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‘Same same but different?’

A roundtable discussion on the philosophies, methodologies, and practicalities of conserving cultural heritage in Asia

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Introduction

‘Same same but different’. A common expression in Asia. Initially perplexing, its simultaneous embrace of contradiction and similarity is a powerful statement. This simple phrase of four words conveys an acceptance of and tolerance for contradictions, differences, and variations within an understanding of the similarities which link and unite. It is applied to all manner of experiences and aspects of the tangible world. How is this relevant to a roundtable discussion on heritage conservation in Asia? With the addition of a single word, it aptly describes the current tension and discourse that is ongoing within the heritage conservation profession in Asia – ‘same same but different – how?’ Over the past twenty years there has been much discussion and international debate regarding the boundaries and essence of heritage and these expanding definitions have profound implications for conservation. The inclusion of vernacular forms and the recognition of the inextricable link between places and objects and the socio-cultural interactions which are bound to and constitute them have challenged the heritage conservation sector to rethink some of its foundation assumptions of what and how to conserve. A great deal of this debate is occurring in Asia and is evidenced in the number of regional conferences, charters and proclamations with some variation on this theme. It is a discourse that questions the applicability of ‘standards’ or notions of international best practice as they are introduced – or in some cases imposed – in a wide variety of contexts throughout the region. The debate has also been driven by and reinforced ideas among many that Asia needs a distinct set of philosophies and methodologies for the conservation of cultural heritage.

Through our own conversations and discussions, we (Fong and Winter) considered a roundtable dedicated to this topic would be an appropriate and interesting entry point to this volume. To this end, we invited three conservation professionals whose work, experience and
geographical affiliation represent some of the diversity of the region. They are educators and practitioners from East, Southeast, and South Asia. Their expertise straddles the built environment, collections and cultural landscapes. Each of them has been engaged at the local, national and international levels of heritage conservation and each is acutely aware of the history and institutions which frame current conservation debates. They are active participants in this regional and international discussion and can thus offer insights into some of its nuances and complexities. Most crucially, they articulate how theoretical questions and abstract instruments of cultural governance such as charters, guidelines or national policies (historic and contemporary) do or do not influence conservation practice on the ground.

Modern conservation theory and the international institutions which represent and promote the precepts of the profession can be traced to European origins. Historically the focus was on artefacts and monuments and the preservation of their material integrity as the locus of values— age, history and artistry. It was believed that the retention of these values was contingent upon an object's intact material existence. The articulation of these ideas most famously begins in the nineteenth century with the sometimes contentious debates between Viollet-Le-Duc (France) and John Ruskin (England). While they were not the first to extol the value of conservation or the philosophical foundations upon which a practice might be based, their arguments formed the core of what would become the profession's guiding principles and discourse (Viollet-Le-Duc 1990; Ruskin 2008). Subsequent thinkers and writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Camillo Boito, Cesare Brandi, Paul Phillipot and others, would contribute to the evolution of the field. In the twentieth century the emerging profession began to codify its concerns with the creation of internationally ratified charters, the two earliest and most important against which many subsequent charters and proclamations would define themselves are Athens (1934) and Venice (1964). While these remain touchstones, the field has matured and is now engaged in more complex and nuanced inquiries into the purview, responsibilities and implications of conservation. It has moved beyond an exclusive concern with the material and has become more reflective regarding the social and cultural roles material culture plays within heritage conservation.

In the years after World War II these seminal conventions and ideas became increasingly influential across the world with the establishment of supranational bodies like UNESCO and ICCROM. And yet, there soon followed an unease about their universalist claims and applicability in non-western contexts. Such concerns, coupled with the ongoing pluralisation of the heritage discourse, eventually led to a series of important initiatives. In the case of Asia, as the twentieth century came to a close, clear assertions were being made for a conservation paradigm rooted in philosophies and methodologies appropriate to the cultural, aesthetic and political particularities of the region. The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), China Principles (1998), Shanghai Charter (2002), Yamato Declaration (2004), Okinawa Declaration (2004), Xi'an Declaration (2005), Hoi An Protocols (2005) and Seoul Declaration (2007) are among the initiatives that advanced such claims across a number of areas including cities, museums and intangible heritage forms. Interestingly, despite pertaining to quite different cultural sectors, a coherence in the voice of these charters has emerged through the foregrounding of a select number of distinct themes, namely community, spirituality, intangibility and authenticity, as the following excerpts illustrate:

Actions aiming at safeguarding [...] cultural heritage [...] need to be rooted in the values and wishes of communities or groups concerned.

(Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage 2004: Article 4)
Heritage structures, sites or areas [...] derive their significance and distinctive character from their perceived social and spiritual, historic, artistic, aesthetic, natural, scientific and other cultural values. They also derive their significance and distinctive character from their meaningful relationships with their physical, visual, spiritual and other cultural context and settings.

(Xi’an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas 2005: Article 2)

Taking into account the interdependence, as well as the differences between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and between the approaches for their safeguarding, we deem it appropriate that, wherever possible, integrated approaches be elaborated to the effect that the safeguarding of the tangible and intangible heritage of communities and groups is consistent and mutually beneficial and reinforcing.

(Yamato Declaration 2004: Article 11)

In Asia, the physical, human-made components of the heritage are not only inextricably linked to but also arise from the natural geography and environmental setting of their respective cultures and serve as the setting for more intangible expressions of cultural traditions.

(Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia 2005: 3)

The notion of authenticity is culturally relative. In much of Asia the rigorous and methodical Western analytical approach needs to be tempered with the abstract and metaphysical concepts that characterise the region.

( ibid.: 14)

The re-occurrence of certain key themes and the coherence they afford has, in certain regards, created a sense of the need for an approach that is in tune with the cultural and historical particularities of the Asian region. In the excerpts above we see this both explicitly and implicitly asserted, and as they are subsequently cited in different contexts they have been reductively invoked as evidence of the need for and legitimacy of an ‘Asian approach’ to conservation. And yet, despite various publications, declarations and conferences dedicated to this theme, it is an argument that remains nebulous and elusive. For example, in October 2006 the UNESCO-ICCROM Asian Academy for Heritage Management and the Faculty of Architecture at Chulalongkorn University convened the conference ‘Asian Approaches to Conservation’. While the Research Conference Proceedings brought together a collection of interesting and valuable papers, the publication did not directly address the question suggested by its title, of whether or not there is indeed an Asian approach to conservation (see Silapacharanan and Withaya Campbell 2006). Notwithstanding such issues, there is little doubt these charters, conferences and declarations have been part of a worldwide move to pluralise what is formally seen as heritage and create more nuanced approaches to the intersections between past-present and human-non-human. Seen together, they also reveal some of the ways in which heritage conservation has become increasingly tied to ideas of identity, revival, sustainability and so forth.

In exploring such themes, the following roundtable discussion reveals a series of concerns: the continuity of tradition and use; a widespread dismissal of indigenous preservation knowledge and methods in favour of science based conservation; the tension posed by religious beliefs which prize impermanence over material stasis; and (in)tolerance for community based (informal) conservation. Our aim in bringing together this small group of experts has been to tease out such issues. Rather than offering simple answers to the six questions we posed, our discussants
thus seek to take us beyond East/West binaries, or the overly reductive accounts of Eurocentrism that all too often permeate discussions in both academia and the policy arena. Conducted as a ‘virtual’ roundtable, communication began via conference calls and emails, with a ‘googledoc’ subsequently created to build the text over the course of several weeks. Each contributor responded to the answers of others in the spirit of engaged conversation, and their replies have been left largely intact in order to convey the character of what was an informal, yet critically important, discussion concerning cultural heritage conservation in Asia.

**Contributor abbreviations**

| AT | Aparna Tandon, Project Specialist, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Italy |
| PK | Pinraj Khanjanusthiti, Lecturer in architecture and heritage conservation, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand |
| HUR | Hae Un Rii, Professor of Geography, Dongguk University, Republic of Korea |
| KF/TW | Kecia Fong, Project Specialist, Getty Conservation Institute, United States and Tim Winter, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Culture and Society, Sydney |

**Roundtable discussion**

**KF/TW** Do you think there is something specific about Asian culture and society that necessitates a particular approach to conservation for the region?

**PK** There are some aspects that make the approach to conservation in Asia different from elsewhere. In countries where Buddhism is a basis for the way of life, such as Thailand, the attitude of the people towards the built environment is shaped by this belief. The idea of impermanence is central to Theravada Buddhism and this leads to the acceptance of material change. Buddhist ideology expresses the attitude towards a place where the spiritual experience is more important than the material representation of the place. These concepts are instilled in most of the traditional custodians, especially those who are safeguarding religious architecture. Actually, they also help conservation professionals to consider other approaches to identifying place authenticity.

It is also important to recognise the social and economic environments of many Asian countries. In many cases conservation of cultural heritage is not high on government agendas. The integration of conservation into development plans is therefore frequently considered a solution. Finding the balance between conservation of heritage resources and the need for economic development has become a key issue in managing historic places. A successful conservation project can allow a historic community to grow whilst maintaining important dimensions of its culture. But we can often see cases where the main objective of conservation is only to generate the economic benefit that comes from tourism.

**AT** For me the answer to this question is both yes and no. Yes, because several Asian countries are facing similar challenges in the conservation of their cultural as well as natural heritages (or environments – for want of a better word). On the one hand we have several ‘hot spots’ in the continent where cultural heritage, if it is not at the heart of an internal armed conflict/war, is intensifying it, e.g., Preah Vihear (Cambodia) or Babri Masjid (India). And equally, on the other hand, numerous countries are faced with cross-cutting issues of rising cultural and pilgrim tourism, changing cultural landscapes, endangered historic city centres, and state run museums and departments of archaeology that in most cases, follow an antiquated and top down, colonial
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model of management. And let's not forget natural disasters that can wipe out years of progress in a few seconds.

Whether it is the protection of the integrity of the seven monument zones of the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal)—inscribed on the Word Heritage List in Danger in 2003 and subsequently removed from the same because of uncontrolled development or the preservation of the endangered Gandhara collections in Pakistan—conservation of heritage in Asia has to be continually negotiated and cannot be simply standardised in accordance with Western ethics and practices. The Hoi An Protocols document gave particular attention to this issue. It is often argued that an Asian approach to conservation is needed because the Western concept of authenticity does not accommodate the Asian philosophy of impermanence and regeneration. It is an assertion, however, that should not overshadow the fact that many of the materials and methods of conservation used in the other parts of the world do not perform well in Asian climatic conditions. This means it is also an issue of finding compatible materials and developing indigenous techniques of conservation.

