

## Abstract

This thesis studies "ban-ruan" (or a homestead-house) and habitation of central Thai peasants at the community of Ban- Mulao, Bang-Sai district, Ayutthaya province. The village was found about a hundred years ago on a typical lowland floodplain of the Chao-Phraya River Basin. The research describes life patterns of farmers in relation to their house-forms and habitation from early occupation up to present.

Early occupants of Ban-Mulao comprised members of several ethnic groups (Thai, Laos, Mon, Khmer and Chinese) who came to the area for seeking unoccupied pieces of land suitable for wet-rice cultivation. The area was usually submerged during several months of the wet season. Also, a long period of seasonal flooding made the land unable to support perential trees, which could serve as a wind break during monsoonal storms. Early farmers with only an old traditional technology would have, therefore, adapted to such difficult environment. They lived in temporary bamboo-huts raised on piles. Hard working in the rice field required both family and buffalo labours, as well as a community labour for some activities. The habitation unit usually comprised several neighboring houses (each had a kitchen and a buffalo house) with a shared houseyard (for some social and farming activities) and a pond.

Since 1957, with the arrival of electricity and a highway, Ban-Mulao has experienced rapid cultural change. Modern life introduced into the area costed more money than ever before, and could not be solely maintained by traditional farming. Agricultural machines and new other technology have been adopted to increase the production and income. The other way of adaptation was that some young farmers seeked for a new job in the non-agricultural section. As a consequence, a considerable fraction of villagers leaved their home, temporality or permanently, for the urban jobs. Now many of them have their land for sale.

These cultural changes have also been reflected by the house forms and habitation pattern. "Ban" in the new sense comprises only the house and kitchen with more luxuries installed. It is also a habitation unit. The buffalo house and pond have been abandoned. Houseyard, which formerly served as a shared working-space, has been modified for other "private" purposes. These physical changes of the community denote the moving of inhabitants' lifestyle from the mode of community-life (in which people shared the same working space and activities) to that of the private-life (in which individuals tried to keep themselves within their own space). Generally speaking, the private space has been increasing at the expense of the common space. The "ban-ruan" become more a place for sleeping and recreation than for working as ever before.