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States, governance and the politics of culture

World Heritage in Asia

William Logan

Following the 34th Session of the World Heritage Committee session in Brasilia in July–August 2010, there are now 936 properties on the World Heritage List – 725 cultural, 183 natural and twenty-eight mixed. Of those, 198 properties or 22 per cent of the list are located within UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific Region. Some 138 Asia-Pacific properties are cultural, fifty-one are natural properties and nine are mixed. However, despite the obvious popularity of the list that these figures show, there has been much criticism of the World Heritage system in recent years, coming from within as well as outside the system. Much of this is useful criticism aimed at identifying problems and proposing solutions. Often, though, criticism is directed at UNESCO without taking into account its character as an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) and the limitations that this places on its work. Often, too, the criticisms would be better placed at the feet of the States Parties to the 1972 World Heritage Convention upon whose goodwill and collaboration the functioning of the World Heritage system ultimately depends. Criticisms of decisions taken by UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee and the World Heritage Centre need to be balanced by a clearer recognition of the governance arrangements and limitations not only within these three entities but also within the various States Parties themselves.

Using case studies drawn from Asia, this chapter shifts the focus of criticism to the States Parties, outlining ways in which they seek to use World Heritage to suit purposes that conflict with the inspirational statements of UNESCO’s founders and showing how they threaten the universalist principles underlying the World Heritage system. I argue that States Parties operate according to their perception of their own national needs. They are jealous of their national sovereignty and can be resistant to what they see as interference from UNESCO and its chief Advisory Bodies – the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Logan 2007: 47–48). The role of nationalism seems to be rising within the World Heritage program, a trend which UNESCO has a very limited capacity to do much about. UNESCO has no police force to make Member States abide by policy or procedural decisions. In any case, it is not a single actor; as indicated at the outset, UNESCO is an IGO – an organisation made up of independent governments.

Little scholarly work has been published to date on governance issues within the World Heritage Committee and the States Parties themselves and how these facilitate the politicisation of the World Heritage system. An exception is the paper by Marko Scholze (2008) on the
frustrating and so far unsuccessful inscription process for Agadez in Niger. This chapter seeks to recast heritage as an element of global and national cultural politics, exploring the linkage between States Parties' actions and conservation outcomes. By focusing on the nomination, inscription and management processes, it highlights some of the difficulties being experienced by the World Heritage system that make it vulnerable to political exploitation at this particular time and that will need to be addressed over the next decade if the system is to retain its credibility and effectiveness. Although the chapter outlines World Heritage processes as they play out for Asian properties, in fact many of the conclusions made about governance apply to the properties in all parts of the world.

**UNESCO and its World Heritage Program**

UNESCO is an Intergovernmental Organisation or IGO, a fact that gives it both strengths and weaknesses. It is made up of 193 Member States that meet biennially in a General Conference to develop and monitor strategies and programs aimed at fulfilling the UNESCO mission, which is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. To date, UNESCO has approved twenty-eight Conventions and Agreements of Standard-Setting Nature, among which six bear upon heritage conservation. The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (the ‘World Heritage Convention’) is the most popular of UNESCO’s conventions, with 187 Member States ratifying and becoming States Parties to it, twenty-two of which are in Asia, Southeast Asia, South and Central Asia. This is indeed borne out by the real likelihood that within the next few years it will become a universal convention, the first of its kind among UNESCO conventions, when the remaining few states ratify it.

Responsibility for implementing the Convention lies with the World Heritage Committee, an elected subset of twenty-one States Parties, meeting annually to inscribe properties on the World Heritage List, examine reports on the state of conservation of inscribed properties, ask States Parties to take action when the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for which they have been inscribed is under threat, and to declare seriously threatened properties as World Heritage in Danger or, if the OUV has been lost, to delist them. The Committee’s Secretariat is the World Heritage Centre, established in 1992 when the World Heritage List and associated management tasks made a specialised bureau necessary. Since then, the procedures under which the World Heritage system operates have become more rigorous, as can be seen by tracking the evolution of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention through its eighteen revisions (World Heritage Committee 2008). This rigour has been directed at trying to achieve both a better balanced list in terms of representing the cultural diversity of the world’s regions and a more effective management of inscribed sites so that their OUV is maintained. The size of the list combined with the greater rigour means an increasingly heavy work load for the World Heritage Committee and Centre, a problem that, given the Member States’ reluctance to countenance increased annual levies to fund UNESCO activities, is unlikely to go away.

**Criticism of UNESCO**

There are now many scholarly studies critical of UNESCO and its World Heritage system. Some of the criticisms are well made and there are many contradictions and disjunctions within the system, but other criticisms are directed at the wrong target or not supported by hard case study evidence. I have used the world ‘behaviourals’ to demonstrate the point.

