

Landscape and Memory: cultural landscapes, intangible values and some thoughts on Asia

KEN TAYLOR

Research School of Humanities
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia
k.taylor@anu.edu.au

Abstract

One of our deepest needs is for a sense of identity and belonging. A common denominator in this is human attachment to landscape and how we find identity in landscape and place. Landscape therefore is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing: we see it with our eye but interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to landscape for intangible – spiritual – reasons. Landscape can therefore be seen as a cultural construct in which our sense of place and memories inhere. Critical to this has been the increasing attention given to the study of cultural landscapes, even to the extent of recognition in 1992 of World Heritage Categories of outstanding cultural landscapes. The paper explores some of the associated ideas of landscape and memory and how landscape permeates much of our thinking of who we are with some focus on Asia as the cultural landscape idea gains ground in this region of the world.

‘Any landscape is a condition of the spirit’ Henri Frédéric Amiel

1 Landscape is ...

Landscape is a ubiquitous word in English and other European languages with origins in Anglo-German language dating back to c.500AD in Europe. The words – *landskipe* or *landscæf* – and the notions implied were taken to Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers (Jackson 1984). The meaning was a clearing in the forest with animals, huts, fields, fences. It was essentially a peasant landscape carved out of the original forest or *weald*, i.e. out of the wilderness with interconnections to patterns of occupation and associated customs and ways of doing things. Landscape from its beginnings therefore has meant a man-made artefact with associated cultural process values. Here is an holistic view of landscape as a way of seeing – its morphology resulting from the interplay between cultural values, customs and land-use practices – recently critically explored by Wylie (2007); it is what Olwig (2007) calls ‘an active scene of practice.’

It also has, as Jackson (1984 *op cit*) indicates, the equivalent meaning in Latin based languages – with antecedents like Germanic and other languages harking back to the Indo-European idiom – derived from the Latin *pagus*, meaning a defined rural district. He notes that this gives the French words *pays*

and *paysage*, but that there are other French words for landscape including *campagne* deriving from *champagne* meaning a countryside of fields; the English equivalent once being ‘champion’.

But what is ‘landscape’?, and what are its connections with human memory? On the first question I want to quote from two of the mid-twentieth pioneering teachers of landscape study, J B Jackson and W G Hoskins. Jackson (1984, *op cit* p.8) in his reflections on what landscape is quotes what he calls ‘the old fashioned but surprisingly persistent definition of *landscape*: “A portion of the earth’s surface that can be comprehended at a glance.” ’ He saw landscape as ‘A rich and beautiful book [that] is always open before us. We have but to learn to read it.’(Jackson 1951). Hoskins (1955, p.14) asserted the significance of landscape in *The Making of the English Landscape* with proposal that ‘The ... landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright is the richest historical record we possess.’

What Hoskins and Jackson were contending was the modern foundation for landscape study. This is where landscape is not looked on as simply a pretty picture or as a static text: rather it is the expression of landscape as cultural process (Robertson & Richards 2003). This is the essence of what Mitchell (1994, p.1) sees as part of a ‘process by which ... identities are formed’. The connections, therefore, between landscape and identity and hence memory, thought, and comprehension are fundamental to understanding of landscape and human sense of place. In this vein of seeing and comprehending is Milton’s comment on a piece of landscape in 1632:

*Streit mine eye hath caught new pleasures
Whilst the Lantskip round it measures.*

But memory of landscape is not always associated with pleasure. It can be associated sometimes with loss, with pain, with social fracture and sense of belonging gone, although the memory remains, albeit poignantly. Margaret Drabble (1979, p.270) in *A Writer’s Britain: Landscape in Literature* referring to Virginia Woolf’s sense of loss of a loved place vividly expresses this emotional sense of landscape lost:

The past lives on in art and memory, but it is not static: it shifts and changes as the present throws its shadow backwards. The landscape also changes ,but far more slowly; it is a living link between what we were and what we have become. This is one of the reasons why we feel such a profound and apparently disproportionate anguish when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition; we lose not only a place, but ourselves, a continuity between the shifting phases of our life.

