<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>The future of Asia's past: an international conference on the preservation of Asia's architectural heritage, Chiang Mai, Thailand January 11-14, 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Murphy, JD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citation</strong></td>
<td>International Journal of Cultural Property, 1995, v. 4 n. 2, p. 369-376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issued Date</strong></td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10722/42399">http://hdl.handle.net/10722/42399</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rights</strong></td>
<td>This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.; International Journal of Cultural Property. Copyright © Cambridge University Press.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conference Reports


J. David Murphy*

The historic, but environmentally-threatened, city of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand was an appropriate venue for what may well have been the most significant Asia-oriented cultural property conference to date. It was not overstatement to advertise the conference as an “unprecedented gathering of scholars, government officials, tour operators, industrial developers, archaeological experts, and the interested public...designed to stimulate awareness of the impact of increased tourism, economic development, and threats such as natural disasters and pollution on Asia’s rich and often fragile architectural heritage”.

The conference was a collaboration of The Asia Society, a leading American educational institution; The Siam Society, an organisation under royal patronage dedicated to the promotion of artistic, scientific and cultural affairs of Thailand and neighbouring countries; and the Getty Conservation Institute, an operating programme of the J. Paul Getty trust committed to the preservation of cultural heritage worldwide.

The Future of Asia’s Past is a three-part project that began with two conferences presented in New York by The Asia Society, dealing with issues of conservation in Cambodia (1992) and in Vietnam and Laos (1993). The Getty Conservation Institute had also previously co-sponsored three conferences devoted to conservation, site management, and policy in Asia—Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific: Conservation and Policy (Honolulu, 1991 and Sri Lanka, 1993) and Conservation of Ancient Sites on the Silk Road (Dunhuang, China, 1993). In spite of these laudable efforts, Asian cultural property conferences have been relatively rare. This is particularly unfortunate if for no other reason than that, as Vishakha Desai of The Asia Society observed in opening remarks, Asia is unquestionably now “at the centre of the global stage”.

The Chiang Mai conference was arguably the most ambitious such undertaking in Asia¹. The impressively large number of speakers and conference registrants included representatives from UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Monuments Fund, national governments,

* Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong.
scholarly institutions, private foundations, non-governmental organizations, museums, conservation institutes, industry, and the arts media.

The conference was structured around six thematic plenary sessions: Preservation Policy in Asia, Cultural Tourism and Monuments, Vernacular Architecture and Colonial Legacy, Public and Private Partnerships, Threats to Architectural Sites, and World Monuments Watch: The Endangered Heritage Program of the World Monuments Fund. Interspersed between these "macro" sessions were numerous "micro" sessions devoted to the management of specific sites, and the particular challenges facing each.

The overriding theme of the sessions was effectively captured in his opening address by Rear Admiral Usni Pramoj, the Representative of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand, who warned that "economic growth today could lead to cultural poverty tomorrow". The dizzying pace of economic development in the Asian region has threatened architectural heritage on a scale that the world has never seen before.

The plenary session on Preservation Policy in Asia identified other pervasive themes, such as the politics of cultural preservation, and the desirability of a uniquely Asian "charter" of cultural heritage. It also highlighted some controversial Asian perspectives on preservation. M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, Director Emeritus of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Architecture and Fine Arts, Thailand, pointed out that the Thai government takes the view that heritage may be preserved in a "revivalist" manner by constructing all future government buildings in traditional style. Moreover, foreign influences are regarded as important to the Thai heritage. Chinese architectural style, as an example, was popular in the 19th century, and the Grand Palace complex in Bangkok contains a Western building with a Thai roof. It was argued that developing countries cannot stop modern architecture; "art dies otherwise". Public preservation efforts in Thailand are complicated by a "conflict of laws" in which ecclesiastical law gives control of temples to individual abbotts.

Asian art scholar and Director Emeritus of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Jan Fontein, observed that historically in Asia "living" religious monuments were altered ad hoc by believers and rulers who made additions and overpainted wall paintings in an effort to render temples "grander", thus ensuring karmic rewards in the next life. "Unfortunately, in modern times this laudable display of devotion is not always restrained by considerations of conservation or good taste, and can threaten the architectural integrity of historical monuments." Ironically, seclusion, poverty and neglect are what have saved some Asian monuments. While wide preservation experience is being built up in developing countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, others are not so fortunate. It is sobering to bear in mind that in the terror of the Pol Pot years in Cambodia almost all trained conservators lost their lives, a tragedy that has caused an almost complete discontinuity in conservation and maintenance.

