

# Keeping It Alive:

## Mapping Bangkok's Diverse Living Culture

Bussakorn Binson<sup>+</sup> Pattara Komkam<sup>++</sup> Pornprapit Phaosavadi<sup>+++</sup>  
and Kumkom Pornprasit<sup>++++</sup> (Thailand)

### Abstract

This research project maps Bangkok's living local culture sites while exploring, compiling and analyzing the relevant data from all 50 districts. This is an overview article of the 2011 qualitative field research by the Urban Research Plaza and the Thai Music and Culture Research Unit of Chulalongkorn University to be published in book form under the title *Living Local Cultural Sites of Bangkok* in 2012. The complete data set will be transformed into a website fortifying Bangkok's cultural tourism to remedy its reputation as a destination for sex tourism. The five areas of cultural activity include the performing arts, rites, sports and recreation, craftsmanship, and the domestic arts. It was discovered that these living local cultural sites mirror the heterogeneity of its residents with their diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There are local culture clusters of Laotians, Khmers, Mon, Chinese, Islam, Brahman-Hinduism, and Sikhs as well as Westerners. It was also found that the respective culture owners are devoted to preserve their multi-generational heritage. The natural beauty of these cultural sites remains clearly evident and vibrant, even though there remain difficulties hampering their retention. The mapping of these sites are discussed as well as the issues surrounding those cultural sites that are in danger of extinction due to the absence of successors and other supportive factors necessary for their sustainability.

**Keywords:** Bangkok Culture, Living Tradition, Thailand Urban Culture, Performing Art, Local Culture, Thai Arts and Crafts

<sup>+</sup> Dr. Bussakorn Binson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok Thailand 10130. voice: +662 218-4582. email: bsumrongthong@yahoo.com, website: <http://pioneer.chula.ac.th/~sbussako>

<sup>++</sup> Pattara Komkam, Lecturer, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand 10130. voice: +662 218-4582. email: peenai2004@hotmail.com

<sup>+++</sup> Dr. Pornprapit Phaosavadi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand 10130. voice: +662 218-4582. email: rosita\_rosalina@hotmail.com

<sup>++++</sup> Dr. Kumkom Pornprasit, Associate Professor, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok Thailand 10130. voice: +662 218-4582. email: pkumkom@yahoo.com, website: <http://pioneer.chula.ac.th/~pkumkom>

## Introduction

Culture plays a crucial role in how individuals identify with their community and reflects one's way of life in society. Culture carries the core characteristics of one's social group. A society that can successfully highlight its culture will more likely succeed in attracting outside interests. In addition to revealing the way of life of those who participate in a given society, a unique culture can attract tourists and generate considerable revenue. Each year Bangkok hosts millions of visitors, many of whom come to experience the unique history of Thailand's capital. Its history dates back to the beginning of the Rattanakosin period in the 17th century when it began serving as the country's business hub. Recently, a number of advertising campaigns have been launched aimed at promoting tourist attractions in central Bangkok. These campaigns draw attention to Bangkok's well-known temples, palaces, art galleries, and museums. In addition to these mainstream places of interest, there are also numerous other types of attractions called 'living local cultural sites.' These sites epitomize Bangkok's cultural diversity.

All of these cultures represent a 'small world' and each one is uniquely characterized by the way of life, customs and traditions, and beliefs of its constituents. These cultures are held to be alive as they are continually immersed in the process of passing knowledge and social values from one generation to the next. Members of these cultures are fully aware of their role as custodians and they produce cultural objects that represent such awareness while demonstrating their cultural importance. However, if no living members of a culture remain then the cultural objects can reveal only the past, not the present.

## Diverse Bangkok: Its People and Traditions

For more than 200 years Bangkok has been developing and transforming as the principle port and capital of Thailand. Then over the years as Bangkok's international trade increased, more and more foreigners settled down and began its unique cultural fusion. Moreover, the fact that Bangkok is the locus both economically and culturally it continues to attract many ethnic groups into itself. When King Rama I (1782-1809) was enthroned, he revitalized the country by supporting the cultural diversity of the nation in many ways. By his supportive policies, it can be said he was the great father of Bangkok who not only established the city, but supported the cultures in the nation that its citizens carried on through the generations. (Thongtor Kluaymai Na Ayutthaya, Department of City Planning Bangkok, 2003:8). Bangkok is a blended city with a diversity of people, traditions and languages. Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian, Mon, Sikh and Westerners can all be found there. (Mon refers to the Raman ethnic group from Myanmar). Bangkok as an historical trade center and a known safe political refuge is comprised of many ancient communities with a diversity of cultures located along the Chao Phraya River and its associated network of transit canals. All of these communities through their ongoing development and historical peaceful coexistence define "The city of history and cultures" (Supaporn Jindamaneeroj, Department of City Planning Bangkok, 2003:253).

The 1999 edition of the Royal Institute Dictionary defines the word ‘culture’ as the norm of the community’s way of life as expressed through their organization, development and morality. Culture can further be divided into two types. First, it is the material culture of physical objects such as clothes, food, houses, medicines and devices. Second, it is a non-material culture that can be categorized into five areas. These five areas are: 1. Social Institutions; 2. Social Control: religions, beliefs, social values, ideologies, traditions, and laws; 3. Arts: fine arts, sculpture, architecture, dance, music, and theater; 4. Language; and 5. Rituals. These elements of intangible culture are influencing on the community member’s lifestyles. (Ngampit Satsanguan, 1995:53-55).

