



The Identities of Paka Kyaw Vernacular Houses: A Case Study of Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province

Sasikan Srisopon

Faculty of Architecture, Rangsit University, Pathumthani, Thailand
E-mail: sasikan.s@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

This article explores the current identities of Paka Kyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province.. The study focused on the history of the settlement of the Paka Kyaw people, specific components and characteristics of the Paka Kyaw vernacular houses, and the identities of the Paka Kyaw vernacular houses in the community. This applied research used the qualitative research method for general information collection. Field surveys, non-participant observations, and unstructured interviews were conducted for data collection. The results of the study concluded that the Paka Kyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community were changed due to the influence of tourism and the development of social and economic systems. In spite of the combined materials, important features that reflected the traditional vernacular houses of the Paka Kyaw people still remained. Bamboo and natural materials were selected as the primary materials for house construction. Their house embraced a simple style with single gable roofs, and a right house size per family. Other important house parts, such as the open space under the house, the stairs, the terrace, living area, and the kitchen with a traditional Thai fireplace were the identities of the vernacular houses as well as the important identities of the Paka Kyaw houses. The results of this study provide insights, which contributes to appreciation and awareness of the potential impacts on the Paka Kyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community.

Keywords: *Identity, Vernacular houses, Paka Kyaw*

1. Introduction

Vernacular architecture refers to buildings and physical environment created by humans in each locality with different characteristics according to the environment to meet the needs of such community. The form of the buildings may be developed from the original form to suit the way of life. This development process requires time to create a unique style (Inpantang, 2018). Anna Dattillo Rubbo's Ph.D. dissertation states that, by studying vernacular architecture, students will understand the social conditions more clearly since it reflects the popular culture hidden in the buildings, which is one of the great creations of humanity (Temiyabandha, 1986).

Ban Mae Klang Luang Community is located at Klang River Basin in Doi Inthanon National Park, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province. The area has abundant natural resources as well as a distinctive cultural tradition. Most of the population in the community is Pga Knyaw Karen ethnic group. The word Pga Knyaw means "human" or I am a "human." They have a simple way of living in the forest, loving peacefulness and nature (Kongcharoen, 2016). The building style and the environment in the community today are still in the vernacular houses or architecture with unique and interesting identities. The vernacular houses are architectural heritages that represent the roots of the landscape culture. The houses built in different periods and contexts can reflect the stories of the area at different times, like a recording device from the past to the present. This also demonstrates cultural wisdom through local architectural craftsmanship (Promsiri, Kingtrakarn, and Prasartsin, 2021). According to the history of the Pga Knyaw in Thailand in the early period, it is believed that they originated from northern Myanmar and Thailand (Anupanpong, (2007). They were immigrants from Tibet due to the effects of the Chinese war and continuously migrated from aggression and oppression from Myanmar to settle in various northern provinces in various watershed areas along the Thai- Myanmar border more than 200 years ago. Generally,



Pga Knyaw houses, with an elevated ground floor, are built from natural materials as influenced by the environment and the climate in the area they settle in as well as their way of life.

Nowadays, Ban Mae Klang Luang Community has been influenced by tourism, leading to the growth of the community's economic system on a more diverse career basis. This affects the physical dimension, such as the expansion of the community and buildings to facilitate the tourists, the Traditional Thai fireplace of residence areas into commercial and service areas, and traffic dense in the tourist season (Payakka, 2017). Despite an abundance of studies of vernacular houses of tribes and ethnic minorities, such as Karen, in various areas of Thailand, no studies have been conducted on Pga Knyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province. The researcher realized the value and importance of Pga Knyaw vernacular houses and local wisdom and therefore investigated the identities of their vernacular houses, focusing on Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai Province. This will contribute to conservation development along with sustainable tourism in the study area.

