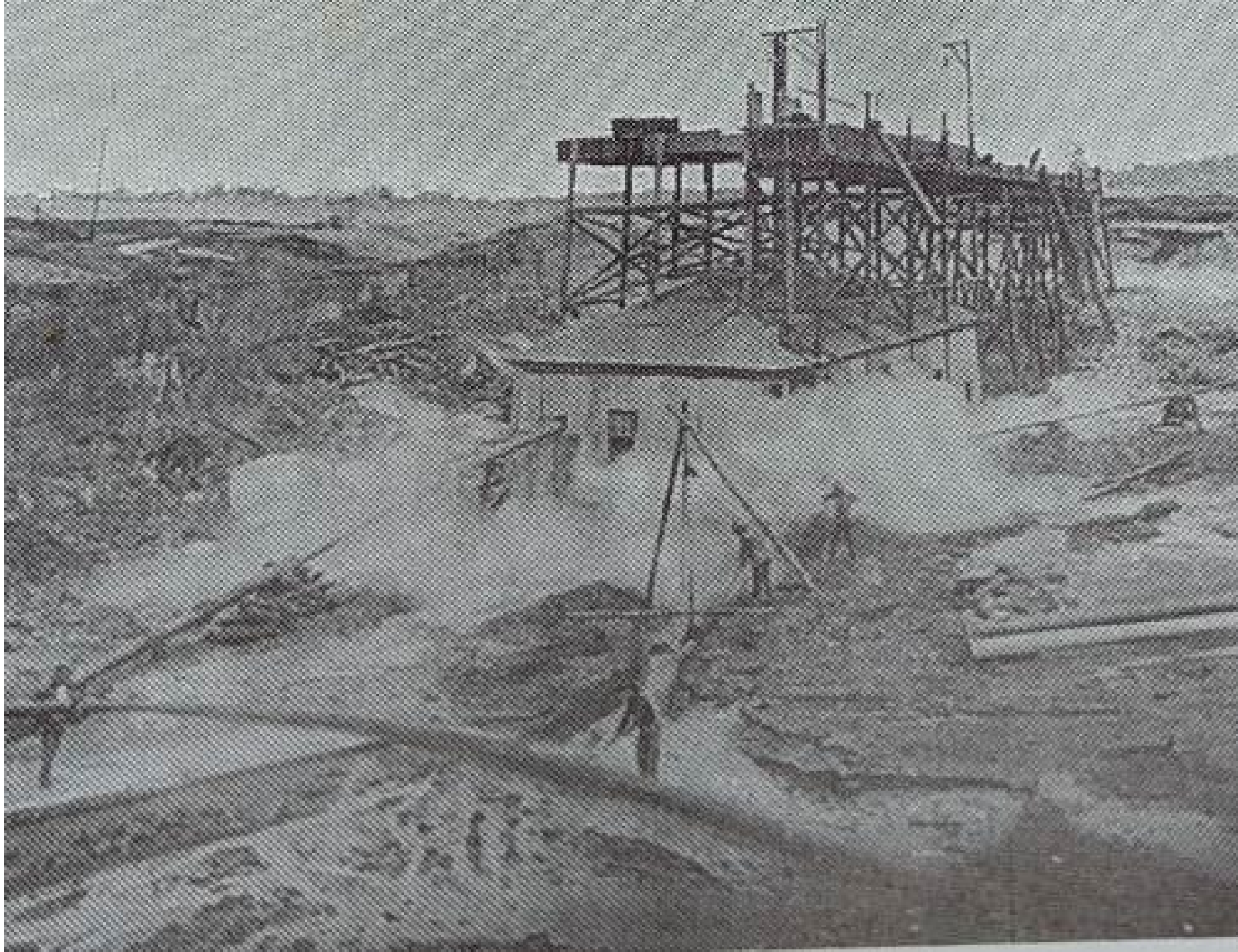
Tin Mining

19th-20th Century

Sluicing of creeks

Water blasting

Widespread disturbance









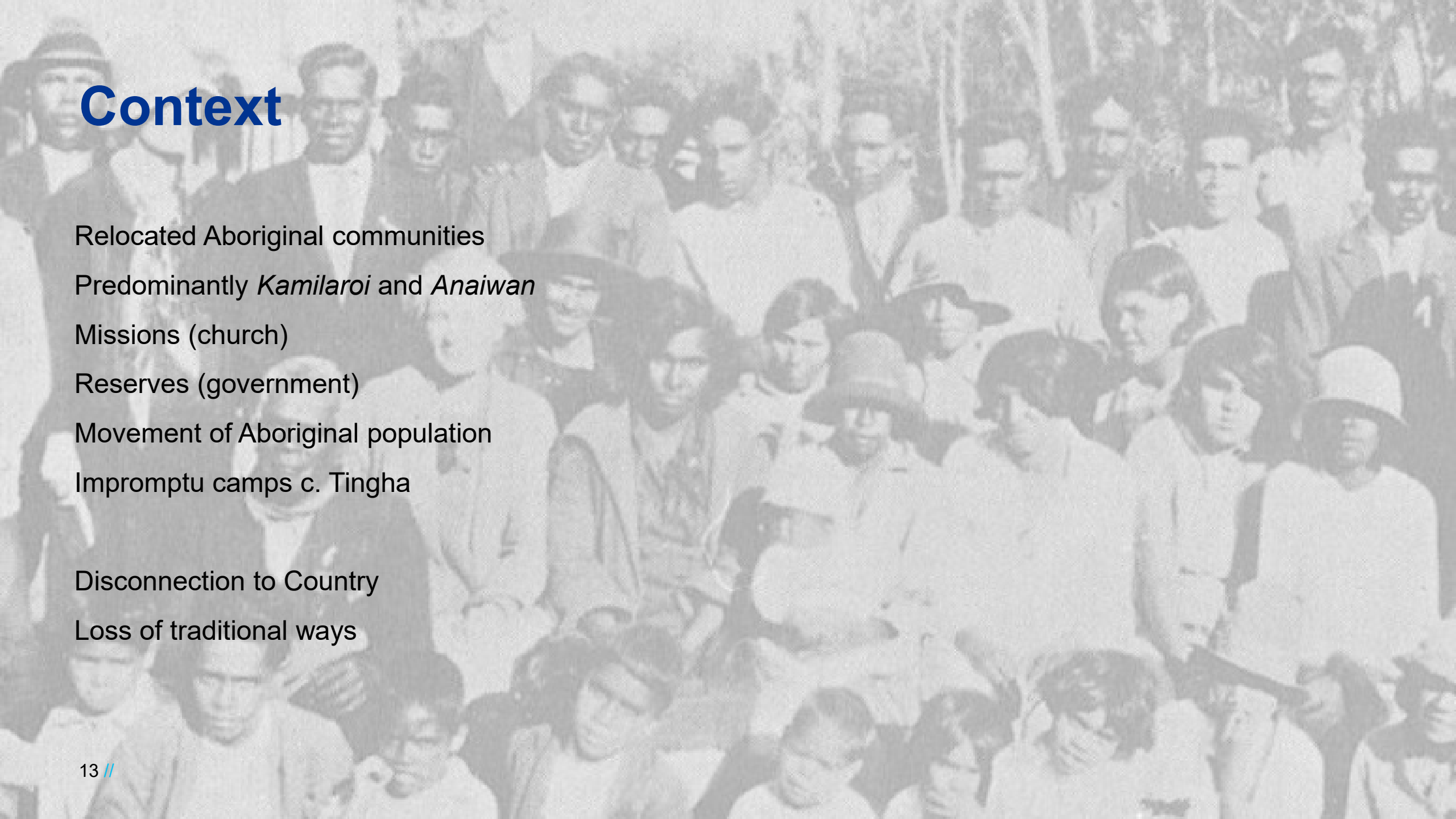




Tingha Stone Woman

*There was once a young girl who decided to choose her own husband, and not let the older people choose one for her, as was the custom of those days. She married a person who was not of her right group and did not belong to her people. The young girl ran away with her husband, but the girl stopped to have a drink of water. The Elders had sent people after her to kill her, because she had broken the law, and when they found her bending over drinking the water, they hit her on the back of the head with a nulla nulla, causing her neck to break. She is still there today with her head in the water, and she is a warning to all young girls **not to break the laws of marriage**.*

Context



Relocated Aboriginal communities

Predominantly *Kamilaroi* and *Anaiwan*

Missions (church)

Reserves (government)

Movement of Aboriginal population

Impromptu camps c. Tingha

Disconnection to Country

Loss of traditional ways







1974 Sacred Sites Survey

Harry Creamer and Ray Kelly (NPWS)

