LOCAL MUSEUMS
Research and Development Project

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre

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The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC) is a public organization under the Minister of Culture. Our core mission is to collect all forms of anthropological information, support relevant research, and promote public education and outreach. Our ultimate aim is to foster public awareness of cultural diversity in Thailand, and to promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect as the basis for a peaceful society.

Thailand is home to hundreds of local museums established and managed by local communities and/or private individuals. Recognizing the important role in safeguarding cultural heritage played by these community-based museums, the SAC launched the Local Museums Research and Development Project in 2003. SAC hopes that by strengthening the work of local museums, they will continue to serve as centers for the transmission of knowledge and heritage for many generations to come. It is also hoped that by supporting and publicizing the work of local museums, Thai citizens will have the opportunity to learn about the rich cultural diversity of their own country.

During the first phase (2003-2004), the project initiated network-building and launched a preliminary, nationwide survey of local museums. Building on these findings, the second phase of the project (2005-present) has continued the survey of local museums for inclusion in an online, digital database, which has grown to over 1,000 entries, including both locally managed and government-supported museums. This phase has included support for network-building and knowledge-sharing among museum practitioners as well as further research on museums and their communities.

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The first phase : 2003 - 2004

Understanding

Museum Practitioners

The Local Museums Research and Development Project began in 2003 with a preliminary survey of local museums in Thailand. During the first year, SAC organized several regional meetings in order to develop an understanding of the various backgrounds, modes of operation, problems, needs, potentialities and limitations of local museums in Thailand. These regional meetings served as forums for network-building and for identifying collaborative opportunities.

Central and Western Regions:

26-27 July 2003 in Nakhon Pathom Province

This forum revealed that there were many museums about the lifeways of the rural farmer; for instance, the Thai Rice Farmer Lifeways Museum in Laan Laem, Nakhon Pathom province, and many museums in Nakhon Chai Si River Basin in Nakhon Pathom province that display Thai rural lifeways. This may be because central Thailand is a region where traditional rural lifeways have transformed rapidly, having been replaced by industrial and urban livelihoods.

In addition, the central region is the site of pilot local museums in the collaborative project between local communities and Silpakorn University, such as Wat Muang Folk Museum in Ratchaburi province, Chan Sen Museum in Nakhon Sawan province, and Yisan Museum in Samut Songkhram province.

Eastern Region:

6-7 September 2003 in Rayong Province

Rayong province is home to a museum dedicated to the collection of Nang Yai shadow puppets. The museum, which is managed by the Wat Ban Don, houses an impressive collection of these giant puppets, many of which are over one hundred years old. Following the meeting, SAC launched a research and development project with the Ban Don Museum.

Other museums in this region include the Khaw Kradone Museum, as well as several museums dedicated to ethnic identity, such as the Tai Phuan Museum at Wat Fang Khlong in Nakhon Nayok province, and the Center for the Study and Revitalization of Chong Culture in Chanthaburi province.

Northern Region:

14-15 October 2003 in Lampang Province

The North is home to many interesting local museums—for instance, the Wat Lai Hin Museum in Lampang province and the Wat Srisuthawat Museum in Chiang Rai province. This forum revealed that many local communities in the north maintain strong ties to their monasteries, which serve as the centers of social life and as important sites for sustaining traditional identities. A number of these communities had long histories in the region--narratives which were still alive in the memory of local inhabitants.

In addition, this region was also home to many museums dedicated to ethnic identity in the north, such as the Ban Jalae Hill Tribe Life and Culture Center in Chiang Rai province, the 'Black Muser' (Lahu) Museum in Tak province, and the Hill Tribe Museum in Chiang Mai province.

Northeastern Region:

27-28 December 2003 in Mahasarakham Province

One distinctive feature of the Northeast is the prevalence of forest monasteries. Owing to this historical tradition, the Northeast is also home to many forest monastery museums. For instance, in Ubon Ratchathani province there is the Venerable Sao Kanatasilo Museum, and in Sakon Nakhon province there are the Museum of Venerable Man Bhuritdattathera and the Museum of Venerable Fan Ajaro.

In the Northeast, there are also many museums dedicated to housing archaeological remains; for instance, the Museum of Ban Kan Lueng Archaeological Site in Ubonratchathani province and the Ban Bungsa Prehistoric Museum in Sakon Nakhon province. Other interesting museums include the Ban Kwian Muk (The Cart House) Museum in Mukdahan province, which features an extensive collection of antique wooden carts, and the Ban Pa Ao Community Museum in Ubon Ratchathani province, which features brass handicrafts made by local, ethnically Lao residents.

