

# **Central Charoen Krung tourism: Creative district as a promotional tool for a historical community**

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## **Abstract**

This research was conducted to answer the question of Central Charoen Krung's identity before and after the emergence of a putative creative module promoted within the area, and how creative district could help raise awareness among today societies. Primary data were collected from survey and observation of physical condition, and interviews of stakeholders; secondary data derived from academic texts and historical images. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the analysis.

The putative 'creative district' concept was used to promote Central Charoen Krung district, where the area was previously forgotten from the wider context of Thailand's tourism industry. According to the literature review and research findings relevant to ideas of genius loci, gentrification and creative city, Central Charoen Krung district presents as controversial despite the injection of a 'creative module' into the district as a current model of tolerance and of the accommodation of difference in an historical area of Bangkok.

**Key Words:** Creative City | Creative District | Gentrification | Tradition | Genius Loci

## เจริญกรุงตอนกลาง: การส่งเสริมชุมชนประวัติศาสตร์ผ่านย่านสร้างสรรค์

### ธนัท ภาอารยวัฒน์

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### Abstract

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้เป็นการวิจัยเพื่อหาคำตอบทางเอกลักษณ์ของย่านเจริญกรุงตอนกลางทั้งก่อนและหลังการส่งเสริมโดยย่านสร้างสรรค์ และ ย่านสร้างสรรค์สามารถสร้างความตระหนักในสังคมปัจจุบันได้อย่างไร ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้วิธีการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพเพื่อนำไปสู่การวิเคราะห์ในเชิงลึก

แนวคิดย่านสร้างสรรค์ได้ถูกนำมาเป็นเครื่องมือในการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวและพัฒนาย่านเจริญกรุงตอนกลาง ซึ่งเป็นย่านที่ถูกกลืนในเชิงการท่องเที่ยวและชุมชน แต่กระนั้นการส่งเสริมโดยใช้นโยบายสร้างสรรค์เป็นเครื่องมือก่อให้เกิดคำถามและปัญหาต่างๆในพื้นที่เจริญกรุงตอนกลางซึ่งเป็นบริเวณที่มีประวัติศาสตร์เก่าแก่อันยาวนานและมีชุมชนที่มีความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมอาศัยอยู่ร่วมกันเป็นจำนวนมาก

Key Words: เมืองสร้างสรรค์ | ย่านสร้างสรรค์ | เจนตรีฟิเคชั่น | ประเพณี | บรรยากาศพิเศษ

## 1. Introduction

“Charoen Krung Road” or “New Road” was one of the major developments in the city’s planning to serve new transportation developments by the Europeans. The purpose of constructing this particular road was to connect Rattanakosin Island (the City Center) area to communities that had expanded southwards along the Chao Phraya River banks (Wright, 1908: 238). The length of the road was 8,575 meters, running parallel to the Chao Phraya River from Sanam Chai Road to Dao Khanong Road, and it accesses many notable communities along its route.

Through these well-known communities, Charoen Krung Road illustrates its significance in historical and social dimensions, also aesthetic and scientific values (Burra Charter, 2013), and has all the potential to become one of the most popular destinations for tourists who visit Bangkok. However, there are some communities along this road, especially the area from Khlong Padung Krung Kasem community downwards to Sathorn intersection, that have been overlooked by visitors who have tended to prefer to visit other popular places.

Nevertheless, there have been development plans progressing to promote Charoen Krung road as a ‘*Creative District*’. The project involves several organizations, authorities and communities as stakeholders to drive the project as the hub of a creative and arts center of Asia, but the plan is facing multiple issues causing slow development.

Despite valuable assets that the area possesses, and the attractive creative district plan that the area is evolving, the development has not come to realization and the number of visitors and tourists has not increased accordingly. The question of why this area is not popular compared to others was raised within the community in the area, since this area is situated on an historical road and, moreover, there are other tangible and intangible values that still exist and are waiting for visitors to discover and explore within the area.

