

## **Introduction: Siam's Threatened Cultural Heritage**

**James Stent**

The Thai heritage conservation community has been stunned by the recent decision of the Supreme Court of Thailand to demolish the venerable buildings on Sanam Luang, in which the Court has been housed for several decades. The resultant uproar, widely reported in the press and social media, has highlighted the cause of cultural heritage conservation in the public eye. What has particularly inflamed passions on the issue is that the Court, which should be an ultimate source of redress against illegal destruction of heritage, is flagrantly flouting zoning restrictions and the attempt by the Fine Arts Department (FAD) to protect heritage sites from destruction. The attendant outcry has galvanized the FAD into bringing a legal complaint against the Supreme Court, and mobilized civil society to protest vocally. It is not as though this desecration of heritage is occurring in an isolated corner of the Kingdom, as the buildings sit in close proximity to the Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Legal ambiguities, official intransigence, insensitivity to modern architectural heritage, and possibly a desire on the part of the authorities to consign to the rubbish heap a building that was conceived as a celebration of democratic values in an earlier period of Thai history—all play a role in this highly emotional case that is playing out in the media. The Supreme Court case is but one of many examples of the difficulties that progressive forces in Thailand face in safeguarding Thailand's rich and diverse cultural heritage against unsympathetic bureaucratic bodies, ambitious commercial interests, and well-meaning but ill-advised agents of "development". These are the themes that are examined in this volume.

Concerned with the destruction and neglect of many aspects of cultural heritage, in 2010, the Council of the Siam Society established a program to give the Society a public advocacy role in spurring greater public awareness and action concerning heritage protection issues. In 2012, the Council formally established this program as the Siamese Heritage Trust, a permanent section of the Society. In the first year of work on cultural heritage, a series of six bi-monthly panel discussions was held

in Thai language, open to the public, on major issues of heritage protection. The seminars attracted large and varied audiences.

In support of the work of the Siamese Heritage Trust, the Society is devoting the entire content of this centennial issue of the *Journal* to essays examining aspects of cultural heritage protection in Thailand. The contributions to this volume elucidate many of the issues with which the Siamese Heritage Trust is concerned, some from a macro perspective, and some through insightful case studies. This introductory essay assesses the state of cultural heritage protection, based on what the Siamese Heritage Trust learned in those panel discussions, and on other work the Trust has undertaken during its first two years of operation.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Thai and foreign scholars and archaeologists identified, documented, and researched Thai sites and materials, leading to a deeper understanding of the history of Thai culture and art, and making Thai culture more accessible to the rest of the world. The importance that Thailand gave to this effort was evidenced by the establishment in 1904 of the Siam Society, Thailand's oldest independent cultural organization, and by the founding of the FAD in 1911 to coordinate the government's role in matters relating to art and culture. During subsequent decades, the FAD focused on the research, excavation, conservation, and, sometimes with regrettable results, reconstruction of the ancient monuments of Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Chiang Saen and elsewhere, and also on the conservation of palaces and Buddhist temples of a certain antiquity. This was in keeping with the international consensus on the approach to heritage protection that prevailed until the 1960s and even later. In following this approach, Thai conservationists were influenced by the excellent work that French scholars had conducted in neighboring Indochina under colonial administration.

In Thailand, scholarly work undertaken to investigate Thai history and heritage was part of the broader effort to establish for both local and international audiences a modern national identity with civilized roots stretching back centuries earlier to a glorious past. Later, the scholarship was put to work in the service of a nationalistic agenda that created an imagined Thai past, which defined "Thainess" (*khwam pen thai*), as described in Piriya Krairiksh's "A Brief History of Heritage Protection in Thailand", Michael Herzfeld's "Crypto-Colonial Dilemmas of Rattanakosin Island", and others (all references are to essays in this volume).

In the past half century, international best practice of heritage conservation has greatly expanded the definition of heritage to include vernacular culture, community culture, intangible culture, ethnic culture, and even industrial culture, as related by H. Detlef Kammeier in "Heritage Conservation in Asia: Shifts and Developments, 1972–2012". At the same time, cultural heritage is no longer the exclusive domain of the elite. Cultural heritage now is seen to have broad social relevance, and "cultural rights" have become an important part of the heritage conservation discourse, as

set forth by Tiamsoon Sirisisak and Akagawa Natsuko in “Cultural Rights and Conservation of Old Bangkok.”

