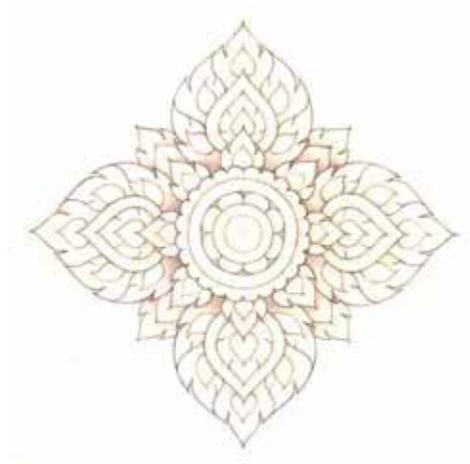


SECTION 3

**INTERNATIONAL
PERSPECTIVES**



Heritage Conservation in Asia: Shifts and Developments, 1972–2012

H. Detlef Kammeier

Introduction

This paper is intended to add a broad international background to the Thailand specific discussion by most of the papers in this 100th issue of the *Journal of the Siam Society*. The time frame selected alludes to this year's celebration of four decades since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the World Heritage Convention.¹ Using the same time period for assessing changes in development, we have witnessed unprecedented economic growth in Asia but also, albeit less visible, some remarkable progress in heritage conservation – changing attitudes, growing interest and capability, and some outstanding tangible results - despite continuing conflict between conservation and development.

The World Heritage system may be the most visible and prestigious framework of conservation worldwide, but the local and national dimensions are more important for each country and locality where the difficult integration of conservation and development must be achieved – often amounting to the proverbial squaring of a circle. In contrast, there would be hundreds of sites in need of effective protection by national legislation and local management skills. For example, Thailand still has only five sites with World Heritage (WH) status² but hundreds more significant buildings, historic towns, nature parks, and wetlands, apart from other largely intangible cultural goods such as dance and music – all of which deserve to be conserved, for different reasons. Many of these vestiges of a rich and lively culture are threatened by modernization and squeezed into a marginal existence, neglected for lack of interest and lack of funding, and, in the growing cities, barely tolerated and often demolished. Even many of the religious and royal monuments that are

¹ The same period of time applies to the author's presence in Asia, most of it in Thailand.

² The five sites are, in order of their inscription: Historic City of Ayutthaya, 1991; Historic Town of Sukhothai and associated historic towns (i.e., Si Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet), 1991; Thung Yai – Hua Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, 1991; Ban Chiang Archaeological Site, 1992; Dong Phrayayen – Khao Yai Forest Complex, 2005.

traditionally better protected by law and more respected by people have been badly neglected by local authorities.

Using the established World Heritage system as a framework for orientation, this paper outlines the system's legal foundation, its elaborate procedures, and the broadening of conservation issues. It will then move on to the shifts and developments in the heritage value system of the past 40 years, at the same time also looking at the principal differences between West and East.

Some aspects of the World Heritage system

The total number of World Heritage sites is now approaching 1,000 (Table 1) so in each country there are only a few, or in larger countries, perhaps a few dozen sites. Over the past decades, the World Heritage Convention of 1972 has been signed by 190 states and territories ("States Parties" in WH parlance) but some of them came quite late in their recognition of this important document. In a sense, it is the most successful international law as not a single state has actively opposed it.

Table 1. World Heritage Sites

Total number of World Heritage Sites (in 157 states and territories)	962
Cultural sites	745
Natural sites	188
Mixed sites	29

Source: World Heritage List, 2012, statistics after the last World Heritage committee session, June 2012

The distribution of sites still reflects the Eurocentric views of many of the committee members who decide on inscriptions under the Convention.³ China and India, the most populous nations with extraordinarily rich cultures (and natural environments as well), still do not have as many of their uncountable number of candidate sites inscribed as the classic European "champions" of heritage protection (Table 2). This imbalance has been addressed for many years by restricting the new inscriptions in Europe and giving a certain "bonus" to developing countries. However, Europe and North America together still account for almost half (48 percent of all World Heritage sites).

Although the majority of sites are in the cultural category, there are now more and more "mixed" sites, natural sites, and cultural landscapes. Some of the newly inscribed sites are exceedingly large and complex, raising serious questions as to their manageability.⁴ Two instruments for regulating the number of inscriptions are

³ The first inscriptions were made in 1978, several years after the convention had been agreed upon.

