

## ALONG THE WAVES OF CHANGE

Khrung Si Ayutthaya, Thailand

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Plate 16: Longboat racing, Pasak River, Ayutthaya



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*Si Ayutthaya  
great Thai capital  
Once destroyed  
by an evil enemy  
We will defeat  
and bring to their knees  
To return the glory  
to our love Ayutthaya*  
(Luang Wichit Wathakan, in Chutintaranond 1996: F).

*Khrung Si Ayutthaya* (the city of Ayutthaya) is a place of contrasts. As a major city in modern day Thailand it displays all the trappings of modernity. As a Buddhist pilgrimage centre the stupa of its many temples pierce the skyline, their serenity disturbed by the blare of horns from vehicles attempting to navigate crowded roads. The strident horns of barges transporting goods along the river network disturb the tranquil sunset endeavours of fisherman laying their nets from simple wooden boats (plate 17). Newly constructed concrete monoliths sit side by side with the ruins of the once glorious kingdom of ancient Ayutthaya, which in its prime conquered the rulers of Sukhothai and Angkor. More than 200 years after its destruction at the hands of the Burmese, Ayutthaya has arisen phoenix-like from the ashes of destruction as a landscape that commemorates its past glory in the embrace of a modern history of redemption. Nationalistic narratives that perpetuate and celebrate the splendour and hegemony of Ayutthaya are given physical presence in the ruins of ancient monuments that enshrine the memory of the destroyed capital.

Although the residents of Ayutthaya are predominantly Buddhist Thais, the various communities reflect a mix of ethnicities (including Mon, Lao, Yuang, Vietnamese) and religions, with significant Muslim and Christian groups. Although many are engaged in employment of a non-traditional nature – for example, working in modern shopping centres or the various hotels that support Ayutthaya’s tourist industry –

many others achieve their living through day-to-day practices that retain links with more traditional occupations and skills, such as fishing, boating and various artisan pursuits. The latter include handicraft production, technological, artistic and culinary skills, many of which are identified as traditionally 'Thai' – *lakhon* and *likey*, for example, forms of dance and performance.

This and the following chapter explore the significance of such practices in the formation and affirmation of identity and community and the creation of place and landscapes. The discussion reinforces the arguments of the previous chapters, that community assertions of heritage – of the aspects of their lives that they desire to retain for their children – are inseparable from the day-to-day practices of lived experience and the web of meanings so created that reinforce notions of community, belonging and of 'being in place'. This chapter introduces the broad community of Ayutthaya, in terms of the historical, social and formal heritage management context, and broadly discusses the processes and practices of community formation within this larger entity. Inherent in such processes are understandings of heritage that incorporate traditional practices that transmit ideas, beliefs, values and emotions.

There are endless opportunities to address the enmeshment of contemporary community making with the experiences and practices of everyday life in the rich and diverse village communities of Ayutthaya.<sup>102</sup> I have therefore confined the following discussion and opted for representivity rather than inclusivity. I have approached this in two ways: the first is through religious affiliation, in an exploration of identity and place making with the minority Catholic and Muslim communities of Ayutthaya. My second approach is to consider the enduring relationship between Ayutthaya people and the surrounding waterways. The chapter that follows is concerned with a specific case study, that of the elephant-rider (mahout) community at the village of Ban Chang

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<sup>102</sup> I am conscious of the use of the term 'village' (*ban*) for what are effectively urban units. However, this is the term that the people of Ayutthaya use when referring to their communities and suggests an interesting focus for meaningful investigation of the nexus between rural and urban community construction. However, the depth of understanding required to make an informed comment is beyond the extent of my own fieldwork. I take recourse in existing debates on Thai 'villageness' and follow Hirsch (1993) in considering 'the village' as a discursive category that is a locus of identity and allows deeper consideration of ideas about community. The village as an arena of struggle between Thai national and local identities has particular resonance in the discussion of Ayutthaya communities.

in an investigation of landscape, place, identity and heritage. The relationship between men and elephants in Thailand is based on ancient traditions, enshrined in a multifaceted system of practices and values. It is closely interwoven with a way of life, ritual and traditional training and the maintenance of a community identity that is passed down through generations.

## Background

Ayutthaya gives name to not only the city, but also the surrounding province located in the south of the fertile central plains of Thailand (Figure 3). For administrative purposes the province of Ayutthaya is divided into 16 districts (*amphoe*). The city of Ayutthaya is included in Amphoe Phra Nakhon Sri Ayutthaya and is administered for the most part by the Municipality of Ayutthaya. The population of the city is approximately 70,000, divided into various villages (*ban*). The following references to 'Ayutthaya' signify the city of Ayutthaya more specifically, and not the province within which it is found. Situated in a floodplain, the region has long served as a vital 'rice basket' for the country, although the recent industrialisation of the area is threatening this status.<sup>103</sup> The city of Ayutthaya lies approximately 80 kilometres north of Bangkok, strategically located on the main north-south railway line. At this location three major rivers converge (the Lopburi, Pasak and Chao Phraya) to form a small island (around 14 square kilometres) that was the stronghold of the ancient kingdom and is today the focal point of the city.

Ayutthaya today is a busy regional urban centre. The sprawl of the city, characterised by a collection of village settlements, extends in all directions. Off the island, the major concentrations of settlement are along the banks of the rivers and its tributary canals (*khlong*), with most of the areas to the north, south and west being less developed than the east. The result is a mix of more crowded urban concentrations with quieter, more-traditional village landscapes, closely associated with the mesh of water ways.

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<sup>103</sup> TAT (2000b) quotes that 'Ayutthaya is in the forefront of industrial development in the country. In 1997 there were 634 factories, creating 63,763 jobs with three Industrial Estates'.

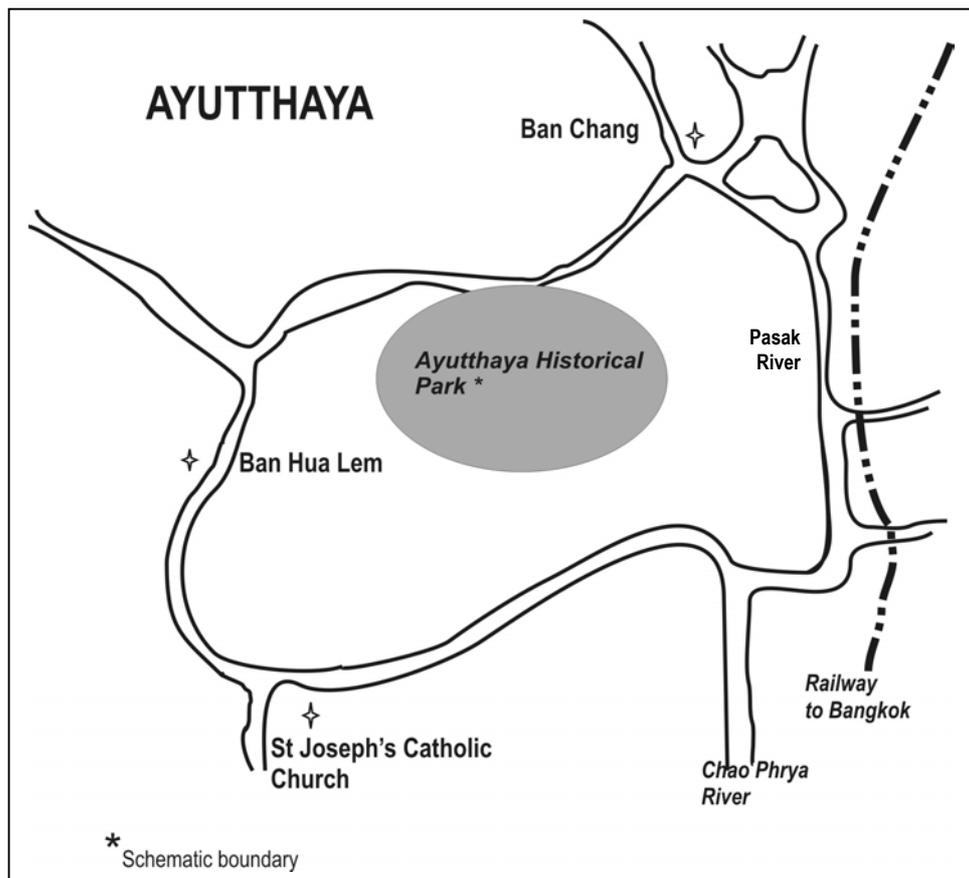


Figure 3: Location map, Ayutthaya

The modern constructions of the town, many of them concrete, stand in stark contrast to the scattered remains of the ancient city of Ayutthaya, the centre of the Thai kingdom of that name, destroyed by the Burmese in 1767. The major concentration of historic features is found in the Ayutthaya Historical Park, an area of nearly 3 square kilometres in the central-north of the island. It was designated a historical park in 1976 and consequently subject to a program of population resettlement and clearing of modern, 'intrusive' features. However, the entire area of the island and the opposing riverbanks are characterised by a haphazard scattering of ancient features, side by side with more modern structures. Most of the elements that are visible today are the remains of temple buildings, a reflection of the use of more substantial construction materials for religious structures.

