

TOWARDS SUSTAIN- ABLE ECO-CULTURAL TOURISM FOR WATER- BASED SETTLEMENTS ON THE BANKS OF CHAO PHRAYA RIVER : KO KRET,CASE STUDY NONTABURI PROV- INCE, THAILAND

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Abstract

“Ko Kret” is a small island of 4.12 square kilometres in the Chao Phraya River. The community of Ko Kret is a traditional settlement with historical value and identity. The residents are mainly from the Mon ethnic group, and have preserved their culture as expressed beautifully through their lifestyle, architecture and cultural activities, including temples, ancient houses, the style of settlement and the pottery artwork. At present, community development as well as cultural and art conservation facilitate tourism on this island. If the Ko Kret community can both display its way of life and manage the impact of tourism then Ko Kret can be protected as a living historic gem of the Chao Phraya River.

Background : Geographic and Economic Conditions of Thai- land

The Settlements and towns along the Chao Phraya River banks, river canals and islands constitute a unique cultural heritage and national identities. With such characteristics, many water-based settlements on the bank of the Chao Phraya River are attracting and welcoming the tourist industry. Therefore how the objective of this research is to determine water-based communities can achieve a practical format sustainable eco-cultural tourism and benefit from the endeavour is the objective of the paper. This study observe “Ko Kret” as a case study

Thailand is located within the northern tropical Zone between 5° and 21° latitudes at the center of the Indochina Peninsula. It has an area of approximately 514,000 square kilometres. The geographical outline of the country may be compared to an axe or a pork chop with the Malay Peninsula as the handle. The maximum distance from north to south is approximately 1,648 kilometres, and from east to west is 806 kilometres. The country has about 740 kilometres of coastline on the western side of the peninsula. Thailand has common frontiers with Laos on the north and east, with the Union of Myanmar on the north and west, and with the Kingdom of Cambodia (Khmer Republic) on the south and east. The peninsula of Thailand is bounded on the south by Malaysia and partially on the west above 10° latitude by the Union of Myanmar.

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Economic development in Thailand has been guided by a sequence of five-year plans since 1961. The government has attempted to create the necessary conditions for the private sector to participate in economic development and growth. A high level of Economic growth has occurred since 1960, with per capita income doubling between 1960 to 1981. The overall average growth rate is estimated to be 5.5 percent. The economy is based on agriculture and its main export is rice. However, among sectors of production, agriculture has seen the smallest share of the increasing gross national product. Sectors outside agriculture have become the important revenue generators, especially manufacturing utilities, banking, and services. Bangkok, the primate city, dominates all other urban areas of the country and exerts a major influence on the national economy. With a population of some 8.8 million in 1995, the Bangkok Metropolitan Region accounts for 45 percent of Thailand's urban population and 16 percent of total population.

Between 1985 and 1994, half of the total national growth was due to economic activity in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. With trade and industrialization policies directed to stimulate growth, 58 percent of all non-agriculture; economic growth was generated only in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region.

History

"Ko Kret" is a small island with 4.12 square kilometres in the Chao Phraya River. The island was man-made, as a result of cutting a canal to make a short-cut in transport and communication at a

prominent bend in the river. The canal was cut in 1772 during the time of King Taisa of the Ayutthaya Era. At that time, the land that was separated by the canal did not form an island in the real sense of the word, because the original "Lad Kret" was only a narrow passage. As the current forced a change in the direction of the river over time, the canal widened due to erosion and the characteristics of an island were discernable, and the island of Ko Kret.

Originally, Ko Kret was a home for a small number of the ethnic Thai population. Beginning in the time of King Rama II of the Chakri dynasty, Ko Kret became the settlement for migrants of the Mon ethnic group which was pursued by the Myanmar King. Since the time of the Mon migration, Ko Kret has become a lively and growing community based on its major occupation, pottery.

The Settlement and the Culture

Ko Kret settlement has long been characterized by households that are densely located along the edge of the island, due to the need of water for household and agriculture use. The majority of the population is engaged in agriculture. The spatial location of the Mon settlement was determined by the location of the Mon temple, which maintains not only ethnic identity, but also spiritual support. The households are clustered around major landmarks such as temples and schools. The clusters of households are small and some households are scattered among agricultural land. These characteristics make Ko Kret a semi rural-urban community. Its members have a simple way of life, in which commu-

nity members know one another well and help each other in times of need. The simple way of life persists despite the growth of the local industry.