**Deconstruction**

Much of the discussion on this issue is driven by the fact that World Heritage properties are not protected by international law and that the property list is not an exhaustive list of cultural heritage. The question of which properties are inscribed and how they are evaluated is a matter of debate. The World Heritage Committee, which meets biennially to inscribe new properties, is faced with a growing backlog of nominations and a declining budget. The Committee has been criticized for its slow progress and for not inscribing enough properties. Despite these challenges, the World Heritage Convention remains one of the most important and influential international agreements in the field of cultural heritage conservation.
This chapter seeks to plor the linkage on the nominati on, being experienced at this particular tem is to retain its processes as they governance apply to

evidence, I have portrayed UNESCO as a modernist institution operating in a post-modern world (Logan 2002a) in its Culture Sector by trying to support local cultures, but to an extent acting as a globalising force itself by seeking to set global standards of heritage conservation behaviour. Jan Turtinen (2000) took a stronger line arguing that UNESCO’s World Heritage program represents a mode of cultural globalisation. Much UNESCO discourse maintains that respect should be shown to all cultures equally, but it is clear that some aspects of some cultures have dubious status in terms of fundamental United Nations concepts such as Human Rights. The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) reflected the UNESCO position and led to major shifts in the World Heritage system. It is reflected, too, in the Operational Guidelines (WHC 2006) where paragraph 81 dictates that ‘The respect due to all cultures requires that cultural heritage must be considered and judged primarily within the cultural contexts to which it belongs’. There is clearly a tension here between global standards, including the notion of OUV, and the local, a tension that provides shelter for parochialism and nationalism.

Against this, it can be argued that it is important to minimise top-down approaches to governance in the World Heritage system and to try to incorporate local and regional conceptions of cultural heritage and conservation practice. UNESCO now argues that it is imperative that the values and practices of local communities, together with traditional management systems, are fully understood, respected, encouraged and accommodated in management plans if the heritage resources are to be sustained into the future (UNESCO 2004: 9). This should create a sense of fairness with respect to what is being demanded of citizens owning, living and working in World Heritage areas. However, there is a contradiction between supporting cultural diversity and maintaining a universal system which, if not handled carefully, can lead to the sense that standards are not being applied equally and fairly across the world. In the early days of the World Heritage program, there may have been positive discrimination to assist developing countries to nominate and manage sites. Perhaps there is a hint of this lingering in more recent efforts to encourage unrepresented States Parties to nominate places to the list under the Global Strategy.

Deconstructing ‘UNESCO’

Much of the criticism of UNESCO is misdirected. Peter Nas (2002) assails UNESCO for stressing the importance of culture as a national property and neglecting the often conflicting diversity within nation states. This is to overlook the fact that UNESCO is an IGO and the States Parties guard jealously their national sovereignty. Robyn Bushell (2010: 1461), referring to Luang Prabang, sees UNESCO controlling ‘what can be built, where, in what style, with what materials; what can be removed, including cultural practice as well as architectural fabric’. Not only is the implementation of conservation management plans a matter dealt with under national Lao legislation and by Lao decision-makers, but also UNESCO simply does not have the financial resources to conduct such micro-management even if it were legally and politically possible. David Berliner’s chapter in this volume is more nuanced: while he refers to the ‘UNESCO-isation’ of places, he shows that the turning of Luang Prabang into a kind of ‘nostalgia’land’ has been mostly the work of foreign conservation experts, only some of whom are related to UNESCO. He sees a range of different actors involved in the management process, although emphasising that such dynamics played in large part from the UNESCO World Heritage designation.

But what actually is the ‘UNESCO’ that is subject to so much criticism? Marc Askew (2010) argues, correctly, that it is important to avoid reifying ‘UNESCO’ into a unitary ‘thing’ or to give it a singular personality because, he says, ‘it is clear that as an organization it is both multifaceted
and constrained'. Even so, Askew seems to fall into the trap himself, concluding his paper with the statement: 'Despite the best intentions of its advocates, as the umpire and accomplice in the global status game of heritage listing, UNESCO is a co-opting partner in nation-states' domestic projects of cultural reification and domination' (p. 401). We need to deconstruct UNESCO and to clarify the various actors and processes that together make up the World Heritage system. What happens and who is involved at various stages in the World Heritage process as defined by the Convention and elaborated by the Operational Guidelines – the nomination stage, inscription, implementation of the management plan and monitoring the results?

In the Luang Prabang case, it was the national government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic that ratified the World Heritage Convention in 1987 and nominated the site, its OUV being seen as the fusion of traditional Lao and French colonial townscapes. Becoming a State Party, it agreed to be bound by the rules of the Convention and to accept the system developed under it. To nominate Luang Prabang was a top-down decision taken by Lao Government, although probably influenced by officials in the UNESCO Bangkok Office and Paris headquarters and certainly by the group of French experts described by David Berliner who were operating around Yves Dauge, then French Inspector General of Infrastructure and Mayor of Chinon, later French Deputy. The nomination dossier was submitted in October 1994, and the Town of Luang Prabang was inscribed by the World Heritage Committee in 1995 following a positive recommendation by ICOMOS. Initially, ICOMOS had considered the nomination should be deferred until there was firm evidence that an effective management plan was in place but softened its position following intervention by Dauge.