The historic city of Ayutthaya, with all its remains, was added to the World Heritage List in December 1991 (see Appendix 4). Ayutthaya is today a major tourist destination attracting around 3 million international and domestic tourists a year. It lies an easy day-trip distance from Bangkok, and supports numerous guest houses and hotels. Most Thais are introduced to the history – and glory – of old Ayutthaya in their school years, through an approach that closely links the ancient kingdom with the discourse of modern-day nationalism and Thai identity.<sup>104</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that it is regularly visited by large numbers of domestic tourists, and is often the destination for organised school outings (frontispiece). In addition, a number of Thai people travel to Ayutthaya for primarily religious reasons, either to visit one of the individual Buddhist temples, or to undertake a special nine-temple pilgrimage. The number 'nine' (*gow*) is considered auspicious by Thai people, and the pilgrimage is deemed to accrue considerable merit (*bun*), more so if all nine places are visited in the one day.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See C. Reynolds (1993a) for a general discussion of the Thai state's nationalistic agenda, including attempts to codify and promote a dominant national culture at the expense of regional and minority cultural expressions and ethnic heterogeneity. Reynolds (1993b: 26) records that the formation of Thai identity in the 1930s was influenced by a martial ethos that lauded military valour and 'the ultimate sacrifice of life itself in the national interest'. Ayutthayan history is replete with shining examples of warrior heroism so lends itself readily to narratives of national achievement.

<sup>105</sup> The nine temple sites are the City Pillar Shrine, Vihan Phra Mongkhon Bophit, Wat Lokaya Sutharam, Wat Na Phra Men, Wat Boromawong Wararam, Wat Phu Khao Thong, Wat Puhutthaisawan, Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon, and Wat Phanan Choeng.

## The Cultural Heritage of Ayutthaya: Ruins in the Ashes

Detailed and descriptive histories of the kingdom of Ayutthaya are contained in a number of publications (for example Hongvivat 1980; Kasetsiri 1976, 1999; na Pombejra 1992; SarDesai 1994; Tambiah 1976; TAT 2000a; Wyatt 1984 & 1994. For overviews of the region's archaeology see Aymonier 1999 [1901]; Charoenwongsa & Diskul 1978; Guy 1989; Higham & Thosorat 1998). The ancient Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya came into power in the mid-14th century, supplanting the reign of the kings of Sukhothai, and lasting for 417 years. During this time it became one of Southeast Asia's pre-eminent trading ports. Although maintaining an essentially Siamese character, it exchanged ideas and adapted aspects of various foreign cultures that were reflected or absorbed into areas as diverse as art, architecture and religion. During what is designated today as the Ayutthaya Period (1350–1767 AD),<sup>106</sup> power passed through the hands of five dynasties.

By 1431, the kingdom of Ayutthaya had grown dramatically with the conquest and inclusion of two of the most important territories of mainland Southeast Asia: Sukhothai and Angkor (the Khmer kingdom). This resulted in an expansion of the land under Ayutthayan rule to cover over 320,000 square kilometres. The rise of Ayutthaya as a power was echoed in its maritime relationships with major trading countries, and its subsequent growth to become 'one of the most powerful port-polities in this part of the world' (Ishii & Kasetsri 1999: ix; see Breazeale 1999a for a comprehensive discussion of the establishment of Ayutthaya as a major trading entity). The trading partnerships led to the establishment of permanent delegations in Ayutthaya, and the growth of the city as a truly international milieu. Each national representation was given a settlement/factory area in the city, allowing for the pursuit of their own religious worship and customs. The leader of each community was chosen in consultation with the *Phra Khleng* (the Minister for External Relations and Maritime Trading Affairs). The value and prominence of Muslims in trading relations, and as a link to the prestigious Islamic world of the Persian Safavî empire, was

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<sup>106</sup> Thai people determine years based on the Buddhist Era (BE), which commences 543 years before the Christian period. Hence the year 1350 AD is reckoned as the year 2893 BE. For ease, all dates here will follow the Christian era protocol, but full acknowledgement is made that an alternative system exists.

reflected in their appointment to positions such as that of the Phra Klang. One prominent southern Indian merchant and his followers, active during the reign of Song Tham (1611–1628) were granted a village site to build homes, and land for a mosque and cemetery: the area remains today and is known as the village of Ban Khaek Kuti Chao Sen (Andaya 1999: 125).

The ancient city was described by a visitor as ‘a city of unbounded wealth and grace, of palaces of gold, giant fortresses and elegant teak homes’ (quoted in Cockrem 1999: 126). The exotic nature of the city lent inspiration to would be writers, and we today have a plethora of foreign accounts of experiences in Siam, many by visitors and residents of Ayutthaya during its period of sovereignty, others are by those more familiar with it as a site of former glory (for example, Bowring 1857; Bock 1884; Bacon 1893; de Chaumont & de Choisy 1685; de La Loubère 1693; Kaempfer 1727; Leonowens 1870; Pallegoix 1854; Tachard 1688. For anthologies of Siamese court life see the collected works in Smithies 1995 and in na Pombejra 2001).

The history of the kingdom is characterised by an ongoing hostility with Burma. The city was first captured by the Burmese in 1568, and after a period of restored Thai rule was destroyed by a second wave of invading Burmese forces on 8 April 1767 (see James 2000 for a discussion of the fall of Ayutthaya). As was common practice of the time, many of the residents were taken captive and transported to Burma. Numerous others ‘dispersed’, fleeing for their very lives. However, the Thai people regained their independence within a few months and a new capital was established, first at Thonburi then finally at Bangkok. The Chakri dynasty that emerged in Bangkok was strong enough to repel several subsequent Burmese invasions, and rules to the present day. The reign of the Chakri kings, and hence the present time, is referred to as the Rattanakosin era. Following the taking of the title ‘Rama’ by the founder of the dynasty, General Chakri, the Chakri kings have taken successive nominals and the present king, His Majesty King Bhumipol Adulyadej, has ruled since 1946 as Rama IX.

Although much of the population of Ayutthaya had been transported, killed or dispersed, and despite the establishment of a new capital to the south, it is evident that

the city was not totally deserted. Within a short period of time some of the refugees returned. Various communities either newly established or re-established themselves in and around the ruins. As Chutintaranond (1996: 39) notes, however, this was only possible with the approval and support of the king, which was to be an important factor in the re-establishment and growth of Ayutthaya as a city and its re-creation as a place of national pride and identity.

The new residents of Ayutthaya were made up of a diverse range of professions, including civil servants, traders and merchants, fishermen, craftsmen and farmers. Many lived on raft houses or boats, reaffirming the close association between Ayutthayan communities and a river lifestyle. A Muslim community developed in the south-west area of the island and the river banks opposite. Predominantly Christian Yuan Thais settled around the site of St Joseph's Catholic Church, on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, to the south of the island. They were joined by other Yuan and Vietnamese families who moved from Bangkok (Chutintaranond 1996: 45). With the influx of new residents, a number of the old temples were rebuilt, but many new temples were also constructed.

Over the next century Ayutthaya once again became a thriving town. This is hardly surprising given that the reasons for its success in the first instance had not been compromised: its strategic location and the fertility of the surrounding area. Chutintaranond (1996: F) notes that Ayutthaya rapidly re-established itself as a centre of rice trade and of economic and communications activity, serving the new Bangkok-based Rattanakosin government. It was not long before it became an important regional centre and in 1894 a new provincial government was established with Ayutthaya at its centre. Not long after, a railway was constructed linking Ayutthaya and Bangkok (ibid: 54). At the end of the 19th century, Ayutthaya was described by a French visitor: 'Today, Krung Kao [Old City] is still a very important city, the seat of active trade and harbouring some fifty thousand people who are spread over the banks of these isles and floating houses on the waterways' (Aymonier 1999 [1901]: 63).

