

# **Devon Morris 2016 Roche Scholarship Recipient**

## **Occupy Heritage: Informal Settlements within Myanmar's Historic Architecture**

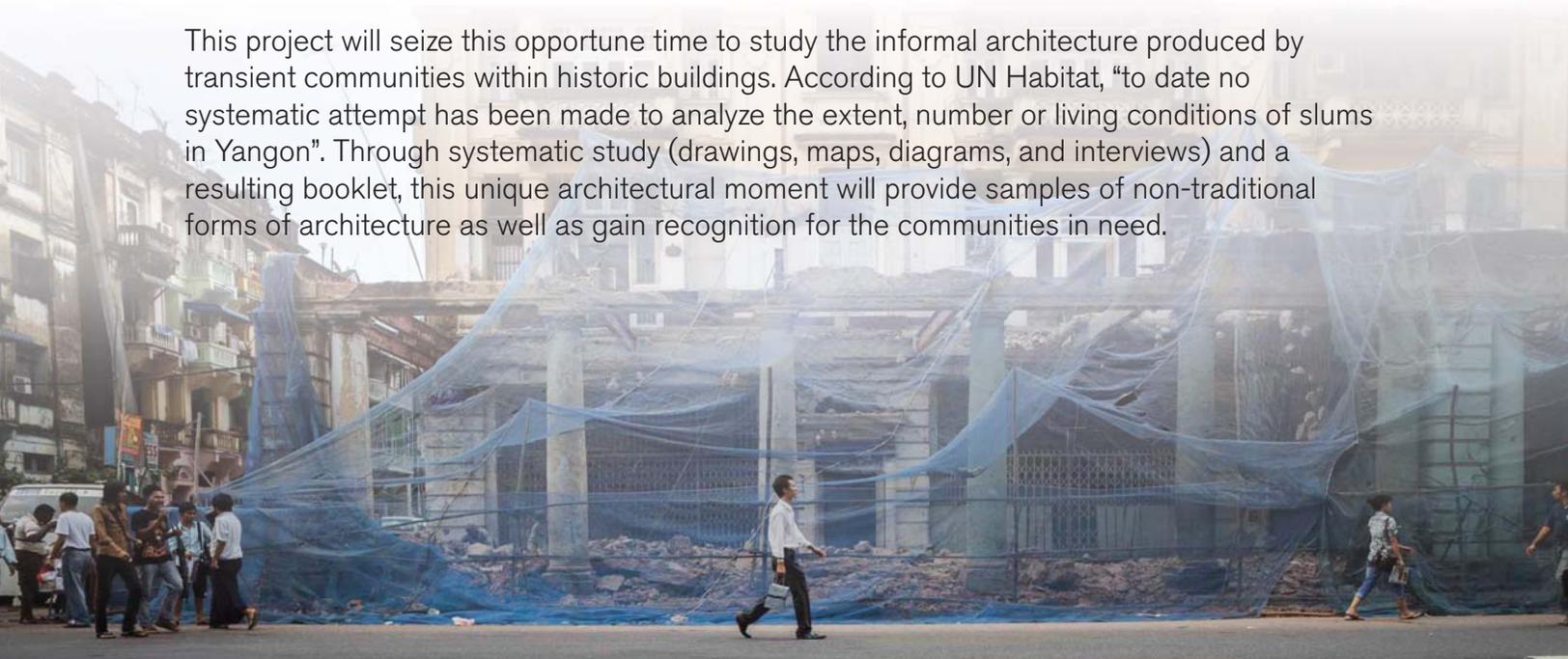
In 1948 Burma became an independent country but shortly fell under a militant coup, resulting in more than fifty years of political and economic isolation. Not until 2011 did the country now known as Myanmar open its borders, and in 2015, hold its first democratic election. Since then, it has been at the forefront of rapid modernization, exemplified by urban development. At the same time, after nearly five decades of disrepair and neglect under a militarist regime, most of the country's heritage sites are struggling. The Burmese government is caught in a conflicting battle between a need to modernize (one third of the country is without electricity) and a desire to preserve (to increase tourism and a sense of history).

In an effort to secure UN funding and global awareness, the Burmese government has proposed 14 sacred sites to UNESCO's World Heritage, but in the urban landscape, non-sacred but still historically significant sites fail to receive recognition. In the former capital of Yangon, the unique Burmese-British blend of 18th Century colonial architecture is being replaced by foreign funded high-rise developments.

