

## Songkhla Cultural Landscape

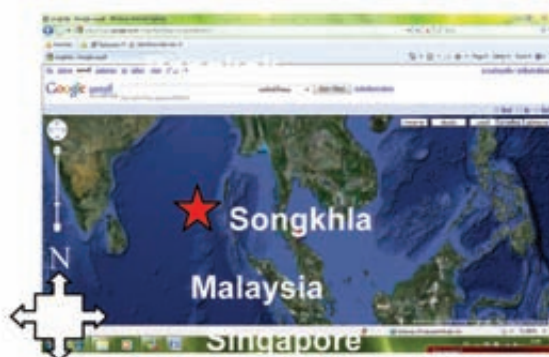
Jaray Suwannachart<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Cultural landscape is the combination between beauty of natural and human cultural that reflects to all human habitats and identifies the uniqueness of people and places. The concept of cultural landscape is recently accepted in worldwide. Hence the old town in Songkhla has been nominated as one of cultural heritage site. The mixture between three of races of local Thais, Thai-Chinese and Thai-Muslim has reflected to their built environment on unique topology of Songkhla. The architectural heritage, old town foodscape and living style are keys to analyze all data and create management plan. The conservation guidelines, interpretation and tourism are involved in the process of management. The expected outcomes are represented in the right understanding of heritage value and motivated them to maintain cultural landscape following the proposed management plan.

**Key words:** Singora, Songkhla cultural landscape, Songkhla old town

### 1. Where is Songkhla?



**Figure 1** Songkhla's location in Google Earth map

(<http://maps.google.co.th/maps?hl=th&q=songkhla&tab=il>)

---

<sup>1</sup> Program in Urban Planning Management , Faculty of Architecture, Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, Muang, Songkhla 90000, Thailand.

\* Corresponding author, e-mail : [j\\_ray191@hotmail.com](mailto:j_ray191@hotmail.com)

## 2. The original name of Songkhla

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Songkhla has been known as a port town. It was considered an ideal port with its ample shelters for large vessels. There were many names and different spellings used before the name, “Songkhla”. The Saingor, Cingor, Singora as well as San gor or Sangora, were used as Songkhla’s name during the 12<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned in John Jourdain’s report in 1622, he wrote to the East India Company in Calcutta to recommend building a large warehouse in Songkhla (Yoneo, 1998). Several literatures relating to “the appearances of Songkhla” show that Songkhla has been called by many different names.

## 3. Songkhla “Boi-yang”: The present settlement

Songkhla Boi-yang is the name of last town of Songkhla three empires. Yeang-How developed Boi-yang following the Chinese architectural style. The old fort at Singora was demolished and the red rocks from it were taken

to rebuild the Boi-yang city wall and fort. Yeang-How spent many years creating the new port town. Begin with the construction of the city wall which was 1,200 meters long with ten city gates. After the city wall had finished in 1836, other buildings, temples, the Governor’s house, city shrine and housing were also completed. The new Songkhla Boi-yang was celebrated at the city shrine in 1843 and this town was officially named as Songkhla Boi-yang.

During the period 1849-1896, Songkhla was under the politic influence of King Rama V. It was merged with a group of nine provinces—Nakornsithammarat, Pattalung and seven Muslim provinces and derived the new name as Nakornsithammarat. In addition, the state governor’s office was established at Songkhla Boi-yang and the Songkhla governor’s role was reduced to be under the control of the state governor. Until this politic was changed in 1932, and Songkhla has been one of Thailand’s Provinces from that time until the present day.