The people of Ko Kret share the same culture as that of the population of Central Thailand. However, Ko Kret people also have their own Mon culture which is distinct and firmly maintained. On the important religious days or occasions, such as Songkran (water festival) and the end of the buddhist lents., there are various plays and traditional Mon classical dances that have been passed on from generation to generation. Another cultural heritage is handicrafts. At first, the crafts produced from clay were useful household items such as cooking pots, in a variety of designs and forms. This provided income for the Ko Kret people. Overtime, clay, the traditional material for cooking pots, was replaced by metal and plastic as result of the modernization process. In response to changes, the form of the pottery was adjusted to the taste and requirements of the modern time. At present, the most popular products are pot plant containers, but the shaping of clay still exists as a cultural heritage to be maintained and passed on. Ko Kret pots are known for their fine, red-black glazed surface and intricate design.

KoKret in the Context of Bangkok Metropolitan Region(BMR)

Ko Kret is a subdistrict of Pak Kret which is one of six districts of Nonthaburi Province¹, with a population of 6,093, Ko Kret forms a small community and plays a role as the rural

fringe of Pak Kret municipality. While the Pak Kret District has been quickly and highly urbanized, the Ko Kret sub-district has seen little change in terms of the physical development.

The importance of BMR to the Country

During the last decade all national economic growth in Thailand was due to activity in the BMA. Bangkok (BMA) is the main center for industrialization and the country's foreign trade. The BMA, therefore, has become the seat of much of the Kingdom's rapid development over the past two decades. The efficiency of Bangkok reflects upon Thailand's international competitive position, ensuring the city will continue to grow. Urban development in the capital has outgrown the administrative boundary of the BMA. There is no clear division between the built-up area of the BMA and the contiguous development in the surrounding provinces. Thus, Nonthaburi municipality, a small town which is only 20 kms. from Bangkok has been the most important

² Nonthaburi is situated in a fertile basin on the bank of the Chao Phraya River. This abundant town is full of fruit and flower plantations as well as historical temples. The town is only 20 kms. from Bangkok and is conveniently accessible by road or river. Nonthaburi can be found in history as a part of the Ayutthaya Kingdom. It was consolidated with Bangkok in 1943 and reestablished as a province in 1946. Nonthaburi occupies an area of 622 square kilometres and is administratively divided into six districts : Mueang Nonthaburi, Pak Kret, Bang Kruai, Bang Bua Thong, Bang Yai and Sai Noi.

recipient of the urban invasion from Bangkok.

Urbanization Process and Growth Direction of BMA

Thailand is classified as one of the less-urbanized countries in the Southeast Asian Region. Around 73% of the population is scattered throughout the rural hinterlands. However, Bangkok, the capital, is clearly classified as a primate city. The area of Bangkok is only 0.29 % of the whole area, but, in 1986, constituted about 11 % of the national population or 69 % of urban population. Its growth rate was 3.8 % compared with 2.5 % of the whole kingdom. Population density in Bangkok is, on the average of 3,700 persons per km².

Unlike cities in developed countries, commercialization, not industrialization, is a major factor for Bangkok's growth. Due to its prime geographic setting in the hub of the country, major domestic products are flown to Bangkok; and industrial products and imported goods are distributed throughout the country through Bangkok. The city is indeed the transportation center not only within the country; but also within this region. Subsequently, a lot of tertiary economic activities are generated to help maintain and develop the growth of the city.

Bangkok's growth can be seen in two respects, namely, the growth of built-up areas and population growth. Considering the growth, developed areas, have grown considerably in the last three decades. The growth pattern is best described as urban sprawl and ribbon development. The effects of the growth pattern include: the intrusion of devel-

opment onto highly productive farm land; excessive infrastructure provision and 'lie-in-wait' vacant land within and around the built-up areas.

Considering the growth corridors of Bangkok, the urban intrusion flow in seven directions to the BMR according to the main roads. The 7 corridors include:-

- The northern corridor following the Vipawadi Rangsit road toward Pathum Thani and Ayutthaya provinces;
- The northeastern corridor expanding toward Chachoengsao province,(out of BMR);
- The eastern corridor expanding toward Chachoengsao;
- The southeastern corridor expanding toward Samut Prakan;
- The southwestern corridor expanding toward Samut Prakan;
- The western corridor expanding toward Nakhon Pathom;
- The northwestern corridor expanding toward Nonthaburi.

Problems of Ko Kret

Before the economic crisis of Thailand, Ko Kret had faced many problems. Several because very serious at the beginning of the economic crisis of the country in 1996. These problems can be grouped into five aspects: (I) infrastructure; (ii) land use; (iii) economic; (iv) social; and (v) environmental.

