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Built Heritage

BOOK, CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION REVIEW

Indigenous peoples, heritage and landscape in the Asia-Pacific: Knowledge co-production and empowerment, edited by Stephen Acabado and Da-Wei Kuan. Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2021. 213 pp. $201.00 (hardcover). ISBN9780367648718

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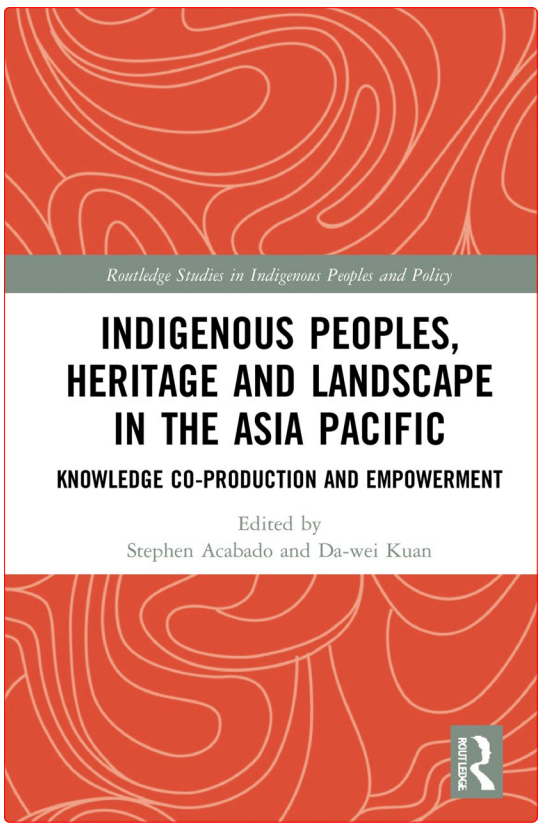

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Collaborative academic scholarly and professional discourse on the links between landscape and heritage has burgeoned over the last two or three decades. What has emerged, in effect, is a manifesto for a move to a refreshed way of thinking and acting where we understand heritage and landscape as philosophically interconnected. That links exist between landscape and heritage is quite clear and we may, therefore, ask where and how does the concept of cultural landscapes slot into thinking on changing perspectives in heritage. Harvey (2015, 911) in this regard observes that:

> *The recent histories of heritage and landscape studies appear to be closely linked, with their epistemological, ideological and methodological twists and turns progressing amid a common broad intellectual and interdisciplinary space … Heritage and landscape are two concepts that appear to have sat comfortably together within academic, policy and popular imaginations for some time. (Harvey 2015).*

For the heritage profession this understanding of the conjunction between landscape and heritage materialised and suffused thinking in the late 1980s/early 1990s. It coincided with emerging criticism of the 1970s/1980s heritagisation process which had focused solely on famous monuments and archaeological sites (and European ones at that). The idea took root that understanding of cultural landscapes underpins the notion of landscapes reflecting everyday ways of life, the ideologies that compel people to create places and the sequence or rhythm of

life over time. Here was seen how telling the story of people, events and places through time offers a sense of continuity and identity, and how associative values between people and landscape evolve. Landscape is not, therefore, simply or overwhelmingly a product, it is a process in which humans create the cultural landscape. Landscape is not static; it reflects changing human ideologies and values over time in culturally diverse communities. As Shannon Speed reflects in her Foreword to the book, linking these landscape forces with Indigenous peoples' and other stakeholders' relationship with landscape has inevitably and deservedly opened up a rich opportunity for collaborative research—and one might add conservation management practice—with Indigenous peoples.

It is in this vein that the timely publication *Indigenous Peoples, Heritage and Landscape in the Asia-Pacific: Knowledge Co-production and Empowerment* will be appreciated by scholars and professionals. Its bringing together of how theory and practice can sit readily together in the real world, with theory informing practice, will also be appreciated. The book unreservedly underpins the notion that:

> *A cultural landscape is a complex phenomenon with a tangible and intangible identity. The intangible component arises from ideas and interactions which have an impact on the perceptions and shaping of a landscape, such as sacred beliefs closely linked to the landscape and the way it has been perceived over time.* ***Cultural landscapes mirror the cultures which created them*** *[my bold italics]. (Plachter and Rössler 1995).*

As heritage studies have focused more and more on the question of values and whose values, the critical role of the values of Indigenous and local communities and the places where they live—the landscape—has started to be taken seriously. Notable also in this discourse is the centrality of the culture (humans)/nature inter-relationship as opposed to the idea of human detachment from nature. It underpins the notion that in the cultural landscape idea culture and nature coexist within a humanistic philosophy of the world around us. Further, it is important to realise as the volume's editors, Stephen Acabado and D-Wei Kuan, note in Chapter 1, that many of the resultant landscapes shaped and used by Indigenous and local communities are known to be rich biodiverse landscapes.