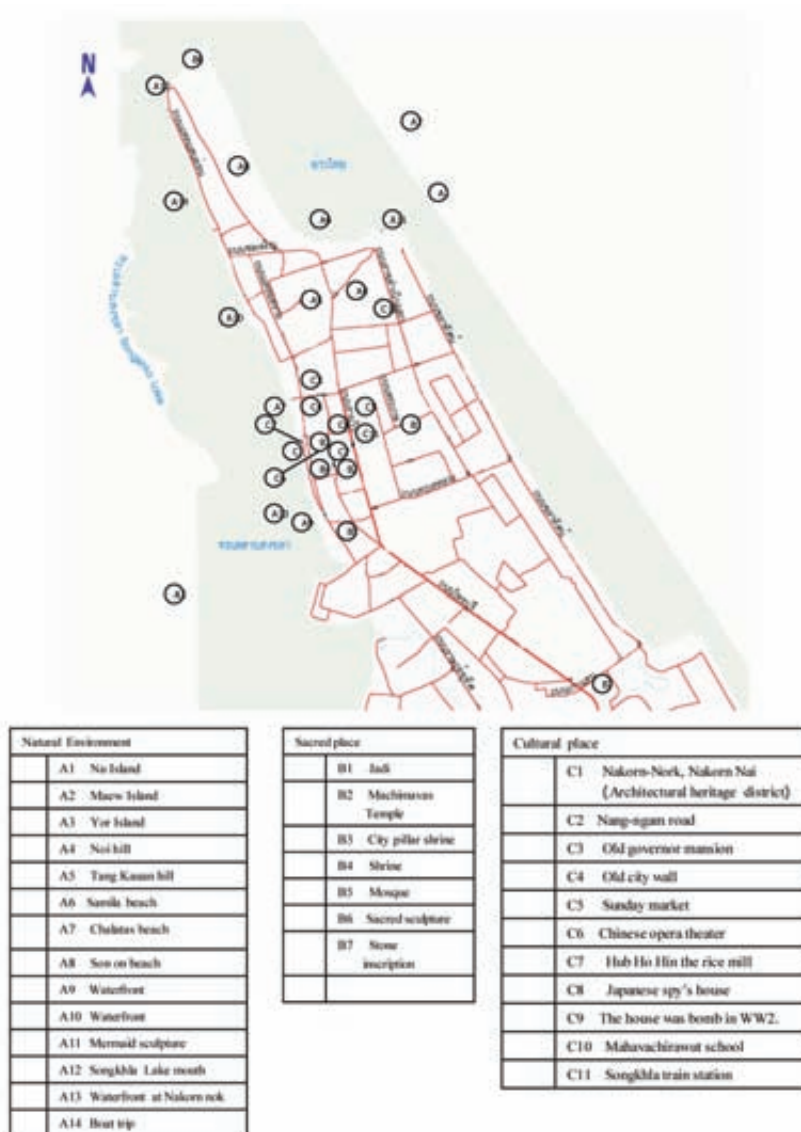


**Figure 2** The Songkhla Boi-yang perspective  
Source: Smyth (1994)

#### 4. Cultural landscape in the old town of Songkhla

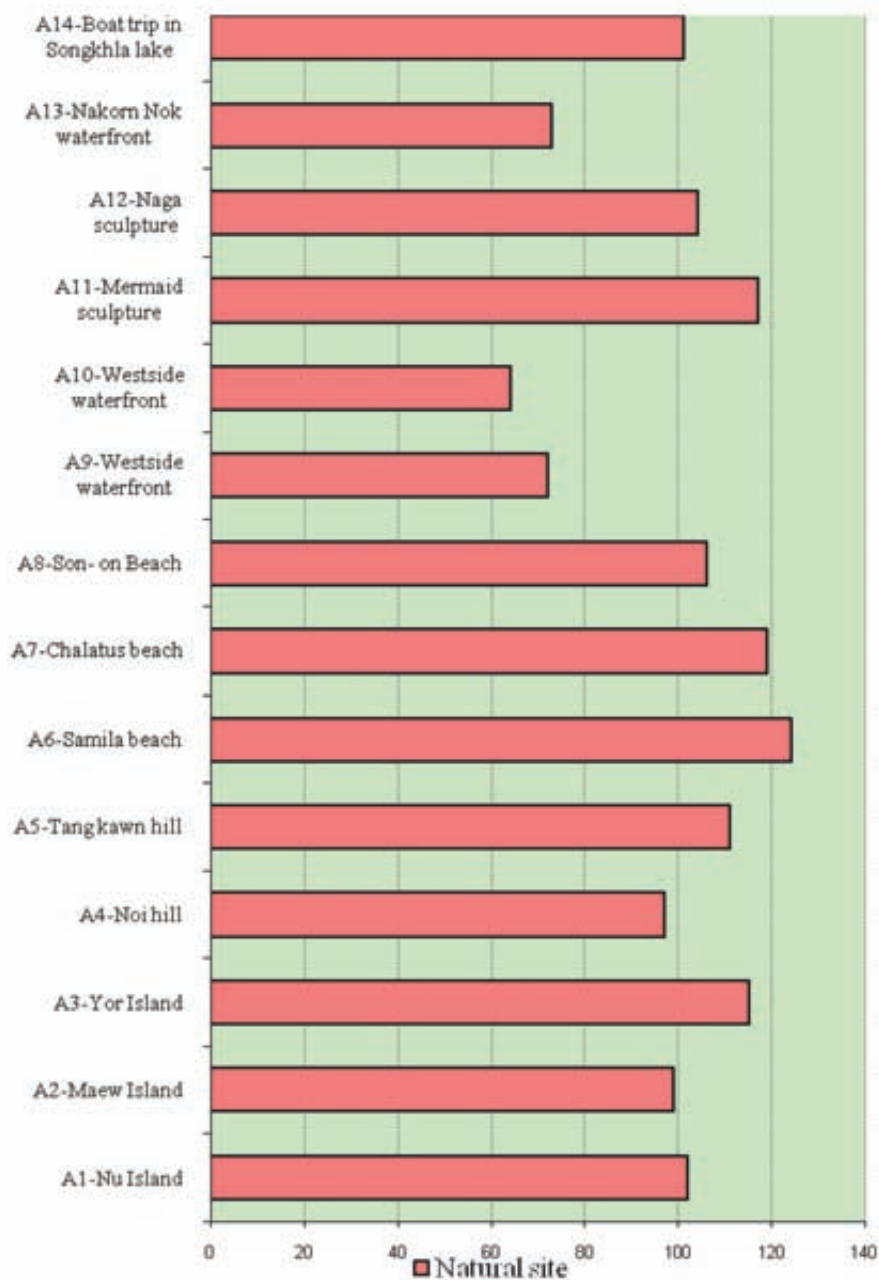
“The concept of cultural context is critical to an appreciation of the rich layering inherent in the cultural landscape idea. The theme of the 2005 International ICOMOS conference held in Xi’an, China stressed the importance of context within the parameters of the concept of setting in the practice of

conserving cultural heritage in changing townscapes and landscapes: setting is not just about physical protection it may have cultural or social dimension” (Taylor, 2009). Songkhla is mix between natural sites and cultural site. Most of them are in the old town area. However, some associated areas located out of old town are also outstanding and popular places.