Southern Region:

7-8 February 2004 in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

Many local museums in the South reflect the unique cultural and historical identity of this region: for instance, the Suchart Sapsin Shadow Play Folk Museum in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, featuring the Nang Talung puppets of Mr. Suchart Subsin. In Surat Thani province, there is the Chaiya Folk Museum, featuring artifacts and installations reflecting Chaiya's history as an ancient port city during the 8th – 14th centuries. Other museums include the Tambon Na Muen Sri Folk Heritage Museum in Trang province, which features local hand-woven fabrics and the Cultural Center of Phatthalung province.

In addition, there are several museums dedicated to archaeology and the display of marine archaeological artifacts; for instance, the Museum of Wat Khlong Thom in Krabi province, featuring artifacts such as ancient glass, pottery, stone mortars and pestles, and beads inscribed with the Pallava script (6th-8th centuries A.D.).

"We thought of setting up a museum because it is common for every town, every village to have one. I remembered staying in Germany during one Buddhist Lent and saw museums in every city like Frankfurt and Stuttgart. When I returned and looked at the situation at home, things were left drifting. There was no active work, just guarding old things. The young generation has no chance to learn how their forefathers managed to lead the nation. I want them to study, to learn, to see and to appreciate such facts."

Ven. Pra Acharn Bunyarat Panyawuttoh,
Wat Phra Yuen
Lamphun province

"I set up the museum initially to strengthen the community. So I looked for things that people cherish and have pride in. I selected the "Mon Way of Life" and "Pottery" as the main themes. At the beginning, I collected all antiques and old objects. But then I asked myself "What is unique about us?" So I let the temple keep the collections related to the monastery and the royalty, while my own house is home to the collections related to the ethnic Mon pottery, documents and artifacts.

What worries us now is the abstract matter such as folk songs, oral literature that cannot be housed in a cabinet. It may be passed on, but not so thoroughly or profoundly, as the language competency is not sufficiently profound."

Mr. Pisarn Bunphuk
Mon Local Museum at Koh Kred,
Nonthaburi province

Voices of the Museum

"Ban Chiang Hean Museum was officially opened on March 14th, 1998. My father feels proud of it although our museum is merely an old house with dusty collections scattered here and there. This museum has appeared on Thailand's map since 1993. Everytime people visit us, my father smiles.

...He dreams of a perfect museum and expects a pension through his lifetime governmental service so that he will contribute with all his effort to Ban Chiang Hean Museum - this is his life."

Mr. Santiphab Khamsa-ad
Ban Chiang Hean Museum,
Mahasarakham province

"To talk about 'museum' then, I did not know it. I had no ideas about what a museum was. I collected old things for my own use as a shadow puppet carver. What I like most are iron tools and knives (for slicing bamboo). I buy them wherever I visit and find them beautiful.

...Until I had a chance to have my audience of His Majesty the King. He said he appreciated my effort to keep old things. He also asked me not to hold my knowledge and skill but pass it on to the next generation. That's why I launched this museum."

Mr. Suchart Subsin
Museum of Suchart Subsin's Shadow Puppets, Nakhon Si Thammarat province

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The second phase : 2005 - present

