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Conclusions

The broad aim of this thesis was to establish an understanding of how changes in the residents’ sense of well-being have influenced the physical and socio-cultural evolution of Thai vernacular houses and vice versa. The present study confirmed that the relationship between vernacular houses and the residents’ sense of well-being is essentially dynamic and reflexive, and is always changing in accordance with social and environmental conditions. In Thai vernacular houses Khwam Phasook, the Thai concept of well-being, embodies the experiences and attitudes of Thai residents, and expresses itself in physical properties, patterns of use and associated meanings. These three factors constantly interact and are unfailingly inseparable when reflecting the residents’ sense of well-being.

This thesis has documented and analyzed the evolution of these three factors in the vernacular houses in Tambon Pakkran of Pra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya since the 1950s. The study confirmed that these factors are perpetually evolving in accordance with the changes of the residents’ expectations and experiences of well-being. The changes, which have been accelerating during the past three decades because of the development around the locality, have taken two forms.

The first form is the modification of various architectural elements of the contemporary Reun Thai, and this has significantly occurred around intermediate spaces such as the Nok Chan, the Phalai, the Tai Thun Baan, and the demarcations between them. These intermediate spaces and their open quality express as symbols of social integration, which seems to be at the heart of everyday living of the residents in Tambon Pakkran, and perhaps of the whole Thai culture. In most cases the
modification of these spaces, however, has allowed the residents flexibility to retain or to adjust their behaviour without obliterating the intrinsic quality of the spaces that provide intimacy among the family members as well as with neighbors. Where the open quality of these spaces has been eliminated through construction of dividing or enclosing walls, the real sense of Khwam Phasook in Thai vernacular houses tends to be lost—at least as it has traditionally been understood.

The modification around intermediate spaces has also resulted in changes to the physical characteristics of the modified Reun Thai. These changes are manifested at two levels. The first level is the evolution of the characteristics of housing compounds, which have changed from a collection of various single houses clustering around the Nok Chan to compact individual houses defining an open space on the ground between them. The second level of change is manifested in the characteristics of the contemporary Reun Thai, which have become enclosed and isolated from interaction with the environment. The uses of modern techniques and materials of construction in these modified houses demonstrate the decline in the development of craftsmanship. Even though some of the symbolic meanings of the culture the residents attributed to the houses and elements have been lost during the modification, most contemporary Reun Thai in Tambon Pakkran still retain the traditional morphological characteristics, and express the residents’ freedom and adaptability to reflect their cultural values of the past during evolution of their houses. However, there is a trend towards deteriorating evolution of those vernacular values from the past.

The second form of change is associated with the insertion of furniture and household goods and the installation of modern services. Even though the coming of modern facilities and services has provided convenience and the benefits of new leisure time, it has resulted in obliterating the traditional lifestyle of the residents in relying on the resources available in the locality, and the interdependence with mutual relationship for ensuring happiness and survival of the clan. However, most residents in Tambon Pakkran are still concerned with who they are and how they live. For these residents, modern things and facilities can be brought in to support their living activities, but only for their needs, so that they are able to control their own ‘being’ towards the future.
These two forms of change have resulted in disconnection of the relationship between the houses, the residents’ lifestyles and the *khlongs* of the villages. The relationship with the *khlongs* is now manifested only in the memory of the residents, and may be utterly lost in the next generation.

Even though the sense of domestic well-being may be expected to differ from culture to culture, the lessons learnt from the relationship of the residents and their houses in Tambon Pakkran provide clues for generalization of what is *Khwam Phasook* in vernacular dwellings that exist elsewhere in Thailand. The study confirms that *Khwam Phasook* in Thai vernacular houses involves a concentration of intentions, attitudes and experiences of the Thai residents in living in harmony with not only other individuals, the community and the environment, but also social norms and cultural beliefs in the ontological sense, and this makes it difficult to be measured scientifically. Since socio-cultural conditions are changing rapidly, the residents in vernacular societies have to adapt and adjust themselves and their houses to those changes. These residents are always gaining and losing various benefits through their adjustment and their adoption of external influences from other cultures and modern technologies and facilities to their houses and their lives. Some residents in Tambon Pakkran have focused on their day-to-day living without giving full attention to all the information of the locality and thus have lost their connection with their cultural traditions. Nevertheless, these residents sometimes felt they had lost various ‘vernacular values’ of their culture. For most residents in Thai vernacular houses, however, their values and the local wisdom of the past have evolved in response to present conditions, and are constantly realized. Their realization is not only for themselves but also for the idea of Ayutthaya itself. The residents’ sense of *Khwam Phasook* in the vernacular houses in Tambon Pakkran is associated with their pride and adaptability to reflect their ‘vernacular values’ from the past for living attuned to their own place in this modern time, and thus to sustain these values into the future. There seems to be no reason to suppose that these findings would not also apply in other regions where vernacular houses still exist.

Besides the above key findings, this thesis puts forward some principles for cultural sustainability of Thai vernacular houses. The most important of these principles is to generate in the local residents awareness and pride in their vernacular
houses and associated cultural values. Acknowledgement of local differences in selecting culturally sensitive methodology, and careful research and evaluation deeply rooted in the cultural value systems of local residents are essential. Finally, attempts of sustaining Thai vernacular houses imposed by government are unlikely to succeed unless they reflect local customs and beliefs. Thai vernacular houses can then be able to sustain and evolve to reflect the vernacular values of inhabitants in their own locality without becoming impediments to the ‘progress’ of society.