

A Challenge to Conserve Moklen Ethnic House: Case Study in Tubpla Village, Phang Nga Province, Southern Thailand

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Abstract : Moklen is a sub-group of ethnic minority in Thailand. In the past, they were vagabonds of the sea. Their livelihood relied on the sea but they built temporary shelters to avoid strong wind and waves during monsoon season. Recently, they have permanently settled on land along coastal area and mangrove forest in Phang Nga and Phuket Province, Southern Thailand. Moklen people have their own housing culture: the Moklen ethnic house was built from local natural materials, indicating a unique structure and design. Its wooden structure is joined by rattan ropes. The construction process is very unique because of using body-based unit of measurement for design and construction. However, there are several threats for those unique structures. One of the most important threats on Moklen ethnic house is tsunami. Especially the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami caused widely damage to Southern Thailand and Phang Nga province was the most affected area. In that time, Moklen villages which are located along the coastal area also affected calamitously. In order to recover the damage in affected villages, mostly new modern style houses were provided by aid agencies. This process has caused a significant impact on Moklen housing culture. Not only tsunami, but also modernization has an influence on the changing appearance of the Moklen houses and the effect of modernization has been started to experience before the tsunami. As a result, local construction knowledge is very limited nowadays because the number of elderly people in Moklen has been decreasing drastically. Last but not the least, restrictions of construction materials which are originally provided from accessible mangroves, create limitations in building a Moklen house. In particular, after the Reserved Forest Act, wood chopping without any permission has become illegal. These are some of the most important reasons for Moklen ethnic houses to disappear. Nevertheless, according to the results of field surveys done in 2013 in Phang Nga province, it is found out that some Moklen ethnic houses are still available in Tubpla Village, but only a few. Next survey in the same area in 2014 showed that number of Moklen houses in the village has been started to increase significantly. That proves that there is a high potential to conserve Moklen houses. Also the project of our research team in February 2014 contributed to continuation of Moklen ethnic house. With the cooperation of the village leader and our team, it was aimed to construct a Moklen house with the help of local participants. For the project, villagers revealed the building knowledge and techniques, and in the end, project helped community to understand the value of their houses. Also, it was a good opportunity for Moklen children to learn about their culture. In addition, NGOs recently have started to support ecotourism projects in the village. It not only helps to preserve a way of life, but also contributes to preserve indigenous knowledge and techniques of Moklen ethnic house. This kind of supporting activities are important for the conservation of Moklen ethnic houses.

Keywords : conservation, construction project, Moklen Ethnic House, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami

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