The vital importance of tourism was highlighted by Karna Sakya, President of the Travel Industry Association of Nepal, who observed that in his country, which has a long history dating back to the 1st century, the extent of controls placed on some states, such as Cambodia, helps rebuild their societies.

Session moderator Lesley Nostra, suggested a definition which enables people to express their life of other people, reflecting conditions and the intellectual context of the "unfamiliar". He drew on a broad definition of "cultural" or "rural" setting. Indeed, Krupali of the remote villages in Nepal ("the totality of the relationship with nature and culture") asked the principles for the balance agreed by the ICOMOS UNESCO.
practical, non-governmental organi-
states, industry, and the arts 
sed six thematic plenary ses-
tourism and Monu-
are, Public and Pri-
these “macro” sessions were 
management of specific 
ent was effectively captured in  
i Pramoj, the Representa-
Thailand, who warned that 
poverty tomorrow”. 
ment in the Asian region has 
ale that the world has never 
other 
also 
the 
thesis 
Asia identified 
other 
sphere of cultural preservation, and 
heritage. It 
lian perspectives on preser-
ctor Emeritus of the SEA-
ne and Fine Arts, Thailand, 
kes the view that heritage 
by constructing all future 
 Moreover, foreign influ-
heritage. Chinese archi-
lar in the 19th century, and 
contains a Western building 
ing countries cannot stop 
t. Public preservation efforts 
et of laws” in which ecclesi-
dividual abbotts. 
ues of the Boston Museum of 
istorically in Asia “living” 
soc by believers and rulers 
all paintings in an effort to 
karmic rewards in the next 
laudable display of de-
erations of conservation or 
tural integrity of historical 
erty and neglect are what 
wide preservation experi-
tries such as Indonesia and 
is sobering to bear in mind 
Cambodia almost all trained 
has caused an almost 
complete discontinuity in the Cambodian tradition of temple recon-
struction and maintenance.

The vital importance of tourism to the Asian economies was high-
lighted by Karma Sakya, President of the Nepal Heritage Society and 
a travel industrialist, in the Cultural Tourism-plenary session when 
he observed that in his country tourism was the third religion along 
with Hinduism and Buddhism. There was little argument among par-
ticipants that tourism was an integral factor in site development; the 
extent of controls placed upon tourism was the only issue. Indeed, 
some states, such as Cambodia, are relying on cultural tourism to 
help rebuild their societies.

Session moderator Lester Borley, Secretary General of Europa 
Nostra, suggested a definition of “cultural tourism” as “that activity 
which enables people to explore or experience the different ways of 
life of other people, reflecting their social customs, religious tradi-
tions and the intellectual ideas of a cultural heritage which may 
be unfamiliar”. He drew on the ICOMOS Venice Charter and sug-
gested a broad definition of historic monument to include its urban 
or rural setting. Indeed, Karma Sakya regarded whole townships and 
villages in Nepal (“the total physical expression of man’s interaction 
with nature and culture”) as monuments. Mr. Borley advocated the 
principles for the balanced development of tourism discussed and 
agreed by the ICOMOS UK Cultural Tourism Committee.

Prambanan
Central Java,
Indonesia Huge 
Hindu temple 
complex, 9th century
AD. Original over 200 
temples on the site
as, non-governmental organisations, industry; and the arts
and six thematic plenary sessions: Cultural Tourism and Monu-
mental Legacy, Public and Private Sites, and World Monu-
"macro" sessions were the management of specific areas.
was effectively captured in Sam Pramoj, the Represen-
Thailand, who warned that cultural poverty tomorrow!
ment in the Asian region has a tale that the world has never
Policy in Asia identified other of cultural preservation, and art" of cultural heritage. It
ian perspectives on preser-
ctor Emeritus of the S.E.A.
and Fine Arts, Thailand, has a view that heritage by constructing all future.
Moreover, foreign influence Thai heritage. Chinese archi-
the 19th century, and
contains a Western building and countries cannot stop
"Public preservation efforts of laws" in which ecclesi-
individual abbotts,
the Boston Museum of Historically in Asia "living" found by believers and rulers
all paintings in an effort to
karmic rewards in the next
this laudable display of de-
erations of conservation of
tral integrity of historical
ery and neglect are what
de wide preservation expen-
tries such as Indonesia and
sobering to bear in mind
Cambodia almost all trained
that has caused an almost
complete discontinuity in the Cambodian tradition of temple recon-
struction and maintenance.

