

Current Trend and Challenges in the Development of a Monitoring Systems for World Cultural Heritage

**-UNESCO Workshop on the Periodic Reporting for Cultural World Heritage Properties
in Northeast and Southeast Asia, 12-16 December 2005, Melaka, Malaysia-**

Yukio Nishimura
Former Vice President, ICOMOS and
Professor, University of Tokyo

Northeast and Southeast Asian Context in General

In order to understand the current trend and challenges in the development of a monitoring system for WCH, we have to understand the unique features of the physical situation of this region.

It is obvious that there are a lot of special features in the urban and rural situation in this region. First, most of the urban areas in this region are densely populated, let alone its large population. For example, population density of the central Shanghai is around 1,100 people per hector, while that of the Western mega cities are much more moderate, such as 280 in Paris, 110 in London, and 100 in New York. This means the planning conditions of our region are by far different from that of the Western countries. Not only should the size of the big cities but also their density be considered when we cope with the setting of the cultural properties sites. Furthermore, these big cities are now still growing. Urban migration from the rural areas is the key factor of this phenomena, which again widen the gap between the urban and rural areas in economic sphere.

Secondly, there is a large amount of development pressure all over the region. Therefore, monitoring system of this region should be designed to tackle this problem. In many cases, local governments which should hold primary responsibility for the conservation of the cultural properties of their areas, are much more pro development rather than conservation, because they think it is more desirable in order to cater for the local needs. Along with the vast development pressure, it is evident that, in most of the planning systems of this region, planning control and its enforcement is very weak and fragile. This creates another type of problems, that is, we cannot judge the effective monitoring system from the stipulated framework, because the implementation is sometime quite different from the beautiful picture of the conservation systems.

Thirdly, even though the mega cities in this region share a sort of similarity in size and population density, there is quite a large extent of diversity in many aspects of the cultural properties in this region. For example, topography, ethnic culture, religion, building types are quite different from area to area. Economic situation, of course, is in different stages and this makes the target solution of the monitoring system different from country to country. Some sites in a certain countries are suffering from the thefts and inadequate legal as well as physical protection of the cultural properties, while other sites in other countries are witnessing the vast change of lifestyle which creates fundamental shift of the human perception for the conservation of traditional culture and technology that are all in transitional stages. This diversity leads us to a sort of cultural mosaic in many fields, such as urban settlements.

These general features of the regions imply that there are no unified solutions for monitoring systems for World Cultural Heritage sites. The system should be more activity-led, and programme-oriented rather than detailed manual and checklist type of solutions. At the same time, system should be led by more culture-oriented action planning rather static rules and regulations. At the same time, we have to understand that there underlies the same kind of the need for the monitoring system, such as effective planning mechanism, wise use of heritage, and how to cope with the lifestyle change of the region.

Northeast and Southeast Asian Context of Monitoring

There are two different approaches to the monitoring system in this region. One is to form a special monitoring system or committee to review the current situation of the sites such as Republic of Korea and the Philippines employ, and the other to strengthen the current planning system to cover the monitoring mission on top of the normal regulations, which are employed, for instance, in Japan.

In my opinion, we should combine with the merits of these two options. In a normal situation, we should make the routine planning system fully function. To fulfill this mission, we should strengthen our daily planning mechanism. Planning permission process, for example, should be extended to cover all sorts of development albeit small, and its execution and implementation should be carefully checked so that the people's perception of law enforcement should be upgraded. For this reason, the number of the professional planners in local government should be increased by initiating the higher planning education for local officers should be promoted in a national scale.

At the same time, mechanism for special planning and design review system should be introduced for special occasions such as large scale development scheme and development proposals for a very sensitive area. And the decision of this special committee should be disclosed so that no corruption or bad decisions are made. Sound democracy based on a sound discussion in a transparent manner is urgently needed in this field.

Detailed guidelines and checklist for daily use by the local assessor of the sites should be developed for better maintenance. Such manual can be commonly studied internationally among the agencies of this region. The outreach to the general public to educate the importance the sites is also important for the daily management of the cultural heritage.

In order to cope with extremely heavy development pressures in many parts of this region, role of the buffer zones are of special importance. Larger buffer zones are constantly requested by the ICOMOS and other conservation organizations, and more extensive planning mechanism to monitor the change around the core should be devised to manage the speed and direction of the change. Furthermore, planning control even outside the buffer zones is being strongly advised to safeguard the setting of the cultural properties.

ICOMOS is in its 15th general assembly held in Xi'an, China, in October 2005 adopted the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Sites and Areas (see appendix). In the Xi'an Declaration, monitoring is one of the five points that need special attention. The Declaration in its fourth part says that 'Monitor and manage change affecting settings'. This part has three major sections, they are, one, 'the rate of change and the individual and cumulative impacts of change and transformation on the settings of heritage structures, sites and areas is an ongoing process which must be monitored and managed', two, 'change to the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas should be managed to retain cultural significance and distinctive character', and three, 'monitoring should be define approaches and actions to appreciate and measure as well as prevent or remedy decay, loss of significance or trivialization and propose improvement in conservation, management and interpretation practices.'

When we monitor the cultural heritage, therefore, we should consider the importance or special character of the setting of the site as well as the site itself, this is one of the main recommendations of the Xi'an Declaration.

Of course, there still remain some basic requirements to accomplish by each state party, such as completing the national, provincial and local inventories and regular revision of the listed cultural properties of national importance. This kind of work is the starting point for the conservation but some state parties still in a difficult situation to fulfill the needs.

Last but not least point is the tourism management using such indices as carrying capacity, level of acceptable changes best practice for interpretation and presentation. However, in this Workshop, there is another independent presentation for tourism management by the UNESCO professionals. I would like not to go into the details in this regard.

I hope my presentation together with several slides may help preparing good monitoring practice and system for each participating state party. Thank you for your attention.

(attached The Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Sites and Areas)