During the period of the establishment of the new capital, there was a systematic and ongoing removal of brick and materials from the site for use in Bangkok, transported south by both boat and elephant transport.

The ruins of Ayuthia [sic] which cover a very vast surface are only a jumble of debris, a shapeless mass of materials, from which all around colossal Buddhas rise up ... Everything is invaded by vegetation, covered by trees and by epiphytic plants: it's a chaos amidst which the Siamese silently come to scratch gold from the statues or to search for buried treasure. (Aymonier 1999 [1901]: 65)

The removal of building material from the ancient city and neglect of the ruins lasted into the reign of King Rama IV (1836–1868).<sup>107</sup> Even after steps were taken to conserve and restore some of the buildings, the looting of artefacts and 'appropriation' of materials for alternative projects continued. King Rama IV undertook to rehabilitate Ayutthaya, including the rebuilding of St Joseph's Catholic Church to its former glory. King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn, 1868–1919) ordered the 'nationalisation' and preservation of the entire area of the Ayutthaya island, accompanied by a program of survey, excavation and restoration of the monuments associated with the Grand Palace.

Following the 1932 revolution that led to the transition from an absolute to constitutional monarchy, legislation was enacted that reaffirmed the status of the Ayutthaya island as public land, with the government taking responsibility for its renewal and conservation. By 1935 the Fine Arts Department (FAD) had begun to register the Ayutthaya monuments. In 1956 cabinet approved funding for the restoration and reconstruction of a number of major monuments as part of a national program to promote tourism and to develop home industries, particularly handicrafts for local and export markets (FAD 1996: 33–37). One effect was that Ayutthaya gained a new group of settlers as part of the restoration and commercialisation project. The other was the formalisation of a nationalistic monument-based construction of cultural heritage, with traditional handicrafts and artisan skills relegated more closely to folk-life and local interests: the primary relationship between the two was predicated on supporting the commercial imperatives of international tourism. Although both to some extent were recognised as 'heritage', protection of the tangible

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<sup>107</sup> King Rama IV, or King Mongkut, is best remembered by many non-Thais as the King depicted in the Rogers and Hammerstein musical 'The King and I'. The movie is banned in Thailand for its irreverence and unjust portrayal of the king as a tyrant and buffoon. It is fair to say that any claim that it is based on Anna Leonowen's recollections (see Leonowens 1870) is clearly of the 'loose' nature.

remains of the Thai past was enshrined as the 'proper' object of cultural heritage management in Thailand (see Byrne 1993).

In 1976, the FAD delineated and registered 1810 *rais* (2.89 square kilometres) on the island, which in 1982 was incorporated into the Ayutthaya Historical Park Project (figure 3). The historical park covers approximately one-third of the city island and incorporates the remains of the Grand Palace and a number of other significant monuments, many of which are temples. This includes Wat Phra Si Sanphet (frontispiece). Its distinctive series of prangs is regularly reproduced in tourist material. One of the aims of the project was – in addition to archaeological preservation – to 'arouse the people's sense of affection and belonging to the nation's cultural heritage' (Palakavong Na Ayudhya 1987: 79), thereby embroiling the monumental landscape of Ayutthaya in grand nationalistic narratives (see Peleggi 2002 for a discussion of cultural heritage and Thai nationalism).

The proximity to the new capital no doubt added to the reinvigorated prosperity of Ayutthaya. But most importantly, it had become a focal site for nationalistic fervour. It is perhaps incongruous that the site of one of the Thai's greatest defeats came to enshrine the memory of a glorious past and act as a catalyst for a newly inspired sense of Thai national identity.<sup>108</sup> A recent promotional publication by the Tourism Authority of Thailand quotes: 'still, these ruins are manifestation of the ingenuity and extraordinary talent of our ancestors, who glorified this former capital city and left behind invaluable heritage for posterity' (TAT n.d.). Sunait Chutintaranond, Director of the Thai Cultural Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University, writes:

Even though Ayutthaya fell more than 229 years ago ... [it] still remains in the memory of contemporary Thais and remains in the interest of younger generations. Again and again the picture of Ayutthaya has been recollected and revealed at various stages, reflecting the understanding and appreciation of the importance of the old capital. (Chutintaranond 1996: D)

Ayutthaya was seen to provide a role model for the revival of various cultural arts (including literature) and for the new Bangkok city plan: 'Ayutthaya ... not just

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<sup>108</sup> An interesting comparison can be made with the Australian World War I site of Gallipoli (in Turkey), which has become a focus of nationalistic attention.

Historical Ruins but the foundation of Thai culture. Ayutthaya is not just a city of ancient decaying palaces and temples, but is the former Kingdom of Siam where much of Thai culture was born and evolved' (ibid: 220). However, as the discussion below illustrates, this broad recognition of contributions from the past is not recognised in cultural heritage management practices at Ayutthaya today. The celebration and protection of the city's heritage revolves around the conservation of the physical manifestation of the 'ancient' past, concentrating on preserving and promoting the remaining monuments (palaces and temples) and archaeological remains recovered from the ruins. The cultural milieu that gave life to the ancient city, and in many instances continues to do so today, is conspicuously absent from the interests of current heritage management practices.

The cultural heritage sites of Thailand, including historical parks, are primarily managed by the Fine Arts Department (FAD), Ministry of Education, under the administration of the Office of Archaeology and Museums. Under various laws and guidelines the FAD is obliged to locate, identify, evaluate, manage and protect cultural resources so that they may be handed on to future generations unimpaired. Under these instruments, 'cultural heritage' is primarily defined as the tangible remains of the past, in either monumental or archaeological form, or as movable items that are properly curated in a museum environment (Appendix 4, and see Byrne 1993). Those heritage aspects more particularly related to traditional practice and cultural identity are considered at one level through the national education system. At Ayutthaya, in the day-to-day practical sense, they are addressed through the programs run by the Ayutthaya Municipality, with some influence from tourism-related policies through the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). There are obvious parallels with the division of heritage responsibilities at the broader international level discussed in Chapter 2, most notably the separation between tangible and intangible heritage. The former is the appropriate object of cultural heritage management and the latter relates to 'culture' more appropriately approached through folklife studies, social 'welfare' and anthropology.

## Industrialisation and Tourism Development

During the 1980s Thailand embarked on a major program of industrialisation, which led to rapid land use changes and factory construction within the provinces surrounding the Bangkok metropolis, including Ayutthaya.<sup>109</sup> The program incorporated the rezoning of protected green areas along the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, taking away large amounts of agricultural land. Ayutthaya was deemed to be an 'industrial promotion zone' with Board of Investment privileges that provided attractive incentives for both domestic and foreign investors. As well as land for industrialisation, there was a need for housing and infrastructure development. This has been achieved not only through buying private land, but also the leasing of government land through agencies such as the Department of Religion, the Crown Property Bureau and the Fine Arts Department, where as Chutintaranond (1996: 67) notes 'ancient ruins and relics from the former capital are still to be found and could now be lost or destroyed'.

At the same time, investors have been taking advantage of the promotion of Ayutthaya as a major tourist destination, with the construction of multi-storeyed hotels, restaurants and department stores. There are certain advantages to local residents, in terms of opportunities to establish tourist-related businesses, or gain employment in such enterprises. This appears to have been restricted in some of the larger hotels, with management apparently preferring to recruit in Bangkok and relocate their staff (see also Chambers 1994: 100). Tourist growth has offered a new incentive to boat owners, notably the redundant water-taxi operators, as one of the major tourist activities is to undertake a river tour, circumnavigating the island while enjoying its splendid riverside views. However, these must also be considered in light of the more detrimental influences and potentially alarming impacts. Chutintaranond (1996: 68)

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<sup>109</sup> Much of Asia has been impacted over the last 40 years by the transformation of traditional methods of subsistence farming into agro-business. The introduction of chemical fertilisers and alternative crops and new, more mechanised farming techniques have dramatically altered traditional and historic field systems. In addition, towns like Ayutthaya have been subject to massive urban growth and industrial development, with the taking up of previously arable land either through urban expansion or for the construction of massive industrial plants and estates.

clearly identifies this in his declaration that the combination of industrialisation, rapid urban growth and tourist influx are

... compounding the outside influences affecting the local populace, their customs, traditions and spirituality that have descended from the earliest settlers. The people themselves work to fit in and take advantage of these changes while they also attempt to preserve their way of life on the river which nurtured them, provided their livelihoods, brought them fortune and fame, and guided their art and culture.