The vital importance of tourism to the Asian economies was high-
lighted by Karma Saky, President of the Nepal Heritage Society and
a travel industrialist, in the Cultural Tourism-plenary session when
he observed that in his country tourism was the third religion along
with Hinduism and Buddhism. There was little argument among par-
ticipants that tourism was an integral factor in site development; the
extent of controls placed upon tourism was the only issue. Indeed,
some states, such as Cambodia, are relying on cultural tourism to
help rebuild their societies.

Session moderator Lester Borley, Secretary General of Europa Nostra, suggested a definition of "cultural tourism" as "that activity
which enables people to explore or experience the different ways of
life of other people, reflecting their social customs, religious tra-
tions and the intellectual ideas of a cultural heritage which may
be unfamiliar". He drew on the ICOMOS Venice Charter and sug-
gested a broad definition of historic monument to include its urban
or rural setting. Indeed, Karma Saky regarded whole townships and
villages in Nepal ("the total physical expression of man's interaction
with nature and culture") as monuments. Mr. Borley advocated the
principles for the balanced development of tourism discussed and
agreed by the ICOMOS UK Cultural Tourism Committee.
Themes in this session included the necessity of involving the local populace in tourism policy as well as its benefits, the value of tourism as a stimulus to the revival of ancient or traditional building techniques and crafts, and even the harmful effects of the grotesque misinformation of some tour guides. Not surprisingly, much of the discussion of tourism-related issues and policy pervaded the individual site management sessions. The numerous anecdotes of tourism horrors included the revelation by Huang Kezhong, Vice Director, National Institute of Cultural Property, China, that local peasants had illegally established a “ghost town” theme park inside the grotto area at Dazu in Sichuan province.

The plenary session on Vernacular Architecture and Colonial Legacy sparked some debate but there was, perhaps surprisingly, general consensus that colonial buildings were a valuable component of the heritage of Asian countries. Indeed, Augusto Villalon, Commissioner for Cultural Heritage, Philippine World Heritage Committee, UNESCO National Commission, admitted in his paper that the Philippines’ extensive rice terraces were its only “monument” with no colonizing influence.

Moderator Waveney Jenkins of the Heritage Trust of Malaysia argued in a paper (using as her main example the traditional wooden Malay house) that while vernacular architecture “has always been seen as the country bumpkin of conservation giving precedence to its classical cousin — completely out of place in any serious discussion of cultural heritage and architectural identity”, there was a possibility that the superb monuments of earlier eras might be the exception to the norm, and the vernacular the real subject of the mainstream.

In a far-ranging, well-illustrated presentation, William Chapman, Director of the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Hawaii, traced the extent and evolution of colonial architecture in Asia, drawing parallels to architectural legacies in other once-colonized regions, particularly Africa and the Caribbean. Interestingly, much of the colonial period architecture attempted, in however simplistic and sometimes patronizing a fashion, to incorporate aspects of local building traditions, such as details of pagodas constructed on schools; indeed, “the striking thing about so much colonial architecture is how greatly local traditions are invoked, if not fully respected”.

A. G. Krishna Menon, Director of the TVB School of Habitat Studies in New Delhi, raised the questions of whose culture was being saved, and which groups were the indigenous inhabitants. He reminded participants that for many Asians preservation does not always take on the same urgency as it does for Western conservation professionals: traditions will carry on even without preservation. The principles and practice of modern conservation in India are Eurocentric in origin; they seek conformity with international conservation guidelines such as the Venice Charter. Because such international charters reflect values and society and culture, implied Menon saw the persistent “theatre of resistance” to.

Discussions generated pointed up an additional, the element of “neocolonial” consultants and conservators to preserve their heritage.
necessity of involving the
as its benefits, the value of
cient or traditional building
tful effects of the grotesque
surprisingly, much of the
olicy pervaded the individu-
cious anecdotes of tourism
ng Kezhong, Vice Director,
ina, that local peasants had
park inside the grotto area

Architecture and Colonial Leg-
perhaps surprisingly, general
valuable component of the
asto Villalon, Commissioner
Heritage Committee, UN-
his paper that the Phillipi-
ly “monument” with no co-

Heritage Trust of Malaysia
ample the traditional wooden
architecture “has always been
eration giving precedence to
of place in any serious dis-
tural identity”, there was a
of earlier eras might be the
lar the real subject of the

presentation, William Chapman,
ogram at the University of
on of colonial architecture in
legacies in other once-co-
he Caribbean. Interestingly,
are attempted, in however
fashion, to incorporate as-
as details of pagodas con-
thing about so much col-
ditions are invoked, if not

the TVB School of Habitat-
s of whose culture was
ng indigenous inhabitants. He-
ians preservation does not
es for Western conservation
without preservation. The
ervation in India are Eurocen-
ational conservation.
Because such international

charters reflect values and attitudes not originally prevalent in Indian
society and culture, implementation problems have resulted. Mr.
Menon saw the persistence of vernacular architecture in India as a
“theatre of resistance” to the phenomenon of globalization.