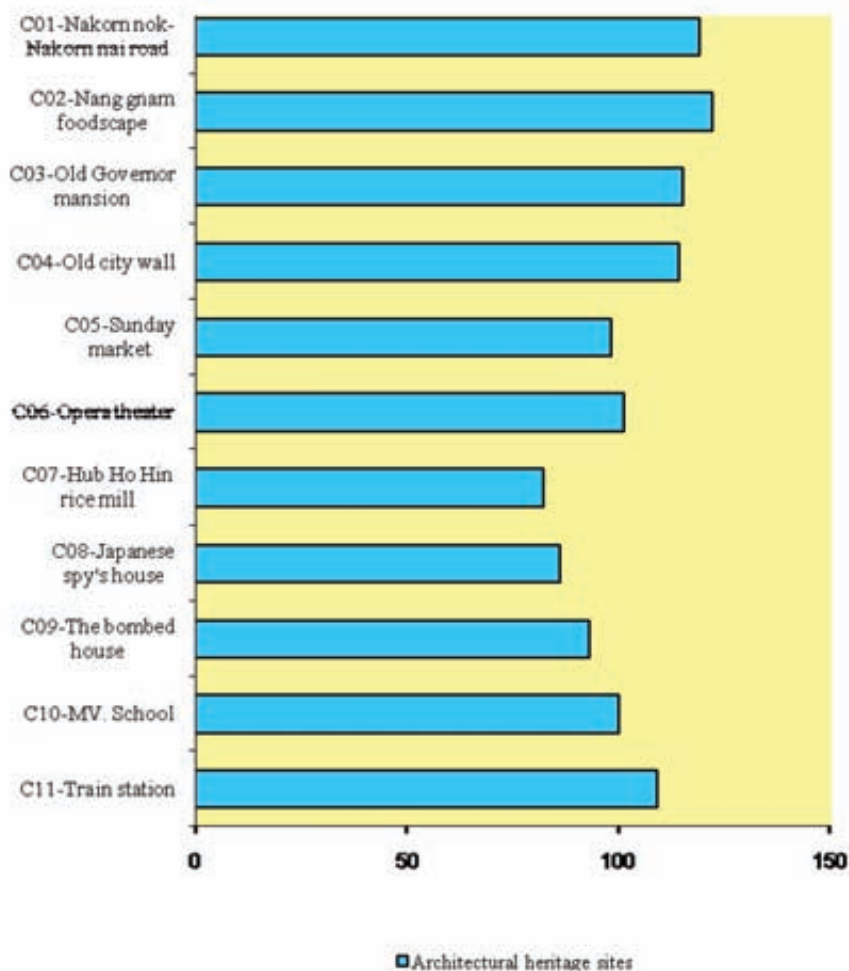


**Figure 3** The map of Cultural landscape sites in Songkhla town

**Table 1** The bar chart shows the popular natural sites in Songkhla as ranked by a survey of 100 samples.



**Table 2** The bar charts shows the popular architectural heritage sites in Songkhla as ranked in a survey of 100 samples.



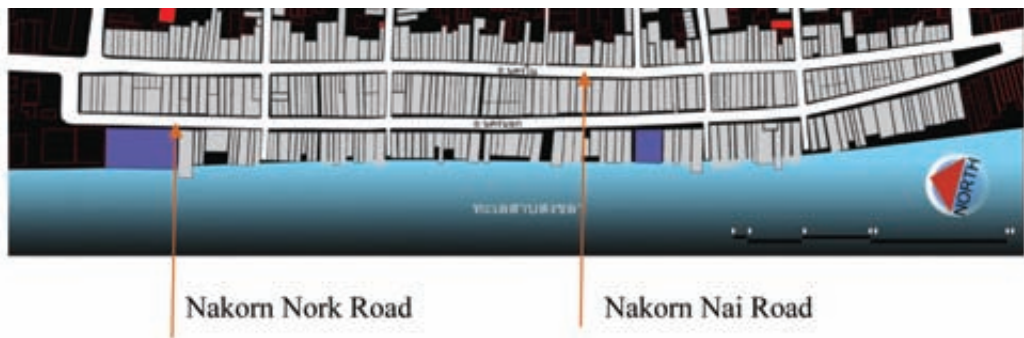
From 100 questionnaires conducted in the City Pillar Shrine ceremony in middle of 2009, it was found that visitors are interested in the old town's cultural landscape in the following areas as architectural heritage, foodscape, town's events and activities, natural sites

Information from these four areas can be used for cultural mapping showing all of the heritage sites in the old town area. Most of them

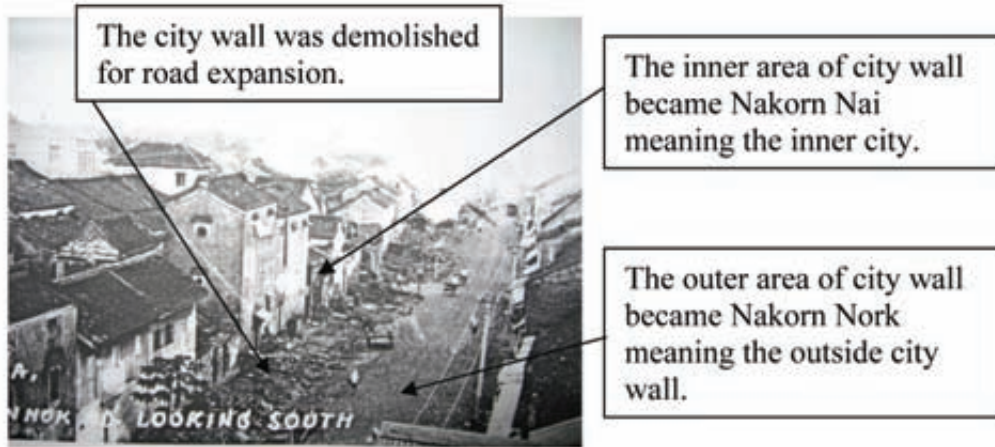
are in Nakorn Nork Road, Nakorn Nai Roads, Nang Ngam Road and Ban Bon, a Muslim town as shown in the map below.

### 5. Nakorn Nork and Nakorn Nai Roads

Nakorn Nork and Nakorn Nai Roads used to be the major commercial areas for trading with foreigners in the past. The record of Prasilidjanakorn (พระศฤงคาร์เงินกรณีย์) in 1894



**Figure 4** The map of Nakorn Nork and Nakorn Nai Road  
(Drain by Somsak Porta, 17/09/2009)



**Figure 5** An old picture taken at Nakorn Nork Road  
Source: Nawigamune and Chanpromrat (2003)

noted that both sides of the roads were paved with cobble stone and there were rows of shop houses selling cloth and all types of other goods (Yodmanee, 1992). When the western part of Songkhla city wall was demolished to expand the new road, Nakorn Nork Road, the land between the two roads (Nakorn Nork and Nakorn Nai) became narrow and deep.

