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Nature and culture in World Heritage management: A view from the Asia-Pacific (or, never waste a good crisis!)

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The gulf between natural and cultural World Heritage management in the Asia-Pacific region – and indeed right around the world – remains wide. This situation obtains from the top to the bottom of the World Heritage (WH) system and persists despite the now well-worn arguments against it and despite continual if still somewhat fitful efforts to find a remedy. Taking a broad view of what we call ‘management’ to encompass everything upstream, during and downstream of a nomination, this chapter¹ discusses the background to the issue, the current positions on the matter of UNESCO, ICOMOS and IUCN,² and what might be done at both the institutional level and on the ground to help find a concrete solution in the near future.

To disclose my interests in the matter, I am Secretary-General of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) and an ICOMOS World Heritage Assessor. In this latter capacity I do desktop and field assessments of properties nominated for World Heritage listing and have worked closely with IUCN in these contexts. I am also Secretary-General of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA) and Convenor of the International Heritage Group (IHG), both mentioned towards the end of the chapter.

What’s the issue?

In a nutshell, the impetus to draw natural and cultural heritage management closer together flows from related and broadly parallel decisions in UNESCO, ICOMOS and IUCN to expand definitions and categories of WH places and protected natural areas to include what UNESCO and ICOMOS call ‘cultural landscapes’ and what IUCN calls ‘Category V [i.e. 5]’ and ‘Category VI protected areas’. The similarities and differences between these two major kinds of heritage place are discussed in more detail below. Here it is enough to note that cultural landscapes and protected landscapes are both centrally concerned with relationships between people and nature but that only the former are a recognised class of World Heritage.

¹ An early draft of this paper is published in the Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Best Practices in World Heritage: Archaeology. Menorca, Spain, 9-13 April 2012.

² ICOMOS – International Committee on Monuments and Sites, IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature; together with ICCROM, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, these groups form the statutory Advisory Bodies to UNESCO on World Heritage.

UNESCO got into the business of cultural landscapes as part of a long-term effort to expand the World Heritage List in terms of both its topical and its geographical diversity (see Jokilehto 2005 for background on ‘Filling the Gaps’). To put it crudely, the idea was to have fewer European cathedrals, and more things such as natural places, archaeological sites and cultural landscapes in all regions as well as more of any kind of natural, cultural and especially ‘mixed’ cultural and natural properties in non-European locations. As UNESCO’s assessment of *The State of World Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region 2003* (Feng 2003:15) puts it:

the bias towards monumental architecture as well as the preponderance of cultural over natural properties, has been repeatedly scrutinised by the World Heritage Committee and Advisory Bodies. However, the World Heritage List of properties is far from fully representing the rich ethno-cultural and biogeographical diversity of the Asia-Pacific region.

As a corollary of broadening the List, non-Western approaches to heritage and its management were to be encouraged and accommodated by the World Heritage nomination process. Amongst other things, this means encouraging and accommodating perspectives on heritage and its management which do not separate nature and culture but rather treat them holistically as indivisibly inter-related aspects of the world in which people live. Mixed nominations and cultural landscapes (the distinction remains somewhat blurry) are seen as keys to advancing this agenda. UNESCO’s *The State of World Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region 2003* (Feng 2003:18) draws attention to the fact that:

the Asia-Pacific region is at the origin of the development of the concept of cultural landscapes on the World Heritage List. The first three cultural landscapes inscribed on the List, Tongariro National Park in New Zealand, Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia, and the Banaue Rice Terraces in the Philippines are all located in Asia and the Pacific. The recognition of the Maori spiritual attachment and veneration of the sacred mountain peaks at Tongariro³ represented a turning point for the [World Heritage] Convention in further emphasising the importance of interaction between people and their environment. The introduction of the category of associative cultural landscape has encouraged the submission of mixed nominations throughout the world, as well as stimulating Pacific Island Countries to see the applicability of the World Heritage Convention in their countries, where customary land ownership and Indigenous knowledge form the basis for heritage protection.