## 2. The purpose of the study

The overall goal of the present study is to come to some understanding of Central Charoen Krung’s potential in the context of Bangkok tourism, albeit most likely as a secondary destination. It has been motivated by the observation of the area’s very recent emergence as a proto ‘creative district,’ in a city that is somewhat bereft of such focuses of creative activity. So there is an underlying thought to the study: might Central Charoen Krung come to take a place as a creative (artistic, avant-garde) precinct in the overall context of Bangkok tourism? It is important, however, to realize that an artistic community focusing on Charoen Krung Road would be merely one element in a rich social ecology. The area emerged from an early ex-

pansion of the city, with each community that existed along this road having its own significance to the history of Bangkok. People should realize the significance of its diverse components but also of each component's role in a much larger whole. However, there are some communities that have been forgotten from the wider city and others, it seems, very recently emerging. This brings the question of what justifies the significance of this area compared to others, and what potential does this area have to become a significant destination in the future, also to assist this community's realization of its own cultural heritage. In order to understand the community thoroughly, various information must be obtained such as its history and existing aspects of this road, the communities along the road, the evolution of transportation systems in Bangkok, the history of local infrastructure, intangible aspects, and possibly ending with identifying the conceptual connection between history and creativity.



Figure 1: Site Map: Scope of area

Source: Image edited from Google Earth

### 3. Objective

1. To explore Central Charoen Krung's identity through ideas of 'spirit of place' or 'genius loci'
2. To identify the area's changes over time, and how those changes are likely to enhance its quality as a place? Central to this question is its seeming emergence as a putative creative district.
3. To identify problems that have occurred in the area's existing condition and creative development plans

#### 4. Literature Review and Methods

This section focuses on theories and research background relevant to the research objective developed in the previous section. It addresses key principles of urban context concerning relationships between humans and their environment as well as examining the notion of place-making, revitalization, and gentrification relative to a creative city concept. These issues were studied as they relate to the question of promoting lesser-known destinations to visitors.

##### 4.1 Genius Loci: Cognitive and Perceptual Factors in Urban Theory

The term ‘genius loci’ is Latin and refers to places that have their own ‘guardian spirit’ (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The concept of genius loci has, however, developed in its transition to modern uses and is often applied to any landscape and any place, including urban places, whereas genius loci more properly describes the ‘atmosphere’ of a place and the quality of its ‘environment,’ in addition to its identity closely linked with ‘the past’ and with ideas of conservation (Jivén and Larkham, 2003: 68).

According to Christian Norberg-Schulz in ‘Genius Loci – Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture’, genius loci is defined in more contemporary terms whereby it has a structure and embodies meanings under five themes: thing, order, character, light, and time. Norberg-Schulz was advocating for a phenomenology of architecture here, where phenomena refer to things or experiences as human beings experience them.

The concept of genius loci described in Norberg-Schulz are understood as the condition of a place and are based on features in the topographical landscape that includes continual changes as in the annual cycle. However, these characteristics contrast with the (in)stability of physical form when we are changing our built environment, and genius loci is as a place in nature that we have to interpret (Jivén and Larkham, 2003: 71).

The factors which create sense of place are divided into two categories: cognitive and perceptual factors; and physical characteristics. Kevin Lynch, in his book “Image of the City” (1960), defines quality of the cognitive space and imageability of space which helps to identify places, so Lynch states:

*“We must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived by its inhabitants.”* – Kevin Lynch (1960:3)

In Kevin Lynch’s “Image of the City”, he formulates a new criterion of ‘imageability’ and shows its potential value as a guide for the building and rebuilding of cities. A principal concept in his book is that of ‘legibility’ which means the extent to which the cityscape can be ‘read’.

Lynch's imaginability links into environmental quality, which protects the human against getting lost, and includes shape, color or arrangements which facilitate the making of identification, and constitute useful mental images of the environment; further our cognition of a place depends on these physical and perceptual elements.

Another important author in this regard is Edward Relph in his book *"Place or Placelessness"* (Relph, 1976). His aim was to examine and to clarify human situations, events, meanings, and experiences as they are known in everyday life but are typically unnoticed beneath the level of conscious awareness. Like Norberg-Schulz and Lynch, Relph contends that, to study the relationship and understanding of a place, it must be explored in terms of how people experience it (Seamon and Sowers, 2008).

In summary, genius loci is the basis for people's interpretation of a place, and it is in relation to nature that places and objects take on meaning. In contrast, while Norberg-Schulz explored the character of places on the grounds of their meanings for people, Kevin Lynch ignored meanings and focused on structure and identity.

#### 4.2 Placemaking, Revitalization and Gentrification

The placemaking idea originated in the 1960s when writers like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte developed innovative ideas of cities that accommodated people, not just vehicles, concentrating on the importance of having healthy public spaces and lively neighborhoods. There are three basic thoughts in placemaking to make livable places, namely (1) The design of places, (2) The experience that these make possible, and (3) The consequences they have in our lives (Artibise, 2010). Therefore, place making is the process of planning quality public spaces that contribute to the well-being of the local community.

