

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION: A CASE STUDY AT AMPHAWA FLOATING MARKET, THAILAND

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Abstract. *Amphawa is one of the most popular weekend destinations for both domestic and international tourists in Thailand. It is also one of the tourist places and it is a local conservation of cultural resources. Moreover, Amphawa is not only rich in cultural heritage; it also boasts a healthy communal life. The aims of this article is to explore the history of the floating market and gain a better understanding on the Thai cultural conservation such as tradition, meaningful of the floating market and ways of life of Amphawa community in the present, by the methods of document research and field surveys.*

Key words: *Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Amphawa Floating Market*

1. INTRODUCTION

The area of the central of Siam have lived with the canals and used the river as transportation. There were many communities lived near the river, so the activity of the market belongs to the river. People brought fruits, fish, and vegetables from their gardens come and sold. Houses along the river became shops, for instance, the first photo shop in the reign of King Rama IV where was near the river, and a missionary who spread Christianity, they also lived in the river as well.

The ancient market was built during Krungsri Ayutthaya period. It was the reality way of life of people who lived near the river in the central part of Thailand, which we cannot see in the present time. The ancient market was a representative of Siam society because it was a huge from the past between Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods.

The rivers and canals were once the main transportation arteries of Bangkok, because Thailand did not have many roads at that time. And those that existed were not always in good condition, especially in the rainy season. So, people preferred travelling and carrying goods from one place to another by boat. In olden time, most communities of Thailand were formed at the sides of rivers. Many criss-crossing rivers and canals served as means of transportation. Such ways of life of the riverside communities, especially in the Chao Phraya River Basin brought to the rise of a number of floating markets. Floating markets had become a token of the communities in the central plain of Thailand for centuries. This type of market gained peak popularity in the Ayutthaya Period from 1350-1767. Early in the Rattanakosin Period (1782-1868) this kind of market was still lively. Nevertheless, soon after more and more road and rail networks were constructed and people preferred street transportation to that by water, so some floating markets were forced to move onto the ground, some were renovated and some were closed down.

In addition, in the past, the special characteristics of Siam society had Buddhist temples, Christian Church, Islam church, Chinese Shrine and also the spirit court in that local area. They reflected to the variety and differences of race and religion in Thailand.

Many of the charming old markets in Thailand, both terrestrial and water markets, have disappeared in recent years. Their loss was mainly caused by urban development. Old wooden shop houses were replaced by concrete commercial buildings to generate more economic benefits owners.

In the study, Amphawa is chosen as a case study because of its authentic attributes of local settlement and community and their evolution through time from the early Rattanakosin period (the late 17th century) to the present. This community is composed of many cultural characteristics and themes which relate to the history of the area, ways of life and ways of living.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE AMPHAWA FLOATING MARKET

Amphawa is one of the most popular weekend destination for both domestic and international tourists in Thailand. Amphawa Floating Market is located in Amphawa district, Samut Songkhram province, in the central (west) area of Thailand. It is not only rich in cultural heritage; it also boasts a healthy communal life. Indeed, located north of the Gulf of Thailand, it is endowed with seashore, mangrove forests, salt pans and orchards. Amphawa literally means a mango grove which denotes a location associated with the Lord Buddha's Life as evidenced by the emblem of Amphawa Municipality portraying an elephant in a mango grove. Amphawa has important historic value to the Chakri Dynasty of Thailand. It also was the birthplace of Queen Amarindra of King Rama I, who also initiated the name SuanNok. The birthplace of King Rama II in Amphawa district is now a Memorial Park.

Around 1974, with the development of roads, trading and commercial activities were moved to land around the network of roads in Samut Songkram. The Amphawa floating market like others disappeared. The social and economic importance of Amphawa changed into a self-supporting community or turned to be residence and local trade. Amphawa then was just a small and quiet community. Housing had dilapidated; some of them were neglected and uninhabited. People had migrated to Samutsongkhram or Bangkok for work. There were only elderly and children left in the community.

Under the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) over a hundred boats plied daily the river. In 1975 the Mae Klong-Bang Phae and Rama II roads and later their ensuing side roads were constructed, marking an important socio-economic shift from river to land transport, which in turn, attracting market activities to the town center and bringing gradually the Amphawa floating market into somnolence. This situation was accelerated by other factors such as the need for young people to work in big cities. As a result, a number of old wooden houses, representing local cultural heritage, were left in bad repair and community life faded away.