Management of World Heritage properties is the responsibility of the relevant States Parties, although in the Luang Prabang case, cash dependency gave the French a large degree of influence. Within a year of inscription, the World Heritage Centre became alarmed by reports of rapid and unsympathetic development in Luang Prabang, and a State of Conservation (SOC) Report was prepared and presented to the World Heritage Committee in 1996. At the 1996 meeting, the Committee was informed that a Heritage House (Maison du patrimoine) had been established within the provincial administration under the Luang Prabang–Chinon (France)–UNESCO World Heritage Centre cooperation project. The role of the Heritage House was to prepare recommendations on building design and conservation methods for all building permit requests in the World Heritage protected area and the buffer zones, as well as to prepare the conservation management plan for the town. The Mayor of Chinon, at the invitation of the Chairperson, gave the Committee an assurance that the City of Chinon foresaw long-term cooperation with Luang Prabang for the transfer and sharing of knowledge. Since the funding available to the World Heritage system is limited, the World Heritage Centre was active in seeking outside sources of funds and welcomed the Chinon involvement.

As well as giving initial signals that properties are under threat, the World Heritage Centre participates in missions, mostly in collaboration with ICOMOS, as in the case of the October 2007 Joint Reactive Monitoring Mission conducted by Giovanni Boccardi of the World Heritage Centre and me as ICOMOS appointee. The mission was made at the request of the Lao government following a State of Conservation Report to the World Heritage Committee earlier in the year, one of a long line of such reports. In such missions, Centre personnel are necessarily required to ensure that the rules are followed or that appropriate consequences are invoked, which may range from further advice and missions to inscription on the World Heritage in Danger List or even delisting. ICOMOS representatives provide more specifically professional input. Together their contributions in this form of monitoring activity represent one of the most important and direct instances of UNESCO and Advisory Body involvement in World Heritage processes.

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Figure 7.1 Development
In this instance, Boccardi and Logan (2007: 2) found that unprecedented pressure from development was posing new strains on the site which the existing conservation system appeared unable to counter effectively. The conclusion we reached at that time – a conclusion that may no longer be valid today – was that if the Lao traditional heritage, in particular, continues to decline, the OUV underlying the Town of Luang Prabang’s inscription would be threatened and it could head towards a situation that might justify World Heritage in Danger listing. Around the perimeter of the property, other threats to the OUV lay in several development projects then being proposed, including a new airport and a major new town in the Chompheth valley on the right bank of the Mekong. Within the property, illegal building activities included the demolition and reconstruction of listed properties, over-densification of the urban fabric and use of inappropriate typologies/materials/decoration for new buildings. Important elements of the historic urban landscape were being lost, in particular Lao traditional structures, gardens and ponds. At the same time, the current socioeconomic trends within Luang Prabang were causing the progressive reduction in the size of local communities, the loss of intangible heritage and an alteration of the spirit of the place. None of this might be important, however, to those national and local policy makers for whom modernisation and expansion of the town are the ultimate goals; for them heritage-based tourism is perhaps merely a stop-gap until such time as a more highly developed economic and urban base can be created. Polarisation of the debate into Development versus Conservation is unfortunate; through sensitive planning, notably decisions where to locate new projects, Luang Prabang could both enjoy development and maintain its cultural assets.

The requirement to respond to State of Conservation Reports means that States Parties, the ultimate decision-makers within their own jurisdictions, have the opportunity to rectify problems.

**Figure 7.1** Densification and loss of vegetation cover in central town precinct: disruption of tra-
Figure 7.2 A new house in central Luang Prabang shows some respect for traditional building form but little for design, materials and set-back regulations (Photo W. Logan)

Figure 7.3 New multi-storey guesthouses on filled-in ponds cause disruption to drainage patterns and exacerbate flooding in the wetlands on Luang Prabang's southern periphery (Photo W. Logan)

By putting the case clearly and strongly, the 2006 Mission Report was worded to prompt the Lao Government to clarify its position. In the SOC report to the 2008 World Heritage Session in Quebec, it was seen that the State Party had made progress on the management plan, the definition of buffer and priority development zones and capacity building for Heritage House personnel. The Committee accepted the State Party’s assurances regarding plans for the Chomphet new town and several key historic buildings in the town and decided that there had been sufficient progress again to the Committee.

The Luang Prabang case shows how involvement in the World Heritage Committee of the Memit Heritage Committee secretariat, the World Heritage Centre and the World Heritage Committee can help to influence Party action. The World Heritage Centre continues to develop its role and responsibilities for drawing attention to its properties and for drawing attention to the importance of World Heritage properties for further action on their behalf.