Like placemaking, revitalization implies rebirth, or giving life back, especially referring to the activity that was once lively and vibrant, but has since been lost. The idea of revitalizing a public space by bringing improvement that brings people together should not generate suspicion. However, examples of places that have seen the cost of living greatly increase after revitalization have highlighted contradictions which have resulted from gentrification (Artibise, 2010).

The term gentrification was adopted in 1964 by the British sociologist Ruth Glass, to refer to a process that involves displacement of lower/working class people by middle class or rich/powerful people. It generally defines a process of the replacement or improvement of old buildings transformed by the rich, resulting in increasing rents and property values (Pokharatsiri, 2012). It also refers to the social, cultural, and economic improvement of a neighborhood or, on a larger

scale, an entire district. It is commonly occurring in urban areas where prior disinvestment in the urban infrastructure creates opportunities for profitable redevelopment, resulting in needs and concerns of business, but also requires policy for urban residents affected by work instability, unemployment, and decline (Slater, 2010: 573). It also occurs in those societies where a loss of manufacturing and an increase in service industries has led to expansion of middle-class professionals with a disposition towards central city living and a rejection of districts in the suburbs. This is the result of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, local responses to globalization and developing environmental and lifestyle trends attracting a certain type of urban professional.

Today, gentrification becomes challenging to the process of urban revitalization, when residents are displaced since they can no longer pay for house, utilities, school fees, and other aspects that are offered in the neighborhood due to the growing wealth of the area. Gentrification tends to stop any consideration of the opinions of those residents who were affected by higher income households moving into their living area. This must start from the local community that uses the space, but this process is limited by gentrification (Hamnett, 2003: 2424).

Although the phenomenon of gentrification is common in large cities, local development of needed community facilities should not be delayed due to excessive fear that they might result in gentrification. The process can advance without population displacement; however, the way projects are run is what determines the result. It is important to emphasize the creating of spaces for all inhabitants, connecting both communities and spaces together rather than dividing them, as local communities need to be identifiable and maintain their genuine quality to keep their history from being forgotten.

#### 4.3 Creative City: The Concept

The idea of placemaking, revitalization and gentrification were fundamental aspects that transformed understanding of the city, and the idea of 'creative city' is among the tools of transformation. In recent years, the creative city concept has gained attention of academics where Richard Florida's and Charles Landry's work seems to affect the debate and political actions relevant to organization at both national and local levels (including UNESCO).

Historically, cities have always needed creativity to work as markets, trading and production centers from their entrepreneurs, artists, students, academics, and communities (Landry and Bianchini, 1998: 11). They have often been the places where there are cultural diversities,

where interaction creates new ideas, and allows people to live through ideas, needs, aspirations, projects, conflicts, memories and more. Landry and Bianchini's theory of the creative city is based on the idea of using culture as an element of urban revitalization, while Florida's idea of 'creative class' has a different theoretical approach. He claims that economic advantages are no longer based on raw materials but rather creativity has replaced raw materials as the crucial source of economic growth, and that to be successful in this emerging creative age, regions must develop by attracting and retaining creative people who generate innovations and develop technologies (Florida, 2002: 7-8). He also singles out that creative-class people in an urban environment are looking for high-quality experiences, openness to diversity, and opportunity to validate their identities as creative people (Florida, 2002: 9). This statement raises controversial questions in urban planning and in academic debate. In 'Clashing theory with practice: Introduction' by Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach and Piotr Radwański, they claim that Florida's definition is too wide, raising questions such as who belongs to the creative class? What is a creative job? How is the creative city agenda linked with urban governance? (Wiktor-Mach and Radwański, 2013: 2; Hutter, 2013: 5). Michael Hutter in "*Controversies about and in Creative cities*" has agreed with the Wiktor-Mach and Radwański statement, arguing that "*Creativity must be organically developed*", otherwise the city will remain as restricted enclaves (Hutter, 2013: 6).

Landry and Bianchini's creative city (1998) explores a guide for local decision-makers encouraging them to embrace an innovative approach to urban development. Here, the phase 'creative city' entitled the adoption of an approach to creative urban planning and public policy making, with a strong emphasis on supporting local cultural institutions and creative industries, in addition to considering the built environment to be based on development of a 'creative milieu', whereas, creative city theory embraces the notion of culture and place (Landry and Bianchini, 1998).

In laying the foundations for a creative milieu, Landry and Bianchini emphasize cultural aspects of the creative city, and this is where gentrification comes into context. Similar to Florida's theory of attracting and retaining creative people, Landry and Bianchini suggest that the contribution of immigrants helps cities in looking at problems and different priorities in different ways (Landry and Bianchini, 1998: 28). The question arises, what about local people? Are they prepared to face the change of their neighborhood? The new generation of creative and innovative cities focuses on creating a high quality of life benefits. Their purpose is to link economic investment with sustainability and social assistance to guide urban develop-

ment but where the phenomenon of gentrification could cause population displacement, economic issues, and cultural erosion. As Doreen Jakob argues, “*The creative city promises urban vitality, distinctiveness, centrality, wealth creation and above all conditions to ‘ride the wave of change’ for the benefit of the city*” (Jakob, 2010: 193).

Urban vitality and distinctiveness, in this context, refers to physical locations where populations choose to be to satisfy their daily basic needs, such as employment, education, recreation, and access to multi-functional services (Rodwell, 2013: 12). Michael Rodwell’s view is similar to Jakob’s, as he states that “For historic cities to be economically successful [...] they need to take full advantage of their individual, distinguishing qualities” (Rodwell, 2013: 18). Jakob and Rodwell conclude that creative city strategies lead to an unfair allocation of public resources which tends to benefit urban entrepreneurialism rather than taking advantage of urban vitality and distinctiveness.

Creative cities are the innovative way to support the transition from stasis to evolution, drawing attention both to technology, infrastructure, productive sectors, as well as to culture, arts and education. Nevertheless, creative city revitalization strategies have been the cause that can lead to gentrification and exclusion in the urban environment. In spite of the controversies the concept has among economists and planners, the creative city’s approach contributes significantly to strategic development, redefines the role of the human resource and considers it as the starting point of the process, while people are important factors not only at the planning phase but most importantly during the evolution of urban life. Therefore, the levels and degree of participation in a place of urban expression will define the fulfillment of people’s expectations and the progress of outcomes of a creative city.

“*Just like all cities, creative cities are about people. This means that they cannot be planned from scratch. Creative places in the city are just like living beings: they are born, grow, decay and can rise again*” – Jane Jacobs in Rodwell (2013:18).

The literature has examined several theories and background research relevant to the understanding of urban context. In reflecting back to the brief introduction, a number of salient issues emerge: Does the idea of genius loci and linked theories of urban image help to throw light on the ‘specialness’ of the area? Does the literature on the creative class and creative city suggest ways to look at the hypothesis of an emerging creative district in Central Charoen Krung?

The methodological issues that arise in pursuing the sorts of questions that emerge from the juxtaposition of ideas from the literature, the method or approach here will be

variously historical and ethnographic, utilizing the techniques of both disciplinary approaches, also both quantitative and qualitative research. Data sources were collected into two categories; primary data sources included observations and survey of the physical condition of the area and population that includes both local communities and tourists, while secondary data sources were derived from academic texts, printed materials, historical photographs, and related research studies that were relevant to the research topic. The initial-stage survey and data collection was to get an overview of the physical condition and the area's communities. This was followed with participatory observation such as activities that the researcher conducted with community samples during festivals, events, as well as with visiting tourists, in order to become familiar with the places of interest in the district. On the other hand, interviews were conducted with stakeholders within the community. Key information emerging from these interviewees was that Central Charoen Krung district is rich in historical values and in the authenticity of the community and their way of life. Respondents were from Western and local business owners, students from Assumption College, residents, and Thailand Creative and Design Centre (TCDC) members. The interview questions sought to understand the thoughts of respondents towards the existing circumstances of the district and their ideas regarding the district's developments that were relevant to the research questions.

Data were recorded and verified simultaneously. Physical surveys and observations in the area were documented in the form of maps and images. To verify the accuracy of information, these data were compared to historical evidence and collaboration from the community. Physical surveys and direct observation were verified through authorities' maps, archives, and interviews from the community. Data from interviews, physical survey, observation, and literature review were organized and classified to throw light on the phenomena within the area. The analyzed data were organized in terms of the district's existing conditions, antiquities, diversity, changes, and issues as highlighted through the informants.