Over the past two decades, various interested parties have engaged with increasing vehemence in debates about the nature of Thai cultural heritage, about what properly constitutes cultural heritage, and about who “owns” cultural heritage. Critics attack Thai official heritage conservation policy for remaining focused narrowly on ancient sites of archaeological interest, on sites connected with the royal institution, and on significant temples. They charge that Thailand’s record in keeping pace with international development of heritage practice, and in compliance with UNESCO treaties to which it is a signatory, is spotty at best. This criticism of Thai heritage practice is argued in the articles by Piriya, and by Tiamsoon and Akagawa.

In “The Crown Property Bureau and Heritage Conservation”, Yongtanit Pimonsathean succinctly explains the core of the problem:

The authorized conservation of cultural heritage in Thailand still focuses on the protection of ancient monuments and archaeological sites under the sole responsibility of a national organization, the Fine Arts Department (FAD) under the Ministry of Culture. The power to register anything as heritage rests with the FAD, and has not been devolved to local authorities.

In part, this problem arises from bureaucratic constraints and inertia within the FAD; in part, as discussed by Rewadee Sakunphanit in “The Development of Law on the Protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage in Thailand”, it is due to national laws governing official protection and promotion of cultural heritage being highly restrictive in the mandate they give to the FAD to look after culture. According to the Act on Ancient Monuments, Objects of Art, Antiques, and National Museums and National Museums, B.E. 2504 (1961), the FAD is authorized to register as heritage only ancient monuments, antiques, and objects of art.

Moreover, in purely technical matters of conservation, Thailand has not kept up with international best practice either. All too often, conservation of monuments aims to increase their touristic value, or supports a mythologized official version of the past. Monuments are sometimes reconstructed with dubious historical authenticity. The presentation and interpretation of sites is often weak. Community involvement and local context in site conservation are overlooked.

This state of affairs has persisted because at the political level, regardless of the government in power, scant attention has been paid to cultural heritage issues, unless they are related to the royal institution or Buddhist religion. Some hope was raised that change was coming when the Ministry of Culture was recreated in 2002—it had briefly existed earlier from 1952 to 1958—and the FAD was placed within this new ministry. Afterwards, however, nothing substantive changed. Cultural heritage issues are low on the national agenda, the Ministry attracts little attention from political

leaders, and cultural heritage is low priority when it comes to budget allocation.

As a result, Thailand lags behind most other Asian nations in the quality and scope of its cultural heritage management. Korea promotes all aspects of Korean culture as an important part of the national agenda, with extraordinary success. As a result, not only are Korean pop singers well known abroad, and Korean historical TV dramas popular in many Asian nations, but also traveling exhibitions of traditional Korean culture are a staple on the international museum circuit, and Korea is seen as an Asian leader in the field of museology. China devotes significant resources and political attention to its major heritage sites and museums, upgrading them to international standards, while the National Palace Museum is a major symbol of Taiwan's identity and claim to be a true transmitter of Chinese culture. Singapore, for many years guilty of wholesale demolition of traditional architecture and traditional community culture, is now attempting to make up for past mistakes through rehabilitation of historical neighborhoods. Tiny Macao diverts a portion of its enormous gambling revenues into preservation of historic neighborhood architecture and into construction of museums highlighting its unique Sino-Portuguese heritage. As Paula Helfrich describes in her article, "Yangon's Heritage: Steps Towards Preservation", in neighboring Myanmar a significant movement to preserve the colonial architecture of Yangon has emerged, and is receiving a hearing at the top levels of both the municipal and national government.

But there are hopeful signs of change in Thailand, beginning with the efforts to block the most egregious heritage destruction in the 1960s and 1970s, as described by Sumet Jumsai in "A Record of Historical Conservation, 1964–2012". As noted by Piriya, Sumet also initiated the Fine Arts Commission of the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA), which was unveiled in 1968 "with the aim of conserving urban and rural features and buildings of architectural or historical interest". Thereafter, as described in the articles in this volume by Euayporn, Phuthorn, and Sumet, private individuals and organizations have seized the initiative to preserve valuable heritage overlooked by the government. In recent years, grassroots communities have increasingly become conscious of their local cultural roots and have organized themselves to ensure that their traditions, ways of life, and built heritage are preserved for future generations, notably including work coordinated by Phuthorn Bhumadhon in Lopburi and by Yongtanit Pimonsathean in Phuket. Starting only twelve years ago, as described in the essay by Yongtanit, the prestigious Crown Property Bureau (CPB) has developed a strong interest in the responsible management and conservation of the many heritage properties over which it has stewardship.