Infrastructure problems

-Transport problems. It was difficult to reach the mainland and boats were the only means of transportation. In addition, the conditions of the roads on the island which had been constructed a long time ago were in need of repair;

-Lack of electricity. The households that were scattered among agricultural areas did not have access to electricity because electric poles had not been constructed to reach these areas;

-Lack of drinking water. The majority of residents uses rain water that they collected during the rainy season and some households used drilled underground water, which was insufficient for the whole year's use. Water for household use was taken from the river and canals, but at that time the water was unusable due to pollution from garbages and community sewage.

Land use problems

-Of the total land area, agricultural land accounts for the highest proportion of land. However, agriculture is not the major nor popular occupation; the majority of agricultural land was left unused;

-The settlement of households in certain areas was too dense, which made them at risk of fire;

-The pottery factories posed a number of negative effects on the community.

-The heat and smoke from the pottery kilns raised the temperature and reduced the natural oxygen.

Economic problems

-While the agricultural land comprised the majority of the land area, it could not bring in the highest proportion of income to the people;

-The pottery industry, though not faced with serious problems to the extent that factories had to be closed down, was not growing as quickly as before.

Social problems

The most serious problems found were drugs and gambling.

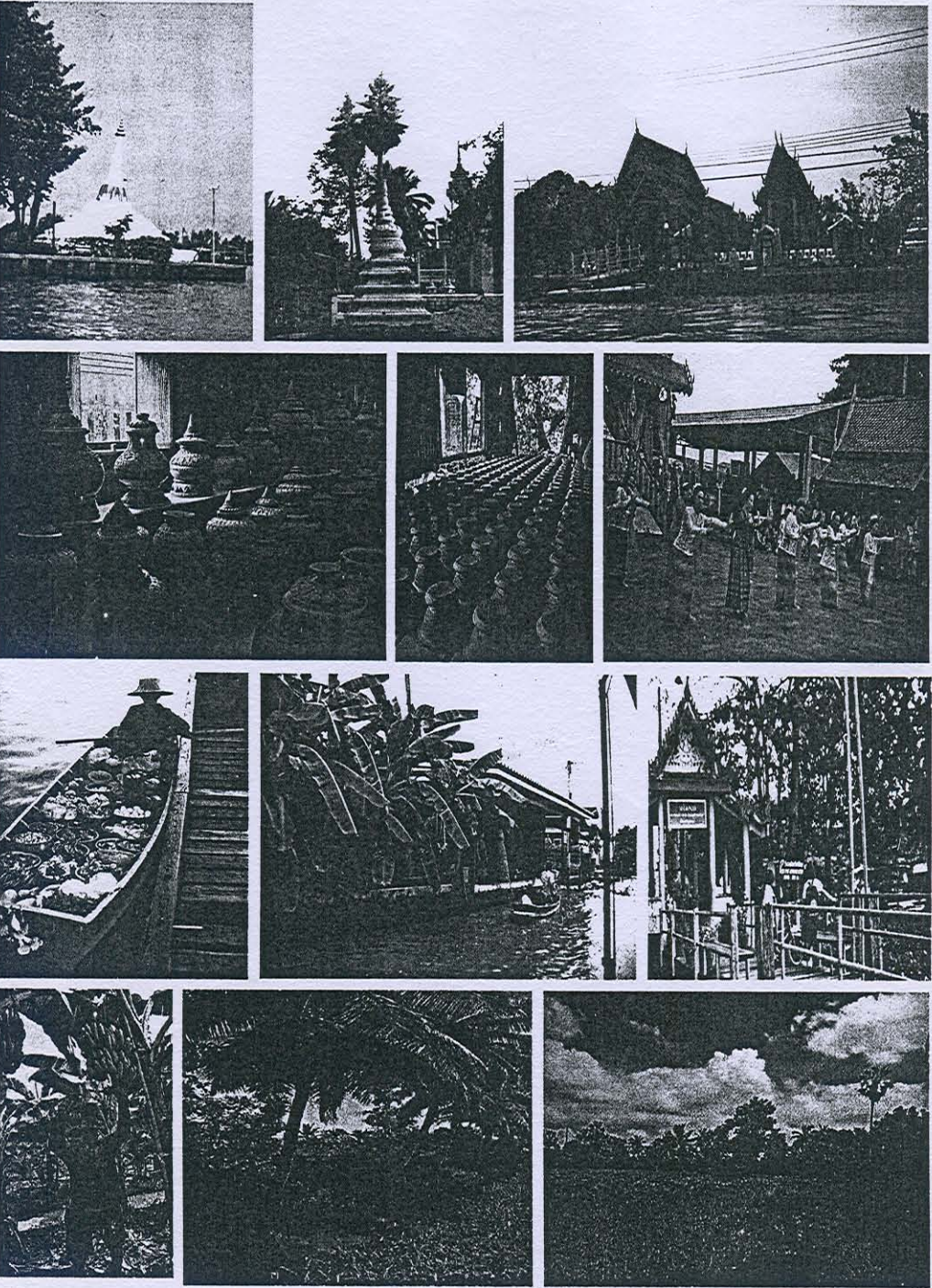
Environmental problems

Most were water-related such as flooding, and water pollution. Siltration of canals, lowered quality of soils, garbage, noise pollution and air pollution.