Today life in Ayutthaya is influenced by a combination of the three arenas of industrial activity, tourism and historic preservation; the economic imperatives of the first two to some extent undermining the character and extent of the last (but see Peerapun 1991).

### **World Heritage & the Historical Park**

The cultural heritage of Ayutthaya has been 'reified' in the monuments of the Ayutthaya historical park, in a process of muting and removing the community. This has a precedent in the assessment of the World Heritage nomination for Ayutthaya (see Appendix 4), undertaken by ICOMOS. In the final listing, the argument presented in the nomination document under criterion (vi) was not considered for inclusion:

Intangible cultural heritage associated to the nominated property continues to exist to the present. Language, literature, music, dancing, sports, cultural entertainment, manner and family relationship, cuisine, handicrafts, festivals, and ceremonies are still practised today. (Office of the National Environment Board, Thailand 1990)

The nomination included assessment under all of cultural criteria (i)–(vi), but the ICOMOS recommendation, and the subsequent inclusion on the World Heritage list was on the basis of criterion (iii) only, on the grounds that the 'site bears excellent witness to the period of development of a true national Thai art' (ICOMOS 1991), emphasising the remains of the temples. It is incongruous that the attributes outlined in criterion (vi), which was rejected, enshrine the heritage values expressed by the Ayutthaya community today.

A senior government tourism official at Ayutthaya with whom I spoke suggests that World Heritage is conceptually meaningless to most Thai people: 'It is incredibly over-rated ... most Thais have no understanding of what it is, or even really care. It is a process of labelling by an organisation that is far removed from the Thai people, many of who don't have any idea of who UNESCO or ICOMOS is' (and see Sullivan 2003). His assessment is that in terms of tourist attraction, the World Heritage listing is secondary to the city's beauty and history. A senior museum official agrees with this, commenting that recognition of the heritage of Ayutthaya pre-dates its World Heritage listing and that Thai people are more interested in the city as their own heritage. However, she recognises that there are economic advantages in an involvement with UNESCO.

As with the previous two locations, the Ayutthaya people with whom I spoke rarely mentioned the World Heritage status of Ayutthaya without prompting. Indeed, few even acknowledged the temple monuments when describing the aspects of their lived experiences and environment that they would like to keep for their children. When specifically asked, there is general agreement that the ancientness of the monuments is important, and maintaining this 'sense of age' should be a conservation priority – although one resident of Hua Laem village suggests that this is the responsibility of the government, and of other countries, not the locals. This reflected a general separation of interest and conceptualisation of responsibility between national and global concerns, and those of the local community. There is an expectation that the monuments will be looked after so this is not a matter that the villagers need concern themselves with. The villagers to whom I spoke expressed attachments and a sense of place that were implicitly local, and for many this was their immediate village environment, both social and physical. This was despite their relatively close proximity to either the Historical Park, or any of the numerous temple ruins outside the park. I do not wish to suggest that the temples hold no religious significance for the Ayutthayan residents, although this is certainly more likely to be the case for the Christian and Muslim communities. The temples are still considered to be sacred places by many Thai Buddhists, as is reinforced in the extent of offerings at various Buddha images found throughout the temple monuments. The comments from those I spoke to, however, suggest that most local Buddhists regularly attend and support a

temple in their immediate village vicinity, many of which are more modern structures. The temple 'monuments' are more commonly visited for religious purposes by non-locals, including those undertaking a pilgrimage.

There is certainly a sense of pride in living in a place that is of such importance to the history of Thailand, and is so old, but little expression of engagement with the monuments as other than something 'over there'. The monuments are rarely incorporated into the narratives of community or place. Many thought the World Heritage listing was a 'good' situation for the town, but this benefit was expressed in terms of financial advantages accruing through increased tourism. The interests of community members in the promotion of their particular 'local' handicrafts was evident, although as one village leader comments, apart from local economic benefits the listing changes little for the people of Ayutthaya.

N. Mulder (1999: 5) argues that constructions of the public world in Thailand should not be taken for granted. This has particular application in terms of the notion of World Heritage. He suggests that the distinction is made in non-complex, communally organised societies between 'insiders' (people who are known and who belong) and 'outsiders' (the 'others' who do not share in the common space or welfare). The outside world in such cases can be perceived as a field of opportunity, and a place where no responsibility is carried. This leads to the notion of a common, private domain that is 'ours', which exists alongside other domains that are 'theirs'. My interpretation of the responses I was given in Ayutthaya conforms with this separation, with a clear demarcation of 'our' local responsibilities and 'their' national and international responsibilities. I am not proposing that the local communities have abrogated their interests in the monuments, but that their life experiences and sense of place and belonging are necessarily tied to more local understandings and concerns.

To some extent this has been reinforced through the creation of the Historical Park as a place that excludes the living community. The result is the separation of public and private realms, appropriating the monuments for use in national and state narratives that obfuscate local stories and interests. In 1996 more than 200 families were targeted for removal from 'illegally occupied' areas of the Historical Park (Klangsoambut

1996).<sup>110</sup> Since then, there has been an ongoing program of removing residents and various businesses from the park.

This has not directly involved any of the communities with whom I worked. However, as there are plans to expand the Historical Park and potentially also the World Heritage area, I was interested in how this possibility was received in the broader community. While some are concerned about such prospects, and temper their support of World Heritage with an understanding of the detrimental effect this has on some sections of the community through imposed relocation, others are more supportive. The major issue seems to be the manner in which it is handled by the FAD. One villager suggests: 'The FAD is not interested in the community, or in what they want or in community heritage issues, but if people find anything archaeological they must tell the government and immediately the FAD appears.' One of the Muslim community leaders, who works with relocation issues through his involvement on a community committee, feels that while some attempts were made to meet the socioeconomic requisites of potential 'relocatees', that there was little understanding of the impact on those families dislocated from places that had been their homes for several generations:

They are very distressed about losing their homes, and the place of their ancestors and their memories ... just because the place is World Heritage listed it isn't fair to have to move people who have lived there for a long time ... it is not good for people to be moved as they have a relationship with the land so they lose their heritage from their ancestors ... they don't want to leave but have no choice because of the law.

A resident from the village at Hua Ro Market, who used to work in the Historical Park, thinks that if they are looked after, many people are better off after relocating. Moving away from the ancient temples is not in itself an issue – it is leaving a lived, historied and known place and landscape of belonging. Hence, an important

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<sup>110</sup> Ayutthaya is not the only place in Thailand, or indeed in Asia, where heritage managers have responded to the threats of population growth, and location, by restricting the use of sites or more drastically by removing whole communities. P. Larsen (2000: 16) comments that relocation from traditional settlements is well documented in other regional (Southeast Asian) countries; see Chadha (1999) for discussion of displacement of communities in India. See also Bianchi (2002) for a general discussion of local community disenfranchisement in a World Heritage listed property, compounded by tourist development.

component in ensuring satisfaction for those who are relocated is the maintenance of the community structure. The Chair of the community committee is more accepting of the process. He believes that there is an obligation on the government's part to educate the people so that they understand why it is important that they move. He notes, however, that this is difficult, and that the Archaeological Office has a limited success with communicating their intent to the community on even more general archaeological matters.

Byrne (1993: 194) suggests that the living city / dead city polemic creates a duality that 'effects a clearing of space, physically and conceptually for the management of the past by the discourses of modernism (namely heritage, archaeology, art history, restoration, architecture).' Experience has shown that when local communities are removed from a site, a site dies, or, if preserved, is preserved only for the benefit of visiting tourists. The parks so created both naturalise a power relation and obfuscate the source of that power (Perers 1999: 125). The process legitimates the right to control the use of the land, and hence to communal cultural ownership in the nation. In this way, the construction of national cultural heritage becomes equally as excluding as it is including (Karen Olwig 1995: 333).

