

Myanmar's Cultural Diplomacy: A Study of Bagan's Inscription on the World Heritage List

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Abstract

For a developing country like Myanmar, which is still in her initial stage of democratic transition and the process of political opening up to the global community, cultural heritage has been used as a resource not only for enhancing national unity and economic development domestically but also for fostering the country's national image internationally. In this regard, cultural diplomacy plays an important instrument in pursuing Myanmar's foreign policy. However, the term 'culture' is vague, ranging from media, arts, museums, language, literature to heritage preservation as well as the exchange of ideas. Among these cultural resources, this article focuses on the cultural heritage of Myanmar; and studies the government's utilization of cultural heritage in conducting its cultural diplomacy by observing the government's efforts on the cultural heritage site of Bagan to be included in the World Heritage List. Findings from this study show Myanmar's broadened engagement with many stakeholders in pursuing cultural diplomacy along with building national unity and identity as well as promoting visibility and economic development. In this regard, this study reveals not only the characteristics of Myanmar's cultural diplomacy concerning the cultural heritage but also illustrates how the country conducts its cultural diplomacy with the help of UNESCO's international framework.

Key Words : Myanmar's cultural policy, cultural diplomacy, cultural heritage, World Heritage List.

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Introduction

Myanmar has the most durable military regime globally because the military has played an influential role in Myanmar since the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. After a long period of the military regime, the political power was transferred to the civilian government in 2011 as the country's democratic transition had initiated. Being a developing country, which has started its transition towards democracy, the government has put great care in approaching the external world. At the same time, all the available and suitable resources are being used as much as possible to facilitate the country's development process.

In the context of international relations, the role of cultural diplomacy has grown in importance, especially for Third World countries. This article examines cultural diplomacy, which is approached from cultural heritage. Therefore, the notion of cultural diplomacy will be discussed by investigating the 'World Heritage Site of Bagan' in Myanmar. The country is rich in cultural heritage, and preserving ancient cultural heritage is also one of the national tasks based on the country's social objectives, including strengthening national identity and preservation of cultural heritage and national characteristics (Htet Htet Zaw, 2020). Furthermore, cultural heritage is an effective element in the diplomatic landscape. In this respect, the government has paid great attention to the nation's cultural heritage afterward. Myanmar's engagement in the UNESCO World Heritage reflects how the government conducts cultural diplomacy in the international arena.

Upon studying the existing literature in cultural diplomacy, it is noticeable that most of the research on cultural diplomacy focuses on developed countries. Scholarly works that investigate the perspective of developing countries like Myanmar in the field of cultural diplomacy remain small in numbers. Given the lack of substantive academic research on developing countries, studying Myanmar's cultural diplomacy will explain how cultural heritage has been utilized in the operation of Myanmar's cultural diplomacy in line with the country's cultural heritage policies highlighting commitments to international regulations and scrutiny and strengthening national identity. According to the findings in the article, it is worth noting that even nominally externally directed cultural heritage policies can be mainly intended for domestic audiences. Therefore, this article not only contributes to the broader pool of knowledge and literature in the field of cultural diplomacy but also helps to gain insights and familiarity with the country and draw attention to its cultural heritage.

1. Objectives of the Study and Methodology

This article discusses Myanmar's governmental policy concerning Bagan's Inscription on World Heritage List, highlighting the influence of social, political, and economic motivations. Therefore, the article seeks to answer the research questions of 'How does the government of Myanmar engage cultural diplomacy by using cultural heritage during the timeframe between 2011 and 2020; and how does such cultural diplomacy initiative serve Myanmar's national interests in terms of political, economic and identity functions?'. The study is based on a qualitative research method

to describe the role of cultural heritage in Myanmar's cultural diplomacy; and the primary and secondary data are collected through historical records, government's press releases, newspapers, relevant textbooks, reports, articles, relevant websites and interviewing some government officials from concerned ministries.

In addition, conceptual variables and structural variables will be approached in this study to understand the government's use of cultural heritage in its cultural diplomacy for enhancing cooperation and promoting Myanmar interests abroad. The article will be organized into three parts: Definition of Cultural Diplomacy and Related Concepts, Bagan in the Process of Nomination into World Heritage List, and Towards the Global Showcase.