The non-material culture can also be called the ‘living culture’ where every community has their own unique cultural compilation with facets related to family, economics, politics, education, religion, medicine, communication, arts, and recreation. Additionally these facets might be viewed either universally or specific to a culture, depending on the knowledge, social values, and beliefs in one’s own community. The area where a local cultural phenomenon originated is called a ‘local cultural site,’ which belongs to the owner. A living local cultural site reflects the lifestyle and characteristics of its host far better than any museum, where only a primary subset of artifacts and knowledge is kept. Meanwhile, the local cultural site has a much more captivating value and presence, filled with the local wisdom from its residents. Moreover, it can be passed on from one generation to the next. Visitors can learn the history of the culture from the culture’s owners themselves as an all-encompassing or ‘full-set’ experience. Furthermore, a local cultural site is a source of pride for the people through the realization of its importance in its role of carrying on a cultural tradition into Thailand’s future.

The reader should be aware that the sites included in this publication are only a subset of those in Bangkok due to the limitation of resources and time. However, sites recommended by the local governors have been included. The living local culture sites are separated into the following five distinct categories: performing arts, tradition, sport and recreation, craftsmanship and domestic art.

The communities that comprise Bangkok, like Bangkok itself, have gone through continual changes and developments over the years. They have needed to adapt to the ever-changing environment and economic climate. Since the establishment of Bangkok, various ethnic groups and individuals have settled there from abroad and other parts of Thailand. As a result, Bangkok is comprised of a blend cultures, social groups and people. Although having this diversity of backgrounds, knowledge, traditions, and ways of life, Bangkok residents identify themselves as Bangkokians. However physically, Bangkok is divided into three major metropolitan areas that is further divided into 50 districts.

### **Core City Area**

This area covers the old city center where the original Bangkok was situated along both sides of the Chao Phraya River, comprised of 21 districts as follows:

Bang Kho Laem, Bang Rak, Bang Sue, Bangkok Noi, Bangkok Yai, Chatuchak, Din Daeng, Dusit, Huai Khwang, Khlong San, Khlong Toei, Pathum Wan, Phaya Thai, Phra Nakhorn, Pom Prap Sattru Pai, Ratchathewi, Samphanthawong, Sathon, Thon Buri, Watthana, and Yan Nawa. This area's most distinctive features are the historical sites of palaces, temples, and the historical structures of houses, governmental offices, military divisions, and commercial buildings located around the old city center along the river's bank in the districts of Bang Rak and Samphanthawong. The new commercial areas are in the districts of Pathum Wan, Bang Rak, Yan Nawa, Sathon, and Bang Kho Laem. Another distinctive feature is that it is an area equipped with facilities and utilities. It is also the center of the public transportation network which integrates road, expressways, railroad and riverboats. Currently, the Krung Rattanakosin area (Phra Nakhorn District) and its surroundings are under development and are expected to become a major historical and cultural tourist attraction that is expected to generate considerable revenue.