2. Objectives

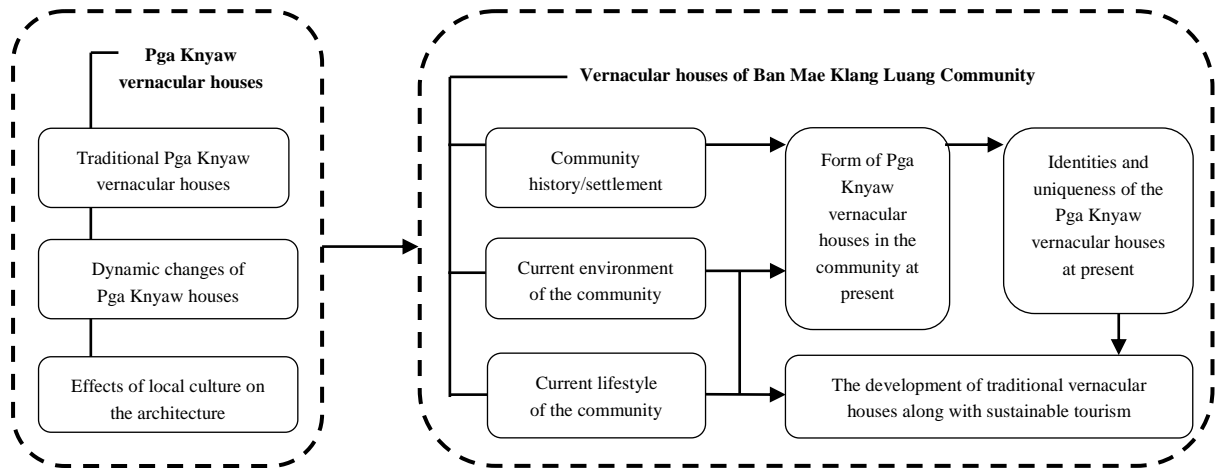
- 1) To investigate the history of the settlement of the Pga Knyaw people in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province
- 2) To study the composition and specific characteristics of the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province.
- 3) To summarize and discuss the identities of the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses and the current environment in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province

3. Materials and Methods

This applied research used the qualitative research method. Data were analyzed and synthesized based on the process as follows:

- 1) Collect secondary data including general, physical, economic, social, cultural, and environmental data as well as ways of life of the Pga Knyaw people in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community
- 2) Collect primary data, both general information and insights of the identities of Pga Knyaw vernacular houses through field surveys, non-participant observations, and unstructured interviews
- 3) Analyze the data to determine the conceptual framework for the study
- 4) Analyze and synthesize data and discuss the important identities of the vernacular houses of Mae Klang Luang Community in the present context
- 5) Provide conclusion and suggestions

Conceptual Framework



4. Results and Discussion

History of community settlement

The community is located in Mae Klang Luang Village, Moo 17, Ban Luang Subdistrict, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province. The community entrance is at km. 26 on Highway No.1009. The area is approximately 1 square kilometer or 600 rai at 1,070 meters above sea level. The area is full of natural resources and is located in Doi Inthanon National Park, the highest mountain in Thailand. Ban Mae Klang Luang is a Pga Knyaw village consisting of three residential areas, namely Ban Ang Ka Noi, Ban Mae Klang Luang, and Baan Sop Hat. This study focused on the area of Ban Mae Klang Luang due to its highest density of residences. Ban Mae Klang Luang was permanently established in 1934, led by the family of Mr. Perlerker who had migrated from Ban Mae Aeb to settle in Ban Mae Klang Luang or in "Mukakloh" in Pga Knyaw Language. Initially, there had been only eight households in total. According to the survey in December 2022, there were about 400 people in 81 households. Most of them were Pga Knyaw (75percent), agriculturist (40 percent), and Buddhist (60 percent) (Figure1).