But I also suggest No because, apart from the obvious, what's the difference between the destruction of a mosque in Kashmir (Pakistan) from an earthquake in 2005 and the fate of a voodoo temple in Leogane (Haiti) in 2010? The point I am trying to make is that the challenges are not uniquely Asian but are shared by many other countries in other regions, such as South America or Africa. Whether we like it or not, we live in an interconnected world, and thus an Asian or African problem is the problem of the entire world. If we pursued the language of an 'Asian approach' this would lead to segregation and fragmentation. In an interconnected and a global society such as ours, that cannot be a viable solution for any region of the world.

I am going to talk about this matter in relation to the Korean case. In Asia, especially in East Asia, the structures and spatial location of most built heritages are mainly related to Pungsu (Fengsui in China; geomancy). Geomancy is the philosophy of people in relation to the natural environment. Traditional heritage structures such as Buddhist temples, buildings in palaces, or peoples' houses are mainly wooden structures. Only in the twentieth century did stone really become an important construction material. This means we always pay particular attention to natural disasters, such as fire, typhoon, earthquake, floods and so forth. This, I would suggest, means there are particular approaches required for undertaking conservation in Asian societies. The traditional wooden building construction of Korea and East Asia is quite different from Western countries where stone architecture is common from the past. This difference in materials and building technology influences our approaches and methodologies for conservation. Most Korean traditional wooden buildings did not use iron nails but rather they were put together like jigsaw puzzles. Moreover, just as important are the decorated surfaces or the traditional painting technology of these historic structures. When old or traditional buildings are repainted, their authenticity must be protected. Keeping the authenticity of buildings means protecting not only the shape and style but also the colouring of the buildings. All of this is provided for in our Cultural Heritage Protection Act (CHPA), which we use as the basic guideline for repairing cultural properties. The CHPA is the essential tool by which all conservation is regulated. It addresses the range of conservation matters from techniques and methodology, to technician training. Increasingly, local and national government are regarding cultural and natural heritage as tourism resources for making money. At the same time, people are beginning to regard cultural heritage as their own legacy, valuable for themselves and their descendants. The particular approach to conservation should be developed, as needed, according to the culture and society of a specific region, in this case the Asia-Pacific region and its different constituent parts.
The past twenty years has seen the creation of various initiatives such as the Nara Document, Yamato Declaration, Hoi An Protocols and Seoul Declaration. To what degree, do you think, have they helped advance heritage conservation in Asia?

Initiatives such as the Nara Document have clearly influenced conservation thinking as well as the development of conservation practice in Asia. They have served as references for conservation professionals particularly in the ways they outline and address issues of cultural diversity and authenticity, both of which are important aspects of a conservation plan. The Hoi An protocols promote awareness and standards of good conservation practice, and as such have provided guidance for both professionals and owners. There are several conservation projects in Asia that have employed these guidelines and principles, and a few have been recognised as successes through the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards Programme. Since the start of the programme in 2000, we have seen increasing numbers of entries from different countries in the region, many of which display innovative conservation approaches and techniques, as well as an enhanced understanding and sensitivity in the implementation of conservation work. The projects have also included strong cooperation between professionals and local communities. The quality of these conservation projects has improved every year, and I think this is partially attributable to the influence of the international guidelines and charters discussed above.

I agree with Pinraj on the positive impacts of the Nara Document and other such charters. Most notably, they have been helpful in developing more inclusive approaches to heritage conservation. In many respects, to date the Nara Document has been the most successful initiative. For example, it is now widely quoted in the conservation charters of many Asian countries, including India.

I would, however, like to point out that these initiatives have mainly focused on issues related to the conservation of immovable heritage and its associated environment. To the best of my knowledge, conservation of cultural heritage collections held within museums, religious organisations, private trusts, libraries, archives and so on, has not been addressed in any of these documents. To some extent, international associations for museum professionals, such as ICOM have tried to include discussions on inclusive and participatory conservation approaches for religious and ethnographic collections yet several inconsistencies remain in actual practice. For example, in most Buddhist monasteries in India, there are tradition-based systems for preserving thangkas (traditional religious scroll paintings usually executed on silk or cotton) based on their ritualistic and spiritual values. Some of these thangkas are brought out for public viewing on special occasions or after periodic intervals. Everyday use thangkas, if damaged are often discarded and burnt. Notwithstanding this, several cultural organisations in India are now organising workshops involving Western conservators, where monks are being given training on scientific methods of conserving thangkas. Somewhat ironically, their own tradition based practices of preservation – that have thus far proved to be sustainable – are not being studied and are at the risk of being lost or diluted.

In Korea, three declarations and one recommendation have arisen from international conferences since 2004. These are the Jongmyo Declaration on the Protection and Use of World Heritage (2004), the Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Villages (2005), the Seoul Declaration on Heritage and the Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific (2007) and the Andong Recommendation (2006). The 2005 Seoul Declaration, the 2006 Andong Recommendation and the 2007 Seoul Declaration were developed in sequence in an effort to protect and conserve the traditional villages and historic cities from increasing mass tourism, and at the
same time help promote sustainable development. The first Seoul Declaration was developed on the back of the Hoi An Declaration of 2003. These declarations and recommendation were used to design the management plans of two historic villages that were subsequently inscribed onto the World Heritage list in 2010.