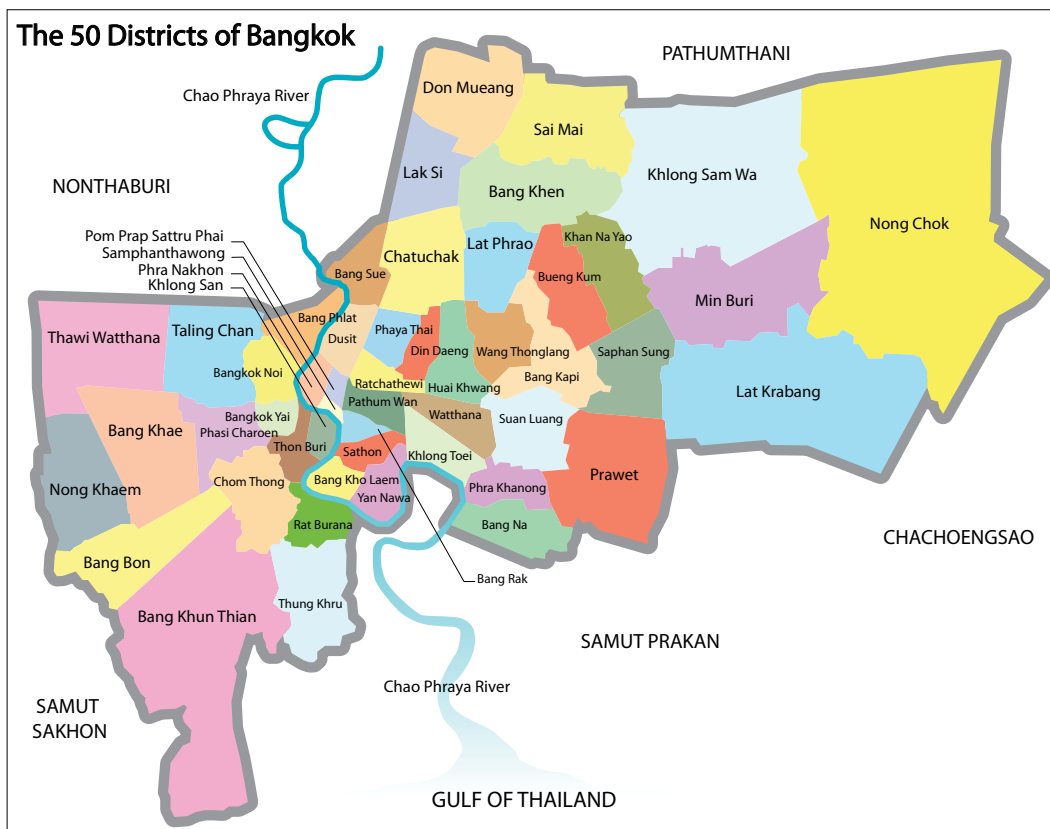


Figure 1. Map of the 50 districts of Bangkok.

**Urban Areas**

Bangkok's urban development extends outward from the city's core and covers a variable area radiating from 10 – 20 kilometers outward. There are districts along both sides of the Chao Phraya River. The 18 districts both sides of the river are: Bang Kapi, Bang Khae, Bang Khen, Bang Na, Bang Phlat, Bueng Kum, Chom Thong, Khan Na Yao, Lat Phrao, Phasi Charoen, Phra Khanong, Prawet, Rat Burana, Sai Mai, Saphan Sung, Suan Luang, Thung Khru, and Wang Thonglang.

This area supports the development of the core city region and most of the lands in the Thung Khru District are agricultural. The Rat Burana District is primarily industrial, while the areas of the Bang Khen District to the east of the city's core supports military and governmental entities. The districts of Wang Thonglang, Bang Kapi, Suan Luang, and Bang Na host commercial, industrial, and governmental concerns with its supportive transportation network.

### **Suburban Areas**

This category covers those areas which are more than 20 kilometers from the core area and is composed of residential developments, agricultural areas and vacant land open for development. The 11 suburban districts are: Min Buri, Don Mueang, Nong Chok, Lat Krabang, Taling Chan, Nong Khaem, Bang Khun Thian, Lak Si, Khlong Sam Wa, Bang Bon, and Thawi Watthana. The eastern side of this suburban area is mainly rice paddy fields, while the western side hosts mangroves. Consequently many of the residents in this area earn their living by aquaculture and fishing (Nattanon Thaweessin, cited in City Planning Department, Bangkok, 2004:23-26).

### **Living Local Culture Sites**

Living local culture sites can survive only if the cultural owners manage to pass on and share knowledge in their community. Without cultural owners there are no living local cultural sites. The research program entitled "Mapping the Living Local Culture" under Bangkok's local museum project explores, compiles and analyses the relevant data of the living local cultural sites in all 50 districts of Bangkok. (Bang Bon, Bang Kapi, Bang Khae, Bang Khen, Bang Kho Laem, Bang Khun Thian, Bang Na, Bang Phlat, Bang Rak, Bang Sue, Bangkok Noi, Bangkok Yai, Bueng Kum, Chatuchak, Chom Thong, Din Daeng, Don Mueang, Dusit, Huai Khwang, Khan Na Yao, Khlong Sam Wa, Khlong San, Khlong Toei, Lak Si, Lat Krabang, Lat Phrao, Min Buri, Nong Chok, Nong Khaem, Pathum Wan, Phasi Charoen, Phaya Thai, Phra Khanong, Phra Nakhon, Pom Prap Sattru Phai, Prawet, Rat Burana, Ratchathewi, Sai Mai, Samphanthawong, Saphan Sung, Sathon, Suan Luang, Taling Chan, Thawi Watthana, Thon Buri, Thung Khru, Wang Thonglang, Watthana, and Yan Nawa). This research effort covers the following five cultural activity areas for each district: performing art, rite, domestic art, craftsmanship, and sport & recreation. Based on the collected data from these 50 districts, it was found that these living local culture sites have managed to survive and prosper as a result of the communities' knowledge and understanding of their own culture as well as the important role played by individuals who pass on their valuable cultural heritage that fuels its continuance.

Figure two illustrates the three major processes driving and sustaining local cultures. They are cultural transmission, dissemination, and preservation. Consequently, the analysis of the interview data collected from cultural owners and stakeholders is similarly divided into these same areas.

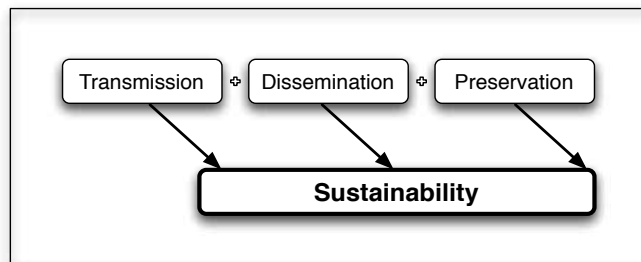


Figure 2. Components of the living local culture sites consists of cultural transmission, dissemination, and preservation that leads to their long-term sustainability.