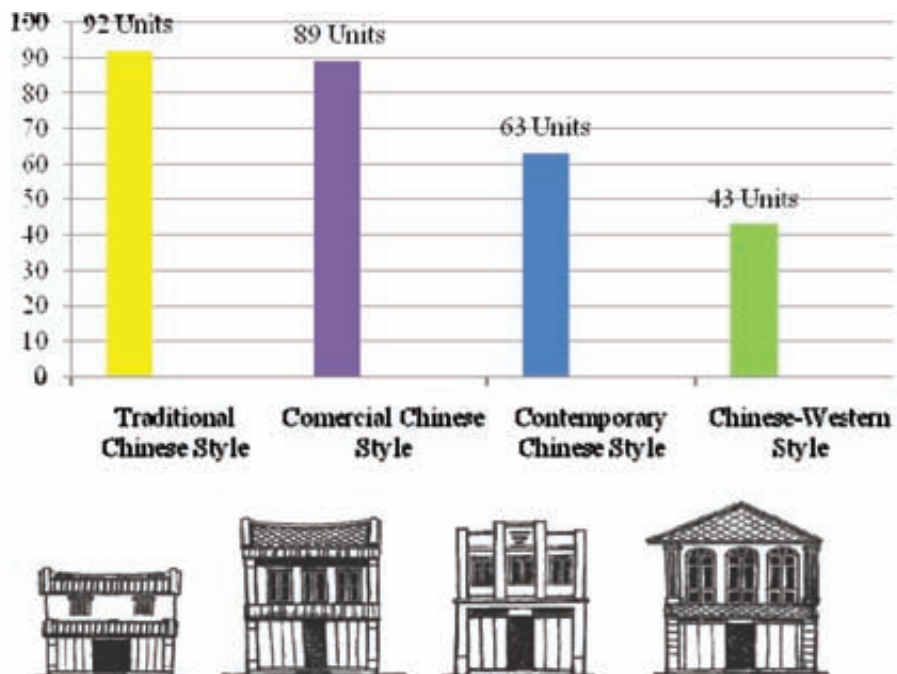
Most residents in this area are descended from wealthy people from the first settlement period of Songkhla. They were Chinese merchants who gained an advantage in doing trade with

foreigners by living close to the international port. Thus, it can be said that Songkhla had close relationship with Chinese merchants from different countries such as China, Singapore, Malacca, and Penang in Malaysia as well as Indonesia (Chuapram, 2003). As a result, such trading relationship influenced on people's life-style and beliefs which can be seen from the architecture from that time until today. According to Supawadee, the architecture on Nakorn Nork and Nakorn Nai Roads can be categorized into three styles—namely, Thai, Chinese and mixed style.