In 2005, the Seoul City Government proposed a redesign of the city plan in front of Jongmyo, a World Heritage site and Royal Shrine of Joseon Dynasty. ICOMOS-Korea reacted to this plan and expressed their concern about the newly proposed building heights around Jongmyo. Accordingly, they offered guidelines for regulating the building heights in that area. The plan was revised a number of times until the National Cultural Heritage Committee finally approved it in 2010. In revising and refining the plan, the above-mentioned heritage declarations were consulted and considered under the Cultural Heritage Protection Law of Korea. Whenever we consider and discuss issues around authenticity of cultural heritage, particularly in the case of potential World Heritage nominations, the Nara Declaration serves as a useful set of guidelines.

KF/TW In what ways do you think national conservation policies and institutions in Asia have evolved in recent decades?

PK Recently, I have seen more awareness of conservation issues among private sector organisations as well as local communities, with a better understanding of the need for conservation of heritage resources involving collaboration between the public and private sectors. There are examples of grass-roots initiative projects carried out in many historic districts throughout Thailand. These demonstrate not only the strength of communities in managing their own heritage, but also the active role of academic institutions and NGOs in assisting local communities to carry out conservation related projects. The Ampawa community in Thailand is one such example, a project that started as research in cultural mapping led by the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University. By involving local residents, the mapping process succeeded in raising conservation awareness. Later on, vernacular buildings were also selected as a pilot conservation project, an initiative supported by the university, local authority, and various NGOs. Once successful, it became an example for other structures located within the community. Further cultural activities were initiated and undertaken by local residents and local authorities, with professional guidance given. The Ampawa project successfully revitalised the local economy and rebuilt a community spirit and thus provided a role model for the management of other community sites across the country. This was an important development because national conservation policies in Thailand had not really addressed the issue of community participation in the past. Today however, there is a growing recognition of the importance of community participation and the opportunities offered by decentralising conservation responsibilities to local government. But this cannot be achieved without detailed management strategies, including community conservation education and training in management skills, empowering local conservation agencies and amending out-dated conservation legislation. There is still quite a long way to go.

AT Asia is a vast continent and it would be difficult to answer this question in a comprehensive way. I can talk about the policy in India. The institutions entrusted with the responsibility of conserving India’s national heritage, namely the Archaeological Survey of India, Indian National Museum Calcutta, Asiatic Society, Calcutta (now Kolkata), and so on were founded during the British rule with an aim to investigate India’s lost past and to educate Indians. In 1947 when India gained its independence, nationalism coupled with a desire to showcase the great Indian civilisation led to the expansion of these institutions. Accordingly, a centralised institutional apparatus
for conservation and management of national heritage was established during this period. For example, to conserve the national records and documents, the office of Imperial Records Department (initially set up in 1881) was converted into the National Archives of India in 1947. In 1960, the National Museum of India was established. First exhibited in the President’s house, the important collections of this museum included Sir Aurel Stein’s collection from Central Asia.

Influenced by the prevailing scientific worldview, the emerging cultural heritage sector in India at this time chose to ignore its own traditional heritage care systems. Consequently, contemporaneous Western concepts, theories and practices were borrowed and applied widely throughout the country in an effort to conserve and manage the nation’s heritage. During the 1950s the scientific approach to conservation maintained its popularity in Europe. As a result, a number of conservation laboratories were established in India between the 1960s and 1980s. The focus was very much on resisting processes of degradation through chemical treatments. Given this heavily centralised ‘scientific’ conservation policy aimed at protecting heritage of national significance – pursued for more than four decades – a significant part of India’s cultural heritage, comprised of vernacular built heritage, water bodies, religious places, trade routes, privately held cultural collections, crafts, oral histories and much more, continues to be unprotected.

The lack of government action has led several NGOs to take on the responsibility of documenting and conserving this vulnerable heritage. As Pinraj has pointed out, the private sector has come up with several creative projects that are based around a more holistic approach to conservation. These projects have increased the general awareness towards conservation issues. There are several good examples that can be cited, ranging from the urban revitalisation of Ahmedabad in Gujarat6 to the much talked about initiative of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture that addresses the revitalisation and the restoration of the Gardens of Humayun’s Tomb (a UNESCO World Heritage site), which has since expanded to the neighbouring Nizamuddin area to include the safeguarding of the intangible such as Sufi music and poetry. It is to be noted that the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), an NGO established in the 1980s, is now the biggest employer of conservation professionals in India. It has recently introduced a charter for the conservation of unprotected heritage (see INTACH 2004). Spurred on by the positive developments in the non-governmental sector and in order to adhere to the operational guidelines of the world heritage convention, the Archaeological Survey of India has employed conservation architects and is now sub-contracting them for undertaking the work of preparing and implementing conservation plans. In some ways this is a huge leap forward, as it has helped open up an institution caught in a time warp, which to date has primarily employed archaeologists and chemists for its professional expertise.