This all sounds commendably postcolonial and emancipatory, and has resulted in globally groundbreaking work such as Smith and Jones’s (2007) assessment of Pacific cultural landscapes, but what does it mean for people at the coalface around the region? Not a lot, from my observation, though not because of any lack of effort or goodwill. More sites are certainly being nominated as ‘mixed properties’, at least in the Pacific, which ostensibly means their cultural and natural dimensions are considered together. In reality, though, at least in my recent experience, the natural and cultural aspects of such nominations are treated completely separately, even when the technical assessors of the two ‘sides’ of the nominations are in-country together and get on well, personally and professionally. In addition, the mixed properties with which I have been involved were very obviously originally ‘natural’ nominations with culture added on later, in a nod to the new more encompassing imperatives.

I am not saying that those concerned with the nominations were not genuine in their interest in cultural matters, and I do not want to diminish their efforts to be inclusive. Far from it. It must be said, though, that their enthusiasm generally outstripped their specialist subject knowledge and management capacity regarding cultural heritage. It was also clear that the ‘cultural sides’ of these

³ Tongariro National Park in New Zealand was first listed in 1990 as a natural property but in 1993 was re-inscribed as the first-ever World Heritage cultural landscape in recognition of its ‘associative’ cultural values.

mixed nominations had been put together after and more hastily than the ‘natural sides’, and that the proposed management of the properties remained almost entirely in the hands of natural heritage managers. Those natural heritage managers were also better organised, better funded and *far* better supported by external civil society organisations than the cultural heritage managers.

In countries with little income to begin with, this relative poverty of resources for cultural matters greatly exacerbates and is, recursively, further worsened by the split between nature and culture in heritage management. The nations we are encouraging to nominate cultural landscapes and mixed sites so that local perspectives on World Heritage are recognised and valued often really can’t afford to nominate and then manage such properties, even with external assistance. This means that when offered a choice by a process divided between nature and culture, they quite pragmatically tend to put most of their eggs in the better-built basket, namely natural heritage management, to help ensure access to the supposed benefits of World Heritage recognition that we tout. Thus despite the official inclusive rhetoric about fostering non-Western perspectives which do not separate nature and culture, this means that people can see their holistic community-based perspectives actively disregarded – or only given a token nod – in favour of quintessentially Western approaches which very definitely separate humans from their environments. The effort to expand the List and the ways in which listed properties are managed is thus suborned and the List doomed to just replicate itself along Western lines, albeit in exotic locations.

This is not just a problem with sites coming on-stream now but which were ‘in process’ for a long time and were thus nominated before discussion of nature vs culture had progressed very far. The dominance of natural heritage extends to many ‘mixed’ properties currently awaiting nomination and assessment on Asia-Pacific World Heritage Tentative Lists. A quick scan of such lists shows that many if not most ‘mixed’ tentative listings focus almost entirely on the natural dimensions of the property. Thus, for instance, the tentative listing of the Huon Peninsula Terraces in Papua New Guinea (PNG), one of the earliest known sites of human settlement in the Asia-Pacific, devotes just two words to the matter out of a 514-word text. The remainder concerns the evolution and biodiversity of the physical landscape. One has to be sincerely thankful such sites have been tentatively listed on any basis, but it is hard not to think that we are going ‘back to the future’ rather than making any genuine headway.

To wrap up this litany of concern about barriers to cooperation across the nature-culture divide, there is no formal capacity for managers of properties nominated as either ‘just’ cultural – such as Kuk in PNG – or ‘just’ natural – such as East Rennell in the Solomons – to have input from the ‘other side’, despite the rhetoric about holistic approaches to management which are sensitised to local perceptions.