2. Definition of Cultural Diplomacy and Related Concepts

2.1 Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural Diplomacy can be defined as a public policy to promote national culture and develop a relationship with other countries under the cultural context within the framework of foreign policy (Kessler, 2020). Another scholar defined cultural diplomacy as influencing foreign audiences in both commercial and political perspectives (Hurn, 2016). According to his works researching on the role of cultural diplomacy in nation branding, cultural diplomacy is the use of soft power in the implementation of nation branding, and increasing use of cultural diplomacy helps nations, as well as business organizations, realize the benefits from the economic viewpoint in terms of trade, investment, and tourism. Goff (2013) also points out that cultural diplomacy sits on a spectrum of ideational approaches to diplomacy, and alongside it on this spectrum, one can locate soft power, nation branding, and public diplomacy.

By observing those scholarly works, the author notes that the notion of soft power is embedded in cultural diplomacy to some degree. According to Nye (2004), soft power lies in three soft power resources: culture, value, and foreign policy. Culture is indeed one of the soft power resources. Akagawa (2015) also states that culture is the set of shared values to produce desired outcomes. Brand Finance also believes that culture and heritage are pillars that soft power rests on. However, it is undeniable that the concept of soft power is still vague. Although there is a link between cultural resources and soft power, it does not mean that those soft power resources will definitely become the soft power. For example, Hollywood is not America's soft power in some countries while it is in others. Therefore, becoming soft power or not depends on the recipients. However, on the other hand, the Korean wave is a successful example of how cultural resources become soft power. Therefore, governments still try to develop cultural resources with the hope of building soft power, even though soft power is not yet their ultimate goal of conducting cultural diplomacy.

There are many reasons behind the pursuit of cultural diplomacy. Culture is realized as an important component of sustainable development, and governments are increasingly making good use of culture for economic advantage (Basu & Modest, 2015). Avraham (2015) points out that various elements of culture are used to promote a positive image of the country and its people in the

global arena. Hence, extensive use of cultural diplomacy is more likely to be conducted in countries dealing with the ongoing crisis to rebuild their image. In addition to the economic advantage and positive image, some governments develop cultural diplomacy to make their countries visible in the international realm.

In their study of cultural diplomacy policies, Gienow-Hecht & Donfried (2010) emphasize the importance of approaching the roles of agents of cultural diplomacy analytically. In doing so, they delineate 'conceptual' variables and 'structural' variables researchers ought to consider. Conceptual variables involve the goals of cultural diplomacy policymakers and their own conceptualizations of problems and approaches, while structural variables define who can be an agent of cultural diplomacy as well as the national interest these policies are intended to serve. The author also believes that these variables are helpful to understand Myanmar's governmental policy on cultural heritage and hence, are observed in this article.

2.2 Cultural Heritage

According to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session in Paris on 16 November 1972, monuments and groups of buildings that are of outstanding universal value from the viewpoint of history, art, and science; and sites that are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological perspectives are considered as "cultural heritage" (*UNESCO World Heritage Centre*).

Many studies related to cultural heritage suggest that cultural heritage acts as a country's soft power, or at least it helps cultivate soft power. According to Nye (2008), soft power is defined as "the ability to influence others to achieve the results one wants through co-opt and attraction rather than using force," and such kind of ability is driven by the attractiveness of culture, values and foreign policies (Nye, 2004). Meskell (2018) said that world heritage serves as a mechanism for soft power, and Maags (2021) and Rots and Teeuwen (2020) also discussed the relationship between cultural heritage and soft power in their works. Their studies also explained that governments use cultural heritage not only for international purposes but also for domestic intentions, which means that developing cultural heritage intends to facilitate soft power and national identity and prestige.

There are many attributes that cultural heritage can offer. Cultural heritage, in general, is the reflection of human history and civilization; and often has been regarded as an essential factor in unifying citizens, and it helps develop a strong sense of the nation's identity. Basu and Modest (2015) argue that cultural heritage can be acknowledged in the form of tangible material culture and intangible culture; and employed to serve different purposes in development contexts in terms of economic, social, and political objectives. Some authors argue that cultural heritage acts as an engine for economic development if the heritage site is appropriately managed and promoted. Nakano and Zhu (2020) also stated that cultural heritage serves as soft power and is also a powerful instrument for the country's socio-economic development because heritage offers the power of

attraction and attention from foreign audiences. Therefore, governments are promoting their national heritage sites in tourism sectors.

