

‘SETTING’ IN CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN THAILAND

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Introduction

The (modern) conservation movement started in the late eighteenth century. The concept of heritage conservation developed from the concern on single building to the groups of buildings, the historic area, and then the cultural landscape where ‘setting’ plays the important role as a part of original value of the heritage. Therefore, it will be useful to understand the conservation movement in international level and then turn back to the ‘setting’ in the cultural heritage conservation in Thailand.

This paper aims to elaborate the concept of ‘setting’ in the cultural heritage conservation in Thailand which has been developing since the first legislation launched around four decades ago. This paper will be discussed in three aspects. The first is the overview of cultural heritage conservation. The second is the development of the concept of ‘setting’ stated in Thai legislation including the brief of conservation system in Thailand. The last part will be the example of current effort on establishment of the Cultural Environment Conservation System by Thai government which could be one of the most important tools for local conservation bodies on safeguarding of the cultural heritage and its setting in the future.

The Overview of Cultural Conservation Movement

The cultural heritage conservation movement started in Europe as a common interest in early nineteenth century as shown by the registration of cultural heritage in France in 1837. It focused on the historic building and archaeological site. Meanwhile, the British Archaeology Association was established in 1844 and the ‘Ancient Monument Protection Act’ was announced in 1882. In the end of nineteenth century, the first movement of the landscape recognition shown in the establishment of Garden City Association, eight months after Ebenezer Howard published the ‘Garden Cities of Tomorrow’. This movement led to the trend of Garden City in city planning which emphasized the esthetic of picturesque landscape influenced by British scholars

especially John Ruskin and William Morris. ‘*whether garden cities or garden suburbs, they shared a picturesque neo-vernacular style, which derived on the one hand from the arts and crafts movement of Ruskin, Webb, Morris, Lethaby, Urwin and Parker, and their many continental allies in the craft workshop movement*’¹

The twentieth century was the period of change by the technological development and international actions on cultural heritage conservation. In the beginning of the century, there were a number of new inventions, such as, radio receiver, airplane by Wright brothers, Theory of Relativity by Albert Einstein, and so on. Unfortunately, it was also the period of World War. *At the end of the First World War, the material and human losses, as well as the destruction of important cultural heritage sites, raised the question of improving international collaboration.*² The WW I in 1914 and WW II during 1939-1945 made a great change on urban and rural landscape including cultural heritage setting. Disasters happened in this period required new measure to the protection of valuable properties and the control of new development. In 1920s, U.S.A. launched new mechanism so-called ‘zoning’, which became the important part of history of urban planning since it was *the evolution of public control over privately owned land.*³ Moreover, the National Park Service was established in 1916 originally to ‘*...promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations . . . by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for*

¹ Hall, Peter, 2000, The Centenary of Modern Planning in Freestone, Robert (ed.), 2000, *Urban Planning in A Changing World: The Twentieth Century Experience*, London: E&FN SPON, p23

² Jokilehto, J. 1996, International Standards, Principles and Charters of Conservation, in Mark, S. (ed.) *Concerning Buildings, Studies in Honour of Sir Bernard Feilden*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, p57

³ Levy, John M. 1997, *Contemporary Urban Planning (4th edition)*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, p41

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*the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.*⁴

Cultural heritage became the valuable resource and the protection of cultural heritage was brought to international recognition after WW II. The concern on historic properties could be the effect from the series of phenomena, for example, increasing population in the mega cities that were over ten million people in 1950-1960, the pressure from Cold War, oil crisis in 1973-1974, etc. In terms of cultural heritage conservation, *the UNESCO decided to launch first international campaign on archaeological research in the areas to flood by emergence of Aswan High Dam in Egypt in 1959.*⁵ The Venice Charter in 1964 could be a crucial milestone of cultural heritage conservation. The aim of this charter is to address the common responsibility to safeguard cultural heritage for future generations in ‘the full richness of their authenticity’. Subsequently, the first international action to preserve the cultural heritage is ‘The Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UNESCO’. As of August 2005, the World Heritage List includes 812 properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value. These include *628 cultural, 160 natural and 24 mixed properties in 137 States Parties.*⁶ In the recommendations, attention is drawn to the knowledge on definition, appropriate protective measures and international cooperation.

In the European Architectural Heritage year in 1975, the concept of ‘integrated conservation’ was defined and launched, first in the European Charter of the Architectural Heritage (26th September 1975), then in the Amsterdam Declaration (25th October 1975). The Charter states that the architectural heritage consists: “*not only of our most important monuments: it also includes the groups of lesser buildings in our old towns and characteristic villages in their natural or manmade settings*” (Amsterdam Charter NO.1) and ‘*integrated conservation is achieved by the application of sensitive restoration techniques and the correct choice of appreciate functions. In the course of history the hearts of towns and sometimes villages have been left to deteriorate and have turned into areas of substandard*

housing. Their restoration must be undertaken in a spirit of social justice and should not cause the departure of the poorer inhabitants. Because of this, conservation must be one of the first considerations in all urban and regional planning. It should be noted that integrated conservation does not rule out the introduction of modern architecture into areas containing old buildings provided that the existing context, proportions, forms, sizes and scale are fully respected and traditional materials are used.’ (Amsterdam Charter NO.7) Since then, the definition of historic area became a coherent whole with buildings, surroundings and human activities. Moreover, the UNESCO launched a series of charters to promote the necessity of the integrated conservation approach such as, The Resolution on the Conservation of smaller Historic Towns (1975), The Florence Charter on Historic Gardens (1982), Charter on the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas, The Washington Charter (1987), etc.

There were two major movements in the late twentieth century which should be stated here. One was the development of the concept of cultural landscape and intangible cultural heritage. Another was the issue on authenticity rose from former international charter. The international recognition on the landscapes, instead of only monuments, was clearly seen when ‘landscape’ was brought into the expert meeting on World Heritage cultural landscapes held in La Petite Pierre, France, in 1992. The output of this meeting is the drafted categories for cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value which subsequently were included in the Operational Guidelines. ‘*Cultural landscapes represent the "combined works of nature and of man" designated in Article 1 of the Convention. The term "cultural landscape" embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment.*’⁷ This could be the first action on the protection of the heritage setting in international level. In the Burra Charter of 1981, it also stated the term ‘place’ to indicate the value of non-physical aspects.

Moreover, the UNESCO addressed the importance of intangible cultural heritage conservation and gave the definition of it in broader scope than before. For places which consist of multiple ethnic backgrounds, the **intangible cultural heritage** is the essential source of an identity deeply rooted in the past. A number of these intangible cultural heritages have already disappeared and many are in danger mostly by modernization and globalization. The issue

⁴ National Parks Service, 2005, "Organic Act" of August 25, 1916, in <http://www.nps.gov/legacy/mission.html>

⁵ UNESCO, 2004, <http://whc.unesco.org/5history.htm>

⁶ UNESCO 2005, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/?search=&search_by_country=&type=cultural®ion=&order=

⁷ UNESCO Paragraphs 36 to 37 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention

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of authenticity and its practical application on heritage conservation is an on-going discussion among experts and practitioners. The Nara Conference of 1994 and the resulting Nara Document on Authenticity could be an important ladder to the advance discussion, and broaden issue and understanding of authenticity. *The Nara Document underscores the importance of the cultural context for heritage conservation and compels us to link judgments of authenticity to a variety of sources of information that permit elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage.*⁸

In summary, the international standard including the evaluation of integrity (or original value) has been applied in various countries. One of the aspects of integrity is 'setting' which is the physical feature expressing the character of the historic place. Regarding this concept, it is useful to highlight the description of setting provide by National Park Service which is widely used in conservation practice.

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the character of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves how, not just where, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space.

Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve. In addition, the way in which a property is positioned in its environment can reflect the designer's concept of nature and aesthetic preferences.

The physical features that constitute the setting of a historic property can be either natural or manmade, including such elements as:

- *Topographic features (a gorge or the crest of a hill);*
- *Vegetation;*
- *Simple manmade features (paths or fences); and*
- *Relationships between buildings and other features or open space.*

These features and their relationships should be examined not only within the exact boundaries of the property, but also between the property and its surroundings. This is particularly important for districts.

⁸ Jokilehto, J. 1996, International Standards, Principles and Charters of Conservation, in Mark, S. (ed.) *Concerning Buildings, Studies in Honour of Sir Bernard Feilden*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann

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The major criteria to evaluate the setting of cultural heritage could be simplified by asking, *is the surrounding area still much the same as during the historic period?*¹⁰ Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to imagine the cultural heritage to be alive without the conservation of its surroundings.

The development of the concept of 'setting' stated in Thai legislation

Thailand signed in the state party of ICCROM since 1967 and World Heritage Convention in 1987, and several years later three cultural heritage site were announced as the World Heritage, namely, Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns (1991), Historic City of Ayutthaya and Associated Historic Towns (1991) and Ban Chiang Archaeological Site (1992). Below are the descriptions of each site.