⁴ An example of the complex types of "sites" is the serial inscription of the remnants of the Roman

worth mentioning. First, tentative lists (prepared and maintained by each country) of prospective sites are often known years ahead of the actual nomination. Second, there is a list of World Heritage in Danger that includes certain sites for a period of observation until the threat of damage or mismanagement has been removed. Otherwise, the site may be de-listed.

Table 2. Eurocentric distribution among selected countries

World Heritage sites in selected countries up to 2012	Numbers
China	43
India	29
Italy	47
Spain	44
France	38

Source: World Heritage List, 2012

During the last few years, several sites have actually been delisted because their management was found to be unsatisfactory, especially where new incompatible developments were permitted in violation of the agreed local statutes. In the long term, it might even become feasible to limit any inscription to a fixed period (perhaps 25 or 30 years) with the condition that it be reconsidered so that new criteria might be considered. Though highly controversial and probably untenable on political grounds, such a measure could adjust the list to the changing state of understanding without growing beyond a reasonable size. The World Heritage system grows in complexity and international competence in heritage protection, reflecting the shifts in defining heritage values and their translation into protection policies.

Categories of heritage and their values

Most heritage objects are buildings that are fixed in a specific site, on a road, next to a square or in a particular geographic spot. Others are mobile, such as statues or other objects that are even easier to move than a statue. Immobile heritage objects are often deemed worthy of protection because of some reasons that could be generalized as "memorial values" or perhaps as historically generated values that are typically tied to a physical site or building (where a memorable historic event took place). While the economic use value of any building or site inevitably goes

Limes (shared by Germany and UK). In comparison, cross-border sites like the English Garden of the eighteenth-century Muskau Castle (straddling the German-Polish border) appear relatively easy to manage. However, nominating and eventually inscribing the Silk Road remains an exceedingly ambitious multi-national project. For more information, refer to the World Heritage List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list> but also to the Operational Guidelines (updated to 2008).

down to zero after the end of its economic life, the memorial value (or historic, or perhaps sentimental value) rises and declines with the importance of that memory in people's minds.⁵ The "natural" or rather economic cycle of growth and decline in a place's economic importance results in periodic replacement or heavy modification. This triggers debates of how to go back to preserving the "original" structure or any particular stage rather than the accepting and enhancing the "palimpsest" of the historical layers that are so typical of any older building.

A general classification of heritage types and their values is outlined in Figure 1. Quite obviously, most heritage conservation projects have more than one dimension – the physical structures that need repair and maintenance cannot be separated from the intangible dimensions of meaning and use of a building, and generally, from the social and cultural issues that are involved.

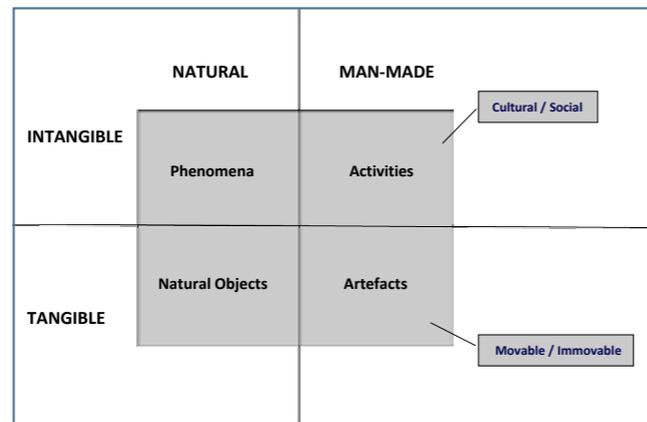


Figure 1. A comprehensive classification of heritage resources

Heritage objects, tangible or intangible, man-made or natural, movable or immovable, come in different sizes – ranging from the familiar single building (or part of a building complex like a sacred shrine) to larger areas like an entire monastery, or a historic city center, or even a whole region of historic relevance. Such a region falls into the category of a cultural landscape where the natural setting is enhanced in value, perhaps due to significant settlement structures or agricultural practices (such as the rice terraces in Nepal, Bali, or the Philippines), or due to specific historical periods that shaped the natural environment (such as the Loire Valley in France that has been a World Heritage site for many years). Figure 2 illustrates the increasing size and complexity of heritage sites over the past thirty years – from single buildings to cultural landscapes and serial nominations.