Many developing countries see cultural heritage as an essential aspect of a country's economy and society (Facchinetti, 2014). This is because getting cultural heritage status benefits those countries in terms of enhanced management plans, better capacity building, and responsible tourism. The contributions of cultural heritage are not limited to soft power, socio-economic benefits, national identity, and prestige. Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) point out that developing countries with lower global visibility use the World Heritage Lists to increase their visibility. That is why, along with the increasing realization of the importance of international engagement in heritage conservation and promotion, governments have recognized the importance of World Heritage status rather than keeping their cultural heritage at the national level.

2.3 Cultural Heritage and Nation Branding

Even though the term 'Nation Branding' was coined in 1998 by Simon Anholt (Tecmen, 2018), the related concept of this terminology has existed since the 1960s (Dolea, 2015) by realizing the effects of country-of-origin. Before the term 'Nation Branding' was introduced, people were familiar with the concept of 'country-of-origin,' which would have similarities in effect as 'nation branding' in a sense. For example, when we hear 'Mount Fuji,' we think of Japan; and when we talk about the best watches, 'Switzerland' comes to mind. This shows the effects of country-of-origin somehow. Nowadays, the term 'Nation Branding' is widely used by governments to increase their visibility and survive in the competitive globalized arena in terms of both political and economic benefits. At this point, it can be seen that nation branding and cultural heritage share in common in terms of increasing visibility and that the cultural heritage of Japan, Mount Fuji, serves in nation branding.

According to Tecmen (2018), nation branding is how countries create their nation brand that represents a wide variety of intangible competitive assets of a country, instigate foreign audiences' familiarity and attempt to survive in the international system. In one of the journal articles from *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, it is said that nation branding is the process of managing the country's whole image in the global public sphere by taking care of issues from political, economic, and cultural perspectives, respectively (Fan, 2010). Another journal article from the same source also noted that countries conduct nation branding activities to mitigate their attached negative stereotypes and improve positive reputations and that the perennial purpose of nation branding is to enhance the nation's competitiveness in the economic, political, and cultural aspects (White & Kolesnicov, 2015).

Nation branding is one of the strategies designed to help create national identities and state's self-esteem, while heritage itself plays an essential role in developing the nation-state and national identity (Nakano & Zhu, 2020). In this connection, World Heritage List and World Heritage nominations help in national identity-making and create national credibility in the international arena. Hurn's work on cultural diplomacy in nation branding also strengthens this concept. Nation

branding is regarded as one of the main instruments of cultural diplomacy; and the process of nation branding aims to communicate the name and identity of a country, and it helps a nation raise its profile abroad by projecting it recognized and respected on the international stage (Hurn, 2016).

3. Bagan in the Process of Nomination into World Heritage List

This section approaches conceptual and structural variables to examine Myanmar's governmental policy concerning Bagan's Inscription on World Heritage List.

3.1 Conceptual variables towards Bagan's Inscription on World Heritage List

According to the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law (1998) of Myanmar, the State Peace and Development Council defined cultural heritage as an ancient monument and an ancient site in need of protection and preservation due to its historical, cultural, artistic or anthropological value. The author interviewed an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. According to him, the Myanmar government was reluctant to develop its cultural diplomacy due to the lack of political will in the past. However, the government's attitude towards cultural diplomacy was improved by the country's democratic transition along with the increasing occasions of international engagement.

As a developing country, in the case of the World Heritage Site of Bagan, the government's use of cultural heritage in cultural diplomacy is based on a dual-motive policy that intends to achieve benefits from both foreign and domestic aspects. Observing the former President and former State Counsellor's speeches regarding Bagan's inscription on World Heritage List, it is found that the government wants to promote Myanmar's cultural heritage to the world, to engage with global people through their cultures and histories, and to get other countries joined with Myanmar in the preservation of Bagan's cultural heritage and make it as an inheritance for all the future generations of the world. At the same time, the government also wants to elevate the dignity of the country and be proud of being recognized as a genuine heritage valuable for all the global people, build the national identity, and achieve socio-economic development.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, Bagan being recognized as a World Heritage Site helps not only Myanmar people but also people of the world to become aware of Myanmar cultural heritage, which portrays the national identity of Myanmar, which has a long history and high cultural standard. Thein Lwin, Deputy Director General (Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture), stated that the origin of Bagan dated back to the 2nd century AD, and Paleolithic implements were found in the region (Thein Lwin, 2020). Therefore, humans have lived in the Bagan region since the Stone Age. Hence, Bagan can be said as a national heritage site that offers the national historical narratives of Myanmar in the international context.