In the domain of movable heritage, the National Museum of India liaises with government run museums in different states, while the Archaeological Survey of India manages its site museums. Endowed with rich collections – which over the years have expanded to include religious and ethnographic objects – the majority of Indian museums have failed to realise their full potential. Static displays, documentation backlogs and overloaded storage areas bear testimony to the mismanagement of India’s cultural wealth. Having considered this for quite some time, I think the only way out is to combine management reforms with the expansions in the infrastructure and training of the workforce. In stark contrast to India, Japan, China, South Korea and Singapore have now invested heavily to create world-class museum spaces and exhibitions.

From the outside it seems that the Indian government’s current cultural policy is all-inclusive and that the government is determined to professionalise its ‘cultural cadres’. On the official Ministry of Culture website, a citizen’s charter is posted with the intent to increase transparency
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and public participation. Yet, the situation on the ground is far from perfect. The centralised heritage management systems coupled with an almost exclusive focus on the buried past have alienated local communities and have broken the links between the past and the present.

HUR Korea, like elsewhere in Asia, did not pay serious attention to the conservation and protection of its cultural past until the 1980s. Up until this point, economic development was the top priority for the country. But now, somewhat different from other countries in Asia, the Cultural Heritage Protection Law of Korea is very detailed and strong. Legislation was first introduced in 1962, and revised thirty-five times to make it stronger and more relevant. In 2010 it was revised fully. Today, all national conservation policies for cultural heritage, especially those designated as nationally significant, are based on this law. In 1999, the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) of Korea was re-established as an independent agency, by separating from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Since then, implementation of a national policy for conservation and protection has accelerated. Under the CHA, Korean National University of Cultural Heritage, a training centre for traditional culture at the college level, was established. Moreover, in 1975 the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage was established, followed by five (national) regionally located Research Institutes of Cultural Heritage between 1990 and 2007. To complement and help guide these, the National Cultural Heritage Committee was set up in 1964, which continues to be actively involved in the decision process for all cultural heritage matters deemed of national significance. Finally here, there are several NGOs working on the protection and conservation of cultural heritage that were established from the 1990s. These organisations do not influence conservation policy directly, but they are involved as advisory bodies and provide monitoring services.

National policies on archaeological cultural heritage have changed as well. When a private company or individual would like to construct building(s), excavations must be done first. Once these are completed and if valuable relics are not found, the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea gives permission for the construction of buildings and development of the site. If valuable relics are found, all construction work is stopped and more detailed excavations are undertaken. These excavations are mostly done by national or local research institutes of cultural heritage and national museums, and some excavation activities are done by private museums, if they have the necessary facilities and expertise.

Today, all national conservation policies are strongly controlled by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, in accordance with the Cultural Property Protection Law. Local governments apply this law and regulations related to the standards of restoration, repair, colouring, etc. Despite this, attempts to standardise conservation practice continues to be a 'hot issue' these days, mainly because geographical differences create particular conditions and challenges for conserving the heritage. Consequently, today experts are working to find possible solutions for conservation approaches that fit the natural environment and other local conditions.

KF/TW Do you think the various conference discussions, guidelines or reports published on philosophies and methodologies for Asia have had an impact on how conservation is actually practiced and approached on a day-to-day basis?

HUR All Koreans were saddened by the devastating fire that consumed Sungryemoon, the South Gate of old Seoul, during the 2008 lunar New Year holiday. This proved to be a turning point for all Koreans and the government stepped up efforts to protect and conserve the country's heritage. Now many are concerned with how we, the government and people, can and should care for our cultural heritage. The decision to reconstruct the Sungryemoon incited many
philosophical and technical discussions. Koreans wanted to keep the authenticity of Sungryemoon due to its importance as an iconic architectural reference of Joseon Dynasty Seoul. Reconstructions would be based on archival documentation and existing original fabric. Once the reconstruction began, people watched closely to observe which methodologies and philosophies were being implemented. In conjunction with discussions on authenticity and the reconstruction of the gate, there were a number of conferences related to issues of risk preparedness with specific regard to wooden structures.

The 2007 Seoul Declaration, the Cultural Heritage Protection Law, and the Nara Declaration were each used to guide the conservation decisions for the Sungryemoon reconstruction. They were also used for the management and monitoring of three other World Heritage sites in Korea – Jongmyo, Changduk Palace complex and Joseon Royal Tombs. Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea manages the program ‘One Cultural Heritage, One Protector’. This program started in 2006, but after the fire of Sungryemoon and the inscription of Joseon Royal Tombs, the number of volunteers has increased. The program promotes day-to-day conservation practices for sites and objects. There are 5,784 protectors including 3,487 individuals, 553 families and 517 companies and groups. These protectors are registered to help with ‘cleaning the site and objects’, ‘monitoring’, ‘interpretation and presentation to visitors’ and ‘supporting all relative conservation activities’. In this regard, I feel many people beyond the government are now involved in the day-to-day care, protection and conservation of cultural heritage.

AT Conference discussions, guidelines and reports have certainly increased the general awareness of the need for adopting ‘culturally sensitive’ or ‘sustainable’ approaches to heritage conservation. Yet, these are difficult to implement in actual practice due to the lack of knowledge, skills and capacities. To illustrate this I would like to cite a few examples from the field. In my native state of Jammu and Kashmir (India), traditional forms of construction – taq (i.e. timber laced) and dhajji dewari (i.e. timber frame with infill masonry) – have proven to be earthquake resistant and several of the old buildings survived the 2005 Northern Kashmir (Pakistan) earthquake. Since then, UNESCO has organised a conference to increase awareness regarding the safeguarding of traditional buildings yet five years on no concrete action has been taken to conserve such buildings. The lack of skilled labour is one of the fundamental problems. The structural engineers in charge of post-disaster reconstruction and repair do not have the requisite knowledge and the masons who had the skills have either retired or died. The issue is made more complex by the declining availability of wood as forest cover in the area is rapidly diminishing.