Redefined consultation

Sought Aboriginal perspective

Site significance through cultural lens

A pure 'Authentic Past' rejected

Indigenous Australians = living culture



Tingha Stone Woman

- Discovery
- Important Myth – maintain Traditional Marriage Laws
- Context of aunty Mary Sullivan – Traditional Marriage
- Significance
 - Connection to culture/country
 - Question of pre-colonial ‘authenticity’ is moot
 - Re-inscribing the landscape as living culture
 - Authentic part of *living* culture

Tingha Stone Woman Aboriginal Site

Authenticity

Recognition

- Cultural Context
- Living Cultures
- Re-inscribing the Landscape
- Traditional and Non-Traditional Values
- Dynamic Concept

Authenticity

Limits?

Sneddon (2021)

- Concept of Authenticity Expanding (Dynamic)
- Inscribing landscape with non-traditional values
- Cautions against 'anything goes'
- Authentic sites
- Significance?
- Require less rigorous management measures



THEME 3 · LIVING, SPIRITUAL
AND ASSOCIATIVE HERITAGE

Form is Emptiness, Practice is Authenticity

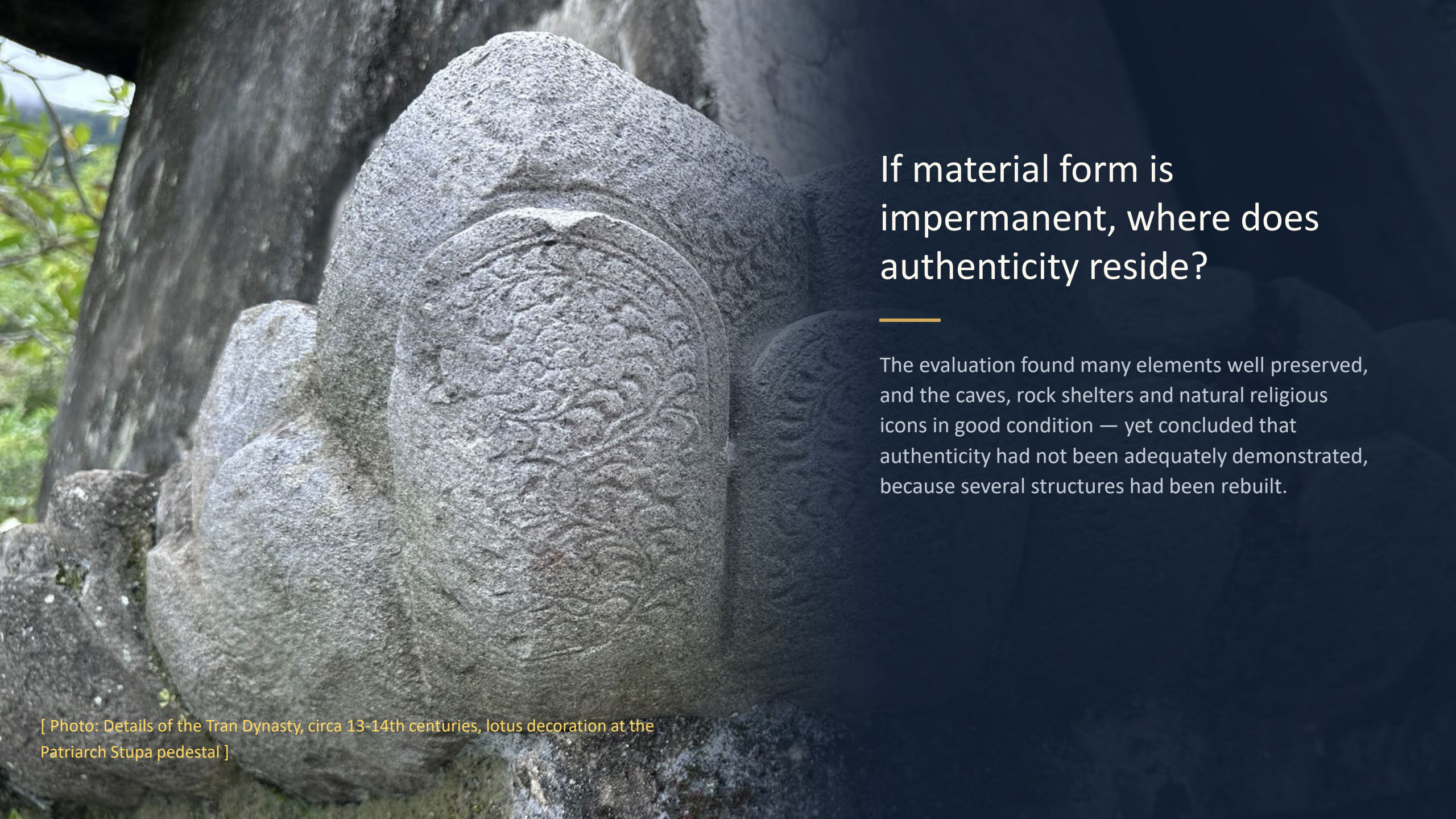
*Trúc Lâm Buddhism and the Reassessment of Heritage Values at
Values at Yên Tử*