3.2 Structural variables towards Bagan's Nomination into World Heritage List

Who are the stakeholders of Myanmar's cultural diplomacy in the case of Bagan? Not only state actors but also non-state actors and international organizations were involved in the process of Bagan's nomination into World Heritage List. Responsible persons of UNESCO, JICA, the World Bank, the donor countries of Italy, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, other relevant ministries, regional governments, the parliamentarians, the local people in Bagan, NGOs, and artists had participated in the efforts to achieve UNESCO's recognition of Bagan as a World Heritage Site.

Moreover, the Myanmar government also actively cooperated with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), JICA, the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Carleton University (Canada), National Research Institute in Cultural Properties (Tokyo), Lerici Foundation, State Administration of Cultural Heritage (China), Archaeological Survey of India, World Bank, Australian National University, and Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation to strengthen the capacity building in respective subject matter as well as to increase the potential to be successful in Bagan's nomination process.

Despite the involvement of many stakeholders in the process of inscribing Bagan on the World Heritage List, it is noted that the critical player handling the subject matters was the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture since the Department of Archaeology and National Museum under the said Ministry mainly dealt with the nomination process for Bagan to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as the supporting Ministry by having Myanmar Embassy in Paris keep in touch with ICOMOS to provide and receive the necessary information in preparation for the Nomination Dossier.

4. Towards the Global Showcase

This section of the article explores how the government had taken measures in the pursuit of cultural diplomacy to achieve its goal on the global stage. According to the Decision Code 43 COM 8B.20 at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee, Bagan has been inscribed on the World Heritage List based on the criteria of being a unique testimony to civilization, being an outstanding architecture, and being associated with living traditions which all prove the outstanding universal significance of the property. This ended a long wait for Myanmar as its first attempt of Bagan for the World Heritage status back in 1995.

4.1 The Failure of First Attempt

Bagan served as the capital of the Bagan Kingdom, which unified the regions that constitute the country of today. In addition, Bagan was the center of an economic, socio-political, and cultural network in a Buddhist empire between the 11th and 13th centuries; and the people's religious devotion and wealth of this empire can be seen through the unprecedented scale, and density of the architecture in the region (*The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 2019) and this heritage site represents

the glorious period of Burmese civilization (Yoshiaki, 1989). In 1975, a large-scale earthquake caused severe damage to the place, and the government of Myanmar requested UNESCO to assist in assessing the damage and the preservation of the monuments in the area.

UNESCO sent several missions, including Pierre Pichard, a consultant as well as an international coordinator of the Bagan Restoration Project, to Bagan to make a survey of the damages and to submit reports. Later, a joint Burma/UNESCO/UNDP project was initiated in 1980 (Yoshiaki, 1989). During the project, expert teams from the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) visited Bagan; UNESCO assisted equipment, consultancy, and specialized training; UNDP also offered technical and financial assistance; the governments of France and Italy provided training facilities as well as scholarship awards to improve the human capital in the field of preserving cultural heritage, and the Japanese government assisted in terms of construction materials and motor-vehicles for the conservation work.

Significant progress had been made under the project, and Myanmar ratified the Convention Concerning the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) on 29 April 1994. In 1995, Myanmar authorities had prepared the nomination dossier for Bagan to be included in the World Heritage List and had put in a bid for Bagan in 1996. An ICOMOS evaluation mission visited Bagan in February 1996 and offered an evaluation report in March 1997 to the State Party as 'referred back.'

Despite the significant progress under the joint Burma/UNESCO/UNDP project, the Myanmar government permitted the construction of hotels and golf courses among the temples in the 1990s (*The Irrawaddy*, 2014). Moreover, about 1,000 temples had been renovated, with little attention paid to historical accuracy. Therefore, it can be noted that the application was rejected mainly because the government had not taken onboard authoritative advice enough on restoration efforts.

4.2 Reviving Bagan: Second Attempt for the UNESCO Badge

Myanmar's tangible cultural heritage is one of the richest and most diverse in the Southeast Asia region. After isolating itself from the international community for a long time, the country began to open to the global economy under the Thein Sein administration. The government had put more effort into global recognition of its cultural heritage afterward. Facchinetti's research on cultural heritage management in Myanmar shows that Myanmar's cultural heritage (if properly managed) can be a helpful resource in implementing the country's development goals in the fields of economic growth, social, political, and environmental conservation (Facchinetti, 2014).

