

The Conservation of Traditional Waterfront Markets in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Once the economic center of the water-based community, the traditional waterfront markets of the flood plains were surrounded by paddy fields and mixed orchards. The major mode of transportation was water. The markets were trading centers for products from fresh-water and brackish areas, those from the sea as well as commodities from big cities such as Bangkok. With the development of inland transportation modes during the mid 20th century, the importance of these markets decreased, resulting in the relocation and the deterioration of the buildings. From 2002 the idea of transforming traditional waterfront markets into tourist attractions led to the participation of local governments, various organizations and market communities to conserve and restore sleepy traditional waterfront markets for tourism purpose.

Keywords: *Conservation, Traditional Waterfront Market, Tourism, Participation*

BACKGROUND

The traditional waterfront markets on the Central Plains of Thailand emerged during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) due to such factors as free trade, the abolition of slavery, the civil right to hold land and the settlement of Chinese immigrants along the rivers and canals which were a fundamental mode of transport. The Chinese lived in row-houses that also served as shop houses selling commodity goods. As middlemen, they bought and sold rice and other produce, owned mills and processed foods. The marriage between the Thai and the Chinese resulted in the integration of economic system, society and cultures. The waterfront markets were trading centers fueled by rice fields or orchards. This gives rise to an urban economic community.

The development of road networks during the late 20th century has led to new roadside markets. As a

result, the waterfront markets have not been in the spotlight more recently. Shops have been closed, residents have moved out of the areas and buildings have deteriorated. However, it has been realized that waterfront communities reflect its identity and value.

This article describes the process of conserving traditional waterfront markets along two rivers, the Mae Klong River, which is to the west of Bangkok and the Bang Pakong River, which is to the east of Bangkok. Community residents, local administrations and related organizations were involved in conserving the markets. At present, the markets are tourist attractions, thus improving the communities' economy. The markets' social and cultural characteristics are conserved and this conservation model is applicable to appropriation by any community in Thailand. (Figure 1)