Sukhothai was the capital of the first Kingdom of Siam in the 13th and 14th centuries. It has a number of fine monuments, illustrating the beginnings of Thai architecture. The great civilization which evolved in the Kingdom of Sukhothai absorbed numerous influences and ancient local traditions; the rapid assimilation of all these elements forged what is known as the 'Sukhothai style'.

Founded c. 1350, Ayutthaya became the second Siamese capital after Sukhothai. It was destroyed by the Burmese in the 18th century. Its remains, characterized by the prang (reliquary towers) and gigantic monasteries, give an idea of its past splendour.

*Ban Chiang is considered the most important prehistoric settlement so far discovered in South-East Asia. It marks an important stage in human cultural, social and technological evolution. The site presents the earliest evidence of farming in the region and of the manufacture and use of metals.*¹¹

⁹ National Park Service 2005, aspects of integrity in National Register Bulletin, http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_8.htm

¹⁰ Chapman, William 2003, The consultancy report for 'Thailand Cultural Environment Project', Cooperation of the Office of Environmental and Natural Resource Plan and Policy, Thailand and Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA)

¹¹ UNESCO 2005, *information and brief description of the World Heritage* provided in <http://whc.unesco.org/>

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It should be noted that all of the World Heritage sites in Thailand retain its historic setting. The remaining of each site is the evidence of how it situated in that place and also expresses the character of the place. Talking about the 'setting' in the conservation system in Thailand, it could be seen in the conservation movement and in the legislation.

The conservation movement in Thailand has started from the establishment of the Archaeological club in 1906 by the King RAMA V. Meanwhile, there were some establishments of private society regarding culture, for example, the Siam Society established in 1904. However, these kind of private organizations have not had much role on the conservation system. Subsequently the Archaeological club was united with other governmental authorities dealing with various fields of cultural heritage, for example, history, literature, drama, music, and so on, by the royal command of the King RAMA VI. The new authority was named the Fine Arts Department (FAD) in 1911. Since then, the FAD became the sole authority in cultural heritage conservation work responsible for the declaration, registration, safeguard, restoration work and daily maintenance.

The safeguarding task became clear after enactment of the protection of Ancient and Artistic Object stealing Act in 1926 and the first Ancient Sites and Objects, Artistic Objects and National Museum Act 1934. It can be said that the enactment of the Act in 1934 was the starting point of restoration work. During 1935-1962 most of the restoration work was stabilization of ruin monuments and ancient buildings. The restoration work was improved and new techniques were tested after the FAD officers have been trained by ICCROM in Italy during 1963-1977. The restoration work in this period tried to strictly follow the Venice Charter, for example, the dates were marked on the new bricks used for restoration in Sukhothai to distinguish from the original bricks. However, one of the characteristics of this type of brick is that since it is easy to look old, as time goes by, the new bricks used for restoration became undistinguishable in a glance.

The turning point of conservation in Thailand could be the launch of the second **Ancient Sites and Objects, Artistic Objects and National Museum Act, 1961 (amended 1992)**, so called 'Monument Act'. This Act empowers the FAD to register the valuable structure in national level. Since the first registration in 1935, so far, there are over 2,200 listed monuments. The only part which seems to concern on 'setting' stated in this Act is in the definition of ancient monument: '*ancient monument*' means *an immovable property which, by its age or architectural characteristics or*

*historical evidence, is useful in the field of art, history or archaeology and shall include places which are archaeological sites, historic sites and historic parks;*¹² In Thailand, the term 'immovable property' means not only the land but also things on/in the land, for example, trees, building, etc. So, each ancient monument could have unique character from how it is situated in the place which could be referred to the 'setting' in the sense of historic value. However, the FAD usually focuses on the restoration technique for the monument, thus the protection of the broader environment in practice has not been seen much.

Since 1992, there has been a new measure for protection the physical environment of a historic property, the 'Enhancement & Conservation of National Environment Quality Act'. Under the idea that cultural heritage is cultural environment, this Act empowers the Office of Natural and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) to declare the conservation zone. The ONEP can work with local authority to launch local regulations and to limit the development in the designated area. However, the designation process depends on the participation of the local authorities, so some historic areas are not protected. According to information provided by the ONEP¹³, they call such conservation area as 'cultural environment' which is the combination of monument and its surrounding. The ONEP divided the protection area to five levels;