Leontis argues that monumental sites become landscapes of the 'noninhabitable, nonutilitarian and enclosed space constructed by aesthetics and archaeology combined with legal, economic, political and institutional considerations' (in Caftanzoglou 2001: 24). The result is an endeavour to normalise and appropriate a place by 'freezing it into some timeless zone' of the past (Hall 1990: 231). Or as Bender (2001: 4) notes, there is an attempt to enforce (and reinforce) a specific viewpoint, at the expense of other viewpoints and of 'the other'.

The precedent for the removal of communities at Ayutthaya is found in earlier park projects undertaken at Sukhothai, an ancient city to the north of Ayutthaya that is also World Heritage listed. The implementation of the Sukhothai historical park led to the resettlement of 200 households (Peleggi 1996: 438). The criticisms by the heritage academy of the massive FAD sponsored renovation program of Sukhothai in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be refuted on the grounds of cultural relativities. In this case

the work was performed in the context of full knowledge of the appropriate international heritage charters and guidelines, based on 'accepted' Western renovation practices (see Byrne 1995; Peleggi 1996. For a discussion of the project by the FAD see Palakavong na Ayyudhya 1987). As with the later 'parkification' work at Ayutthaya, it appears that the primary factors are to do with the legitimation of the connection between the ancient city and the contemporary nation, and with economic concerns and tourism (see broader discussions in C. Reynolds 1998 and Peleggi 2002).

My observations after visiting Sukhothai are that many members of the local community have now adopted the park as place of recreation. Picnicking family groups are common, and the guide who was showing me through the park commented that in summer they lengthened the opening hours to allow families to stay longer. One implication is that the landscape has been (re)appropriated by the local community, albeit a different community to those who had been earlier relocated. I follow Mulder (1999: 5) in his reminder that in the context of Southeast Asia, while there is an undeniable inculcation of Western ideas and institutions, the challenge is to take into account the specific environment in which they have to operate, that is, to address local peculiarities: 'while we may be in our way a 'global village', it still seems that the different houses and their inhabitants will be recognisable as such for a long time to come'.<sup>111</sup>

## The Ayutthaya Communities

Ayutthaya's many communities ... provide deeper understanding as to how and why these people and villages strive to preserve their traditions and artistry, boat building, house building, fishing, cooking and handicraft. Together they must also strive to learn and adapt to new advancements, but in ways that will let them enjoy the best of life environmentally, spiritually, technologically and professionally. (Chutintaranond 1996: 169)

Ayutthaya has a number of village communities made up of Muslim and Christian groups, with a strong Catholic representation in the latter. Many villages of course

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<sup>111</sup> For example, see M. Thomas (2002) for a discussion of culturally divergent interpretations in Vietnamese and Western constructions of 'parks' and recreation.

have a mixture of religious representation. The presence of Muslims and Catholics, albeit as minority groups, has additional interest in the context of a long history of international engagement with Islamic and Catholic influences during the Ayutthaya period. I was interested therefore in exploring the processes of identity formation and maintenance among these smaller communities. As all these groups consider themselves 'Thai', the processes involved are intimately associated with the creation of identity at an intrinsically local level.

An observation from the time I spent with the people of Ayutthaya is that assertions of Muslim and Catholic community and personal identity are reinforced through expressions of place and belonging that are inseparable from religious practice, the physical place of worship, and of 'being Muslim' or of 'being Catholic'. In comparison, the inculcation of Buddhism as an integral component of day to day life, and its solidity and pervasiveness in lived experience requires minimal reaffirmation in expressions of 'being in place' voiced by the Buddhist people I spoke with. I am particularly mindful, however, that: 'It is facile to say that Buddhism pervades all aspects of Thai life. The reverse of this statement is equally true. It may be taken as a matter of course, but what does this mean?' (Mulder 1999: 302). The need to consider Buddhism in the light of social, ethical, ritual, experiential and doctrinal dimensions is noted by Gosling (1996: 119) who argues for the 'importance of having an interdisciplinary methodology and framework such as Tambiah's highly structuralist interplay between anthropology and history'. Tambiah (1984: 7) states:

For me, Buddhism is a shorthand expression for a total social phenomenon, civilisation in breadth and depth, which encompasses the lives of buddhist monks and laymen, and which cannot be disaggregated in a facile way into its religious, political and economic realms as these are currently understood in the West. I am mindful and influenced in this respect by the views of Louis Dumont on Indian society as a hierarchical totality.

The discussion of Thai Buddhism and community affirmation in a broader sense is beyond the scope of this thesis, other than to note that while previous studies have affirmed the significance of the temple in social processes of community formation,

this was given less attention by those I interviewed in the course of this fieldwork.<sup>112</sup> Rather, emphasis is placed on ethical practices, such as 'being good' and 'respecting elders', that are seminal to Buddhist ideology, and cornerstones of family and community dogma reinforced through the Thai education curriculum (see Mulder 1999. For an overview of literature on Thai society and social order see Pongsapich 1998: 5–11). Given the influence of the latter on reaffirming attributes of 'Thai-ness', and of analogous philosophies in Islamic and Christian teachings, there are similar assertions of the importance of such behaviour from the non-Buddhist Thais I interviewed.

### ***The Catholic Community of St Joseph's Church***

The area surrounding St Joseph's church has been home to Catholic families for hundreds of years, not only more recent Thai families, but also the Dutch, Portuguese and French of the Ancient Ayutthaya period. After its destruction with the greater part of Ayutthaya in 1767, it was resettled predominantly by Yuan and Vietnamese communities, with several families resettling from Bangkok. It is clear that the focal point of these villages – in terms of identity and belonging – is the broader identification with the Catholic community and its physical manifestation in the church of St Joseph. Although rebuilt in 1841 with the support of King Rama IV, a new and larger church was constructed in the later part of the century in the 12th-century Roman style. The first mass in the new church was celebrated in 1891. This is the church that can be seen today, adjacent to St Joseph's Catholic School and the Catholic cemetery. A number of villages are affiliated with the church and their communities regularly attend services at St Joseph's.

A senior teacher at the school is very proud of their history: 'St Joseph's is the first Catholic Church in Thailand ... The Church is important to the people here. We can't live without it'. There are around 500 Catholics associated with St Joseph's, coming

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<sup>112</sup> Many valuable ethnographies have been written that explore rural village community life, Buddhist practice and the role of animism; see, for example, P. Cohen (1981), Ingersoll (1966), Kaufman (1977), Moerman (1966), J. Mulder (1973), H.P. Phillips (1970), Tambiah (1970, 1976), Terwiel (1975). See also Anderson (1978) and Wijeyewardene (1986). Bunnag (1973) is one of the few anthropological studies of urban Thai life and is based in Ayutthaya. It is an excellent background study for the purposes of my work, and in concentrating on monastic organisation is a detailed exploration of the relationship between daily life and Buddhism and the formal structures of Buddhist practice.

from some 150 families in the surrounding villages, which also include Buddhist and Muslim families. Two of the villages are predominantly Catholic and have residents with Vietnamese origins. Many are from families who have lived here for several hundred years, their ancestors helping to rebuild Ayutthaya after the Burmese invasion. The teacher I spoke with recounts a story that the Vietnamese who arrived at this time were not Catholic, but that they were 'commandeered' by the French priest who was charged with rebuilding the church, and later converted. The village where several Vietnamese families now live is the site of the former French settlement. Unfortunately, it was not possible in the short period I was in Ayutthaya to further investigate attributions of ethnicity. Many of these Vietnamese families have been in Thailand for multiple generations, and to varying contexts identify themselves, or are identified by others, as Vietnamese. The 'Vietnamese' Catholics to whom I spoke placed no emphasis on such an attribution, and spoke more closely about their way of life as Catholics or as fishermen.

The combined school, church and cemetery form the physical locus of the Catholic community, symbolising the continuation of faith and acting as the social hub on which community and place making are centred. This reinforces S. Reynolds' (2000: 24) assertion that religious places of community gathering are attended not just for spiritual fulfilment but equally for social reasons, and for the collective confirmation of a group's identity. A young woman from a Vietnamese family confirms that 'the church is very important to the life of the community', echoing her father-in-law's comments that it is important that the adults and children attend Mass.

The contemporary Catholic community has no ancestral continuity with the French and Portuguese Catholics of the Ayutthaya period. However, the long history of Catholic presence is seen by the St Joseph's community as seamless and continuing, creating a connection between the contemporary Thai Catholics and the European Catholic communities of ancient Ayutthaya. They are connected through a shared history of place, church and locale that roots the Catholic community as one with ancient links to place, reinforced by an continuing affirmation through religious practice. Identity is reaffirmed not only through contemporary practice (both religious and educational) but also in a landscape that encompasses the physical remains of the

earlier Portuguese and French communities. In the process of landscape creation, the local narrative is reinforced and legitimated through its connection with international and national histories, and through the connection with the more powerful global entity of the Catholic Church.

It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the places and practices identified by the Catholics as important markers of their heritage have little congruence with the Buddhist temples of the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. Apart from the church itself, and the complex of adjacent school and cemetery, the 'Portuguese Settlement' was identified as an important place to the community, a village leader reinforcing that 'it was a Catholic village and is part of our heritage'. The Settlement is an archaeological site that was previously excavated by the FAD. Together with the footings and remains of a structural complex, a number of grave sites were uncovered and the skeletons of those buried there can be viewed in situ. Around 10 years ago a project was funded to provide a building to shelter the exposed skeletons. Although registered by the FAD, the land on which the site is located is still owned by the Catholic Church. It is through such associations that the villagers see themselves working with the FAD, who employ local labour in maintaining the site. Previous attempts by the FAD to also register the church building have been rejected by the Church authorities and practitioners: under the *Ancient Monuments Act* approval for registration must be given by the property owners. It is explained that the community was concerned that in allowing registration they would lose control of their building and not be allowed to do the works of their choice without first gaining appropriate permits.

One of the more significant aspects of 'being Catholic' is the ability to maintain an independent Catholic school, a financially challenging task as the Thai government provides no support through its education funding. The reinforcement of Catholic practice and ideology through formal education is identified as an integral part of the heritage of the community. It is also asserted that the children should be able to participate in a community that preserves the Catholic church, allows them to believe in God and to be good people. The church in this sense is interpreted as both a physical structure (St Joseph's) and as the maintenance of a particular way of life, belief structures and ritual activities that assert Catholicism.



**Plate 17: Barge transporting goods to Bangkok, fisherman in the centre foreground. Pasak River, Ayutthaya.**

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**Plate 18: Carp weaving, Ban Hua Laem, Ayutthaya.**

The affirmation of a Catholic community, however, is not seen as a rejection of other faiths and ways of being. St Joseph's school includes both Muslim and Buddhist students, and the teaching curriculum includes religious education that is specific to these doctrines. It also exposes the student body at large to the philosophies and teachings of the various religions. In concert with the expressions of inter-religious harmony from the Muslim community, the Catholics I spoke with indicated a good relationship with the non-Christians in their area. The senior teacher from St Joseph's with whom I spoke urged me not only to attend Mass in celebration of the Easter period (in the following week), but also explained the intent of the community to participate in the immediately following festival of Songkran, an important event in the Buddhist ritual calendar (see plate 21). Both Songkran and the later festival of Loy Krathong are celebrations involving a symbolic link with water, and these are discussed below. Songkran and its associated traditions are reinforced by other Catholics as an important aspect of the heritage of Ayutthaya.

As with others I spoke to, the Catholic villagers are keen to identify their involvement with the sub-district community development committee. A school teacher describes the committee as being important as it is responsible for the preservation of 'our own culture'. The members of the committee, for example, assist with the organisation of the Songkran festival, and assist older residents with attendance. The committee's activities include the protection of traditions, local careers (handicrafts) and archaeological sites. The teacher identifies examples that are relevant to his village and those nearby, traditionally Vietnamese in origin and today associated with the Vietnamese Catholic Community: these include preparing the dessert *kanhom mat tai*, and hammock making. Several other villagers are excited about prospects to promote the craft of making small model boats, an important traditional practice associated with Ayutthaya (see discussion below).

An elderly couple with whom I spoke explained that they had only started hammock making in the past 5 years, before that the family income was from fishing. Depleted fish stocks from overfishing have resulted in the imposition of restrictions so they have been forced to find an alternative source of living. They are concerned, however, that with no employment to be found in fishing, and a lack of interest from their

children in hammock making (it is hard to do and time consuming) that the younger people are starting to leave the village and Ayutthaya in search of employment. Their worry is not so much that skills will be lost, but the impact the exodus will have on the community and on the role of the next generation in community reinforcement. This was a concern expressed in varying degrees by most of the older people with whom I spoke, and is taken up below in the discussion of Ayutthaya's Muslim community.<sup>113</sup>

### ***'Being' Muslim***

There are four major Muslim communities in Ayutthaya. A local Imam advises that the province more broadly supports over 50 mosques and 100,000 Muslims. One of the Ayutthaya communities is found at Ban Hua Laem, a village known for the craft of palm leaf weaving (plate 18). The most traditional form is a fish, representing the carp (*pla taphian*), an animal that has symbolic associations with both fertility and perseverance. Woven fish artefacts are ubiquitous in tourist shops and stalls, not only in Ayutthaya. The art involves weaving, binding, and painting – using techniques and skills that have been passed on through Muslim families over generations. It is something that the Ban Hua Laem villagers identify as being a specifically Ayutthayan craft. They acknowledge that others in Ayutthaya, or indeed elsewhere in Thailand, may also practise the craft, but assert that such people would have learned it from one of the Muslim families in Ayutthaya. Often all members of a family will take part in the production, with children learning aspects of the craft at a young age. 'The details in these handicrafts reflect the past. They symbolise the richness of our land. The patterns and colours are inspired by what we know and imagine' (Khun Ketsuni Rungsatra, a Muslim carp-weaver from Hua Laem village, quoted in Chutintaranond 1996: 194).

Several families with whom I spoke comment that they learned their skills from their parents, and note that the retention of carp weaving as a craft is very important for the future of the community. As it does not take long to become proficient they are not worried that the skill will vanish – although with life-style changes it is acknowledged

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<sup>113</sup> The anthropological literature for many years has been recording the impact of Westernisation and economic change on Thai society and values; see for example Cohen & Wijawardene (1984), Ingersoll (1966), Irvine (1984), Kriengkraipetch (2000), Mougne (1984), Terwiel (1975).

that there are less craft people involved in this today. As it is possible to do 'part-time' a number of children will help their parents when big orders are required, but otherwise pursue less traditional careers. As indicated above with the Catholic villagers, the concern in terms of retaining a way of life and community identity relates to the continuing involvement of young people in community life. The perception is that this is inseparable from maintaining a village community where identity and 'knowing' one another is intertwined with sincerity, kindness and respect for elders – and with the practice of Islam.<sup>114</sup> The continued provision of a Muslim school at secondary level is hence a priority, and of being allowed to teach in 'the Muslim way'.

While the local mosque is acknowledged as an important part of community life, its significance is accrued through use, not age. There is an old disused mosque near the village of Hua Lem, and I found no support for the suggestion that this might continue to be important: as one villager, a carp-weaver, comments 'there is no need to keep the old mosque if we have a new mosque to use. The old buildings are not important'. The Muslim community lack an enduring physical structure such as the Catholic church of St Joseph's. However, in common with the Catholic community, there is an attempt to assert a continuity of emplacement that links the contemporary Muslim community with those who lived in ancient Ayutthaya. For the most part these were people from Persia, Malaya and Indonesia. In discussing the length of Muslim presence in Ayutthaya, one grandmother asserts: 'My people served with the Ayutthaya kings and were great war leaders'. The Imam of Wattana Mosque reports that one of the ancestors of the Muslim community today came as a trader and was made an important person and community leader by the king of Ayutthaya before the Burmese invasion. A Muslim community re-established itself immediately after. However, with no buildings or archaeological sites of equivalence to those claimed by the Catholic community, the heritage of Islam is asserted primarily through continuing Islamic practice and associations with the contemporary Muslim community and modern mosques. Particular emphasis is placed on Islamic education, and the necessity to meet the financial requirements of maintaining the few Muslim schools.

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<sup>114</sup> See Cornish (1997) for a comparison with a Malay Islamic community in southern Thailand.