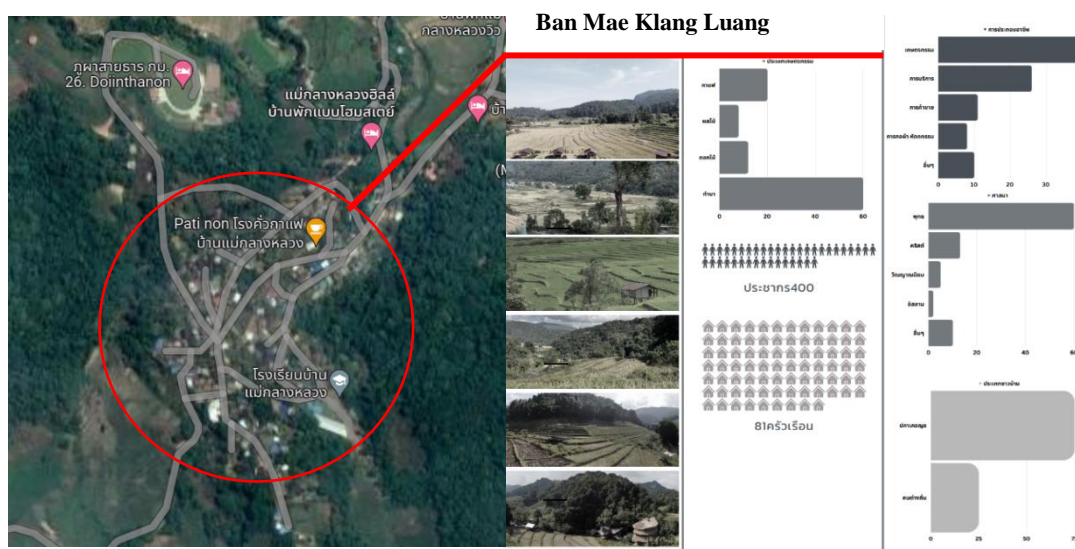


Figure 1 Aerial photograph and summary of community characteristics in Ban Mae Klang Luang Residential Area



The landscape in Mae Klang Luang is outstanding with beautiful nature and unique rice terraces. There are also buildings and facilities to support activities including houses, homestays, schools, coffee shops, restaurants, churches, the Department of Fisheries, temples, and weaving shops. The change in characteristics and architectural styles is due to the influence of tourism as well as the economic and social changes. A combination of modern industrial materials and natural materials are employed for vernacular house construction. In addition, many houses have been expanded to accommodate the changing purposes of use (Figure 2-3).

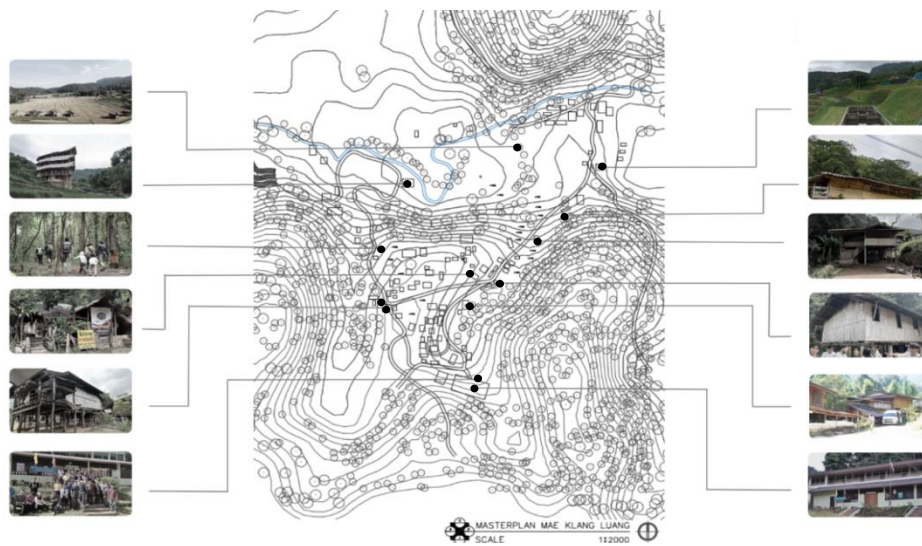


Figure 2 Landscape and buildings in Mae Klang Luang Residential Area



Figure 3 Facilities for activities in the area

Present way of life of Pga Knyaw people in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community

At present, the way of life of the Pga Knyaw people in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community still reflects their bond with nature through their way of life and culture, such as rice terrace farming, the use of natural materials in the construction of most houses, the reliance on the potential, and the use of Pha Dok Seo Waterfall for living and generating income from tourism. Mae Klang Luang Village started to become an agricultural tourism destination in 1999. Villagers received advice on tourism management from Doi



Inthanon National Park as well as the development and lifestyle improvement from other agencies before the promotion of agricultural tourism and finally gained reputation in 2005 (Rattanapan and Sin-ampol, 2017). Nowadays, the tourism activities focus more on exploring the way of life, environment, and landscape of Ban Mae Klang Luang. The influence of such tourism has resulted in the physical development to support tourism, such as a homestay, as a service facility for tourists rather than promoting importance of outstanding features, adding values, or presenting local stories, differences, and links between resources and the way of life of people in the community (Surang Payakka, 2017), resulting in the changes of characteristics and styles of vernacular houses in the community.

