

How to sustain the subject of culture other than to preserve the object of culture?

The preservation experience in Kochapongan

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Abstract

Located at the southern Taiwan mountain area, Kochapongan settlement is an abandon tribute location of Lukai. There were up to 160 households and public spaces still spreading over this traditional territory.

Considering the preservation work, our main research interest is "How to sustain the subject of culture other than to preserve the object of culture?" That is to say, we care both the settlement and the people who used to and want to live there at the same time.

The core question will be how to make appropriate people-settlement relationship established within the preservation in Kochapongan. The crucial task is not only to preserve the people's living and the traditional settlement at the same time in Kochapongan, but also try to closely conjoin them in a dynamic way.

Making the culture and the subject of culture appropriately match to each other will give the central meaning of preservation in settlement scale. The position and meaning of subject would change with different social and spatial context. Therefore, putting people's living back to the social and spatial context of Kochapongan, would intensify the further articulation between the people's living and the physical setting.

In our field study, we found that preserving the settlement founded by ancestors would help the young generation to restore the ethnic dignity of individuals by conserving the traditional crafts such as the ancestral gathering and hunting skills, and the knowledge to build and maintain household. In Kochapongan, the real life thus extends and transforms to actual cultural heritages.

In other word, the formation of individual living style and value will closely articulate with the spatial cultural form of the traditional housing and settlement, and the production of space related to the natural landscape. By doing so, we hope to sustain the subject of culture other than to preserve the object of culture, to maintain and renew the unique human cultures in Kochapongan that creates positive, enduring relationships with the natural world.

1. Our perspectives of the preservation of Kochapongan settlement

● The preservation process and present problems of the Kochapongan settlement

As Kochapongan was registered as cultural heritage ten years ago, the aim set up then is “*preservation of heritage should be a live preservation of the culture,*” “*dynamic preservation,*” or “*integrated preservation.*” Therefore on one hand the buildings, settlement, natural and cultural landscape as living space should be preserved, on the other hand, the territorial history, cultural life and industry should be protected, sustained and developed to get the dual meanings of settlement preservation and community development.” (Wang, 1997)

Under these conditions, three objectives including community networking, revitalizing the territorial industry and reforming the ethnic confidence by recognizing Rukai culture were set up. Among them, the empowerment of community networking is especially the base of the impetus of preservation. However, owing to competitions of public resources between several organizations and relations with different communions, none of them could play the leading role to integrate divergent opinions so that to search for common vision. As a result, no actual action about community networking has been done, not to refer the practice of the other two.

Therefore, during these years after the settlement was been registered as heritage, the preservation of the settlement has only once been carried out in the form of an experiential training of building the traditional house(1998), so that rebuilt a house. Thereafter, under the condition that no investment came into the tribe, only three inhabitants self-built their own houses, while more than one hundred houses are devastated. Without proper management and inhabitation, the paths, rock stairs and structure in and surround the settlement is covered by the overgrowth of the Mexican Sunflower, and construction of some houses are



Type A: The houses which are preserved well and often inhabited



Type B: The walls and elevation are preserved well, only roof of the house is partly or completely collapsed

damaged by the trees' growing. In all, the settlement become more and more destroyed though the spatial context of the settlement still exist. Since the overgrowing vegetation inhibit the access of the people to the houses, construction of more than half of the houses might not be kept without daily maintenance.



Type C: the walls of the house are partly demolished but keep a clear presence of plan

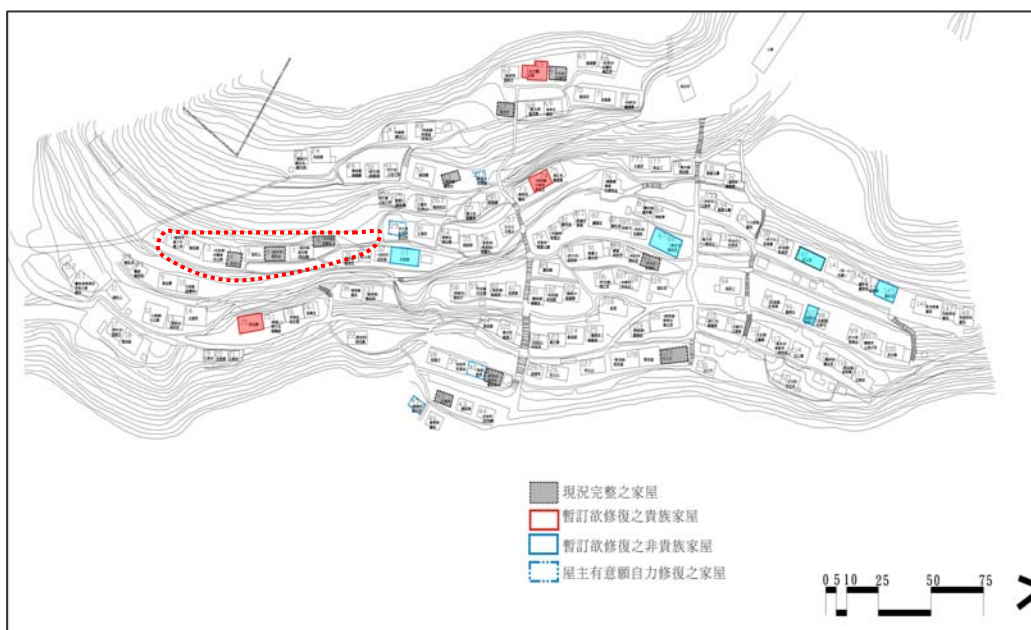
According to the research by *Taiwan University Building and Planning Research Foundation* (2006), there are 163 stone houses in all in Kochapongan. Among them, 11 houses are preserved well and occupy 6.74% of the all. As for those which are almost demolished, there are 45 houses occupying 27.61%.