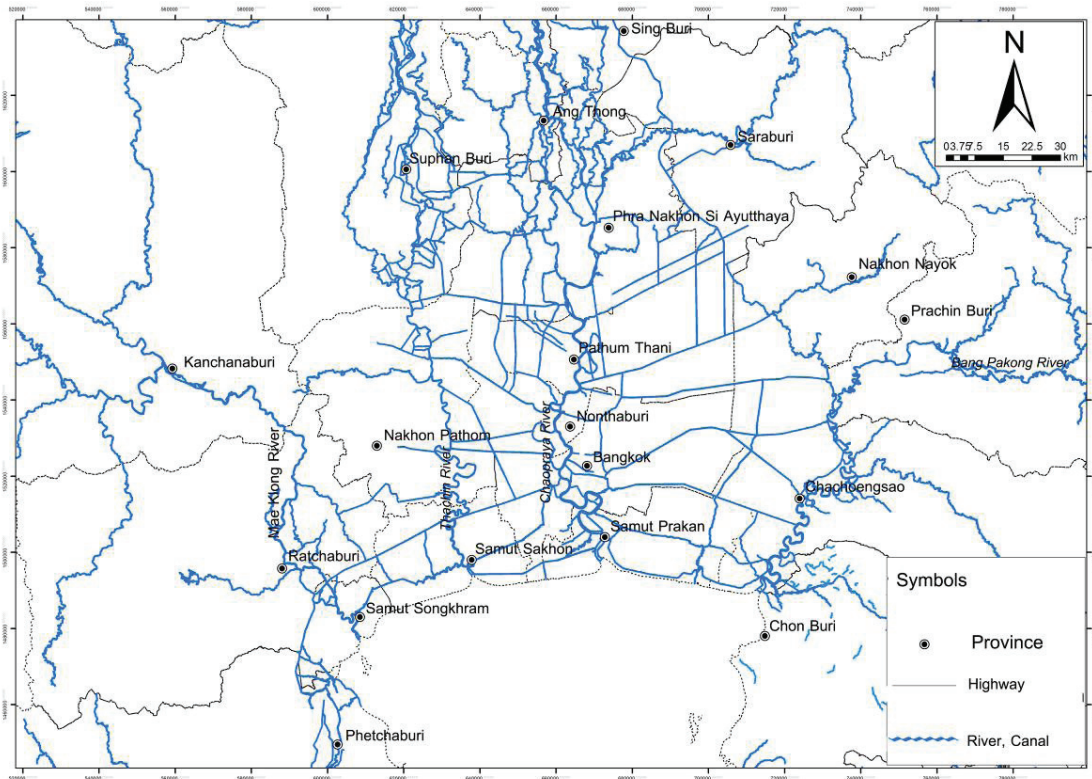


Figure 1: Mae Klong and Bang Pakong Rivers in the Central Plains of Thailand

HERITAGE AS A DRIVER OF DEVELOPMENT

1,150 participants from 106 countries gathered in Paris at the UNESCO headquarters at the invitation of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) France from 28 November to 1 December 2011 on the occasion of the 17th General Assembly of ICOMOS. They adopted a Declaration of Principles and Recommendations on the relationship between heritage and development, to be viewed as an asset to heritage conservation, to the dissemination of its inherent values, and to the cultural, social and economic development of communities. This declaration and the recommendations are addressed to stakeholders involved in heritage conservation, development and tourism, and especially to states, local authorities, international institutions, the United Nations agencies and UNESCO in particular, as well as to relevant civil society associations. Some selected issues are as follows: (ICOMOS, Paris Declaration, 2013)

Conservation

- To authentically conserve built heritage; whether urban or rural, prestigious or vernacular. To ensure it is of a high quality, including original materials, design and construction, architecture, the maintenance of original functions, and integration into the physical and socio-cultural environment;
- To adapt new uses and functions into existing heritage, rather than the reverse, and to help users of historic buildings adjust their expectations of modern living standards.
- To link and integrate conservation and preservation of heritage into the core of cultural tourism development. To preserve the cultural resource as a fundamental asset of long term tourism expansion, especially, in developing countries and the least developed countries (LDC).

- To help local communities take ownership of their heritage and related tourism projects. To encourage their empowerment and their participation in heritage conservation, in the planning process, and in decision making. Local participation, drawing on local perspectives, priorities and knowledge, is a pre-condition of sustainable tourism development.

CONSERVATION OF TRADITIONAL WATERFRONT MARKETS ON MAE KLONG RIVER

Traditional waterfront markets in Samut Songkhram include Amphawa, Bang Noi and Bang Nok Khwaek. In the past they were trading centers where floating markets were organized. (Figure 2) The produce, such as onions, garlic, chilies, limes, coconuts, mangoes, pomelo lychees and rose apples from ridge orchards, was exchanged.

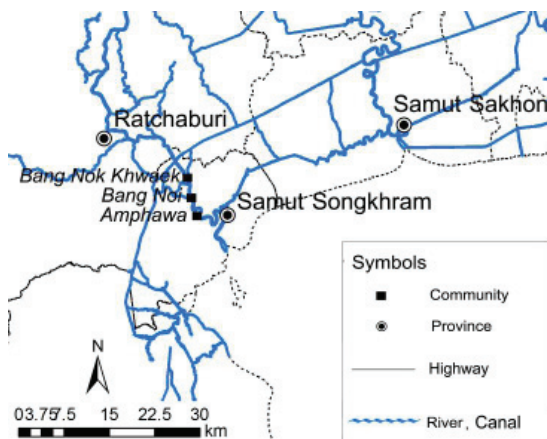


Figure 2: Traditional Waterfront Markets in Mae Klong River

Amphawa Community

Amphawa is located about 18 kilometers from the estuary and 80 kilometers west of Bangkok. Amphawa literally means “mango grove” and it has a long history as a water-based settlement since the mid 17th century with the biggest floating market in this river basin and was the birthplace of King Rama II.