Ven. Thich Nu Hanh Tam (Dr. Nguyen Thi Kim Chi)

Tran Nhan Tong Institute, Vietnam National University, Ha Noi, Viet Nam

Dr. Huong Pham

Culture Specialist, UNESCO Representative Office in Viet Nam



If material form is impermanent, where does authenticity reside?

The evaluation found many elements well preserved, and the caves, rock shelters and natural religious icons in good condition — yet concluded that authenticity had not been adequately demonstrated, because several structures had been rebuilt.

[Photo: Details of the Tran Dynasty, circa 13-14th centuries, lotus decoration at the Patriarch Stupa pedestal]

Thirteen years of assembling the evidence

A serial nomination of **12 components** across **3 provinces** — Quang Ninh, Bac Giang (now Bac Ninh) and Hai Duong (now Hai Phong City) — inscribed in **July 2025** under criteria (iii) and (vi), after an upstream mission in 2015 and four supplementary reports.



[Photo: Dr. Le Thi Lien (center) and her team in an excavation project at Dong Ma Ngua Stake-yard, Quang Ninh Province - 2013]



[Photo: The archaeologists working on classification of excavated artifacts around Nhậm Dương temple, Hai Phong City - 2000]

GIÁO LA KINH LỤC THỈNH BÀY,	教 羅 經 錄 請 排。	TỰ NHÂN ĐÓN NGO TÂM TỔNG,	自 然 頓 悟 心 宗。	AI CHUA TÍN THU CON NGHI,	埃 耨 信 受 群 疑。	TAM THẾ CHƯ PHÁP TỔ SƯ,	三 世 諸 佛 祖 師。	CHÂN HOA SẮC TỨC THỊ KHÔNG,	真 花 色 即 是 空。
GIẤY MỤC VĂN TỰ CHẤT ĐÂY HÀ SA.	紙 墨 文 字 實 若 河 沙。	KEO TÌM KINH GIAO LUÔNG CÔNG LÀU TRÔNG,	嬌 尋 經 教 隨 功 飄 朝。	THÌNH KINH LĂNG GIA QUYÊN NHỊ HÒA TRÔNG,	請 經 楞 伽 卷 二 和 禪。	TỰ MỤC TƯƠNG CÓ THỊ CỤ THIỆN CƠ,	四 目 相 顧 示 渠 擇 機。	KHÔNG TỨC THỊ SẮC THỂ ĐỒNG NHƯ NHƯ,	空 即 是 色 休 同 如 如。

“Chân hoa sắc tức thị không,
không tức thị sắc, thể đồng như như.”

Yên Tử Nhật Trình, in *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh* —
woodblock preserved at Vĩnh Nghiêm Pagoda

FORM

The mountain and its
hermitages, the stele and the
the woodblock, the step of the
the pilgrim on the old path.
path.

EMPTINESS

Non-self and dependent
origination; heritage as a body in
motion, not a closed museum.

[Photo: The print copy from the woodblocks kept in Vĩnh Nghiem temple (left) and The Bronze Pagoda, Yen Tu Mountain]

[Photo: Ngọ Vân Hermitage, Yen Tu mountain | Gold lotus box, Ngọ Vân – Yên Tử, Trần dynasty, National Treasure 2018
— National Cultural Heritage Department]

Ngọ Vân: austerity is the doctrine

The place where Buddha King Trần Nhân Nhân Tông entered nirvāṇa is plain brick brick and open mist. The restraint is not a not a shortfall of means; it is the teaching teaching made visible. The evaluation read this simplicity as a lack of distinctiveness. Read from within the tradition, it is the distinguishing mark.



Beneath the pilgrim path to this hermitage lay a gold lotus of the Trần court — 42 mm high, made for ritual, not for display. The means were there; the restraint was chosen.

*Cư trần lạc đạo — at ease in the world, at
at one with the way*

Dressing, eating, walking and sitting are themselves the practice. Monastics and villagers work the slopes, walk the old paths, chant and keep the route together.