A group of mosque leaders with whom I spoke express their concern that there is a failure to publicly tell the story of the Muslim presence in Ayutthaya. They note that there is nothing about their presence in the museums, and hence many visitors would remain unaware of the existence of a large Muslim community in Ayutthaya. As the museums and visitor centre concentrate on the story of ancient Ayutthaya, and the monuments and temples that give physical presence to this narrative, this charge has validity. The Catholic community is given presence through the tangible 'heritage' structure of the church of St Joseph's, and the Portuguese settlement archaeological site. Both are identified on tourist maps, and St Joseph's is located close to the river so is a prominent landmark for boat tours of the island. The Muslim communities have no such 'heritage features', and as their villages are located away from the main tourist areas, the otherwise prominent minarets of the various mosques are hidden from visitor view. Because most of them are relatively small modern structures, they offer neither architectural nor historical interest to visitors.

Although Ban Hua Lem is predominantly Muslim, the view is that 'the communities are linked and it doesn't matter whether you are Muslim or Buddhist – we are all friends and pitch in and help each other as needed, and this is what is important' (Muslim villager). Similar expressions came from several people I interviewed in Ban Sam Pao Lom, another Muslim village. Festivals, which are an important aspect of life in all the communities, whether Muslim, Buddhist or Christian, are shared events. The villagers go to the temples or mosques together, and there is an understanding that there are certain practices that some will not be able to participate in, including the sharing of certain foods, but that this isn't important. The major issue is that of the 'friendship mind' or 'kindness of mind'. I believe that this is what Chutintaranond (1996: 100) is referring to when he describes the communities of Ayutthaya as 'accepting diversity as variety and not difference for alienation, much like the natural flow of the river, cool and calm but forever flowing, nurturing to link all lives together as a wholesome unity'. Integral to this is the identification of the importance of knowing your community and being able to assist them when in need, and knowing that similar assistance will be provided – a sense of community that is seen to be lacking, for example, in Bangkok.

## Water Lifeways

The railway and the 1930s construction of the Pridi Dhamrong Bridge across the Pasak River precipitated what was to be an ongoing decline in the use of the river as the primary means of transport at Ayutthaya. Two further developments dramatically affected water lifeways: the connection with the main road route to Bangkok, and the completion of the Chao Phraya and Phumiphon Dams in 1957. However, the heritage of living and working on the water is not one that has been totally lost. A number of districts and villages in Ayutthaya are named with boat associations – Ban Sao Kradong (Mast Village), Ban Samphao Lom (Sunken Junk Village) – and Wat Rua Khaeng (Racing Boat Temple), the site of the annual boat races (plate 16). Long boat racing has a long history in Ayutthaya (see Chadchaidee 1994: 140), and is commonly held in the months of November and December. There are still several ferry crossing points that operate in daylight hours, and the easiest way to reach the island after alighting from the train is to embark on the two minute ferry ride from the nearby jetty.

Fishing is still a commercial past-time in the waterways of Ayutthaya, although with restrictions on catch size one can more commonly see single fishermen in small wooden boats (plate 17). Living in harmony with the rivers and canals, and the ability to take fish and shrimp, are endearing aspects of Ayutthaya life described by a fisherman in his early 20s. He fishes from the boat that was once his father's, and is proud that his father has the skill to make water craft. He notes that there are fewer boats on the Ayutthaya canals and rivers today, with boats such as those belonging to the water traders – *rua kam pan* – being almost gone as goods are carried by road. An elderly woman who has been selling *tao hu thoad* (a type of Chinese dessert) on the river for 30 years has also seen the river traffic decrease rapidly over the years – no longer can one travel down the river to Bangkok on the passenger ferries that commuted between the capital and the river settlements. Today, she is one of only four boats selling on the river, and is proud that her product is still sought by the locals. Both she and the younger fisherman, however, share a concern that the river is being 'dirtied' by people who do not respect it or understand the strong spiritual nature of the river. Both acknowledge the importance of making offerings to *Mae Ya*

*Nang*, the boat goddess, and to the water and river spirits, particularly *Mae Kong Kha*, the goddess of water, who is an important figure in the Loy Krathong Festival.<sup>115</sup>

Another local fisherman, asserts that it is important to love what one does, and that this is why he is a successful fisherman:

I love Ayutthaya ... here, the air is clean and fresh. If it is hot, you just take a bath [in the river]. The water here is clean for bathing and drinking ... Life is good here. There are festivals to go to at the temple. We are all good friends and neighbours. Each home is like our own. (Khun Sangwian Kasemsuk, quoted in Chutintaranond 1996: 183)

Chutintaranond interprets this as 'the equipment, experience, season, knowledge of the tide are not as important as his heart ... he and his boat are like one' (ibid). This emotive connection with the practices that inform daily existence and affirm 'who one is' is echoed in the stories of the connection between mahouts and their elephants found in the following chapter.

One of the most distinctive features of the river is the steady stream of heavy cargo barges carting products such as rice and gravel south to Bangkok (plate 17). Ban Kacha, located on the south eastern tip of the island, at the junction of the Chao Phrya and Passak rivers, has 'since the earliest times' been an important market and unloading pier (ibid: 159). The lives of the villagers still revolve around the river in terms of sustenance and employment. The boat goddess and shrines on-board watercraft take the place of the spirit houses customarily associated with land based properties. The decrease in barge transport has obvious impacts in an environment where new sailors learn their skills from the older people. Similarly, there has been a decline in boatyards, and skills associated with building and repairing boats, although there are three yards still operating at Ban Kacha, in the area around Wat Phanan Choeng.

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<sup>115</sup> Any discussion of life, culture and religion in Thailand must recognise the historical interplay between indigenous animism, Indian influences and Buddhism. The Loy Krathong festival is held in late-October or early November and honours the spirits of the water (see Van Beek 1995).

Khun Paitoon Khaomala, a now-retired teacher, told me he remembers as a child being given his own small boat as it was the only way he could travel to school. For many years he taught boat building at the Ayutthaya Industrial and Ship Building Training Centre College, which when it was established in 1839 was the first such school in Thailand. Studying there as a pupil, he recalls: 'we used to take the floating logs from the river and make them into planks to build our boats'. He has spent his life studying Thai boat design, but has also been involved in numerous projects that have seen adaptations of new designs, technology and materials. The series of books he has written are today used as texts by various boat building schools.

The inspiration for my endeavours has been to provide knowledge and understanding to develop a pride in later Thai generations in the expertise and accomplishments of their ancestors, particularly in the Thai Royal Barges that have become famous worldwide. (Quoted in Chutintaranond 1996: 173)

There is no country in the world with as many different boats and watercraft as Thailand. I am a native of Ayutthaya and my life has evolved around the water since I was a boy. Today it is important that we protect our waterways and vessels. (ibid: 176)

Khun Paitoon is very concerned that the skill of building traditional Thai boats will be lost, as so many young people find that careers in boat building depend on understanding and practising modern techniques, materials and designs. He recalls that before the bridge and good roads, the only transportation was by boat and that most households would be able to make their own form of floating transport, even if it was just hollowing out a log. Today such simple practices are forgotten and even fishermen will buy a boat rather than make one themselves. Not only are the skills being diminished, but he laments that even those who buy boats have little understanding of wood or design that would help them purchase the right craft. With this in mind he set up the Thai Boat Museum as a place to not only show visitors the important aspects of traditional crafts, but also to teach the skills of building scale models to the community, both young and old: 'I can do something important to preserve Thai culture, because boats are an important part of Thailand – even before Ayutthaya the river was here, same as now ... even the King travels by boat'.

The traditions of boat building also involve a knowledge of decoration, and of the rituals and ceremonies that accompany the process from the time a tree is cut to the launch of the boat. The latter requires a ceremony to *Mae Ya Nang*. The paintings found on the rear of a boat are representations of *Ra Hoo*, the water spirit, and the skill to paint these designs is an important part of traditional boat building. Khun Paitoon is still invited to perform the ceremony to launch new boats, and he is concerned that there are few artisans left who have the knowledge of these ceremonies. He also thinks that boat building is one small part of other related water and boating activities and traditions that are important to the heritage of Ayutthaya, including long boat races and boat songs, and the festivals of Loy Krathong and Songkran. Both these festivals are associated with water and its symbolic association with purity (see Van Beek 1995 for further discussion of the role of water in Thai cultural and ritual life). The latter festival occurs at the end of the second week of April and is synonymous with three days of water madness, in which Thai people welcome in their new year and participate in public and riotous water-battles that are the epitome of the Thai sense of *sanuk* (fun) (see plate 21). The two festivals, long-boat racing and boat songs, and the capacity for their children to 'have fun' are among the more commonly identified practices suggested by Ayutthaya people as important to their way of life and heritage.