Another example I would like to highlight is the continued use of toxic chemicals in conservation practice, despite the existence of several Indian publications on traditional, non-toxic methods. Until 2007, ASI was using ethylene oxide as a fumigant on the paintings of the historic Ajanta caves, a World Heritage site. Ethylene oxide is banned elsewhere and is highly carcinogenic. I can cite several other examples on the use of harmful chemicals in both government and private institutions. It is a battle that we are losing everyday. So while we discuss good practice or the need for sensitivities to existing (historic or traditional) approaches, the reality on the ground regarding how this translates to practice is not always so successful.

PK I think that the main advantage of the publications and discussions to date has been in raising the level of public awareness concerning heritage and conservation. People now have a much better understanding of heritage values and the need to conserve them. Previously neglected or overlooked forms of heritage are recognised and protected, including industrial and modern architecture. In Thailand, there are increasing numbers of conservation activities carried out by the private sector and communities on properties that have not previously been recognised as
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significant in terms of historic or architectural value. For example, residential buildings and shop­
houses were renovated to accommodate modern usage patterns. The definition of heritage has
also expanded from simply the preservation of historic sites to include the management of cultural
landscapes. Public and professional understanding of this conservation area has emerged from
the ongoing efforts of cultural agencies. ICOMOS Thailand and the Association of Siamese
Architects, two active agencies, have published documents, organised conferences, exhibitions
and workshops to foster an awareness of heritage values and conservation practices. The Thailand
Charter was drafted by ICOMOS Thailand with the hope that it can be used as a reference for
conservation practice throughout the country. Even though there are increasing calls for con­
servation and more developed understandings of conservation concepts and practices, as well as a
lot of good intentions, proper protection remains a real challenge. This is often due to many
factors, such as a lack of conservation expertise, skilled craftsmen and experienced contractors,
development pressures that affect the management of conservation, or a general lack of funding
and management expertise.

KF/TW Part of the debate on conservation in Asia focuses on the tension between ‘formal/
professional’ approaches and ‘informal/popular’ practices of local communities. Do you know of
any examples of how that is or is not being addressed?

PK The conflict between popular practices and professional approaches to conservation is
demonstrated clearly in the case of Buddhist monasteries in Thailand. The distinctive character of
Buddhist monastic architecture in the country is in part due to their lavish decoration. The main
construction materials are brick, stucco and timber. The detailed decorations consist of gold
gilding, mirror and ceramic tiles and mural paintings which all have a relatively short life-span in
the intense heat and heavy rainfall of the tropical climate. As a consequence, restoration has been
the norm of practice. This often involves the replacement of materials, both decorative and
structural. Traditionally, the work was done by local craftsmen or the monks themselves. The
restoration of monastic buildings and the financial support required for this has long been
considered an act of piety. There are many examples, including listed monasteries, where historic
fabric was completely restored, resulting in the loss of patina and material authenticity. An
additional source of conflict relates to the need for management and policies associated with that.
Plans and regulations designed to conserve local heritage are often developed by outsiders who
adopt top-down approaches which may not address the real needs of the local community.
Zoning proposals, listing regulations and building control systems are often considered by local
residents as restricting development. Indeed, it is often more convenient for them to pursue their
business interests outside protected areas, which, as we know, can lead to the abandonment or
neglect of historic places.

AT My experience is that renewal, revitalisation and the conservation of ‘living’ elements in
keeping with the aspirations of all concerned frequently create controversy. The right to repaint
a mural in a Buddhist Gompa in Ladakh is directed by the monks in charge or the local
community. In this instance, the primary source of knowledge is the local craftsmen who have
been renewing the structure for years. They can and should lead the conservation work, such that
conservation professionals provide additional support. However, what if there are multiple
stakeholders and the cultural rights of a minority are in question? For example, an NGO that
I worked with in Jammu Kashmir was approached for the conservation of an eighteenth century
fort. It is now being used as a school and has an in-use temple and an out-of-use mosque. The
fort was originally built by a Muslim ruler and was later taken over by a Hindu ruler. At a certain
point in history, there was a Muslim community of weavers living in the vicinity of the fort, hence the presence of a mosque. However, given the inhabitants are predominantly Hindu, the question thus arises: which elements of such an ensemble should be revitalised? Not surprisingly, in this case the local community was not willing to support the restoration of the mosque.

