Transcending Western and Eastern Understanding in Cultural Landscape Management: an Insight from Borobudur Temple

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Abstract. In recent decades, the dichotomy between Western and Eastern paradigms in heritage conservation management has been growing alongside the new interpretation of cultural landscape. However, this dichotomy seems inaccurate as it ignores the locality and historical context in which cultural heritage conservation management is implemented. This study used Borobudur Temple as a case study to show how Western and Eastern paradigms are complementary. This study will examine Borobudur’s cultural heritage management development from a Western perspective emphasizing materiality to an Eastern perspective emphasizing social significance. Through literature review, this study found that conservation practices have changed to emphasize Borobudur's social and cultural importance to the indigenous community. In the beginning, the conservation practice that focused on a scientific approach was useful in reconstructing the architectural structure of the temple. Then, in recent times, the conservation management that values indigenous people’s spiritual, social, economic, and cultural ties to the Borobudur temple is considered more appropriate. This study enriches Indonesian cultural landscape management literature and shows how Western and Eastern views should be viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. It also prompts cultural geographers to consider more-than-human aspects of cultural heritage sites in conservation management.

1 Introduction

Scholars have extensively engaged in topics regarding the conservation of cultural sites [1-3]. The central discourse revolves around the applicability of Western-derived heritage conservation in Asia and other regions across the globe [3, 4]. The Western perspective on heritage conservation is often characterized as being predominantly focused on material aspects, whereas the Eastern perspective places greater emphasis on intangible value as a central argument [3]. Within the Western paradigm, conservation efforts prioritize the preservation of authenticity and originality [3]. Conversely, Eastern nations believe that when it comes to the preservation of heritage sites, emphasis should be placed on the social and cultural significance of the site to its community [5]. This divergence in perspectives gives rise to a problematic dichotomy of ‘the Eastern and Western’ idealized conceptions and approaches to heritage conservation [3, 5-8].

By revisiting the conservation effort in Borobudur, this study will challenge the West and East dichotomy in heritage site conservation. Borobudur was chosen as it is unique in representing a heritage site its conservation efforts transcend two different governmental systems. Then, its location in Java, Indonesia, has the potential to provide new insights into the influence of socio-cultural in the interpretation of a cultural heritage site. This article contends that Western and Eastern heritage site conservation approaches are complementary rather than contradictory. The assessment of the applicability of Western and Eastern approaches in conservation management must consider the socio-geographical context in which the site is located and at what stage conservation is being implemented. This study is not intended to criticize conservation management throughout time. Rather, to appreciate the adoption of Western and Eastern conservation paradigms and use them to enrich the current understanding of cultural landscape management.

1.1 Heritage Conservation

The primary objective of conservation efforts is to protect cultural heritage, while also ensuring its availability to both current and future generations [9]. The conservation effort encompasses various strategies such as preventive preservation, adaptation, reconstruction, and restoration, all of which prioritize the preservation of the cultural heritage item's significance and physical properties [9]. The world convention on cultural heritage conservation was adopted first on November 16, 1972, at the UNESCO General Conference for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage [10].

Generally, there are two distinct categories of the subject of conservation, namely natural sites, and
cultural heritage sites. The natural site was initially recognized as an area unaffected by human intervention and thus necessitates safeguarding against human activities [11]. It brings consequences in conservation practices, which are likely to violate the rights of indigenous groups on their land for the sake of protecting wild landscapes [12].

Moreover, cultural heritage manifests in various forms, including tangible entities such as sites, buildings, and landscapes, and intangible aspects such as memories, emotions, values, and customs [13]. The Western views often translate the heritages as sites, monuments, and objects [14]. Moreover, their approach to conserving cultural heritage sites emphasizes the material value and crucial aspects of the site's authenticity, as stated in the Venice Charter and the first United Nations World Heritage Convention [14, 15]. However, this Western view in conservation management was criticized for failing to recognize heritage sites' intangible value. Byrne [8] criticized the Western view as overly relying on scientific proof while managing heritage sites, neglecting existing cultural aspects that sometimes cannot, or do not always need, to be measured and scientifically proven. For example, the community's spiritual relations with its environment are sacred and intimate.