- 1 Nucleus; the monument which has a very strict control.
- 2 Preservation Area; the sensitive area or educational area or area which is under the threat and needs strict control.
- 3 Conservation Area; surrounding area of the monument, change in this area might affect the monument, so there are controls but some changes are allowed.
- 4 Service and Management Area; neighboring area which has small effect to the monument, so new development is allowed.
- 5 Atmosphere; the area which is related to the monument (level of control is not mentioned)

In summary, setting has been stated in the legislations for years. The implication of legislation depends on how the responsible authorities interpret it, so in some cases they are not used effectively. Lack of effective cooperation among governmental authorities, especially the collaboration

¹² Article 4 of the *Ancient Sites and Objects, Artistic Objects and National Museum Act, 1961 (amended 1992)*, translated version provided in <http://www.krisdika.go.th>

¹³ Office of Environmental and Natural Resource Plan and Policy 2005, <http://www.onep.go.th/ncecd/natural/art3.html>

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between the FAD and the ONEP, is one of the issues. In this situation, many landscapes have been changed by the industrial and housing development. Moreover, unavoidable threat from tourism activity is becoming a great challenge. As Kuban argues, *'Tourism is a twentieth century phenomenon. You cannot put it aside. One must accept it as a phenomenon that exists, good or not so good. Millions of people travel. One cannot stop them...'*¹⁴ To safeguard the cultural heritage, it is essential to prepare and create the measure to handle this situation. Information system for planning is important and would be useful for local bodies to make wise decision in development plan.

The effort on establishment of the Cultural Environment Conservation System

The project elaborated below is one of the efforts on cultural heritage conservation in Thailand. It is the project 'Thailand Cultural Environment Project' (TCEP) by Thai Government via ONEP supported by Danish Government via Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) in 2002-2005¹⁵.

The cooperation between ONEP and DANIDA in this project started in May 2002. The Danish Government wanted to test the Danish procedures for registering cultural environmental assets, known as Survey of Architectural Values in the Environment, or SAVE, and Cultural Heritage in Planning, or CHIP in Thai context. *The project is in line with Thailand's National Policies and Local Priorities. These include Policy and Prospective Plan for Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality (1997-2016), the Rattanakosin Master Plan, National Canal Committee Policy and its urgent plan on Conservation and Development the Rivers, Ditches and Canals Year 2001 – 2003. It also furthers the objectives of ONEP's three pilot projects in Nonthaburi Province, Amphawa Canal and Bangkok.*¹⁶ Below is the brief description of the character and significance of each site (adapted from ONEP 2003, *Executive Summary Report of Thailand Cultural Environment Project*);

- *The canal environment in Nonthaburi Province: the extensive rural canal environment that still supports traditional lifestyles, the many single detached houses that retain Thai and vernacular designs; its important position as part of the old canal system stretching between Rattanakosin and Ayutthaya.*
- *The canal environment in Samut Songkram Province: the historical importance and relatively conserved state of the wood townhouses along Amphawa Canal; the highly dense structures along the canal; the high potential for cultural related tourism.*
- *Traditional communities in Rattanakosin, the historic area of Bangkok: it provides a dense urban context for testing the methodology; it is recognised by the government as having major cultural heritage importance.*

In all three sites, the common issue is that the local government as well as local people were not aware of the cultural environment value, so the historic structure and landscape were damaged. In this situation, it could be difficult to raise support from decision maker to launch legal measures, economic incentives, or more government investment in cultural environment conservation. Therefore, four major objectives were indicated; 1) to **raise public awareness** of the cultural environment, 2) to **obtain participation from key stakeholders** on the conservation of cultural environment, 3) to **increase knowledge** about local perceptions of the cultural environment, other priority community issues, existing development plans, the socio-cultural-economic status of the population, local organizational capacities and motivations, and other factors, and 4) to **develop a practical strategy** to towards cultural environment conservation in Thailand and to build the capacity to implement that strategy.

To achieve the objectives, ONEP and DANIDA have decided to set the Cultural Environment Conservation System (CECS) based on the understanding that Danish system cannot be applied directly to Thai context. CECS is based on an interdisciplinary and participatory approach comprising; 1) Cultural asset registration (inventory), 2) Socio-economic research, 3) Awareness raising, and 4) Planning. The surveys on three sites, started since April 2003, were used to revise CECS for applying all over the country in the future.