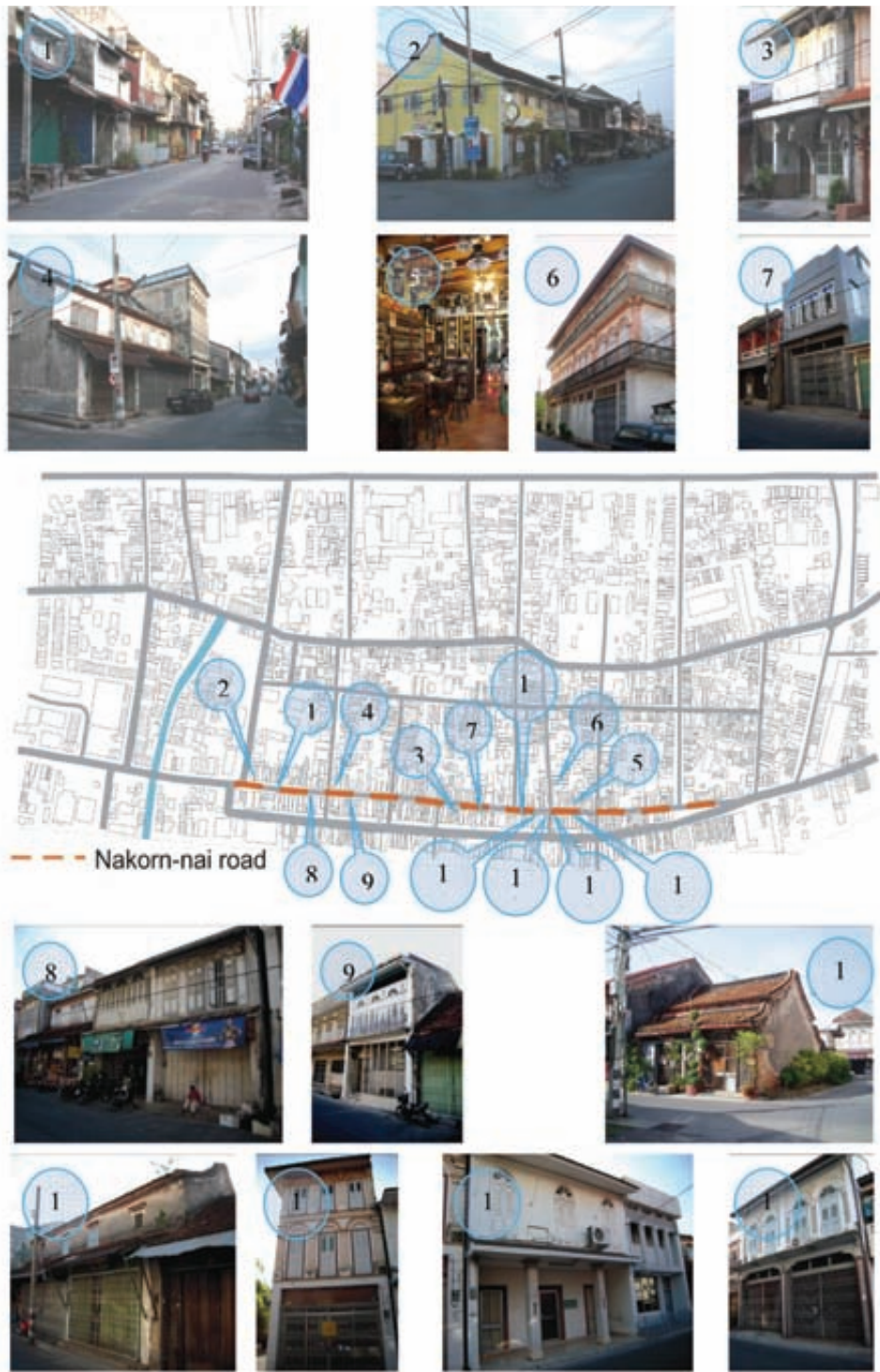




**Figure 6** Map showing architectural styles of the old town district.

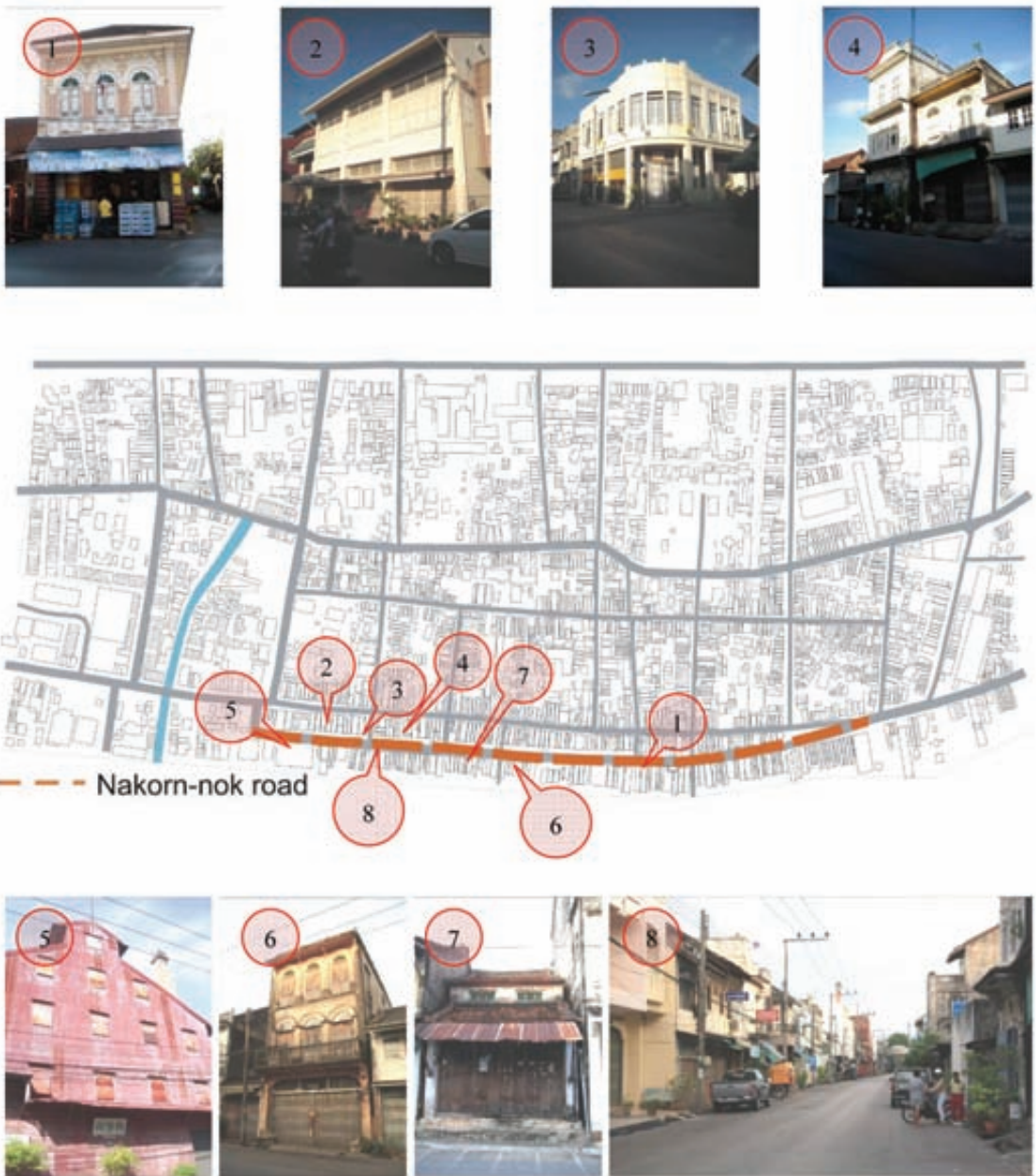


**Figure 7** The portion of architectural styles in the old town district.  
(Drawn by Yuttana Yabaji, 28/5/2009)



**Figure 8** The architectural heritage of Nakorn Nai Road.  
(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart, 25/06/2009)





**Figure 9** The Architectural heritage of Nakorn Nork Road.  
(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart, 02/2009)

## 6. Chinese shrines in the old town

The Chinese shrine was regarded as an important institution in the community. Most were built by the leaders of the community in order to express their worship and faith. Chinese people firmly believe in religion, so when they emigrated, they also brought their beliefs and practices along. As a result, the location of many Chinese shrines could be found at the center of the community, for the sake of their convenience. Chinese shrines can be divided into two types according to the time.

The first type involved those built before the reign of King Rama V. They were highly affected by the Chinese architectural style because the construction occurred during the time of Songkhla's governor, and most citizens who were Chinese descendents. The second type was built after the reign of King Rama V. The materials and the techniques used were modern, yet the style still remained traditional (Yodmanee, 1992). As previously stated, the shrine's location was at the center of the community. Today, there are five Chinese shrines in the old town and another one that is out of this dissertation scope.

6.1. City Pillar Shrine (Siang Hong Lao Aie): This is highly respected shrine among the Hokkien Chinese. This shrine was constructed by Praya Vichienkiree (พระยาวิชัยกรี) the governor of Songkhla who was Hokkien Chinese. Most Hokkien Chinese feel a personal connection with this historic shrine.

Today, Hokkien Chinese people use the shrine as the meeting place. The Songkhla City Pillar Shrine is located on Nang Ngam Road and its construction record can be found in a manuscript which stated that: "In 1204 (Chulasakarat), King Rama III gave the milestone in Songkhla and also gave the Cassia Agnes wood with sacred objects as well." Praya Songkhla (Tian Seng) used corvee labor to construct the City Pillar Shrine. Moreover the governor directed engineers to erect a building to cover the City Pillar Shrine and two adjacent shrines.

