

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

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Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2024

H.E. Ms. Thi Van Anh Nguyen
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of the Socialist
Republic of Viet Nam to UNESCO
61, rue Miromesnil
Paris 75008

World Heritage List 2025

Yen Tu-Vinh Nghiem-Con Son, Kiep Bac Complex of Monuments and Landscapes (Viet Nam) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2025. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “Yen Tu-Vinh Nghiem-Con Son, Kiep Bac Complex of Monuments and Landscapes” was carried out by Mr. Ratish Nanda (India) in August 2024. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 26 September 2024, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the maps of the component parts, the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value, the comparative analysis, buffer zones, protection and management, major threats and conservation, management, visitation and presentation, research, funding, and the monitoring of the nominated property. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 9 November 2024 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2024, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2025. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with the mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2025.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 25 November 2024 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the “Yen Tu-Vinh Nghiem-Con Son, Kiep Bac Complex of Monuments and Landscapes” might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

General narrative of the nomination

ICOMOS acknowledges that the general narrative of the nomination focuses on the history and far reaching influence of Truc Lam Buddhism and its impact on the foundation and development of the Vietnamese state. The different component parts of the nominated property express a political and religious narrative, but they do not clearly show how the two aspects intersect. ICOMOS also notices that the nomination narrative mostly focuses on the 13th and 14th centuries, which correspond to the rule of the Tran Dynasty. However, many of the attributes of the 20 component parts of the nominated property cover a much broader time frame, from the 13th century to the present. ICOMOS agrees that this multifaceted and diachronic vision of the Yen Tu complex of monuments and landscapes is certainly of great importance for Viet Nam, but it makes it difficult to understand its potential Outstanding Universal Value, “[...] *the cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity*” (*Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, paragraph 49).

In addition, ICOMOS notes that the potential Outstanding Universal Value does not need to be unidimensional, but a clear narrative relating all the component parts of the series would be required. Indeed, according to the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, in the context of a nominated serial property, “*each component part should contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property as a whole in a substantial, scientific, readily defined and discernible way [...]*” (paragraph 137).

ICOMOS would also like to inform the State Party that a refocusing of the nomination narrative would most likely impact the selection of the component parts and the related comparative analysis. Any change in this respect would have to be explained in detail.

Distinguishing characteristics of Truc Lam Buddhism

ICOMOS acknowledges the additional information that was provided by the State Party in November 2024 on the architectural style of Truc Lam Buddhism and the symbolism of royal relics. As a follow-up question, ICOMOS would like to know what distinguishes Truc Lam Buddhism and its tangible expressions (artefacts, buildings, interaction with the environment, etc.) from other Buddhist sects in the region. Which of these specificities are the component parts reflecting? It should be noted that these specificities should be reflected in physical attributes as well as intangible attributes as the World Heritage Convention is a site-based Convention.

Difference between use of criterion (v) and the concept of cultural landscape

The State Party describes the relationship of the Truc Lam Buddhists with nature as “*the integration between people and the environment, through selection of suitable natural sites in the mountains for occupation and religious worship, use of natural materials for construction and resources for living (food, fuel, and medicine)*” (nomination dossier, p. 156). However, ICOMOS would like to better understand what makes the case of Yen Tu special in that respect.

Furthermore, this line of argumentation is employed by the State Party in relation to the use of criterion (v) as well as in relation with the concept of cultural landscape. With reference to the nominated property as an “*organically and continuously evolved cultural landscape*”, the State Party notes that “*all the landscape features within the nominated property, e.g. mountains, ridges, streams, waterfalls, forests*

and pilgrimage routes, are currently protected" (nomination dossier, p. 246). ICOMOS would like to understand what difference the State Party sees between the concept of cultural landscape and the use of criterion (v), if any.

Authenticity - reconstruction

The arguments used to demonstrate the authenticity of the nominated property and its attributes are very broad references to continuities, principally in use, function, location and setting. The nomination dossier also mentions inscriptions, Buddhist scriptures and poems, epitaphs, maps, etc. However, this information is very general and does only in very few cases make references to specific built and tangible attributes of the nominated property. While this information attests to a general continuity of ritual practice, ICOMOS would like to receive more specific information on the authenticity of the built and tangible attributes that convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

In addition, as mentioned in the nomination dossier in the description of the nominated component parts (pp.81-143), ICOMOS acknowledges that several component parts have been reconstructed during the 20th century. However, the nomination dossier does not provide clear or detailed information in this regard. ICOMOS would welcome more clarity on which component parts have been reconstructed, on the scope and documentation of these reconstructions as well as on the associated archaeological evidence.

Intangible heritage

ICOMOS acknowledges the importance of intangible heritage expressed through ceremonies, ritual practices, or oral history that is related to the nominated property. Could the State Party please provide more information about how these intangible cultural expressions have been studied and possibly inventoried?

Risk of fire and theft

ICOMOS notes that some of the archaeological and historical artefacts that are part of the nominated property are stored in environments where fire and theft are potential threats to their conservation. Could the State Party please clarify what measures are being undertaken to mitigate these risks?

Community involvement

ICOMOS acknowledges that the State Party has involved (and plans to continue involving) local communities, particularly local authorities (duty bearers), in the management process of the nominated property. It is also understood that the local communities are generally supportive of the nomination process. However, ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could clarify the participatory processes. Which local communities (rights holders) were engaged during the nomination process, and how will they be actively involved in the management, conservation and interpretation of the nominated property in the future?

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above requested information by **28 February 2025 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* concerning additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this statutory deadline will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any additional information submitted within the statutory deadline, it will not be possible to properly evaluate a completely revised

nomination or a large amount of new information submitted at the last minute. ICOMOS would therefore be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation procedure.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Department of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
 Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre