

Conservation of the Built Vernacular Heritage

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Abstract

The built vernacular heritage has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society within interdisciplinary contents. Not only vernacular architecture, but including natural environment, overall community image, lives and living, socio-cultural aspects and the Continuity of lives. It appears informal but nevertheless orderly. It is utilitarian and at the same time possesses interest and beauty. This article emphasized the survey study of the Karen village of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai, Huamuang Subdistrict, Muang Pan District, Lampang Province. And lastly found that the built vernacular heritage of the Karen need the transdisciplinary approach for conservation. The diversity impacts around are, natural environment and ecology, traditional beliefs, local wisdom, lives and living, socio-cultural impacts, local people and lastly vernacular architecture and cultural landscape. The overall impacts are the means of the remaining of Built Vernacular Heritage. If any impact missing, the remaining could not be retained. So on conservation of Built Vernacular Heritage, the over all system should be taken care as the heritage of man.

Key words : The Built Vernacular Heritage, Karen village, traditional beliefs, local wisdom

The Conservation of the Built Vernacular Heritage

The built vernacular heritage has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society within interdisciplinary contents. Not only vernacular architecture, but including natural environment, overall community image, lives and living, socio-cultural aspects and the continuity of lives. It appears informal but nevertheless orderly. It is utilitarian and at the same time possesses interest and beauty. It is a focus of contemporary life and at the same time a record of the history of society. Even if it is the work of men but it also represent the creation of time. These traditional harmony which constitute the core of man's own existence should be conserved and taken care as the heritage of man.

The built vernacular heritage is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of the relationship of it's territory and at the same time also the expression of the world cultural diversity.

Vernacular architecture : the essential part of built vernacular heritage

Vernacular architecture is the traditional and natural way by which communities house themselves. With necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to social and environmental restrains, it is a continuing process. The survival of vernacular heritage is threatened by the forces of economic, cultural and architectural homogenization. Due to the homogenization of culture and of global socio-economic transformation, vernacular structures all around the world are extremely susceptible to be damaged, facing serious problems of going out of use, internal balance and integration. How these forces can be met the fundamental problem that must be addresses by the community and also by a multidisciplinary group of specialists such as, planners, architects, conservationists and local governments.

What is the Built Vernacular Heritage?

The Built Vernacular Heritage seems to be newly known in Thailand. The principles for the care and protection of built vernacular heritage had been established in addition¹ to the Venice Charter which ratifying by the ICOMOS 12th General Assembly in Mexico, October 1999. On establishing The Thailand Charter

1. charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage was ratified by the ICOMOS 12th General Assembly in Mexico, October 1999.

at present, the Built Vernacular Heritage is also one of the essential part of the Charter, which could survive vernacular structure that are extremely vulnerable and obsolesced.

The need of Multidisciplinary group of specialists for the Built Vernacular Heritage.

For clearly foresight on the Built Vernacular Heritage. The care study of the Karen village in Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai, Hua Muang Subdistrict, Muang-Pan District, Lampang Province should be introduced to clarify the diversity contents in concerning with built vernacular heritage such as, the contemporary life which record the history of society, the natural way by which communities house themselves, the continuing process of tradition and believes inconcerning with forest, soil and water including necessary changes and continuous adaptation as response to social and environmental constraints.

Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai, a small Karen village of 21 households, situated in Jae-Son National Park, Lampang Provnice. The Local people migrated from Muang Korn, Chieng-Dao District, Chingmai Since 1840,² almost 166 years ago but without Land property.³ All of the local people are peasants which use the swidden cultivation for their crops.

The physical Condition of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai

With the gross area of 3,905 rais (6,248,000 sq.m), which were warmly enclosed by three stream, Lam-huay Kom, Lam-huay Mae-Mee and Lam-huay Mae-Tom. The whole fruitful area not only enclosed by the streams but also surrounded with rainforest. Ban-Mae-Me-Nai divided into five division, 5 rais (9,600 sq.m.) for community settlement 110 rais (176,000 sq.m.) for rice field, 390 rais (624,000 sq.m.) for cultivation arca which can be used for farming gardening, swidden plantations, 2,600 rais (4,160,000 sq.m.) for utilization forest which includes domesticate cattle, forest products collected for food and health and timber cut for house building. Lastly 900 rais (1,440,000 sq.m.) for conservation purpose include hill rainforest, forest that are sources of water courses, water-absorbing forest and spring-water forest.