2 Attractive, important, and ambiguous term

Thirty years ago Donald Meinig (1979, p.1) proposed that ‘Landscape is an attractive, important, and ambiguous term [that] encompasses an ensemble of ordinary features which constitute an extraordinarily rich exhibit of the course and character of any society’ and that ‘Landscape is defined by our vision and interpreted by our minds.’(p.2). In other words, to understand ourselves we

need to look searchingly at our landscapes for they are a clue to culture (Lewis 1979), and our ordinary everyday landscapes at that, not just the national icons.

Images of landscape are evident in a remarkable range of our creations: literature, poetry, paintings, ceramics, tapestries and weaving, myths, gardens, cultural activities, films, television documentaries, travel material, maps, advertising . We laud our virtues and achievements through iconic landscape imagery, often forgetting that equally the ordinary everyday landscape reflects deeply who we are and is a storehouse of private and collective memories. In this vein Jane Austen (1816), in the novel *Emma*, has her see a ‘sweet view, sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a bright sun, without being oppressive.’

In the seventeenth century in Europe, particularly England, the idea of landscape was supplemented and enriched when it became associated with landscape paintings, including the Dutch realistic *landscap* (*lantskip* in English) school and the imaginary Italianate School history paintings of artists such as Claude Lorrain with figures set in idealised pastoral scenes. Particularly through the latter genre landscape and scenery as an idealised representation of nature became fused. Here, as John Dixon Hunt (1992) suggests, was landscape rendered ‘fit for human consumption.’ Landscape as idea and entity was thus reinforced, importantly, in the western mind as the meeting point of culture and nature. A meeting point that had existed in the eastern mind in a tradition going back a thousand years as can be seen in Chinese landscape paintings.

Western landscape art since the Renaissance has focussed substantially on portraying landscape reality even when the landscape portrayed is symbolic as in the Italianate School genre. In contrast, eastern landscape art has often focussed more on imaginary landscapes as in Chinese landscape art (and literature) where, over one thousand years ago at the end of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), a deconstruction of material nature was taking place. This was accompanied by a representation of nature which ‘began to express its more spiritual side. Appearances became less important and spiritual reality emerged as the main focus ... paintings became more and more abstract and symbolic.’(Feng Han 2006; Gong 2001)). In this way, Chinese depictions of nature – cultivated landscapes – were expressions of the mind and heart of the individual artist rather than of the real world, reflections of human beliefs and emotions (Metropolitan Museum of Art 200). Even so, the often seemingly fantastic renditions in these landscapes do reflect the hauntingly beautiful shapes seen in Chinese landscapes. Nevertheless both forms, eastern and western, represent subjective notions of an ideal, perhaps illusive, nature.

We see and make landscapes as a result of our shared system of beliefs and ideologies. In this way landscape is a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted. Simon Schama (1995, pp.6/7) in *Landscape and Memory* contends that:

Before it can ever be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

In contrast in the nineteenth century the concept of landscape became imbued with nationalistically religious and then scientific associations in Europe and the USA. In the latter it was particularly linked to the construct of wilderness or wild nature as Roderick Nash (1967) explores in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. The ultimate wilderness experience was one of solitude: people and their trappings spoiled landscape in this image. We saw the zenith of this ideology in the 1980s and 1990s where nature and culture were regarded by some natural heritage lobbyists in the western tradition as antithetical. At the extreme, people were not part of nature and landscape was not seen as a cultural construct. It acquired objective scientific meaning. It was part of the movement where conservation causes, such as wilderness, [are] symbolic of hopes for new human-environment relationships predicated on revaluing nature (Russell 1993). Yet in this proposition, wilderness like all ideas of landscape, is a cultural construct, a product of the mind framed by ideologies and experience. 'Landscape is memory, there is no unmediated perception of nature.' (Ignatieff 1995). Even in so-called wilderness areas such as Yosemite or examples in Australia there is ample evidence of human occupation and manipulation of the landscape particularly by fire. In this sense, then, I contend that all landscape is cultural landscape.