1.2 Cultural Landscape

Furthermore, in light of the cultural turn, there has been a notable rise in scholarly attention towards symbols, values, and meaning [16]. In the context of cultural conservation, it results in a transition of conservation paradigm from materialistic to cultural significance-oriented [5, 8]. In 1992 UNESCO established terminology for cultural landscapes that "integrate human and natural creations" [10]. This category encompasses both natural and human-made works, with cultural landscapes often exemplifying a distinct connection between humans and the natural environment [17]. Within this new perspective, the conservation then prioritizes the intangible value of a heritage site. The prioritization of intangible value over authenticity was implemented in Asian countries before its recognition by UNESCO. An illustrative instance is the Japan Nara Document, which initially expounded upon the significance of authenticity from an Asian standpoint and its correlation with the cultural reliance on a heritage site [15]. Despite UNESCO’s growing acknowledgment of the intangible connection between humans and their environment, European nations continued to exert dominance, as they did with other cultural heritage, by contributing vineyard landscapes to the World Heritage List instead of the initially inscribed sacred mountains [18].

The emergence of a new paradigm in conservation that recognizes intangible value raises critics of the Western paradigm that highly focuses on the material aspect and overwhelmingly relies on scientific evidence to prove originality and authenticity. However, despite many scholars criticizing the Western view in cultural heritage management and praising the current conservation – which recognizes the socio and cultural significance – as the best practice for conservation management [5, 7, 14, 15], they are likely to neglect the locality and time frame factor in their consideration. I argue that whether the Eastern view is better than the Western view or not depends on the context of where and when the conservation management is executed. Most cultural conservation studies are concentrated in developed countries, and their inquiries are focused on a one-time frame [19]; those studies may result in bias in geographical and time frame context. The research on developed countries will be biased regarding resource availability while determining the outcome of using one of the conservation paradigms. Meanwhile, using separate time framing in criticizing the conservation model will ignore technological and scientific developments in the conservation process and the needs of the conserved site.

2 Method

This study employed a conventional literature review approach [20] to critique the ongoing discourse surrounding the dichotomy between Western and Eastern approaches to cultural landscape management. I have curated a collection of scholarly journal articles examining the theoretical and practical aspects of cultural heritage management, focusing on the Borobudur temple. The articles utilized in this research were obtained from reputable academic publishers, namely Springer, Elsevier, and Taylor and Francis. The selection process involved employing targeted keywords such as ‘heritage site conservation’, ‘Borobudur’, and ‘cultural landscape’. The analysis in this study does not require a specific number of articles to be included, as the primary focus is on synthesizing information rather than generalizing or quantifying it.

3 Borobudur: The Seven Wonders of the World

Borobudur Temple is the largest Buddhist temple in the world, located in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia (Figure 1). This temple was constructed during the Dynasty of Caylendra between the eighth and ninth centuries AD. The structure of this building consists of gradient levelling ground with ten floors, a terraced pyramid-like shape, and quadrangular galleries at the base [21]. The dimension of the temple is 123 x 123 meters in size, and it stood 42 meters tall before and 34.5 meters after renovation [22]. Each level contains 504 Buddha statues and 1460 reliefs depicting Buddha's and human life's journey. In Buddhist cosmology, the three levels of the Borobudur temple represent the universe: kamadhatu, rupadhatu, and arupadhatu [21] (Figure 2). Kamadhatu represents the lustful world in which humans live today. Rupadhatu represents a higher world than humans, as evidenced by the array of Buddha statues. Meanwhile, arupadhatu is the highest and most
sacred world, represented by three circular terraces with the main stupa.

Fig. 1. The location of Borobudur temple. Source: Google Earth.

Besides the magnificent architectural structure, Borobudur Temple has cultural and spiritual significance. Borobudur was believed to be the place for worship of the ancestors of the Caylendra Dynasty [15]. The stupas served as repositories for relics, sanctuaries, places for the Buddha and Sangha, and divine symbols. Furthermore, this temple is philosophically connected with two other temples surrounding it, the Mendut and Pawon Temples (Figure 3). Those smaller temples mean preparatory stages for a human before entering the highest stage called lokattora, which is Borobudur Temple. The Borobudur, Mendut, and Pawon temples are in straight lines, reflecting life per the doctrine of dacabodisattvabhumi.