## **5. Research Findings**

To understand how cultural heritage is important to the cultural setting of Central Charoen Krung district, it is necessary to explore the cultural significance of the place and its setting. Thus, this part will assess the significance of the cultural heritage setting in both tangible and intangible aspects.

### **5.1 Evidence of Early Western Diplomats' Relations to the Siamese**

In the Central Charoen Krung district, one of the significant values of the area was its being known to be the early hub of Western activities. According to King's "*Reading Bangkok*", the

very first European nation that had connected with Siam was the Portuguese. They had a huge impact during the Ayutthaya era in the forms of traders, diplomats, and army (assisting in the Siam-Burmese wars); the Dutch came in 1604 and then the formal arrival of the French in 1662 (King, 2011: 2-3). The connection between Siam and Western nations has continued since.

Among historical buildings that illustrate antiquity from the King Rama IV period is the French Embassy. It evidences the connection between Siam and Westerners during the rise of trading between the East and the West. The French Embassy was built during the 1850s as a residence for French diplomats who came to Siam as officials for trading and political purposes. The Portuguese Embassy is representative of another European country that has had a long relationship with Siam, since the 16th century. The embassy is located on Charoen Krung Soi 30, on land given to Portuguese officials since the reign of King Rama I, but the embassy building was first opened in 1875. The Ambassador's residence can be seen from the river bank and illustrates the history of the place where the oldest diplomatic residences in Bangkok were established. Additional to French and Portuguese diplomats that had established their consulates in the Central Charoen Krung area, British, American, Italian, and German consulates were located in the area before later being relocated elsewhere. These all show how the district was a strategic location that served the connection activities between the Westerners and locals.

## 5.2 Transition of Modernizing Central Charoen Krung: Influence of Western Technologies through Architecture and Urban Design

Dating back to the King Rama IV era, the Siamese government had recruited Western experts to government office for consultancy in urban and architectural development of the country. Due to the rapid expansion of the capital, much infrastructure and buildings were built to cope with the increasing population, resulting in an introduction of new construction technologies from the west that had a huge impact on construction industries in Bangkok.

The architecture and urban design of the capital carried a layer of European modernity. Other than government buildings, the European modernization influenced the design and planning of private buildings, roads, railways, bridges, and infrastructure. The technologies and interventions that were introduced into the capital during these periods were significant aspects that modernized Bangkok. New construction materials allowed buildings to be completed faster, helping the convenience of communities, while new transportation allowed accessibility around the city. Central Charoen Krung district evidences Western technological influences in the area's streetscape reflecting the history of the European district and its architecture, turning the district into the city's first modern district.

### 5.3 Collections of Architectural Building Styles

From the survey, the architectural styles presented in Charoen Krung can be based on the period of time of the buildings' establishment, reflected in the transition of streetscapes from past to present. This section is thus divided into three periods as follows:

#### a) The Early Period

These buildings were developed after the improvement of Charoen Krung Road in the King Rama V period, mostly in the form of shop-houses. The buildings are mostly 2-3 stories, built with brick and plaster wall-bearing structures, although after advances in construction technology steel and reinforced concrete were used in the construction. Plaster stuccos were popular decorative elements found on the casements, columns, buttresses, and pediments resembling European Renaissance, Neo-Classical, and Palladian styles. Moreover, there are a few Victorian style houses, and traditional Thai houses found in the area as well.



**Figure 2:** Examples of the Early period buildings along Central Charoen Krung  
**Source:** Tanat Bha-aryaphatn [2017]

### b) Twentieth Century Architectural Style Buildings

Modern architecture looks quite different from early architecture. Whereas many older architectural styles were focused on being as decorative as possible, modern architecture is based more on simplicity and functionality. Many buildings on Charoen Krung were developed to convey new construction technologies and designs according to ideas of famous architects. When modernism took over Bangkok after World War II, buildings in Central Charoen Krung district were also affected by ideas of modern architecture that were essentially Western. Moreover, gentrification and globalization also emerged to shape the fabric of the district in other ways.

### c) Modern / Late -Modern Architecture (and recently built buildings)

Resulting from modernization, globalization and gentrification, several old buildings have been abandoned and demolished and replaced by brand new post-modern or late-modern architecture. The rapid growth in economy and population within this area resulted in development of high-rise and modern-shaped buildings which effectively reshape the overall fabric of the area.