Then later on, in 2001, Amphawa was listed as being a case study of "an environment that relies on canals, rivers and orchards". It was chosen because of the place remains rich in natural resources and unique living characteristic of riparian community. Then in 2002 the Amphawa community received "The Best Conserved Community" award in 2002 given by the Association of Siamese Architects under the Royal Patronage.

Amphawa fully became a cultural tourism attraction after the raising of Amphawa floating market in August 2004. The floating market received a great response from the community and spread out to Bangkok. Numbers of tourists had increased rapidly. It brought in revenue to the community. Consequently, house owners had more confidence to invest in their property. Many houses were renovated for running businesses. The number of boat vendors in the floating market had increased as well as tourist boats (firefly trips, canal trips, etc).

3. THE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION AT AMPHAWA FLOATING MARKET

Amphawa is the largest traditional water-based community in Mae Klong river since the 18th century. The community is rich in its cultural heritage both tangible (architecture, monuments, mural painting, handicraft, etc.) and intangible (performing arts, rituals, music, culinary arts and

way of life, etc.) reflect its identity closely related to water. At present, Amphawa is one of the most visited cultural tourism attractions in the central region of Thailand as a result of the conservation of canalside buildings and the floating market revitalization launched in 2004.

Nowadays, Amphawa floating market is more popular after it has won the 2008 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation. It becomes a fashionable and commerce for Thai people and tourists. The market opens in the afternoon on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and closes about 8 pm. Thai people and tourists are enjoyable tasting with Thai food, travel along the canals to see houses, temples, a memorial park of the King Rama II and local people lives.

Most of the goods sell are foodstuffs. People in Amphawa are famous for their culinary and confectionary skills as reflected through Thai-style fried noodles, noodle soup, rice and curry, grilled river prawns and squids as well as Thai desserts especially those made from coconut including those referred to by King Rama II in his poems and fruits such as pomelos, rose apples, mangoes, bananas, oranges and flowers, not to mention handicrafts such as baskets made from coconut leaves, decorative birds crafted from coconut. Moreover, shops along the canal also sell multi-colored overglaze enamel ceramics (Benjarong in Thai) and other souvenirs, with a motif of temples, fire flies, paintings depicting local scenes, and so on.

Amphawa during weekday without the floating market has a different ambience. It is very quiet, calm and green. It seems to be an oasis of traditional life. The charming characteristic of the old riparian town can be clearly seen. The time seems to really slow down.

3.1. Architecture and Water-Based Settlement

The communities along the Amphawa canal and its vicinity boast typical architecture, as evidenced by wooden row houses, traditional floating houses, traditional Thai-styled houses, traditional local houses in the orchards, and a school. Some shops, homestays and restaurants have developed to attract the tourists but still conserve as Thai Style in the past.

3.2. Water Transport, Floating Market and Way of Life

Although water transport in the river and canals have dramatically dwindled as more and more roads were constructed over the past 40 years, people along the river and canals still communicate by water, using public boats. They still have their own boats but use them less often than they did formerly. Monks still paddle to receive food from villagers in the morning. Villagers still buy ready-made food and groceries (vegetables, fruits, fishes, meat and herbs) from boat vendors at the pier in front of their houses. Amphawa is an old-fashioned Thai-style market that comprises an outstanding collection of wooden shop houses along its canal.

Children can be seen swimming and diving in canals while adults bathe and do their washing along the banks. People still use water from the canals to clean their house floor and water plants. They often sit together along the canal and use canal side areas as a community meeting place; thus attesting to the fact that their life is very much associated with the water.

3.3. Cultural Heritage

According to the cultural Heritage definition, this research will describe on three main various forms embodies of the Amphawa's identity, as follow:

3.3.1. Water-related social practices for food donation

In a special occasion, monks still getting food donation from people such as on the anniversaries of their Majesties the King and the Queen or during important festivals, locals often take monks by boat to receive food donations in a festive atmosphere and also in everyday life too.