Between the crossfire of modernization and preservation sits Myanmar's increasing number of unlawful tenants. With decades of political change, landownership and deeds are a foreign concept that has recently resulted in undefined ownership and forced relocation. Additionally, the destruction caused by the 2008 Cyclone Nargis has displaced many rural communities, forcing them to move to urban settings. As of 2015, 10% of the population of Yangon are squatters, occupying the unprotected historic buildings as a means of relief. The resultant informal dwellings take advantage of the pre-existing structure, location, design, and monumentality of the buildings but also add their own personal attributes.

This conflict is occurring globally; communities of Romani people in Turkey are being forced out of historic neighborhoods as to promote tourism; Peru's Nazca geoglyphs are currently occupied by an overflow of unlawful tenants as the government scrambles to protect the ruins. In Myanmar however, where development currently overrules preservation, the current economic and political change-over is a time sensitive opportunity to record the informal colonization of historic sites before the government relocates inhabitants either for likely demolition or highly-unlikely preservation.

This project will seize this opportune time to study the informal architecture produced by transient communities within historic buildings. According to UN Habitat, "to date no systematic attempt has been made to analyze the extent, number or living conditions of slums in Yangon". Through systematic study (drawings, maps, diagrams, and interviews) and a resulting booklet, this unique architectural moment will provide samples of non-traditional forms of architecture as well as gain recognition for the communities in need.



# **TIMELINE:**

## **Week 1 + 2            PREPARATORY RESEARCH**

Data Compilation  
    Study the location and history of 188 proposed heritage buildings  
Establish local Contacts  
    Yangon Heritage Trust - Dr. Thant Myint-U  
    Local Liaison - Peter Sylvester  
    UN Habitat + Cities Alliance - TBD  
Precedent and Sources Research

### **--- YANGON, MYANMAR ---**

## **Week 3                FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH**

Move into living and workspace  
Meet with local contacts  
Urban exploration and familiarization  
Begin survey of “at-risk” historical buildings

## **Week 4 + 5 +6        INFORMAL ARCHITECTURE**

Continue survey of proposed buildings.  
Move from historic city center to Central Business District.  
Study Hlaingthay neighborhood, which houses the highest concentration of squatters.  
Record, photograph, draw, and diagram the informal dwellings within historic buildings.  
Conduct interviews with inhabitants

## **Week 7 + 8            GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT**

Study renovated and re-purposed historic buildings.  
Focus on government sponsored heritage restoration.  
Focus on government sponsored housing solutions for displaced communities.

### **--- CHICAGO, ILLINOIS ---**

## **Week 9 + 10         DATA SYNTHESIS**

Produce diagrams, charts, and comprehensive maps  
Transcribe interviews  
Finalize drawings and graphics  
Begin production of booklet

## **Week 11**

Publish and Present

## GENERAL BUDGET:

<b>FLIGHT</b>	<b>\$1400.00 USD</b>	Round Trip Chicago (ORD) to Yangon (RGN) for month of July Sources: expedia.com, kayak.com, google.flights.com
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$1300.00 USD</b>	Furnished studio apartment in downtown Yangon for 6 week stay Sources: htecto.com, go-myanmar.com, airbnb.com
<b>MEALS</b>	<b>\$540.00 USD</b>	\$12.00/day Sources: numbeo.com
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$252.00 USD</b>	\$6.00/day Sources: numbeo.com
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>\$190.00 USD</b>	Audio Recorder, film and development, printing, notebooks Sources: amazon.com, nikon.com
<b>PUBLICATION</b>	<b>\$500.00 USD</b>	Print final booklet and report for exhibition/distribution Sources: blurb.com, lulu.com, kinkos.com
<b>VISA</b>	<b>\$50.00 USD</b>	70 day visa Sources: US Embassy of Myanmar
<b>INSURANCE</b>	<b>\$125.00 USD</b>	Sources: BlueCross Travel Insurance, Signaglobal.com
<b>VACCINATIONS</b>	<b>\$75.00 USD</b>	Co-pay for Malaria, Typhoid, and Hepetitis Sources: UIC Campus Care
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4432.00 USD</b>	