Figure 3: Examples of Twentieth Century buildings along Central Charoen Krung Road  
Source: Tanat Bha-aryaphatn [2017]



Figure 4: Examples of modern and late-modern buildings on Charoen Krung Road  
Source: Tanat Bha-aryaphatn [2017]

In summary, architectural styles in each period of time have their own distinct characteristics, uses of construction materials, and detailed elements and ornaments. This could be defined as in the following table:

**Table 1:** Period of Time: Building Features in Summary

Source: Tanat Bha-aryaphatn [2017]

PERIOD / STYLE	CHARACTERISTIC	STRUCTURE / MATERIAL	ORNAMENTS / ELEMENTS
Early Period Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influenced by European</li> <li>- Neo-Classical, Palladian, Renaissance, and Victorian Style</li> <li>- Mostly 2-3 Stories Shop-houses</li> <li>- Decorative Colorful Wall</li> <li>- Front porch decorated with arch and stucco</li> <li>- Timber window frame</li> <li>- Tile Kite roof finishing</li> <li>- Pitched roofing or deck with balustrades</li> <li>- Plaster buttress</li> <li>- Balcony on 2nd and 3rd floor</li> <li>- Stuccos on walls or air vents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wall-bearing stucture systems</li> <li>- Post-column structure systems</li> <li>- Brick and Plaster as a major material</li> <li>- Reinforced concrete</li> <li>- Floor finishing with European decorative tiles</li> <li>- Timber for doors and window</li> <li>- Timber Natural air ventilation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neo-Classical ornaments</li> <li>- Chinese decorative pattern</li> <li>- Highly decorate ornament on pilaster</li> <li>- Decorative balustrades</li> <li>- Geometrical design on doors and windows</li> </ul>
Twentieth Century Architectural Style Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inspired by European and American famous architect</li> <li>- 3 to 6 stories shop-house building</li> <li>- High-rise building as accomodations and residences</li> <li>- Symmetrical Design</li> <li>- Grid system floor plans</li> <li>- Simplicity architectural detail</li> <li>- Reinforced concrete roof slab</li> <li>- Plain and Regid façade design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reinforced concrete structure</li> <li>- Post and Column system</li> <li>- Concrete, Steel, and Glass as a major material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thin plate simple concrete fin at façade</li> <li>- Geometrical pattern</li> <li>- Few decorative elements and ornaments</li> </ul>
Late-Modern Architecture (Recent Built Buildings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mixture of low-rise and high-rise buildings</li> <li>- Asymmetrical and Symmetrical shape building</li> <li>- Partially influence by historical buildings</li> <li>- Low decorative, but complex in design</li> <li>- Simple shape façade</li> <li>- Mostly renovated from old building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reinforced concrete, steel, glass, aluminuim as a major material</li> <li>- Metal sheet roof system</li> <li>- Concrete and steel structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less decorative ornaments</li> <li>- Simplified from original ornament</li> <li>- Geometrical and rigid design decorative items</li> </ul>

To conclude, the architectural collection in Central Charoen Krung district could be seen as evidence of the significance that the area has developed through layers of time, while the cultural juxtapositions there display the district's present architectural diversity.

#### 5.4 Genius Loci: Spirit of Place

The genius loci of Central Charoen Krung district presents unique attributes, as Norberg-Schulz has argued that such attributes will relate to (1) natural environment, and (2) man-made environment. Natural environment does have a significant influence in Central Charoen Krung district, except in the dominating presence of the Chao Phraya river. In most of the sites, waterscape is like the background to the man-made structures. Central Charoen Krung district has the Chao Phraya river as its main bloodline for trading activities which could evidently be seen from buildings along the river, and its memories and ambience permeate the spirit of the community accordingly. Today, waterscape activities maintain the place's continuity with the transits of its history.

The man-made environment, on the other hand, has its own structure and meanings, produced by the real situation and the natural environment to which it is related. The basic task of the man-made environment is to concretely and positively link with the natural phenomena. In Central Charoen Krung

district, these man-made environment elements link with the natural place in three ways, namely visualization, complementation and symbolization, which give people identity and orientation.

From Norberg-Schulz, man-made environment always has a close connection with people. A comfortable and familiar environment can promote people's awareness of their belongingness, such as through architecture, paths, nodes, signage, vegetation, walkways, and streetscape patterns.

### 5.5 Cultural Juxtaposition

According to ideas on architectural diversity, buildings have been shaped by the culture of the inhabitants who have lived in the area. In Central Charoen Krung district, the variety of architecture characteristics shows that the community in the area has developed as a mixture of ethnic, social, and religious groups.