Development

of the Local Museums Database

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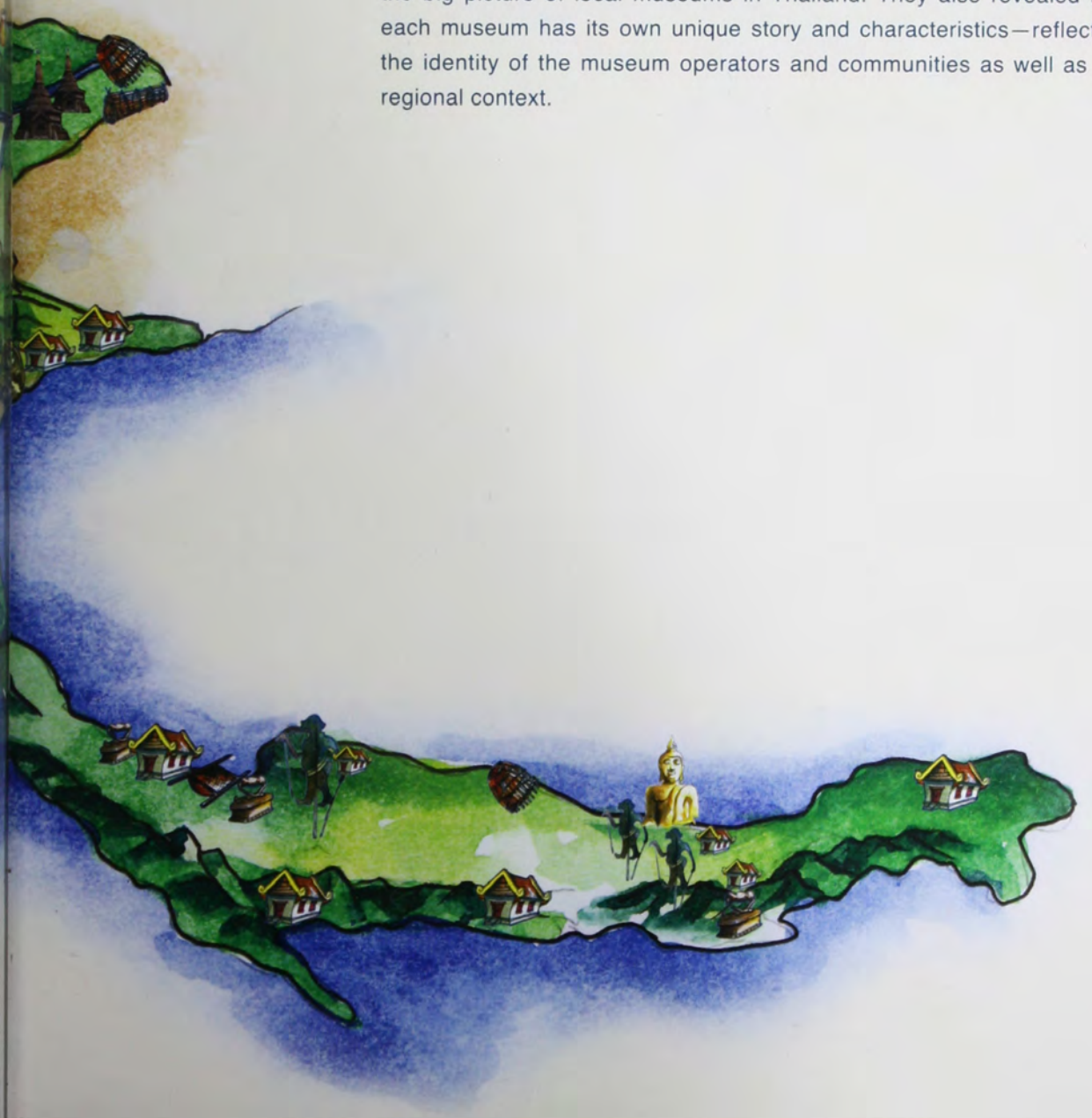
Local Museums Research and Development Project

One important objective of the Local Museums Research and Development Project is to develop a comprehensive online database of Thailand's local museums which is free and accessible to researchers and interested members of the general public. Based on the data from field surveys, documents and regional meetings, the Centre has found that there are more than 1,052 museums in Thailand (in 2008). Of this total, 314 are operated by monasteries, 173 are operated by private citizens, 261 are operated by schools, and 71 are operated by local administrative organizations.

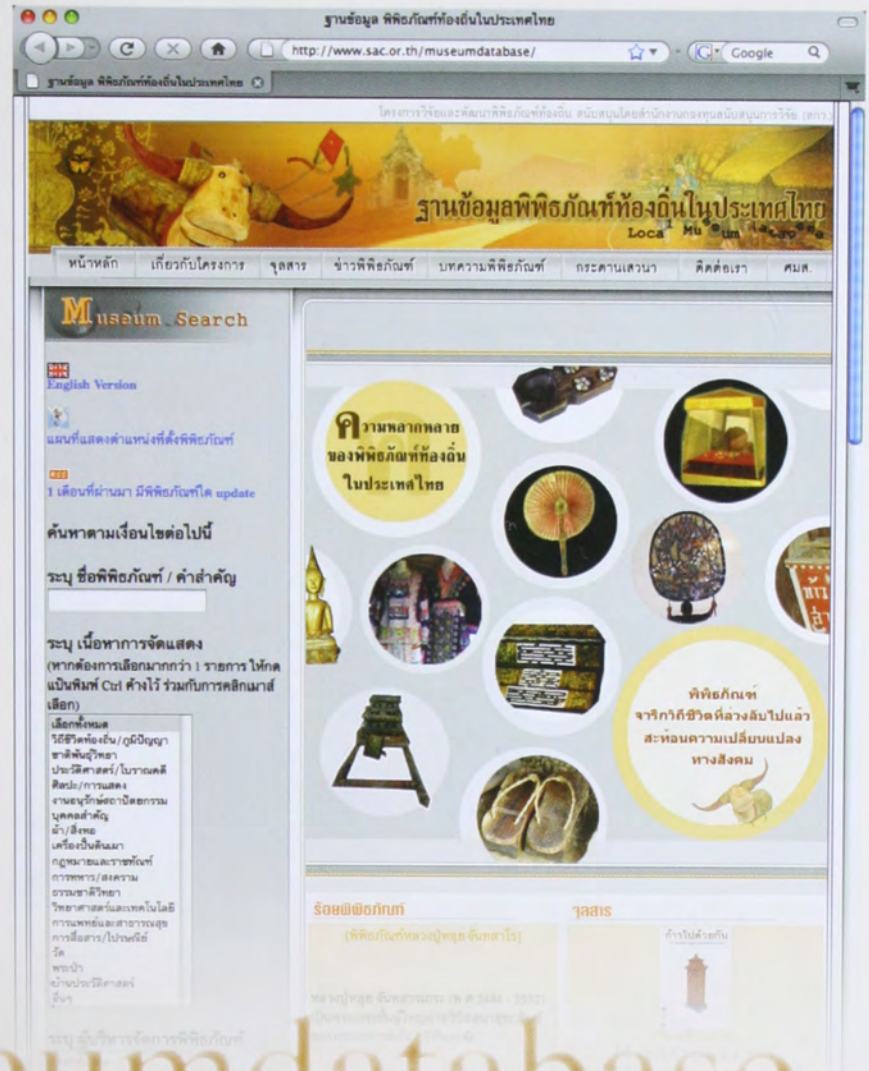
From 2003 to 2008, the Centre undertook surveys throughout the country covering a total of 312 sites. These surveys helped us to see the big picture of local museums in Thailand. They also revealed that each museum has its own unique story and characteristics—reflecting the identity of the museum operators and communities as well as the regional context.