UNESCO has added another global register of outstanding heritage of the intangible category, the so-called "memory of the world". This term refers to a growing collection of exemplary documents of art, science, and civilization that

⁵ And also in the appreciation by changing governments, or in the views of various social groups – which indicates the complications in defining heritage values.

are inscribed in a list which was launched as late as 1992. In addition, there is a convention on safeguarding intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003). This is a very significant extension of the previously narrow focus on material heritage, without adequately recognizing their immaterial aspects. It can be argued that the separation into "tangible" and "intangible" heritage is artificial because the physical evidence of human interaction with nature (buildings, towns, cultural landscapes) is based on intangible constructs of the mind, on societal power structures, and on human ingenuity, while most intangible features of heritage are closely linked with territories and sites.

The World Heritage system constitutes the most refined collection of expertise in heritage conservation with contributions on all kinds of heritage sites that are under examination. It could serve as a model for legislation at the national level

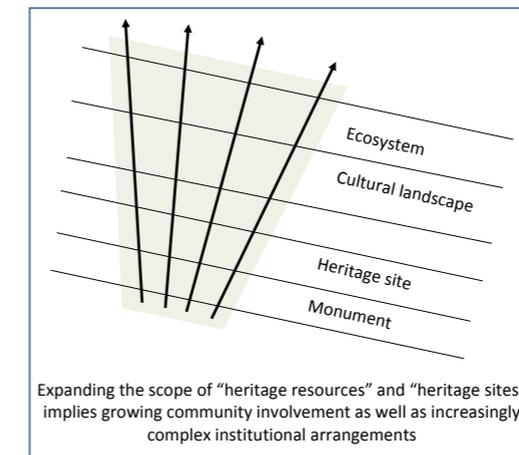


Figure 2. Expanding scope of conservation objects

which in many countries is far behind the demand for adequate consideration and treatment of heritage resources.

Compatibility of traditional and modern buildings and urban fabric

If historic fabric in Thailand (or similar countries) is currently met with more adequate understanding and treated with growing expertise compared with the situation forty years ago, one might ask whether the overall situation has been better – here or in advanced countries where heritage conservation is taken even more seriously. This is almost a rhetorical question because new urban development has always required transformation, rebuilding, and demolition of existing stock. So the cycle of new development, demolition, and conservation always leads to difficult choices, between replacing or retaining parts of the environment, with no chance ever of meeting all stakeholders' preferences.

What is new nowadays is the sheer size of new urban construction projects on a scale unprecedented in history. Similarly, the acreage of prime forest converted into oil palm plantations (in Indonesia, for example) or into grazing land for cattle raising (in the Amazon area) is much larger than any rural transformation in the past. The difference lies not only in the enormous scale of modern city growth, but also in the great difficulty of making modern concrete and steel construction compatible, in terms of scale and materials, with traditional buildings made of timber and bricks. In former times, the style of what was “modern” differed from the styles of earlier periods, but both scale and materials were much more sympathetic to the historic surroundings than nowadays.

History is replete with dramatic cases of the changing “use values” of previously grand structures. Three examples:

- After its heyday as the center of the ancient Greek democracy, the Acropolis of Athens lost its significance and monument value. During the Ottoman occupation of Greece, Athens was a dusty provincial town, and the Acropolis was used as a gunpowder magazine which then became the target for a destructive attack by the Venetian army (1687). It took another 200 years for the Acropolis to be re-appreciated for its “heritage” value.
- Not long after the Forum Romanum had lost its dignity as the center of the most powerful empire of the ancient world, it became a quarry for building houses and streets.⁶
- After Ayutthaya had been sacked by Burmese troops in 1767, a new capital had to be founded in a safer location, in the swamps along the Chao Phraya River. What had been left of the proud capital was the memory, and the bricks, many of which were shipped down the river to build the landmark chedi at the “golden mount” of Wat Saket so as to recreate the old capital.

Differences between East and West

Are there any significant differences between a typical Western country and an Asian country in terms of heritage appreciation and conservation? This question is not as easy to answer as it would have been forty or fifty years ago, especially when comparing countries at widely different stages of their socio-economic and legislative development.⁷

⁶ The wonderfully documented archaeological sites at some subway stations in Rome (and Athens) show that many houses used the marble from previously important historical structures as solid but inexpensive building material.