I have stressed that the foregoing observations are made on the basis of my own recent experience with World Heritage management, broadly defined, but none of these concerns is new. Nor are such complaints made only by people such as me from the ‘ICOMOS side’. IUCN advocates of protected landscapes make precisely the same sorts of comments. Phillips (2005:20), for instance, points out:

that landscape has usually been seen as a second class member of the environmental club. ‘Lacking a coherent philosophy, thin on quantification and without a strong, unified disciplinary core, it has often been viewed as a ‘soft’ topic, to be swept aside in the rush to develop and exploit the environment, a trend that is justified by that trite commentary: ‘jobs before beauty’ (Phillips and Clarke 2004). Compared to the wilderness movement in North America, and its equivalents in Australia and other countries, the idea of taking an interest in lived-in, working landscapes was slow to emerge, and confined to relatively few countries for many years. In this it contrasts with the demands of wildlife conservation or pollution control. The protection, management and planning of landscape has generally been a less powerful movement, and has taken longer to emerge as a political force.

The contrast is particularly evident at the international level.

He goes on (2005:26) to explain:

The World Heritage Convention...combines two ideas: cultural heritage and natural heritage, and in operating the convention two separate streams of activity have developed...Over the years, the sharp separation and differentiation of these two approaches has been found less and less helpful in understanding the world's heritage and its needs for protection and management...the separation of the cultural and natural world – of people from nature – makes little sense. Indeed it makes it more difficult to achieve sustainable solutions to complex problems in the real world in which people and their environment interact in many ways.

The discourse(s)

The two approaches referred to by Phillips are exemplified by the differing discourses of UNESCO and ICOMOS on the one hand and IUCN on the other. I will sketch the gist of each rather than attempt to chart every twist and turn of the sometimes ill-defined and confusing decision-making processes.

Cultural landscapes

UNESCO recognised ‘cultural landscapes’ as a category of World Heritage in 1992, specifically to overcome obvious conceptual and practical difficulties with the cultural/natural dichotomy recognised in the original World Heritage Convention and with the ‘intellectually flaccid idea of the ‘mixed site’ (Fowler 2003:17) that subsequently emerged to bridge the nature-culture divide. Fowler (2003:18) notes that the notion is of nineteenth century origin but was brought to prominence by the Berkeley geographer Carl Sauer in the early decades of the twentieth century. For Sauer (1925, cited in Mitchell *et al.* 2009:15):

The cultural landscape is fashioned out of the natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result.

Archaeologists mainly know Sauer for his work on the origins of agriculture, and Fowler (2003:18) goes on to point out that conservationists – including heritage archaeologists – only adopted Sauer's idea in the 1990s. Fowler contends that the ‘cultural landscapes’ designation “remains ... an uncommon term for an opaque concept”. Fowler wrote those words almost a decade ago now. To advance the state of play, the World Heritage Centre published Mitchell, Rössler and Tricaud's edited volume *World Heritage Cultural Landscapes. A Handbook for Conservation and Management* in 2009. Yet the term and its practical application remain a work in progress, not least because of the differing perspectives brought to the discussion by the non-Western societies such as those in the Asia-Pacific, which continue to be strongly encouraged to participate in World Heritage affairs (cf. Smith and Jones 2007). Somewhat surprisingly in this context, the definitions of cultural landscapes in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention have not changed since 1992 despite several revisions to the Guidelines in that time. This wording specifies three types of cultural landscape (UNESCO 2011:88):

1. The clearly-defined landscape (such as gardens and parklands);
2. The organically-evolved landscape, in which culture and nature have co-evolved (to use an IUCN term). There are two sub-types, the relict or fossil landscape in which the material results of a past co-evolution are still visible, and a continuing landscape, where the co-evolution carries on; and,

3. The associative cultural landscape, where a natural landscape is invested with largely or entirely intangible cultural values.

To be inscribed on the World Heritage List, any place nominated under any of these categories must exhibit Outstanding Universal Value, using the same six criteria as other categories of eligible cultural properties.

Protected areas

Confusingly, although IUCN advises UNESCO on natural aspects of World Heritage, and thus like ICOMOS is enjoined to use the cultural landscapes designation in relation to World Heritage matters, the organisation has its own nomenclature which is not particularly consistent with UNESCO's conceptualisations and terminology.