Uses and a Changing Identity

Judging by the evidence, it appears that Luang Prabang as a town is changing again. The question remains: how far will the World Heritage Convention take it in helping to prevent further change, and how far will it allow it to change?
sufficient progress to remove the reference to In Danger listing. The State Party will report again to the Committee at the Paris session in 2011.

The Luang Prabang case reveals the complexity of relationships between the various parties involved in the protection of its cultural heritage. The role played by UNESCO is constrained by its character as an Intergovernmental Organisation dependent on the good will and cooperation of the Member States. In the heritage place arena, its mission is carried out by the World Heritage Committee made up of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention and its secretariat, the small and underfunded World Heritage Centre. In Luang Prabang, while these agencies can propose and monitor, ultimately it is the State Party – the People’s Democratic Republic of Laos – that ultimately determines what happens at the site. If until now the State Party has been happy to run with cultural tourism, enjoy the global advertising that comes from World Heritage listing and accept French financial support for conservation works, this may be changing as national aspirations for the once royal city shift towards population growth, urban expansion and modern development.

**Uses and abuses of the Convention**

Judging by the almost universal ratification of the Convention, UNESCO Member States appear to love this Convention and the List that comes with it. This is for a mix of reasons, including a philosophical commitment to the Convention’s aims, benefits to the national economy, the status acquired by international recognition, and for other political and ideological advantages. Askew (2010: 40) refers to UNESCO’s ‘magic list’ in the ‘anthropological sense as a potent signifier to various actors’, even signifying ‘a tangible mechanism for drawing development aid for governments and tourism for private and/or state enterprises’. But the World Heritage system’s popularity comes at a price. With 936 inscribed properties following the 34th World Heritage Committee Session in Brasilia in July–August 2010, at what point do we say that the places of Outstanding Universal Value have been captured by the list?
Clearly being inscribed on the list produces a commodification effect, with World Heritage being seen by many as a brand and inscription little more than a branding exercise. Joana Breidenbach and Pal Nyiri (2007) see the notion of World Heritage being quickly embraced by the tourism industry, with the consequence that countries in which commodified tourism was non-existent twenty years ago are now experiencing a tourism boom. Every new inscription on the WH list spurs tourism, they argue. Using as case studies two States Parties – Russia and China – they reach the conclusion that, rather than representing ‘Our Common Heritage’ and ‘treasures of all mankind’, the sites are ‘laboratories and mirrors of new cultural practices and ideologies that reflect the two countries’ different historical traditions, views of development and the ‘good life’, structures of social order, and positions in the current global order’.

Often States Parties openly reveal non-conservation related motives. In the case of the Central Core of Thang Long–Hanoi Citadel, there was no secret that achieving inscription in 2010 was linked to that year’s celebration of the 1,000th birthday of the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. Inscription meant an enormous boost for tourism. It also meant recognition of the Hanoi site by the international community – and by implication, international recognition of Vietnam and its governing structures. In a newspaper interview in 2007, Vietnam’s Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nguyen Van Tho, gave five reasons for embracing the World Heritage program: it was seen to fit with government policy; especially the resolution of the fifth meeting of the Central Party Committee on ‘Building an advanced Vietnam culture with strong national identity’; it promoted national pride and Vietnam’s image in the world; it offered a global brand, and was a prerequisite to developing human resources, attracting foreign investment, especially in tourism; and it could be a good and convincing tool to introduce Vietnam’s national identity to the world, especially its age-old history and rich culture (Nhan Dan 2007). In the case of the Thang Long Citadel, it meant, too, that Hanoi’s claims to be the cradle of Vietnamese civilisation and modern Vietnam’s undisputed international metropolis were boosted, which was internally very important given the longstanding rivalry with Ho Chi Minh City, the economic powerhouse in the country’s south (Logan 2009).

If, in the case of Luang Prabang, heritage tourism may only be an interim position in the Lao national strategic thinking, in Lijiang, China, it is both currently rampant and the long-term growth objective. Various negative concerns filtered back to the World Heritage Centre and Lijiang became subjected to the World Heritage Committee’s SOC reporting process. An Advisory Mission was sent in November 2008 of which I was a member and report writer (Jing, 2008). One of the many missions to Lijiang, we were charged with reviewing the consultation process held for formulating the draft management plans and advising on their further development. This included providing guidance to the Chinese national and local authorities on the preparation of a clear Statement of Outstanding Universal Value and the establishment of institutional arrangements for managing the property.