⁷ In this broad comparison, Australia is part of the “West” in terms of culture and socio-economic

Obvious differences would exist between the most advanced economies (such as Japan and Singapore) and the latecomers in development (such as Laos and Cambodia). Singapore embraced heritage conservation only in the early 1980s, after having re-developed most of its former shophouse fabric. What is left of the traditional Singapore townscape is a few islands of highly gentrified complexes of shophouse alleys and a good number of public buildings, apart from the meticulously conserved open spaces. Within less than twenty years, China probably achieved the greatest progress in catching up on state of the art conservation methodology with many interesting results, including some last-minute decisions for active conservation in Tibet, after most of the extant buildings had been demolished. Cambodia and Laos have not had enough time and opportunity for updating their heritage legislation, but there are some modest projects of urban conservation, apart from the special case of Angkor where large-scale historic preservation meets an increasingly unmanageable influx of tourists. Thailand, as witnessed by the most interesting range of papers in this volume, has its share of successes and failures all over the country, in terms of historic substance rescued, long-term policies, and some intelligent projects.⁸

In a sense, from superficial observation, there are no great East-West differences any more because Asian urbanization has already overtaken the West in speed and volume. The present conditions prove that long periods of economic boom are far worse in their destructive power than war.⁹ Similarly, the overly confident modern architects and city planners in the East are as bad as their Western colleagues in their apparent superiority complex (coupled with a lack of historic knowledge) that is let loose on cities and landscapes with rich layers of historical fabric.

But there are differences that can be generalized. In the East, there is generally a short historical distance of perhaps twenty to thirty years between a stage when much of the cityscape is the product of “traditional” modes of building production and planning, and the current stage of “modernity” in terms of architectural style that is often poorly adapted to Asian environments and culture. In the West, that historical distance would be at least sixty to eighty years. In addition, there is also a

development although clearly geographically part of the Asia-Pacific Region. It is inappropriate to throw all of the Asian countries into one basket because there are so many significant differences.

⁸ One of the most successful long-range programs must be that of Rattanakosin Island which was launched at the 200th anniversary of Bangkok. When the program began in 1982, I would never have believed it would become so successful in showing what a consolidated and continuously refined policy can achieve.

⁹ That was the same in Europe where the economic boom after the war destroyed more historic substance than the devastating bombing. The signal for overall policy change was the European Year of Architectural Heritage declared by the European Council in 1975. At that time, most cities had already successfully begun to turn from new urban development to piecemeal rehabilitation and conservation.

significant difference between a mature planning and control system and one that is only recently created and largely untested.

There is another significant difference – in defining the authenticity of heritage. In the classical European doctrine (which only developed since the eighteenth century), the authenticity of the material is very important, while in Asia the focus is on the authenticity of the spirit of place. Therefore, murals may be repainted, and facades may be rebuilt rather than being painstakingly restored, to clearly mark the difference between genuine old parts and reconstructed parts where there is no evidence how it may have looked 300 years ago. In contrast, the spirit of a sacred place is not considered affected if the mural now appears in vivid fresh colours.¹⁰

Defining and assessing heritage values

Perhaps the most well-known general criterion for World Heritage listing is that of “outstanding universal value”. This is contradictory in itself because, by definition, all heritage is culture-specific as well as locality specific, hence “universal values” are always difficult to define.

Two other key terms have given rise to long discussions among heritage specialists. The first is “authenticity”. Its specific interpretation in Asia was authoritatively presented in the Nara Document (first published in 1994), setting it apart from its earlier Eurocentric meaning. The China Principles (ICOMOS, 2004) were adopted for similar reasons.

The second term of equally high importance is “integrity”, again with differences in interpretation in Asia and Europe. Both terms have been proposed in an innovative way as qualifying criteria for World Heritage nominations and also as part of the increasingly refined management framework for World Heritage sites. The late Herb Stovel (2007) presented an inspiring discussion of the complexities of authenticity and integrity and their practical use, leading to most interesting alternative approaches to dealing with World Heritage resources. The framework for assessing heritage qualities contains the following criteria:

- Wholeness; intactness; material genuineness
- Genuineness of organization of space and form
- Continuity of function; and continuity of setting

Stovel demonstrates the use of such criteria with regard to archaeological sites, historic towns, architectural monuments and complexes, and cultural landscapes.

