

# The Potential of Cultural Landscape for Cultural Tourism Development of Bang Luang Community, Nakhon Pathom Province

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## **Abstract**

This research focuses on concepts of cultural landscape conservation, more specifically on cultural tourism management at Bang Luang community, Nakhon Pathom. Bang Luang community has existed for more than 100 years; people have simple lifestyles, help each other mutually and are friendly towards tourists. There is both natural beauty in the area and surviving old architecture. The community has provided services for visitors and it organises events and festivals annually.

However, there is no management plan to serve the cultural landscape and cultural heritage tourism. An outline of a cultural tourism management plan and cultural landscape conservation is needed for the community, covering conservation, the organisation of travel programs, planning for tourism activities and facilities, conservation and rehabilitation of the community, also community involvement in the process of management. The underlying idea is to develop cultural tourism in Bang Luang community.

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, cultural landscape, Bang Luang community, Nakhon Pathom*

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## **Statement and significance of the problem**

Bang Luang community is located on the riverbank of the Tha Chin River in Bang Len district, Nakorn Pathom province. From Bangkok, the distance to Bang Luang community is approximately 75 kilometers. The community was established in 1903 by a group of Chinese migrants. With a long and invaluable cultural history, Bang Luang community has many attractive places which provide a glimpse back to a Siam of a century ago and which are imbued with both tangible and intangible values. There are traditional wooden shop-houses integrating Thai and Chinese styles, local temples, local museum and ways of life which have a close relationship with the Tha Chin River.

In the past, the commercial activities and the general transportation were mainly by the river route, so this community functioned as the center of local trading and the hub of river route transportation through which people heading for the southern provinces along the Tha Chin River would pass. Nowadays, it is not as crowded as in the past due to road construction. In addition, the road is more convenient and faster than the river so that the river is no longer the main transportation route. Even though the community today is not as active as in the old days, it still acts as the center of local trading and many shop-houses are still opened every day. Consequently, the cultural landscape, with its high historic, aesthetic, social and spiritual significance and value, has a great potential to be conserved and interpreted as a visitor attraction for cultural tourism. The management plan of this community should embrace a way of protecting, encouraging and communicating ways of life based on traditional modes to the new generation as a way of safeguarding living history.

The community has a lively character and sense of place which can attract domestic tourists. Therefore appropriate guidelines for cultural tourism management are very important for the site. To achieve sustainable conservation, both its natural and cultural resources should be realised.

The present project focused on cultural landscape conservation and a model for cultural tourism management that includes the participation of stakeholders.

## **Aim and objectives**

The over-riding aim of the project was to establish guidelines for a cultural tourism management plan based on cultural landscape conservation of Bang Luang community. To this end, four objectives were specified.

1. To study the concepts of cultural landscape conservation and a cultural tourism conservation approach to cultural tourism management at Bang Luang community.
2. To study cultural and natural significances of Bang Luang community, in order to understand the potential of Bang Luang's cultural landscape.
3. To study the advantages and disadvantages of the present cultural tourism management at Bang Luang community.
4. To create an outline of a cultural tourism management plan along with cultural landscape conservation of the community.

## **Scope of the study**

The study area is Bang Luang community in Nakhon Pathom province. The cultural landscape of this community includes Bang Luang market as the core zone and the natural surrounding area including the river and agricultural activities. The target groups comprise local residents, related agencies in charge of tourism management and tourists.

Both tangible and intangible heritage values of the community with its environment will be sought as information for creating a cultural tourism management plan.

## **Research methodology**

The research used a multi-method approach including document analysis, on-site survey and in-depth interview with target groups, also participant observation, each utilised where appropriate. Data used can be grouped into two categories:

### *Primary data collection*

- Original documents from libraries, national archives
- Old maps, old illustrations and old photographs from national archives
- On-site survey and on-site observation in the Bang Luang community
- In-depth interviews with related stakeholders.

### *Secondary data collection*

- Other related information from libraries, past studies and online resources
- Current documents from various resources related to the project.