The key quality of Central Charoen Krung district is that it is part of the local life of its own area, but also has linkages to other place and people since historical times. From the present research, the area shows its juxtapositions in many ways in both tangible and intangible aspects.

The importance of juxtapositions lies in their role in explaining the dynamic and the hybridity of the relationships between inhabitants, place and traditions (Hall, 2012). Central Charoen Krung district occupies the peculiar urban geography of Charoen Krung road, a place signified by the symbolic prominence of religious diversity, culture, art, and economic landmarks like Assumption Cathedral, the Haroon community, Thailand Creative and Design Center (TCDC), and Robinson Bangrak Department store.

In addition to these and other more prominent landmarks, there are powerful symbolic relationships peculiar to the area particularly in a religion and cultural perspective. Especially this is the case in the southern part of Charoen Krung district, where it presently shows juxtapositions and relationships between Jeal Aeng Beal (the Chinese Shrine), Baan Ouu Mosque and its community, Suan Phlu temple, and Assumption Cathedral. Although they are different in culture and traditions, a direct physical connection and encompassing community show no sign of significant boundaries that separate them; instead, the community is bonded as a large community.



**Figure 5:** Jeal Aeng Beal Shrine, Baan Ouu Mosque, Suan Phlu Temple, and Assumption Cathedral

**Source:** Tanat Bha-aryaphatn [2017]

### 5.6 Symbolic Value through the Architecture of Central Charoen Krung

Cultural property provides awareness of and pride in cultural identity. Among the cultural juxtapositions, Central Charoen Krung streetscape holds symbolic values that illustrate cultural significance through architecture.

The essential meaning of craft in architecture is the connection of building or space in relation to its own parts internally, and to its surroundings externally, whereby these connections can be an integration of the physical, temporal, and spiritual. Thus a building such as Assumption Cathedral signifies the symbolic meaning of Catholic religion through its architectural characteristics and ornaments. Its craftsmanship and construction technique and its profusion of references has the effect of reflecting the

### 5.7 antiquity and continuity of Catholic tradition.

Another example of distinctive symbolic meanings in terms of architectural craft could be identified through the display of Western arts and crafts on the Charoen Krung streetscape. A place like the Oriental hotel (1876) designed by Mario Tamagno and Annibale Rigotti could be seen as a symbol of Western craftsmanship that is related to their other works in the capital such as The Siam Commercial Bank (1908) and especially the Abhisek Dusit Throne Hall in the Dusit Palace (1912).

The Grand Postal office could be another symbolic element that portrayed political power of the ‘Khana Ratsadom’ during the era of General Phibunsongkhram, prime minister and virtual military dictator from 1938 to 1944 and again from 1948 to 1957. The building is an example of brutalist architecture influenced from German and Italian architects. Its architectural characteristics reflect the revival of nationalist values with its structure similar to several buildings in fascist Italy and Germany.

In term of symbolic value through architecture, these various buildings illustrate religion, arts and crafts, and political power and its symbols respectively. Nevertheless, there are several more remnants in Central Charoen Krung district that are related to cultural significance and that make this area laden with meanings and their evocation.

Siam’s juxtapositions are presented in the mixture of communities and their characteristics, and in the diversity of cultural identities since the early Rattanakosin era (King, 2011: 20). Similarly, in Central Charoen Krung district, the diversification of ethnic, social, and religious groups is presently illustrating the history of this particular area from a cultural viewpoint which has shaped the character of the area and which is emblematic of the extraordinary tolerance of both historical and present Siam.

### 5.7 Central Charoen Krung as a ‘Creative District’ – Existing Plans

According to ideas of ‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ factors in the tourism industry, push factors are defined as the motivation to travel, while pull factor concern destinations with their attractions (Hsu C.H.C. and Huang S, 2008: 20-21). Central Charoen Krung district has assets that could potentially fulfill both push and pull factors for visitors and tourists. Promoting the area as a creative district to attract visitors was a smart move, but still there are other aspects that need to be considered for the project to be sustained in the market.

The creative district project (as of now) has survived through multiple events, seminars and conferences, as software. The implication is that there are loopholes in the application of software into the district's hardware, and this is where a sub-project "Co-Create Charoen Krung" has come into play.

Co-Create Charoen Krung comprises five projects to revitalize the area: (1) Riverfront public area development, (2) Abandoned building renovation and development, (3) Small green space development, (4) Alley connection project, and (5) Signage for a walkable district. These developments address the problems that the district has encountered for a long time, and the plan somewhat interests the wider local community who want to see improvements to the area.