IUCN works with the notion of 'protected areas', of which there are six kinds with differing management goals. Categories I-IV are purely natural heritage areas with decreasing levels of restriction on human activity within their boundaries (e.g. Category I is called a 'Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Area'). Categories V and VI, on the other hand, recognise the place of humans in the world. The two are sometimes combined under the rubric of "protected landscapes", though that term technically applies only to Category V, Protected Landscape/Seascape. In conception, Category V is closest to a cultural landscape. Indeed, the main IUCN publication on the matter states that '*protected landscapes are cultural landscapes* that have co-evolved with the human societies inhabiting them' (Brown *et al.* 2005:3, my emphasis). Category VI, 'Managed Resource Protected Area', is designed to manage sustainable harvesting of natural resources. It thus also encompasses the protection of human interaction with the environment, but on a somewhat different basis.

Although IUCN's protected landscapes are similar to UNESCO and ICOMOS's cultural landscapes, they are not the same. As Brown *et al.* (2005:9–10) write:

there are important distinctions between the two designations, in particular related to how they are selected. In designation of Category V Protected Landscapes, the natural environment, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem integrity have been the primary emphases. In contrast, the emphasis in World Heritage Cultural Landscape designation has been on human history, continuity of cultural traditions, and social values and aspirations (Mitchell and Buggey, 2001). As Adrian Phillips further notes in his chapter [in the same 2005 volume], "outstanding universal value" is a fundamental criterion in recognising a World Heritage Cultural Landscape, while the emphasis in Category V Protected Landscapes is on sites of national, or sub-national significance.

Phillips (2005:27) also points out that the IUCN Category V lacks UNESCO/ICOMOS's 'designed landscape' type.

ICOMOS's Rössler (2005:46) regards cultural landscapes 'as a role model paralleling the development of the IUCN Category V Protected Landscape/Seascape. In cultural landscapes specifically, the local communities are acknowledged with the (co)responsibility in managing the sites'. IUCN's Brown *et al.* (2005:10) are at pains to declare, however, that 'central to the protected landscape approach, though not expressed in any formal designation, are the array of strategies that Indigenous and local communities have been using for millennia to protect land and natural and cultural resources important to them.'

Biocultural diversity

Given what seems to be the 'furious agreement' among UNESCO, ICOMOS and IUCN regarding what we might lump as 'protected cultural landscapes', it is hard to understand why such a gulf remains between the 'natural' and 'cultural' camps when it comes to managing what

everyone concedes is effectively the same thing. Remain it does, though, and in an attempt to bridge it, some within IUCN have begun promoting the concept of ‘biocultural diversity’ (BCD). Although it dates back to at least the 1980s, BCD in its current form is primarily the initiative of Canadian linguist Luisa Maffi (2005), of the NGO Terralingua, generously supported by the Christensen Fund (e.g. Persic and Martin 2007). Maffi (2010:74) writes that the:

Central tenets of this field are that the diversity of life is diversity in both nature and culture and that the two diversities are co-evolved and interdependent.

Recognition of this link has significant implications for conservation practice and for the policies that regulate access to and use, management, and protection of biodiversity and natural resources. Conservation discourse and policies are moving away from certain preservationist and exclusionary approaches toward ones that increasingly promote the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities. A biocultural approach provides an integrative framework that further strengthens and motivates this shift. A new focus is becoming apparent in the statements of principle and, in some instances, the programmes of work of various international organizations that make specific reference to the importance of cultural diversity and traditional knowledge in relation to biodiversity.

Although almost entirely an IUCN project – the Christensen-funded UNESCO volume on *Links between biological and cultural diversity* (Persic and Martin 2007) makes no mention of ICOMOS – a team including an Australian cultural heritage practitioner with an executive role in ICOMOS has begun engaging with the concept with promising results (e.g. Hill *et al.* 2011). It seems, though, that IUCN itself is not as keen on BCD as its own rhetoric suggests. Maffi (2010:75) laments that the IUCN Council did not make provision in its 2009–2012 program to implement the organisation’s own resolution on ‘integrating culture and cultural diversity into IUCN’s policy and programme’. Nor did the Council see the issue ‘as a priority for additional fundraising’.

