



Heritage Protection: The Asian Experience

A Pan-Asia Conference



**Friday, 25 – Saturday, 26 January 2019
at The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, Bangkok, Thailand.**

Conference Objective

The conference will explore how thinking about culture, cultural heritage, and cultural heritage protection in Asian nations differ from the West. The conference aims to stimulate discussion on a range of issues related to these topics in an entirely Asian context. (For the purposes of this conference, the terms Asian nations, Asian continent, and Asia exclude Central and West Asia.)

Conference Background and Rationale

At a time of rapid economic, technological, and social changes, the Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, a leading Thai civil society organization in the field of cultural heritage together with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Authority of Thailand, is hosting a conference entitled “Heritage Protection: The Asian Experience”, held in the English language, in Bangkok, on January 24-26, 2019. The conference will bring together Asian thinkers, professionals, and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage protection who will examine the meaning of “Culture”, “Cultural Heritage”, and “Cultural Heritage Protection” in Asian nations.

A well-developed corpus of conventions, guidelines, and internationally accepted best practices for cultural heritage protection already exists, which largely arose out of successful European experiences in heritage protection in the 19th and 20th centuries; hence, it is only natural that heritage protection theories reflect such European experiences.

This conference invites Asian speakers to describe cultural heritage from an Asian perspective, recognizing the diversity of cultures and cultural heritage protection experiences across the Asian continent.

The speakers will look at various aspects of the Asian experience of cultural heritage protection within diverse Asian settings to determine: what are the main obstacles to successful heritage protection; what works and what does not; what lessons can be drawn for Asian people from Asian experiences? Furthermore, they will suggest cultural heritage protection strategies most likely to be effective within the Asian socio-cultural and political contexts, focusing on community involvement, the role of law, and entrepreneurs’ contributions.

Conference Thematic Framework

The conference will be divided into four sub-themes, each addressed in one of the four half-day panel discussions:

- **Heritage is the living present of the past.**

This panel will introduce the conference program, looking broadly at cultural heritage protection issues across Asia. What does cultural heritage mean to Asian people? Can one make general statements about cultural heritage across Asia or can one only look at regional or country-specific heritage? Do European and Asian concepts of cultural heritage diverge due to their different historical experiences, socio-cultural milieus, and cultural values? If so, how can heritage protection in Asian countries be best pushed forward in a way consistent with Asian views of culture and cultural heritage? And should internationally accepted best practices be modified to better suit Asian countries' needs and circumstances?

- **People taking ownership of heritage.**

Cultural heritage is often used and abused, promoted and destroyed, by governments to suit their own agendas, and cultural heritage protection policies in Asia are often defined top-down by national governments neglecting community ownership of cultural heritage. Within the Asian political-economic and social context, how can ownership of heritage be claimed by people and communities, whether at local, ethnic, or national level? What are the respective roles of government and grassroots communities in protecting heritage? How can education, formal and informal, promote heritage protection at the grassroots level?

- **How to put law to work on behalf of heritage protection?**

In many nations, the rule of law is weak. Is a legal framework essential for cultural heritage protection? If yes, what are the conditions for success in using the law to protect cultural heritage in Asia? What successful examples exist in Asia for an effective legal framework for cultural heritage protection law? If no effective legal framework is in place, how can heritage protection work? What lessons can be drawn for Asian countries based on this analysis?

- **How can entrepreneurial energies complement heritage protection?**

When cultural heritage protection complements and supplements economic development to improve people's lives, it is more likely to be embraced at grassroots and national levels. How then can entrepreneurship, ranging from large corporations to micro enterprises, be harnessed to further cultural heritage protection? What are the benefits and what are the risks of entrepreneurs playing a major role in cultural heritage protection? How can governments facilitate this role?

Speakers from twelve nations will participate on the panels, each delivering a 20-minute oral summary of the main points of their respective papers. (The abstract of each paper will be published in the Conference Booklet to be distributed to all the attendees.) A moderator will pose questions, solicit audience participation, and conclude the sessions. At the end of the conference, two seminar rapporteurs will synthesize key points and themes that arose during the four sessions.

A book compiling the conference papers will come out in 2019 for widespread distribution throughout the Asian region.