Fig. 2. The structure of Borobudur Temple. Source: Modified from [21]

Borobudur Temple Compound consists of Borobudur, Mendut and Pawon Temple, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List No. 529 in 1991, based on its outstanding universal value (UOV) as defined in the Operational Guidelines (OGs) of the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the World Heritage Convention). As Indonesia’s first World Cultural Heritage site, the Borobudur Temple Compound has become a pilot project for conserving high-value cultural landscapes. It represents the development of sophisticated conservation management and challenges for world cultural heritage in developing countries spanning the period from colonialism to independence.

4 Borobudur as Monument: The Western View during Rediscovery and Restoration Period

After a thousand years had been abandoned, Borobudur was rediscovered during the colonial occupation. Western colonials enjoyed exploring historical relics in their colonized countries, even removing indigenous groups from their cultural landscape [23]. Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 until 1816, was strongly interested in Javanese cultural heritage and had visited historical sites such as Hindu and Buddhist temples. In 1814, he sent a Dutch expert, Cornelius, to investigate pieces of the monument that had appeared on the surface around Central Java. Cornelius’ team and at least 200 workers opened up the mass of volcanic material caused by the eruption of Mount Merapi in 950 AD. Moreover, the investigation of the building proceeded until 1835, with a series of project leaders culminating under the direction of the Dutch colonial government and was completed in 1859 [24]. Then, large-scale restoration began in 1907, under the supervision of Th van Erp, and included a thorough examination of the surrounding environment.

Besides being scientifically defined, early conservation management involves global partners and multidisciplinary expertise. It can be shown by the involvement of professionals and institutions from other nations, such as the Netherlands, India, and Belgium [21]. Furthermore, following the end of Dutch colonialism and Indonesia’s independence in 1945, Indonesia began a campaign on safeguarding world heritage to gain funding and support from the international community. Soon, several international experts and organizations actively contributed to the restoration initiatives. However, it should be noted that, following independence, the contribution of local experts and institutions such as ITB, UGM, and UI grew, with the main task of investigating the history and relationship between the temple and the social culture of the surrounding community [21]- a part of the investigation that was previously not carried out by western colonials.

Nagaoka [15] mentioned that Western perspectives significantly shaped the conservation management of Borobudur during the period of rediscovery and restoration. This influence is inherently linked to the historical context of Western occupation in the region before the twentieth century. At that time, the Dutch regarded Borobudur primarily as a monument rather than a cultural representation. Numerous scholarly investigations have highlighted that during the mid-twentieth century, a range of conventions, protocols, and...
guidelines about preserving cultural heritage emerged, 
signifying a proactive endeavour by the Western world 
to safeguard heritage sites [3, 25, 26]. The Eurocentrism 
document, such as the 1964 Venice and World Heritage 
Convention, had become the heritage conservation 
philosophy [3]. Aligned with this argument, Daly [27] 
mentioned that the European perspective is also applied 
globally as an "official" heritage discourse and practice 
through international conventions.

Byrne [5] and Nagaoka [15] criticized the Western 
perspective on heritage site management. Although they 
presented different critics, they are commonly focused 
on authenticity and the West's failure to treat a heritage 
site as a living cultural product that belongs to the community and continuously evolves as the culture develops. Specifically, Nagaoka [15] criticized Western viewpoints and practices that dominated the rediscovery and restoration of the Borobudur temple because they were not consistent with Eastern values' understanding of cultural heritage. In his study, he noted that for a long time, the indigenous people of Java had an understanding of the cultural landscape that Western experts were not examining at the time. The Javanese believe the environment, historical objects (pusaka) or other natural features have a sacred spirit, including this temple. It is supported by Taylor [28], who mentioned that Asians have a spiritual and magical connection to certain items, locales, or landscapes, whereas Europeans have a heritage in the form of works of art or historical sites. Winter [29] also claimed that the Western viewpoint is materialistic and scientific-oriented. They focus on authenticity by relying on absolute science approaches, while the Eastern viewpoint recognizes beyond the scientific explanation and more-than-human relationships.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that the critique of the Western approach may be groundless as it may not have adequately considered the socio-cultural context in which the heritage site is situated. The utilization of the Western paradigm and the participation of Western entities played a significant role in the process of rediscovery and restoration in the context of Borobudur. Restoring the abandoned heritage site, which required significant scientific knowledge and expertise, appeared to be an insurmountable challenge for indigenous individuals who lacked sufficient resources, skills, and expertise. In pre-colonial, the Javanese population exhibited a lack of engagement with the field of archaeology, resulting in their perception of archaeological sites as sacred spaces associated with divine entities. Consequently, their inclination to further explore the Borobudur site is minimal. Had the Dutch not engaged in exploration utilizing their advanced scientific methodologies, the Borobudur temple would probably have retained unknown and not been subjected to scientific investigation or utilized for tourism purposes. The inclusion of the Western approach in the conservation efforts of Borobudur should be acknowledged as a valuable contribution to the overall evolution of preservation practice. This particular approach has yielded substantial advantages for the heritage site. However, I must admit that the Western approach overlooked an important process Byrne [8] described as determining the value of heritage sites before formulating conservation management. As a result, Borobudur was initially regarded as a monumental work rather than a cultural product with social and religious significance.