The spring pilgrimage to Yên Tử is among the largest in the region, one of thirteen festivals held across the property each year — unbroken across generations.

[Photo: Yen Tu Spring festival, the path to the Bronze Pagoda]





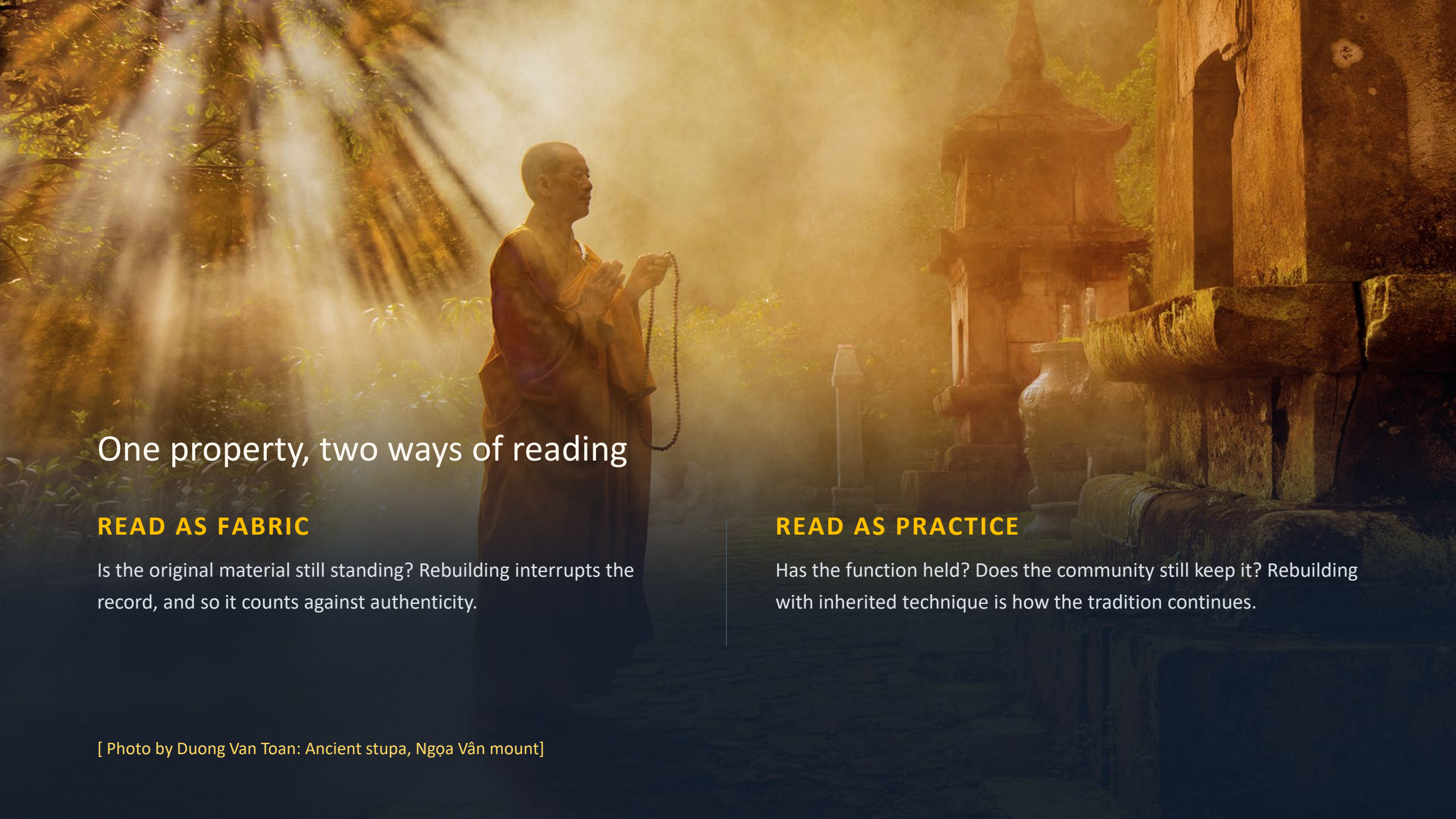
Ancient Pine Path (Đường Xích Tùng): authenticity carried by the living

Red pines planted along the pilgrim path have stood for more than seven centuries. Their exposed roots hold the path that generations of feet have worn — continuity that is at once material, ecological and spiritual.

Hermitages here are built to recede into the forest rather than to command it. The landscape is not a setting for the teaching; it is the teaching, read directly.

An ecological reading of authenticity, in which the forest itself is an attribute of the property.

[Photo : The ancient pine path - the path of pilgrims in the Yen Tu sacred mountain]

A Buddhist monk in a brown robe stands in a misty forest, holding prayer beads. Sunlight rays stream through the trees on the left. In the background, an ancient stone stupa and other structures are visible on a hillside.

One property, two ways of reading

READ AS FABRIC

Is the original material still standing? Rebuilding interrupts the record, and so it counts against authenticity.

READ AS PRACTICE

Has the function held? Does the community still keep it? Rebuilding with inherited technique is how the tradition continues.