Discussions generated by the session on Vernacular Architecture
pointed up an additional, perhaps unintended, conference theme –
the element of “neocolonialism” inherent in the pattern of Western
consultants and conservation professionals advising Asians on how
to preserve their heritage.
In the plenary session on Public and Private Partnerships, a prominent theme (one that pervaded the conference as a whole) was that non-governmental agencies had a role in remedying the perceived failings of government. Frances Affandy of the Heritage Society of Bandung, Indonesia pointed out, for example, that problems arise because Indonesian cultural legislation must be crafted, accepted and implemented by each level of government. Moreover, there are very few links between regionally based cultural departments and locally based urban planners. She argued that the gap between law and implementation in an expanding country experimenting with Western capitalism, resulted in ignorant exploitation or even extinction of sites. The fact that heritage societies are consulted at all by governments such as Indonesia’s is an achievement itself when legislative systems tend to be paternalistic and public participation rare. Such groups must be seen as consensual cooperating bodies rather than as confrontational pressure groups.

The plenary session on Threats to Architectural Sites in the Asian context generated a good deal of emotion. M. C. Mehta, an Indian environmental lawyer involved in litigation aimed at saving the Taj Mahal from pollution, gave an impassioned address that no doubt inspired numerous participants to sign his petition to save the monument. He detailed several other examples of imperilled major sites in India, including the Red Fort in Delhi and the Kamakhiya Temple in Assam. Giora Solar, Director of the Conservation Division of the Israel Antiquities Authority, outlined the threats to heritage sites in wartime. Mr. Solar’s presentation was particularly graphic and meaningful given his own vantage point in a troubled region. He observed that the 1954 Hague Convention does not address terrorism, guerrilla war or civil wars — a situation not lost upon Asians. The remarks of Vann Molyvann, the President of the Supreme Council of National Culture, Cambodia, particularly with reference to Angkor (possibly the only symbol for unity in Cambodia), served as a stirring reminder to participants that ancient monuments are often the forgotten victims of horrendous domestic conflict. But as Mr. Solar put it, “when the value of human life is diminished, protecting old buildings and stones becomes a luxury”.

The final plenary session was given over to trustees and the Program Director of the World Monuments Fund who unveiled their proposal for an endangered heritage programme called World Monuments Watch. The programme is to involve national input into the compilation of a global survey of the most dramatic examples of endangered sites. The threats envisaged could include economic depression, overpopulation, political turmoil, war, vandalism and looting, development and pollution. Nomination to the “World Monuments Watch” list is a process seemingly aimed at mobilising public opinion, following the example of environmental groups. Following completion of the survey in 1997, the World Monuments Fund intends to provide a series of crisis response grants to a minimum of ten imperilled sites annually.

The merits of such intervention were seen to be, first, that it will give money to governments for reasons; second, that such an idea will be of political policy; and finally, to speed and agility. The role of existing organizations was also sufficiently explained.

The highlight of the Conference Management Sessions. The example presented is apparent from these sessions: Luang Prabang (Laos), Borobudur (Indonesia), Kyongju (Korea), Mohenjodaro (Pakistan), Dunhuang (China), Herat (Afghanistan), and Ayuthaya (Thailand) — all of site experiences — an example of an innovation for the Asian continent.

Typically each session had a national representative, an archaeologist or an art scholar, each could enjoy on a particular travelogue — as well as in site management, construction and conservation, ranging from earthquake disaster to fragments (including the basic legal issues included urban renewal matters, vehicle bans, tourism possibilities in this short space to emerge in presentations and of the conference themes).

The normally politically underlying tension in Asian culture, the Deputy Director of the Department of the project, despaired over the local tourist authorities.

The panel on Borobudur, led by the Director, the Head of the Restoration Department of Archaeology raised contentious issues in conferences. The controversy involved the issue of reinforcement. The issue of Borobodur monument invited contrast between the crooking village to allow the “cosmic mountain”.