The synergy between landscape and heritage in the book is a welcome critical aspect of the thesis of the book. Chapter 1 argues persuasively (p. 5) that landscape is seen as central to the lives of Indigenous communities, the place where their histories and community relationships are portrayed. It posits that landscapes are shaped by human decision-making, formed because of human behaviour, not environmental constraints. Notably, Chapters 2–12 in the book highlight examples where cultural heritage management has involved community inputs. The result is an effective, wide-ranging discussion on how to learn more about community based research, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.[1] Chapter contributors include disciplines from geography, socio-cultural anthropology, archaeology and heritage conservation.

The book is divided into two main sections dealing with landscapes and heritage. Section I, Wisdom of the landscape in Chapters 2–7 highlights examples of social and environmental justice through active engagement with communities. Essentially these chapters, through the medium of landscape, address aspects of disagreement associated with landscapes around the context of whose values are involved, whose landscapes are they and landscapes as sources of knowledge involving intangible, spiritual associations. How communities can empower themselves and approaches to solving ecological problems using local knowledge systems are themes running through the chapters.

Chapter 2 by Work et al. is set against Cambodia's deforestation story which started after the country emerged from communist rule with abundant forests covering 73% of its land surface. Work et al. inquire into how deforestation (nicely dubbed 'green grabbing') has connections with climate change politics and disenfranchisement of local resource users, often disrupting and displacing people in ways that exceed climate change effects. This followed international advisors declaring exploitation of Cambodia's forest resources to be the best option for the country's economic future with the promotion of Forest Concessions. The consequences were rapid falls in forest cover to under 40% with dramatic negative effects on rural and indigenous communities. The chapter describes climate politics in the Prey Lang region of Cambodia, outlines land and resource losses and then outlines the kinds of collaborative research activities that have emerged in the context of the changing political landscape.

How a bottom-up approach to environmental justice can be an effective strategy is the focal point of Chapter 3 by Fisher through experiences of the Kajang community in Indonesia. Kajang were among the first groups to gain recognition to their land from the Indonesian forest estate. Fisher shows how engaged methodologies—such as participatory rural appraisal, participatory

[1] The Asia-Pacific region had become the focus of increasing attention in the heritage field: see for example *The Routledge Handbook on Cultural Landscape Heritage in the Asia-Pacific* currently in press.

action research (PAR), and more broadly co-production of knowledge—are a pathway for researchers to identify, involve, and value local perspectives. In similar vein Demeulenaere (Chapter 4) reviews the contemporary context of the struggle between Indigenous residents of Guåhan (Guam), Mariana Islands, and different colonial powers that have sought to use the island and its neighbouring islands for their own purposes. She uses Indigenous epistemology, a way of knowing connected to the land and spiritual world, and scientific knowledge, to ponder the question of how to address concerns of the CHamoru people given the US is not bound in domestic law to do so. Salvador-Amores et al. in 'Expressive cultures' (Chapter 5) review how weavers in the Philippines Cordilleras can be empowered by textile revitalisation. The authors pose three leading questions that inform the research. How does revitalisation of traditional weaving empower communities? What are the challenges and consequences in revitalising textile tradition? How does textile revitalisation contribute to heritage conservation and expressions of culture? They argue cogently that Cordillera weaving practices have emerged as a venue for cultural expression and economic ventures for local groups.

Kuan (Chapter 6) addresses efforts to facilitate dialogue among Indigenous ecological knowledge, modern science and state policies for land management in Taiwan. The work is based on participatory mapping and ethnophysiographic research in Indigenous communities. The argument that there needs to be a dialogue between state and Indigenous groups is clear. He also argues that community mapping shifting from a top-down model toward a grass-roots movement has improved communication between Indigenous groups and state bodies. Shepardson's Chapter (7) examines blending traditional and modern knowledge through educational outreach on Rapa Nui (Easter Island). It concerns Terevaka Archaeological Outreach (TAO) launched in 2003 to improve community engagement and empowerment on Rapa Nui. TAO is based on the idea that for many Indigenous communities, sustainable development depends on an ability to balance the best of modern technology with the collective wisdom of generations of cultural and environmental knowledge that has allowed communities to thrive.

