

**ASIAN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT -CONTEXTS,
CONCERNS AND PROSPECTS**

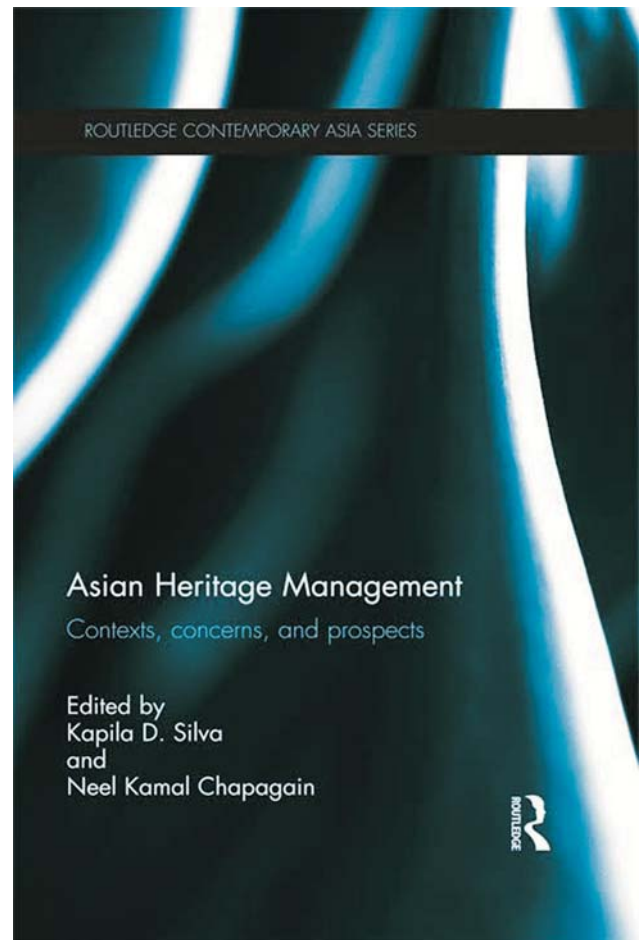
Neel Kamal Chapagain and Kapila D Silva (eds)
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A Review by Masooma Shakir*

'Asian Heritage Management' is part of the Routledge Contemporary Asia Series and is a scholarly compilation of research papers from different parts of Asia. It puts together the complex albeit intriguing task of presenting the multifaceted nature of heritage management in Asia. On the one hand, local traditions have historically played a major role in the maintenance of many Asian heritage sites. These are accompanied by indigenous / native communities, rituals, informal practices and customs. Simultaneously, on the other hand, formal institutional practices of heritage listing, conservation and management exist alongside.

The book edited by Kapila D. Silva and Neel Kamal Chapagain is an essential contribution to the subject currently debated and discussed in international circles of heritage institutions. The book is divided into three major parts, highlighting firstly the contexts through case studies from the region, second the concerns regarding heritage management and third the future prospects, by design, planning and management that can be looked at. As Chapagain writes in the introduction of the book, the demarcation between the three aspects is not too clear and unambiguous, and overlaps are common within the research papers. The introduction and the epilogue put together the subject and attached dilemmas across very well in theoretical terms and international practice. They connect to the larger overall international debate and issues and present how the various articles are examples of the multiple issues of the context, pointing toward the need for independent Asian charters for heritage conservation and management. They elaborate on the broader scope of heritage in Asia, where the relation between the people of the regions and their cultural associations to places of historic importance is deep rooted. Chapagain points toward the engagement of 'heritage' within a cultural process without which it is insignificant.

The intangible aspects and values of heritage within the Asian context are a defining and driving force for their historical continuity and traditional management practices.



National interpretations of heritage and the formal processes take a differing but official stance on such heritage too. While the latter is driven by formally trained professionals, the former happens without a formally drawn management plan.

Various chapters in the book together are able to cover the salient issues concerning the informal local traditional and the formal institutional practices of heritage conservation and management. The research case studies provide the

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various instances of conflicts in these practices and the perceptions of heritage and conservation at the different levels from the individual, to clan, community, national and global. The 'Asian worldviews on conservation' in the contexts section include an article each on the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Islamic views and perspectives on conservation of heritage. Religion as the editors and the authors of the articles suggest, plays an important role in defining the significance of commemoration. Within the same part of the book, a subsection consists of research papers under the national heritage management frameworks in specific contexts (China and Pakistan are included in these).

The colonial history provides some linkage to the making and enforcement of policies and regulations at the formal level. The instances provide an exploration of the identification of the gap between traditional conservation and contemporary conservation.

The second part of the book titled 'Concerns' highlight the clash of values between traditional and modern nationalistic frameworks. While the former attaches greater significance to intangible associations, the latter regards the physical form to be of monumental value as a marker of the past. Ken Taylor and Amita Sinha highlight the presence of 'heritage' as a landscape / cultural landscape. Globalization and significances attached to physical form of heritage structures has led to commodification processes as a major phenomenon that an abundance of cases through Asia itself have become subjected to, destroying traditional, attached social context and highlighting the issues of 'sustainable tourism'.

The third and last section of the book titled 'Prospects' is the most interesting, in my opinion, as various academics and

practitioners aim to provide a different way of contextualizing heritage management approaches through concepts and tools within Asian settings. For instance, Syed Abidin Idid and Dilsham Ossen propose the tool of Heritage Impact Assessment for heritage management. Similar to Environment Impact Assessment, they suggest impact assessment for heritage when undertaking planning processes particularly in urban historic areas.

Jamie MacKee in her article, adopts a unique methodology to explore overlapping and differing links between Buddhist philosophy and Systems Theory to theorize the management of Buddhist cultural heritage within the South / Southeast Asian context.

Tara Sharma through her research field work with communities in Ladakh, India suggests that it is the local people's / communities perceptions and memories that could determine the significance of a heritage site, as opposed to its valuation on the basis of its objective history and design features. She asserts that the conservation strategy should in fact start from understanding how the communities are maintaining their heritage.

Altogether the compilation of research articles in the volume has tried to point toward the multi-dimensional nature of Asian heritage, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach for effective management that respects and integrates traditional values. It adds to the scholarship that exists internationally and in Asia on the subject of heritage management. It is a valuable resource for academics, professionals, researchers, practitioners particularly officials into policy making, on the subject of heritage providing directions for future development on the subject.