Content analysis was the principal approach employed on the mass of data thus assembled.

### **A brief history of Bang Luang community**

Bang Luang community was formally established in 1903 by Chinese immigrants with 68 wooden shophouses in two rows facing each other. It is located on the western riverbank of the Tha Chin River. With a long cultural history, it was once a market junction for hundreds of carts carrying local goods from the forest areas to the west of the river and exchanged here for eventual sale at Tha Tian market in Bangkok. It was one of the most active Chinese communities in the Central Plain, where a Chinese school, Chinese instrument band, old opium hall, iron casting shop and various types of shops and businesses were found. At first, there were only a few Chinese families living there, then other families followed and formed a big market community. Rows of wooden shop houses were built and the market then expanded. There were also several rice mills in the area and nearby. Most of the settlers found that this area was peaceful and provided a good trade opportunity.

In the past, this community was busier because the commercial activities and the general communication mainly used the river route. The community was once a transportation hub through which people heading for the southern provinces along the Tha Chin River would

pass. Nowadays, the population of Bang Luang Community is mostly Thai people of Chinese descent with occupations divided into two main groups: people involved in agricultural occupations mostly live along the Tha Chin River; the second group is related to people with occupations in trade who live in the market.

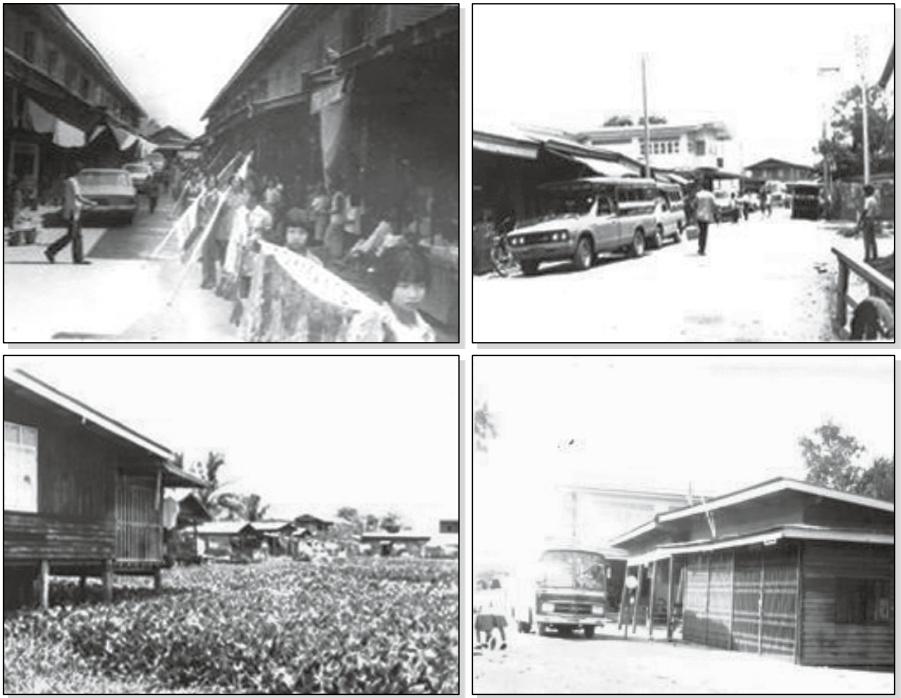
The history of Bang Luang community settlement can be dated back to the late Rattanakosin period. In the early period of Bang Luang community settlement, only two households came to live, namely Meng Lee and Luang Pu Pian (Pongsiri Taewong, 2010). In the reign of King Rama V, there was the proclamation related to the establishment of the county, district and subdistrict, when this area came to be called “Bang Luang community”. In 1884, Lao Song, Vietnamese and Chinese people had come here to settle. They built two-storey wooden shophouses with tin roofs for their trade occupations. In the beginning, there were only a few shops, with homes later expanding into the commercial market. Some people in the community were engaged in trading. When more money could be collected, houses could be modified from the original, as desired.

Bang Luang market was established under the leadership of Mr. Chuang Daengutai, the village chief, who had the market called Talad Bon (Upper Market) created adjacent to the Tha Chin River. Later, when the trade of the community improved, the market called Talad Klang (Middle Market) was expanded under the leadership of Luang Zhu (manager) Pia. Mr. Sod Rojanasuthee was the leader in the establishment of Talad Lang (Lower Market). As a result, the community had marketplaces for major trading in which there was a variety of products including food, fabrics, cups and bowls from China, Chinese medicine, also gold smithing which has been an occupation passed on from Chinese ancestors. Moreover, there were agricultural products comprising rice, agricultural crops and herbs, agricultural equipment such as knives, big knives, basketwork and so on. Therefore, many people came for shopping at the market. As a result, Bang Luang Market became the major market of economic importance of the wider community and dependent for its success on river transportation.

In the past, the Tha Chin River functioned as the main transportation route of the western provinces in Thailand, with many communities settled along it, all of which used the river as the main communication route. Later, economic growth and the national development were linked to the development of a land transport system, leading to its greater convenience for travel. This resulted in fewer trade contacts by waterway and increased trade contacts by land routes so that the market of Bang Luang community consequently became stagnant.

Since 2008, Bang Luang Market has come back to be known by people again after its publicising via dramas and television programs. As a result, more people have come for tourism in Bang Luang community. Thenceforth, various shops representing the identity of Bang Luang Market have offered specific local products and ways of life that have enabled more trade. As a result, people in the community and relevant agencies have facilitated the revival of tourism and trade in the community of Bang Luang Market. A variety of facilities have been developed to support services to tourists and to offer the uniqueness of Thai-Chinese culture as a selling point of the community for the purposes of stimulating and encouraging more visitors to come for tourism.

At present this community is considered a unique local market with the beauty of its architecture and a simple lifestyle of people that remains intact in the Tha Chin River basin. (Bang Luang Subdistrict Municipality, 2010: 28-29).



**Figures 1 to 4: Bang Luang community in 1990**

(source: <http://www.Bang Luang.go.th/market.htm>, retrieved 15 October 2010).

## **Assessment of significance of Bang Luang community**

The historic, social and aesthetic significance and values of the community derive from the history outlined above.

### **1. Historic Value**

A population survey at the end of the King Rama V period revealed that Chinese in Tha Chin basin were around 33 percent of the whole population in that area (Jindamaneerot, 1989, in Paramaporn Sirikulchayanont 2009: 179). There are more than five Chinese groups in Bang Len district, most of whom are Teohiu people and whose histories can be traced through the town.

The Bang Luang market comprises of several rows of antique, wooden shop houses that feature a combination of Chinese, Thai and Western architectural influences that characterised commercial centers at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As many old shops are now preserved for public view, visitors are able to conveniently glimpse into the past. An old cinema with wood benches is here with its old projectors. Old-style dental care equipment is also on display at a now-closed dentist's place. A Chinese grandpa still practises his Chinese medicine for people; he makes diagnoses by feeling the pulse of his customers. The market is full of delicious foods including dried shrimp, Chinese chive rolls, dumplings and satay. A boat ride is available at the market for just 30 baht per person.

## **2. Social Value**

The Bang Luang community reveals the relationships between Thai and Chinese culture. Thai and Chinese have been living together and have always shared their culture. In 1953, Yok Khiew Chinese school was founded, later changing its name to Jianhua. It was a very famous Chinese school of the area. Interestingly, the number of Chinese language teachers at this school is the highest in the country (Paramaporn Sirikulchayanont, 2009:181) Even the Buddhist Thai children can study in the Chinese school because the school is teaching in both Thai and Chinese languages.

The development of the old market is not the only effort launched by the local people to ensure that the community remains dynamic. In 2004, it was decided to try to revive a traditional Chinese musical troupe in a bid to inject a new lease of life into the neighborhood. The troupe is now playing a major role in the community by performing live during various ceremonial events. In the past, the songs were played in Chinese; at the present the songs have been applied and played in Thai.

Several senior members of the community were involved in getting this project off the ground, and these individuals share the same desire to pass on their skills to young people in the neighborhood. The string section includes children aged from 7 to 16 years. Among the instruments used by members of the troupe are flutes, fiddles and guitars, along with drums, cymbals and other percussion instruments.

Music lessons include an introduction to the hundreds of traditional Chinese songs that feature lyrics in the Teohiu dialect. Among the opportunities during which the youngsters can show off their musical skills are major festivals and events, such as the Chinese New Year festival, the celebration of the birthday of the goddess known as Tubtim, along with a number of other significant ceremonial events. Typically, the troupe makes its way around the community's streets and sidewalks playing their instruments in unison during these kinds of performances.



**Figure 5:** Chinese musical troupe

(source: <http://www.tannetwork.tv/tan/ViewData.aspx?DataID=1027392>, retrieved 15 October 2010).

According to local people, they have lived with their traditional ways for a long time but their lives have been changed because the river trade has ended since the road was built to the community. This has meant the ways of life were changed; moreover, it brought new infrastructure including convenience stores such as a 7-eleven which would change the behavior the local people and affect both the social and natural environment.

### 3. Aesthetic Value

The character of the market community is of wooden rowhouses that face towards each other. They opened as shops doing various types of business. The community market consists of several rows of antique, wooden shophouse buildings that feature a combination of Chinese, Thai and Western architectural influences.



**Figures 6 and 7:** *Wooden houses* (source: author 21 Dec 2010).

The appearance, design, materials and function of some houses are the same as in the past. At the present time many wooden shop-houses in the market are still in good condition. The environment and atmosphere from the wooden shop-houses can create an experience that looks back to a previous time. On the other hand some houses have been modified or rebuilt. Moreover, the landscape of the Bang Luang community creates a fine setting comprising housing areas, temple, public school and the river.

## **Proposed Management Plan for Cultural Tourism in Bang Luang Community**

The following is a discussion of guidelines for a management plan to address the question of cultural tourism in the community. It arises from the author's own impressions and ideas and will address programs for conservation and tourism, planning for tourism activities, conservation and rehabilitation, community participation and zoning.

### **Conservation and tourism programs**

#### *1) Revision of Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum*

A first needed action is revival of the existing Bang Luang Museum (Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum). The museum is in need of renovation, preferably with the attention of a professional interior designer. Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum should be able to offer various kinds of interpretation tools such as brochures, visitor maps, guidebooks and other printed materials, including some audio-visual media such as CD-ROMs with documentary clips about Bang Luang community. These are not currently available.

Current exhibitions of Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum are not of much interest for visitors; therefore some improvement is needed. On the ground floor, the museum might attract visitors by telling the 'story' of Bang Luang community, thereby to enhance all stakeholders' awareness. The second has only one small room which might be used as a projection room to tell the story of Bang Luang community in various aspects such as 'General information of Bang Luang community', 'Cultural and historical values of Bang Luang community', 'Way of life' etc. to build an atmosphere of the past.

#### *2) Organisation of activities for tourists*

Tourism activities are for tourists to be part of and learn about the culture, life and natural conditions of a locality as well as create fun. It is important that tourists enjoy the experience of visiting the museum and the town. Additionally, valuable knowledge and experience can be gained from such tourist attractions. Therefore,

Bang Luang community might usefully organise a range of activities as follows.

Water activities would include boat trips to allow tourists to see the scenery of both sides of the river as well as to learn about lifestyles of local residents. The boat trip should be scheduled explicitly so that the tourists can determine the travel time. A guide for each boat would provide information as well as answer the tourists' inquiries. However, the number of boats should be controlled, taking into account the impact on the environment. Furthermore, there should be supervision in terms of safety for tourists, such as provision of a life jacket for each traveler when getting on to the boat. This reduces the risk resulting from events that are not anticipated.