3 Intangible values and landscape

A common theme underpinning the concept of the ideology of landscape itself as the setting for everything we do is that of the landscape as the repository of intangible values and human meanings that nurture our very existence. This is why landscape and memory are inseparable because landscape is the nerve centre of our personal and collective memories. Notably in this regard are the words of Bambang Bintoro Soedjito (1999), then Deputy Chair for Infrastructure with the Indonesian National Development Planning Agency, who suggested in 1999 that:

For us, the most important expressions of culture at this time are not the monuments, relics and art from the past, nor the more refined expressions of cultural activity that have become popularised beyond Indonesia's borders in recent years, but the grassroots and very locally specific village based culture that is at the heart of the sense of community. And that sense of community, perhaps more than that of the individual has been a strong shaping and supportive influence in times of trouble, through turbulence and now in strengthening a confident sense of identity as we combine heritage with a society opened to the opportunities of the world.

Soedjito's sentiment on expressions of everyday heritage links comfortably with current international notions of the significance of cultural landscapes and ideas of the ordinarily sacred. Pivotal to this is the realisation that it is the places, traditions, and activities of ordinary people that create a rich cultural tapestry of life, particularly through our recognition of the values people attach to their everyday places and concomitant sense of place and identity. Identity is critical to a sense of place – *genus loci* – for people. Relph

(1979, p.61) aptly summarises this in his proposal that ‘identity of place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other - physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meaning or symbols. (see Figure 1)

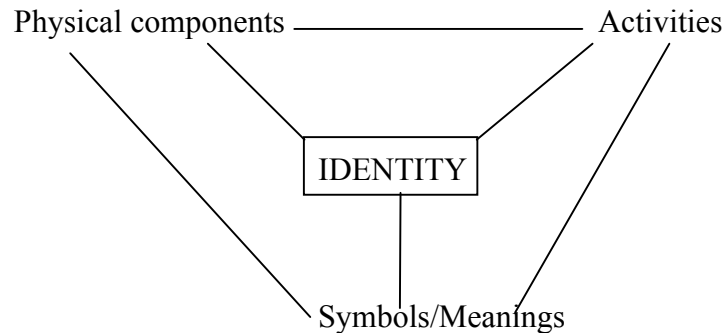


Figure 1 Place identity and its components (after Relph, 1976)

We can see therefore that both tangible physical identity and intangible identity related to the distinctiveness of our lived-in world and human experiences are inextricably inter-woven with place meaning and significance for people and the symbols, images, and meanings associated with places/landscapes. Nowhere is this more relevant, in my view, than in the Asia-Pacific region where some of the world’s outstanding examples of living history and heritage exist in its cultural landscapes, traditions and representations.

4 The rise of cultural landscapes

The 1990s saw a remarkable flowering of interest in, and understanding of, cultural landscapes: what David Jacques (1995) calls ‘the rise of cultural landscapes’. As a result of the rise – with associated emergence of a different value system inherent in cultural landscapes – there came a challenge to the 1960s and 1970s concept of heritage focussing on great monuments and archaeological locations, famous architectural ensembles, or historic sites with connections to the rich and famous. It is what Richard Engelhardt* nicely refers to as the widening of understanding of cultural heritage from a focus on the three traditional Ps – Princes, Priests, and Politicians – to include People. Widening interest in public history and understanding that ‘the ... landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright is the greatest historical record we possess.’ (Hoskins 1955, p.14)) informed the emergence of the cultural landscape movement. It also informed the notion that places or landscapes reflecting everyday ways of life, the ideologies that compel people to create places, and the sequence or rhythm of life over time are significant. They tell the story of people, events and places through time, offering a sense of continuity, a sense of the stream of time. They also offer a cultural context setting for cultural heritage.