Amphawa is situated in an area where fresh and brackish water ebb and flow twice a day. As a result, vegetation that thrives in brackish water, such as cork trees and Nipa trees, appear along the waterway, offering beautiful scenery. Coconut trees and mixed orchards with ridged ditches and raised beds form the landscape where wooden houses line both sides of the Amphawa Canal. Consequently, Amphawa is well known as the “Venice of the East” in this region. (Figure 3)

In the late 20th century, the road network was undertaken in that area. Consequently, its importance as a waterfront market was lessened, resulting in more out-migration and more deteriorating houses. The population reduced from about 10,000 around in 1950 to about half – 5,000 in 2000.

CONSERVATION PROCESS

In 2003, the Thailand Cultural Environment Project (TCEP) was launched by the Office of the Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (OEPP), the Office of the Danish Academic Assistance (DANIDA), the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University and the Amphawa Municipality in order to conserve wooden houses along the canal.



Amphawa Canal

Thai house on stilts

Vernacular house

Figure 3: Scenery of the Amphawa Community

The TCEP operators organized various activities including monthly meetings with representatives from the Amphawa Municipality, the related government agencies and the locals to identify problems, and to analyze SWOT. In addition, they jointly formulated the development vision of Amphawa as follows:

“Amphawa is a municipality of history, culture, arts and eco-tourism which retains its unique water-based community and its cultural heritage based on King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s Sufficiency Economy Development concept.”

The TCEP encompasses various activities; an awareness raising project, surveys of cultural heritage project and a demonstration project for architectural conservation whose principle of 50% matching funds between the DANIDA and the building owners is applied. Most of the 350 buildings lining the Amphawa Canal are wooden row-houses, vernacular houses, traditional Thai houses and concrete row-houses, 17 of which received 50% financial support for conservation by the TCEP during 2003-2004. (Figure 4)

Through local communities and the municipality’s efforts since August 2004, the Amphawa Community gradually established itself as a tourist attraction with the introduction of this project and the revitalization of the Friday to Sunday Amphawa Floating Market. Most of the goods sold are fruits, flowers and prepared foods since the local people are famous for their cooked food and desserts. Local handicrafts are made from coconut shells, multi-colored overglazed enamel ceramics and other souvenirs (Phamornsuan, 2010).

A number of building owners have readjusted their conserved houses to accommodate home-stay for tourists, restaurants, coffee shops and souvenir shops. As a result, the housing owners can recoup the cost of conservation in relation to tourism development. In addition, Ms. Prayong Nakhawarang, an Amphawa Resident, donated her 31 row-houses and her orchard on the Amphawa Canal to the Chaipattana Foundation. Consequently, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, President of the foundation, decided to renovate the row-houses and put them on display in order to participate the conservation process of Amphawa; therefore, the Amphawa Community became more widely known.