¹⁰ In the past ten years, the famous murals at Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Suthat have been carefully restored, fully in line with the Asian interpretation of authenticity rather than material authenticity.

The Asia-Pacific Awards for Heritage Conservation

All of the demanding criteria for good heritage conservation have been applied in selecting projects in a program that has attracted the attention of professionals and communities throughout Asia. The director of the cultural office of UNESCO Bangkok launched the program of best practices in 1999.¹¹ The idea is to award privately funded cultural heritage projects in the Asia-Pacific Region (which includes Australia), avoiding any inappropriate competition with government sponsored programs. Typically sponsored by individual property owners or by non-government agencies and often managed by communities, the projects represent an extraordinary range of interesting and competently managed cases of heritage conservation. Thus they do not compete with the World Heritage properties that are normally funded and managed by states, municipalities, or specific public agencies.

The annual competition has been running successfully for more than ten years, with very encouraging results. The award-winning projects of the first five years have been published in a beautiful book (Engelhardt, 2007). On the basis of the documentation, it can be stated with confidence – and that is a very important message particularly for the poorer countries in Asia – that privately sponsored and competently executed conservation projects are the most effective promotion of broad based heritage management.

The convergence of heritage conservation and environmental protection

The “heritage of mankind” can be conceived as a precious but fragile gift that comes with heavy conditions for its care. The gift is from previous generations to our present society (who must take responsibility for looking after that precious gift) and future generations (who, one would hope, will eventually receive that gift undamaged). This is precisely the same moral obligation which is now universally accepted with regard to the environment.

Both principles, of the protection of natural and cultural heritage, have effectively moved from marginal positions in public opinion to center stage (the environment probably more than cultural heritage). In the process which can be observed all over the world, there has been a convergence of both types of social

¹¹ Here is a welcome opportunity for giving credit to Dr. Richard A. Engelhardt as the untiring and resourceful promoter of heritage conservation campaigns in all of the Asian countries. He launched the series of Asia-Pacific Awards and managed the implementation of the program until his recent retirement from UNESCO. It was a privilege for me to serve on the jury for several years where I met a good number of other professionals who have faith in the growing potential of highly competent heritage conservation projects. The special website for the program is richly illustrated and informative – UNESCO (Bangkok), 2011.

responsibility, so much so that new legislation for heritage conservation is often incorporated in environmental laws that are already in force.

Nature protection and the recognition of the role of indigenous peoples

The imperative of sustainable development takes a different direction when it comes to the role and the rights of indigenous peoples, who are typically living in those nature reserves that have been left untouched by modern civilization. Over the past two decades, two global movements have brought issues concerning indigenous peoples to greater public attention.

- One movement is the continuous human rights activism of international organizations and the ceaseless efforts of indigenous peoples themselves, supported by a number of NGOs, which have brought to light the reality of ethnocide, the oppression and discrimination of indigenous groups all over the world.
- The other movement is focused on environmental issues – the vulnerability of nature and its fragile equilibrium, global warming and climate change, excessive logging in tropical forests, overexploitation of natural resources and the destruction of ecosystems, man-made catastrophes like hazardous mining activities and frequent cases of oil pollution, and purely natural catastrophes, such as the *tsunami* which hit Southeast and South Asia in December 2004.

These events triggered a new perception of nature and an increasing interest in indigenous and tribal societies that have a strong attachment to their land and live in apparent harmony with their environment. Indigenous peoples are more and more perceived through a lens of nostalgia, a longing for things that cannot be found in conditions of modernity, particularly in those countries that call themselves “advanced”. The rapid decrease in biological and cultural diversity has spurred the interest of scientists and environmentalists in the unique ways in which indigenous peoples perceive, use, and manage their natural resources. For environmental protection, indigenous peoples have now been discovered as useful partners, even though this sympathetic view is not shared by many governments.

Indigenous communities often have admirable and complex practices for the sustainable management of their land, even though these methods differ from those of western science. Indigenous practices have proven to be successful, have delivered similar results as Western approaches, can be inexpensive, and, through religious or spiritual prescriptions, can sometimes be enforced more effectively.