The Local Museums in Thailand

Database

The Local Museums in Thailand Database compiles data on local museums from various sources. In addition to information about individual museums, the database includes information about regional museum networks, museum news, and technical articles for museum operators. Available through the SAC website (www.sac.or.th), the database contains the following information about museums: location, hours of operation, history, community background, exhibits and photographs. Database users are invited to share comments on a web comment board. Due to the dynamics of local museums, SAC's involvement in the improvement and expansion of the Database is an ongoing process.



Museum Data Research and Development Project

Collaboration
with Local Museums

"We develop our work on the basis of on-the-ground experience"

Our aim is to strengthen the capacity of Thailand's diverse local museums, so that they will continue to serve as centers for learning and spaces for the transmission of culture, managed by local communities. It is our hope to see local museums as living and vital spaces where objects tell stories—not just storage spaces for dead objects.

Objectives for collaboration:

- Local museums will be places where objects tell stories about livelihood practices, lifeways, experiences, community problems, and social and cultural change.
- Local museums will become centers of local knowledge and experience for the next generation.
- Local museums will continue to reflect the cultural diversity of Thailand.
- Local museums will offer an alternative source of pastime activities for families.

There is no "blueprint" or "formula" for the local museum, because each museum has its own distinctive history and context. Rather, our goal is to support the sharing and exchange of knowledge and experience among museum practitioners with both lay and professional backgrounds.

In 2005, SAC began to work in close collaboration with three local museums: the Museum of Shadow Puppet Theatre, (Nang Yai) at Wat Ban Don in Rayong province, the Local Museum of Wat Tha Phut in Nakhon Pathom province, and the Museum of Wat Lai Hin in Lampang province.

The Museum of Shadow Puppet Theatre, Wat Ban Don, Rayong Province

...We can sense the dedication of this group of people to protect their heritage for the future ...

The Nang Yai troupe of Wat Ban Don is one of three troupes in Thailand which have a large treasury of Nang Yai puppets, and which are still performing this genre today. The striking feature of the Wat Ban Don Puppets is their age—many of the puppets are over one hundred years old and have been used in shadow plays by many generations of performers. Recognizing the determination of this small group of artists to protect their art form, SAC launched a collaborative project with the Wat Ban Don aimed at safeguarding the Nang Yai heritage of this community for future generations.

The Museum of Shadow Puppet

This stage of the project involved surveying the condition, quantity and characteristics of the Nang Yai puppets.

Preserving the Design of the Puppets through Reproduction

In order to preserve the knowledge of puppet craftsmanship, this stage of the project involved the reproduction of the Nang Yai puppets using grease paper. This process was undertaken in collaboration with students in the Department of Arts at Prince of Songkhla University in Pattani province.