Components and specific characteristics of the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community

Most of the vernacular houses in the community are gathered in the southern part of Ban Mae Klang Luang Residential Area. Approximately 25 vernacular houses still express certain original characteristics according to the study on Karen Pga Knyaw: Sustainability and Adaptation under Swidden-agricultural Cultural Ecology. Most of them are used mainly for residential purposes (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Overview of the vernacular houses in the community

However, due to the study limitations in providing information of the house owners and the study duration, the researcher selected 7 vernacular houses in 7 survey routes for this study to explore the architectural identities (Figure 5).

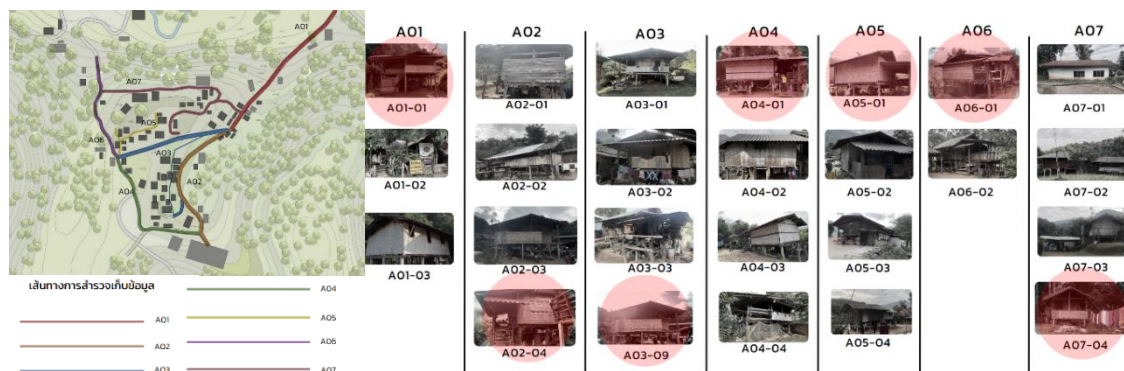

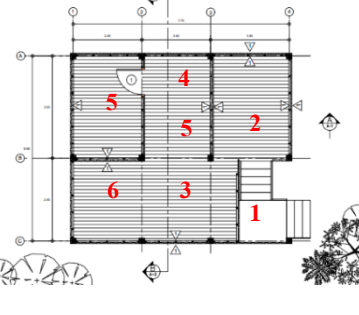

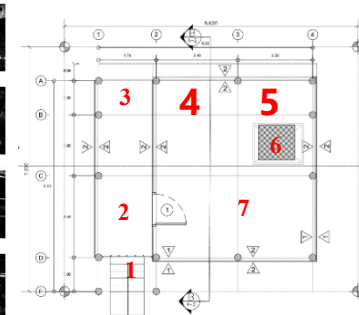

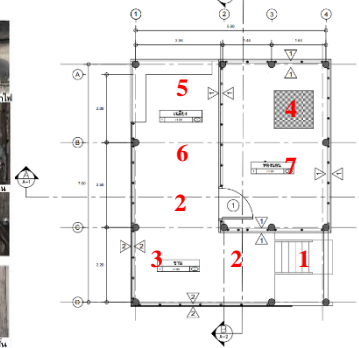


Figure 5 The vernacular houses in the community

Table 1 Survey of the significant building components and characteristics of vernacular houses in the Community