Type D : More than half of the walls have been demolished

● **The nexus between the inhabitation and the characters of the stone houses**

As the environment where the settlement is and the characters of the stone houses, the sustainable preservation of the settlements rely closely on the inhabitation of people. Were it not for continuous dwelling, the heritage in the mountains will face difficulty in management



The marked part shows the area which are preserved and inhabited in Kochapongan now.

again though been preserved completely. Now that the settlement has moved away, what kind of dwelling mode could be developed in this preservation project?

There's only few preserved houses located in the entrance area of the settlement (marked in the illustration below) with three inhabitants dwelling there, so that the management of the area

As the human activity as concerned, though there are only few inhabitants who can stay in the old settlement, the connection to adjacent eco-tourism route brings new way of use into the settlement. Situated in the surrounding mountains in the Pei-Ta-Wu Mount, Kochapongan is a node of the hiking route in southern Taiwan. On the weekend, some hikers(of the size from 3~50 people) start their route from the new community to Kochapongan for 4-6 hours and stay in the old settlement for a night, then go back next day. They often use the stone houses as accommodation and thus result in a new form of dwelling. The inhabitants and hikers compose the small-amount dwelling mode which sustains the inhabitation and enrich the future vision of the settlement. In our opinion, these ongoing experiences should be integrated into the planning and assessment of the preservation to help examine the future development.

The practice of nostalgia: the transition and transformation during the period from migrating to dwelling.

As the physical and mental condition of inhabitation as concerned, have the Rukai people settled down completely in the new settlement after a migration period span for more than 30 years? This might be question without a standard answer. In fact , perhaps most of people have moved on to migrate to other place to search for new possibility, and some people have adapted or have been adapting to the new home in the new settlement, while part of them could not dwell in the new community and the social context related to it, so that they cast their nostalgia onto the refurbishment of Kochapongan.

Instances of the last kind might be the minority in the tribe, however, their stats show important meaning in the dimensions of settlement and culture preservation.

Here in the case of Kochapongan, nostalgia might bear a potential to become a positive and active driving force. The influence induced by the nostalgia depends on the social supporting the actor could obtain.

Some Rukai people observed that the life and living environment still could not improve their economical life, but cut off their attachment to their mother culture and self-esteem from individuals. Therefore, we could see that the appeal to 'Rebuilding Kochapongan' not only

enacted at the level of aboriginal culture but also affected the living status of individuals through the performance of everyday life of some inhabitants.

There are three types of performance relevant to the Rukai who are inspired by nostalgias as follows:

(1) The first type can be applied to those who consciously stay in the old settlement and can be used to the lifestyle there. They could develop informal small-size eco-tourism on their own economical base so that they might maintain their life without worrying. They know their own cultural background clearer and more completely, and still keep the living experiences and skills to stay in the old settlement.

(2) The second type refers to those who were born in Kochapongan and have kept the childhood experience. They belong to the mid-age generation. This generation group is generally familiar to the setting of Kochapongan. They recognize with traditional social ties and the lifestyle that depends on gathering, hunting and farming. More or less, they command the skills necessary to live in the old settlement.

The migration just occurred to this generation and resulted in their growing up in a changing process. Unstable life makes them less educated so that are lack in occupational skills for ideal job and life in a new modern society. They are right those people who have difficulty in making earnings at home but can not be used to the urban life.

(3) The third type contains those who are about 20- year-old or younge. They leave Kochapongan in the very early years or was bore in the new settlement, so that lose or miss the living experiences in Kochapongan. They learned the old settlement from their fathers, or from the second-hand data. They live as the transformed mode of the Rukai who are used to the life in the plain and Han society. Regarding the recognition and understanding of traditional culture, unlike their fathers, they not only are lack in body experiences but also in inheritance intellectually.