A travel program should allow tourists to learn of and exchange culture with people in the community by taking advantage of distinctive features of the community, such as cooking preparation. In this regard, Bang Luang community has unique and distinctive foods as mentioned above, which attract the interest of customers and cause the desire to take part in cooking. Moreover, Bang Luang community has Ironwork House which is a unique aspect of the community and rarely found nowadays. Ironwork House is a place that allows tourists to watch the making of agricultural equipment and household tools such as knives or weapons. Tourists can learn and gain experience as well as become aware of conserving the way of life and culture of the community.

Activities can be organised in accordance with various important community days, such as the Chinese New year, Loy Krathong, A-Ma Parade, by encouraging tourists to take part in these activities. This is also a way of disseminating community culture so that the youth in the local area can study and learn of the identity of the community in which they live, resulting in enhanced awareness of such culture.

### *3) Interpretation management*

Bang Luang Community has prepared information material in the form of guideposts and signs showing the details of tourist attraction related to only one place, that is to say, Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum. As a result, the tourists who come to Bang Luang Market do

not get basic information such as background and history. Therefore, the tourists do not recognise the value of the cultural heritage. So the best way of conserving the community culture is to “convey the meaning (Interpretation)”. Therefore, in order to enhance the conveying of meaning for the recognition of people in Bang Luang community and tourists as well as the understanding of community culture, signs conveying information and explaining meanings should be arranged in major tourist attractions within Bang Luang Market, such as Ironwork House, Bang Luang Cinema, Goddess Ruby Shrine, etc.

Present guideposts are found to have different forms and are difficult to observe. So, they should be arranged in the same format to be easily understood and remembered by tourists, and in obvious places. Additionally, the community should prepare a map of tourist attractions within Bang Luang Market to be placed at the Tourist Service Center.

#### *4) Publicity about Bang Luang community for tourism*

The current website, that is to say, <http://www.bangluang.go.th/market2.htm>, which disseminates information on the background, landmarks, illustrations, and agencies involved in tourism management as well as contact information, is found to be rarely updated. This clearly needs to be addressed regularly and systematically.

The community has prepared brochures for publicity about tourist sites in Bang Luang Market by providing information on tourist attractions, desserts and food specialties, a travel map, dates and times of opening and closing as well as the contact number. However, the brochures have not been evenly distributed by the community for tourists; again it is a situation that needs to be addressed, to have these available at important locations such as the Tourism Authority of Thailand headquarters and in the area of Central Region, Office of Bang Luang Subdistrict Municipality as well as in the tourist locations in the community.

A travel guide is needed to give the tourists more detailed information than can be contained in a brochure. In this regard, the information should include background, details about major tourist sites, accommodation, travel, tourism events, foods and drinks, activities and festivals.

Bang Luang Community should take part in various tourism activities and exhibitions, such as Discovery Thailand which is annually held by the Tourism Authority of Thailand in order to promote tourist sites in the community and to build partnerships in the field of tourism with both the public and private sectors to develop and publicise tourist locations.

## **Planning for tourism activities**

### *1) Setting up a visitor information center*

At present the community does not have a visitor information center. Such a centre clearly needs to be set up with staff for providing maps, brochures and calendar of events. The visiting times should be set so that the visitors can plan their journey. Moreover the staff should record and check the number of visitors because this can also help manage the carrying capacity of the sites in the future.

### *2) Access to tourist Attractions*

Tourist attractions with easy access would be convenient for tourists, resulting in large number of travelers to such sites. Regarding the journey to Bang Luang Community, some roads are damaged, bumpy, making the journey rather difficult. Moreover, some road routes have no wayside lights, making travel at night difficult with the risk of accidents. Therefore, the relevant agencies should improve the paths of access to tourist destinations by ameliorating the roads and installing wayside lights to provide tourists with convenience of access as well as to increase the safety of the tourists.

