

1. Revealing Urban Development History Engraved in Yangon Heritage – Hlaing Maw Oo (alias) Maw Oo Hock, Deputy Chief Architect/Senior Urban Planner, Architect Section, Public Works, Ministry of Construction, Myanmar

Abstract: Yangon, the primate city and the previous capital of Myanmar, is home to around 40% of urban population residing in Myanmar. It is also home to rich urban heritage which is deeply rooted in its geographical features and its history. The urban heritage of Yangon reflects different periods, and layers of urban development history contributing towards integral part its society. Apart from that it eminently contributes to the unique character of Yangon. This study attempts to reveal important milestones of the urban development history engraved in its present urban heritage. By identifying the potentials and challenges of Yangon urban heritage, the study attempts to come up with a meaningful way forward.

2. Yangon's Green: Evolving Visions for a Tropical City's Urban Parks – Ivan Alexander Valin, Assistant Professor, Division of Landscape Architecture, Department of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong

Abstract: Recent political reform in Myanmar has sparked an extraordinary transformation of the country's largest city and commercial capital, Yangon, where traditional social, economic, and spatial fabrics are being reorganized, or in many cases replaced, to produce an image of a modern Southeast Asian city. Although this most recent phase of urban change is taking place with alarming speed and is being chronicled by a newly free local press and ever-suspicious international one, it is not the first time the physical city has endured a reorganization in the service of legitimizing authority and of maintaining power. Indeed, Yangon, etched into the swamps and jungle of the Irrawaddy Delta just 150 years ago, is by its very nature, a volatile city. This paper traces the evolution of the public park—a significant, if scarce component of urban Yangon—to uncover conflicting traditions of repression and resistance as they are practiced through and within these spaces. Three specific parks are presented, each illuminating different strategies for appropriating meaning in service of and in rejection of power. The first, a large open space currently known as People's Park, surrounding the most important religious monument in the city, which was for nearly a century held in cantonment as a space reproducing military power and colonial recreation while simultaneously destabilizing Buddhist practices and spatial frameworks that predated the British occupation. The second, the park at Inya Lake, which exhibits traditions of occupation of multiple levels: a former colonial suburb, its plantings and spaces have been readapted as it became incorporated into an expanded urban core. The park is most recently being used by the marginal activities of a newly opened society. Finally, a series of former natural spaces along the riverfront are examined as they have come under pressure as land values rise. Some spaces have remained resistant to development by virtue of entrenched religious and cultural practices—a surprising fiat in the most volatile space of the city. Though the production of the colonial city is well-

chronicled, urban histories since the 1960's are not well-known outside of Myanmar and archival records are incomplete. Parks and natural areas within a city—as a living fabric in the city evidencing growth, decay, maintenance and interference—offer a lens into the practices that produced them. Parks and open spaces in Yangon also serve as cultural and spatial, and sometimes spiritual, anchors that structure meaning and belonging in the city's diverse communities. This paper shows that the conflict over parks is deeply imbedded in the cultural and political practices that are and have been transforming the city since it was established.

3. Scenario-Planning in Yangon: Two Futures for an Urban Waterfront – Natalia Echeverri, Lecturer, Department of Urban Planning and Design, The University of Hong Kong (*This paper is co-authored with Ivan Valin*)

Abstract: This paper presentation presents recent speculative work produced by Valeche Studio, an interdisciplinary design and research studio focused on urban design, landscape and architecture. This paper reflects on developing operative approaches to urban design and landscape planning within the highly volatile context of Yangon. Work discussed in the paper have been shown in the 2013 Bi-City Biennale in Urbanism and Architecture in Hong Kong and will be presented in the Urban by Nature, the 2014 International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam. The projects are situated as following: What is the future of urban Yangon? As designers and planners, we don't pretend to tell the future or dare to design for it. Instead, we present two plausible scenarios, each based in credible notions of reality and springing from coexistent, yet contradictory histories of the city. We explore these scenarios for the city in general and for its most contested territory in particular: the waterfront. It is there that a range of voices are converging. Will it be preserved or rebuilt, reclaimed or eroded, will it be a space for the public or will it be limited private interests? Will it flood again? If some of these voices speak from a position of entrenched privilege, other voices, still timid, are finding confidence in speaking out. Our dealings with the city, we have come to understand what many locals still feel in their guts: that growth and increasingly sophisticated urban development is not the only possibility for this city. It is possible that reform in the country is de-railed and that the city returns to some other version of 'development' that grows out of decay and disinvestment. The first scenario explores a Yangon as the city's planners and elites imagine it. "Resurgent Yangon" presents a city that leveraged political transformation into continuous growth. Taking it's subtitle from the Yangon City Development Council's recent publication: "Yangon 2040: Beloved and Peaceful Yangon: A City of Green and Gold". In this scenario, the city must balance an expansion of the core with a protection of public space and ecological functionality. The second scenario explores a return to idleness and disinvestment. "Retrograde Yangon" presents a case for a city that can decay gracefully in spite of growth. It takes its subtitle from the kind of languages used in early Western accounts of the city that captured the contradictory feelings on observing the interface between nature and urban 'civilization'. In this scenario, the city must appropriate small investment for large gains and use natural

systems in place of built infrastructures. Ours is not a wish to predict the future, but rather to open a debate into the challenges of urban development at the water's edge of Yangon and to debate the copious strategies and positions that might arise for the citizen, for the politician, for the planner, for the designer, or for the entrepreneur from the multitudinous hybrid futures that exist between a resurgent or a retrograde Yangon.

Note from organisers: Abstract for a paper by Dr Hlaing Maw Than will be forthcoming soon.