

2.2 Arts and Culture, Historical / Archeological Heritage and Local Wisdom

The Songkhla Lake Basin has long been a place where arts and cultures have nourished and flourished. In prehistoric era, human settlements were established along limestone caves in the west as well as on hill forests. Later they moved down to alluvial plains and coastal shores, established contacts with Indians and Arabians and developed communities on the Sathing Pra Peninsular circa 7th – 13th century A.D. named "Sathing Paranasri" or Sathing Pra City. Ancient settlements dotted the peninsular of prominence include the ancient Sathing Pra Town, which had developed into a large settlement with center at Ban Chathing Pra, Tambon Chathing Pra, Sathing Pra district, Songkhla province. Developments later degenerated and Muang Phattalung on the west of the Lake sprung up at Bang Kaew circa 14th – 15th century A.D. together with Muang Songkhla on the eastern shore circa 16th – 17th century A.D. Development of Songkhla actually accelerated circa 17th – 19th century A.D. with 3 governing centers: Muang Songkhla at Hua Khao Daeng, Muang Songkhla at Laem Son, and Muang Songkhla at Bo Yang. The area around the Lake prospered socially and economically, together with arts and culture, and represented a center of contact with various foreign civilizations such as Chinese, Malayan and western European - not to mention other cultures within Thailand. These have combined, intertwined and melted together ways-of-life to the extent that localized uniqueness resulted and passed down for generations as local wisdom to the present SLB.

2.2.1 Arts and Culture

These consist of matters relating to religions, beliefs, traditions, crafts and handicrafts, languages and literatures, viz.

(1) Religion

The Songkhla Lake area is an old settlement establishment, people have long embraced beliefs on ghosts and holy spirits. After religions and rituals propagated from India reached SLB, Bhuddhism and Bhrama religions were adopted. Later when Islamic religion from Malaya and Indonesia arrived, interwoven mixtures of ancient beliefs and more recent religions had created a society of togetherness. Brief details of these are as follow:

- **Bhuddhism:** Bhuddhism spread to SLB ca. 7th to 14th century A.D. Lanka Vong Sect Bhuddhism initiated establishments of several prominent temples such as Wat Kian Bang Kaew, Wat Sa Tung, Wat Sathing Pra (Wat Chathing Pra) and Wat Pa Koh. Approx. 580 temples and monasteries can be listed.
- **Islam:** Islam is the second largest religion worshipped by SLB denizens after Bhuddism. The religion reached SLB during Ayudhaya Period. At Songkhla, evidences suggest that in 1607 A.D., during the reign of Pra Aega Thosaros, Dato Mogaul – a Muslim – had requested an area around Hua Kao Dang (in Songkhla) to be bequeathed for settlement. Many Muslims from other places joined the growing community. However, during the Rattanakosin Period, many Muslims from Songkhla and Sai Buri were on several occasions transported to Phattalung.
- **Other Religions:** *Bhrama religion* has long prospered in the region brought in by fleeing Indians during the reign of Asoka the Great when he raided Galinggaraj province in India. The religion influences and intermingles with Bhuddism and ancient beliefs. *Christianity* also reached SLB, though at lesser extent. It is postulated that Christianity reached SLB during the Ayudhaya Period when Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish missionaries entered. Churches have not been established much until late 20th century A.D.

(2) Beliefs

Besides prominent religions, SLB folks have embedded faiths in a myriad of ancient beliefs in their daily living. Main characteristics are mixtures of ancient sectarian rites, religions and longtime continuously held traditions by Chinese descendents. Examples are beliefs about former life and reincarnation, heaven and Hades, as witnessed in the performing arts "Nora".

(3) Traditions

SLB has long developed socially and culturally. It has been in touch with various other cultures, be it within or without the region. This has shaped SLB traditions both in similarity and in uniqueness to other cultures such as in attires, food consumption styles and local traditions.

(4) Arts and Handicrafts

SLB boasts ancient ruins, relics and crafts that are outstandingly unique such as the ancient **Grottos at Khao Ku Ha** in Sathing Pra district, Songkhla province; **Lankan-Style Coral-based Pagoda** at Wat Chedi Ngam, Ranot district, Songkhla province; **Sino-Portugese Buildings** in Nakorn-Nok Nakorn-Nai area in the Songkhla Municipality; **Handicrafts** that are uniques and outstanding such as

Ko Yor textile, Sathing Mor pottery, woven Kra Chute, Nang Talung effigy from cow and buffalo hide, etc.

