



Design and Building Culture: An Architectural approach from the Public Realm and its Experience in Thai Urbanism

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Abstract

This paper is an issue about building culture, particularly in urbanism. It seeks to identify reactions and responses of public to their built environment. It also aims to interrogate and to discuss about built environment in Thai urbanism in terms of building culture.

There are three matters in this paper. The first matter is a critical review in building culture and it related literature from a range of disciplines; including history, sociology, anthropology, economics, architecture and design. It is to illustrate the interrelationship between built environment and public realm. The second matter is a phenomenological observation in Thai urbanism by the author, a flight attendant who has been travelling to major cities in the world almost twenty years. Built environment in urban area of Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket are employed as an empirical evidences to comprehend the deductive approach of building culture. The third matter is the ways forward for changing built environment through building culture.

Keywords: building culture / built environment / urbanism





This paper is to highlight an issue about ‘Building Culture’, particularly the building culture in Urbanism. It seeks to identify reactions and responses of public’s awareness to their own built environment. It also aims to interrogate and to discuss about built environment in Thai Urbanism in terms of building culture.

There are three matters in this paper. The first matter is a critical review in building culture and it is related literature from a range of discipline to include history, sociology, anthropology, economics, architecture and design. It is to illustrate the interrelationship between built environment and public realm. The second matter is a phenomenological observation in Thai urbanism by the author, a flight attendant who has been travelling to major cities in the world for almost twenty years. It focuses to notify changes and to question the observable experiences of urban areas in Thailand. The third matter is the discussion in the ways forward for changing built environment through building culture.

It is significance to note here that culture is the central character to distinguish human being from animals. Although some animals live as a society, they do it upon their instinct. Many kinds of animals can build their structure in differences such as birds’ nests and bees’ combs as well as humankind. Structures built by human are what we call ‘architecture’. In contrary, others create their structure through their instincts; we create architecture and our built environment through process of culture. This makes architecture as well as built environment are the representation of culture, which is embedded in them.

Built Environment: from Design to Building Culture

Built environment is an outcome of which human touches a space. In the modern world, most of the spaces have been designed professionally by architects, urban designers, or interior designers. But before then, space was designed and created through social and vernacular processes, which intertwined with all other aspects of culture. This makes built environment being utilised as an empirical evidence for cultural studies.

Henri Lefebvre¹ noted in *The Production of Space* that:

Here space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a design (in both sense of the word). The design serves as a mediator – itself of great fidelity – between mental activity (invention) and social activity (realization); and it is deployed in space. The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is an antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a



single glance from the mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates.

For Lefebvre, intelligibility contained in a space can be understood through its design. The hidden message also can be seen through the 'mental eye'. Similar to Lefebvre, Bryan Lawson² noted that space can be used to express, to indicate, to communicate, to convey and to demonstrate many purposes; as well as to generate feelings, to control something, to bring people together, to keep them apart, and also to signal something. Space, therefore, becomes a vehicle of information can be perceived and be understood.

Leland Roth³ also notes that Architecture, then, is like written history and literature—a record of people who produced it—and it can be 'read' in much the same way. Architecture is a nonverbal form of communication, a mute record of the culture that produced it.

According to Roth Architecture, including built environment is not only hermetic container of a space. Both of them can also be perceived as an art like painting, printing, sculpture and literature, which are the products of culture. Architecture and built environment, therefore, have characteristics sharing with these arts. Nanda and Warms⁴ noted about the characteristics of art in terms of cultural anthropology that:

- Being a universal means of interpreting the world through images and marking the real world symbolically;
- Expressing the basic themes, values, and perceptions of reality in ways that are culturally meaningful;
- Being a reflection of cultural values and patterns at the same time that it intensifies the experience of these cultural values;
- Empowering from their symbolic nature, which leaves their production and performance open to a variety of interpretations;
- Conveying a basic cultural theme or combining several themes, which may be in opposition to one another;
- Conveying comprehension both the surface and the deep symbolic structures that communicate and elicit responses from participants and audiences;
- Representing or participating with supernatural world, in order to be manipulated and controlled by humans.