5 Borobudur as cultural landscape: the struggle of conservation practices in the post-colonial era

A significant change in the approach to conservation accompanied the shift from Dutch colonialism to Indonesian governance. After successfully completing the reconstruction efforts, the Borobudur monument was recognized as a World Cultural Heritage site. Then, Indonesian experts have contemplated the most suitable approach for Borobudur conservation. The previous conservation framework, which primarily focused on scientific investigations on archaeological elements, transformed towards a conservation model that acknowledged the Borobudur as a monument and a cultural landscape. The conservation management and implementation of Borobudur during the 1970s and 1980s marked a transition from European perspectives influenced by Dutch colonialism to a more Asian-centric approach. [15]. The Indonesian government, under the guidance of the Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA), attempted to define and manage the broader cultural landscape of Borobudur through the Borobudur Prambanan National Archaeological Parks Final Report July 1970, later known as the JICA Master Plan [15]. The JICA study team combined their understanding of the cultural landscape with the Javanesse people's pre-existing understanding to create a management system for the larger area surrounding the Borobudur temple [15].

5.1 Disconnection

Even though the paradigm was shifting, the colonial governance style was likely to persist. The withdrawal of colonial power does not imply that its ideology has vanished, especially since Indonesia, as a new country, lacks a strong and stable foundation in conservation management thinking. As a result, many Western notions and practices continue to be used—for example, the creation of protected areas that dispossessed indigenous groups from their land. Hartijasi et al. [30] mentioned that Borobudur had become a representation of a nation rather than a Javanese culture or religious group; hence, the state has overpowered to manage the heritage site. Conserving the surrounding area of Borobudur was articulated by the government by creating zones of conservation divided into five protection zones, including the zone of preservation, zone of archeology laboratory, zone of settlement, zone of historical landscape, and zone of national archeology. The zoning resulted in resetting five villages and prohibiting traditional practices from zones I and II [7]. This practice was mentioned by Dominguez and Luoma
Furthermore, the cultural landscape. The relationship between indigenous people and their heritage conservation [23, 32]. Although originally their cultural landscape by the state in the name of people are frequently excluded and disassociated from contemporary conservation management. Indigenous [31] as the perpetuation of colonial practice in the name of cultural heritage protection. Western conservation management could not be generalized since it depends on at which stage and in general since the role of academics in introducing Cultural Resource Management and reshaping the identity of Borobudur's cultural landscape by holding traditional ceremonies outside the core zone, representing people's connection to the temple [7]. The annual festival, such as the Seven Mountain Festival, is held by the community outside the conservation zone and helps define the Borobudur Cultural Landscape [7].

The primary objective of the community is to revitalize their local traditions to attain economic advantages and evolve into a means of revitalizing the authentic cultural landscape of Borobudur.

Recently, conservation management has been progressing. The central and local governments have collaborated to develop Borobudur temple tourism as an integral part of the surrounding environment. Furthermore, local community involvement is also becoming more common, thanks, for example, to the existence of The Young Guardian Club Borobudur, a youth conservation activist organization. This young ranger was initiated by Indonesia International Workcamp in 2019 and intended to help develop cultural education and tourism in Borobudur and the surrounding villages. This policy implements what Byrne [8] mentioned as "heritage as social action". In addition, the government is making efforts to integrate the educational aspects of Borobudur's cultural landscape with the increasing number of tourist visitors by implementing thematic tours. The policy's approach to the temple as a cultural artifact that remains intertwined with the community, rather than solely as a monument to be admired for its grandeur, is regarded as a favourable progression.