One of Khun Paitoon's more spectacular model boats is on display at the Ayutthaya Historical Centre, and he has created models that have been presented to not only the Queen of Thailand, but also to the Queen of England. He is, however, unable to obtain any support from the government for his museum. He has been visited by representatives of the FAD, who he believes commend his efforts, but have not provided any assistance otherwise. He was advised that he should rather approach the TAT for funding as a tourist project. This deeply concerns him, as he is confident that boat building is an important part of the heritage of Ayutthaya, and is in danger of being lost.

Training programs can provide community members with a way to participate in the preservation and restoration of part of their heritage, while at the same time being able to derive an economic benefit. Khun Paitoon is excited that the Catholic villages near

St Joseph's have elected to concentrate on the production of model boats as a handicraft activity, the products of which will be primarily consumed in the tourist market. However, both the villagers and Khun Paitoon place value on the activity as being more than a tourist enterprise with economic benefits: they acknowledge that the skill itself is an important part of their heritage.<sup>116</sup>

There is a need to preserve the relationship between objects and the living community, and values that the community might place on an object. It is important to recognise the complications that arise through tourism, which serves as a further catalyst for the secularisation and reinterpretation of culture as product, commodity, art, performance, spectacle and display. The alternative is to succumb to the 'floor show' imperative where practice is divorced from a system of beliefs and tradition and becomes manifest as a tangible collection of artefacts – both authentic and created for tourist consumption – in a process of trivialisation, miniaturisation and impact on quality. This was exemplified in my discussions with a master Khon-mask maker who lives at Ayutthaya (he is one of only ten such master artisans in Thailand). The decline in the popularity of Lakhon performance, a traditional Thai art form, has led among other impacts to a decreased need for masks (see Yupho 1963 & 1989 for an overview of Khon and Lakhon). Master artisans now spend more time creating miniature masks for the collectors market, and contending with mass-produced products of limited quality that flood the tourist market. The end result in terms of Khon-mask traditions is a decline in skilled artisans. Lakhon performance and traditions face similar threats. It can be argued that tourism can promote the revival, preservation and protection of traditional practice. However, the conditions of reception are altered, with both the frame and content shifting to reach an accommodation between tradition and commercialism. The result can be to foster a secularisation of the past that compromises authenticity and leads to the depreciation of values (see Acciaoli 1985; Henry 1999: 284; n.a 1995; Peralta 1995).

For value to be more than that accrued through commodification, there is a reliance on a connection with the past that involves the object in a broader historical and

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<sup>116</sup> See C. Reynolds (1993b: 15) for a discussion of the connection between Thai culture, tourism and government promotional programs.

experiential context. The object, a small model traditional boat for example, is otherwise little more than an illusory image of the original, depleted of the symbolic connection with past lifeways and lacking the narratives and meanings that support its role as a mnemonic device. It is through such symbolism and ability to inspire narratives and memories that Khun Paitoon's models are given the power to link people, practice and place, and connect the present with the past in the immutable relationship between people and water. Such attributes are not available 'off the shelf', or retained through absorption in the tourist enterprise: 'You cannot buy cultural values, or the dignity of the ancestors and their achievements' (I Made Sutaba 1998).

Bérard and Marchenay (2000: 162) make the interesting comment that products found in a local area, become identified as 'traditional' and move from the status of local domestic products, to be the products of artisans. The next stage in this 'evolution' is that of industrial production, which is one of the developments that is in fact threatening local artisans. It is, however, the sense of identity that is crucial for the relationship between a product as a commodity and a product as a form of heritage, resulting from a sense of shared time, space and memories. It is a changing heritage, influenced and constructed by people, but one that 'is an integral part of collective representations and social reproduction' (ibid; see also Chambers 1994). Culture as change recognises that people adapt, innovate, borrow and assimilate in response to multiple encounters, events and contacts, whether enforced or voluntary. Over time, new practices also become traditional.<sup>117</sup> It is to be expected, however, that the more enduring component of tradition will be its core values, reflections of belief systems and forms of expression – the intangible elements. This highlights the ability of modern societies to collectively project themselves into the future, based on a shared identity that is derived from the product and place. While such products are grounded in the past, in traditional skills and their points of origin, they are at the same time modern products, in the sense of their contemporary status and the significance and

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<sup>117</sup> However, note Koanantakool (2000: 189) who contends that traditional and folk performances have been constantly changing and that it is inadequate to try and understand these changes only in the light of modernisation and technological advances. Through a case study of Thai puppetry, Koanantakool suggests that a particular type of performance arises through the interaction 'between the text, defined as the basic structure of a dramatic form, its limitation and the potential for change, and the context, defined as the sociocultural factors which function to create an environment of such performing art. In this way stylistic variations at a particular time can be explained'.

meanings that are attached to them today, much of which is grounded in the relationship with their makers.

## Conclusion

At Ayutthaya, there is a danger that traditions and practices can become marginalised or lost through a process of heritage attribution that privileges the tangible remains of the monumental past. The engagement of archaeologists with landscape has tended to follow what J. Thomas (1995) refers to as a 'specular' approach, in which the 'landscape' becomes little more than an arbitrary boundary encompassing a series of physical manifestations of past human conduct (sites). The actors – the people – have only a 'hypothetical status' in which the material evidence is awarded greater reality than the people who produced it. The consequence of ignoring the significance of action negates the linkages between places and renders the landscape as artefact.

Klaichinda (1995: 25) suggests that in the context of the built environment the tourist industry has ignored and devalued associated intangible cultural 'resources'. Tourists are delivered to temples, advised on proper attire, history of the place, and what to do or not do. However they are given little that would promote an understanding that these 'beautiful and grand structures have come into existence due to the loyalty, confidence, and magnificent imagination of the creators'. Nor is there an attempt to reveal the obstacles and difficulties that may have faced the artisans and architects involved in the construction – much less any attempt to understand how the more humble inhabitants lived and continue to live within the broad landscapes that encapsulate the structures.

Ongoing cultural heritage management practices are complicit in reinforcing this depiction of a sterile and unpeopled landscape. Various management and landscaping approaches at monumental sites exemplify the intervention by modernising processes that work to reduce the otherwise multiple layers of meaning inscribed onto landscapes through time. They strive 'to rearrange these living palimpsests in ways that are deemed appropriate to the national project' (Caftanzoglou 2001: 23). At Ayutthaya, Thai national identity has been vested most closely in a particular construction of landscape, a scenic nationalism that relies on a connection with a

frozen moment from a glorious past. By enforcing a separation between heritage as practice and tradition, and heritage as architecture and archaeology, a holistic understanding and protection of heritage is compromised at more than the local level. The diminishment of the cultural life of any community can affect identity, community cohesion and diversity, and can reduce the wealth of traditional knowledge and practice that is carried into the future. Daily life, community growth and the ability to absorb change are all intimately linked with the cultural heritage of a group, where that heritage encompasses both intangible and tangible aspects. In the case of Ayutthaya the diversity of lifeways and religious practices has contributed to a cultural pluralism and tolerance that engender a wider and more vibrant community.

Traditional practices help to provide a sense of historical continuity and a common belonging and identity, and rely on a transmission of skills and practices that have been acquired over a long period. Ayutthaya's contribution to both local and national heritage is more properly a coordination of places and landscapes with the enduring traditions that give life to both past and present communities. The myths and legends of ancient Ayutthaya are as intricately linked with the actions and experiences of the communities who populated the ancient city as they are with the bricks and mortar that remain. Today, the lived traditions, rituals, ceremonies, skills and practices of the contemporary communities of Ayutthaya complement and give life and meaning to hallowed but otherwise lifeless sites of the archaeological landscape.

It is almost impossible to consider the heritage of Ayutthaya without embracing the diverse lifeways, world views, ideals, values and supportive social relations that give meaning and identity to its communities in a dynamic process of community affirmation and emplacement. From fishermen to kings, it is equally difficult to ignore the intimate and timeless relationship between the people of Ayutthaya and its network of waterways. This relationship was integral to the establishment of Ayutthaya as a major kingdom and remains a significant factor in the creation of Ayutthayan community identity today. A similar reliance and connection with water is found in another Thai icon, the elephant, and this is taken up in the following chapter.