(5) Language and Literature

SLB uses language and literature to communicate, relate and express thoughts that are locally unique. Local wisdom, civilization and identity bind them together. Various cultures grouping together render a multitude of languages and writings in forms of legends, folklores and etchings. Each of which is highly localized: **Local speeches** that bore marked accents and wordings to the general Thai tongue, **Legends** that are passed on verbally and/or literally, such as those about Ko Nuu Ko Maew and Khao Pu - Khao Ya, **Folklores** that reflect ways of life of individual groups, **Etchings** that are more permanently written or engraved historical records, better knowns are the Sultan Sulaiman engraving and Sum Rong stone tablet.

Problem Issues

Though arts and cultures in the Basin have long since prospered, in-depth penetrating researches are but few. Conservation and resurrection in standardized development formats are scarce and hence it is vital to be more serious on studies in response to needs for more local public participation and less common conflicts.

2.2.2 Historical and Archeological Heritage

Historical and archeological heritage of national stature include ancient settlements, temples, chedi (pagodas), caves, etc. Ample evidences found in SLB are:

(1) Ancient Settlement

These are discovered across SLB on sites where development centers once established. Major or primary ones are settlements of Munag Phattlung and Muang Songkhla. Minor or secondary ones are Muang Pra kerd, Muang Charad, Muang SriChana, Muang SaTung, Muang Pa Koh, Muang Sathing Pra, for example.

(2) Temple and Chedi (Pagoda)

Principal places of worship and faith in SLB are temples comprising chedi, chapel, minster, mass hall, Bhuddha icon, and monk residences.

(3) Ancient Ground

Grounds of the cavern category are found on limestone hills in SLB. These were either dwellings for prehistoric folks or burial caves, many of them later converted to religious sites for rites and rituals for locals. Caves are rich grounds for historical and archeological studies, unfortunately much evidence have been lost, looted or vandalized.

Problem Issues.

Assessment of value/prominence and problem/threat on present SLB heritage employing procedures set by the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) to set priority in the SLB reveal that from the list of 174 sites 25% are of more than 5 values and 48% with 3-4 values. At the same time 6% exhibit more than 5 problem issues and 27% with 3-4 issues each. Overall, heritage environs are of high values but also under serious threats and need to be urgently restored.

2.2.3 Local Wisdom

Situation

Local wisdom stems from accumulation of knowledge and experience plus enlightenment. Wisdom in SLB are of 4 principal incubation contexts: natural, creative, physical (universal), and mental (religious). These may be subdivided into: *local wisdom related to professions* such as farming, planting, fishing; *local wisdom related to health cares; nutrition; accommodation; natural resource and environment*. Accumulation and dissipation of knowledge in SLB indicate that local folks in the past were very adept to live well within the bound of natural resources and environments.

Problem Issues

Harvesting and adopting SLB lifestyles according to indigenous natural *resources* and surroundings without over-exploiting the fragile environment had for generations passed onto successive generations as local wisdom and were adhered to more or less strictly. However, present patterns in the society, particularly the industrial practice in place of agricultural practice that have put emphasis on commerce and financial returns, have induced productions in large quantities that serve needs of huge markets. This phenomenon is influencing a grave change in

attitude from a **“Practice for Living”** to a **Practice for Profit**. Local wisdom have been brushed aside and in places totally ignored, and hence dire needs are required to recall, reconcile and restore them if for SLB viable and sustainable future.

2.2.4 Information Networks on Arts and Culture, Historical / Archeological Heritage

Situation

Information networks in the SLB are groups of organizations both in government sector (including local administrative bodies such as Tambon Administration Office (TAO) and municipality) and private sector that either are responsible or are interested in the upkeep/update of relevant information. Furthermore, several tertiary institutions in the area both governmental and private universities - with one of their missions to support and uphold arts and cultural activities - could also join.

In all provinces there are establishments of cooperating agencies between governmental and private sectors in multi-lateral forms with representative working groups from officers, academics, businesses, and sages. Organization of Local Volunteers for the upkeep of national arts and Cultural Heritage (LV.CH.) established under the Fine Arts Department was founded. Moreover, there exist private agencies/organizations with high degree of awareness on the importance of the above matter. These have been operating in forms of groups, foundations, clubs and networks such as the Dhamma Yatra (Pilgrimage for Environmental, Community and Social Space) Group, Rak Ban Gurd (Home Loving) Foundation, Khao Ban Tad Upstream Forest Conservation Club, Songkhla Nang Talung (Leather Hide Effigy) Club, Monk Education networks in the SLB, etc.

Problem Issues

Although information on arts and culture, historical / archeological heritage in the SLB at present are sufficient in number, application and usage of information for development are not, and cooperation between agencies are not at their best because of weak linkages. There should thus be establishment of formal networks to formulate working directions together, to lay out a master plan for projects and implementations concerning information, and to link together information from all relevant agencies for continuous co-enlightenment, co-developments and common coverage on the topic.