Another example that comes to my mind is that of a sixteenth century stone temple. The walls of the sanctum-sanctorum were lined with ceramic tiles to block moisture seepage. This work was carried out at the behest of the temple authorities without involving 'professional experts'. Aesthetics aside, this intervention has resulted in further degradation of the structure. As Pinraj has pointed out, negotiating with religious communities can be challenging and involves tough decision-making over function, form, spirit, access and more often than not economics. An allied issue is the lack of historic materials or those that are compatible with older techniques of fabrication. Historically, careful selection of materials, elaborate processing, and fabrication techniques were considered necessary for ensuring longevity of religious manuscripts, paintings and other such objects. We lack knowledge on how contemporary materials age. Some may argue that this is yet another reason why minimal intervention should be observed. In a populous country like India, land is one of the most prized commodities. Ensuring the adherence to guidelines such as the ban on building or adding new construction within a 100 metre radius of a protected site continues to be contentious. There are several archaeological sites in India where local pastoral communities living around the site have had difficulties in farming or grazing cattle, leading to protracted disputes with heritage authorities.

**HUR** Yes, such tensions have long existed in the sites and cases I am familiar with. For us, the most common source of tension or conflict revolves around the competing needs of conservation and economic development. To alter any of the buildings registered as cultural property at the national, provincial or local level permissions need to be obtained. Of course, these buildings receive financial support from the government when any repairs or restoration plans fall within the national guidelines. This is the formal and professional approach. However, people always want to undertake informal conservation without the inconvenience of these processes, and/or for other, unapproved purposes. It is a problem and a debate that has been discussed for a long time. Naturally, this is not unique to Korea but occurs in all Asian countries that are experiencing rapid economic and regional development.

When regional developers or companies plan to develop a site, planning permission is required. In certain instances, excavations by a research institute or professional excavation institute need to be conducted first. If important cultural relics are found, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage is contacted. In one example of this, an apartment complex located on an historically significant site that embarked upon a renovation program in the mid-2000s continues to be excavated several years later. When we visit the site, there is a clearly visible sign made by the land owners complaining about the slow and overly formal approach to conservation. I have visited this site many times and fully understand their frustrations. However, if we are to fully protect the cultural heritage, I feel there is no other alternative. My only concern is the slow progress made by the government and how they are not adequately negotiating with the landowners a policy for how the site will be used. As a member of the National Cultural Heritage Committee, I am aware of several other examples that suffer from the same challenges and problems. Without going into details, I feel we have made good progress as a profession in educating people and preventing much of the informal and popular practices of conservation in recent years.

**KF/TW** What do you consider to be the most useful next steps for advancing appropriate conservation philosophies, methodologies and practices in Asia?
Concerning the practices, it would be useful if we could really address the importance of maintaining and reviving traditional construction techniques and materials, as well as the knowledge of how to incorporate them into contemporary contexts in ways that would ensure their sustainability. Successful buildings have been continually modified throughout history, due to traditional practices of restoration. Transformation has long been part of building traditions carried out by traditionally trained craftsmen using local materials. Craftsmanship is one of Asia's traditional wisdoms. Vanishing materials and skills are a significant loss to the region's heritage. Having said that, I do believe that knowledge of traditional materials and construction techniques in Southeast Asia is not totally lost, but scattered. It is a knowledge form that is not fully documented and is difficult to transfer through modern educational systems. In training craftsmen, apprenticeship is a normal practice. The fact that traditional architecture textbooks are virtually non-existent makes it more difficult for modern-day practitioners to study and gain a correct understanding of the architecture. Academic institutions, conservation and cultural agencies could play a vital role in researching and documenting the knowledge of traditional crafts, techniques and materials by working together with craftsmen. This knowledge will be of great benefit not only to conservation professionals but also to architects working on contemporary designs. Since traditional construction practices are based on appropriately chosen local materials and labour intensive activities, they are more sustainable than many modern construction practices. If architects and other design professionals gain a better understanding of building traditions and use them as a basis for contemporary design projects, we will have more sustainable buildings and the continuity of traditional knowledge can be ensured.

For me, first and foremost, more opportunities for professional training and exchange have to be created and, as I have noted above, this exchange should also involve African and Latin American professionals.

To be clear, here you mean conservation professionals (formally trained as distinguished above)?

Actually we need to consider both formal and informal training and it needs to occur in the many places where people receive on-the-job training. Perhaps the word 'practitioner' is better? Here I would like to highlight that many talented practitioners from the region are not able to disseminate their knowledge and experience as reputed peer-reviewed journals on heritage conservation have predetermined requirements for references and scientific methods of research that are difficult to meet. Additionally, it seems the publishing of books requires a long preparatory period and therefore may not be the most effective way of sharing information when and where it is most needed. Training of conservation professionals should also include knowledge of traditional techniques of fabrication. To some extent, countries such as Japan and South Korea have already taken a lead on this issue as they have studios and ateliers where formally trained conservators can acquire skills for restoration of lacquered and paper-based objects, traditional buildings and so on. There should be a concentrated effort throughout Asia to train the next generation of craftspeople and these efforts should be linked with livelihood diversification initiatives. Bhutan is one such successful example.

To address the challenges of conserving heritage in Asia, we need innovative programs and policies that can capitalise on the success stories in the field of culture from all over the world that focus on sustainable, local solutions. Moreover, in order to ensure that culture is one of the key drivers of social and economic growth in Asia, national governments need to introduce sector-wide structural reforms with an aim to increase public participation and to integrate...
cultural heritage projects with poverty alleviation, public health, education, urban and rural development and disaster risk reduction. A pertinent example here is that of the untapped potential of Asian contemporary art. China and India now have their art ‘hubs’ where connoisseurs and investors alike trade and collect aggressively. This is a ‘heritage’ in the making and has the potential to create jobs for many. Both policy makers and heritage professionals should look to new ways in which we can tap into this resource and multiply the benefits to conserve other endangered legacies. Having said that, I would like to emphasise that a scientific discourse rooted in materiality and mainly sourced from the West is incongruous with the realities of Asia and rest of the developing world. Thus, first and foremost, we have to correct this imbalance.