Critical to the 1990s movement were the 1960s and 1970s scholarly writings of cultural geographers like David Lowenthal, Peirce Lewis, Donald

* Dr Richard Engelhardt, until recently Regional Advisor for Culture, Asia-Pacific, UNESCO Bangkok.

Meining (*op cit.*) J.B. Jackson (*op cit.*) with his inimitable essays on the everyday American scene, Dennis Cosgrove in Britain, or Dennis Jeans in Australia. They built on the late nineteenth century German tradition of Otto Schlütter's 'Kulturlandschaft' with landscape morphology seen as a cultural outcome and Franz Boas who championed the idea that different cultures adjusted to similar environments and taught the historicist mode of conceptualising environment Taylor 1998). Franz Boas argued that it was important to understand cultural traits of societies – their behaviours, beliefs, and symbols – and the necessity of examining them in their local context. He also understood that as people migrate from one place to another, and as the cultural context changes over time, the elements of a culture, and their meanings, will change, which led him to emphasise the importance of local histories for an analysis of cultures. His teachings and ideas in social anthropology and geography remain central to present-day interest in the cultural landscape idea where 'landscape is a clue to culture.' (Lewis *op cit.*).

Cultural geographers also followed the tenets of the American geographer Carl Sauer who, in the 1920s, continued this discourse with the view that 'the cultural landscape is fashioned out of a natural landscape by a culture group.' (1925, p.25). An underlining message was – and still is – to use one's eyes and intellect out there, to read the landscape as a document of human history with its fascinating sense of time and layers replete with human values which inform the genius of the place.

Equally important to the new sense of history and heritage values in the cultural landscape idea is the concept that we could be involved in place making. Visitors to cultural landscapes can be given a sense of participation through presentation of appropriate interpretative material. As the 1990s cultural landscape idea gathered momentum it permeated cultural heritage management and planning thinking and practice, leading in 1992 to UNESCO recognising three categories of cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value for world heritage listing:

- ***Clearly defined landscapes designed and intentionally created by man***
- ***Organically evolved landscapes in two categories:***
 - (i) A relict or fossil landscape in which an evolutionary process has come to an end but where its distinguishing features are still visible.
 - (ii) Continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society associated with a traditional way of life and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress and where it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time.
- ***Associative cultural landscapes:*** the inclusion of such landscapes is justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic, or cultural associations of the natural element rather than the material cultural evidence.

The initiative was predicated on the understanding that '***cultural landscapes are at the interface of culture and nature, tangible and intangible heritage, biological and cultural diversity – they represent a closely woven net of relationships, the essence of culture and people's identity ... they are a symbol of the growing recognition of the fundamental links between local communities and their heritage, humankind and its natural environment.***'

(Rössler 2006). Intimately connected with these landscapes are people's stories and the things of which memories are made: the cultural richness that promotes a sense of local distinctiveness.

5 A living entity and record of social history: interface of culture and nature

Whilst there exist relict or fossil landscapes, most cultural landscapes are living landscapes where changes over time result in a montage effect or series of layers, each layer able to tell the human story and relationships between people and natural processes. This is summarised in paper *Understanding Cultural Landscapes – Definition* (Leader-Elliot et al 2004) with the commentary that '*It is now widely accepted that landscapes reflect human activity and are imbued with cultural values. They combine elements of space and time, and represent political as well as social and cultural constructs. As they have evolved over time, and as human activity has changed, they have acquired many layers of meaning that can be analysed through historical, archaeological, geographical and sociological study*'. The character of the landscape thus reflects the values of the people who have shaped it, and who continue to live in it. Culture itself is the shaping force. Landscape is a cultural expression that does not happen by chance but is created by design as a result of human ideologies (Figure 2).