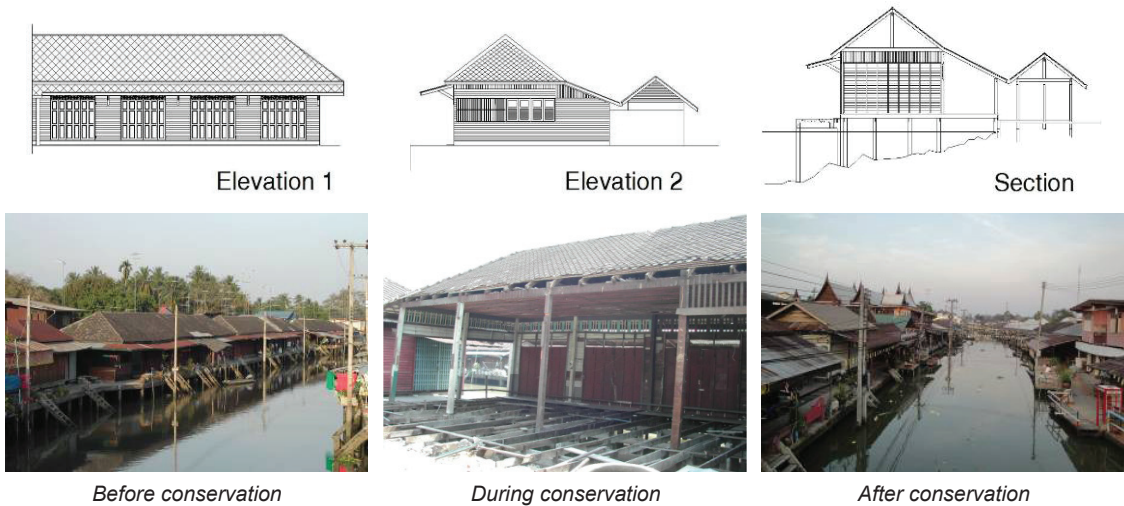


Figure 4:
The Conservation of Traditional Architecture

The conservation of housing helped to raise the income of the local people and also create jobs for different generations in a small-scale economy. Local residents of various age groups who once worked outside their community or in Bangkok have returned home to help their family operate small scale businesses such as offering food and dessert, boat and home-stay services, and souvenir production.

In 2008, the TCEP conservation project in Amphawa was granted the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Culture Heritage Award. The committee praised the effort: (UNESCO, Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Award, 2008)

“The restoration of the traditional Amphawa Canal Community has successfully achieved public-private cooperation in the safeguarding of heritage structures in Thailand. With co-funding from the local government and Denmark, the project has benefited from the active support of the local residents and homeowners and the guidance of Chulalongkorn University. The project has conserved numerous historic buildings of local significance and retained the traditional canal-side urban morphology, which is under threat around the country. The project demonstrates a recognition of the cultural significance of Amphawa and an appreciation of both the architectural and living heritage of the historic canal community”

Apart from the TCEP, there were at least 35 buildings along the Amphawa Canal that had been conserved by the owner's expense from the survey in 2007 (Silapacharanan, 2008). From 2008 to 2010, more than 80 buildings were renovated by their owners as a multiplying effect of the TCEP and have been used as shops selling souvenirs and food and beverages as well as home-stays. According to the 2010 survey, out of 39 buildings in the Amphawa Municipality area which are used as accommodation for tourists, 27 are home-stays and 12 are resorts and most of them are in fruit orchards (Phamornsuwan, 2010).

To better serve tourism purposes the religious institutes such as Amphawanjetiyaram Temple, Phrayayat Temple and Phumarin Kudithong Temple plus the King Rama II Memorial Park were renovated and developed interpretive components.

The conservation of Amphawa Community also impacts cultures and traditions relating to a water-based way of life. A long succession of giving alms to monks traveling by boat or floating of banana stalks continues. This makes a beautiful spectacle under a full moon on the night of the Loy Krathong Festival. Moreover, performances of traditional Thai music, the Khon mask dances and puppet performances are also conserved along with the revival of traditional cookery and handicraft (Silapacharanan S. and Dupuy J, 2011).

A tourist satisfaction survey was carried out by the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University and the Institute for Tourism Studies, Macau in March 2013. It found that 67% of respondents live in Bangkok and were most impressed by the variety of attractions offered with the Amphawa Floating Market and the King Rama II Park being the most interesting sites to visit. (Faculty of Architecture CU and IFT, 2013).

At present, Amphawa is one of the most popular cultural tourist destinations in Thailand. This is evident by the presence of more and more tourists visiting the community. Since 2008, there were more than 1 million visitors per year coming to this community (National Statistical Office, 2010), generating more income for Samut Songkhram Province. The success of Amphawa Community is a model for conservation and revival of other water-based communities nation-wide especially those in the Central Region.

