Abstract

Architecture has long been viewed as the monumental and formal edifices of every society. In general, architectural description principally focuses on the material aspects of the building. But relatively little is said about social facts of the people who live inside. In recent decades, many architects and anthropologists have begun to connect architectural works with the development of social and cultural anthropology. As a result of this interest, the bridge between these two disciplines has consequently become the subject of a growing literature. Several works written from different perspectives have in common a more holistic focus, emphasizing the theoretical significance of indigenous architecture as intellectual, political and sociological processes. With this viewpoint, architecture can be perceived as a visible picture that bears the role of the container of human beings; it is cannot be able to separate from its surrounding world and socio-cultural influence. There was about 1930s; anthropological study has been first suggested to Thai scholastic society but anthropological study related to architecture was quite clearly limited; a small number of literatures have been instigated to explore how socio-cultural factors manipulate Thai architectural features. Based extensively on historical documents, this paper devotes the attention to chronological developments of the study of architectural anthropology both in Western and Thai academic society and aims to exemplify how anthropological approach is important to the study of architecture.

Keywords: Architectural Anthropology, Anthropological Study, Architectural Study

I. INTRODUCTION

Architecture can be described much more than a shelter of human beings; it is primary constituents of social bonds and important artifact for symbolic, ritual, artistic and political expressions. As it reflects and influences the cosmologies and ideologies of the people in different cultures; it might be said that research on architecture is unavoidable related to the people who build and use it. However, large numbers of foregoing literatures on architecture principally focus on physical aspects of the built forms, such as construction techniques, environmental conditions, resources and technology, while some of them put their concerns in spatial organization, symbolism and aesthetic values of architecture. But relatively little is said about the socio-cultural organization of the people who live inside. In addition, most of anthropological descriptions have shown little attention to constructive behavior of materiality of the buildings and the study of architecture with anthropological view appears very limited.

Only in recent decades, architecture became to be viewed as worthy of admiration and study, both architects and anthropologists have begun to concern themselves with indigenous architecture, in particular the study of a house of single society and the remote tribes. By emphasizing the theoretical significance of domestication as intellectual, political and sociological processes, several works of anthropological
approach written from different perspectives have been suggested to architectural society.

Following this interest, it is relatively to say that the study of indigenous architecture has become the subject of a growing literature, the common goal of this study not only describes and classifies the built forms but also tries to understand them within their local contexts. The main difference between this study and ordinary architectural study is that it can explain a deeper understanding related to socio-cultural aspect, rather than its surface style, as Peter Blundell Jones describes “the effect of anthropologists’ studies is both more indirect and more essential, provoking fundamental questions about the issues concerning the organization of social life, the function and significance of art, the origins of architecture, the relation of people with buildings, and the role of the architect…, anthropologists can help us to understand how the relationship between buildings and society worked before it became so complicated, and they can also help us to trace the stages of the complication”[1].

II. ARCHITECTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The term “architectural anthropology” can be described as a subject that attempts to investigate an evolution of human culture and their related built environments by defining space and place in response to socio-cultural development. It is a renewal of anthropological study of the perception and interpretation of the built form as social process. However, anthropological approaches to architecture take disarticulated forms with a wide array of topics, but they put the same concern in human constructive or building behavior, and tend to explore how the built form is culturally defined and constructed. With the help of insights from architecture, architectural anthropology can better serve to understand, describe, and represent the human worldviews embodied in different built environments and socio-cultural contexts.

The most pioneering works in architectural anthropology can be dated back at least to Lewis H. Morgan’s 1881 in “House and House- life of the American Aborigines, this description was considered to be a forerunner of the investigation of such factors of the dwellings. Based considerably on ethnography, Morgan identifies different “social usages and customs” which determine the form of the “long houses” of the Indian tribes in aboriginal America, and emphasizes that the built form and its construction techniques can be represented as a “container” of social units [2]. Following this work, house can be described as a specific form of social organization. Several later works have been accomplished with a more holistic focus on vernacular architecture. But not simply with its physical structure, they focus instead on the interrelations between its built form, its dwellers and their ideology. Therefore, various systematic techniques in anthropology have been applied to describe the interrelation between them, revealing some of the different ways in which houses come to stand for social groups and represent the world around them. These prominent works confirm that vernacular architecture was significantly determined by socio-cultural factors: man within a specific social complex and the house was considered to be a pride place for understanding the development of human society.

III. AN APPROACH OF THE STUDY

There is no single approach to the study of vernacular architecture. As a subject which has not yet to be defined as a discipline, it suffers from the lack of co-ordination of approaches, and benefits from the diversity of perceptions which various research direction bring to it. In the first place, the study of vernacular architecture would have been made with educational intentions, either to indicate certain fundamental principles in architecture and building, or to
explore a specific characteristic. Alternatively, the approach might have been from the position of the architectural profession, perhaps with a view that attempts to bring contemporary design into a regional tradition.

With the view of architectural anthropology, the study of vernacular architecture can be described in two main concepts; ethnological and anthropological frameworks. The ethnological study mainly focuses on domestic architecture as found in the remote area of every country. In regard to its cultural significance, vernacular architecture was usually understood as important part of material culture, representing as “local architectural dialect” which was built up along with the development of the people different cultures around the world. They explain the relation between architectural aesthetics and the very special structural conditions of related ways of life and social orders.