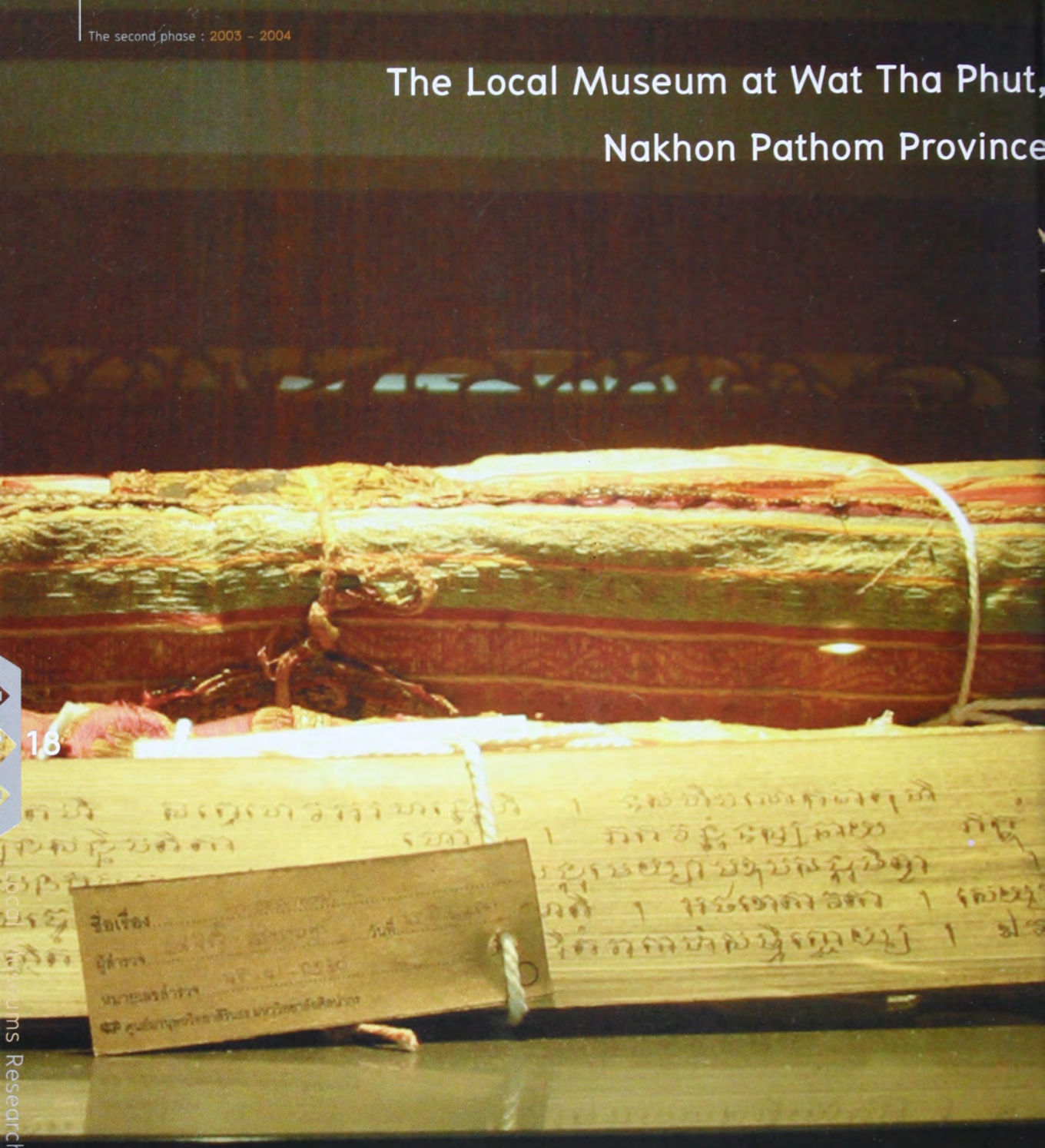
Workshop in Puppet Carving

This stage of the project was aimed at transmitting skills and knowledge about puppet carving to youth and the local community. The workshop included training in bleaching, carving and painting the leather puppets by two experienced Nang Yai teachers—Watee and Sanee Subsin--who are the children of of Suchart Subsin, a renowned Nang Yai performer from Nakhon Si Thammarat province.

Publication of "Nang Yai Wat Ban Don"

This publication, packed with information and illustrations, although the color of the century-old shadow puppets is waning through time, demonstrates the desire for the conservation of this performance art and encourages further research.

The Local Museum at Wat Tha Phut, Nakhon Pathom Province



..We are learning together by working together...

The Wat Tha Phut is a monastery with a long history in the region. Established on the bank of the Nakhon Chai Si River, the Wat Tha Phut Museum is a testament to the local population's faith and respect for the Venerable Phra Khru Phisansathuwat, the former abbot of the monastery. After his death in 1997, the temple committee, along with local residents and devotees, joined together to consolidate objects in Phra Khru Phisansathuwat's personal collection. These objects were put on display along with other artifacts belonging to the temple and donated by local residents.

Over the three-year period of collaboration in local museum development, SAC has established a strong working relationship with the local residents. It is for this reason that we say that "we are learning together by working together."

Learning from Observation of Local Museums

SAC encourages learning from experiences of other local museums and sponsors study tours. Drawing on observations of the archaeological site in Ban Pong Manaow, the Wat Tha Phut museum operators and SAC staff have realized the importance of good museum management for long-term sustainability.

The local museum in Cha Thawi (Maj. Sgt. Thawi Buranakhet), Phitsanulok province, is a good example of how museums can be exciting, interactive spaces, while the museum of Khao Yisan village in Samut Songkhram is a vivid illustration of community involvement.

Learning from Participation

Registering objects by recording their narratives and biographies is one way of drawing a connection between objects and their users. It is also a useful method for organizing objects in a museum.

Inviting members of the community to come and talk about objects is also one way of transmitting knowledge from older to younger generations.