The focus of Section II Owning History and Heritage, Chapters 8–12, is on how archaeological practice in Southeast Asia has shifted to active engagement with stakeholders, both as contributors and involved research participants. The section emphasises the power of knowledge production in taking control of one's heritage. Ririmasse and Lape's work in Maluku (Moluccas), Indonesia (Chapter 8) shows how archaeology has been used to heal wounds of years of internal conflict which ended in 1999. Since then Moluccans have been increasingly interested in exploring their identity through history, culture and archaeological heritage. The chapter offers reflections on the experiences of different community archaeological projects, in particular through changing interests of local people, ways media have used archaeological information and prospects for heritage values, and protection in different social, economic and political circumstances. Chapter 9 by Chevance continues with the theme of archaeology empowering local communities by a focus on local issues. He discusses an example from Cambodia, Phnom Kulen, the site of an Angkorian capital in the nineth century[2] based on collaborations with local communities in the last 20 years at Kulen Mountain.

Dharmiasih et al. (Chapter 10) continue the dialogue on involvement, or non-involvement, in governance by local communities in the case the famous rice terraces of Bali and their traditional subak water management system, World Heritage listed in 2012 as the Cultural Landscape of Bali Province. The authors review the effects of listing and subsequent imbroglio over questions of an imposed top-down management, questioning whose values are being considered and consequent undermining of local farmers. In the face of clashes of opinions on management, Dharmiasih et al. turn attention back to the farmers and local communities' residents to examine concerns on changes taking place. They introduced a bottom-up facilitation using *photovoices* to focus attention on local perspectives where, through photographs taken and selected by participants, respondents can reflect on and explore the reasons, emotions and experiences that have guided their chosen images.[3]

World Heritage concerns and Indigenous care of heritage places are reiterated in Chapter 11 by Peterson et al. focusing on the World Heritage property of Nan Madol on the island of Pohnpei, Micronesia. They emphasise how descendants and local communities embody knowledge and belief systems that are critical to heritage conservation of places. Nan Madol is a remarkable landscape of islets constructed over 1000 years ago with prismatic basalt boulders forming temple and housing complexes. It was World Heritage listed in 2015 but also placed on the *List of World Heritage in Danger* because of three concerns: silt build-up in waterways; encroachment of vegetation damaging stonework; threats by storm surges, not least in view of climate changes. ICOMOS commissioned a technical mission to review the problems in a way that is sensitive to local cultural values involving

[2] Phnom Kulen: Archeological Site/Ancient Site of Mahendraparvata was nominated in 2020 to the Tentative
World Heritage list.

[3] A similar technique was used in 2012 by a research team from Tsukuba University at the Philippines Rice
Terraces. (Kikuchi et al. 2014)

collaboration among local, Indigenous and international stakeholders.

The final Chapter 12 by Paredes reviews the author's experience of collaboration with the Indigenous Lumad community in the southern Philippines. It is part of a wider ethnographic study examining the history, development and challenges of traditional political authority figures among the Higaunon in northern Mindanao The narrative has to be seen in the context of top-down conflicts and locally driven perspectives and their socio-political impacts. Paredes, in addition to examining efforts to conserve oral traditions, focuses on different engagements with, and attitudes to, cultural heritage conservation and 'reinvention' operating between different groups. At one point Paredes is critical of modern approaches to Higaunon culture with aspects such as costumes, music, dance—what she dubs the tangible—presented in performances for public consumption such as city parades and civic events. For me as book reviewer this prompts the question, so what? If the alternative is that these aspects stagnate and die out, surely maintaining them and their intangible associative links, albeit in different contexts, is worthwhile. Linked to this point is that culture, cultural values and cultural context are not static, they change over time, but can and do maintain some meaning for local people. We need to avoid trying to fossilise living traditions as though they were inanimate museum pieces devoid of life. Also I question the idea that culture is a nebulous thing (see Parades' Conclusion). Nebulous means hazy, ill-defined, vague. Is it?

The words of Acabado and Kuan (p. 5) aptly summarise the book's value: 'Our co-production of knowledge is reconnecting local/Indigenous relations to the landscape and diversifying the philosophy of human-led relations. We are enriching the knowledge of landscape, while changing the landscape of knowledge.' Here is a book of solid interdisciplinary appeal, not only to the range of disciplines reflected by the authors, but also intellectually and professionally to architects, planners and landscape architects involved in heritage work. They should read it. This book convincingly puts forward the view that supports the contention that landscapes are shaped by human decision-making, formed because of human behaviour, not environmental constraints.

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