In IUCN’s in-house journal *Policy Matters*, Maffi (2010:77) frankly admits that:

existing intellectual and institutional frameworks pose barriers to greater and more concrete progress towards adopting a biocultural perspective in policy and practice. Some conservation organizations are not yet wholly sensitive to people-centered conservation. This presents obstacles to the implementation of an integrative approach that incorporates an understanding of cultural dynamics, as well as the full and equal participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation decisions that affect them. As yet, there is even greater reluctance to accept the idea of Indigenous peoples and local communities as stewards of the biodiversity and ecosystems of their territories. In turn, cultural institutions have tended to remain rather insular, instead of seeking meaningful connections and collaborations with conservation organizations. Funding limitations preventing more integrative work are also reason for organizations in the respective realms of nature and culture not to “stray” into the others’ institutional territory. Finally, policy-makers (especially at the national level) tend not to act on an issue unless there is a groundswell of support for it.

Where to from here?

Plainly there is a need to act if change is to occur and we are to effect a meaningful shift in the kinds of properties successfully nominated to the World Heritage List, especially on the basis of holistic, local community-based approaches to their management. The need for change is particularly acute in the Asia-Pacific. Although this region is at the forefront of developments in the nomination and management of mixed sites and cultural landscapes, the current situation

on the ground indicates that there is still a long way to go if local concerns and aspirations concerning integrated approaches to natural and cultural heritage are to be met in a manner that gels satisfactorily with global norms. ICOMOS and IUCN need to cooperate more effectively on the matter while also getting their own houses in order so that their various structural elements (and political/ideological factions) are mutually supportive, and supportive in action as well as in theory. As noted earlier, IUCN has made nearly all of the running on this matter to date, so although ICOMOS people periodically appear in IUCN publications discussing the issues, ICOMOS itself has not engaged with IUCN in any consistent and productive way to advance matters. This means that the two organisations continue to operate in ‘two separate spheres of activity’, as Phillips puts it. In turn, this means that World Heritage managers on the ground, as well as the sites they try to protect and the communities they endeavour to engage, continue to suffer the consequences, including communal division and the loss of knowledge associated with properties as well as the loss of physical fabric in such places. This is exactly the opposite of what more expansive views of World Heritage are intended to produce. In my personal experience it is already seeing people vocally reject World Heritage as yet another neo-colonial imposition that causes them even more disadvantage than they already suffer in a globalised world.

Time and resources are too short to permit this situation to go on. Something new is needed if we believe World Heritage is of any value. I do not underestimate the difficulties in overcoming the problems so clearly identified by Maffi, and I certainly do not believe we can solve the matter overnight. By the same token, one should ‘never waste a good crisis’. Nothing will be achieved unless concrete steps are taken to maintain the momentum that Maffi and others have built up. Work has to proceed simultaneously on a number of fronts, to ‘join up’ all the players to move things forward effectively. In this connection, the ICOMOS International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) is working with the International Heritage Group (IHG), a recently formed NGO, and with the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA) to achieve locally appropriate results on the ground in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere.

Bridging the nature-culture divide is a key IHG objective, and so to get some early ‘runs on the board’ IHG is organising a ‘knowledge café’ on the matter at the 2012 IUCN Congress in Korea, entitled *Cultural Heritage Management Capacity and Enhanced Biocultural Resilience in High-Value Landscapes*. The event – a form of specialised workshop – is co-sponsored with ICOMOS-ICAHM and IUCN and features the participation of Tim Badman, Head of IUCN’s World Heritage Programme, two colleagues cited earlier – Jessica Brown, Chair of the IUCN Protected Landscapes Specialist Group, and Terralingua’s Luisa Maffi – as well as other senior members of IUCN with high profiles in this area. The objective is to come up with a shortlist of achievable proposals for concrete action that will enhance capabilities in the integrated management of natural and cultural World Heritage in places where heritage managers identify themselves as in need of such assistance.