### *3) Establishment of Homestay*

Bang Luang Community and the nearby area have no accommodation for tourists, although the community has the idea to establish accommodation in the form of homestays. One homestay raft has been created but has not yet been available for tourists since it has not been ready for service yet. The community should investigate establishing a homestay standard for providing facilities for tourists who wish to stay overnight to experience community life.

## Participation

Various groups linked to the community need to be involved in planning for conservation and tourism in Bang Luang community: the Bang Luang Municipality, community leaders, the local people, the local Buddhist temple and the school. Such community participation inevitably leads to better and more democratic decision making procedures and better outcomes; it also creates an ethos of community 'ownership' of the town's future trajectory and an environment in which the community can advance its own knowledge of its traditions and culture.

## Zoning for conservation management

A physical plan for the community must inevitably acknowledge the different functions and constraints associated with various 'zones' of the area.

### *1) Core Zone (preserved area)*

The core zone is the primary settlement and the most important area of this cultural landscape. The religious area and the commercial area are also included in the core zone. Based on the high level of their authenticity and physical integrity, the highly significant buildings in the core zone such as the vernacular houses, Bang Luang temple, the wooden shophouses, local museum and the local shrine therefore need to be managed through appropriate conservation measures to protect their existing character, built form, and condition. The new construction should be restricted in material, design and appearance in order to preserve the original pattern of this area. Therefore, the most appropriate treatment to this area is to take a preservation approach.

The values in the core zone include not only tangible values but also intangible values such as the traditional rites which take place in this area. Ultimately, the Tha Chin riverfront must be preserved as the highly significant natural resource of this cultural landscape.

## 2) Buffer Zone

The buffer zone is essential for protecting the authenticity and the integrity of the cultural landscape from the effects of modernisation and urbanisation. For protecting this area, the authority would need to use legislation to limit the pattern of land-use.

For Bang Luang community, the rural area around the community including the Tha Chin River should be defined as the buffer zone. The government, including the Fine Arts department, would be wise to create regulations and policy for conservation of the buffer zone area, arranged as a ‘green zone’. Treatment of Bang Luang Community’s cultural landscape in the conservation plan would aim to preserve the significance of both tangible and intangible values of the community and its natural resources. Furthermore, community engagement with the conservation plan and public awareness should be developed and sustained.



**Figure 8:** Map of zoning management

(source : [www.earth.google.com](http://www.earth.google.com), retrieved on 11 October 2010).

## Conclusion

The objectives of this research involved focusing on the concepts of cultural landscape conservation and a cultural tourism conservation approach to tourism management at Bang Luang community. In studying cultural and natural significance of Bang Luang community, it was important to establish an understanding of the potential of the

Bang Luang cultural landscape, advantages and disadvantages of the present cultural tourism management at Bang Luang community, present opportunities and to create an outline cultural tourism management plan along with cultural landscape conservation of the community.

From the analysis of Bang Luang community, it can be seen that it exhibits historical, social and aesthetic value. The history of the community began with the migration of Chinese people who came to settle in the area of Bang Luang Subdistrict and created the market characterised by rows of two-storey wooden houses facing each other. As the community occupies the area adjacent to the Tha Chin River, so in the past people in the community traveled and traded by waterway. Subsequently, progress has come to the area, such as with the construction of roads. As a result, trade contact or travel by waterway began to diminish.

At the present time, people in Bang Luang Community have a simple lifestyle, help each other mutually and are friendly towards both local residents in the community and tourists. In addition, Bang Luang community maintains the beauty of its area, including the old architecture from the past. The community is a source of distinctive identity, especially in foods. The foods typical of the community that are popular among tourists are “Shun Pia” and “Kao Kiab Pak Mo”. In addition to the matter of foods, the community has tourist sites that can well attract the tourists such as Ironwork House, Ban Kao Lao Rueang Museum, the Chinese Music House, among others

It was found that the community has provided appropriate services; moreover, the community organises events and festivals annually. However, a Tourist Information Centre has not yet been established, nor has any accommodation. Simply stated, there is at present an inadequate variety of tourism activities available for tourists.

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