

A Heritage of Ruins: The Ancient Sites of Southeast Asia and Their Conservation

WILLIAM CHAPMAN

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With this well presented book, William Chapman has provided a fascinating overview of the iconic heritage sites of Southeast Asia. It is, as the introduction and acknowledgments indicate, the outcome of the author's many years of thorough research, and of reflection, conversations, practice, and accumulated knowledge in the field. The locations Chapman discusses will be familiar to all who have traveled or read the history of Southeast Asia, but perhaps few will have visited all of them. This makes the book, apart from anything else, a significant overview of these sites. But in the first place this is a book on the history of heritage practice.

Ruins have long been the iconic markers of antiquity, empire, and nationhood since the nineteenth century, and through scholarly and popular literature, textbooks and nationalist propaganda, tourism and documentaries, the "ruins of Southeast Asia" featured in this book have become recognized globally as significant heritage sites. As the reader would expect then, represented here are the temple complexes of Prambanan and Borobudur in Indonesia, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Khorat Plateau temples in Thailand, My Son in Vietnam, Vat Phu in Laos, Pagan in Burma, and Lembah Bujang in Malaysia. Other sites, notably the Prasat Preah Vihear temple complex, currently the center of conflicting claims by Thailand and Cambodia, are discussed in passing. The main purpose of *A Heritage of Ruins*, aside from presenting an account of their origins is, as the subtitle indicates, to review how they have been conserved since their discovery as "ruins," to become essential elements in national and world heritage.

In five substantive chapters, the book provides a "history of heritage practice" for each of these ancient sites. The reader is thus invited to compare different colonial conservation practices and their legacy for post-colonial nations, as well as to compare contemporary heritage practices and the uses of heritage under different political regimes. When it comes to the present, Chapman shows how the safeguarding of these "ruins" has become a focus of international interest, cooperation, and of increasingly uniform practices.

The title of this finely produced book will catch the eye of many readers, and will no doubt also raise some questions. As Chapman indicates, in the nineteenth century "ruins" came to form a central theme in the nostalgic remembrance of things past. Ruins had long formed the imaginary of artists and poets, particularly in the British tradition, and with increased travel, they became the destination for new generations of well-heeled tourists, firstly within Europe but increasingly also in Europe's empires abroad. Here they played a role in bolstering the justification for European imperialism, as representing literally the ruins of the past empires of Asia now superseded by superior modern European ones. Yet, as Chapman's account shows, the colonial conservation

practices that developed in the course of the nineteenth century safeguarded, and in some cases salvaged, these Southeast Asian ruins as national monuments for future post-colonial nations. As Chapman's succinct overview of the histories of each of these sites demonstrates, many of today's conservation practices and the "meanings" given to heritage have emerged from these past practices. For post-World War II modern nations of Southeast Asia, these ancient sites, whose presence has over the course of the previous century become firmly established in the Western imagination, provided immediate and imposing, internationally recognizable symbols of nationhood.

While necessarily concise, the histories Chapman provides in five country-focused chapters present an invaluable overview for understanding the background of heritage practice in Southeast Asia that will be useful to students of heritage and equally informative for the diligent traveler and the interested general reader. For most readers, the current state of heritage practice which forms the final section of each chapter will be of particular interest. Building on these individual accounts, the book's two concluding chapters offer a broader discussion of the state of heritage in Southeast Asia today, as this pertains not only to the particular sites in question, but briefly in a final chapter, also with regard to heritage practice in general.

In the penultimate chapter, Chapman provides brief insightful commentaries on a range of practical issues that arise from contemporary practices and circumstances related to these well-visited sites. Emphasizing the interconnection between heritage and tourism, a perspective that permeates the whole volume, Chapman points to the tension between local and foreign tourism in their "use" of these heritage sites, and between the historical value of the sites and the growing dependence upon them as income-earning enterprises. This tends to point to conflicting messages for heritage practitioners. While on the one hand, Chapman appears to concur with the suggestion that site managers "have to fight for market share" of the tourist dollar by bringing "fresh attractions to their venues" (p.230), elsewhere he argues strongly that the historical "spiritual links" adhering to these must be safeguarded. These links often reach back to older traditions that defy contemporary religious boundaries, political ideologies, and modern preoccupations. Underlying this discussion is the potential conflict between the interests of different stakeholders to which the future of these sites are beholden.

In a final brief chapter Chapman in a sense brings the narrative of this book full circle. These ancient ruins, once plucked from obscurity by imperial endeavor to become the focus of international tourism and scientific research, now need to be seen as "part of a shared past," as important elements of a global heritage whose on-going conservation concerns us all.

This is a useful book in many respects. While full of history, each chapter follows a consistent, forward framework. For the uninitiated in heritage questions, the book requires little technical pre-knowledge yet introduces the reader to real and contemporary questions facing site managers and heritage practitioners, national governments and world bodies. With its rich history and thought provoking discussion, these issues should also concern the conscientious traveler when

he or she next visits one of these awe-inspiring edifices of human civilization.

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Diversifying Retail and Distribution in Thailand

ENDO GEN

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Once again, Thai studies need a determined Japanese researcher to unearth the puzzling research areas that are plagued by limited data, poor statistics, and mistaken presumptions. A comprehensive account of the retail and wholesale industry has been rare, despite this industry being Thailand's second largest sector by constituent ratio of GDP and employment.

This book by Endo Gen provides a thorough understanding of Thailand's retail, wholesale, and distribution systems. It gives a historical background of the business with a focus on the dynamics since the 1990s—the period that has unleashed the “modern trade,” such as cash-and-carry, hypermarkets, supermarkets, and convenience stores, throughout the country.

Chapters 1 and 2 present the historical background and characteristics of Thai retailing, which, until the 1980s, had been overwhelmed by small-scale grocery stores (*cho huai*) or the so-called shophouse, a one-story shop with a dwelling over the top. While there is no strong argument within these two chapters, I find them insightful for those who want to understand the evolution of the sector. In addition to the general structure, the author traces today's major players, such as the Central Group and Saha Pat, back to their origins. Competition and coordination among them are addressed and put into contextual settings extremely well. The investment and consumption booms of the late 1980s led to the advent of new retail formats and fiercer competition. The succeeding chapters develop the arguments of the book, capturing the contemporary structure and situation of the industry.

Chapter 3 discusses the 1997 financial crisis and the massive influx of new retail formats introduced by multinational companies. The author conceptualizes post-1980s Thailand's consumer market as a “mosaic structure” that possesses significant disparities among geographical areas and income strata. He then argues that this mosaic structure is the main explanation for why retail and distribution firms in Thailand must adopt diversification strategies (pp. 38–46) and why Bangkok-based and provincial department stores “competed to open new stores in provincial cities, which led to excessive competition” (p. 63).

Chapter 4 poses an important question: Have new retail formats really heralded a distribution revolution? As the 1997 financial crisis created the opportunities for new, foreign-led retailers,