In brief, CECS has two major stages; Wide area study and Detail study. The content in each stage might be different from one place to another depending on the character of the place. CECS needs to be revised after the testing in different regions of the country. However, it would be useful to

¹⁴ Kuban, D. 1978, Conservation of the historical environment for cultural survival. In Holod, R. (ed.) *Conservation as Cultural Survival*, Istanbul: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture. P84

¹⁵ DTCP, ONEP, and DANIDA 2005, *Cultural Heritage Atlas of Rattanakosin*, preface (in Thai)

¹⁶ ONEP 2003, *Executive Summary Report of Thailand Cultural Environment Project* (in Thai)

mention the first model of CECS here as described below.

1 Wide area study

to overview the cultural environment of the province and to plan the further work:

- **Characterization** of the wide area to make the scope of future study and to understand the character of the place. This procedure is based on the secondary data that will show the prominent feature that the survey should focus on. The category for characterization might be type of landscape, type of cultural environment, type of building, etc.
- **Identification** of subjects and areas for further investigation (list of potential cultural environments) that usually use the mapping technique to illustrate the various theme of the place, for example, explanation and mapping of historical, socio-economic, cultural, landscape, and so on. The data of each theme could be shown in the map scale 1: 50,000. In the mapping technique, each layer shows data of one theme, so the area comprised of several layers (themes) could have high significance.
- **Inventory** of cultural environments in the province that will use the survey form to check and to identify the cultural environment character. Generally, the collected data in this procedure should have historical and cultural information, nature and landscape feature, and architectural and built structure feature. Moreover, collected data might be displayed in the map to show the uniqueness of the place, for example, the settlement, agricultural pattern, infrastructure system, location of historical building, landscape, and so on. According to the definition of cultural heritage and cultural environment from various sources, such as UNESCO, the selected area will be delimited as the cultural environment.
- **Prioritization** of cultural environment will be done to select the area for the detailed area study. In the beginning, the criteria for prioritization will be based on the evaluation system of FAD which is the existing mechanism. These three main criteria are; 1) value in various aspects; aesthetic, historic, environment, educational & technological and social value, etc., 2) the present condition and its integrity, and 3) other factor, such as, vulnerability.

2 Detail study

to focus on the uniqueness of certain cultural environment and to investigate the appropriate safeguarding measure including heritage management:

- **Architectural survey** could be divided into two groups; developed structure and individual building. Developed

structure could be dominant architectural features, such as religious structures, building patterns, or selected urban elements. Architectural survey of the individual building will focus on the descriptive character and the check list of architectural elements, such as age, material, number of storey, etc.

- **Trend/ threats/ vulnerability and perception of the local people** will be used to set up the recommendation and strategy for management and safeguarding the cultural environment. Therefore, the understandings on aspects, such as, socio-economic aspect, are needed. Additional studies, such as trends of the development in the area or the functions of the cultural environment, local people's perception on conservation in general and on cultural environment in specific, threats and challenges facing the area and its vulnerability, other social-related information through history, etc. could be done. These studies could use different technique to analyze and record the data, such as, oral history, focus group meeting and questionnaire.

The output of the project will be published to be the reference for the local bodies. Identified cultural environment will be shown in the 'Atlas' of the province which is the map of cultural environment. Conservation technique proposed in each site is also demonstrated as example for the local conservation bodies and local people. Moreover, it could be a way to enhance local participation in conservation process.

Conclusion

The concept of 'setting' has been applied for years in international level, especially the term of setting derived from the integrity aspects provided by National Park Service as **the physical environment of a historic property**.

In Thailand, the concept of setting has been seen in the legislation for four decades but in practice, there were not much concern on the importance of historic property's setting. Though the Thailand Cultural Environment Project started since 2002, the result of this project is still in the testing process. Regarding CECS, one of the outputs of TCEP, there are two points that still need further study. One is the definition of cultural environment, which still is not clear. The definition is the important medium for collaboration among authorities, so it has to be clear enough to avoid misunderstanding. Another point is the way to use the CECS, how to use cultural environment data effectively and who will take action on the conservation work.

Abstract

The international recognition on ‘setting’ has been clearly seen for years. ‘Setting’ is the physical environment of a historic property. It illustrates the relationship between cultural heritage and its surrounding as well as how it is situated. The attention on the setting rose when cultural landscape was taken into the World Heritage Convention in the end of last century. In Thailand, the safeguarding of ‘setting’ has been taken into account since Thai Government realized that many monuments in urban and rural areas were under the threat from the changes of its surrounding both in physical and socio-cultural dimensions. Nowadays, the consideration on the setting of cultural heritage is increasing. Recently, there was cooperation between Thai Government and Danish Government to establish the Cultural Environment Conservation System. The success of this project could bring more attention to the setting of cultural heritage conservation in the long run.