However, the success story of the architectural conservation in Amphawa and the integration into tourism development also involves risks. Outside investors may not be concerned with heritage conservation. An example is the issue over a hotel constructed in 2012. Consequently, land use and building control should be strictly implemented.

Bang Noi Community

It is assumed that the Bang Noi Community was established in the 17th century. From the 18th to the 19th century, various ethnic groups such as Thai, Mon and Chinese settled along the Bang Noi Canal. Chili plants, betel palms, and betel vines were grown. Ridge tillage was practiced there. However, during WWII, the government issued a law prohibiting chewing betel nuts and betel leaves. So the betel palms and betel vines were replaced by sugar palms in order to make sugar since during that period the country faced a shortage of sugar. The influx of more residents led to community expansion. Shops selling groceries, drugs and clothes, rice mills, opium dens, gambling houses for cock fighting and fish fighting, and a printing house were established along the banks of the canal. The floating markets were organized at the mouth of the canal where the Ko Kaew Temple is located, selling on the third, eighth and thirteenth of the waxing days of the lunar calendar. This market arrangement offered produce from nearby orchards and products such as shrimp paste, fish sauce and salted fish, while on the bank where the Ko Yai Temple is located, the market offered only palm sugar.

Eventually the Bang Noi Traditional Waterfront Market went out of business because the mode of transport shifted from water to inland. Bangkok Noi became a sleepy community until the Amphawa Floating Market was revived in 2004. Witnessing the success of Amphawa Community, Bang Noi residents and the municipality have reestablished their market in May 2009. To attract holidaymakers the community transformed and renovated old buildings. The 1-2-story wooden houses were

transformed into coffee shops, souvenir shops, massage parlors with some being adapted into home-stays. Tourists can take a boat trip along the Bang Noi Canal to see beautiful scenery. In addition, walkways along the canal and foot-bridges over the canal have been constructed to facilitate tourists. Instructors from the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University have provided guidance on community conservation for this traditional waterfront market. (Figure 5)

Bang Noi Traditional Waterfront Market has a high potential to be developed in terms of space and built heritage even though this market is not famous among local tourists compared to Amphawa. There is a lack of community interpretation consequently an information center should be set up to increase visitors' understanding of the community.

Bang Nok Khwaek Community

Bang Nok Kwaek Traditional Waterfront Market is situated at the mouth of the Bang Nok Kwaek Canal where it meets the Mae Klong River. The canal connects the Mae Klong River and the Damnern Saduak Canal, which was dug from 1867 to 1868. One and two-story wooden row houses sold groceries, gold jewelry, clothes, food, and included a gas station using a barrel pump. The floating market was organized on the first, sixth and eleventh days of the waxing moon of lunar calendar at the mouth of the canal. Here, produce from nearby orchards and preserved seafood was sold. During 1970s, like other markets, Bang Nok Kheak market was closed because of increased construction of roads.



Figure 5:
Bang Noi Community



Figure 6:
Bang Nok Khwaek Community

The Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady and Chancharoensuk Temple are major attractions here. Built in 1896, the cathedral is located at the mouth of the Bang Nok Khwaek Canal and boasts fine Gothic art. Without pilings, the cathedral is built on look-alike raft foundations with bearing walls. Due to this fact, big buses are not allowed into the premises to prevent damage to the cathedral. The main Buddha image at Chancharoensuk Temple is believed to have had the power to save the temple from a bomb during the World War II. (Figure 6)

The municipality and its local residents followed the conservation model of Amphawa, consequently the Bang Nok Khwaek Traditional Waterfront Market has been revitalized during weekends since April 2009 for tourism. This is a small market compared to the others in this province with the limitations of parking space and the dead-end walkway along the Mae Klong River.