6 Discussion and concluding remarks

The shift from British and Dutch colonial to an independent country has changed the conception of cultural heritage, stakeholder collaboration, and indigenous relationship to the heritage site. As previously mentioned by Nagaoka [15], the conservation in Borobudur has shifted from the European-dominated discourse and authenticity concept approach to the cultural and social significance of Eastern countries. The Reformasi that resulted in a more democratic government structure allowed indigenous people to be involved in conservation by practising their culture and reshaping the cultural landscape of the Borobudur.

The dynamic of Borobudur Conservation provides insight into the interpretation of the cultural landscape. At the beginning of the conservation effort, Borobudur was viewed only as a product of a culture that needed preservation. It was useful considering that, at the time, this temple required major reconstruction to reveal the physical structure of the temple and its past stories. Furthermore, as the cultural heritage conservation paradigm has been shifting to the recognition of cultural and social significance, Borobudur was viewed as more than just a "frozen past". The temple is considered part of the existing and continuously changing culture. Acknowledging more-than-human aspects in conservation (i.e., the spiritual relation of people to the temple, biodiversity, and the landscape) has become a big progress in Borobudur conservation management.

Another important point is that the social significance of the Borobudur temple for indigenous people who live in the surrounding area has changed. Before it was rediscovered, the Borobudur site was no more than a sacred place and was avoided by the locals [7]. Thanks to the success of science in uncovering Borobudur and its historical stories, the social value of the community towards the site is developing better. There is a sense of pride, respect and ownership of this world-recognized site. It also proves that a Western-style scientific approach can be useful for cultural sites in societies where science and technology are not yet developed. It supports my argument that critics of Western conservation management could not be generalized if it depends on at which stage and in what local context the conservation management is applied.

The current conservation of Borobudur recognizes the cultural landscape in the surroundings. Protecting the Borobudur does not only mean protecting the
temple’s physical structure. Rather, it also means to protect the cultural interrelation with the society and its natural landscape. By expanding the conservation area outside the building complex, the government indirectly broadens the definition of a heritage site to include natural and cultural landscapes. It is better than adopting a natural-cultural dualistic approach, which, according to Heras-Escribano and Pinedo-Gracia [35], is problematic because it solely focuses on a cultural approach, considers landscape as objects of contemplation and does not take into account the role of humans in shaping the landscape.

The future conservation challenges for Borobudur are related to climate change. Rising temperatures and the threat of acid rain cause the rocks to weather, removing the relief forms on the temple walls. The temple will lose its aesthetic value and meaning if this relief vanishes. As a result, conservation managers face a significant challenge in re-implementing a conservation system that heavily relies on science and technology, as it did during the recovery and recovery period, while maintaining an inclusive conservation system, as it is today. Collaboration between science and social science is required in the future to put the concept of cultural conservation into action. However, the presence of the Young Guardian Club will bring innovation in responding to this challenge.

This article argued that the conservation management paradigm should recognize the locality aspect and the time frame of the conservation management. After reviewing the conservation management in the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras, this study concludes that political power dynamics give key changes in cultural heritage conservation. While the Western approach dominated the conservation paradigm during the Dutch colonial era, the Eastern approach was gradually implemented in the post-colonial era. The government tried to acknowledge the socio-cultural factor in managing the Borobudur Temple. The conservation effort in the post-colonial era went through phases of disconnection and reconnection of society and its landscape. There were several issues at the beginning of independence (Orde Baru era) where the government likely used overpower in protecting the temple and disconnecting people from their cultural product, in the present time, the indigenous people have gained their right to live by and live from the Borobudur Temple. The key changes can be summarised in the scheme below (Figure 4):

![Fig. 4. The key changes in the cultural heritage conservation of Borobudur.](image)

This study contributes to enriching literature on cultural landscape management. By taking a case study of Borobudur, this study has demonstrated that adopting a conservation paradigm must consider the socio-geographical context of the heritage site and the time frame of heritage management. However, this study has limitations regarding the data source, which largely relied on the academic literature and conservation plan documents. It may lead to the bias of the real implementation of conservation management as that source may provide the ideal conservation management action. Future studies need to collect data on the implementation of conservation management from interviews or fieldwork to get insight into the real implementation of conservation management.

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**References**


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