However, Myanmar has been stuck in a reputational crisis under political factors, and those crises seem to overshadow any news regarding Myanmar. Is it not better to develop international engagement rather than let those crises sour the country? Given Myanmar's situation of dealing with those political crises and human rights issues, the government tried to revive Bagan with better multilateral cooperation among the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, UNESCO, UNDP, ICCROM, ICOMOS, and many other supporting ministries.

Efforts have been restarted under the administration of President Thein Sein and continued to

the administration of President Win Myint. To successfully achieve UNESCO's badge on Bagan Cultural Heritage Site, the government of Myanmar has made a great effort through the adoption of the Integrated Management Framework, which is composed of (a) Institutional Framework; (b) Legal Framework; and (c) Resources Framework. A lot of diplomatic engagements and multilateral cooperation were made under these frameworks.

(a) Institutional Framework

The government of Myanmar has established the Myanmar National Culture Central Committee and Bagan National Coordinating Committee to provide the organizational set-up. Myanmar National Culture Central Committee is inter-ministerial level, and it has been established under the Vice President to better coordinate between all concerned ministries. Bagan National Coordinating Committee is at the regional and district level, and it has been established to make Bagan Cultural Heritage Site be in line with international rules and regulations. Furthermore, ICOMOS Myanmar was accredited by ICOMOS Board in March 2017 to pursue close cooperation between two parties.

(b) Legal Framework

The government of Myanmar has adopted the legal provisions for the Bagan Cultural Heritage Site to strengthen legal protection. Measures include both enacting new laws as well as amending existing laws. For example, Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law 1998 was amended in 2009 and updated the rules and regulations in 2011; Protection and Preservation of Ancient Monuments Law were enacted in 2015 and updated as Protection and Preservation of Ancient Monuments Bylaw in 2016; and Protection and Preservation of Antique Objects Law were enacted in 2015 and then, updated as Protection and Preservation of Antique Objects Bylaw in 2016 respectively. In addition to domestic Laws, the Myanmar government has also ratified the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property on 5 September 2013; and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 7 May 2014. In this regard, the government took measures not only at the national level to strengthen legal provisions for cultural heritage protection but also at the international level to align with international standards and show Myanmar's commitment as a responsible member of the international community.

(c) Resources Framework

The government of Myanmar has conducted close cooperation with JICA, ICCROM, Carleton University (Canada), National Research Institute in Cultural Properties (Tokyo), Leric Foundation, State Administration of Cultural Heritage (China), Archaeological Survey of India, World Bank, Australian National University, Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation, and many more international organizations to manage human resources, financial resources, material, and equipment resources under this framework (See 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List: BAGAN').

4.3 Preparation of Documentation

Through the Integrated Management Framework designed for Bagan Cultural Heritage Site,

Myanmar authorities have reached the point where they can prepare the Nomination Dossier to submit to ICOMOS in 2018. According to the Advisory Body Evaluation by ICOMOS submitted to World Heritage Committee, an ICOMOS technical evaluation mission was sent to Bagan from 15 to 24 September 2018. By studying the correspondence back and forth between ICOMOS and the State Party, it is found that Myanmar Embassy in Paris served as a mediator to bridge between ICOMOS and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. In October 2018, ICOMOS sent the correspondent to Myanmar Embassy, which is based in Paris, asking for additional information to be added to the Nomination Dossier prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. With the help of the Myanmar Embassy, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture revised the Nomination Dossier and submitted the modified Nomination Dossier to ICOMOS again.

Then, ICOMOS World Heritage Panel Evaluation was held in November 2018. The Embassy of Myanmar in Paris had met with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel on 23 November 2018 (See 'GB/AS/1588/IR'), and the exchanges between both sides were helpful to the submission procedure of Nomination Dossier as ICOMOS asked for additional information for Interim Report in December 2018 through the diplomatic channel and the State Party responded to the request on time. The whole process of ICOMOS evaluation concluded in March 2019. After completing the ICOMOS evaluation process, World Heritage Committee documents WHC/19/43.COM/8B and WHC/19/43.COM/ INF.8B1 were submitted to the committee and examined for the inscription on the World Heritage List. Finally, Bagan was successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List on 6 July 2019 (See 'WHC/19/43.COM/18').