2. from the official document of The Administrative Office, Muang Pan District, Lampang Province
3. The Study of The Karen Village, Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai (Boonsom Kasemsattsak : 2006)



Figure 1 Location of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai Hua-Muang Subdistrict, Muang Pan District, Lampang Province

Figure 2 Village plan

The wisdom of Karen's ancestors expressed on the selection of village settlement. The Karen traditionally live with the forest, and believe that soil, water and forest are equally important for their living. The villagers feel closer to the soil rather than water and forest but they need all three for their crops. Villagers thinking is holistic, without any subdivisions. Their traditional beliefs in concerning with the forest deal with the preservation of forest and environment. At present, the villagers cannot classify their origin, only think that their ancestors should be migrated from Myanmar along Salwin and Muei River to Thailand⁴ and settled down at Ban Muang Korn, Chiang-Do, Chiang-Mai Province until 1840⁵ all of them moved to Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai, a small village of 21 households with only 118 males and 59 females population. Their period of settlement is 166 years old which the villagers can still retain their cultural roots.

What cause the Karen's remaining?

From the secondary document on holistic knowledge and local Wisdom of the Karen (Tavorn Kumpolkul : 2004 and Chootsit Choochat : 2003) in combination with the interviewing and field survey of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai together with the research report on biological diversity and local wisdom for sustainable development (Yos Santasombat : 1999), together with various documents in concerning with the

4. from interviewing Mr.Chan Chanmali, representative for education and culture of the village committee on March 30, 2006.
5. from the official document of The Administrative Committee of Muang-Pan District, Lampang Province.

Karen. It was found that the main cause for remaining of Karen's cultural roots is the traditional beliefs and way of living which tightly united with nature. Hundred years of settlement which the Karen live with forest, soil, and water with warmly protecting and preserving. In every Karen's villages, not only Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai, but all of them closely surround with forest and streams. Karen's wisely land use management with local wisdom based make their lives and nature united and balanced. Every Karen knows how to deal with their soil, water and forest, knows how to use swidden cultivation for their crops, knows which kind of forest can be utilized and which parts are untouchable and preserved.

The Karen's inherited wisdom in concerning with nature

From their traditional beliefs that soil, water and forest are equally important for lives and nature. The Karen believe that forest is the most important sources for their knowledge. They also inherited local wisdom from their ancestors that their forest should have 7 layers (Kanika Promsao and Benja Silarak : 1999). The first layer should contain plants and insects the second layer should be ground covered, next one are shrubs, trees, trees with fern and moss, orchids and lastly are big trees with crawling plant and ivy. Those layers in connecting with their traditional beliefs are truly express the quality of biological diversity.

The classification of forest in the Karen's traditional beliefs

The forest in concerning with the Karen's lives and living can be classified into three categories : (Choosit Choochat : 2003)

- **Koenoemu** : The conservation forest including hill rainforest which is the source of streams and rivers and also the place for hanging the bamboo cylinder containing of new born baby's umbilical cord which represent the human's soul. So preserving trees and souls seems to be similar. From this traditional beliefs, many prohibitions are pursued such as, the prohibition of tree cutting. cultivation, village settlement the only use they can do is burial ground of the passed away villagers. (Choosit Choochat : 2003)

- **Koenoepha** : The forest for their settlement and cultivation. The Soil in this area is very fertile, they can cultivate rice on the hill slopes with the assistant of water from water courses or transfer by local dam
- **Kobekho** : The community forest, contain big and tall trees but sparse rather than dense. The Soil is not as fertile as Koenoepha so the Karen will not use this kind of forest for cultivation. But it can be used for timber cutting, gathering products such as mushrooms, leaves, thatch and medical herbs.

In comparison to soil quality of those three categories of forest, Koenoepha, which is used for cultivation purposes because of soil fertility, but after long time of cultivation, the swidden cultivation technique should be used for refertilizing soil quality. The period of swidden cultivation cycle is approximately 3-5 years.

Traditional beliefs : Karen's tools for forest and vernacular heritage conservation

Besides holistic thinking on protect, preserve and living with the forest, traditional beliefs seems to be the special tools for both natural and vernacular heritage of the Karen. Prohibitions rules, regulations and penalties are the significant roles for Karen's living. The Karen knows that what is prohibited should not be violated. "Prohibitions" are norms of behavior which the Karen elsewhere have upheld for a long time. There are lots of prohibitions concerning with "soil and water," such as, not to touch and destroy a big basin, channel, cave entrance, hill terrace, mountain top or river bank, etc. (Jarat : 1995) or "If you use water you have to protect water; if you use the land, you have to protect the land" (Choosit Choochat : 2003)

