AMPHAWA ROW-HOUSES

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ABSTRACT

An architects, we tend to speak about man's need (function) for shelter from the environment and security from his enemies – is as a product of the building process involving the use of materials, construction and technology, developed within the constraint of the site, climate and environment, financial, labour and skills. Through the years and centuries this architecture has the ability to carry out diverse functions and form.

Concerning heritage conservation and management, the Amphawa water-based community conservation has something absolutely refreshing, towards the means and purpose of preserving its heritage in holistic manner. With the strong support from the local community and Amphawa Municipality, the preservation project by the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University (C.U.), the Thai Cultural Environment Project (TCEP) and the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) have succeeded in turning the place into a well conserved yet vibrant community. However, the test of time will tell whether the project is sustainable – as monitoring and maintenance are essential to sustain the project in a long term.

Keywords : *row-house / heritage conservation / Amphawa*

INTRODUCTION

The history of water-based architecture in Amphawa could be traced back from the 18th century ago. This community was a melting pot of Chinese, Thai-Chinese and Thai who form the population of this township of King Rama I. King Rama II was born in Amphawa and hence, the historical significance. *(Figure 1)* These row-houses were not simply shelters but also encompassed social and cultural heritage of the region. They were constructed using local materials, technology and local labours which were instinctive response to the climate and ecology of the place. This water-based community formed as a horizontal ribbon-like pattern settlement that stretches linearly north-south of the Amphawa canal. The Amphawa canal is 80 kilometres west of Bangkok and is located along the Amphawa Canal and the Mae Klong River in Amphawa District, Samut Songkhram Province. *(Figure 2)*

For the purpose of the paper it is important to note about other early water-based communities and settlements in Thailand. These include, the fishing villages whose livelihood depended on water that grow naturally along the coast and islands and these settlements are commonly found in the south of Thailand. Their houses are built on stilts and constructed in timber or bamboo with high pitch roof to help offset against strong wind and rain.

And another form is those who lived on raft houses or on boats. The practice is for mobility and to float to the ever changing water tide and floods. The people who live on boathouses are those who practice nomadic life style and they are mostly confined to the South of Thailand of the Andaman Sea.

There are those whose livelihood depended on the cultivation of wet rice and the farming of animals and farming of fish. They live on flood plains, deltas and other low lying areas. Their houses are constructed with timber and on stilts to protect from seasonal flood. The example of these settlements could be seen in the flood plain the delta of Mae Klong River. *(Figure 3)*

PLANNING LAYOUT

The row-houses are planned with the view of economy in materials, economy in space and street frontage (walkway and canal) and a view to security. The linear rectangular-planned north-south row-houses are rigidly arranged following the meander of the canal. *(Figure 2)*

The row-houses as an architectural form is very much suited to the social needs and business requirements the past and present community of Amphawa. The house is divided into two main parts, the primary is at the front facing the walkway and the riverine and the secondary is at the back of the house. The secondary spaces at back of the house consist of kitchen, storage and work area or bed room. *(Figure 4)*

While the primary spaces are at the front consist of one main space which is flexible to accommodate trading and living spaces. Some row-houses retain the open concept and whatever changes needed either to entertain, sleep, and so on are achieved by placement of furniture or just a floor mat. Some of the row-houses have an upper storey floor that can accommodate an attic or storage or bed rooms. The main entrance is either of wood folding doors or shutter door which can be opened the length of the row-house. *(Figure 5)* The entrances to all the row-houses are via walkway or via the canal.

Figure 1: A mural painted on the temple in Amphawa depict daily way of life of the community