Another pivotally important aspect of the larger practical effort will be structural change in the form of a return to actually doing what the 1998 ‘Berlin Agreement’ between ICOMOS and IUCN specifies should be done to integrate evaluation of World Heritage cultural landscapes. Amongst other things, the accord ‘agreed to co-ordinate working practice towards producing a common evaluation report, agreement over recommendations and harmonisation of presentation’ (Fowler 2003:16). To my knowledge such goals have never been realised. If they were they would provide local managers with a much more coherent start than they get now with new nominations of cultural landscapes and mixed properties. My recent experience also suggests that it would be timely to extend such agreement to cover any assistance to local heritage managers to ensure harmonised approaches to World Heritage nominations and the management of natural and cultural dimensions of sites in their care, and to the co-ordination of the World Heritage Centre’s

monitoring of listed sites. It would also help immeasurably if the process explicitly required integrated local community input on natural and cultural dimensions of the nominations to ensure its inclusion on more than a token or *ad hoc* basis.

Communication is another crucial area of action at the coalface. Issues of mutual translation of IUCN and ICOMOS ideas and terms will loom large in such efforts to integrate approaches to natural and cultural heritage management, as will translation both literal and metaphorical of ‘World Heritage-speak’ for local communities involved with nominations and, if successful, the management of listed properties. As made clear in the foregoing discussion, it is natural heritage managers who have made most of the advances so far, conceptually as well as on the ground, where at least in the Asia-Pacific they are usually better organised and resourced than cultural heritage managers owing to the well-known ‘cuddly panda effect’ in conservation. The fact that they may often have to do much of the ‘heavy lifting’ in conserving the cultural as well as natural aspects of a listed place does not mean however that their normative approaches – including biocultural diversity – should inevitably hold sway. It is important that ICOMOS, ICAHM and civil-society organisations such as the International Heritage Group press to have specialist cultural heritage approaches integrated into any management plans at both the conceptual and technical levels.

This can only be done by developing a common terminology. BCD does not seem to fit the bill in this connection. It has not attracted much attention from cultural heritage specialists despite the hopes of its proponents (e.g. Harmon 2007 in addition to Massi and Hill *et al.* cited earlier) and despite calls from UNESCO for “an anthropological approach to the definition of cultural heritage and people’s relationship with the environment” (Mitchell *et al.* 2009:25). To quote Strathern (2006:192) quoting Galison (1996:14), the job thus remains to ‘work out an intermediate language, a pidgin, that serves a local, mediating capacity’. As MacEachern (2010:350) points out in a related context, this is because past failures to advance satisfactorily in such circumstances are not a matter:

of bad faith on the part of one group of people or another...[but rather result from] the difficulties of translation, of groups of people who in many cases wished to work productively together, but who found themselves frequently at odds or misdirected because of a failure to appreciate the presumptions and the constraints on other actors in what was supposed to be a shared endeavour.

Harmonisation and coordination between natural and cultural World Heritage management, broadly defined to capture everything upstream, during and downstream of a nomination, are essential if we are to avoid such ‘difficulties of translation’, which lead to such undesirable consequences as the minimal attention to cultural matters in tentative listings, the belated addition of cultural considerations to ‘mixed’ nominations and the unquestioned dominance of ‘natural’ approaches to the management of listed properties. As a start, matters of translation and harmonisation should be included in the capacity-building options in UNESCO’s emerging plans for ‘creative responses’ to ‘upstream processes to nominations’, as discussed by a meeting of global experts in April 2010 in the lead-up to the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 2012. The meeting was held in Thailand and co-sponsored by Australia and Japan and was another example of the Asia-Pacific taking the lead in World Heritage matters. Those of us working in this region should take advantage of the momentum that meeting created. If this opportunity is missed, the gulf between nature and culture will continue to undermine other progress made in our part of the world and globally in preparing the Convention for its next 40 years.

Integrated capacity-building is the key, but only if it is approached in ways that promote and support rather than undermine and suppress local interest and initiative. The moves canvassed above are one step in that direction.

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