Until the late 1980s there was some tension between cultural and natural heritage conservation. This was based on a hegemony of western values where cultural heritage resided mainly in great monuments and sites – not least from the Old Classical World – and in scientific ideas of nature and wilderness as something separate from people. Culture and nature were uneasy, sometimes suspicious, companions. Reflective of this, cultural and natural criteria for assessment of properties of outstanding universal value for World Heritage nomination and listing were separate until 2005 when they were sensibly combined into one set of ten criteria included in *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2008, para. 77).

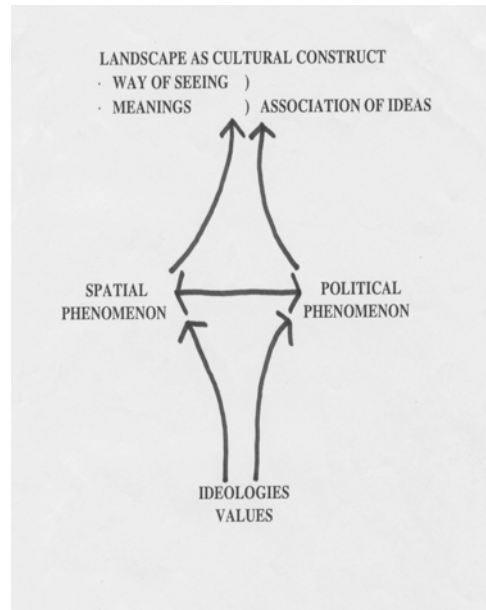


Figure 2 Interactive phenomenon of landscape (K. Taylor)

6 Southeast & East Asia-Pacific Region: a missed opportunity?

By February 2008 there were 60 World Heritage Cultural Landscape Properties[†]: of these 12 were in the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Region (Table 1). In addition Chief Roi Mata's Domain, Republic of Vanuatu, was submitted in 2007 and inscribed in July 2008, whilst Tana Toraja is on Indonesia's Tentative List. By comparison the figures for 2003 were 30 and 4 respectively. Whilst there has been some welcome increase, the relatively small number of Asia-Pacific nominations is due partly to

Country	Property & date inscribed	Type*
Afghanistan	Cultural landscape and archaeological remains, Bamyan Valley (2003)	1, 2, 4
Australia	Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (1994)	1, 5
India	Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka (2003)	2
Iran	Bam and its Cultural landscape (2004)	2, 4
Japan	Sacred Sites and pilgrimage Routes in Kii Mountain Range (2004)	1, 3, 4
	Iwami Ginza Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape (2007)	
Kazakhstan	Petroglyphs within the Tamalgy Archaeological Landscape	2
Lao PDR	Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape (2001)	1, 2
Mongolia	Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape (2004)	2
New Zealand	Tongariro National Park (1993)	1, 5
Philippines	Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordillera (1995)	3, 4
Turkmenistan	Parthian Fortresses of Nisa (2007)	

[†] Note: more than 60 are listed, but a number are transnational inscriptions.

Table 1 UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscapes in Asia Pacific Region (Source <http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape>)

* Type characteristics from Akagawa and Sirisrisak (2008)