Tourism Development in Ko Kret

Eco-tourism was recommended as the strategy to develop Ko Kret Island. Its tourism potential was indicated in 1993 by the researchers from the Environmental Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University who worked for the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The tourism plan provided in 1993 was not implemented until 1998, when the central government (by TAT) announced "Amazing Thailand" for tourism promotion. It is accepted that "tourism" must be one of the tools of the country to alleviate the economic crisis. The policy was adopted and practiced by Mr. Wacharin Rojanapanit the sheriff or "Nai Amphoe" of Pak Kret District at

Historical Value & Identity of Ko Kret



that time. He was successful in organizing the collaboration among Ko Kret people. This established the collaboration between the community and the government through the mediator, the sheriff. No one can deny the charming attraction of Ko Kret itself. The historical value and identities of Ko Kret co-habitation are as follows:

1. The “living together” of ethnic groups including, Mon (43 %), Thai and Chinese-Thai (42 %) and Moslem (15 %) create cultural of the island.

2. The residents of the Mon community have preserved their culture and exposed it beautifully through the way they live, architecture and cultural activities, e.g. Temples, ancient house and settlement styles.

3. The pottery artworks of the Mon are very finely crafted.

4. The riverine and canal settlement, the natural environment, and especially, the friendly and sincere welcome of the Ko Kret people to visitors is the intrinsic tourism attraction.

Some Sites to Visit at Ko Kret

Wat Poramaiyikavas

Mon people treasure this wat as the centre of their merit making and festivals. It is also the depository of the Buddhist Scripture in Mon language: “Phra Nonthamunin”, the official Buddha statue of Nonthaburi and a Chedi (pagoda) in Mon style, the symbol of the wat. It was built in 1774 during the reign of King Taksin the Great and still stands distinctly at the bank of the river. Inside

the U-bosoth building, there are beautiful mural paintings in the Thai style. The temple has its own small museum displaying some personal effects of King Rama V.

Wat Phai Lorm

The first wat built by the Mon people. It is the most beautiful in Ko Kret. It contains the finest U-bosoth and an unique chedi.

Wat Sao thongthong

This wat was built in 1770 and restored during the reign of King Rama IV. The name of the wat was given the name because a special post decorated with a golden swan at the top resides there. A swan or “Hong” represents “Hongsawadee” the former capital of the Mon people.

Wat Yai Sawang Arom

This wat is located west, on the mainland of Ko Kret, Krom Phra Wachirayan waroros gave it the name in 1920 when he rested there for 17 days. The name means “very happy or satisfied.” A remarkable aspect is that thousands of fish scramble over each other when given food. Giving food to the fish is done for merit and amusement.

Pottery-making

Nonthaburi province adopted the Mon earthen water pot as its symbol for the provincial logo due to its intricate, exquisite and fine craftsmanship. This craft preserved the Mon traditions and culture, since the majority of Ko Kret

Mons are involve in this industry. Perchasing this artwork is disarable for those who want to remember Ko Kret.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The community on Ko Kret is a traditional settlement within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. It is located at the fringe of the growing Pak Kret town. The tourism development can be expected to be increased in terms of both the number of tourists and the entertainment activities. At present, tourism on this island can be regarded for the community development as well as the cultural and art conservation. With the income from tourism, the people enjoy the positive economic impacts.

Since Ko Kret is a peaceful sanctuary for urban dwellers who want to be away very quickly leave the urban calamity, the number of tourists might exceed the capacity of the island. Tourism could possibly be over commercialized. Leading to the end of tourism within the frame of respect, appreciation and friendship. When tourists become boss, the sustainable development and conservation of this settlement can not exist. To prevent that unwanted situation, an attitude of restraint and self-sufficiency should be realized, as a part of the economic development concept. If, public participation in the tourism development of Ko Kret continues to be promoted by the government, residents can be a part of the process and Ko Kret can be protected as the living historic gem of the Chao Phraya River.

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