

# Saving Asia's Historic Cities

## The 6th Annual AWPNUC Meeting

Over 200 registrants attended the 6th annual Asia and Western Pacific Network in Urban Conservation (AWPNUC) conference on conserving Asia's cities, held in Taipei, Taiwan, November 21-25, 1997. Held at the Chien Tan Overseas Youth Activity Center and sponsored by the Yaoshan Cultural Foundation, in the shadow of the famous Imperial Hotel, the conference featured speakers from 26 countries, with talks ranging from the conservation of Euro-Chinese (Sino-Portuguese) shophouses in old town Phuket, Thailand to urban policy and conservation in the host city of Taipei. Among the papers were: Radiman Ganung on "Grassroots Mobilization of Professionalism in Conservation Work at Menang Village, East Java;" Ryotaro Katura on "Earthquakes at Citizen-Based Town Planning [in Japan];" Rosli Haji Nos on "Management of Changes and Policy Options for Heritage Sites—The Malacca Scenario;" and David Lung on "Heritage Preservation in a High Density and Valued Environment—The Case of Hong Kong."



*Historic shophouses in Bangkok, Thailand. Subject for the 1997 and 1998 University of Hawai'i Asian Preservation Field Schools. Photo by William Chapman.*

In addition to the two days of formal papers, the conference also included a series of "mobile workshops." These focussed on the coastal areas of Kaohsiung; Kinmon Island, located just 2,100 meters from mainland China; and Taipei city. Participants had an opportunity to visit historic fortifications, pagodas and, especially, to view extant rows of traditional shophouses—a basic building block of many Southeast Asian cities in particular.

As the conference organizers recognized, Asian cities have come late to historic preservation. The historic cores of many cities have been, in many cases, overwhelmed by new development. Witness, for example, Kuala Lumpur with its new twin towers or historic Bangkok and its often startling juxtapositions of new and, usually neglected, older buildings. As Professor Mei Cheng, Vice Chairman of the Academic Committee of the conference, recognized in his introduction "urban conservation is facing even harsher challenges in the developing countries." The conference, along with the other work of the AWPNUC, was intended to call attention to this need and also help bring people of like mind into contact with one another.

The AWPNUC has recently published *Heritage Habitat Handbook* (1997), a useful resource guide to preservation in the region. Edited by Khuo Salma Nasution, a founding member of the organization, the publication includes a bibliography and a list of organizations and individuals involved in heritage protection. Among the countries included are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China (including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), India, Indonesia, Japan, Maylasia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Those interested in obtaining copies should contact the AWPNUC offices at:

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The AWPNUC was formed in 1991 at a seminar held in Penang, Malaysia. With subsequent meetings in Adelaide, Australia (1993), Hanoi, Vietnam (1994), Nara, Japan (1995), and Jogjakarta, Indonesia (1996), the organization has been active in disseminating information on research and preservation strategies among its membership.

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