As described by Euayporn Kerdchouay in his essay on "The Siam Society's Role in Heritage Protection", the Society in the 1960s and 1970s expanded the scope of its work beyond strictly scholarly concerns to take a leadership position in heritage conservation. Subsequently, after several years of reduced activity in this

area, the Society has again become active in the heritage conservation field with the establishment of the Siamese Heritage Trust. Unlike earlier Society programs in heritage conservation, the focus of the Siamese Heritage Trust is not principally the preservation or conservation of individual buildings, but a broader program of knowledge building, advocacy and raising awareness in society at large of the importance of cultural heritage protection. This approach recognizes that without broad social awareness of and support for cultural heritage, saving a small number of individual buildings will be of little avail. The Trust's focus is also consistent with modern, broader understanding of what constitutes cultural heritage, including community culture, intangible culture, minority culture, and so on.

From the discourse of the six panel discussions that the Siamese Heritage Trust has conducted, and from other activities and investigations that the Trust has undertaken, a few issues and challenges have emerged that appear to be the principal obstacles standing in the way of effective heritage protection in Thailand. They can be roughly grouped into the following ten areas.

1. *Inadequacy of legal framework.* In case after case, heritage conservation efforts are confounded by the inadequacy of the governing legislation, principally the 1961 Act on Ancient Monuments, Objects of Art, Antiques, and National Museums, which is much in need of updating, as set forth in Rewadee's article. That law sets forth a restrictive and outmoded definition of cultural heritage, namely ancient monuments, antiques and objects of art. The law provides insufficient power, scope for action, and flexibility to the FAD to effectively conserve the nation's heritage, and does not adequately protect the FAD from litigation of propertied interests suing to obtain maximum economic value from properties declared to be of heritage value. The law centralizes all heritage protection power with the FAD in Bangkok, does not devolve power to local governments, and does not empower communities to protect their heritage. It also does not recognize intangible culture, vernacular culture, community culture, cultural landscapes and other aspects of cultural heritage set forth in UNESCO charters to which Thailand is a signatory. These inadequacies in the legal structure are recurring themes in several of the essays in this collection.

2. *Deficiencies of governance.* The problem of legal structure is compounded by the fact that government agencies do not effectively use what limited powers they do have under the heritage legal structure, do not enforce compliance with heritage laws, and are plagued with bureaucratic rigidity and timidity. The FAD has identified 8,000 buildings for registration as monuments, but processes only a hundred or so a year, meaning its backlog will already require several decades. As pointed out in the essay by Tiamsoon and Akagawa, the FAD is reluctant to list many worthy heritage sites on the register of protected sites, particularly sites of vernacular and community heritage. It is also apparent in the criticisms that are made of management of the

Ayutthaya World Heritage Site, which some consider an endangered heritage site that is not being conserved properly. As Piriya notes, in 1967 O. P. Agrawal, head of the Indian Conservation Department “remarked that if the trend of reconstruction was allowed to continue, and the directives for conservation, as spelled out at the Venice Meeting of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1964, were not taken into account, then many of Thailand’s architectural masterpieces would be turned eventually into fakes.”

In her interesting case study, “Atrocity Heritage Tourism at the ‘Death Railway’,” Apinya Baggelaar Arrunnapaporn demonstrates how the Kanchanaburi Death Railway illustrates both the inadequacy of the legal framework and the lack of initiative and responsibility in governance at several levels. The Supreme Court’s impending demolition of its existing building is an extreme example of these weak standards of governance. As mentioned above, to its credit, the FAD has attempted to initiate legal action to demand compliance with its designation of the Supreme Court building as a heritage site, but it is being thwarted by other parts of the government, while the Rattanakosin Committee, established to oversee heritage planning for the entire district, has been silent on this and other issues. With the Supreme Court showing such scant regard for the laws of the land when they apply to itself, one realizes the depth of the governance problem in the area of heritage protection.

3. *Failure to recognize intangible and vernacular culture.* The Thai official approach to cultural heritage protection focuses almost exclusively on the protection of ancient buildings, and does not recognize that traditional ways of life, traditional livelihoods, oral traditions, folk customs, and other inheritances from the past all form part of the fabric of national cultural heritage, as valid and meaningful as palaces, temples, and archaeological sites. This issue is dealt with clearly in the essay by Tiamsoon and Akagawa, and also in Worrasit Tantinipankul’s “Reviving the Neglected Heritage of the Rattanakosin Era: The Case of the Old Chao Phraya River Oxbow.” What Worrasit describes with reference to an area in Thonburi across the river from the Rattanakosin District could apply equally well to any number of historical communities around the country:

the Thai state’s official heritage discourse neglects not only the vernacular architecture, but also the histories of farmers, merchants and bureaucrats who established these river-based urban settlements on the periphery of the royal capital. I will argue that restoration and planning efforts must focus not only on conserving the physical fabric of vernacular architecture, but also on documenting and revitalizing the intangible culture and local histories of its residents.