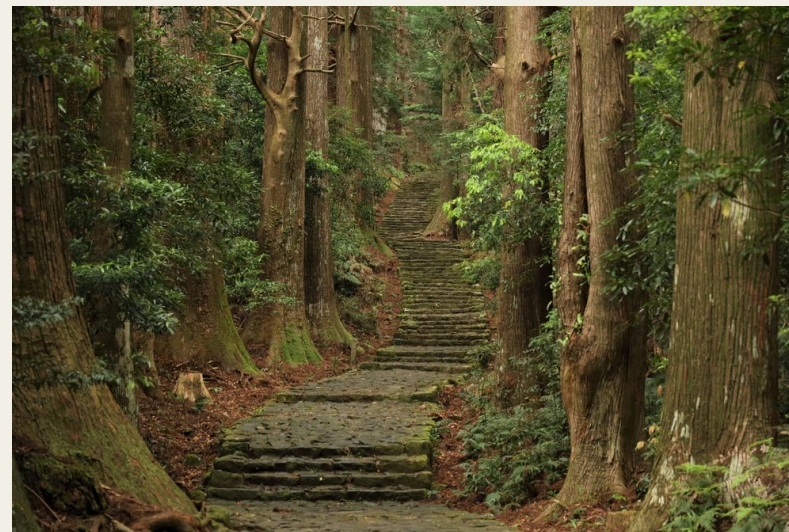
[Photo by Duong Van Toan: Ancient stupa, Ngọa Vân mount]

Authenticity: Applying the same principle consistently

Historic Centre of
Warsaw/Narodo
wy Instytut
Dziedzictwa,
1980.
(ii), (vi)



POLAND



Nakahechi
Trail/Wakayama
Tourism Federation
Sacred Sites and
Pilgrimage Routes in
the Kii Mountain
Range, 2004
(ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)

JAPAN

Buseoka Temple/CIBM,
Sansa, Buddhist
Mountain Monasteries
in Korea, 2018
(ii)



REPUBLIC OF KOREA



Yen Tu-Vinh Nghiem-
Con Son, Kiep Bac
Complex of
Monuments and
Landscapes, 2025
(iii), (vi)

VIET NAM

THE ADOPTED STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

“... not only in physical structures, but in continuing religious significance, significance, community stewardship ...”

The adopted text grounds authenticity in the sacred origins of the Yên Tử range and in ritual, festival and teaching carried unbroken across generations. It accepts that rebuilding with traditional materials and methods, after war and decay, reflects an authentic continuity of Vietnamese architectural and spiritual heritage.

Suggestions for the Ha Noi Outcome Document 2026

01	02	03	04
Continuity as evidence	Consistent application	Austerity as content	Communities as custodians
Treat functional and spiritual continuity as evidence of authenticity in its own right, not as a supporting consideration.	Invoke Nara, Hô An and Nairobi on equal terms for every nomination, in every region under examination.	Read intentional simplicity as doctrinal expression, and not as an absence of distinctive material character.	Recognise religious and local communities as holders of the property's authenticity, not only as parties consulted.

Together these point towards dedicated guidance for living spiritual landscapes — covering functional continuity, the transmission of technique and intent in restoration, and the standing of the communities that sustain them.



**Authenticity does not rest in the
permanence of matter, but in the
persistence of practice.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
ATTENTION!**

Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Heritage and Authenticity

Ha Noi and Ninh Binh, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,
27 September to 1 October 2026

Rethinking Heritage Authenticity: An Asia-Pacific Dialogue for the Future of World Heritage The Case of Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of Jingmai Mountain

SHAO Yong with the support of China Academy of Cultural Heritage

Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University
Secretary-General, WHITR-AP, and Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai
Vice President, ICOMOS CIAV, and member of ICOMOS CHINA



Cultural Landscape of Old Tea Forests of Jingmai Mountain

Criterion (iii): outstanding testimony to the tradition of tea cultivation under forest canopy

Criterion (v): a sustainable land-use system based on the combination of horizontal and vertical land-use patterns

Attributes:

under-forest cultivation techniques

land-use patterns

village-building traditions

the social governance system



Under-Forest Cultivation Techniques: A Vertically Layered Community of Trees–Tea Trees–Herbaceous Plants



Authenticity: continued for a thousand years; Tea is harvested in spring and autumn, while the plants are allowed to rest and recover in summer; Tea leaves are picked by hand with gentle movements, without damaging the branches or roots. The **three-dimensional “trees–tea trees–herbaceous plants” structure** of the old tea forests has been preserved

Conservation approach: Productive conservation; village rules and customary regulations; the “one tree, one code” system; Intangible cultural heritage, knowledge remains embedded in the tea gardens, in production activities, and in transmission.

Land-Use Pattern: A Symbiotic Pattern of Forests–Old Tea Forests–Traditional Villages



Authenticity: The horizontal concentric pattern of “forest–old tea forest–village” and the vertical pattern of “sacred–mountain forest–old tea forest–village–farmland–paddy field–river”; Three separating protective forest areas, five old tea forest areas, and nine traditional villages.

Conservation approach: Strict protection; Village planning controls are used to continue traditional construction techniques and traditional village forms; a monitoring and early-warning platform; combines strict protection in the mountain areas with moderate development at lower elevations and the integration of tea production and tourism.

Village-Building Traditions: Site-selection of Ancient Villages and the Vernacular Character of Local Dwellings



Authenticity: Villages sited around sacred mountains and established within the tea forests; **Traditional features maintained; Stilted buildings undergone evolution, with sequence still clearly identifiable;** The old villages retained traditional materials and construction methods, overall appearance continues to reflect ethnic characteristics.



Sustainability Approaches: Safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and on the living transmission of traditional building and construction skills; Guidelines have been formulated; Village planning is used; The residential function of the villages is maintained; attract young people to return home, and sustain the vitality of the villages

Social Governance System: Living Folk Customs, Tea Culture, and Rituals Honouring the Tea Ancestor

Authenticity: Long-established ethnic communities account for more than 97% of the population of each village; Beliefs associated with the Tea Ancestor, sacred mountains, sacred trees, and sacred forests continue to be practised; Rituals; Village rules and customary regulations, as well as traditional co-management mechanisms, have also been maintained.

Conservation approaches: Traditional tea processing, festivals, ritual practices, dances, and other traditions are incorporated into intangible cultural heritage inventories; Traditional co-management mechanisms are connected with modern laws and regulations; Cooperatives and integrity alliances apply unified standards for harvesting; The integration of tea production and tourism.