With regard to tourism, the Mission concluded that the balance between tourism and related infrastructure growth on the one hand, and safeguarding of the cultural heritage on the other hand, was tipping too far towards the former (p. 19). There had been 1.7 million tourists in 1997; this has grown to at least 4.6 million by 2007. Since tourists added 5.824 billion Yuan to the local economy in 2007, it had to be a primary objective of the Lijiang authorities to make the town’s tourism sustainable. However, two visions of the property’s future seem to be at play. The first vision is based on large-scale domestic tourism with the main motivation for visiting Lijiang being a combination of pleasure-seeking, shopping, restaurant dining, with side visits to the Yulong (Jade Dragon) Mountain snow resort and the spectacular Impressions of Lijiang show. Curiosity about World Heritage may exist but only as a supplementary motive for visiting Lijiang. In general, this is a theme park approach to heritage management, but one that is lucrative and structures and traditions are diminished. Lijiang is based on ethnic group activities and to Tibet all this characterises aspects as more than can be controlled. It was clear to all that the references were to an ethnic group that had decided that their survival depended on be more strong (2008: 10) and that the religion of the religious minority temples are no longer observed, but that since its establishment in 1950 and its subsequent ethnic form of the ci
with World Heritage listing exercise, Joanna quickly embraced by modified tourism was very new inscription states Parties – Russia ‘Common Heritage’ cultural practices and views of development global order’.

In the case of the inscribing inscription in Vietnamese capital, Vincent of the Hanoi recognition of the Viet Nam Deputy Minister for World Heritage project: fifth meeting of the national identity; national brand and was specially in tourism; national identity to the case of the Thang long ‘civilisation and was internally very unique powerhouse in position in the Lao and the long-term Heritage Centre porting process. An and report writer reviewing the coming on their further local authorities on the establishment of tourism and related site on the other million tourists in 204 billion Yuan to authorities to make sure seem to be at air motivation for it dining, with side bar impressions of narrative motive for ment, but one that

is lucrative and pleases many tourists. In this vision, the integrity and authenticity of the historic structures and traditional customs are easily sacrificed. Eventually, however, the heritage assets are diminished and their World Heritage status may be withdrawn. The second vision for Lijiang is based on a smaller scale tourist interest in World Heritage, the culture of the Naxi ethnic group and links to other parts of Yunnan (including other UNESCO recognised sites) and to Tibet along the Cha-Ma or Tea-Horse route. Most international tourists are likely to fit this characterisation, but it is reported that there is growing domestic tourist interest in these aspects as more Chinese become aware of heritage protection and concerned by threats to it from uncontrolled development. Both visions are viable; the question is to what extent and for how long they can coexist.

It was clear to the Mission that the Naxi ethnic culture was attracting an increasing amount of attention from the heritage authorities, tourism agencies and, indeed, tourists. Although references were made in Lijiang’s nomination dossier to the rich traditional culture of the Naxi ethnic group, the Chinese at the Mission’s meetings, some of whom were Naxi, had already decided that the significance of the Naxi cultural heritage, most of which is intangible, needs to be more strongly acknowledged in the planning and management of the property (Jing et al. 2008: 10). The Mission’s role was simply one of explaining how this intangible heritage could be incorporated into a Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the property. Rather than being pushed aside by China’s dominant Han group, the Naxi ethnic minority constitutes the local majority. There is, in fact, a danger that Lijiang’s ‘living heritage’ could become dominated by Han and Naxi elements to the exclusion of the area’s many ethnic and religious minorities (p. 11). The Advisory Mission heard, for instance, that some Wen Miao temples are not being well looked after by the authorities, although, by contrast, the Mission observed the careful attention being given to several Christian churches. The claim is often made that since its earliest days the Old Town of Lijiang has been an open society into which successive ethnic groups have been welcomed. This, it is said, is reflected in the physical form of the city, most notably in the absence of a wall to keep out alien groups, a feature.

Figure 7.5 Staged dance in a Lijiang square: commodifying the intangible heritage of the Naxi ethnic minority (Photo W. Logan)
common in other Chinese cities. The open city feature ties in with one of the globally significant themes – living together – but Lijiang’s management plans must ensure that the heritage of all ethnic groups is protected.

Referring to Hevia’s 2001 study of the Qing dynasty summer palace and temple complex at Chengde (inscribed 1994) containing a scaled-down replica of the Tibetan Potala of Lhasa (inscribed 1995), Askew (2010: 35) notes that ‘UNESCO has, it appears, avoided any comment on this process of symbolic incorporation of minority groups in China’. He would probably make the same comment about the Lijiang property. It seems clear that the national interest is being served by portraying Lijiang to visitors, domestic and foreign alike, as a place in which ethnic groups live harmoniously, perhaps as a counterpoint to Tibet. Decisions are clearly made in a top-down fashion and there has been little direct community participation – Han or ethnic minority – in Lijiang’s inscription and management, although, as noted, some of the officials were themselves Naxi. When the Advisory Mission visited in November 2008, it was to participate in a day-long ‘Stakeholders Meeting’. In fact this was interpreted by the Chinese organisers, the State Administration for Cultural Heritage, as essentially meaning the authorities responsible for heritage matters at national, provincial and local levels and the experts from the Tongji University Planning Institute in Shanghai who were drawing up the plans. The community was represented by two residents. It is not clear how these were selected, in what way they were ‘representative’ or whether they reported back to the wider community.