More broadly, in developing Bangkok into a modern city, the planning authorities

failed to consider how Thai cultural adaptation provided Thai people in earlier years with the tools that were needed to live in harmony with the particular conditions of settlement on a flood plain. Montira Horayangura Unakul describes the devastating consequences of this failure of urban planning to build on the traditional wisdom embodied in Thai culture in her “Reconnecting Bangkok’s Heritage Landscape: Urban Waterways and the Modern City”.

4. *Official narratives.* Officially sanctioned historical and cultural narratives that reinforce the power of the state and support established descriptions of national identity skew the formulation and implementation of cultural heritage conservation policy, not only at the national level, as described by Chatri Prakitnonthakan in his essay “Rattanakosin Charter: The Thai Cultural Charter for Conservation”, but also at local levels, as explored by Alexandra Denes in “Mapping Living Heritage at the Phnom Rung Historical Park: Identifying and Safeguarding the Local Meanings of a National Heritage Site.”

The practical implications of these official narratives are not solely of academic interest, as will be clear in the discussion below on the threats that have arisen to the traditional cultural landscape of the Yaowarat district of Bangkok. An early example of this threat appeared with the attempt by the Bangkok city government to demolish the small but vibrant community of Pom Mahakan, composed of early to mid-nineteenth century wooden houses in vernacular architecture. The government saw no cultural heritage value in this traditional community, and wished to level the space into a public park in order to open up a view of the old city wall and fortifications. Against improving the view of a historical site, the traditional way of life, early nineteenth century wooden vernacular architecture, and community heritage of Pom Mahakan did not count for much in the reckoning of city officials. Other examples of this sort of problem include reconstructions of ancient sites that have been done with scant attention to historical authenticity, but which serve to support an official narrative of Thai history.

5. *Suppression of diversity.* A related problem of equal magnitude is the official downplaying of cultural diversity in favor of the mainstream “Thai” culture, resting on the triptych of “nation, religion (Buddhism), and king”. As part of Thailand’s successful program of nation-building over the past century, regional cultural variants, ethnic roots, minority groups, religions other than Buddhism, and non-indigenous cultural influences have all been de-emphasized.

Much official effort goes into defining “Thai identity”, setting a standard of what is properly Thai, based on the cultural norms of official Bangkok aesthetics and practices. Witness the imposition of standard designs by the Department of Religious Affairs on new temple construction throughout the nation; the design templates are based on Bangkok’s Rattanakosin aesthetics, often totally out of keeping with

the traditions and styles of Thailand's different regions. Local communities in the provinces have been conditioned to believe that, if they build temples in their communities in the styles that their ancestors developed, then they will be looked down on by officials—they will be seen to be “provincial”, so better to adopt accepted Bangkok styles. The results are not only culturally insensitive, but can occasionally result in local heritage being threatened by destruction, as described in Euayporn's essay in this volume.

One of the tasks confronting those engaged in heritage preservation is to suggest to the official arbitrators of Thai culture that they should not define standard norms of “Thainess,” but instead encourage full expression of the country's glorious cultural diversity. Cultural homogenization was promoted in the service of nation-building in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but it is quite counter-productive in the present age, leading to monotonous building styles that lack spirit, and to traditions that lack soul.

Another aspect of the diversity question concerns borders. It makes no sense to delimit cultural heritage by modern nation-state boundaries. This became clear in the Trust's panel discussion on the Muslim contribution to Thai cultural heritage. Thailand contains one of the world's most interesting and diverse Muslim cultures, deriving from many different national origins—Persian, Malay, Indian, Cham, Chinese, and others—over a long period of centuries. The same point is made in a different context by Woraphat Athayukti and Edward Van Roy in their interesting study, “Protecting Heritage Across Borders: The Funerary Monument of King Uthumphon”, on the fate of what might be a Thai king's tomb located in the heart of Myanmar.