Organizing temporary installations and exhibits is a good way of disseminating local knowledge between communities. "When Grandfather and Grandmother were Young," "Stories from the Hearth," and "Lanterns," are the titles of some of the exhibits that were on display as part of annual merit-making rites and festivals in the community.

SAC has endeavored to involve the residents of Tha Phut at every stage of exhibit planning and set up, in order to ensure that the layout of museum installations also reflects local interpretations. Building One of the museum, which was converted from the traditional library, tells the history of the community as told by the residents of Tha Phut, while posters for the lantern festival in Building Two tell stories of the lives of these objects. In Building Three, there is a drawing and painting exhibition of agricultural lifeways, accompanied by descriptive captions written by local residents.

The Museum of Wat Lai Hin, Lampang Province

...We support "insiders"
so that they can realize their potential strengths..

The Wat Lai Hin is a Buddhist monastery with a long history, including archaeological remains dating to several hundred years before the present. It is said that the main prayer hall (vihara) and the arched entryway (sum pratu) were built by the prince of Chiang Tung as an offering to Khruba Maha Paa Kesone Panyo, a highly respected monk among the Lai Hin community.

With their ornate stucco work and carvings of mythical animals, the main prayer hall and arched entryway are excellent examples of the refined architectural craftsmanship of the Tai Yai. The temple is also a tangible expression of the Buddhist belief system and cosmological order of the local residents.

The local community of Lai Hin are committed to making their museum into a resource center for learning about their history, lifeways and culture.

Learning from Field Visits

The Lai Hin community learned a great deal about methods and approaches to museum exhibits from visiting other museums in Thailand; for instance, the Center for Arts and Culture in Chiang Mai province, the Chiang Mai Local Museum, and the Khruba Srivichai Museum in Lamphun province.

Photography Exhibit and Roundtable

In preparation for the exhibit entitled "Lai Hin in the Past," the organizing team asked local residents to donate old photographs for display at the museum. In conjunction with the exhibit, local residents participated in a roundtable event, where they had an opportunity to narrate the stories behind the photographs.

In the exhibit entitled "Passport Stories," residents of Lai Hin shared their stories and compared experiences of travel abroad. This exhibit encouraged not only lively storytelling, but also became a means for residents of the same village to learn about their fellow villagers' experiences abroad which might otherwise have been forgotten.

Old Objects Telling Stories

This exhibit focused on the many objects that have lost their social and ritual function in Lai Hin, such as the "wi" or "talapat"—a fan used by monks in ritual.

Drawing, Writing and Learning in the Museum

In order to encourage youth to participate and take an interest in their community museum, this activity aimed to teach children basic skills in art and museum installation.

Learning about our Village through Stories

For this activity, the youth of Lai Hin interviewed elders in their own homes and community as a means of recording this generation's knowledge, including: oral narratives, teachings, proverbs, beliefs, myths and traditional games and pastimes.

News of Wat Lai Hin Museum

This publication is a means of communication between the museum and the local community.