Authenticity of Cultural Landscape as Organically Evolved

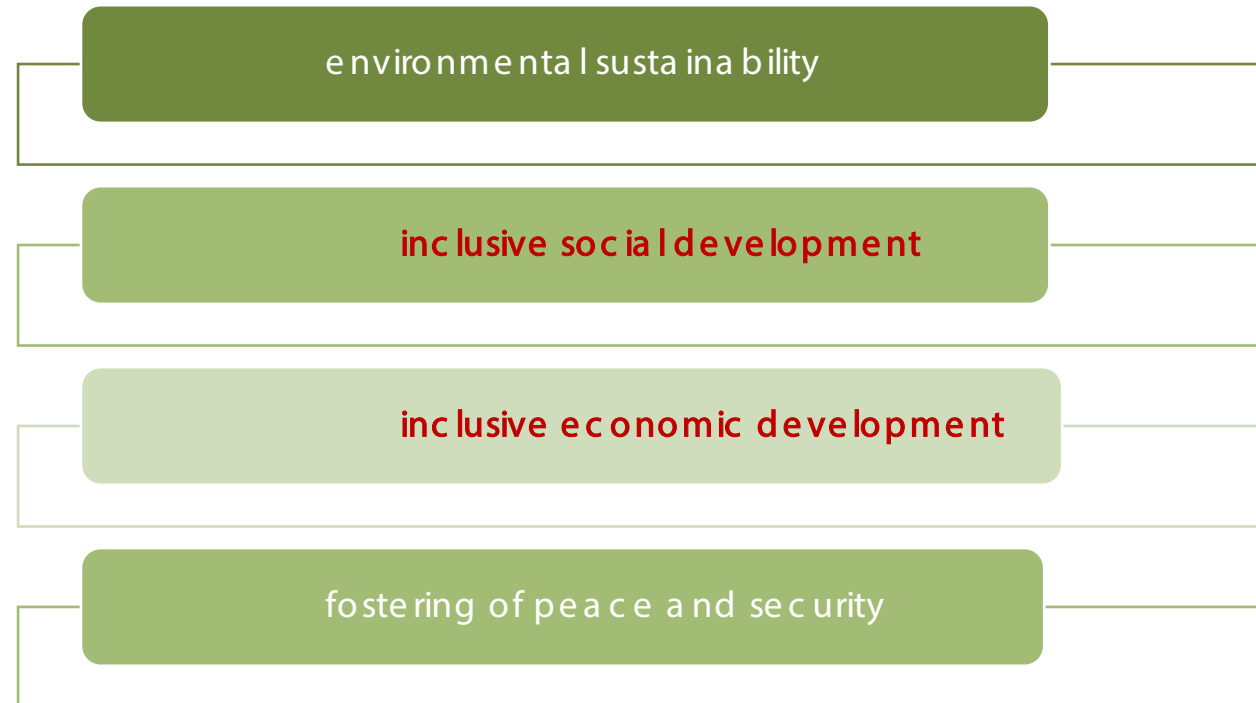
Under-forest cultivation techniques continue to be transmitted through **productive practice**; villages continue to endure through **ongoing habitation**; belief in the Tea Ancestor continues through **ritual practice**; and **traditional governance continues to function while being connected with modern institutional systems**.

The authenticity of an organically evolved cultural landscape does not lie in freezing the past in time; rather, it is embodied in **living practices** through which **communities continue to use the landscape in production, transmit traditions through belief, and sustain them through governance**.



The Three Dimensions of "Authenticity" in Living Heritage

- As **“Historical Witness”**: Material authenticity, interpretation authenticity and evidence-based narratives
- As **“Traditional Human Settlement Exemplar”**: Human-land wisdom, continuity of adaptive practices, cultural transmission, evolving traditional knowledge.
- As **“Living Daily Space”**: Management of changes.



The 4 dimensions of Sustainable Development for Living Heritage

Some recommendations:

- **Further encourage the integration of the two UNESCO Conventions.** ICOMOS has already established the International Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICICH) and has developed relevant theories and methodologies. The VIDA work plan, jointly undertaken by CIAV and ICICH, as well as research by the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and others on the integrated protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, are already moving in this direction. This returns us to a more holistic cultural ecosystem and a more complete set of conservation concepts and methods.
- **Refine and specify authenticity criteria for different types of World Heritage.** The Nairobi Outcome Document is relatively clear at the conceptual level, but there are gaps at the operational level. It is suggested that a working team could be established to develop a more specific operational framework for assessing the authenticity of living heritage.
- **Encourage a multi-stakeholder co-governance model.** Heritage protection involves multiple actors, including government, communities, enterprises, and experts. It is suggested that, further encouragement be given to the multi-stakeholder co-governance model, and in particular ensuring the substantive participation of communities, so as to avoid protection biases caused by the dominance of a single actor.

Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Heritage and Authenticity

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Thank you

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The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam



Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Heritage and Authenticity

Rethinking Heritage Authenticity:

