

Jennifer Malin

## "The Future of Asia's Past" An International Conference on the Preservation of Asia's Architectural Heritage

*Can policies that allow for economic development also ensure the preservation of Asia's architectural heritage?*

*What is the effect of industrial development on the Taj Mahal?*

*What will increased tourism mean for the monuments at Angkor in Cambodia?*

*How do Japanese authorities manage sustained development in the ancient city of Nara?*

Tourism, development, and the protection of Asian cultural and architectural resources were the foci of the January 11-14, 1995, conference held in Chiang Mai, Thailand that brought together scholars, government policy makers, private developers, and tourism officials for discourse and the exchange of ideas in order to begin the generation of a framework for more allied preservation efforts. Organized by the Asia Society, the Siam Society, and the Getty Conservation Institute, the conference drew attendance from across Asia and the Pacific in order to discuss the immediate needs of Asian countries to generate "a judicious blend of site management, focused funding, and political will" so that ancient architectural resources might be saved in the face of rapid economic growth.

The conference included sessions such as "Preservation Policy in Asia," "Cultural Tourism and Monuments," "Vernacular Architecture and Colonial Legacy," "Public and Private Partnerships," "Threats to Architectural Sites," and "Site Management" sessions in regards to the present conservation of specific monument areas in Laos, Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Korea. The World Monuments Fund (WMF) announced during the conference that it will establish a program in which grants

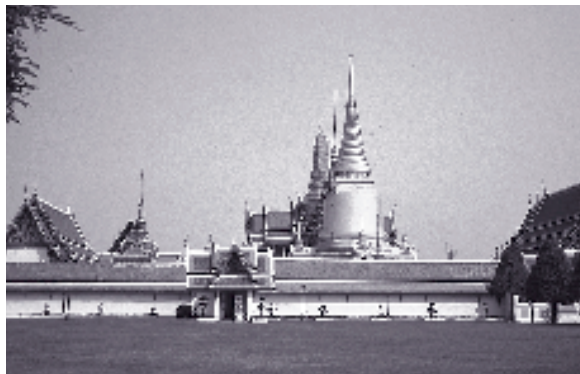
will be provided annually to aid a minimum of the 10 most endangered world monuments as identified by a "World Monument Watch" list established by WMF.

The management of Asia's many cultural assets, such as Chiang Mai in Thailand, Borobudur in Indonesia, or Angkor Wat in Cambodia, need to be promoted and supported not only via national legislation, but through the sponsorship and funding of captains of industry and tourism in each nation, as well as small-scale local efforts which would involve the immediate community of a site. The conference has also noted the necessity for the establishment of heritage trusts, comparable to the British National Trust, to give political and financial independence to the conservation efforts of a nation. Many of the sessions were concerned with the impact of tourism, both positively and negatively, on cultural sites. Ideally, the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage sites in Asia would promote and support the national culture as an asset, as well as improve cultural tourism economies that in turn would create revenue to be used in future conservation of the monument.

The consensus among participants was that there needs to be consideration of how to preserve the past without exploiting it and how to balance economic development with respect for the living heritage of a site. Miguel Angel Corzo, director of the Getty

Conservation Fund, concluded the conference with the resolution that "It is time to make a commitment to protect our values and roots of spiritual development. Can we imagine a future without a past?"

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*The Grand Palace, Banglampoo, Bangkok, Thailand. Photo: William Chapman, 1995.*