Further integration of cultural heritage conservation with development initiatives would also be of great help. The ‘Culture Bank’ in Mali, a collaboration between the Peace Corps and various NGOs, is a good example of involving the local community in ways that help create different values for objects. Along with the economic gains secured, this initiative has helped curb illicit trade of cultural artefacts in the area. With some modification, I think this project would work well in Jammu and Kashmir, for example, where one of the ways in which terrorism is being financed is the illicit trade of heritage objects. I believe structural reforms within top-down national heritage institutions and a decentralisation of power and funding can help increase public participation. In India many development schemes are implemented through Gram panchayats, i.e. a body of democratically elected representatives that acts at the village level.

PK I agree with Aparna that the training of conservation professionals should include knowledge of traditional techniques. In Thailand, as in other Southeast Asian countries, most of the historic buildings are maintained by local communities, the traditional custodians. It is also equally important to provide them with knowledge of building crafts, so that they can undertake repair works on their own heritage. A UNESCO project in Luang Prabang, a World Heritage site in Laos, is one such example, where monks have been taught traditional building skills and related arts so that their roles as traditional custodians of the religious heritage can be revived.

HUR I agree somewhat with Pinraj. But in Korea, we have taken the approach of specifically training technicians in the traditional skills and knowledge. In international conferences, experts and practitioners present theories, methodologies and the practices they adopt. Although there are language barriers because some experts are only able to communicate in their own language, ideas and experiences are easily shared. I feel the conferences I have attended are very important events. I have also been involved in valuable events which bring together researchers and practitioners from three countries in the region, and while we are not able to share a common language we all learn much about traditional conservation techniques and methodologies. I think the most useful next step would be the further sharing of experiences with experts in other Asian countries. I hope we will continue to find common methodologies and learn philosophies and techniques from each other.

KF/TW In drawing this discussion to a close, one of our key questions seems to linger uneasily in the air, of whether we can indeed speak of an Asian approach to conservation. What is revealed here is that such lines of enquiry soon run into a converging mix of pragmatic, philosophical and historical components. It is clear that the historic standards and guidelines of conservation, as they emerged from Europe and have been applied globally, did not include some of the essential concerns and realities of those in Asia or, for that matter, other parts of the world (Africa and Latin America) as Aparna states. Continuity of tradition, use, craft, belief, community and available resources are powerful aspects of life in Asia which profoundly influence
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conservation practice there inasmuch as they define and inform the values of heritage; themes which various chapters that follow explore in greater detail. Traditional practices, the active engagement of the (informal/non-professional) community, and religious beliefs do not neatly conform to the scientific method, although neither are they necessarily in conflict with it. What our respondents and their Asian colleagues seem to be asking for is an opening up of the notions of acceptable best practice and of what is conservation. The concerns for history, culture and heritage are 'same same'. How that heritage is honoured and carried into the future may be 'different', or at least much more nuanced than has been historically asserted. This is not to cast a relativist approach across everything, but rather that our measure of what is the best conservation approach must integrate the concerns of the cultures who produced, steward and cherish that heritage. The scientific method is useful until it denies, negates, or isolates the life of that heritage and its culture from the object, site or act at hand. What is needed is a balance of the physical with the metaphysical. As both Pinraj and Hae Un clearly indicate, the concepts, institutions and legal instruments of conservation evolve, and as such they will always be reflections of the socio-cultural contexts which define and enable them. Conflicts arise with complexity, and with a greater diversity of voices at the table discussing and defining what is heritage and how it is best protected and preserved there are bound to be differences of opinion. This complexity and deliberation should be welcomed. It allows conservation to evolve, will only aid in its maturation and will help ensure its continued relevance.

Notes

1 For more detailed accounts of the history and evolution of conservation theory and philosophy, see Stanley-Price et al. (1996), Jokilehto (2002) and Bewer (2010).
2 The full titles for these are: Nara Document on Authenticity; Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China; Shanghai Charter 2002: Museums, Intangible Heritage and Globalisation; Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage; Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage; Xi’an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas; Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia; Seoul Declaration on Heritage and the Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific.
3 We readily acknowledge these charters and declarations form part of a complex landscape of international heritage governance, and interpreting their proliferation requires the incorporation of different explanatory frameworks that interrogate them within discourses of nationalism, postcolonial identity politics and so forth, a discussion beyond the scope of this roundtable.
4 For further details, see UNESCO (2003).
5 The latter was the result of the International Conference on ‘Impact of Mass Tourism on Historic Villages Identifying Key Indicators of Tourism Impact’.
6 For further details, see Times of India (2001).
7 For further details, see Langenbach (2009).
8 For further details, see Japan Bank for International Cooperation (2007).
9 The drafted version of the Charter is only in Thai and the title can be translated as ‘The Charter for the Conservation and Management of Historic Monuments and Sites and related Cultural Heritage’. The Thailand Charter is the short version of the title that is used by ICOMOS Thailand.

References