"Spirit" is another tool for prohibitions. The Karen believe that water and forest have it's own spirits. Before utilizing water, there must be a ceremony to apologize to the water spirits. Water's intrinsic nature is to flow downward, so any impediment and containment of water is prohibited. If they build the local dam and create new water-way or change water direction they must build the spirit house for apologizing to water spirits. This belief is the collaborative issue for both Thai and Karen. If we visit the rice field in Chieng-Mai, Chieng-Rai or Mae-Hong-Son where

the local dam are commonly used, the similar scene of scattered water spirit houses in the rice field can be easily found. The prohibitions for water conservation of the Karen can be classified as flowing water, bog water, streams, Spring water and crystal pool water. Destroying these source of water in any form is totally prohibited. Anyone who violated the rules may suffer from death or other disasters. With scientific analysis on these categories of water, you'll find the significant impacts for lifes and living of the whole community.

Beside traditional beliefs in concerning with the conservation of forest soil and water, closed families social system and self-sufficient economy are also another fools for retaining the way of lifes and living of the Karen. Self-sufficient economic and closed families social system lead to the warm and hospitality living, solidarity in cultivation which bring happiness (rom-yen-pen-suk) and full of "nam-jai" not "production" (Chatthip and Phoonsak : 2003). At present, with seriously attack of globalization development, the clearly change expresses on their costume and household instruments. But fortunately, the Karen's cultural roots with nature is still strong and still remain.



Figure 3-4-5-6 many stream which enclosed Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai

The physical condition of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai village plan represented very tight cluster of Settlement on the sloping terrain surrounded with cultivation area on the lower hill along the streams. Each family contains a group of individual house, granary and bath booth compound together enclosing tiny open court. All households clustered densely on the sloping terrain. Every house has similar characteristic of the timber house built on stilts, with gable roof of wooden shingles or grasses. The bamboo house with binding system construction can be seen on the domestic bovines. The house form and spatial organization are quite similar, with open ground 1.20-1.50 m. high. The ground floor use as living space and timber storage. The stairs always locate under the covered roof with the 5-7 steps (by their traditional belief). The interior spatial organization classify in three categories, entrance hall, main living hall including special space for daughter and kitchen at the back in conjunction with back terrace for dish washing. Every house has at least one granary located beside the house with similar gable direction. Mostly of the granary, the structure and construction system are stronger than the house. The bath booth are popularly built at the back of the house. With the appearance of logged-cabin with unshaped heavy timber, the bath booth appearance seems to be treasury than only use for bathing and toilet. There is the open "sala" at the village entrance, with the information board, telling of village committee, the information of village location and settlement, rules, regulation and penalties of the village which are the basic information for all visitors. On the extreme north of the village the local primary school is located on hill top with a small flat terrain for children's play ground. Looking around from this point. The clear image of the whole village with tightly united with the forest, hills, local streams and step rice-fields and community forest can be seen from the school play ground.