In recent years, based on the living experiences accumulated continuously, media, documentary and campaign of preservation all contribute to the representation of Kochapongan. Accordingly, those who belong to the younger generation more or less are inspired to participate in relevant movements and deeds. However, no substantive acts have been exhibited because the access and supporting system for participation are deficient at the moment.

● **The public sector's influence on the settlement preservation**

Reviewing the preservation process of Kochapongone from 1992 until today, the respected investment that should had been spent on the preservation indeed delayed the work. However, this may result in a chance for the Rukai people to develop their own cognition and understanding in a longer period and so that bring out some potential basis for a better preservation. Under this condition, as an ethnic people which is minority in cultural, economical and social dimensions, the Rukai people avoid a top-down preservation plan proposed and enacted rapidly from outsider's perspective. Therefore, through different recognition, living practices and visions, the possibility of settlement preservation and its interrelations between the Rukai people can be developed deeper and more careful in a process long enough.

● **Our perspective of the preservation in Kochapongan**

Considering the preservation work, our main research interest is "How to sustain the subject of culture other than to preserve the object of culture ?" That is to say, we care both the settlement and the people who used to and want to live there at the same time.

The core question will be how to make appropriate people-settlement relationship established within the preservation in Kochapongan. The crucial task is not only to preserve the people's living and the traditional settlement at the same time in Kochapongan, but also try to closely conjoin them in a dynamic way.

Making the culture and the subject of culture appropriately match to each other will give the central meaning of preservation in settlement scale. The position and meaning of subject would change with different social and spatial contexts. Therefore, it's important to put people's living back to the social and spatial context of Kochapongan, which would intensify the further articulation between the people's living and the physical setting and thus sustain the subjectivity of culture.

Discoursing 3 different levels of the preservation point,

In our opinions, the purposes and recognized values of settlement preservation could be divided in to three levels as follows,

(1) The value of the perceived object: physical and visual aspects of the settlement;

The significance and distinctive character of settlement preservation at this level show in the presence of the architectural form and the spatial structures of the settlement, landscapes of its setting, cultural routes and archaeological sites, which could exhibit the values of the perceived object including social and spiritual, historic, artistic,

aesthetic, natural, scientific, or other cultural values.

(2) The values within the relations between object and subject: intangible values accumulated by the interactions between the inhabitants and the settlement

The more intangible values of settlement preservation at this level lie within the relationships between object and subject, including the organic acts and process and relevant cultural traditions between the inhabitants and the settlement. To be more specific, in the case of Kochapongan, these values could be found in the continuing building system as a kind of local wisdom, the sustaining of the building culture and the passing of the crafts, the cooperation to build as a necessary building process, and the know-how of the application of the natural resources (such as the place to collect stones and woods, etc.)

The relationships in between also derive distinctive character from the tradition for each Rukai man in the tribe to build their own house as a necessary living skill and cultural performance, in comparison with the professionalized skills and crafts monopolized by certain groups of general heritages.

As the notion has been clarified in the Xi-an Declaration (2005),

“These relationships can be the result of a conscious and planned creative act, spiritual belief, historical events, use or a cumulative and organic process over time through cultural traditions.” Though the role of the actor, that is to say, the subject, is not specified, these values within settlement and its context and setting have referred to the intangible but significant interactions that are led by the inhabitants .

(3) The values of the subjectivity between the inhabitant and the settlement

The values embedded at the third level of settlement preservation, yet not been strengthened by relevant charters or declarations, are what been observed and perceived much more in the case of Kochapongan, the subjectivity between inhabitants and the settlement. The subjectivity not only cast influences on the formatting and sustaining of the settlement, but also on the cultural confidence and recognition of the subject, that is, the inhabitants. Therefore, this subjectivity will substantively affect the living status of the individual, and thus act on the communal life and collective values of the group. In the case of Kochapongan, the subjectivity is exhibited in the maintaining and adaptation of traditional life, the way the inhabitants build up their cultural confidence, and the succession of the collective part of the culturally traditional lifestyle of the settlement.

Reviewing the context and characters of the settlement preservation in Kochapongan,

we could see the values of the settlement as a kind of cultural heritage exhibited at three levels as mentioned. Moreover, the value of subjectivity elaborated at the third level is worthy of more attention when the inhabitants and the settlement interact so closely in Kochapongan.

2. Findings in the field about how the people's living status affected by the settlement

In our field study, we found that preserving the settlement founded by ancestors would help the young generation to restore the ethnic dignity of individuals by conserving the traditional crafts such as the ancestral gathering and hunting skills, and the knowledge to build and maintain household. In Kochapongan, the real life thus extends and transforms to actual cultural heritages.