Is this out of line with UNESCO’s support for community involvement and the references in the Operational Guidelines and annexes that draw special attention to community involvement? The Chinese government authorities, like those in Vietnam and other communist states, argue that the accountability of their decision-making processes is guaranteed by the elaborate nested political and administrative structure established by the Communist Party to govern the country (Logan 2002b: 173). If, on the other hand, it is out of line, what could be done about it, remembering that UNESCO is an IGO and that it is the States Parties that ultimately determine identification, nomination and conservation plan implementation. UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre can push where it can, but it is a fine line to tread between bringing the

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In the case of Thailand, Peleggi (2002) states that Thailand is large in particular, the religious minority in the south. The

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In the case of another State Party, Thailand, Askew (2010: 36) notes that ‘UNESCO appears as just one of the actors authorizing and shaping representations of the past, and a minor one at that’. Overlooking the reification involved, it is correct that the politics of conservation in Thailand is largely dominated by internal political, economic and social considerations. Maurizio Peleggi (2002) sees the Thai state’s efforts from the late 1970s to restore and protect monuments and sites such as the ancient capitals of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya as part of a deliberate state-forming strategy – creating a community-bonding sense of ‘Thai-ness’ by promoting a particular authorised version of Thailand’s national history. It also helped in the packaging of Thailand’s cultural identity for tourism promotion. The problem is that this privileging of a particular set of monuments and places, especially those related to the current Chakri dynasty and to Buddhism, means that other aspects of Thailand’s cultural environment are excluded and with them the groups for whom these alternative forms are important, notably ethnic and religious minorities such as the Lao and Mon in the north of the country and Islamic groups in the south. Within Thailand’s capital, on the other hand, efforts by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority to turn the Rattanakosin Island area into a royal theme park have led to the long-running conflict with the local community in Pom Mahakan (Bristol 2010).

**Acting against the spirit of the convention**

Cultural heritage is a mental construct and decisions about it are always subjective. Definitions of what heritage elements are to be regarded as significant enough to merit protection by the state is open to ideological bias and political manipulation. Within States, heritage can be used by governments to reshape public attitudes in line with undemocratic political agendas or even to rally people against their neighbours in civil and international wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Numerous case studies show more blatant misuse of heritage to impose the majority culture on minorities, recent examples being Robert Shepherd’s paper (2006) on ‘UNESCO and the politics of cultural heritage in Tibet’, and Janette Philip’s chapter (2010) on the appropriation of Buddhist culture by the military regime in Myanmar. The political use and abuse of heritage clearly occurs within states, but it seems to be becoming more prevalent within the World Heritage system. Here, despite the 1972 World Heritage Convention recognising Advisory Bodies upon whose impartial professional expertise the system should depend, the States Parties elected to the World Heritage Committee are increasingly making decisions based on issues other than a concern purely for heritage conservation.

Many cases can be found to demonstrate aspects of this disturbing nationalist trend. At the least harmful end of the scale, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was determined to push for the Thang Long-Hanoi Citadel’s inscription at the 2010 Committee Session against the recommendation of ICOMOS because world recognition was seen as a critical feature of Hanoi’s 1,000th birthday celebrations. The position taken by ICOMOS was that further work needed to be done to demonstrate the site’s Outstanding Universal Value. At the other extreme, in the case of the Complex of Koguryo Tombs (inscribed 2004), the State Party, the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea, used the inscription process to make claims to the whole of the Korean peninsula through the maps used in its nomination dossier. UNESCO’s World Heritage List web site includes the disclaimer that the inclusion of cartographic material presented by the State Party in its nomination dossier ‘does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries’.
In the Temple of Preah Vihear case (inscription 2008), heritage has become caught up in internal politics and international relations. This Khmer culture temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva has its origins in the ninth century AD. It lies in present-day Cambodia abutting the border with Thailand. Many Thai see the demarcation of this boundary as a colonial imposition that deprives Thailand of its rightful territory and hence they dispute Cambodia’s right to control the temple and surrounding land. Nevertheless, the inscription of the temple on the World Heritage List had followed a Joint Communiqué between Thailand’s Foreign Minister and Cambodia’s Deputy Prime Minister signed in Paris on 22 May 2008 that affirmed Thailand’s full support for the nomination. This agreement subsequently came under fire from Thai ultranationalists in the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), a coalition of royalists, Bangkok elites, elements within the military and powerful business interests. According to Chachavalpongpun (2010), the escalation of the conflict needs to be read in the context of the struggle between yellow and red factions that has crippled Thailand in recent years. Clearly there are many different agents with different agendas involved in this conflict which peaked dramatically in October 2008 with armed confrontations around the temple between Thai and Cambodian troops. While on-the-ground tensions have since eased, the property remains a thorn in Thai-Cambodian relations and a headache for the World Heritage Committee. Thailand withdrew from the Joint Communiqué before the World Heritage Committee’s 2009 session in Quebec, making it politically impossible for the Committee to deal with Cambodian progress reports, which were to have included development of a conservation management plan for the property. For management to ensure effective protection of the site’s OUV, a buffer probably needs to extend into Thailand. In fact, no buffer zone has yet been defined for the property. A proposal was presented by Cambodia at the Brasilia World Heritage Committee meeting but was not considered by the Committee. In an ideal world, a joint management committee might be established; in reality, management cooperation can only occur when the heat is taken out of the conflict.

