

Cultural Landscape in Urban Areas: The Remnants

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Abstract

Urban areas are seen as places and centers on which people, in the old time and of the present days, have carried out myriad activities. To facilitate such needs, these people have been fascinating shaped and built urban environment where roots of their cultures have been laid as their cultural landscapes. The components of the urban areas have been changed through time responding to the needs of the successive inhabitants. Few parts still remain untouched; many are removed or modified. This paper will explore the elements of cultural landscapes in urban areas, with respect to physical aspects, in major cities in Thailand. It is hoped that the study will help further understandings of the cultural landscape concepts and components in today's time.

Keywords: cultural landscape, urban areas, Thailand

Introduction

Cultural landscape is a term that came into general use in geography in the 1920s by Carl O. Sauer, a professor of the University of California at Berkeley. He developed a school of cultural geography which focused on the cultural landscape concept. The definition of the cultural landscape was then proposed as the forms superimposed on the physical landscape by the activities of man. The forms on that landscape result from cultural processes belonging to cultural groups and their successors who contribute to the development (De Blij, 1977).

The term "Cultural Landscape" can be seen as two combining words: culture and landscape.

"Culture", in a general dictionary, means the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time. It consists of people's beliefs and their values (religious, political), institutions (legal, educational, governmental), and technology (skill, equipment). Culture is the way of life of a population - the way of doing things and the kind of behavior they have learned and transmitted to successive generations. It is expressed in the ways people communicate, in the way they perceive and exploit their resources, and in the way they organize that part of the earth that is

theirs (De Blij, 1977). The word "culture" is rooted from "cultivate" which means "develop"; thereby, a culture is cherishment of a society.

"Landscape", in a contemporary dictionary, denotes a portion of land or scenery which the eye can view at once. It refers to a picture or image of the land, as well as the land itself. Landscape is the topography we see and the terrain we travel through. Included are the fields, the cities and the mountains (Wylie, 2007). It is also a unified synthesis and arrangement of material forms and objects (De Blij, 1977).

Regarding the cultural geography, the cultural landscape is the composite of human imprints on the surface. It consists of buildings, roads, agricultural fields and other development with tangible and intangible characteristics. Smells, sights and sounds, for examples, are intangible qualities which create an atmosphere - personality of a place (De Blij, 1977). Cultural landscape is the outcome of interactions between cultural and natural forces. It is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent; the natural area is the medium; the cultural landscape is the result (Sauer, 1963). Many geographical scholars proposed that the cultural landscape concept reveals visible, material evidence of culture in the landscape - the type and spatial distribution of built forms and artifacts (Wagner and Mikesell, 1962). It is accepted that culture can be distinguished by specific traits such as distinctive agricultural and architectural practices. The shape, form and structure of a given landscape which reveal characteristics, trace, distribution and affectivity of the human culture that had inhabited and molded it can be described (Wylie, 2007). Culture spreads and distributes over the earth's surface in natural and urban areas. The cultural landscape in urban areas includes several facets; architecture is one of the good elements which can well define cultural groups.

In cultural landscape, architecture is expressed in 2 salient ways. One is permanent structure which is exceptional in functions, durability, form and configuration. This kind of architecture, with expression of ideas and aspirations of the culture, is generally associated with religion and government. The other kind of architecture is utilitarian architecture or domestic architecture. Its characteristics are ordinary, lesser important and thus lesser expressive of the culture as a whole (De Blij, 1977). This structure includes houses and miscellaneous buildings. Notwithstanding the degrees to which architecture is expressive of the culture, it has long dominated cultural landscape in urban areas.

Other than architecture, several urban components with respect to physical aspects, such as roads, bridges, water courses, planting trees, public arts and sculpture, as well as towns' wall and moat, are associated with cultural landscape. These elements have direct, visible impacts on cultural landscape. The impact varies from culture to culture and from one time period to another. It is said that landscape is dynamic. It does not remain the same when conditions change. The remains carry information necessary for understanding the composition and structure of the old times. In order to understand the past, more or less, conservation is needed. However, conservation of cultural landscape requires preservation of traditional land use practices, buildings, walls and other components (De Blij, 1977). There might be questions why we need to maintain such things. Here comes the opponent. Since landscape is dynamic, we may let it change as time goes by. Evidently, there are several practices to deal with cultural landscape in urban areas.

Thereby, this paper is aimed to provide some information regarding the changes through time, more or less, of urban elements in cultural landscape of Thailand. It seeks remnants from the past and compares today's conditions, as well as explores how cultural landscape has been treated. The urban areas investigated include small parts of old towns in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, two major cities of Thailand. The information gained is expected to further understandings of the cultural landscape in these urban areas.

Study

The Office of the Board for National Culture, Ministry of Culture (2007), has issued a document relating to cultural landscape. It describes that: according to the differences pertaining to characteristics of an area, contemporary users' needs, and values of an area, there are various approaches to manage cultural landscape. However, these approaches are not exclusive to others. They can be used as a combination and an application. To treat cultural landscape, the management approaches can be divided into six methods.