3.3.2. Loy Krathong Festival

One month after end of Punsu, on this occasion people float their tiny boats or baskets on the 15th night of the waxing moon of the 12th lunar month (November). A *Krathong* is a floating offering traditionally made of banana or plantain leaves to form a cup-like receptacle in the shape of lotus flower. *Loy* in Thai means “to float”; hence the name of this popular and impressive festival, *Loy Krathong*, ‘to float one’s offering’ (Ruth Gerson, 1996).

These little boats are fashioned from banana leaves on the eve of the festival. They are decorated with joss sticks, candles, flowers and small coins are put in them. People light joss sticks and candles before floating their boats on the water. Through this gesture, they pay homage to the Lord Buddha’s footprint at Nammatha River. In addition, people often prepare their little boats by cutting up banana trunks into 1-foot long sections. These sections are then taken off by layers, the sheaths of which are removed one by one to serve as little boats. Joss sticks, smeared with latex are stuck on these boats and left to dry on the eve of the festival. These boats are floated one after another in a large number; thus contributing to the festive spirit for the children. This tradition has now been revived to its old splendor. The fact that these boats are floated in succession gives rise to the expression of “*Krathong Sai*” (little boat floating in a long succession) which makes a beautiful spectacle under a full moon, much to the delight of both children and adults.

3.3.3. Traditional handicrafts

Nowadays, Thai and foreign tourists can see the traditional handicrafts at the Amphawa floating market. They reflect to Thai local people in that community and some of souvenirs are made from coconuts. The traditional handicrafts have a long history since Ayutthaya period for example, the ceramics or we called in Thai ‘Benjarong’ some of which were decorated with gold applications. This ceramics were developed in the Ayutthaya period with motifs of deities in adoration, mythological beings, half-bird, half-lion, etc. The outer background surface of the ceramics is black while their inner surface is green. Under King Rama II, these ceramics came in different colors and designs such as lions, garuda, flowers. At present, a number of well-known local master artisans still perpetuate this craft.

Moreover, the handicrafts made from coconut shells. There exist varieties of coconuts. A traditional soprano fiddles, fashioned from a large coconut shell, and produces a high-quality sound. People also craft coconuts or their shell to make utensils such as spoons, forks, lanterns, and souvenirs for tourists as well as toy birds, fire-flies or other animals.

CONCLUSION

The old markets both land markets and floating markets in Thailand are reflected to the ways of living of people in the communities in the past.

Siam in the past, did not have many roads at that time, people used boats to communicate, sale goods, and transport the passengers. People in the communities built houses along the river and canal. Chaopraya and Mae Klong River were very important for people at that time. People in the communities grew fruit and vegetable near their houses, then exchange and sell it.

Later on, the market becomes an important place for trading between people in the Siam society, especially in the communities. Because they can bring their agriculture such as fruit, vegetable from their gardens and Thai food to sell by boats. Houses along the canal, built by wood and they really look like Thai house styles. Moreover, in the ancient city, Thai houses were very beautiful; the ancient market was built during Krungsri Ayutthaya period. It was the reality way of life of people who lived near the river in the central part of Thailand, which we cannot see in the present time. The ancient market was a representative of Siam society because it was a huge from the past between Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods.

At the present time, there still have many floating markets in Thailand where we can see Thai people and tourists enjoy sightseeing there. Those markets can reflect to Thai cultural heritage from the past, it is an identity for instance, the ways of life, architecture of houses, living along the canal, temples and so on.

As in this paper, the study base on Amphawa floating market, Samutsongkhram province which it is not too far from Bangkok, about 80 kilometers. Amphawa has a long history; it has important historic value to the Chakri Dynasty of Thailand, it is the birthplace of King Rama II in Amphawa district where is now a Memorial Park and it is also rich in cultural heritage.

Amphawa's cultural heritage both tangible and intangible ranges from ancient monuments to living heritage of various forms: architecture, works of art, orchards, traditional irrigation systems, local traditions and customs, all of which are closely related to water-based communities and constitute the cultural identity of Amphawa which is, in turn, is influenced by its geographical features, ecosystem, local wisdom and culture as well as its Thai ways of life. However, this legacy is subject to environmental changes and passage of time. As a result, each period of time reveals its own characteristics, meaning and values.

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