## Pathways of Cultural Transmission and Dissemination

### 1. Performing Arts

- a. Transmitted by lineage: Elders transmit their art form to their descendants as in the Thai-styled antiphon groups named the Phor Songkhram Band of the Bang Khen District (Phor is the Thai word for father) and the Mae Waeata Band in the Watthana District (Mae means mother in Thai).
- b. Transmitted by formal instruction: The art form and related skills are transmitted formally by a teacher in a school setting. For example the choir group of the Soon Ruam Namjai School - Khlong Toei District, the youth dance-sport class of the Wat Khlong Toei School - Khlong Toei District, the Thai folk music performances of the Mathayom Prachaniwet School - Chatuchak District, the Wat Don Mueang School Military Band - Don Mueang District, the military band of the Atthawit Commercial School - Bang Na District, the Bahn Pramejai Thai Musical School - Bang Sue District, the Suteerattanachai Music & Art School - Lat Phrao District, as well as both the Angklung Band of the Wat Samakeetham School and the Thai Contemporary Music Band of the Surao Don Sakae School - Wang Thonglang District.
- c. Transmitted by a private individual artist or performer to the general public: In this case the artistic skills and heritage are transferred personally by artists themselves to interested youths. One such example is the Apinya Thai Dance Club of the Din Daeng District.

### 2. Traditions

It was found that the transmission of Thai cultural traditions is comparable to that of the performing arts. The rites are transferred in the form of belief supported activities organized by temples or governmental agencies for the community. Recently there has been both supportive and detrimental changes in Bangkok that affect its traditions. One negative change has been the result of infrastructure changes to the canals and development along the waterways. The filling in of canals and restricted riverside access due to private development of buildings has both altered the floating procession routes during the Chak Phra Festival in the Bang Sue District and the Chak Phra boat procession hosted by the

Wat Nang Chee Temple in the Phasi Charoen District. In some places there is no river front access for viewers and participants and some segments require the procession to go overland in vehicles. On the flip side, over the last three years and running the Bang Na District has renewed its long-tail boat race and has become a broadcast media event revealing its positive future.

### **3. Sports and Recreation**

The cultural transmission in the area of sports and recreation takes place via an expert, coach or teacher to primarily youths and students who are interested. Additionally, an element of competition aimed at winning prizes popularizes the events of ballroom dance and inter-District takraw matches that further support their viability.

### **4. Craftsmanship**

The skills associated with Thai craftsmanship is transmitted in ways similar to those described above through formal or informal education and training, but with a wider range of learners from young to old.

Often a group is formed to work with the master. Currently, some art forms have no successors to ensure its viability such as the Thai bonsai at the Wat Khlong Toei Nai Temple in the Khlong Toei District. Consequently, the last surviving caretaker of this art, has created and installed metal lamps around the temple as a more permanent example of the forms and style of Thai bonsai for future generations. Another area in decline is found in the 200 plus year-old Bahn Bu community that specializes in making stone-polished bronze bowls in the Bangkok Noi District. Presently, there are only small number of bronze bowl craftsmen remaining and the same is true for the declining makers of the monk's alms bowl in the Ban Bat community of the Pom Prap Sattru Phai District. With these low number of cultural attendants these traditional crafts are in danger of extinction.

### **5. Domestic Arts**

The domestic art sites thrive upon the continuation of their original product identity or brand as many are rooted in the fame of an original recipe. And some have been discontinued over the course of time as required specialized ingredients are no longer available or the processes are too complicated and/or time consuming to be economical. One example is there is no successor carrying forth the Crispy Coconut Soup of the Yan Nawa District. While lost traditional recipes cannot be recovered, there remains some conservator groups who offer these rare recipes that are essential elements of the identity of a number of Bangkok communities.

## **Pathways of Cultural Preservation**

### **1. Performing Arts**

a. Performances: Serves to both publicize and preserve a particular performing art. Some examples includes the following: In the Khlong Toei District there are

the Youth Dance sport of the Wat Khlong Toei School, the choir group in the Soon Ruam Namjai School, and the Khlong Yao Prayook Band “Silp Suan Aoi” (Khlong Yao is Thai for a tall, slender drum and Prayook means applied). There are also the Thai folk music performances of the Mathayom Prachaniwet School - Chatuchak District, the Wat Don Mueang School’s military band - Don Mueang District, the Apinya Thai Dance Club - Din Daeng District, the military band of the Atthawit Commercial School - Bang Na District, the Khon performance of the Rungruang Upatham School (Khon is the name of a traditional Thai theatrical performance with masked performers) - Bang Na District, the Likay of the Sri Iam Anusorn School (Likay is the name for a Thai folk drama) - Bang Na District, the angklung band of the Wat Samakeetham School & the Thai Contemporary Music Band of the Surao Don Sakae School - Wang Thonglang District, the Khlong Yao Band of the Wat Lak Si School - Lak Si District, and the Siam Niramit theatrical production - Huai Khwang District.

b. Education - Cultural Courses: The Thai arts are being preserved through a curriculum of courses in Thai classical music, dance, and fine arts at the Suteerattanachai Music & Art School - Lat Phrao District and the Thai classical music course at Bahn Pramejai Thai Musical School - Bang Sue District. Additionally, Thai cultural courses are also established at many universities as either compulsory or elective courses throughout Bangkok.