New Exhibition

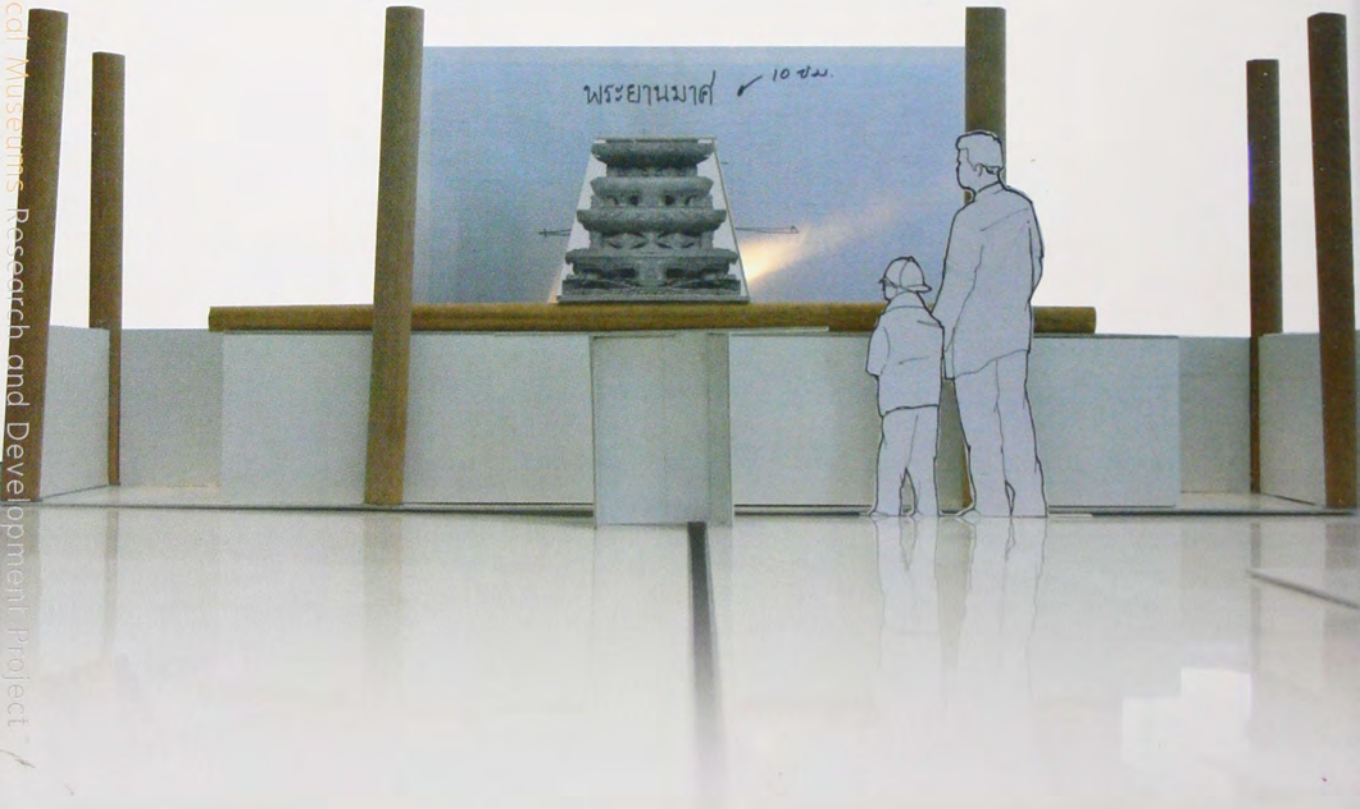
This new exhibition describes myriad aspects of the local way of life—for instance, house-building, cooking, irrigation systems and rice farming. The entire process of staging the exhibition is a collaboration between local community and SAC researchers – from collecting field data, designing the exhibition, and installation on the basis of local technology.

Museum Forums:

Sharing Knowledge, Exchanging Experiences and Networking

"We can learn from each other both through our similarities and our differences"

Museums generate knowledge through practice. Each museum has its own unique set of experiences, challenges, and methods for overcoming obstacles. By creating forums for the exchange of knowledge, museum practitioners can learn from each other's successes and mistakes. The core aim of the museum forum is to foster networking and build capacity among museum practitioners.



Meetings,

Seminars, Lectures, and Training Workshops

6 September 2004

Lecture "Learning from the Smithsonian: Lessons (Good and Bad) from the United States National Museum," by Dr. Frank Proschan, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institution of the United States

In this lecture, Dr. Proschan shared his own experiences in museum work, particularly in building networks among small museums in America.

28-29 September 2005

"International Conference on Museums and Communities: Cross-Cultural Comparative Perspectives"

This international conference provided a forum for sharing experiences about community participation in local museums, and for discussing the social and cultural role that museums play in communities. Presentations were given by participants from many countries, including Professor Nguyen Van Huy from the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Dr. Richard Kurin from the Smithsonian Institution of the United States, and Dr. Clare Harris from Oxford University, U.K.

3-5 November 2008

ฟังเรื่องเล่า ฟื้นความหลัง สร้างพลังท้องถิ่น

เทศกาลพิพิธภัณฑ์ท้องถิ่น

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แลกเปลี่ยนเรียนรู้ประสบการณ์
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บูรณาการความรู้จากผู้คน ข้าวของ และงานแสดง
นำมาอวด ชวนมาชม และสนทนาอย่างรื่นรมย์

Local Museums Festival

Showcasing local museums from throughout the country, this festival brings together local museum organizers to come tell their stories and share experiences of museum work. The three-day festival also offers an excellent opportunity for the public to learn more about Thailand's cultural diversity through its wide variety of museums.

Passing on Knowledge to

Regional Museum Networks

4-6 October 2004

Workshop on Local Museum Work and Development

This workshop provided basic training for field researchers who would be working closely with local museums. The content covered introduction to local museum operation, field techniques, and experiences in museum development.

First Workshop: Central, Western and Eastern Regions

Rai Khing Temple, Nakhon Pathom Province

One of the workshop activities focused on the creative adaptation of widely available materials for use in the conservation of artifacts and objects.

25-27 November 2005

Second Workshop: Northern Region

Wat Lai Hin, Lampang Province

Museum practitioners experimented with methods of "narrating" museum objects and exhibiting these objects and their stories.

3-5 February 2006

Third Workshop: Southern Region

Surat Thani Province and Krabi Province

Museum practitioners and supporters donated funds to support the Pla Hin (Stone-carved Fish) Museum. Workshop participants experimented with installation methods, including labeling objects and the use of lighting techniques to highlight special objects.