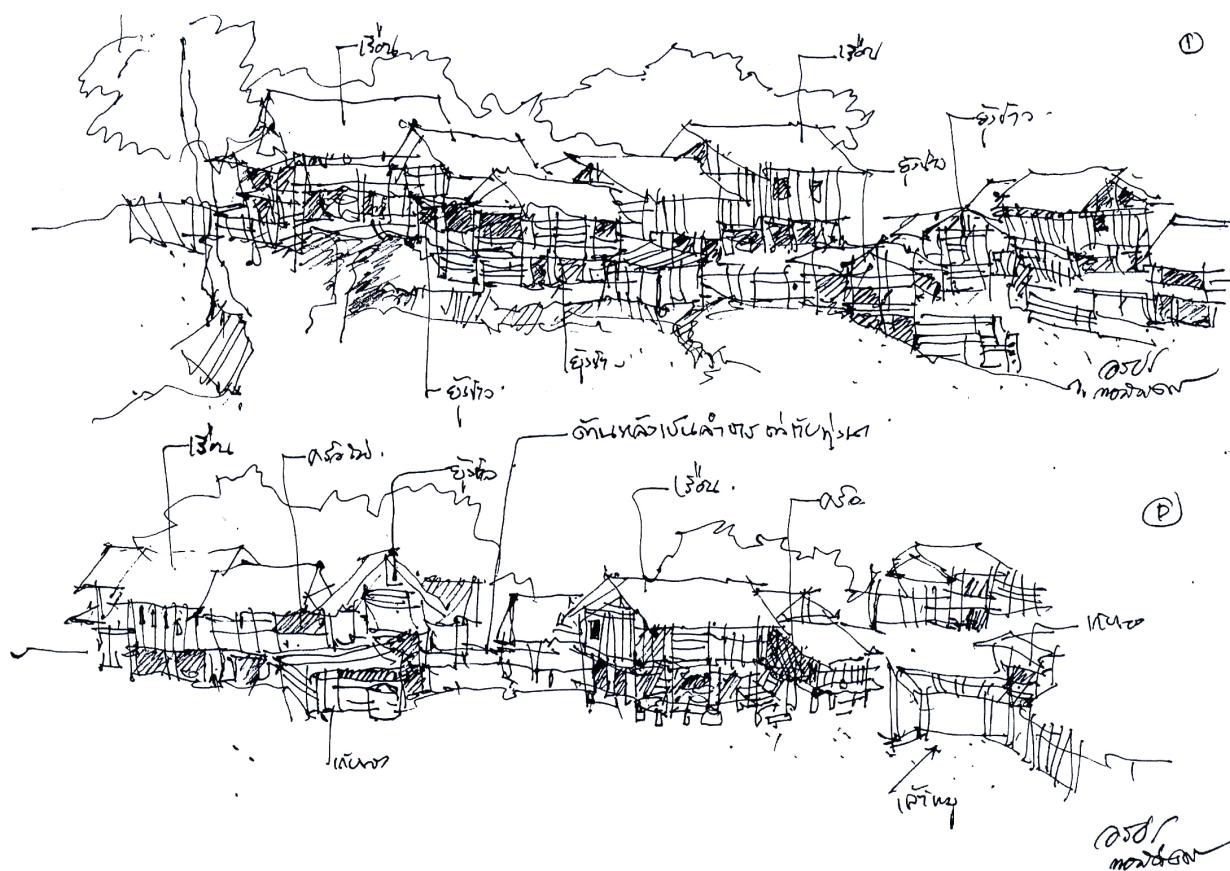


Figure 7 the sketch of houses cluster in the village



Figure 8-9-10-11 showing houses cluster and granary

Figure 12-13-14-15 showing : granary, kitchen, living, hall and entrance hall

The expression of houses clustering in the village plan represent very tight unity of social relation of the villagers. Away from modern comfort and convenience from outside. The Karen still retain their identity from their remaining of folk tales and poetry. Many people say that “The poetry and folk tales of the Karen are similarly as the leaves of trees in the forest” (Montree Jirapornpanit : 2006). The Karen folk tales are the mean of social and cultural relation in closed-family social system of various ethnic groups.

The way of lives and living of the Karen are highly connected with traditional beliefs, which leads to the question : **Are the Karen’s lives and living, social and culture dynamic?** As mention about public information announced at the public board at the village entrance of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai on the paragraph before, we can easily realized the dynamistic of Karen’s socio-cultural way of lives. The announcement shows the penalties of two types, which are penalties from the local gods and spirits and the penalties arising from villages agreements, such as : on the meritorious day, no washing, no killing animals, no cutting bamboo, no climbing tree, no working, no quarrelling, on the ceremonial day : no staying over night outside, no working, on the buried day : no noisy, no gun firing and the most penalty for the Karen’s woman is every one have to be virgin until getting married. Those are the penalties from local gods and spirits. At present the Karen got new penalties from the villagers agreement such as, the drunkard have to pay 2,000-5,000 Bahts fine, firing gun without any reasons from 6.00 pm – 6.00 am have to pay 2,000-5,000 Bahts fine, fishing or shorting or poisoning fishes in the conservation forest have to pay 3,000-5,000 Bahts fine, wood firing or cutting in the conservation forest have to pay 2,000-10,000 Bahts fine, strictly prohibited for addictive drug and imposed this penalties in form of law. From those two types of penalties, the latter show the dynamic way of lives and living of the Karen’s society in the globalizing world.

From the Karen’s of Ban-Mae-Mee-Nai lives and living inconcerning with built vernacular environment in connection with natural environment. Thus realized that

the remaining of Built Vernacular Heritage need diversity impacts around. Those are, natural environment and ecology traditional beliefs, local wisdom, lives and living, socio-economical impact, local people and lastly vernacular architecture and cultural landscape. **The overall impacts are the means of the remaining of Built Vernacular Heritage.** If any impact missing. The remaining could not be retained. So on conservation of Built Cultural Heritage, the overall system should be taken care.

With hundred years of continuous lives and living of the Karen in harmonious with Buddhist way that men are the tiny part of nature.....human should be harmonious with human, animals and nature not to be over every thing (S. Siwarak : 2006)..... Land and forest are the balancing of human, animals, plants, soil and water..... the peasants should be the mean of man and nature, should express the valuable of man, should lead their lives and living with self-sufficient way.....from Small is Beautiful (E. F Schumacher. 2006)

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