1. Maintenance
2. Preservation
3. Restoration
4. Reconstruction
5. Adaptation
6. Development and New Creation

1. Maintenance

Maintenance is the first step to manage cultural landscape to be in a good condition by cleaning and up-keeping an area. It is also to safeguard the cultural landscape and its elements by regular monitoring. If there were any damages or impairment on interested areas, the problems will be easily noticed. Consequently, promptly maintenance can be conducted. This management approach is greatly effective and inexpensive. To solve a problem right after it is found is more practical than to solve the problems long left and spread around.

2. Preservation

Preservation is to keep an existing and present condition of the cultural landscape and its elements. This approach is usually employed in the areas which have no connection with contemporary uses, such as historic buildings and sites. Such areas, evidences of the past and ancient civilizations, are mainly valued for education and tourism. Techniques used include sheltering archeological sites and sustaining ancient structures, for instances.

3. Restoration

Restoration is to repair and improve cultural landscape and its elements to be in conformity with original conditions. However, such amendment should be distinguishable from originality. It is noted that tarnishing and incongruous objects may also be removed. This approach is aimed to strengthen the intangible value of an area, by interpretation, for spiritual significances and education benefits. Interpretation is important for make understandings of cultural heritages and, as a result, successful conservation. Restoration will provide clear images of an area to be recognizable its values.

4. Reconstruction

Reconstruction is to rebuild dilapidated or lost cultural landscape and its elements in an original condition. This approach needs high quality and quantity of information and knowledge. Construction may lack authenticity. However, it is appropriate for an area which is able to support contemporary uses or affirm spiritual values.

5. Adaptation

Adaptation is to change an original function of cultural landscape and its elements to new ones. Significant values should be taken into account. Such adaptation will also respect existing condition and activities on the area. Physical aspects of such changes including type, size, scale, color and texture, for example,

should be resemble, but not imitate, to the original. Thus, originality will not be confusing.

6. Development and New Creation

This management approach is to develop and create new structures on an area. It greatly impacts on cultural landscape and its elements. For a conservation aspect, it can be conducted to maximize the use of its community, and to respect the originality. Any impact on cultural and natural resources should be avoided. Sustainability is aimed. Therefore, development and new creation requires contemplating analysis and brainstorming. However, in urban areas, regardless a conservation concern, there are so many development and new creation which impacts on the environment. The concept of sustainable development is thus urged and aimed.

According to the management approaches, two case studies in Thailand are reviewed. First is in the old town of Bangkok; second is of Chiang Mai. Not considering a statistic basis, the study is simply conducted as a pilot project and humbly conveys the researcher's expression on the management approaches to cultural landscape and its elements in urban areas. Old photos, taken 40-110 years ago, of cultural landscape and its elements in each city are sought. Then pictures of those areas, in a present time, are taken at the same view as those of the old ones. It is to explore changes whether they are maintained, removed, renovated, or else, regarding to the management approaches previously revealed. A summary of the study follows.

Case Study: Bangkok

There are 28 black-and-white old photos, taken 50-100 years ago, of cultural landscape and its elements in the old town of Bangkok. Included are the pictures of the grand palace, palaces, temples, shop houses, roads, canals, a river, monuments, bridges, and government buildings. The scenes of these photos are also taken in February 2008 in order to compare with the old ones. The management approach employed to the cultural landscape and its elements is examined. The approaches are individually and mutually used. Nine pairs show a maintenance approach in conjunction with either a development and new creation approach or a reconstruction approach. This may due to the fact that only maintenance cannot keep an area alive in an urban growth. Moreover, there is no pair yielding a preservation approach. Two pairs reveal a restoration approach combined with a maintenance approach and a development and new creation approach. Only a pair shows a reconstruction approach used together with a development and new creation approach. Six pairs employ an adaptation

approach. There are quite numbers, twenty one pairs, reveal a development and new creation approach.