An Asia-Pacific Dialogue for the Future of World Heritage

HA NOI – NINH BINH, VIET NAM , 27 September – 1 October 2026

Town of Luang Prabang

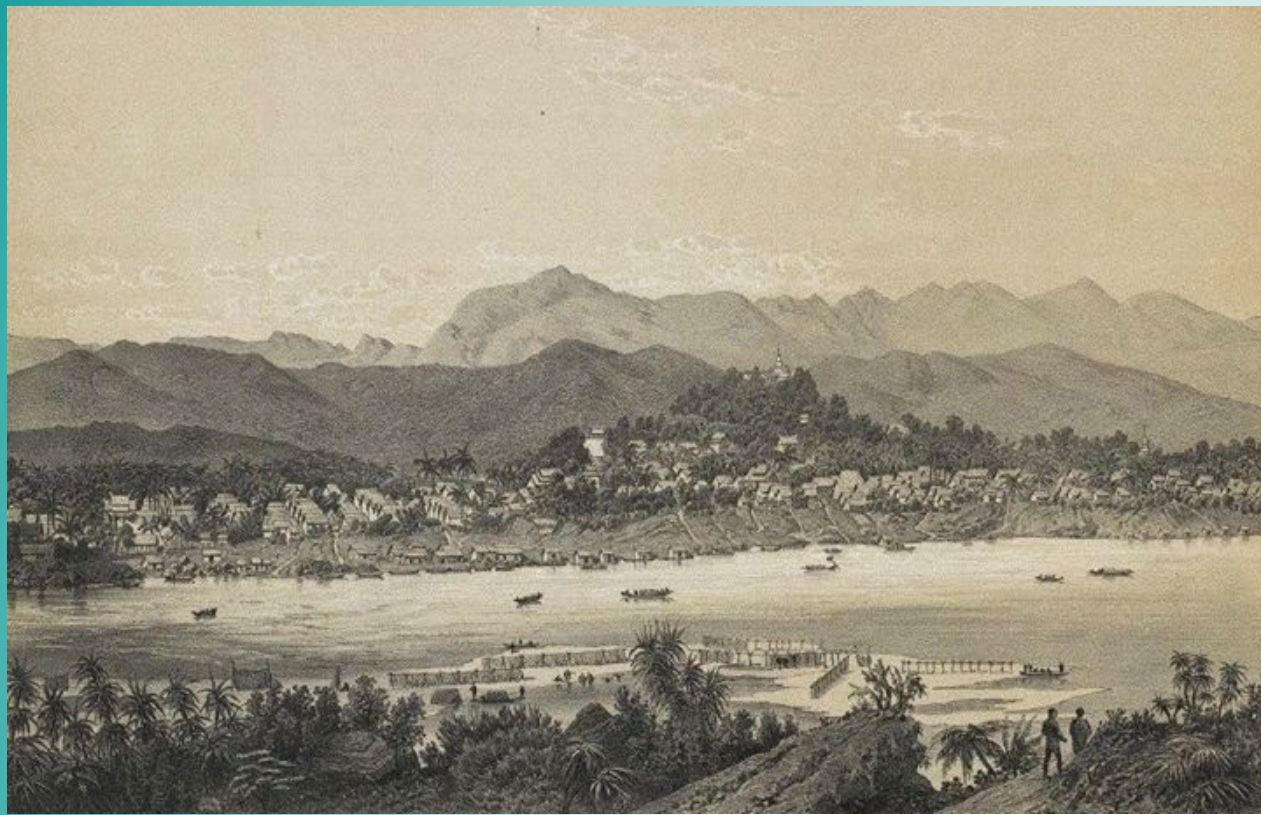
**Understanding Authenticity through Its Living
Heritage,
People and Their Practices**

Paxa NYORDSAVANH

Deputy Head of World Heritage Sites Management Division

Department of Heritage and Fine Arts

Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Lao PDR



Town of Luang Prabang from 150 years ago

Town of Luang Prabang today



**Town of Luang Prabang was inscribed
On the UNESCO World Heritage List In 1995**

OUV and distinctive character of the Historic Town of Luang Prabang

Criterion (ii): Luang Prabang reflects the exceptional fusion of Lao traditional architecture and 19th and 20th century European colonial style buildings.



Criterion (iv): Luang Prabang is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble built over the centuries combining sophisticated architecture of religious buildings, vernacular constructions and colonial buildings.



Criterion (v): The unique townscape of Luang Prabang is remarkably well preserved, illustrating a key stage in the blending of two distinct cultural traditions.



Attributes of the OUV of the Town of Luang Prabang



Religious Architecture



Vernacular Wooden Housing



Architecture Influences



**Town scape: urban life,
culture and nature**



Materials and Techniques



Understanding the Authenticity through Its Living Heritage, People and Their Practices



www.luangprabangculture.com





Religious practices



Great Grand Ancestor Performance



Youth joint community activity



Ritual practices



Cảm ơn
Khob Jai
Thank you

“Lulik”/Sacred on Living, Spiritual and Associative Heritage of Timor-Leste

Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Heritage and Authenticity

By:

- Francisco Urbano dos Santos
- Luis Nívio de Fátima Soares



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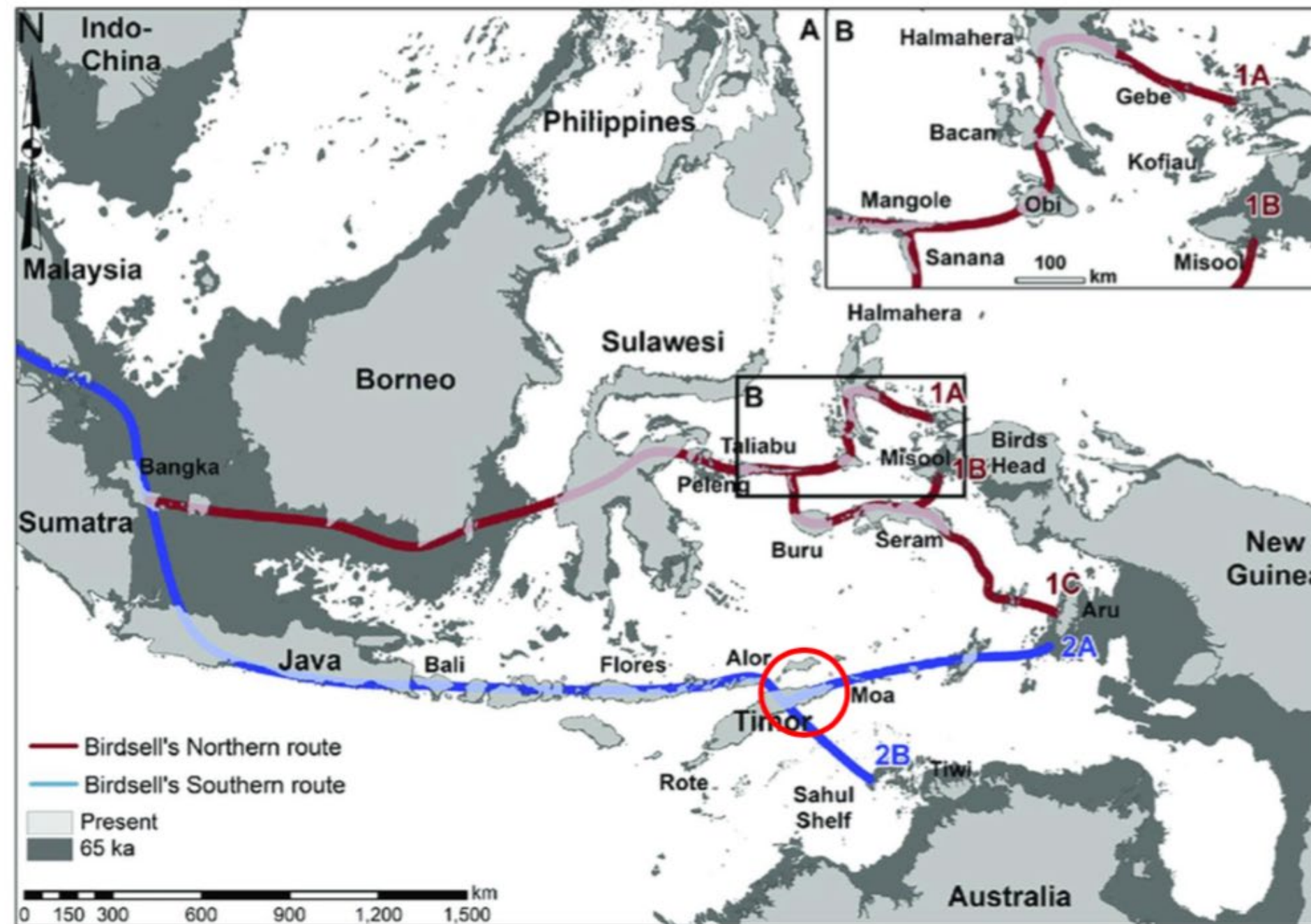


Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO

TIMOR-LESTE

Early Modern
Human Migration
from Southeast
Asia (Sundaland)
to Australia and
(Sahuland)

70.000 – 50.000 y.a



Timor-Leste is South East Asia is newest sovereign
Nation

Restored it's Independence in 20th May 2002

As a potential crossroads for human movement
southward towards Australia and further eastward
towards Papua

Caves and rock shelters containing ancient rock art
and archaeological finding evidence continue to
maintain spiritual connections with local
communities. Traditional fortresses are also used by
communities as places for ancestral invocation and
supplication, among many other purposes.



8. Ceremony following the replacement of a new tēi post at Illi Kéréké.

Sue O'Connor.



Ratification of the WHC
2017



Ratification of the ICH
CONVENTION IN 2016

“Lulik”/Sacred IN TIMOR-LESTE CONTEXT

The Timorese people possess rich cultural heritage and have manifested through diverse cultural expressions over generations. The cultural identity of the Timorese people commonly manifests in something called Lulik (Sacred)

Lulik refers to the spiritual cosmos that contains the divine creator, the spirits of the ancestors, and the spiritual root of life including sacred rules and regulations that dictate relationships between people and people and nature. (Trindade, 2011)

The word itself, Lulik, refers to the spiritual cosmos, a root of life and sacred rules that dictate relationships between people and nature.



Uma Lulik/Sacred House

Symbolic foundation of family identity and lineage tied and home for traditional rituals practices.



Sau-Batar / Corn Harvesting:

A Timorese traditional ceremony performed during the corn harvest, a staple food in Timor-Leste. This ceremony is conducted to thank the ancestors and nature for protecting the plants and providing a successful harvest.



Figure 13. Monumental ancestral grave at the fortified settlement of *Macapainara* near Com.

Source: Sue O'Connor.

Ancient Grave:

Site for conducting rituals of healing and ancestral protection.

These ancestral settlements are no longer permanently occupied, ratu members regularly return to them to perform rituals and ceremonies at the téi and grave sites located within them (O'Connor and Pannell 2006:37)

“The values attributed to cultural heritage are those recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals”. World Heritage Convention’s Operational Guideline (2023)



SUSTAINED VALUE

During periods of colonial conflict and war, many Uma Lulik were destroyed. Their survival embodies not only the physical structures but also the enduring spiritual power that remains alive within the community. The Uma Lulik, or sacred house, stands as the spiritual and social center of Timorese life, embodying ancestral connections and the continuity of cultural identity (McWilliam and Traube, 2011, p.253). The cultural significance of Uma Lulik endures, sustained by the conservation efforts of the Timorese people who continue to revive and maintain these traditional houses, emphasizing their intangible cultural values.

The enduring significance of the sacred house lies not in its physical fabric but in its intangible values — the spirit of place, ancestral connections, and communal identity.

The background image shows two women in traditional Timor-Leste attire, including patterned sarongs and headwraps, working on a craft. One woman is in the foreground, focused on her work, while another is slightly behind her. The image is overlaid with a dark red semi-transparent shape that contains the title and text.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

◆ **Lulik (Sacred) holds a core value in interpreting the cultural heritage context of Timor-Leste. Serves as a unifying cultural principle linking tangible and intangible heritage, offering an essential framework for understanding and safeguarding Timor- Leste's cultural heritage.**

◆ **The authenticity of cultural significance should be inherently human-centred, shaped by knowledge, beliefs, and ways of thinking. It is influenced by social structures and collective experiences throughout different periods, and its role as a source of life and meaning should be recognized.**

◆ **The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (2013) explicitly recognizes that “the significance of a place is determined by the community that values it.” This principle should be incorporated into approaches to understanding and assessing the authenticity of heritage within Asian cultural contexts.**

A photograph of a traditional thatched roof, likely made of palm fronds, set against a backdrop of lush green trees. A semi-transparent red overlay covers the bottom half of the image, and the text "OBRIGADU BARAK" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the red area. In the background, a wooden structure with a corrugated metal roof is partially visible, and a sign on it reads "UYA SORONG HECOLAI 22-01-2002".

OBRIGADU BARAK