According to our participation experience of the life in Kochapongan and the new settlement, the interaction between people's living status and the settlement has the most obvious presentation on the middle-age generation in Kochapongan. They are exactly the generation mentioned in this paper, which were bore in the old settlement, with living experiences there during their childhood. Until today, they can conduct their life well by applying traditional habits and wisdom when they stay in the original settlement, in terms of gathering, hunting and other management that are necessary for everyday life.

Besides, they are easily used to the life in Kochapongan, though the material dimension of living standard are restricted, adjustment in lifestyle should be take to reply the lack of modern facilities such as electricity and tap water, not to say the general supplying service by consumption system. Everything about living has to be taken care by them.

All of this sounds hard to take. However, we could clearly observe their cultural confidence shown when they completely command their local wisdom inherited from their aboriginal tradition, for instance, during the time they use natural resources at their hand or when they making the necessity for living by traditional crafts.

On the other hand, in Kochapongan, the relationship between individuals transform naturally back to the traditional collective life with the interdependence on the production relation, which focus more on status, seniority, and shared values. Compared to the atomized individual in the Han cultural society outside the mountains, these people experience the transformation of mutual relations in more traditional ways, which are positive and constructive to them.

However, it is totally different when overlooking to the living status of the same group of people staying in the new settlement outside the mountains. Take Hu as an example. Hu is quite active when living in the old settlement. He play the role as a leader who take care of

others in the collective life. But leaving the mountainous area, the traditional skills and cultural habits he have lose the context to dwell in (including cultural context at spiritual level and environmental context at physical level) and thus lose the base to sustain and to transform into general knowledge and skills for labor or work. All the cultural heritage he kept could not better his life in the city, in other word, could not help him enter the economical life under the capitalism's domination. As a result, he could not find a stable job and thus lose the ability and confidence to handle his own life.

This kind of problems happen a lot to the mid-age generation, especially to the male, is one of the phenomenons worth considering most when processing the settlement preservation. What we care is how to substantively improve their living status and how to use the embedded potential among their relations to the old settlement, which might be able to be transformed into the key man power and energy to sustain the preservation work.

Considering general preservation of the historical city or settlement, the trivial relations between people and the settlement (subject and object) among the work are hardly to be possessed well following the change of the society, not to say to become the cultural basis of the preservation, which is a pity. There are lots of instances could be compared, such as the historical city in Li-Chang in Yunnan, or the historical settlement in Kinmen in Taiwan. Since the interaction in between are often excluded from the preservation, the outcome often exhibited by the conservation of the physical settlement without sustaining the contexts that peoples as the subject of culture, the subject of the production of space should dwell in. In the end, people are too much often to be externalized as the object of the settlement, or are totally excluded. What is often resulted in is the subject-object relation between people and space are often transplanted into the level of management, or a more flat relations in the dimension of property.

In brief, the formation of individual living style and value will closely articulate with the spatial cultural form of the traditional settlement, and the production of space related to the natural landscape. By doing so, we hope to sustain the subject of culture other than to preserve the object of culture, to maintain and renew the unique human cultures in Kochapongan that creates positive, enduring relationships with the natural world.

3. Live settlement preservation : memo for preservation inspired from the case of Kochapongan

The preservation of Kochapongan is an ongoing project which could not be given a definite result at the moment. However, we do develop some perspectives inspired by the complicated changes of the nexus between the people and the settlement during the period of more than 10 years. We hope these points as tentative conclusion might

become a memo that could be applied to process preservation. The key points are as follows,

To make a better support for the people to sustain their nexus with the settlement

- To make sure the subject of culture (that is the inhabitants) could participate in the preservation and future development of the settlement.
- To make sure the subject of culture sustained by the preservation so that to improve the cultural diversity
- Settlement preservation is an important tool to improve social justice and should take care of the social state of the subject of culture of the minority

At last, we would like to strengthen again that the relations between the subject and the cultural heritage is important basis for settlement preservation. We should use it as a reference to dynamically adjust the aims and approaches of the preservation. Regarding the relations between the subject and the cultural heritage, it should be better reviewed through a thorough and long-term process so that the core and nexus could be clarify to help build up a more adequate preservation way.

Considering the Kochapongan case at level of physically preservation of heritage, it seems no too much progress in these years. However, as the subject of culture (or heritage)- the Rukai people as concerned, during the 10-year-long period, their multiple recognition and practice about the vision of preservation are worth concerned, whether by individual or by collective efforts. What could be confirmed is that there is critical relevance between the living status of the Rukai people and their potential articulation with the preservation project. Through their dwelling type, we could see how they try to dwell their self physically and mentally in the environmental and cultural context. In other word, it is not enough to learn this project by the approach of preserving national heritage. We should stress on the perspectives of the Rukai people as the subject of the culture, to learn the influences put on the living of an ethnic group and the sustaining of culture, which is so-called “live settlement preservation.”

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