## 2. Traditions

a. Continual practices: The tradition has been maintained in the community through a continuity of practice of its traditions such as the Wai Phra Sapan festival - Khlong Toei District, the Buddhist traditions at the Wat Samian Nari Temple - Chatuchak District., the annual floating procession of Luang Phor Sumrit - Bang Sue District, the Vegetarian Festival at Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Eim - Lat Phrao District, and the Loi Krathong Festival held in the Wat Phasi Temple - Watthana District.

b. Governmental collaboration with the community: Governmental agencies, primarily the district offices, join hands with the community in supporting the local traditions to preserve the community’s identity. This is evident during the Don Mueang District’s Songkran festival, the annual procession of Phra Buddha Sihing Buddhamuni during the Songkran Festival - Din Daeng District, the community harvest festival called the Long Khak Tradition - Bang Khen District, the traditional long-tail boat race - Bang Na District, the Songkran Festival at the Wat Samakeetham Temple - Wang Thonglang District, the Songkran and Pid-thong Wai- Phra festivals at the Thung Song Hong Housing Community - Lak Si District, and the Phra Buddha Sihing procession - Huai Khwang District.

## 3. Sport and Recreation

a. Public educational programs offered at the Bangkok Planetarium - Phra Khanong District.

b. Public competitive events such as boxing matches or takraw competitions that is held in many districts.

c. Organized recreation and exercise activities such as aerobics, Taiji (Chinese boxing) and others in parks and youth centers throughout Bangkok.

#### 4. *Craftsmanship*

Thai crafts and craftsmanship are being preserved in a similar manner to others listed above. The culture owners are invited to impart their understanding and artistic skill to youths and the general public. Additionally these masters play a role in job creation in the community by educating and training the locals in a financially viable craft as well as disseminating an awareness of the importance of their particular area of cultural preservation.

#### 5 *Domestic Arts*

The domestic arts are being preserved only through the supportive commerce of the marketplace. The products are offered and manufactured for sale with assistance from community organizations to coordinate their distribution.

### Pathways to Sustaining the Thai Cultural Heritage

#### 1. *Performing Arts*

a. Ancestral mode: This is the traditional form where cultural heritage is passed on down through the generations by ones ancestors. The contemporary owners have learned it from family or community elders who were masters of the art or well-known regional artists. Some examples are the Thai-styled antiphon bands



Figure 3. The Kamnai Puppet Troupe of the Phasi Charoen District.

Phor Songkhram Band of the Bang Khen District and Mae Waeata Band of the of the Watthana District. The dance and theater group Lakhon Chatree from the Pom Prap Sattru Phai District, and the classic Thai music band Bahn Duriyapranat of the Phra Nakhon District are some more examples. The Bahn Silapin, Phasi Charoen District is also home to the traditional Thai puppet group named Kamnai. Additionally in this category, the Islamic community's musical folk dramas named Likay Hulu, Likay Rieb, and Nasep) are found in the districts of Saphan Sung, Min Buri, and Nong Chok. Musically, the Bahn Pramejai is a Thai classical music school, whose owner learned from his father and the Patayakosol family's Bahn Piphat ensemble in the Thon Buri District are further examples of this type of cultural transmission.

b. Formal education mode: In this category the art form or tradition continues to be taught and practiced in the district's schools and usually is centered on either an individual teacher's particular skill set or a school's interest. Some examples are Thai Folk music performances of the Mathayom Prachaniwet School in the Chatuchak District, the military band in the Don Mueang District, and the ballroom dance & choir singing groups at the Soon Ruam Namjai School in the Khlong Toei District. In the Bang Na District there is the Thai folk theater group of the Sri Iam Anusorn School that performs the Likay, the Thai Dance Arts and Music Club at the Bahn Bang Kapi School, the Khon and Thai Dance Arts Club at Ramkhamhaeng University (Khon is the name of a traditional 'masked' Thai theatrical performance as well as its leading character). The Wang Thonglang District is home to an angklung ensemble of the Wat Samakeetham School (The angklung is a musical instrument of Javanese origin that features bamboo tubes). There is moreover a Khlong Yao Band hosted by the Wat Lak Si School in the Lak Si District (The Khlong Yao is a tall drum with shoulder strap allowing the player to move with it).

c. Contemporary culture creation mode: These sites have served as recently acquired contemporary cultural repositories during the last ten years. They were founded by individuals with an interest in a cultural practice and nurtured its continued existence over time. A few examples are the Thai Contemporary Music Band of the Surao Don Sakae School in the Wang Thonglang District, the Apinya Thai Dance Club from the Din Daeng District, the Suteerattanachai Music & Art School in the Lat Phrao District. Some local performers have learned the art from other regions and established their own cultural group such as the drum troupe named the Khlong Yao Sit Phorpoo Punyi Phorpoo Chatkaew of the Pathum Wan District and the traditional Thai dance group in the Natasilpa Sambhan School of the Dusit District.

## 2. Traditions

a. Historical traditions: Means those that have been practiced for a hundred years or more and where the attendants have learned them by direct participation. Some examples are the traditions practiced at temples during Songkran (Songkran is Thailand's new year's water festival held during the 2nd week of April) of the Mon community in the Bang Khuntien District.