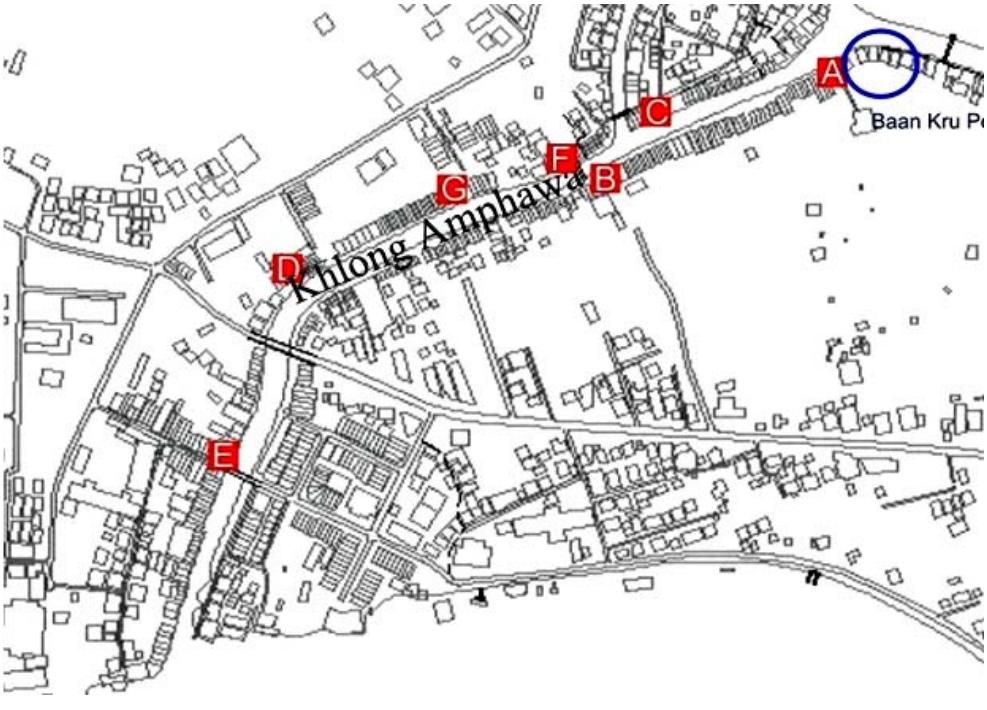

Figure 2: Map of Khlong Amphawa. Author's focus on parcel "E" of the row-houses.
Source: Faculty of Arch. C.U.

Figure 3: Fishing village at Bangbo canal

Figure 4: A conserved row-house along Amphawa canal

Figure 5: Folding doors or shutter in Amphawa row-houses

Figure 6: The walkway linked to all the row-houses. Innovative balconies have the view of the canal

Figure 7: Traditional Industry: Coffee making and packaging at the Row-house

Figure 8: "Old bottle New Wine": Gifts Shop and an Art Gallery

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

The continuous covered walkway along the front of the row-houses is the most important architectural feature in the community. The walkway is use as unifying element to the row-houses. The two meter-wide walkways is covered by extending the roof eaves and the feature is to protect from sun and rain. Along the walkway, some tenants have shaded balconies. These balconies are cantilevered from the walkway and are projected out to the canals - are areas for outside lounging or eating. Some tenants have their own jetties to park their boats and are also an alternative access by boat via the canal. *(Figure 6)*

The pitched roofs are steep to facilitate running off the rain and also to shelter from the hot mid-day heat. The roof space creates insulation to the rooms below from direct heat and also to allow openness without letting in the full heat of the sun.

Above the doors, vents and decorative latticework are installed to allow natural draught for better ventilation and comfort. These vents besides being ornaments are designed as holes and openings built to minimize the discomfort of the tropical climate.

The walls and the floors of the row-houses are of wood and the roofs are covered with clay tiles. The roofs are built on post and beam construction system. The traditional methods of wood construction of wall panel, doors, windows and structural framing are common elements found in these row-houses.

ADAPTIVE REUSE OF ROW-HOUSES

During my visit to Amphawa earlier this year I saw many traditional cottage industries, for example coffee making, traditional Chinese medicine, traditional bakery and few local sundry shops and the many traditional residences using the canals as the means for their livelihood. Thus, with the advent modern life style new needs have been inserted to accommodate new functions like home-stay lodgings, exhibitions, internet caf s, art and crafts, sundry and retail shops and so on. The community's socio-cultural and economic activity begins to take effect as income generator not only for the local community but also for the tourist industry in Amphawa. *(Figure 7)*

However, the concept of *"old bottle new wine"* in adapting an old building to a new use - one has to preserve as much of its original character as possible. The architect and designers who have an in-depth knowledge of the original building must also meet modern requirements of cooling and lighting, life-safety, and accessibility with a structure that was built under different of constrain and needs. In the process of adaptive reuse the respective people involved must attempt to maintain and preserve as much as possible of the building components such as floor, wall, openings, roof and finishes during the physical change. Never let a building loose its identity and dignity by stripping away all there is. *(Figure 8)*

CONCLUSION

In the developing cities of ASEAN, heritage conservation does not seem to fit in the economical development. The old architectural buildings are not 'rich' enough to be conserved and preserved and or the people and the related government bodies do not share the value and pleasure, as some do when living in an historical or traditional community. The regulation pertaining conservation and preservation might be too weak against the high land price. Perhaps, regulations should blend with new developments to create scaled development with a mixture of heritage. The Amphawa Riverine has a rich history and rich heritage value. And the incorporation of its socio-culture and socio-economic vitality has indeed, revitalized the Amphawa community.

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