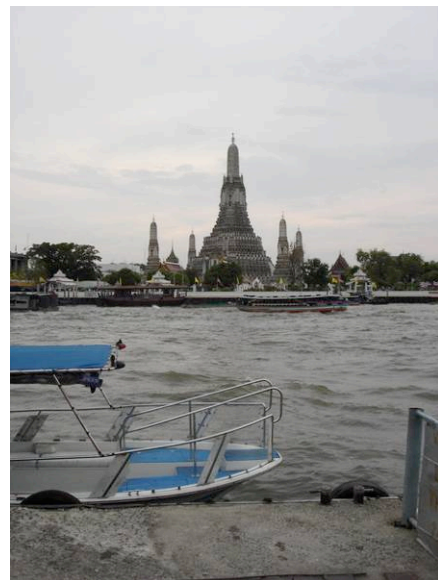
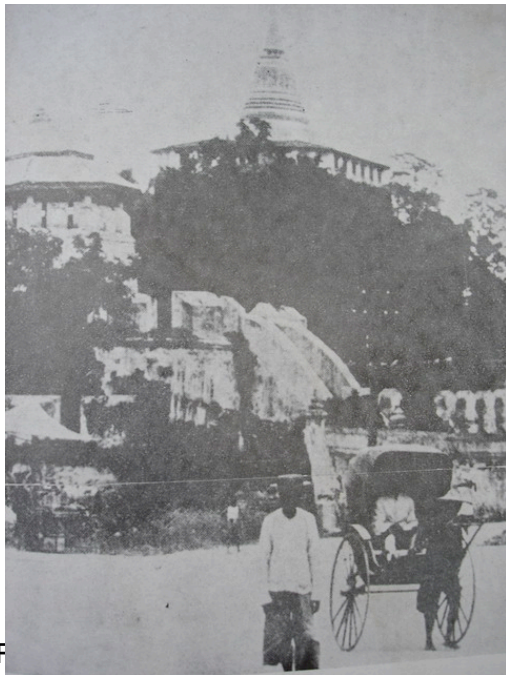


Fig. 3 Reconstruction and Development and New Creation



Fig. 4 Adaptation



Case Study: Chiang Mai

There are 27 black-and-white old photos of Chiang Mai taken around 50-110 years ago. They show cultural landscape and its elements, such as moats, city walls, temples, roads, a market, a river, bridges, a public building, and monuments. The scenes of these areas are taken at the same view, in February 2008, to compare with the old ones. The management approach employed to the cultural landscape and its elements is examined. Some today's scenes show that there is one approach managed on the areas; others reveal one or two approaches employed. According to a maintenance approach, the compared pictures unveil there are 2 areas maintained as the yesteryears with some new development nearby. Among 27 pairs of photos, there is no show of a preservation approach. Eleven pairs of photos reveal a restoration approach with new development surrounds. Most of them are the scenes of temples, moats and city walls. There is a pair showing a reconstruction approach. Two pairs unveil an adaptation approach with development nearby. Majority of scenes, fifteen pairs show a development and new creation approach.



Fig. 6 Maintenance



Fig. 7 Restoration

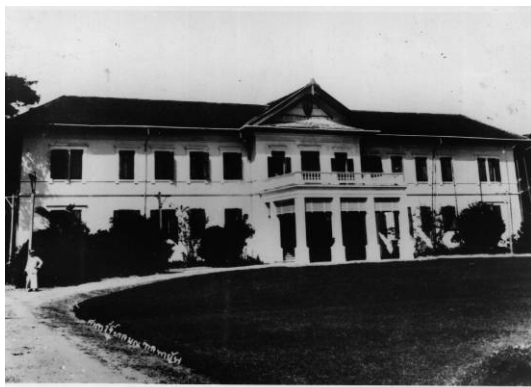
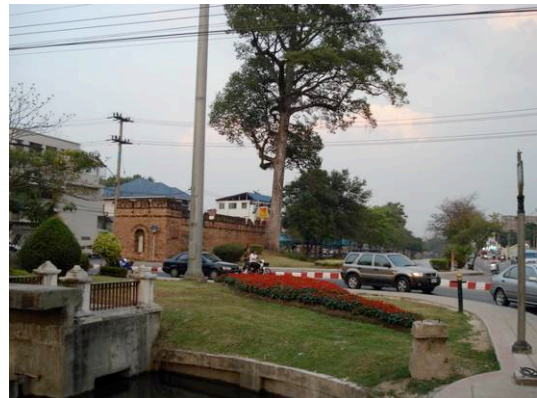


Fig. 8 Adaptation





Fig. 10 Development and New Creation

In summary, within two major cities selected, the least common approach used in the management of cultural landscape and its elements is a preservation approach and followed by reconstruction. It is suspected that preservation is too difficult to be accomplished in urban areas, where a city expands, and preservation may prohibit new development. Regarding a reconstruction approach, it needs lots of information and knowledge to work on; therefore, it is not much preferred. Surprisingly, a maintenance approach and a restoration approach are usual management practices in the case studies. However, maintenance is not solely used to get successful results. It is frequently conjunct with a development and new creation. It is found that a restoration approach has often been utilized on city walls, moats, and temples. An adaptation approach is also practical in urban areas, where land is high-valued, since old buildings can be kept for cultural benefits while such buildings are also in use. Lastly, it is found that a development and new creation approach is widely precedent in urban areas due to the nature of city growth. The cities require land for new development; therefore, old buildings are replaced with new creation.

Conclusion

The paired photos studied lead to an understanding that there are several changes in urban areas within 40-110 years. Cultural landscape and its elements have been altered, adapted and removed through time. According to the Office of the Board for National Culture, Ministry of Culture, there are six approaches to manage cultural landscape: maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation, and development and new creation. They can be combined and applied so as to obtain successful management and result the remnants for people of today and tomorrow to possess.

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