4.4 Perceived Benefits

Myanmar's cultural heritage preservation practice is in its infancy. In such a country, receiving UNESCO's badge is the incremental achievement or a milestone in the process of the government's practices on cultural diplomacy. Under the government's dual-motive policy regarding cultural heritage, Bagan's inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List not only promote the country's tourism but also helps the process of nation branding by communicating the name and identity of Myanmar because being inscribed into the World Heritage List results in projecting the place to be recognized and respected worldwide and hence increasing the country's international profile and placing greater emphasis on its role as a responsible member of the international community.

For example, on 15 December 2021, the Voluntary Agency Network of Korea, a non-governmental organization, mentioned Bagan as 'a world heritage site that continues to show the world's Buddhist traditions and culture to the present day' on its Facebook page both in English and Korean languages in pictures. Furthermore, Bagan was described as Myanmar's ancient Buddhist city of World Heritage Site on Buddhistdoor Global website. On 17 February 2020, Drew Binsky, a travel blogger, uploaded a video of his trip to Bagan on his Facebook page. Those appearances on foreign media help promote the country's visibility to some extent. In addition to visibility, the author also observed the comments under Binsky's video. The author found that most of the comments

discussed were about foreign tourists' favorable experiences in Bagan, their appreciation of Bagan and the local people, and their desire to revisit the place. However, the author also found that few people, who did not mention if they had been to Myanmar or not, commented that they hate Myanmar just for political conflicts. So, the government has built soft power resources, but whether these soft power resources become soft power or not depends on the recipients.

Regarding economic benefits, Bagan was mentioned in the Top 30 Millennial Travel Destinations for 2019, the most popular bucket-list destination for muvTravel users (Krause, 2019). Bagan is always one of Myanmar's highlights (Richmond et al., 2017) under tourist attraction destinations sections of the Travel Guide Books such as '*The Rough Guide to Myanmar*' and '*Lonely Planet Myanmar (Burma) Travel Guide*.' The place is even regarded as one of the great wonders of Asia and one of Asia's great sights (Saunders & Stephens, 2017). Therefore, if we look at Table 1, it can be said that economic benefits such as more significant revenue from tourism jobs and employment opportunities were partly from Bagan's inscription on World Heritage List.

Table 1: Tourist Arrivals in Myanmar

Months	Number of Tourists		
	2018	2019	2020
January	324,505	380,172	408,182
February	607,150	747,905	648,393
March	928,453	1,136,615	816,851
April	1,225,856	1,502,404	823,162
May	1,488,970	1,842,315	832,094
June	1,722,049	2,143,468	841,857
July	1,970,013	2,474,311	852,432
August	2,259,981	2,814,139	–
September	2,511,984	3,144,270	–
October	2,844,598	3,523,784	–
November	3,188,274	3,930,150	–
December	3,551,428	4,364,101	–

Note: Data is the cumulative number of tourist arrivals except for the data of January.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Myanmar Tourism Statistics (<https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>)

Unfortunately, pandemics made it difficult to further study the impacts in terms of economic advantages. However, the government of Italy has granted 400,000 euros to build the capacity for safeguarding cultural heritage in Myanmar (*UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2011*), and Myanmar received financial assistance and international expert advice from the World Heritage Committee as well. This helps to reduce Myanmar's financial burden on preserving its cultural heritage to some

extent, as the government had to carry out costly restoration works. It is hoped that UNESCO's badge on Bagan will prevent any further damage to the site by securing support from the international community.

Moreover, this award is significant, primarily when the Myanmar government seeks to improve its status locally and play an active role on the global stage by using its cultural heritage since the cultural heritage serves as a soft element in the diplomatic landscape. Furthermore, the award helps to raise the global awareness of Bagan's exceptional features, historical, architectural, and artistic value and stimulate local conservation efforts. Indeed, at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee, the Myanmar delegation had got the chance to showcase Bagan's history and explain the historical value of the place in front of the other member states; and it was proudly mentioned in the nationwide newspaper (*The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 2019). Abhijit Dutta, the author of 'Myanmar in the World: Journeys through a Changing Burma,' shared his experience that he felt a sense of pride on the faces of the people he met during his stay in Myanmar (The Hindu, 2019). He also mentioned that the pride he would encounter would grow more confident when he visited Bagan next time.