A seminal work which goes back to the 1930s is Griaule and Dieterian’s analysis of the shelters of Dogon in Mali. This description demonstrates how a very complex cosmology was expressed in an esoteric anthropomorphism which informs the layout of houses and settlements and determines their built forms [3]. It was not until the 1950s that the new emphases were placed. In “Seasonal Variation of the Eskimo”, Marcel Mauss illuminated the interconnection between the Eskimos’ cosmological ideas and their geographical determination, drawing on the evidence of large body of ethnographical data. This work also demonstrates a new insight that a single case study is well conceived as executed since it is sufficient to establish a general principle [4]. The major contribution with the purpose of the view, vernacular architecture has been in a specific society. In anthropological viewed much larger and deeper than just an edifice of a certain society. It was perceived as a “humanly constructed space” and a ground of interaction between men, their ideology and environment. By carrying with spiritual and emotional loads, vernacular architecture can be viewed as a visible ethic domain and a space of influence by giving particular meaning with reference to socio-cultural context.

**IV. ARCHITECTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

The diversity of vernacular architectural study can be found recently in various sources of literature. One notable example is a series of work edited by Paul Oliver (1998) in “Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World”. These three volumes of work investigate and document the great variety of house forms in understanding of meaning in architectural form has been accomplished by Amos Rappoport (1960) in “House From and Culture”. According to this work, the meanings of things are derived from the way in which men define things around them. The meanings do not actually reside in the things but they develop from the way people want their environment to mean certain things, which include almost everything built by men since they first started to build. The interpretations of things function under the “physical determinism” of modifying factors such as climate, material, construction technique, economy, belief and religion. In this thought, architecture is clearly determined by the relation between men and their specific socio-cultural complex. Slightly late than Rappoport’s work, Bernard Rudofsky (1964) in “Architecture without Architects” points out the special “humanness” of architecture with its organic integration of buildings in their natural surroundings [5].

At the same time, more programmatic approaches to an anthropological study of vernacular architecture have been developed, many of them initiated by architects with an interest in anthropology. In “Do Dual Organizations Exist?” Levi-Strauss (1963) suggests the idea of analyzing
human settlement patterns and quests for potential factors which determine the shape of architectural constructions and which can explain the enormous diversity of built forms [6]. This essay provides an inspiration to later literatures in anthropological analysis of the spatial organization of house, such as the works of Cunningham (1964) and Bourdieu (1973). Prime example of symbolic interpretation of traditional house forms is much-quoted analysis of the Atoni house accomplished by Cunningham and the Berber house by Bourdieu. These descriptions confirm that vernacular house is one of the best modes available to preliterate society to store and encapsulate ideas.

Fig. 1 Cosmological order of the Atoni was explained cooperatively in the sketches.

Since the end of 1970s, the concept of "house" has attained additional significance, one primacy principle is that house has been frequently thought of as like a human body. The idea of "house and the body" was introduced in order to draw the picture of intimate connection between domestic domains; human body and mind in continuous interaction in terms of the physical structure, social conventions and mental images of space. It stresses that once people construct house and make it in their own image, so they use house and house-image to construct themselves by taking house as the representations of individuals and groups. The potential theoretical significance of the houses was drawn with the scope of "house society". Levi-Strauss (1963) suggests this idea to draw attention to the role of house that plays in societies all over the world. This idea expands an alternative language of house by focusing on the connections between architectural, social and symbolic significance. In this view, house is the depiction of a specific and widespread social type which emphasizes the significance of the indigenous category of house in the study of systems of social organization [6]. Accomplished by Susan Kent in “Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space” and Roxanna Waterson in “The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in Southeast Asia”, anthropological study of symbolic representation of house and the vital role of kinship systems of the people in specific culture became much more sophisticated. These essays mark a major step in understanding of the links between material culture, kinship system, sociality and the human body, and they also reveal some different ways in which the house is considered as the social interactions with surrounding world.

V. ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN THAI ARCHITECTURE

About the 1930s, anthropological theory has been first suggested to Thai academic society. Various approaches have been applied to instigate an investigation in a complex socio-cultural influence that plays its significant role in Thai culture. Many literatures have been accomplished with the thirst to know Thai culture by both local and western scholars. But most of them are dominated by an interest which geared towards preserving traditional beliefs, customs, and ways of life as “cultural heritage”. As same as the study of Thai architecture, most of what they have been spotlight on the physical characteristics, construction materials and historical interpretation of traditional and vernacular architecture. For the search of socio-cultural aspect of the building was very limited, and
frequently viewed as an “historical artifact”.

By the end of 1950s, the bridge between anthropological and architectural study of Thai architecture was first attempted by Phraya Anumarnrajadhon, a notable Thai anthropologist in a series of “Customs of Life”; traditional belief, cosmological ideology, customs and ritual practices related to building a Thai house were clearly scrutinized with analytical discourse on Thai culture [7]. This series establish an understanding that why and how the aboriginal beliefs were manipulated the house itself and its dwellers. Following these dominating source, most of the later descriptions have been derivatively accomplished with distressingly little new or original information to offer. But the work of Pinijvarasinsin (2004) in “Experience of Well-being in Thai Vernacular Houses” and Karnchanaporn (2005) in “Fear as a Cultural Phenomenon in Thailand with Spatial Reference to the Spatial Relations of Domestic Architecture” are the few exception. These works provide alternative approaches in architectural anthropology and phenomenology to interpret the relationship between the inhabitants, their houses and their ideologies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

It might be concluded that there have been little research so far on the relationship between man, architecture and its related built environment. However, architectural anthropology is an approach that can provide a new insight in the interconnection between them. Thus, architecture defined in an anthropologically wider framework can reveal a better understanding in the human condition and its relation to built environment. With this view, it confirms that architecture cannot be considered only in a narrow concept of physical values. It should be reconceived in its temporal depths and extended towards anthropological approach that can help us to clarify the factual complexity of architecture.
REFERENCES