Compared to other arts, Architecture is durable, static, more functional for daily life, and more public. Fundamentally, the physical manifestations of Architecture accommodate human activity. However, Architecture can promote human activities, elicit responses, and communicate meanings. These make Architecture being used to intensify ideas of nationhood, to express ethnic identities and record ethnic histories, and to make political statement. Architecture may also be used as a tool for negotiating or resisting something. Architecture, such as personal premises, is used to express personal identity, social status, or identification



with a particular group in society.⁵ This includes giving voice from marginalised individuals, classes or social groups.⁶ Beyond the need for physical survival, Humans express themselves through Architecture with characteristic forms of creation or 'design'. The architectural design is always guided by functional, psychological, and artistic elements.⁷ The artistic element involves imagination, beauty, skill, and style. It is therefore one of the criteria in evaluating the cultural significance of Architecture in heritage studies.⁸ Contemporarily is the artistic element that has always been employed for marking cultural boundaries, particularly with regard to the construction of ethnic identities of indigenous peoples.⁹

Aimone¹⁰ noted that the purposes of design involve descriptive [to document the visible world], narrative [to tell a story or to send a message], emotive [to convey or to evoke a mood], utilitarian [to serve a practical function], and decorative [to embellish or to beautify a thing or a space]. This is an account that applied to architectural design. The architectural design is based on non-verbal thought. Visual thinking is particularly relevant at the design process, which makes the most significant perceptual impact. Imagination and spatial perception are fundamental elements to design Architecture. These make architecture be a verbally difficult interpretation.¹¹

Le Corbusier¹² noted in his book, *Towards a New Architecture*, that:
'But suppose that walls rise toward heaven in such a way that I am moved. I perceive your intention. Your mood has been gentle, brutal, charming, or noble. The stones you have erected tell me so. You fix me to the place and my eyes regard it. They behold something which expresses a thought. A thought which reveals itself without wood or sound, but solely by means of shapes which stand in a certain relationship to one another. These shapes are such that they are clearly revealed in light. The relationships between them have not necessarily any reference to what's practical or descriptive. They are a mathematical creation of our mind. They are the language of Architecture. By the use of raw materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotion. This is Architecture.'

According to Le Corbusier, a work of Architecture is constituted by basic elements, systems and orders. Through these constituents, Architecture can be experienced and perceived. These, moreover, allow architecture being readily. Architectural forms and spaces have connotative meanings as in language. Associative values and symbolic content determined by personal and cultural interpretation, which can change through time.

Architectures always embed hidden meanings in their appearance. The meanings can be interpreted differently at different time. These meanings also depend upon what expects to be seen.¹³ In other words: visual meaning of Architectures is selective interpretation, which depends upon the relevant memory as the precedent. It is not only a 'pictorial' but an extensive 'vision' to understand and to explain the



intention of the sender or the creator, as well as to understand and to explain the interpretation of what is seen by the receiver or the viewer.

In a contemporary globalising world, the flux of advanced telecommunication technology and the increasing of the tourism industry have dissolved the geographical and imagined world boundaries. On one hand, globalisation introduces us a new ways of living. On the other hand, it initiates a resistance to itself. Localism becomes the focus for resistance, which evokes the public's awareness in every dimension including economic, politic, environment, society and culture. Associated with Post-modern paradigm, Architecture becomes an issue beyond the realm of a small group of Architects, Planners, Designers, Professionals and Practitioners to the General public. Architecture, after it has been built, is turned to be an empirical evidence for criticism to itself and to whom being involved. However, the issue is not to replace existing professional and institutional efforts in Architecture; but it is to extend those efforts into the public at large. The approach of Architecture from the public realm becomes more and more significant. The debates and discussions in this approach are called 'building culture'

Building culture represents a view of the process to develop and to expand the built environment with respect to environmental, socio-cultural, economical sustainability and political compatibility.¹⁴ In other words, building culture is an issue dealing with 'the change of our environment that we need'. The process is complex and involving a sequence of steps, which are:

