

Negotiating for Squatter Housing Adjacent to the Historical Site: A Case Study of Kampaeng Ngam Community, Chiang Mai

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ABSTRACT

The study of securing housing in this particular settlement, Kampaeng Ngam, touches upon political influence and power struggle between low-income groups, assisted by NGOs and local authorities and the central government. Kampaeng Ngam residents have squatted on land along Mae Kha Canal and a historical earthen wall that is owned by the government. Historically, this area was unoccupied because it was subjected to seasonal floods. The eventual settlement of this community began after Chiang Mai had been selected as the primary northern urban center in the fourth plan of national economic and social development (1977-1981). Designation has led immigrants from rural areas to illegally occupy the land between the historical wall and Mae Kha Canal. As environmental decay along the canal has come to the foreground, city people formed negative images of the squatters as those responsible for destroying the canal. Furthermore, the governmental authorities have attempted to evict the squatters because they detract from the living city concept of promoting tourism through protecting and restoring historical resources. With the help of the People's Organization for Participation (POP NGO), residents held meetings with government officials to negotiate a solution that both parties could accept. Finally, the squatters moved down from the earthen wall and on to the adjacent land and established a set back of their backyards of 1-2 meters to establish a tourism route. Moreover, they help keep the canal clean as a means of improving the city's image. From this study, one could conclude that communities are willing to adapt their lifestyles to survive in the city context even though that area is environmentally degraded. The primary goal of their fighting is the legal right of land occupation and affordable housing in the city center. They are ready to work with government officials to achieve these goals.

Key words: Squatter housing, Kampaeng Ngam Community, Living city concept, Affordable housing

INTRODUCTION

Affordable housing is an important problem of every city in developing countries including Thailand. This problem seems to be more serious when its population growth is increased. In Thailand, the affordable housing issue raised in importance after World War II. The informal affordable housing does not happen only in the capital like Bangkok but also in big cities like Chiang Mai.

Chiang Mai is a province that is located in the northern part of Thailand. King Meng Rai established Chiang Mai in 1825. After he set unsuccessful towns in several areas, he finally found the valley plain of Chiang Mai and Lamphoon. King Meng Rai formed his city in a square shape with a city moat around it.