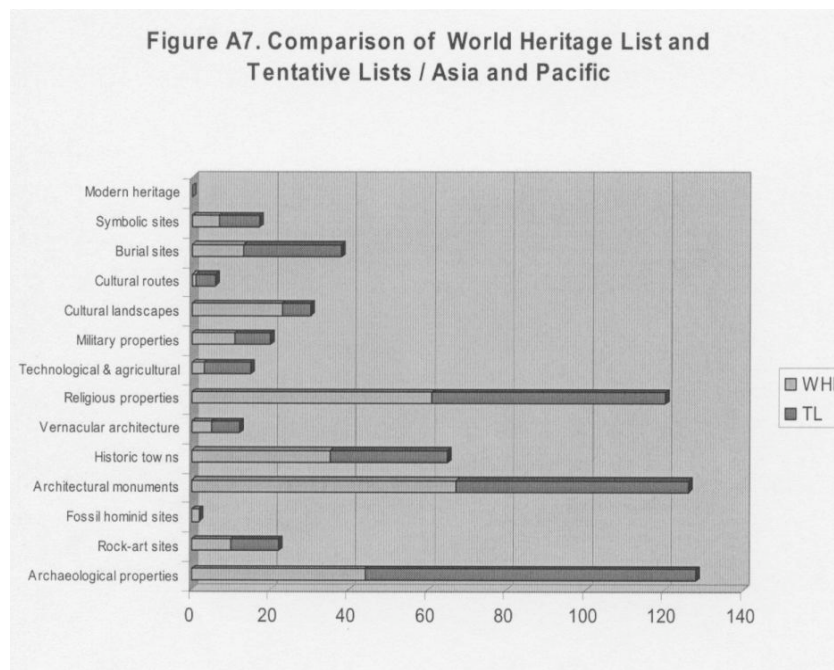
the fact that the cultural landscape categories are latecomers to the World Heritage scene and have been perhaps better grasped by Europe and North America. Further recognition may be assisted by two initiatives: Peter Fowler's (2003) report for UNESCO on World Heritage cultural landscapes and the September 2006 initiative by Sonia Berjman and Monica Luengo prepared for the ICOMOS International Committee on Cultural Landscapes. This is a proposal for a *Universal Cultural Landscape Registry and/or Inventory Card*. It marks a first step in the aspiration to have a universal inventory of cultural landscapes. The proposed list is the first step in a sequence directed to:

- discover a hidden heritage;
- promote human resources (informers, specialists, professional nets of national reach);
- establish organisations competent in the matter (creation of provincial, regional, national and international centre networks);
- promote multiple tasks, such as population enlightenment about the cultural landscape values, education in all levels and develop specialised teachings, establish ties with the national and international
- economic communities, for the generation of economic, tourist and/or employment resources in different areas;
- establish diffusion and protection action plans;
- establish restoration and rehabilitation programs;
- study and regulate urban and landscape codes in accordance with the value given to the different inventoried cultural landscapes.

A 2004 report by ICOMOS *The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps – an Action Plan for the Future* highlights the gaps in the Asia-Pacific Region in the inscription of cultural properties on the World Heritage List in general, and cultural landscapes in particular. The majority of places on the World Heritage or Tentative Lists are archaeological, architectural monuments and religious properties. Whilst this logically reflects the importance, for example, of Buddhist or Islamic places and archaeological sites, the paucity of such ensembles as cultural landscapes, vernacular architecture, technological and agricultural sites – all within the cultural landscape spectrum – represents a missed opportunity taking into account the spirit of places in the region. Notable in this regard is the fact that many existing Asia-Pacific Region properties on the World Heritage List would admirably fulfil the category of continuing landscape of outstanding universal value with cross references to the associative cultural landscape category. They offer scope for renomination; for example Ayutthaya in Thailand, whilst in China there are the Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System or the Ancient Villages in southern Anhui-Xidi and Hongcun. Akagawa and Sirisrisak (2008) in a review on cultural landscapes and the World Heritage Convention map the characteristics of the 10 World Heritage cultural landscapes listed in 2006 in the Asia-Pacific region (By February 2008 the Asia-Pacific number was 12, see Table 1, another

2 sites were added in 2007). They propose it is possible to define five major characteristics: (1) religiosity/indigenous beliefs, (2) archaeological/architectural remains, (3) continuing historic land-use, (4) outstanding type of landscape, (5) distinctive nature and that eight sites share at least two or more characteristics (Table 1). Comparing these with the characteristics of sites from the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists for Asia-Pacific (Table 2) there is a correlation with the major types of site (e.g. religious, architectural, archaeological) and scope for further nomination work in such types as technological and agricultural, historic towns, cultural routes.