- Project creating
- Decision making
- Location choosing
- Building character and placement regulating
- Financial supporting
- Construction planning
- Architectural designing
- Materials and technology selecting
- Architectural constructing and engineering
- Interior decorating and exterior landscaping
- Display trim and finishing
- Maintenance and monitoring
- Conservation and rehabilitating

These steps cannot be encapsulated into a single formula, but differ depending on temporal, spatial and socio-cultural dimension of the building. Building culture involving many Stakeholders including Architects, Planners, Engineers, Interior Designers, Landscape Architects, Developers, Investors, Conservators, Government bodies, Private Sectors, NGOs, and General public. These stakeholders have their own



different motivations, interests and tactics to deal with architecture. Therefore, building culture is a platform of dialogues and debates among the Stakeholders.

There are two approaches of building culture: inductive and deductive. The former is to create a well-built environment focusing in public awareness through the quality of planning, design, construction and maintenance. It is also to deal with building stock though adaptive-usage and revitalisation, as well as to balance the advantages of the public and clients. The latter is to perceive meanings and values embedded in built environment and void space. It is the ways what that people understand and explain built environment and make their senses of place.

The deductive approach of building culture means that the public as the users or the perceivers respond to the built environment, which always has hidden meanings in their appearance. The meanings are different from culture to culture. They also can be interpreted differently at different time. These meanings depend upon what one expects to be seen.¹⁵ In other words: visual meanings of Architectures are selective interpretation, which depend upon the relevant memory as it is precedent. This makes Architecture become the account of visual literacy. Somkiet Tangnamo¹⁶ noted that the visual literacy is not only a 'pictorial' but an extensive 'vision', which covers every visible things including architecture. The visual literacy, therefore, is a discourse between people and their built environment. In many case, the people are not only viewers to the built environment, but have their direct experience to the place as users. This easily makes built environment become a platform of debates, contestations and conflicts.

Built environment is no longer a world that is reserved only for professionals; the built environment is now 'released' for individuals to perceive and to interpret upon their agency. There is neither absolute right nor absolute wrong for perceiving a built environment. Freedom of consciousness is now offering an opportunity to 'demystify' surrounding in all senses. It is a fact that built environment, which possesses a certain degree of autonomy like other arts, has its own code. Historical, sociological and cultural components do not even condition architecture mechanically or physically; they can be perceived through an intangible element of design.¹⁷ In this sense, the design of built environment is the 'language' that can be 'decoded' not only its 'denotation' but also its 'connotation' in order to understand the efforts, which have been 'encoded' beforehand. However, the following topic tends to employ the deductive approach of building culture in order to explore experiences of the built environment in Thai urbanism.



Building Culture: an Experience in Thai Urbanism

Built environment indeed is one of the most enduring activities of cultural, political and economic power as its extensive, extravagant and durable properties. The art and design of built environment makes our existence not only visible but meaningful. This makes built environment becoming a more discussed topic, particularly through its dissemination in its socio-cultural meanings and values. This subtopic refers to a phenomenological observation of the author, a flight attendant who has been travelling to major cities in the world for almost twenty years. It neither focuses on seeking a unique national built environment in Thai urbanism nor leads back to primitive living patterns of the old days. As an alternative, it aims to notify changes and to question the contemporary observable facts of built environment in selected urban areas Thailand and their ways forwards.

The subtopic involves a review of related literature from a range of disciplines to include; history, sociology, anthropology, economics, architecture and design. It seeks to illustrate the interrelationship between public realm and their built environment in urban space. The author's state while being a genuine Thai Native with international point of view and the professional experience, he enriches the capability to develop a cross-culture approach. Local and global aspects are underlined in this study as well as idealistic and realistic issues.

Built environment in urban area is not only a concern of natural landscape, but also of cultural landscape. The cultural landscape is of which human manipulation of their landscapes through their culture. Collective cultural ideology including cultural identity is employed to manipulate those landscapes. Urban landscape, as a cultural landscape, is both product and representation of cultural identity.