For many participants, the interplay of the “macro...
O Northwestern Partnerships, a pro-
nouncement as a whole) was that
remedying the perceived
influence of the Heritage Society of
example, that problems arise
must be crafted, accepted and
be remedied. Moreover, there are very
al departments and locally
gap between law and inter-
unting with Western
ion or even extinction of
consulted at all by govern-
ment itself when legislative
participation rare. Such
ating bodies rather than

Architectural Sites in the Asian
M. C. Mehta, an Indian
aimed at saving the Taj
address that no doubt
petition to save the monu-
me of imperilled major sites
and the Kamakshiya Temple
rervation Division of the
threats to heritage sites in
particular graphic and
in a troubled region. He
2 does not address terror-
not lost upon Asians.
ent of the Supreme Coun-
ularly with reference to
Cambodia), served as
ent monuments are of-
istic conflict. But as Mr.
 diminished, protecting

ter to trustees and the Pro-
Fund who unveiled their
ne called World Monu-
ons national input into the
best dramatic examples of
uld include economic de-
war, vandalism and loot-
tion to the “World Monu-
med at mobilising public
mental groups. Following
Monuments Fund in-
ate to a minimum of
ten imperilled sites annually, as determined by a panel of experts. The merits of such intervention by a non-governmental organization were seen to be, first, that potential donors could avoid having to give money to governments — an unpalatable prospect for various reasons; second, that such organizations could freely oppose to political policy; and third, that they could act with more speed and agility. The relationship of the World Monument Watch to existing organizations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS was not sufficiently explained.

The highlight of the conference for many participants was the Site Management Sessions. The extraordinary richness of the material presented is apparent from the mere listing of the sites examined in these sessions: Luang Prabang (Laos), Nara (Japan), Angkor (Cambodia), Borobudur (Indonesia), Ajanta (India), Bagan (Myanmar), Kyongju (Korea), Mohenjo-daro/Harappa (Pakistan), Hue (Vietnam), Dunhuang (China), Herat (Afghanistan), Samarkand/Bukhara (Uzbekistan), and Ayuthaya (Thailand). To a significant extent, this sharing of site experiences — an extensive cross-fertilization of ideas — was an innovation for the Asian region.

Typically each session was presented by a panel consisting of a national representative, an international conservation consultant and/or an art scholar, each closely associated with the site. These sessions could be enjoyed on the most basic sensory level — as spectacular travelogues — as well as on higher planes for those involved in site management, conservation and policy. Technical issues ranged from earthquake dangers to the computer matching of stone fragments (including the broken heads of statues). Site management issues included urban relocation, compromise solutions in zoning matters, vehicle bans, tourist control and afforestation. It is not possible in this short space to do justice to the extensive data that emerged in presentations and papers. A few examples, reflecting some of the conference themes, must suffice.

The normally politically cautious Chinese highlighted one underlying tension in Asian cultural property matters when Fan Jinshi, Deputy Director of the Dunhuang Academy, and a longtime veteran of the project, dispaired of the conflicts between conservators and local tourist authorities.

The panel on Borobudur, consisting of Jan Fontein and Samudi, Head of the Restoration Division, Directorate of Protection and Development of Archaeological Heritage, Indonesia, pointed up some contentious issues in conservation. The Borobudur “hidden base” controversy involved the covering of some reliefs in order to allow reinforcement. The issue of the appropriate “environment” of the monument invited controversy over the clearing away of an encroaching village to allow for the “original” view of the structure as a “cosmic mountain”.

For many participants, a lingering image of the conference was the interplay of the “macro” and “micro” views represented by Cam-
bodian Minister Vann Molyvann, an unscheduled member of the Angkor panel, repeatedly interrupting a technical presentation by John Sanday, Project Director of the Preah Khan Conservation Project of the World Monuments Fund, in order to provide a broader picture because he was “so impressed with what his ancestors did”.

The consensus of the site sessions and the conference generally was perhaps best captured in the paper of Jan Fontein: “When we look back at the ups and downs in the history of the preservation of all these monuments, which are often the survivors of ancient, rich and diversified cultures of which most other vestiges have disappeared, and if we study the story of their almost miraculous survival against all odds, the message is clear: stay alert, proceed with caution, profit from the experience of others in other countries, without ever losing sight of what is typical and unique of the site entrusted to your care”.

For many in attendance, the conference made it clear — if we needed convincing — that, as in so many other areas of endeavour, Asia must now be regarded as the central focus of world cultural property issues.

Notes

1 Important contributions have been made by national conferences, and by smaller international conferences such as the International Cultural Tourism Conference, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 24–26 November, 1992. For overview purposes, useful reference may be made, in particular, to Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific: Conservation and Policy, Proceedings of the 1991 Honolulu Symposium, edited by the Getty Conservation Institute; and to Trails to Tropical Treasures: A Tour of ASEAN’s Cultural Heritage, World Monuments Fund, 1992.