CONSERVATION OF TRADITIONAL WATERFRONT MARKETS ON BANG PAKONG RIVER

Several canals in the lower Bang Pakong River in Chachoengsao Province were dug to connect the Chao Phraya River and the Bang Pakong River for transport and government purposes. The Prawet Burirom Canal and the Nakorn Neungkhet Canal were dug during the reign of King Rama V, as a result, the deserted areas along these two canals were turned into paddy fields. Khlong Suan Market and Nakorn Neungkhet and other markets emerged along the canals with Ban Mai Market on the old Bang Pakong River in Chachoengsao City. (Figure 7)

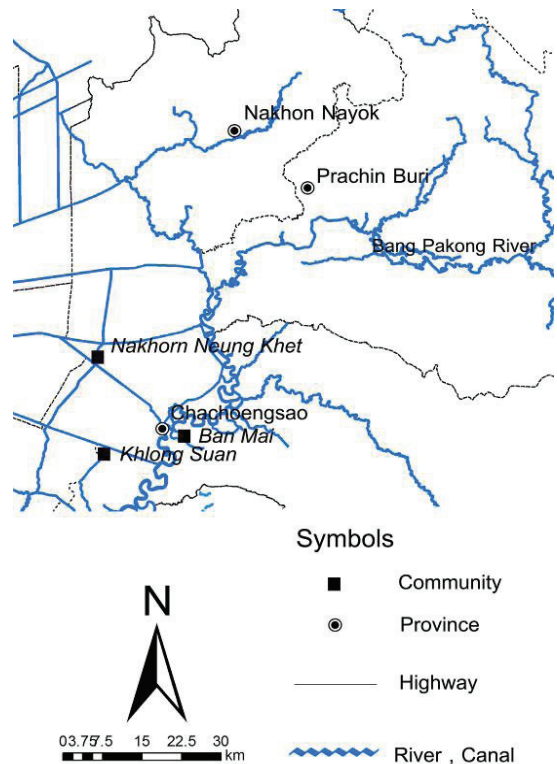


Figure 7:
Traditional Waterfront Markets in Bang Pakong River

Khlong Suan Market

King Rama V had Chinese laborers dig the Prawet Burirom Canal connect to the Phrakhanong Canal, which is part of the Chao Phraya River, with the Bang Pakong River at Ban Tha Thua. It was dug from east to west and was the first canal where the subjects were allowed to pay for the digging and were granted the right to land holdings on both sides of the newly

dug canal. It was found that the demand was more than the supply. As a result, only some could own the land. Later, Chinese laborers were hired to dig four canals branching out from the Prawet Burirom Canal from the north to the south of the canal, leading to real estate developments to meet the demand for economic development and settlements.

Located at the corner of the Prawet Burirom Canal and the Phraya Nagaraj Canal, Khlong Suan Market is a community comprising Thai, Chinese and Muslim settlers who initially grew rice so it became a center of rice trade. Some Chinese set up rice mills in 1887 on the east bank of the Phraya Nagaraj Canal (now in Tambon Thepparat, Chachoengsao Province). A market called Sam Phi Nong Market was established. Later, religious buildings were constructed. For example, Pun Thao Kong Shrine and Peng An Tuo Alms House were built by the Chinese, Khlong Suan Temple by the Thais and Alvatorniya Mosque by the Muslims.

This market was expanded when mill owners on the west bank of the Phraya Nagaraj Canal (now it is Tambon Khlong Suan, Samut Prakan Province) built two-story wooden row houses in 1934 and a wooden bridge to connect the west market with the east market. Khlong Suan Market was a stopover for travelers heading to Bangkok. There was a boat service carrying passengers and goods from Tha Thua Watergate passing Khlong Suan Market, Preng Market, Khlong Luang Phang Market, Phrakanong Market to Pratu Nam Market in Bangkok.