Characteristics of vernacular houses	Plan	Functions
<p>A01-01</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A01_01</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 multi-purpose area/drying area 4 dressing area 5 sleeping area 6 kitchen
<p>A02-04</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A02_04</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 washing area 4 kitchen 5 shelf 6 traditional Thai fireplace 7 sleeping area
<p>A03-09</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A03_09</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 water shelf 4 traditional Thai fireplace 5 shelf-washing area 6 kitchen 7 sleeping area

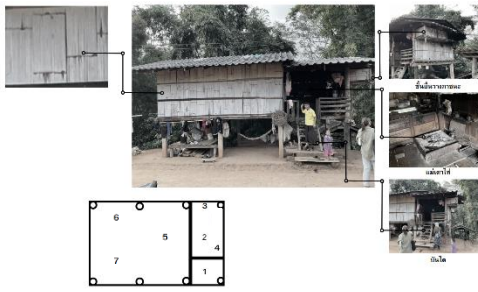
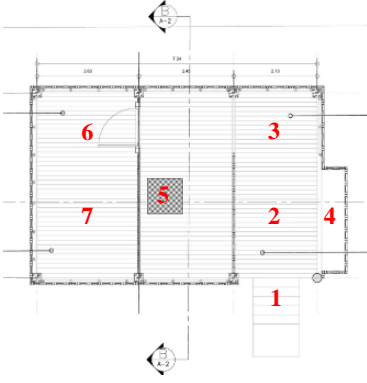
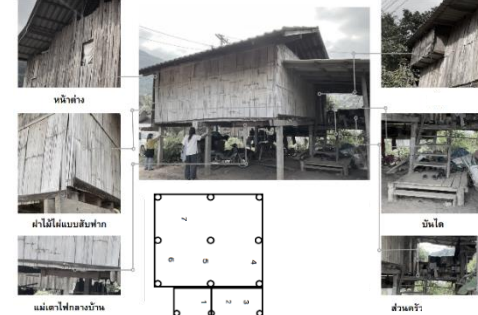
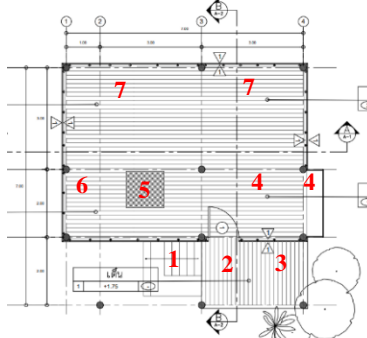
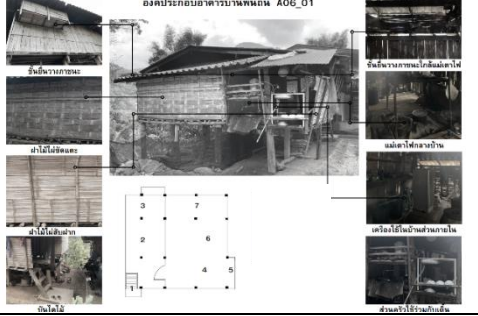
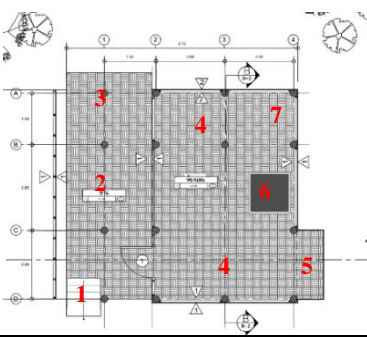
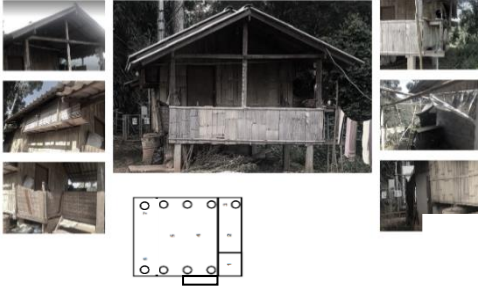
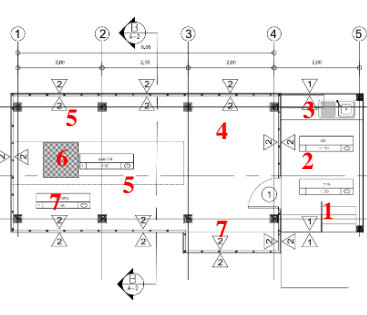