There are large gaps between international policy and local realities. Perhaps

most significant are the gaps between the well intended, but highly sophisticated and Eurocentric international documents and guidelines, and the national, regional and local conditions at the implementation level. Because many states fear their sovereignty may be undermined, the core provision of human rights, the right to self-determination, is not yet accorded to groups which differ from the mainstream society. For many governments sovereignty, along with political and economical issues, are still paramount over conservation.

The status of indigenous peoples in nation-states differs greatly. In North-European liberal democracies, indigenous peoples enjoy relative autonomy; in North-America, Australia and New Zealand they have recently achieved some striking successes concerning their territorial claims. Fleischhauer and Kammeier (2007) expressed the cautiously optimistic view that there is hope in sight, despite the long established incompatibility of international laws and the restricted role that indigenous peoples are commonly allowed to play in managing natural resources. The issues involved are very complex, cutting across the realms of international law, natural science, cultural sciences, social anthropology, and also “heritage management”, as an emerging field which is not quite established as a branch of scientific knowledge.

The human rights based approach to cultural heritage conservation

A human rights based approach has also been discussed with regard to cultural diversity, which is seen as equally important as biological diversity, and thus serves as a strong argument for the management of cultural heritage resources by local ethnic groups that may otherwise not be part of mainstream society (Bjoenness, 2008; Jokilehto, 2012). It is surprising that human rights issues have not been brought into the discussion of cultural protection much earlier, although they have been basic to the goals of the United Nations from its beginnings in 1945 (Logan, 2008). Amund Sinding-Larsen uses the human rights argument in his monumental work on the development of Old Lhasa (2012) – perhaps the most controversial and highly politically loaded case of heritage management anywhere in Asia.

Demanding management plans for heritage sites

The institutional framework, negotiation and mediation among stakeholders, and regular monitoring of existing sites have moved to center stage in the assessment of World Heritage sites. Management plans are now required as part of the nomination and inscription procedures, and it may be expected that all sites that do not have an adequate management plan now (and that is the majority!) will need to have one in a few years. The elaborate specifications of the World Heritage system may also

be applied to nationally and regionally registered monuments and sites, perhaps in appropriately simplified manner.

As one of the largest global industries, tourism is often closely related to major heritage places, and heritage tourism has become big business. Decision makers in all countries usually equate heritage conservation with tourism promotion although this is patently wrong because the two sets of objectives are hard to reconcile. Heritage protection requires carefully balanced limits on the number of visitors depending on the nature of the site, but commercial tourism promotion aims at ever larger numbers. The heritage management plans must deal with tourism – typically, for small and unknown sites, with the objective of bringing in more visitors, but more often, with the aim of controlling the visitor crowds within sustainable limits. As with all other aspects of heritage, from value definition to local participation in decision making or implementing maintenance and monitoring procedures, the seemingly technical work is inextricably linked with local and often national politics.

Concluding remarks

Conservation concerns have grown much more over the past forty years than any earlier conservation movements with their nineteenth century roots. The main reason lies in the speed of change in recent decades that has been much faster than in the past. There are serious threats to the finite heritage resources (natural and cultural). Broad sectors of society are worried by the vanishing of cultural identity as a result of the levelling effects of economic and cultural globalization.

The growing conservation movement all over the world is in fact a counter movement against the widespread and naively unreflective faith in unlimited economic progress. This observation may however only apply to the post-industrial countries of the West with their much longer experience with that kind of progress. Elsewhere, it tends to be the position of intellectuals who can see well beyond contemporary development fashions though they might lack opportunities for intervention.

The scope of conservation has been broadened considerably, linking the formerly unconnected fields of cultural conservation, urban development, and environmental protection. The emerging cultural conservation movement has also been fused with the global environmental movement since the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro) and the well known Local Agenda 21 since 1996.

Despite its growth all over the world, the conservation movement may still be seen as a Western and distinctly post-industrial agenda, which originated in the 1960s and 1970s when the post-war economic boom (which had been utterly disrespectful to historic city centers throughout Europe) came to a halt.

For the poorer pre-industrial (or industrializing) part of the world the principal question is whether the relatively new import of “Western” conservation thinking is

relevant and affordable at all, as it competes with the much more pressing problems of poverty, health, education, social injustice, and inequality.

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