Mr.Nattakarn Techawanto, the secretary of Hokkien association, advised the Hokkien Chinese to go to the City Pillar Shrine if they became sick due to unknown causes. He said that if they were sick, they should go to "Zhou Shi Gong" (the god of medicine) to ask for identification of the cause of the disease and the best way to treat it. However at the present time, not many people go to ask "Zhou Shi Gong" about the cure for their disease because of the advances in modern medicine.

6.2 The Kuan Uu Shrine (The Sam Leng Tien Kuan Tae Kun god): The Hokkien Chinese pay respect to Kuan Uu at this shrine. Belief in "Kaun Tae Kun god" (or "Kuan Uu") is a significant characteristic of the Hokkien people. Therefore they build a "Kaun Uu shrine" wherever they settle. In the old town of Songkhla, the Kuan Uu Shrine is located on Nang Ngam Road near the Songkhla City Pillar Shrine.

Mr.Somsak Tantimaneerak, the Shrine Keeper, said that the Hokkien Chinese who sailed to Songkhla in the past faced numerous challenges; both during the voyage at sea, and after arrival in a town which viewed them as strangers. They always paid respect to Kuan Uu because he is the god of courage and patience.

The Kuan Uu shrine was constructed in BE 2422 or about 129 years ago. This shrine was built in the beginning of King Rama IV's reign; 37 years after the completion of the City Pillar Shrine. The Kuan Uu Shrine followed typical Chinese architectural style with the roof ridge curved like the bottom of the river boat and the edge of the roof decorated with green pearls. The roof of the shrine used earthenware tiles and the entrance used wooden doors. There are no windows or ventilation sources in the shrine. Both doors were decorated in Chinese style.

6.3 The Bun Tao Gong Shrine: This shrine is located on Nong Jik Road. The shrine looks like an ordinary Chinese house. It was built for Bun Tao Gong whose duty is to guard the mouth of the Songkhla Lake where ships arrive and depart. The belief in Bun Tao Gong is most frequently found among Hokkien and Taejiew Chinese. According to belief, Bun Tao Gong has the same duty as Taud Hua Kao Daeng but Taud Hua Kao Daeng is a god while Bun Tao Gong is the Jao Mae Tub Tim's servant.

6.4 The Bo Aun Tian (Goi Sheng Aong) Shrine: This shrine is located on Yala Road. Goi Sheng Aong is the god of happiness and

prosperity. He was the founder of the Zhang Zhou located in Hokkien Province in China. Most Chinese pay respect at this shrine as it represents their ancestors.

Miss Auranid Sakarin, a seventh generation Hokkien Chinese resident of Songkhla, said that she didn't know much about the biography of each god but thought that Bo Aun Tian is a sacred god that she should pay respect to. Mr. Santi Thongnampet, a fifth generation Hokkien Chinese resident, said during an interview that he did not know much about the biography of each god, but that he pays respect to each of them and has done this since he was young boy going to the shrine with his parents.

6.5 The Tang Sheng Aong Shrine: This family shrine has been at its present location for more than 10 years. Mr.Chertsak Tiewthanakit, the descendant of Tang Sheng Aong and the present Shrine keeper, said that this shrine was built long time ago. An investigation determined that the sculptors of the Tang Sheng Aong Shrine came directly from China with an early group of immigrants. However, there is no clear biography or history of Tang Sheng Aong. On Cheng Meng day, the descendants of Tang Sheng Aong come to the shrine and pay respect to their ancestors by offering sacred items including a big slice of pork, a boiled chicken, fried noodles, pa-lo soup and flowers. After completing the ceremony, the descendants will burn the "gong teck" (กงเต็ก) to send to their ancestors and light fireworks.



Figure 10 The Tang Sheng Aong Shrine(A)



Figure 11 The Kuan Uu Shrine (B)



Figure 12 The City Pillar Shrine (C)



Figure 13 The Bun Tao Gong Shrine (D)



Figure 14 The Bo Aun Tian (E)



Figure 15 Map showing the location of 5 shrines





**Figure 16** A first unit of nine row houses at Nang-ngam Road.

(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart, 15/2/2008)



**Figure 17** This building is under Fine Arts law protection.

(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart, 9/9/2009)

### 7. From Kow-Hong road to Nang-ngam road: the Foodscape of Songkhla

It is very interesting that the old name of this area is called “Kow-Hong road” meaning nine units of row -houses in Thai. This might explain the original landscape perspective where there are the nine row houses settled in this area. Nearby the nine units of row houses, there are Chinese shrines and the city shrine— the sacred places at the center of this road. Kow-Hong Road was changed to Nang-ngam Road at a later time.

“Nang-ngam” is a Thai word which means beautiful women. Asst. Prof. Srisupon Chuangsakul wrote in her dissertation about the background of Nang-ngam road that it was used to honor the first Songkhla beauty contest

winning girl whose name is Ms. Nongyao Photisarn (Boonyasiwa, a former last name) or Dang as her nickname. She won a beauty contest at Songkhla in 1935. Because her house was settled at Kow-Hong road, so people started to call this road as Nang-ngam Road afterwards.