Brasilia and the ‘future of the Convention’

States Parties use heritage and the World Heritage system for their own nationalistic, political purposes, even to the extent of boosting jingoism and facilitating aggression against neighbouring countries. Despite this, a combination of nationalistic, commercial and professional forces continues to push for further enlargement of the list. The sad conclusion reached from observing the World Heritage system over the past decade is that, while the strengthening of intercultural dialogue underlies the creation of UNESCO, its flagship World Heritage program under the 1972 World Heritage Convention seems to have moved away from this motivating principle and serves the cause of nationalism rather than dialogue between cultures, states and nations.

Observers at the most recent World Heritage Committee session held in Brasilia in July—August 2010 have described it as the most political to date. Many of the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies – ICOMOS for Cultural Properties including Cultural Landscapes, and the IUCN for Natural and Mixed sites – were overturned as the result of the States Parties lobbying Committee members. This was particularly flagrant in the case of the State of Conservation Reports but also applied to new World Heritage List nominations. The Canadian delegation of observers – Canada’s term as a Committee member ended in 2009 – apparently walked out in a mix of despair and disgust. One State Party and Member of the Committee fought to overturn the negative ICOMOS recommendation on its own nomination. Back in its own country, it subsequently introduced the twelfth manipulation of the inscription, in relation to Osuna. Meanwhile, the Convention’s sponsor, the United Kingdom, has identified five measures to improve the Convention, [as seen in the accompanying chart].

While this is a growing political trend, Terrill, noting this change in the political integrity of the Convention, states:

Certainly, these meetings are a showcase for the new inscription of the World Heritage Committee is a subtext to interest when site’s cultural and natural changes. As a result, the new Committee’s proposal for the next session is

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- imbalances within the World Heritage List;
- public perception and maximisation of the brand value of World Heritage;
- current focus on inscription to the detriment of conservation;
- governance structures which are not participatory and are overloaded;
- financing the implementation of the Convention.

While this is a largely bureaucratic response, there is room under the fourth issue to deal with the growing politicisation of the World Heritage system. The convenor of the workshop, Dr. Greg Terrill, noting the intense lobbying by States Parties in Brasilia, has commented that

This changed approach appears to be rooted in something deeper than the new composition of the Committee, and may manifest a post-Global Economic Crisis world order. This politicisation (...) indicates we are on the right track in terms of seeking to strengthen the integrity of the Convention.

(Terrill 2010)

Certainly some improvements in the way the World Heritage Committee conducts its meetings are called for, such as using secret ballots more frequently for decisions on SOCs and new inscriptions. It might also be wise to prohibit States Parties while they are on the World Heritage Committee from nominating new properties. Given that the World Heritage Committee is a subset of States Parties to the Convention, each of which acts primarily in its own interest when that interest is at risk, much persuasion will be needed to win even these procedural changes. Unlike most other Conventions, the World Heritage Committee’s sessions are not open to the press. Would allowing the press into the room have a sobering effect on the behaviour of World Heritage Committee members and help to strengthen the credibility of the Committee’s proceedings?

Too many places on the list?

As we move down from universally known icons such as the pyramids, Venice and the Great Wall of China, we arrive at places that are mostly of national interest and significance. It seems that many places now being nominated do not have convincing Outstanding Universal Value. Some are merely the top of the national heritage list; others are not even well known in their
own country, let alone to the wider world. The Thang Long Citadel in Hanoi is very clearly of national importance, but the argument for inscription had to emphasise clearly what the OUV is – to demonstrate what is its importance to the world; to show that it is ‘so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity’ (WHC Operational Guidelines 2008, Paragraph 49).

Many of the places on the list are not being well managed and thirty, including six in Asia (excluding Arab west Asia), have been inscribed on the World Heritage in Danger List. Often, good management cannot even be expected, given the inability of some States Parties to invest sufficient funds in conservation works and professional capacity building. Steps were taken with the Cairns decisions of 2000 to slow the list down but were subverted by the States Parties (World Heritage Centre 2007: 41). Another attempt to slow the list down is needed, allowing time for a deeper reflection on where the World Heritage Convention is heading, a reconsideration of priorities and a search for new strategies that better uphold the principles for which UNESCO claims to stand.