The popularity of Khlong Suan Market declined with the construction of On-nut-Thepparat Road in 1974, paralleling the Prawet Burirom Canal. This has resulted in shops lining the road. In 1999, Khlong Suan Municipality and Thepparat Municipality jointly promoted Khlong Suan Market as a tourist attraction called “*Khlong Suan 100 year Old*”



Figure 8:
Khlong Suan Market

Market". At present, the Khlong Suan Market is still a waterfront market, preserving its traditional culture and its historical buildings. It opens every day with more shops opening on weekends. The Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut Institute of Technology helped preserve its architectural characteristics and set up the community's information center to provide services for tourists. (Figure 8)

Ban Mai Market

Located on the west bank of the Bang Pakong River in Chachoengsao Municipality, Ban Mai Market was set up during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851). Now it is more than 160 years old. In the past, the areas around the market were paddy fields and sugar cane plantations. Some of the Chinese were hired to work in the plantations and in the sugar mills while the others did what they were good at. For example, The Tae Chew Chinese sold goods and worked in rice mills. The Hokkian Chinese grew fruit and vegetables. The Khae Chinese sold goods and worked as goldsmiths. The Hailam Chinese were carpenters and sold food. This market, originally known as "*Rim Nam Market*" (waterfront market), was crowded with shops and wooden row-houses with thatch roofs. In 1904, it was destroyed by fire and in 1905 it was reconstructed and named "*Ban Mai Market*" (new market), which was divided into the upper market and the lower market. Later, the market was extended to the south, called the middle market, and was connected to the upper market with a wooden bridge. The market became alive especially during the Second World War (1939-1945), when some of the Bangkok residents stayed there. This market was a stopover spot for boats from

Bang Khla, Bang Nam Priaw and Phanomsarakham. Piers were established for the red service boats, the green service boats, the white service boats and the boats carrying produce from different places to this market. With the development of roads, the water transport and the popularity of the market declined. Shops were closed down and the buildings were not properly maintained, leading to fires.

In 2009, the municipality and some politicians in Chachoengsao Province and the local residents worked together to set up the Ban Mai Market Conservation club. The club aimed to promote the market as a weekend tourist attraction while still conserving its traditional Chinese character. Currently, about 400,000 visitors come here per year, raising more income. As a result, some of the income is used for maintaining and repairing the buildings. In addition, boat trips to watch the scenery along the Bang Pakong River and the Ban Mai Canal are provided. Tourists can visit two important temples nearby, the Upaiphatikaram Temple and the Jeenprachasamosorn Temple. In the market, tourists can pay respect to the Naja Shrine and the Puntaoma Shrine, which are highly revered by the market residents.

The club consists of about 200 members, including residents and entrepreneurs in the market. They manage tourism by providing services, issuing related rules and regulations, providing information, welcoming educational institutes and other organizations, and encouraging the locals to conserve their cultural identities. The Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University measured the architectural models in this community and worked with the municipality to promote this market as an eco-tourism attraction. (Figure 9)



Figure 9:
Ban Mai Market

Nakhorn Neung Khet Market

This community emerged as a result of canal digging in 1876-1877. King Rama V had a canal dug from the Saen Sap Canal to the Tha Khai Canal, resulting in an intersection since the Nakhorn Neung Khet Canal runs across the Khwang Canal. This was suitable for being a trading and service center. Some of the Chinese laborers who were hired to dig the canal and others settled here. They sold groceries, set up rice mills, and were middlemen for rice. With the marriage between the Chinese and the Thai, an interaction of cultures occurred, witnessing the establishment of Pun Thao Kong Shrine along with a spirit house on the southern part of the canal, while in the northern part, Tai Cheu-ia Shrine was built near a 100-year-old Ficus tree (*Ficus benjamina*) that is wrapped with strips of colored cloth according to a Thai belief.