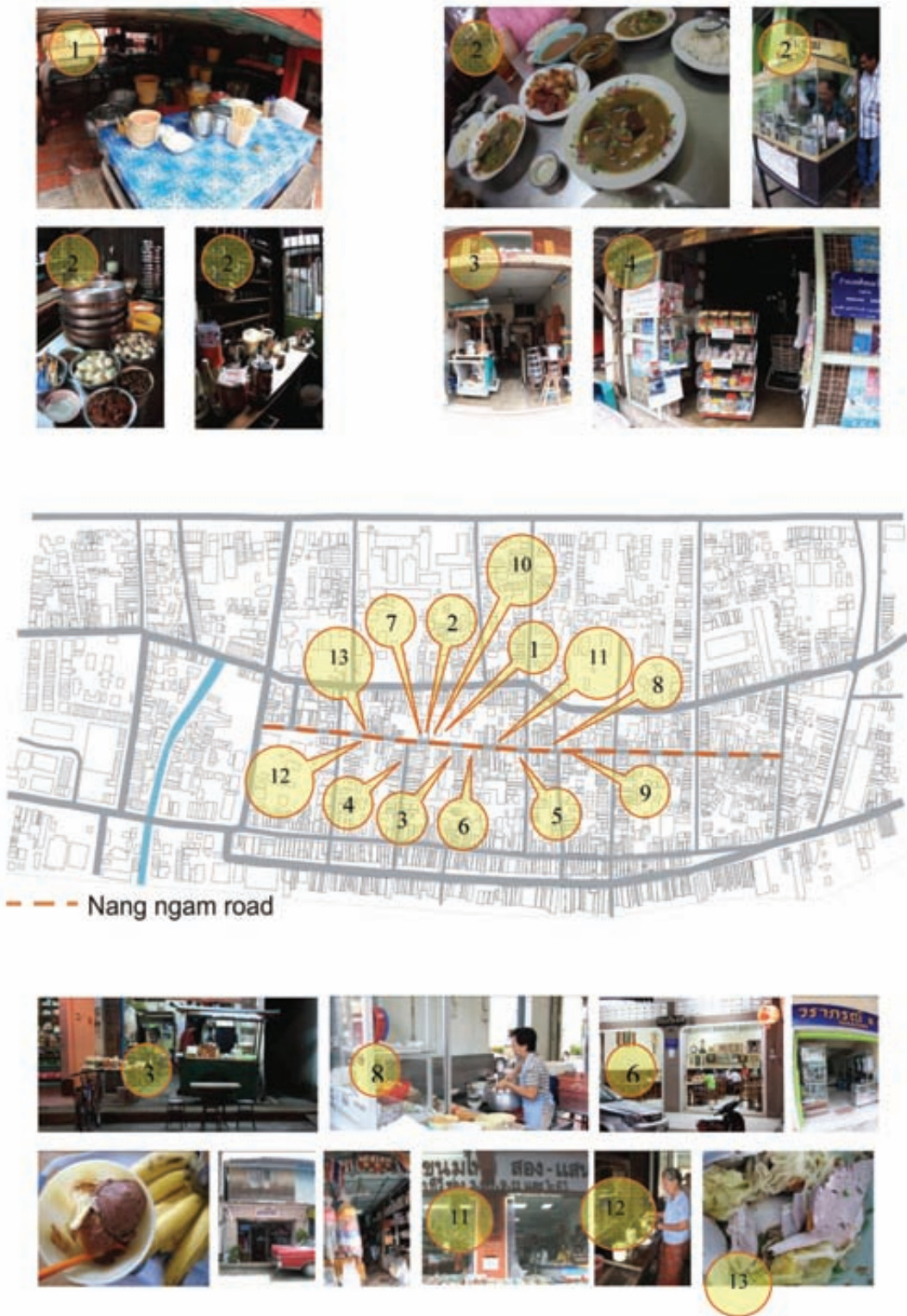
Nang-ngam Road lies in the east site of the old town. It is three kilometers long from north side until the end of road at south. The place is charming with various kinds of shops and restaurants such as local spicy Thai food restaurants, Chinese noodle, Chinese steamed stuff bun, white tea, Muslim rice and sweets shops. People enjoy having meals in this road from the early morning until midnight. From this significance, Nang-ngam road is so-called as the “Foodscape of Songkhla”.



**Figure 18-20** The lively street life at Nang-ngam Road

(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart 13/6/ 2008)





**Figure 21** The food-scape of Nang-ngam Road.  
(Taken by Jaray Suwannachart, 03/2009)

### 8. Pattalung Road: The Muslim district

On the southern side of the old town, there is a Muslim area called “Ban-Bon district”. It is a center of Muslim residents which is located along Pattalung road. They moved from Songkhla previous town and settled down in this area. The center of Muslim residential area is the Asasul Islam Masjid or Mosque which was built in 1850. It reflects both Muslim and Thai architecture and emphasizes the impact of location. The Mosque reflects southern architecture which has gable roof and rectangular floor plan. Mosque is enclosed with Muslim shop houses which were built with brick at the first floor and wood at second floor with roof tiles. The geometric wooden window shape and small wooden wall are the main characteristics of Muslim houses. All shop houses face to the road and open directly to Mosque at the rear side. This allows local people to walk cross the Mosque area to meet their friends at the other side of the road. The small walkway has joined the residents

together and it links as a dense web system around the Mosque, with small houses along the walk-way.

The Ban-bon district is becoming popular because of Muslim food—for example Muslim tea, roti, rice steamed in coconut milk mixed with chicken called Nasi Dagang or Kaw-mun-kang-kai in Thai. Muslim students and Muslim officials in Songkhla enjoy having a daily meal here.

### 9. Heritage Value Analysis

With regard to value judgment under criteria of UNESCO, Songkhla old town derives statement of significance as “*Songkhla old town is living heritage that has high degree of authenticity in terms of original fabric and town transformation under the topography uniqueness*”. From the heritage value assessment, the old town was examined in the four areas of historic value, social value, scientific value and aesthetic value. According to the data collected by interviewing



**Figure 22** The verities of Pattalung district (Taken by Jaray Suwannachart,1/6/2009.)

and collecting information, it was found that Songkhla comprises a great variety of inhabitants— local Thais, Chinese immigrants from mainland China, and Muslims from Indonesia. What they brought along with them was their culture from the motherland which was then merged in Songkhla for more than a century. Because of the diversity and a high sense of community belonging of the people, this reflects that Songkhla has unique cultural landscape where its people have been living for many generations.

#### **10. Songkhla when compared to World heritage standard** (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention)

UNESCO classifies cultural landscape value in two types namely natural value and cultural value. The international value is the most important criteria while the local value is less significant. The experts made changes in the criteria for cultural landscape judgment in 1992 and revived it again in 2004 by incorporating the cultural criteria and natural criteria (i-x) together as shown below.

##### **10.1 Cultural heritage**

(iii) Songkhla old town and the associated areas bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is still living or has disappeared. The relationship and dynamic functions present in cultural landscapes, historic town or other living properties should be maintained.

