

The Landscape Context of Asia's Monuments

David H. Engel*

To preserve Asia's architectural heritage, and to form strategies for its survival, attention must be paid not only to the existing structures themselves, but also to their much neglected landscape contexts. Too often the impact of economic development around those sites has altered or destroyed the original environments which were a vital and necessary element of the monuments' design, and of deeply felt meaning for the people who built and used them in their daily lives.

The siting of the buildings—their approach, their access, their views and vistas, their connection to waterways, their open spaces, pavements, plantings, relationships with other architectural features—together created a powerful aura, either sacred or secular, which one profoundly sensed on approaching and entering their precincts. The landscape context was an integral part of the design. And so today, if those sites are to be preserved and made an impressive feature of the cultural heritage of each country, their landscapes must become an essential element of the plan.

But what criteria are to be followed? Aside from the problems of financial cost, there is an even more fundamental question to decide: should the site be authentically restored to what it was in ancient times? In which case, it may be quite uncomfortable and inadequate to receive visitors, and even in some cases, unattractive. Or should the first consideration be to make the site comfortable and convenient for receiving tourists, and even to prettify it, with only a slight regard for authenticity.

What at first seems like a hard dilemma, however, actually suggests a solution to the question. It is simply to find a middle way, a compromise that offers both a sense of authenticity to the site, while also providing an appropriate setting for today's visitors.

When addressing the question of authenticity, each site must be studied with research both into the traditions and customs of its ancient peoples as well as of the present populations. Consider such factors as: In the past how was the

*Principal Landscape Architect, Landgarden, New York, NY.
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site used? What was the extent of the space around the buildings? Where were the roads and walks? What kinds of pavements were underfoot? As one approached, when did the buildings first come into view? Was surprise or awe an important ingredient in the experience? Was the access approach narrow and restricted or wide open? Was there water at the site—canal, pond, lake, stream? Moving or still? Were there bridges and causeways? Boats in the water? Lotus? Were agricultural fields an integral part of the scene, or close enough to be visible? Irrigation channels? What species of trees and shrubs and flowers? Were trees planted to form groves or to line allées along roads? What type of pruning and shaping of the plants? Those are just some of the points to consider as the sites are developed.

In restoring an authentic landscape, the other consideration is how to integrate into the site provisions for handling visitors, while, at the same time, preserving a sense of an authentic landscape. With imaginative landscape architectural design, I believe this can be accomplished. Thus, for example, separation of the two concepts can be accomplished with regrading, berms, walls, fences and planting. Stable, well-drained pavements should also be provided. Modern conveniences, such as parking areas, toilets, eating facilities and souvenir stalls, should be segregated away from the monuments so as not to spoil their pristine effects. In hot, tropical climates groves of shade trees should be located so that the architecture may be comfortably viewed by visitors from a distance.

Fortunately, through archaeological research, the study of ancient written documents and art, and reports from travelers of long ago, we can learn enough to be able to re-create the atmosphere of significant aspects of the ancient environments, while also developing them to receive visitors who will be coming in greater and greater numbers in the future. Once the landscape context of an architectural monument is valued as a vital element, then the total site attains a most interesting and impressive quality. Visitors will immediately feel its powerful impact. It becomes a national cultural treasure to be proud of, as well as a first-class tourist attraction that, over the years, will pay economic dividends—a wise initial investment.