6. *Lack of community consultation and participation.* Just as community heritage is not properly valued in Thailand, so communities are rarely consulted or involved in decisions regarding their own heritage, or involving historical sites that are located within their communities, nor are they encouraged to become involved in a meaningful way in conservation and protection of heritage.

Phuthorn Bhumadhon, in his essay “Long-term Strategies for Thai Heritage Preservation: Civil Roles in Lopburi Province” makes clear that the preservation of living cultural heritage in a traditional architectural setting or cultural landscape can only succeed when it has meaning to the resident community and has local support and participation. The relatively high standard of heritage preservation in the town of Lopburi is a rare example in Thailand of successful involvement by the local community and of constructive dialog between the authorities and the citizens on heritage issues. So also is the revival of traditional Peranakan culture and preservation of Straits Settlement style of architecture in old Phuket, as described by Khoo Salma Khoo Nasution in “Exploring Shared Histories, Preserving Shared Heritage: Penang's Links to a Siamese Past.” Unfortunately, the Pom Mahakan

confrontation and the threats presently posed to the old Sino-Thai communities of the Yaowarat area have been the more common situations in Thailand.

7. *Professional deficiencies in heritage conservation.* Compounding the legal, governance, and conceptual problems, and the overbearing approach of officialdom in support of official narratives, are deficiencies in the professional quality of the work of those charged with stewardship of the nation's heritage. Foremost among these is the failure to create an accurate, accessible data base of the nation's heritage. This was a major problem after the 2011 floods that severely damaged many monuments of the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. Those charged with repairing the damage and undertaking measures to protect against future floods, and major international donors prepared to assist in the effort, found that there was no reliable database to use as a reference for developing plans. Inauthentic reconstruction of ancient monuments, as described by Piriya, is another important area of technical deficiency in the practice of heritage conservation in Thailand.

8. *Quest for tourist revenues leading to inferior heritage conservation.* All over the world, "heritage tourism" is big business, and how to balance the conflict between tourism promotion and responsible heritage conservation is the subject of public policy debate and academic investigation everywhere. For the most part, over the years, countries on the European and American continents have developed means of providing broad tourist access to heritage sites without compromising the heritage value of those sites. Asian countries have worked out reasonable solutions in some of their sites—Bhaktapur in Nepal, various archaeological sites in India, Angkor in Cambodia, and Hoi Anh in Vietnam come to mind. But China is replete with heritage sites where tourism promotion has overwhelmed responsible heritage protection, with tacky commercialization for the benefit of vendors and tourist operators, and visitor numbers greatly exceeding carrying capacity. Likewise, in Thailand, where tourism is the single largest earner of foreign exchange, and the power of tourism interests in the government and in the private sector greatly exceeds the financial power and political influence of conservation advocates in government and in civil society, heritage conservation generally loses out to the commercial interests of the purveyors of tourism services. The essays by Apinya and Denes in this collection are excellent case studies of this problem.

In addition, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, which has plenty of financial resources and political support, but seems to be obsessed with promoting Thailand as a land of smiles, beaches, night life, and good food, has shown surprisingly little imagination or initiative in advocating an upgrade in the quality of heritage management, particularly with respect to museums, which are discussed below. The tourism authorities seem to underestimate the lure that well-presented cultural heritage can have for tourists. They do not learn from the examples of

Cambodia's ability to attract large numbers of Chinese tourists to visit Angkor, Penang's historic World Heritage Site neighborhoods, Taipei's National Palace Museum, or Singapore's excellent and much visited museums. Surin Pitsuwan's essay "Tourism and Heritage: A Tense Relationship" discusses this issue with accuracy and passion.

9. *Poor condition of Thailand's state museums:* The low importance that Thailand gives to the presentation of cultural heritage to its citizens and to visitors to the country is apparent in the condition of the state museums, including both the National Museum and provincial museums. Most of these contain outstanding examples of Thai art along with historical and cultural artifacts from the locality, but these collections are often (with some commendable exceptions) poorly housed, displayed, and interpreted. Thai school children are herded through the dusty and poorly arranged displays of the National Museum. Instead of exciting visitors about their nation's cultural history, these dry museum visits kill potential interest in cultural heritage, making it seem irrelevant to their lives. Fortunately, as in other areas of cultural heritage protection, the private sector is leaping into the breach, and a large number of local level private museums of considerable interest have been established, plus a few of nationwide heritage scope.