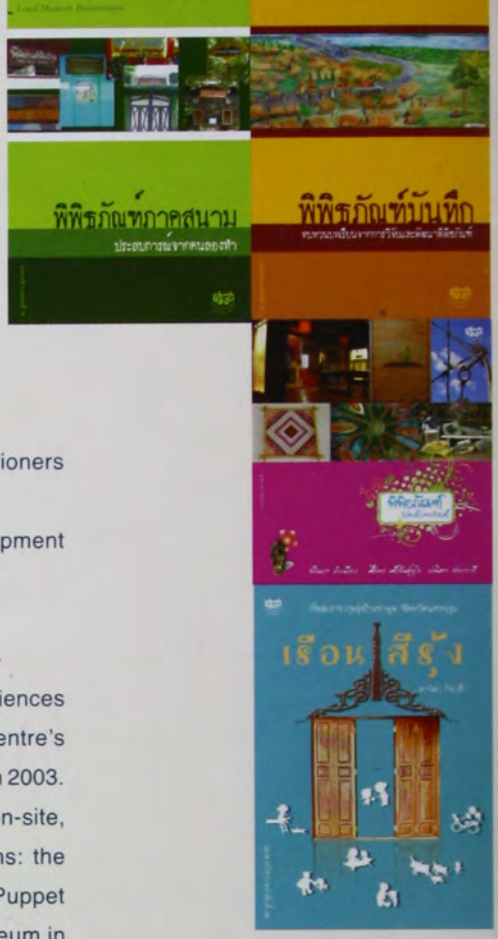
14-17 August 2007

Fourth Workshop: Northeastern Region

Khon Kaen Province

This workshop, entitled "Northeastern Networks for Local Museums," focuses on the importance of regional network-building for the longterm sustainability and development of local museums.

11-12 September 2008



Publications

Local Museums Series

Museum Fieldwork: Experiences from Local Museum Practitioners *(Forthcoming 2008)*

Museum Notes : Lessons from Museum Research and Development *(Forthcoming 2008). Edited by Siriporn Srisim-urai*

Museum Unlimited *(Forthcoming 2008)*

Rainbow House *(Forthcoming 2008)*

The Local Museums Series presents the observations and experiences of SAC researchers and fieldworkers who have been involved in the Centre's Local Museums Research and Development Project since its inception in 2003. The Series focuses on sharing reflections and lessons learned from on-site, action research and development projects with three local museums: the Wat Lai Hin Museum in Lampang province, the Museum of Shadow Puppet Theatre, Wat Ban Don, Rayong province and the Wat Tha Phut Museum in Nakhon Pathom province.

Booklet for Museum Communities: "Moving Forward Together"

This publication was first printed in 2005. Distributed nationwide via museum networks, this publication presents different perspectives and aspects of museum work; e.g. it introduces interesting museums to the broader public, presents scholarly articles on museum practices, and publicizes news and events about local museums.

Exhibits

Exhibitions are periodically displayed as in seminars and festivals in order to disseminate lessons and findings from the Local Museums Research and Development Project.

Future Directions
for Museum Work

- Organize a national conference for museum practitioners to meet and share experiences.
- Print and publicize publications about local museums.
- Collaborate with various organizations which are involved with the regional museum networks in order to generate further support for local museums.
- Support museum research in order to develop appropriate methods for local museum work.
- Support local museum practitioners by organizing workshops and network meetings aimed at strengthening technical expertise in museum management.

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Research Funding
and Local Museum Development

Over the past five years of the project, researchers have been both learners and bearers of knowledge. We have learned a great deal about the many facets of the local museums springing up rapidly across the country, and we have encountered beautiful and fascinating objects as well as the more mundane objects that once held meaning for local communities. Through these encounters, we have learned to see both the stories of happiness and suffering that are manifest in objects.

We have come to realize the complexity of the lives of local communities where museums are found, and we have absorbed the desires and wishes of museum caretakers, from community elders to children, who wish to see their museums as vital, living spaces. Most importantly, we have recognized the strength of museum communities in protecting their cultural inheritance and their determination to continue the work of sharing and learning from kindred museum practitioners.

Local museum keepers and operators tend to feel that they are working in isolation, and that no one is really interested in or supportive of their work. The Centre's project is only a small project reaching a few local museums amidst a large number of museums throughout the country which are continuing steadfastly with their work.

If you share SAC's concern for and commitment to supporting community museums, we would like to invite you to take the time to visit local museums and to stay abreast of their activities.

The Local Museums Research and Development Project has received financial support from the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and from the Local Museum Research and Development Trust Fund, which was established by the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre using funds from the Eastern Water Resources Development and Management Public Company Limited.

You can support the continued development of local museums by making a financial donation that will help local museums strengthen their role as cultural organizations which improve the quality of life and enrich our collective knowledge of the world.

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Local Museums Research and Development Project	: Project
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