There are also the significant Buddhist days such as the Vesakha Bucha Day, Asanha Bucha Day, and Buddhist Lent. Some temples hold other annual traditions such as the Chak Phra in the Bang Sue District where there is a parade with a statue of Buddha. Other examples are the traditional long-tail boat race of the Bang Na District, the Pid-thong Wai-phra festival in the Lak Si District that involves showing respect to Buddha and applying a renewed layer of gold leaf to his figure, the Songkran festival of Wat Rama IX Kanchanapisek in the Huai Khwang District, a Buddha's relics celebration at the Wat Saket Temple located upon the Golden Mountain in the Pom Prap Sattru Phai District and the Tan Kauy Salak tradition that involves a group offering where one person is selected by lottery to make the donation at the Marble Temple in the Dusit District, and the Artipuja Ritual for paying homage to the Hindu gods and a lamp greeting ceremony at the Wat Witsanu Temple in the Sathon District.



Figure 4. The Songkran Mon tradition of the Bang Kradi community in the Bang Khun Thian District.

b. Local community traditions: These traditions are based on a belief established in a community. During such events, the community members take part in a large scale activities that have become traditions. For example the Vegetarian Festivals at the Great Chinese Shrine Sum Por Yee in the Bang Khae District and at the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Eim temple in the Lat Phrao District (Tamnak is Thai for a Chinese temple and Phra Mae Kuan-eim is a revered Buddhist nun that is also known as Guanyin). Other examples are the annual Nawaratree festival held in October, where the temple hosts an ancient ten day/night Hindu festival (also known as Ducera) at the Wat Phra Si Maha Umathewi Temple of the Bang Rak District and the Dancing Redemption to God at the Erawan Shrine in the Pathum Wan District.

c. Governmental initiatives: Some governmental agencies have joined with communities in helping support and promote cultural traditions. This can be seen in the community rice-harvesting tradition known as Long Khak - Kaiew Khao in the Bang Khen District. This tradition is related to both King Rama 8 and 9 who planted rice in the district. The continuation of this cultural practice has also been promoted through the publication of research conducted by Phranakorn Rajabhat University. The ongoing revitalization of this tradition takes place through the organization of demonstrational sites, exhibitions, and academic seminars on this tradition. This event draws a large number of visitors every year.

### 3. Sports and Recreation

a. The continuation of ancient sports: These are those initiated by the long term practitioners of a sport (the attendants of the culture) or those who by interested continue participating in them. In the case of Thai Boxing (Muay Thai is the Thai name for kick boxing), the following sites are active: The Meenayothin Boxing Camp - Chatuchak District, the Joggy Gym Boxing Camp - Bang Sue District, the Aswindum Boxing Stadium - Lat Phrao District, the Kru Suer Boxing camp - Wang Thonglang District, the Mauy Chaiya Bahn Chang Thai - Watthana District, the Sor. Vorapin Thai Boxing Gym - (Sor. is short for the first syllable of the founder's name, Surapol) - Taling Chan District, the Sor. Wongthong Thai Boxing Gym - Lak Si District, the Jitti Gym Boxing Gym - Huai Khwang District, and the Phet Yindee Muay Thai Academy - Pathum Wan District. Many gyms have made a name for themselves by producing successful international champions. There is also support for traditional Thai sword art forms at the Phraya Tak Sword Academy - Nong Khaem District, and sword performances and instruction by Mr. Boonterd Buathongkum - Bangkok Noi District. Another popular sport is takraw at the Suan Pa Chaloeprakiat Sports Park - Khlong San District (Takraw is like a kick version of volleyball played with a rattan ball and net. It is a blend of volleyball and soccer).



Figure 5. Training at the Joggy Gym Boxing Camp in the Bang Sue District.

b. Contemporary sports features the adoption, hybridization, and invention of new ones: The government supports the equestrian club of the 29th Royal Cavalry Squadron of the Phaya Thai District. There is also a version of takraw known as Takraw Lod Buang at the Sit Wat Dokmai Club that incorporates the hoops of a western basketball court as played by the disciples of the Dok Mai temple in the Yan Nawa District. In the Bangkok Yai District there is a human chess game at the Youth Rotary Club where people adopt the role of the playing pieces. Sport swordplay is held at the Thai-Japan Bangkok Youth Center in the Din Daeng District as well as at the Thon Buri Worathepi Palarak School of the Thon Buri District.

#### 4. *Craftsmanship*

a. Continuation of ancestral skills: The crafts have been learned from one's ancestors or under the apprenticeship of a master. Craftsmanship is a complicated art, requiring meticulousness, dexterity, and a great deal of experience to become a master craftsman. Some examples from the Phra Nakhon District are the gold smiths that produce gold leaf at Bahn Gold Leaf and the Thai Theatrical Costumes by Bahn Mae Piak. The Buddhist alms bronze bowl makers in the Bangkok Noi District and the Thai style of Bonsai at the Wat Khlong Toei Nai Temple in the Khlong Toei District.



Figure 6. Thai style bonsai at the Wat Khlong Toei Nai temple in the Khlong Toei District.

b. New products by contemporary craftsmen: For example, the ceramic jars produced by the Ong Daeng Chatree Shop (Ong Daeng is Thai for a red jar) in the Bang Bon District and the resonator for a Thai fiddle (Saw U) made from ground jackfruit seeds made by Mr. Siri Ruaydee in the Taling Chan District.