10. *Power of development interests.* In Thailand as in many other countries, commercial interests in league with government officials and political leaders have the power to pursue private goals, overwhelming the public interest. Recently, real estate developers have begun to eye areas of Bangkok that were previously defended as heritage protection zones. The Department of City Planning of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority has responded to this development interest in the draft Bangkok Five Year Masterplan, released for comment in 2012. In this document, height and other restrictions on development are lifted for areas of exceptional heritage value in the historic parts of the city stretching between the Chao Phraya River and the Krung Kasem canal. This draft plan suggests that planning officials of the city have scant understanding of the role of architectural and community heritage in a well-planned city.

In China, the power of real estate developers and the weak heritage consciousness of the government have resulted in the destruction of the heritage buildings and communities of entire cities such as Kunming, Chengdu, and Nanjing. It appeared that the city of Bangkok would be spared the fate of Chinese cities. Over several generations the historic portions of the city of Bangkok, including major public landmarks such as the Grand Palace, and historic neighborhoods such as Yaowarat and Charoen Krung that developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, largely retained their authenticity and vitality. But now, with the debacle of the Supreme Court building, the contextual landscape of the Grand

Palace is threatened, and with the proposed new Masterplan, the thriving Yaowarat and Charoen Krung areas may soon fall under the wrecker's ball. If this comes about, one of the last areas of Bangkok to retain a distinctive identity, character, and appearance will be transformed into yet another concentration of the non-descript shopping malls that dominate the landscape of much of contemporary Bangkok.

Despite the excellent reporting of journalists such as Ploenpote Atthakor and Sirinya Wattanasukchai of the *Bangkok Post*, despite the resistance of local communities, and despite the protests of civil society groups working together under the banner of the Cultural Heritage Conservation Alliance, these threats to the city's heritage are materializing because the general public remains unaware, government bureaucrats lack vision and flexibility, and leaders at the political level are not interested. Until the general public is made more aware of the important role that cultural heritage should play in a nation, and is aroused to take action, we cannot expect the authorities and the political leaders to be more responsive to heritage values in the formulation of development policy.

This is a formidable and somewhat discouraging rendition of problems and challenges that confront those who care about the future of Thai cultural heritage. But there are also several positive factors that provide grounds for hope in the cause of heritage conservation in Thailand, and that encourage the Siamese Heritage Trust in its advocacy work. Foremost among these is the pride and love of Thai people in their heritage—and not just the formal aspects that are the focus of official heritage protection efforts, but heritage in its glorious entirety, including vernacular architecture, minority group heritages, and local customs and ways of life and livelihood—in short, all the things, large and small, that make up the magnificent richness and diversity of Thailand's cultural mosaic, with its regional, ethnic, and community variants.

Another encouraging sign is the increasing assertiveness in both Bangkok and the provinces of community-based civil society groups that are standing up to the destruction of historic buildings and neighborhoods, and are asserting their rights to cultural identity. An excellent example of this is the success of the old Peranakan Sino-Thai community of Phuket, which has rediscovered its cultural roots and its relationship with Peranakan communities in the Malacca Straits to the south, as described here in the essay by Salma Khoo. Another example is the success of Chiang Mai residents in saving the historic Wat Kate community. And as Richard Engelhardt, Montira Horayangura Unakul and Julia Davies show in their essay on "Lessons from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation: International Best Practices in Thailand", there are several communities and institutions in Thailand that have undertaken conservation projects that meet the highest international standards for best practice.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in the first two years of its work, the Siamese Heritage Trust has found

that there is no lack of knowledgeable and committed heritage conservation advocates in Thailand, including both academic experts in universities and community leaders and volunteers, who care deeply about Thailand's cultural heritage, understand what should be done to protect it, and are willing to work together for the cause.

The Siamese Heritage Trust works to provide channels for conservation voices to be heard against official apathy and misguided forces of development, to increase public awareness of heritage conservation, to advocate heritage causes, and to provide networking opportunities for all those interested in protecting Thailand's official heritage.

Until the governance and legal structure of heritage is strengthened, it must be primarily in the court of public opinion, and through advocacy and education, that the campaign for heritage protection and improved heritage management must be fought. The Siamese Heritage Trust, in its first two years, has been finding its way, identifying the issues, and enlisting support. Gratified by the positive public reaction to its initial efforts, encouraged by the emergence of a broad based, albeit still embryonic, social movement for cultural heritage preservation, and motivated by the immediacy and magnitude of the threats, the Trust will intensify its heritage conservation efforts in future years. The Trust hopes that the essays in this volume will contribute to increasing public awareness and interest in the conservation cause.