Recently, the author has conducted telephone interviews with those involved in the tourism industry in Myanmar. One is Ye Htut Win, a founder of Silver Song Travels and Tours Company, and another one is Soe Min, a tour guide. When the author asked Ye Htut Win about how he thought of Bagan, he said, "Generally, Myanmar people are proud of Bagan as it has a long history in our country. Bagan is the beginning of the first Myanmar Empire, and this place is the heart of our people. This is the place our people value as it is the core of our religion, culture, literature, arts, and architecture." Then, the author contacted Soe Min and asked him whether he, as a Myanmar citizen, regarded Bagan as the national identity of Myanmar or not. According to Soe Min's answer, he firmly believed that Bagan is Myanmar's national identity. He even provided the author with some examples along with his opinions. He said that people knew it was China when they heard of the Great Wall, France when they heard of the Eiffel Tower, and the U.S.A when they heard of the Statue of Liberty. He also claimed that people knew it was Myanmar when they heard of Bagan, based on his tour guide experience with tourists from different countries.

After Bagan's inclusion in the World Heritage List, *The Global New Light of Myanmar* (7 and 8 July 2019), a nationwide newspaper, welcomed the UNESCO's badge on Bagan by having articles describing the outstanding universal value of Bagan and its unique cultural significance; how Bagan's value was transcending national boundaries and recognized on the global stage. Some articles in the newspaper also raised public awareness of Bagan's upgrading from national heritage into international heritage, as well as the responsibilities that Myanmar people must share with the international community. Even a group of photographers, known as 'Bagan From Our Heart,' went to the UNESCO's meeting at their own expense to support the designation of Bagan as a World Heritage Site (*The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 2019). This showed how Myanmar people valued Bagan and were enthusiastic about this designation. Therefore, last but not least, it can be seen

that Myanmar's success in achieving World Heritage status for Bagan boosts national pride and reaffirms Myanmar's position as a country of deep history since Bagan is not just for Myanmar but also it is for the world, as Bagan is the heritage of the world.

Conclusion

In the context of Myanmar, the inscription of the Bagan archaeological site to the World Heritage List is the achievement of Myanmar's cultural diplomacy efforts. This article explains the Myanmar government's use of Bagan in cultural diplomacy under the government's dual-motive policy concerning cultural heritage. It is found that the government has tried to facilitate soft power resources by transforming the national heritage into world heritage. Although Myanmar's advantage in these resources has not yet resulted in a dramatic change of comparable attractiveness in the world, the government's objectives in domestic aspect and foreign aspects have been fulfilled step by step, little by little, in terms of visibility, national pride, national identity, and economic development.

The government has put significant efforts in setting up and strengthening Institutional Framework, Legal Framework, and Resources Framework with solid determination and attitude towards cultural diplomacy attempting to protect Myanmar's cultural heritage. This achievement of Bagan's inscription on the World Heritage List not only encourages local cultural expressions in terms of the local cultural sector, improving social cohesion and environmental protection but also contributes to the global world by developing a mutual understanding of shared cultural values for future generations of humanity. Moreover, this serves as evidence of the international cooperation and utility of global engagement as well as serves to endorse its contribution to the culture.

National heritage being listed on the World Heritage List means the global recognition of the country's efforts in cultural heritage safeguard, and this helps to draw attention to Myanmar's cultural heritage at the international level. In addition, this successful case of Myanmar's cultural diplomacy articulated cultural heritage as an instrument of building (Burmese Buddhist) national identity and moral restoration, enhancing visibility on the international scene. Therefore, the study proves that cultural heritage has become a resource for various political, economic, and social objectives, such as enhancing national unity and economic development domestically as well as fostering Myanmar's national image internationally.

After considering the above, this article shows that Myanmar's cultural diplomacy is conducted by broadening engagement with a wide range of stakeholders in nominating Bagan on the World Heritage List, not only for international engagement but also for the sense of the country's national unity and identity. In this regard, the article helps to improve our understanding of cultural diplomacy and reveals the role of cultural heritage in Myanmar's cultural diplomacy in academic works.

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Documents and Speeches

- (1) Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List: BAGAN

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- (2) GB/AS/1588-Add.Inf_1
 - (3) GB/AS/1588/IR
 - (4) WHC/19/43.COM/8B
 - (5) WHC/19/43.COM/INF.8B1
 - (6) WHC/19/43.COM/18
 - (7) President and State Counsellor Speeches regarding Bagan

Interviews

- (1) Than Htike, Director from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 22.4.2021.
- (2) Soe Min, tour guide, 29.6.2021.
- (3) Ye Htut Win, founder of Silver Song Travels and Tours Company, 20.6.2021.