## 5. Domestic Arts

a. Family businesses: Ancestral continuation is found in many small businesses such as the Pad Thai Kua Kai Mae Um (Thai fried noodles) and the Jae Too (taro dumplings in coconut milk dessert), meringues from the Rina Bakery - Khlong Toei District, the Charoen Saeng Silom Partnership (Pork leg with rice) - Bang Rak District, the Kaysorn Lumjiak & Kang Krub Maprao Kung - Yan Nawa District (Kaysorn Lumjiak is a pancake with coconut filling and Kang Krub Maprao Kung is yellow curry with young coconut meat and prawns), the Export's Grilled Sticky Rice - Din Daeng District, and the Krongthong Chilli Paste - Lak Si District.

b. Markets: Market areas are integral to the community as they provide the venue for these home-based businesses and their domestic products. This refers to five historical road intersection areas of markets and restaurants that have coexisted for a long time as follows: The Phraeng Sanphasat, Phraeng Nara, and Phraeng Phuthon markets in the Phra Nakhon District. Then the Sri Khema market in the Bang Sue District and the Phra Khanong market in Watthana District. There are also long-standing locally-owned markets such as the Khunying Boonme Sapan 3 Market in the Sathon District, the Yingcharoen Market of the Bang Khen District, the new airport market, Jay-Leng and the Wattananan Market on the Khong river in the Don Mueang District as well as the Sirichai market of the Bang Bon District.

c. Markets with expanded community involvement: These are markets with additional commercial or tourism focuses making them a theme destination. For example, a governmental agency helped develop the Taling Chan Floating Market of the Taling Chan District into a tourist attraction. There is also the Leng Buay-Ia Market, which is a center for fresh food and famous restaurants in the Samphanthawong District and the Soi Aree Market that offers ready-made food and is home to several famous restaurants for office workers in the Phaya Thai District.



Figure 7. The Taling Chan floating market - Taling Chan District.

## Discussion

This research project revealed that in most cases where there were well-established living cultural sites and no assistance from the city's district offices, the sheer determination of the community and their conscious engagement in cultural preservation activities was responsible. The communities viewed their cultural preservation as part of their independent and unique identity. In other words preserving their culture was viewed as one of community self-survival.

However, no matter how uniquely vital and beautiful these living local cultural sites are and regardless of the tremendous effort put into the preservation of these ancient facets of Thai culture, there is still lacking the proper development of access to them for both locals and tourists. There is no central policy of guidance and management of local, living cultural sites in Bangkok, there is only the spotty and uneven support provided at the local district level. And these efforts appear to be mostly ineffective and has lead to the deterioration of their physical environment as well as pushed them nearer the edge of extinction if a more unified assistance is not forthcoming. This is especially true for traditional sword and baton forms of Thai martial arts.

Luckily, a few of Bangkok's district offices have fostered a close relationship with the culture owners by providing public relations support and providing encouragement in other areas despite the lack of coordinated central funding. However, some cultural sites are occasionally passively prevented from effectively preserving their local culture through the withdrawal of moral and financial support. One such example is the sword performance, by Mr. Boonterd Buathongkum in the Bangkok Noi District. But most district offices simply lack knowledge about the living local culture entities in their region. This cultural mapping project addresses this information deficit directly and full details will be provided to the directors of each district.

It is furthermore recommended that staff in the various departments at each district office share their knowledge and experiences to assist in creating a common understanding of the overall task of enhancing the preservation of the living local culture sites within the larger Bangkok city administration and the Creative City Initiative. Bangkok would also be well-served to have its district offices provide ongoing support in connecting with its living cultural sites. This includes determining appropriate management approaches to preserve, renovate, and develop valuable cultural sites and prevent them from falling into neglect leading to their extinction.

The cultural attendants, who are the most knowledgeable individuals need to be identified and briefed so they can serve as representatives to provide input and feedback to the central administration departments of community development and social welfare so that support and development initiatives are congruent with the community's needs. In other words, the district offices need to establish a network of the relevant cultural owners to serve as liaisons for providing input and feedback to the government.

Furthermore, additional staff training in how to provide these supportive services and build effective relationships with individuals in the community is needed. This latter point is essential as this research project found that conflicts between the district officers and communities has lead to past protests and antagonism which undermined the smooth development of cultural sites and instead planted the unproductive seeds of mistrust on both sides with adverse results. A positive relationship on the both sides will encourage a more collaborate and thereby effective relationship.

Another hurdle to the viability of these living local culture sites is that many roadway signs are outdated and inaccurate. It is therefore recommended that each district apply the resources to ensure they have a current and accurate map of its cultural sites (This project staff used GPS receivers in it database work). The production of a local community map will not only serve visitors and tourists, but will become a tangible source of pride and symbolize an awareness of their culture. Additionally, transportation and logistics to the sites need to be improved to facilitate interchanges with both the locals and visitors. For example, the rerouting of public transportation or having stops closer to some cultural sites would alleviate access problems.