Characteristics of vernacular houses	Plan	Functions
<p>A04-01</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A04_01</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 kitchen 4 shelf 5 traditional Thai fireplace 6 storage 7 sleeping area
<p>A05-01</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A05_01</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 washing area 4 multi-purpose area - shelf 5 traditional Thai fireplace 6 kitchen 7 sleeping area
<p>A06-01</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A06_01</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 kitchen 4 sleeping area - multi-purpose area 5 shelf 6 traditional Thai fireplace 7 storage
<p>A07-04</p> <p>องค์ประกอบอาคารบ้านพื้นถิ่น A07_04</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 stairs 2 terrace 3 washing area 4 multi-purpose area 5 sleeping area 6 traditional Thai fireplace 7 storage - shelf



Table 1 showing the survey results of all 7 houses describes the overall characteristics of the vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, which are vernacular houses made of hardwood. A combination of structural materials such as bamboo, pine wood, and concrete (for the pillars), were used for the construction. The houses were elevated from the ground level with a nearby bathroom separated from the house and a separate small house for rice storage. House elements consisted of an open space under the house, stairs, walls, a floor plan, and a roof, which can be summarized as follows.

- 1) The open space under the house was the area under the elevated house. Most of them were used for storing firewood and things, farming chickens and pigs, and parking motorcycles.
- 2) The stairs comprised 5, 7, or 9 steps, depending on the height of the houses, with and without handrails. They were usually positioned on the side or corner of the house but not in the middle of the house.
- 3) The walls were still made of natural materials, e.g. bamboo, in the forms of strips of split bamboo or woven bamboo.
- 4) The floor plan can be divided into four main areas:
 - a) Entrance area was the front area before entering the main area inside the house; it was a multi-purpose area for a variety of activities. Some of the houses were also found to have a water shelf or Tee Ter Lor. It was also used as a dining area as well.
 - b) Multi-purpose area was a space for family members to gather to relax or do activities together or accommodate guests.
 - c) The sleeping area was an area near the location of the traditional Thai fireplace; in some houses, the area is divided from others by a cloth; above the sleeping area, higher than others areas, was a Buddhist altar.
 - d) The kitchen area was not large. It was shared with the sleeping area in some houses; however, the two areas were separated in other houses. It usually connected to the terrace area or co-existed with the multi-purpose area. Some houses had extended shelves as well
 - e) Traditional Thai fireplace was located in the sleeping area in 6 houses but not in the house no. A 01-01 with a separate sleeping area
- 5) The roof was a single-gable roof with and without flashing of which thatched materials were galvanized iron sheets and tiles; however, all 7 houses were not made with natural materials at all.

Table 2 Survey of traditional vernacular house identities that still exist in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community

Important identities in Pga Knyaw vernacular houses					
Strips of split bamboo	Woven bamboo	Traditional Thai fireplace	Shelf	Terrace, living area	Stairs
					

Based on the surveyed and analyzed data based on the Pga Knyaw house concepts and Pga Knyaw vernacular house dynamic change concepts, it was found that the vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province were small-medium sized houses with a mixed vernacular style. Their traditional style was changed because w the house owners did not want to repairtheir houses too often. Also, the changing way of life from the influence of local tourism and more accessible transportation resulted in more convenient transportation of new materials for the construction. This is consistent with a study by Anupanpong (2007) indicating that the reasons of the change of the Pga

[382]



Knyaw house style were 1) internal factors: not preferring repairing materials in traditional houses, values, and way of life and 2) external factors: convenient access transportation and imitation (). Regarding the space utilization system in the house, there were merely a few adjustments in the use of space. The systems and characteristics of the space usage were still similar in almost every house due to similar social relationships and lifestyle. The social relationship between individuals and various activities is the expression of culture and influences the style of space usage and the layout of space within the houses (Petcharanon, 2003).