Ways forward

I have argued elsewhere (Logan 2010) the ostensibly paradoxical proposition that the best way to move forward might be by going back to the essential mission of UNESCO as outlined in its founding Constitution of 1945. Here it is clear that one of UNESCO’s overarching objectives is to support cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace. This flows from the preamble to UNESCO’s 1945 founding Constitution which began by asserting that since wars are created in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be built. It was clearly vital to explore this proposition in the post-World War II years, but it is equally critical in the twenty-first century when world efforts towards peace continue to be undermined by intense forms of nationalism and ethnic rivalries that commonly use cultural difference as a justification for conflict.

Taking this as the most fundamental concern of UNESCO, there is a need to shift the emphasis of the World Heritage system from the celebration of ‘our own heritage’ (the role of national systems) to the understanding of ‘other people’s heritage’. Much more can be done within the World Heritage system to build bridges between States Parties, especially to encourage and facilitate professionals working together across cultural divides both in the preparation of nomination dossiers and in the management of the properties once they have been inscribed. In short, the growing mismatch between UNESCO’s founding charter and the politicisation of the World Heritage program needs a more fundamental refocus if the program is to be used more effectively as a means for achieving intercultural dialogue and understanding, greater tolerance and, ultimately, peace. This does not require change to the Convention; indeed, such would be practically impossible to achieve. It could be done, however, by the World Heritage Committee voting to change the Operational Guidelines. Even so, to change the mindset of the Committee members will be challenging enough.

The experts at the World Heritage Centre are well aware of these issues but are caught up in making the system processes operate smoothly; a difficult enough task given their small numbers and limited funding. They have worked assiduously with key members of the World Heritage Committee to implement important changes over the last 15–20 years. Some of this effort focuses on making the processes work better and reducing the Centre’s and Advisory Bodies’ work load. Additionally, there are efforts to maintain the overall credibility of the system and the List, and efforts, such as the Global Strategy and the Cairns 2000 decisions, that are a mix of these. But, more importantly, some initiatives push the States Parties into new directions. In this category are the Indigenous peoples.

New mentor ICOMOS and IFLA around the world

Scholze (2008) notes that local intellectual world heritage Advisory Bodies Heritage Centre might be better transnational and of transnational see Logan 2010.

Another key interpreting sites heritage being:

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New mentoring roles for the Advisory Bodies will be required to facilitate change. Firstly, ICOMOS and IUCN should seek to influence their professional members in national branches around the world. We should not underestimate the difficulty of this task, however. If Marko Scholze (2008) is right, they will be starting from a very low base in many parts of the world. Looking at a World Heritage site in Niger, Scholze finds that 'there are only a few local intellectuals who have genuinely embraced UNESCO's idea of creating and preserving a world heritage that encompasses the cultural diversity of mankind' (p. 229). Secondly, the Advisory Bodies should continue to put pressure on the World Heritage Committee and World Heritage Centre. Together they should explore ways in which the World Heritage program might be better used to promote dialogue, such as giving priority to new inscriptions, especially transnational inscriptions, that say something about sharing heritage; encouraging the establishment of transnational or transboundary management teams for inscribed sites (for further discussion, see Logan 2010).

Another key way to refocus the World Heritage system is to develop new strategies for interpreting sites in cross-culturally sensitive ways that help lead to a keener perception of heritage being shared by people across political and other divides. The World Heritage Committee has been steadily tightening up the inscription process since the early 1990s, such as requiring Statements of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) - or Retrospective SOUV for existing inscriptions - and clearer management plans. It is perhaps time to require new nomination dossiers to also include an Interpretation Plan and, for existing properties, to prepare a Retrospective Interpretation Plan. Further, it might also be possible to give priority in the scheduling of inscriptions to those nominations whose interpretation plans seek not only to elaborate on the significance of the heritage sites from the nominating State Party's point of view, but also to fit that heritage clearly into a world context and, where relevant, to tell the various sides of the history and highlighting messages of reconciliation and peace. In short, to give preference to nominations which move away from promotion of the nation to the promotion of dialogue and peace.

Such a reorientation of the World Heritage system would have significant implications for heritage in Asia. It would mean that national Tentative Lists should be reconsidered to add and prioritise sites whose Outstanding Universal Value relates to themes of harmonious cultural diversity, reconciliation between previously contesting groups and the achievement of peace and justice. The interpretation of sites already on the World Heritage List should be reviewed and revised either through the preparation of Retrospective Statements of OU and by re nominating the site. Such changes would, of course, almost inevitably flow down to national and local or municipal heritage protection systems.

A reorientation would require the development of new training programs and other capacity building in the form of documentation support. Training needs in Asia are already considerable and range widely from the technical aspects of conservation to the interpretation of sites that more effectively elucidate their OU. However, training must also encompass the negotiation skills needed to work with local communities in the identification and management of sites and, where heritage lies across political boundaries, with decision makers and site managers who come from different cultural, political, economic and social contexts and have different philosophical and technical approaches to the protection of the cultural heritage. The challenge for Asia - as for the rest of the world - is enormous but, if the World Heritage system is to maintain its credibility as a global system in which nation states work together to uphold UNESCO's mission, it is both necessary and overdue.
References