In reviewing an eastern values perspective on cultural landscapes it is instructive to look at the issue through the lens of **authenticity** and **integrity** (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2008, *op cit.*) and the relevance to notions of heritage value in the Asia-Pacific Region (Taylor 2007). This is where the spirit of place resides as much in the meaning and symbolism of places and their setting – intangible values – as it does in tangible physical fabric. The continuum between intangible values and sense of living history/heritage and continuity of traditions within the rubric of concepts of authenticity in the region has been well explored (Wei & Ass 1989; Logan 2002; Taylor 2004; Sofield & Li 1998). **Authenticity** (para. 80 of the Guidelines) concerns ‘the ability to understand the value attributed to the heritage depending on the degree to which information sources about this value may be understood as credible or truthful.’ In relation specifically to cultural landscapes we may see authenticity therefore as ability of the landscape to represent accurately/truthfully what it purports to be.



source: ICOMOS 2004 *World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps*; p58

Table 2 World Heritage List and Tentative Lists, Asia-Pacific

Integrity is a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes. Examining the conditions of integrity, therefore requires assessing the extent to which the property:

- a) includes all elements necessary to express its outstanding universal value;
- b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance;
- c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

Given the traditional relationship between nature and culture in eastern cultures where people are not regarded as separate from nature, one may ask the question whether the term 'cultural landscape' poses a dilemma in SE & E Asia. Following this line of thought Feng Han (2004 and 2006 *op cit*) argues, for example, in China that the 'term "Cultural Landscapes" is ... problematic'. She posits that people are part of the landscape experience and that landscape in the context of nature has its specific meanings which, she argues, contrast with western notions, including *inter alia* that it is humanistic rather than religious; it is aesthetic rather than scientific; travelling in nature aims to be enjoyable, instead of solitude oriented; artistic rebuilt nature is more beautiful than the original. However, there are similarities with western traditions in this nature-culture transaction. In the sixteenth century Renaissance gardens of Italy it was held that design, whilst imitating nature, improved on nature. The idea of improving on nature was central to the English eighteenth century landscape movement where one of the first practitioners of the new approach to landscape design, William Kent, was deemed by Horace Walpole (1782) to have 'leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden.' In the modern idiom landscape is equally viewed as humanistic in the European Landscape Convention and culture/nature are not divided. This culture-nature link is also a fundamental principle in the World Heritage cultural landscape categories. The old Germanic/English *landscaef* connotation has in effect been revitalised. If this is so, why then has there been comparative reticence in SE & E Asia with the term 'cultural landscape'? A straightforward answer is that traditionally all landscape is cultural to the eastern mind, hence the conjunction of 'cultural' with 'landscape' could be seen to be a tautology.

7 Conclusion

It is apt to close with words from an international workshop – *The Right to Landscape: Contesting Landscape and Human Rights* – to be held in Cambridge, UK, 8-12 December, 2008, on the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

The workshop aims to expand on the concept of human rights in the context of landscape, an umbrella concept of an integrated entity of physical environments that is imbued with meaning.

Landscape and identity are inherent components of our culture, one informing the other ... access to, and freedom to enjoy the landscape as well as respect for spiritual and symbolic meanings people ascribe

to their landscape, are some of the components that will support dignity and well-being of communities.

The interface of culture and nature in the World Heritage cultural landscapes idea offers a primary foundation for extending the acceptance of the cultural landscapes in SE & E Asia and understanding of the rich living history in the region's cultural landscapes, whilst paying attention to the concept of universal value. Many existing properties in the region such as Borobudur or Angkor sit within a wider cultural landscape to which they are inextricably tied tangibly and intangibly. This relationship suggests a need to re-evaluate such properties with a view to re-inscription to celebrate their cultural landscape settings and their broader interpretation and presentation as a palpable link between past and present (Taylor 2003; Taylor & Altenburg 2006). Inscriptions such as Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape already do this.

In spite of cultural nuances and differences in landscape language globally it is time to move attention away from these and onto the common ground of attachment to landscape, cultural environment, or whatever the regional word variations are. It seems underneath the rhetoric there is commonality in the way people feel attachment to and association with our surrounds, no matter what terminology is used.

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