In spite of the adjustment and changes, important features reflecting the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses were the use of bamboo which is an easy-to-find material, the simple house style with a single gable roof, enough space for family members, and important house parts including the space under the houses, stairs, the terrace, the living area, and the kitchen with a traditional Thai fireplace (Somjaimak and Saicharoent, 2019). In addition, there were important features of the house, such as strips of split bamboo, woven bamboo, and shelves protruding from the house. The details of the houses mentioned were still visible in the community area, reflecting the identities of the vernacular houses and important identities of the Pga Knyaw houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The study of the identities of vernacular houses of Ban Mae Klang Luang Community, Chom Thong District, Chiang Mai Province aimed to study and understand the specific elements and characteristics of the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community in the present way of life. Lifestyle, society, and economy of the community have changed due to the influence of tourism, leading to the physical modification of the houses. The most noticeable finding that reflected the ongoing adjustment and change of the houses was a combination of materials, such as concrete columns and tiled or galvanized roofs. However, the remaining forms or identities of the Pga Knyaw houses were bamboo and other natural materials used as the main materials for house construction with a simple style and a single gable roof. Each house had a right size per family. The important house elements consisted of the space under the house, stairs, the terrace, the living area, and the kitchen with a traditional Thai fireplace. The results of this study would provide insights of Pga Knyaw people in Ban Mae Klang Luang Community. This would also help tourists to realize the value and the impact of the change on the house identities as well as promote public acceptance towards the local culture of the community. Therefore, a further study on guidelines for the physical changes of vernacular houses to meet the cultural landscape and local ecological conditions in the present way of life should be conducted to promote the development of the Pga Knyaw vernacular houses in a conservative manner along with the development of tourism in the area. This would preserve the precious heritage as a pride of their tribe that ancestors have created for their future generations.

6. Acknowledgment

This study was supported by the Faculty of Architecture, Rangsit University. I would like to thank Mr. Punarat Jarungkon and Ms. Parisa Musigakama, lecturers of Rangsit University, for their advice on data analysis as well as Mr. Somsak Khiripoomthong and the villagers of Ban Mae Klang Luang Community who generously facilitated the field survey and the data collection, and a big thank you to all the SOS Studio students who helped in the field survey and graphical work.

7. References

- Anupanpong, A. (2007). *Houses of Paka-Kyaw Karen: Sustainability and Adaptability on Cultural Ecology in Rotation Farming*. A thesis for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Architecture, Silpakorn University.
- Inpuntung, Vira. (2018). From Vernacular Architecture to Contemporary Architecture. *Beyond Ordinary: Living Vernacular Architecture*. (pp. 55-71). Bangkok: ASA.



- Kongcharoen, P. (2016). *MAEKALNGLUANG DIARY*. A Diploma for the degree of Diploma of Volunteer Program. Puey Ungthakorn School of Development Studies. Thammasat University.
- Payakka, S. (2017). Sustainable Tourism Management at Ban Mae Klang Luang, Tumbol Ban Luang, Chome Thong District, Chiang Mai Province. Paper presented at the 2nd *Academic National Conference*, pp. 366-373, Kasetsart University, Sriracha Campus.
- Pecharanon, M. (2003). Architecture/Community/Local. *Academic Seminar Faculty of Architecture Khon Kaen University 2003*. 11-26. Khon Kaen, Thailand.
- Promsiri, A., Kingtrakarn, N., Prasartsin, N. (2021). Conservation of Vernacular House in the Mon Bang Hue Community for the Development of Community Cultural Learning Center. *Academic Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences Dhonburi Rajabhat University*. 4(3), 126-137.
- Rattanapant, N. & Sin-ampol, P. (2017). Landscape Changes, Effects and Adaptation in Mae Klang Luang Village under Commoditization for Agro-tourism. *Journal of Man and Society Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(1), 78-97.
- Taameephan, W. (1986). Guidelines for studying vernacular architecture. Training materials "Vernacular Architecture Guidelines". The Faculty of Decorative Arts together with the Academic Sub-Committee on the Art Gallery Establishment Project at Silpakorn University, 24-26.
- Somjaimak, M. and Saicharoen, C. (2019). Dynamic of Vernacular Houses of the Paka kyaw Karen in Mae Chaem River Upstream, Galyanivadhana District, Chiang Mai. *Built Environment Inquiry Journal (BEI): Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University*. 18(2), 1-19.