Despite the great plans for the putative creative district, to achieve certain milestones of the development plan is one thing; on the other hand, however, understanding the nature of the emerging creative district needs to be examined. According to a statement from Jane Jacobs in Rodwell (2013:18), creative cities are about people and cannot be planned from scratch, where her statement could be seen as describing a dilemma for Central Charoen Krung district.

## 6. Discussion

The question of 'spirit of place' and its specialness is relevant to identifying Central Charoen Krung's identity that could help people to realize its significance as it is presented in Thailand's history. Reflecting from Norberg-Schulz theory of genius loci, the natural environment of Central Charoen Krung effectively reeks of the memory and imaginings of the past – it is in the decaying teak of old, traditional houses, the blackening mosses on old white-washed walls, the smell of street foods, the sudden glimpses down a constricting soi to the magical expanse of Chao Phraya river, the extraordinary inter-relations between faiths and beliefs – Buddhist, Islam, Catholic – a dream-world of tolerance and multiplicity in a wider global society of its opposite.

In the final analysis, the real nature of this spirit of place is indefinable. Yet it presents as something invaluable, that is to be guarded against the inroads of both economic modernization and cultural modernism.

This is the 'global' role of Central Charoen Krung – to present a model of tolerance and of the accommodation of difference.

Non-controversially, the area of Central Charoen Krung is changing through the economic

development and cultural diversification that currently transforms Thai society more widely – the tourist hordes, new public transportation, 5-star hotels. The second part of the question relates to how these shifts might enhance the area’s qualities as a place. The answer here is ambivalent: transformation inevitably enhances local economies and broadens local visions and horizons, yet also destroys old memories, customs and culture.

Then there is the question of the ‘creative district’ idea. This would have to be described as putative, at best. It is at present merely a few galleries exhibiting indifferent art, an underutilized artist workspace, some street art and some managed events. It is certainly not yet a Paris Left Bank nor a Bloomsbury nor a New York SoHo. Yet, in the context of Thailand, it is certainly an innovation.

It raises the difficult issue of modernization against the retention of tradition. If the creative district idea thrives, it would seem to catalyze the forms of reinvestment and upgrading normally identified with gentrification, thereby with the erosion of traditional societies and economies. At a conceptual level, it is a question of a dialectic of gentrification and tradition.

## 7. Conclusion

It is suggested above that gentrification and tradition are in something of dialectical relationship. This is to say, first, that the tradition is only definable when it comes under threat from change, of which gentrification is one form; second, change is really only to be defined as gentrification if it is in the form of threat to the traditions of existing communities – otherwise it is merely ‘development’. In other words, tradition and gentrification are to be defined in relation to each other, somewhat like polar opposites.

The dialectical method, a method of thinking in terms of opposites (notably from early 19th century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel) can be described, albeit simplistically, as the proposing of an idea (thesis, or hypothesis), to be considered against its dialectical opposite (antithesis), thence to find some tentative resolution or accommodation between the two (in synthesis) which will then enter into yet a further dialectical relationship – a new opposite (the thesis, antithesis, synthesis – ‘triadic structure’). The method does not really apply in any pure way in the present case of the tensions in Central Charoen Krung, yet it does suggest a further question and certainly a method: in this tension between gentrification and tradition, is some accommodating pathway (synthesis) to be sought through the idea of a creative community? There might be two answers to this question. The first, is that a role of art is always to address

the dilemmas of the era – perhaps in the present case to interpret the transformations of Central Charoen Krung variously to the artists themselves, to the community, and more widely. However, the present research has found very little evidence of any such endeavor. It seems that the art of Central Charoen Krung is merely self-indulgent, notably, an attempt to inject a creative module into the community. The second answer to the question would invoke the criticism that have been leveled against Florida’s argument of ‘the creative class’, that any such class is always alienating – in the present instance, they might be seen as a somewhat egregious sub-set of gentrifiers. So the creative community idea might seen as offering some sort of synthesis between modernization and tradition, but that it then sets up a new tension with social groups for whom these new social practices and ideas are alien.

So is the next synthesis to be sought in actions to bring local communities to participate in new cultural movements – for example, through programs in the schools (local schools, not just Assumption College)? or community’s tradition interpretation program through creative processes? This might suggest a topic for further research.

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