Its unique feature is its 130-year-old detached houses and row-houses. They can be classified into 3 groups: over 100-year-old houses, over 70-year-old two-story wooden detached and row-houses and 50-30-year-old two-story row-houses. The first group consists of buildings at the Tha Khai intersection, the Pun Thao Kong Shrine, old opium dens and the Chinese opera house. Most of them are one-story row-houses. At present, there are 30-40 houses left. The front of these houses are facing the canal and have porches extending above the canal. The second group consists of 20-30 houses with tile roofs and the third consists of 20-30 houses with galvanized and tile roofs. Most of them are still in good condition and they are used as houses and weekend shops. The two rice mills can still be seen but one of them is not in business anymore.

This canal side market was affected by the construction of roads and roadside shops. It has been a sleepy market for about 30 years before its popularity picked up due to a new trend in tourism - a visit to traditional waterfront markets. The local leaders and the community residents, with the support of the Chachoengsao Commercial Office, developed this market into “130-year-old traditional Nakhorn Neung Khet Market”. The committee to develop the market was set up in 2009. The committee, comprised of the municipal leader, provincial leaders and representatives of the community, mapped out plans to revive and conserve the community. They planned to conserve the houses, improve the porches so that goods can be sold there, improve the walkways along the canal, build more foot bridges in order to provide a better circulation between both sides of the canal and to improve the landscape of the canal. Therefore, some who have moved out come back to sell products during weekends and holidays. Since more visitors come here the quality of life is better because of the additional income. The Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University provided guidance on how to restore and conserve the architectural characteristics of the community. (Figure 10)

The location of this market is quite isolated compared to the others but the walkways of both sides of the canal provide better circulation for tourists. A threat to the market came from the concrete embankment constructed in 2012 by the Irrigation Department in order to protect the area from flooding. This structure made a strong hardscape for the community.



Figure 10:
Nakhorn Neung Khet Market

CONCLUSIONS

The traditional waterfront communities on the Central Plains of Thailand were affected by the construction of roads and roadside shops during the late 20th century. Consequently, their popularity started to decline, resulting in relocation of population and deterioration of buildings. However, the new trend in tourist's visits to traditional waterfront markets in the past 10 years encourages these communities to restore and conserve their traditional buildings as part of their identity and to promote them as tourist attractions. This tourism is in line with the tourism behavior of Thais who love to spend a weekend eating and buying souvenirs. The conservation and restoration of the traditional waterfront communities along the Mae Klong River and that of the communities along the Bang Pakong River differs in terms of procedure, the participation of government offices and the private sector, budget and community participation. These are in addition to other factors such as the location of the community and tourist attractions nearby. These lead to different levels of developing the community into a weekend tourist attraction. However, the similarity is that the residents reuse their houses and shops as a local commodity to promote the community's economy and use their indigenous knowledge to make food, sweets and handicrafts to generate additional income. As a result, the communities have gradually been improved in terms of physical, economic and social aspects.

The important factors that influences the conservation of the traditional waterfront communities is the involvement of various partners; 1) the locals who own the buildings and decided to conserve their buildings 2) the municipalities which have been working closely with the locals 3) the outsiders such as the OEPP, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Commerce and 4) educational institutes which are the Faculty of Architecture of various universities. These faculties provide guidance on how to conserve and restore those communities so that the locals can use their resources to develop tourist attractions. Tourism is an economic activity that allows investment from outsiders. This can be both beneficial and harmful to a community

conservation. As a result, the active participation of the community residents is necessary to maintain their cultural identity.

The case of Amphawa was presented in the 17th General Assembly of the ICOMOS in 2011 and it also assisted in formulating the Declaration. This paper presents additional cases of conserving traditional waterfront markets in the Mae Klong and the Bang Pakong River Basins to be attested to by the Declaration.

It can be concluded that the conservation of traditional waterfront markets, which is a fundamental asset of long term tourism development, plays an important role in new economic activities. In addition, the heritage empowerment of local communities and their participation in conservation, in planning processes and in decision making needs to be encouraged for sustainable development.

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