(v) Songkhla old town and the associated areas are the outstanding examples of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of culture; especially it becomes vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

(vi) Songkhla old town and the associated areas are directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, or with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significances (a criterion used only in exceptional circumstances, and together with other criteria)

##### **10.2 Natural properties**

(ix) Songkhla old town and the associated areas are the outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological process in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals. These processes on long term conservation of the ecological and biological diversity they contain that represent on the perfect natural diversity of two mountains at CBD and nature sand beach.

#### **11. Justification for outstanding significance**

The grading of significance of Songkhla is “high level” and is justified in high degree because of its original fabric. It can be thus said that:

*Songkhla has a high degree of authenticity in terms of original fabric and town transformation under unique topography. The*

*remaining local Thai, Chinese and Muslim life style has been reflected in their cultural landscape.*

## 12. Conclusion

From the study, it was found that the local community has a good attitude towards their cultural landscape. Most of them understood the value of the Songkhla cultural landscape. From the questionnaires, popular places like natural and cultural sites were equal in ranking. The beach front and foodscape in the old town received high scores. The in-depth interviews also revealed that locals were impressed by the sunset atmosphere of the old town at the west side beach where they could enjoy having meal. However, most of them had little knowledge about the town's historic background. They could not explain the exact details of the town's history. It can be said that because Songkhla has no interpretation system that can explain or present the valuable historic background, the local people and tourists are less likely to appreciate and pay attention to the value of it as a heritage site. On the contrary, they are happier to enjoy the pleasant atmosphere and have a meal at the beach. In addition, with the lack of foodscape interpretation, it is possible that the appreciation of food value such as heritage food which has been handled down for three generations may be lessened or overlooked.

From the heritage value assessment, the old town was examined in the four areas of historic value, social value, scientific value and aesthetic value. According to the data collected

by interviewing and collecting information, it was found that Songkhla comprises a great variety of inhabitants— local Thais, Chinese immigrants from mainland China, and Muslims from Indonesia. What they brought along with them was their culture from the motherland which was then merged in Songkhla for more than a century. Because of the diversity and a high sense of community belonging of the people, this reflects that Songkhla has unique cultural landscape where its people have been living for many generations.

## References

- Chuapram, S. 2003. Shop house: Evolution of Vernacular Architecture from Physical and Cultural in Old Community of Songkhla Province. M.A.thesis, Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University. (สุภาวดี เชื้อพรหมณี. 2546. ตึกแถว ผลผลิตทางกายภาพและวัฒนธรรมในชุมชนเมืองเก่า จ.สงขลา. วิทยานิพนธ์สถาปัตยกรรมศาสตร์มหาบัณฑิต, ภาควิชาสถาปัตยกรรม, มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร.)
- Nawigamune, A. and Chanpromrat, J. 2003. **The heritage of Songkhla Province & Maha Vajiravudh School.** Duantula press, Bangkok. (อนุก นาวิกมูล และ จรัส จันทร์พรหมรัตน์. 2546. มรดกเมืองสงขลา มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏ. โรงพิมพ์เดือนตุลา, กรุงเทพฯ.)
- Yodmanee, S. 1992. The Construction Traditions of Chinese architecture in Songkhla Province. M.A. thesis, Srinakharinwirot University-Southern Campus. (สมปอง ยอดมณี. 2535. คตินิยม



- การก่อสร้างที่ปรากฏในสถาปัตยกรรมจีน  
ในเขตอำเภอเมืองสงขลา จ.สงขลา.  
วิทยานิพนธ์ศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต,  
วิชาเอกไทยคดีศึกษา, มหาวิทยาลัย  
ศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ ประสานมิตร.)
- Cultural Landscape. Retrieved March 20, 2008  
from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_landscape)  
[landscape](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_landscape) ICOMOS Thailand. Retrieved  
March 20, 2008 from [http://www.](http://www.icomosthai.org/charters/icomosth%20charter_Draft09-2007.pdf)  
[icomosthai.org/charters/icomosth%](http://www.icomosthai.org/charters/icomosth%20charter_Draft09-2007.pdf)  
[20charter\\_Draft09-2007.pdf](http://www.icomosthai.org/charters/icomosth%20charter_Draft09-2007.pdf)
- Smyth, H.W. 1994. **Five years in Siam from  
1891-1896.** White Lotus, Bangkok.
- Songkhla map. Available source: [http://maps.](http://maps.google.co.th/maps?hl=th&q=songkhla&tab=il)  
[google.co.th/maps?hl=th&q=songkhla&tab](http://maps.google.co.th/maps?hl=th&q=songkhla&tab=il)  
[=il](http://maps.google.co.th/maps?hl=th&q=songkhla&tab=il), October 26, 2009.
- Taylor, K. 2009. Cultural Landscapes and Asia:  
Reconciling International and Southeast  
and East Asian Regional Values.  
**Landscape Research** 34:1.
- UNESCO. 2008. Operational Guideline for the  
Implementation of the World Heritage  
Convention, World Heritage Center, France.
- UNESCO, What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?  
Retrieved March 13, 2009 from [http://](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002)  
[www.unesco.org/ culture/ich/index.php?pg](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002)  
[=00002.](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002)
- UNESCO, Criteria for selection, Retrieved  
March 20, 2008 from [http://whc.unesco.](http://whc.unesco.org/en/criter)  
[org/en/criter](http://whc.unesco.org/en/criter)
- UNESCO, World Heritage: Cultural Landscape.  
Retrieved March 20, 2008 from [http://whc.](http://whc.unesco.org/exhibits/cultland/categories.htm)  
[unesco.org/exhibits/cultland/categories.](http://whc.unesco.org/exhibits/cultland/categories.htm)  
[htm](http://whc.unesco.org/exhibits/cultland/categories.htm)
- UNESCO. Convention for the Safeguarding of  
the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Retrieved  
March, 20 2008 from [http://www.unesco.](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00022&art=art2#art2)  
[org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00022&art=](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00022&art=art2#art2)  
[art2#art2.](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00022&art=art2#art2)
- Yoneo, I. 1998. The Junk Trade from Southeast  
Asia: Translations from the Tosen  
Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723. Data Paper  
Series, Sources for the Economic History  
of Southeast Asia, no. 6, Institute of  
Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.