For budgetary concerns, it was uncovered that many times as the fiscal year-end approached the districts were confronted with the “use it or lose it” situation and would hastily throw together events to utilized non-designated funds. This meant that cultural events were held without respect to traditional calendar or season. This is a deeply regrettable situation that can only be solved by management that values both planning ahead and cultural preservation. This mapping project heightens the awareness of Bangkok’s living local culture sites and it is hoped that this increased awareness will motivate a change in city and community planning.

It is also recommended that the unified umbrella policy of cultural preservation be developed for Bangkok with a focus on its relationship with the individual communities. Input from the communities and a prioritized list of needs should be identified and incorporated into the policy development process. Accurate budget allocations to maintain continual and extensive public relations are also needed.

It is the concern of all parties to find the best approach in promoting a sustainable existence for these living local cultural sites. The cultural owners should be encouraged to enhance the sustainability of their own culture and this in turn will help Bangkok become an attractive capital for tourists from all over the world, and enhance its reputation as a “City of Culture” into the future.

### Conclusion

The living local culture sites uncovered in this research have been sustained in a variety of ways by their respective owners that brings together the culturally-dynamic, urban-blended community known as Bangkok. However, there remains many cultural caretakers that face assured extinction without prompt changes

in cultural management policies and targeted support. It was found that over 70% of Bangkok's 50 districts have no comprehensive policy in developing and supporting their living local cultural sites. The authors suggest that the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) should create a centralized umbrella policy of cultural management in order to assist in maintaining and developing these sites throughout the city, as a Bangkok without these pillars of culture would be a city of stale ruins not worthy of human interest. Additionally, this mapping project has set a foundation for a future UNESCO Creative Cities Network application and supports the Creative City Initiative of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. All parties must come together and assist each other in keeping Bangkok's diverse culture alive.

### Acknowledgements

The research is successfully completed with the collaboration of many parties. The authors would like to thank the Thai tax payers. From their contributions, a budget was allocated to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Culture, Sports and Tourism Department, who recognized the importance of this research project and supported the Urban Culture Research Center and the Thai Music & Culture Research Unit, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University in developing a project of "Maps of the Living Local Cultural Sites under the project of Local Museums of Bangkok" which forms the basis of this article.

### References

- Binson, Bussakorn et.al, *Living Local Cultural Sites of Bangkok* (Bangkok: Culture, Sport and Tourism Department, Metropolitan Administration, 2012).
- Original in Thai*  
 บุษกร บิณฑสันต์ และคณะ, แหล่งวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่นที่มีชีวิตของกรุงเทพมหานคร, สำนักวัฒนธรรม กีฬา และการท่องเที่ยว กรุงเทพมหานคร, 2012.
- Fennell David A, *Sustainable Development* (UK: Huddersfield, 1999), 204.
- Jindamaneeroj Supaporn, *225 Years Rattanakosin* (Bangkok: Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Bangkok, 2552), 253.
- Kluaymai Na Ayutthaya Tor, *Portraits of Bangkok 220 Years* (Bangkok: Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Bangkok, 2546), 8.
- Goeldner and McIntoch, *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies* (Ohio: Columbus, 1984), 112-113.
- Pakdeekum Santi, *Bangkok Boklaorueng* (Bangkok: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2554), 10-11.
- Satsanguan Gnamphit, *Lakmanusayavithaya Watttanatham* (Bangkok: Dhamma Sapha, 2538). 16-55.

Sumrongthong Bussakorn, *What's Happening on the Street*, Urban Culture Research 1 (2003): 61-62.

Sumrongthong Bussakorn, *Cultural Resources Management at Koh Kred*, Urban Culture Research 4 (2007): 60-61.

Thawesin Nothanon, *Portraits of Bangkok 222 Years* (Bangkok: Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Bangkok, 2547), 21-22.

The Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association (KCBTA), *Community Based Tourism Guidebook* (Kyrgyzstan: Hospitality, 2006), 6.

#### Websites

"Asarnha Bucha Day," Dharma Thai. Accessed July 16, 2011, [www.dhammathai.org/day/asarahabuch.php](http://www.dhammathai.org/day/asarahabuch.php).

"Buddhist Holy Days," Dhamajak.net, Buddhist Doctrines Dissemination Group for Social Morals and Ethics Support. Accessed May 19, 2011, [www.dhammajak.net/budday/pansa1.php](http://www.dhammajak.net/budday/pansa1.php).

"Buddhist Holy Days (Khao Phansa Day)." Larn Buddhism. Accessed July 16, 2011, [www.larnbuddhism.com/puttaprawat/day/alsaha.html](http://www.larnbuddhism.com/puttaprawat/day/alsaha.html).

"The Creative Cities Network," UNESCO's initiative for creating a network of creative cities, Accessed January 20, 2012, [www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-industries/creative-cities-network](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-industries/creative-cities-network).

"Sepak Takraw Regulations of the Federal of International Sepak Takraw (ISTAF)," Takraw Association of Thailand. Accessed August 5, 2011, [www.takraw.or.th/th/regu/sepaktakraw.htm](http://www.takraw.or.th/th/regu/sepaktakraw.htm).

"Ting Krajad Tradition of Suphan Buri," SUPHAN.BIZ. Accessed August 28, 2011, [www.photo.suphan.biz/tingkajad.html](http://www.photo.suphan.biz/tingkajad.html).