In the introduction to the unique account of urban civilization, *The Culture of Cities*, Lewis Mumford¹⁸ noted that:

The city as, as one finds it in history, is the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community... Here in the city the goods of civilization are multiplied and manifold; here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order. Here is where the issues of civilization are focused: here, too, ritual passes on occasion into the active drama of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society.

According to Mumford, every large city today is a dynamic crossroads of cultures. Interaction between global and local cultures is overlapping in contradictory processes. This consequently generates assorted identities in both people and the communities. The consequent identities include multiple identities, neo-identities, and mixture of identities.

The identity issue involves the concept of 'we-they-others' and a 'similarity-difference.' An identity could be a result of innovation, borrowing from others, disruption or displacement. It is rather a mixture than one single unit. Identity



is also dynamic and contradictory. In other words, identity can be constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed. It definitely is related to power and categorization in human society. The topic of identity becomes more critical concerning today's mass migration, convenient transportation, faster telecommunication, transnational finance, and international tourism. Beyond the perception of 'we-they-others', the interchange between 'ours' and 'theirs' is equipped with extreme technologies, which is much faster than our past experiences. Although the forthcoming issue of identity remains un-concluded, the cultural identity remains in making difference among human and even between human and animals.

Urban spaces have been transformed by the influence of the cultural shift. Urban identity as a source of linkage between people and their communities becomes loose compared to the traditional days. These spaces eventually lost their geo-political reality at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁹ The urban identity, in fact, lies not only on its telecommunication, infrastructure, business districts, hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls; but also on the diversity of cultural contexts.

Globalization together with local development transforms the cities by introducing an international-dominated identity, which destroys or masks their local cultural identity. In contrast, it creates a new identity, which is harmonious to the contemporary lifestyles. The new identity may face a counter-effect of anti-globalization or it might one day be accepted.

Levels of urbanisation in Thailand are constantly increasing. People, commodities, capital, and information are put into the urban realm. Urbanisation has introduced a vast change not only into the natural environments, but also to the cultural atmosphere. Globalisation associated with local development is a threat to traditional built environment of urban area. It simultaneously engenders a new built environment into the city. Although the new urban built environment seems appropriate to the contemporary urban lifestyle, the traditional built environment reflects the 'root' of the city and its people.

The followings are some examples of the current urban built environment in Thailand to include Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket. These are to illustrate the sight from the public realm respond to the built environment in the urban areas.

Bangkok is being changed in rapid mode from 'Venice' to 'Los Angelis' of the East. The amphibious urban character that is settled along waterways: rivers and canals, has been transformed into a hectic modern city with high-rise buildings connected with fly overs, Sky train and Expressways. Crucial is not the urban development itself but the quality of life that people get from the development. In fact, people in Bangkok have a lot of experiences in their built environment. One of the cases is that the Ban Khrua community disagreed with the Expressway and Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (ETA)²⁰ to relocate the community's mosque, cemetery and its neighbour-



hood. By March 2011, the access from Rajadamri and Rama I Road to the second phase of the expressway has not been completed. The other obvious example is the case of Mahakan Fort, which is the resistance from the community to the project of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) in revitalising the landscape of the fort. The case has drawn criticism for its attention to tourism and impressive view by compromising the local interests.

Not only with the experiences being incompatible motivations between government agencies and the public, people in Bangkok also suffer from many projects that emphasise economic and financial incentives without consideration the socio-cultural benefits. The case of Wanglee community demonstrates the practice in such suffering way. The community is one of the Bangkok's urban heritages, which commemorates the trade activities and also Chinese settlement in the past. But the temple which owns the property preferred to develop this piece of land to generate greater financial income. With similar experience, a night market was set up by taking the place of Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School after the school has been relocated to Nakhon Nayok Province. The prime location of the school would be better to adaptive use for public space such as; a library, a youth centre or a recreation centre. This experience indicates the provision of authorities in economic development above social-cultural improvement.

Architectural design in Bangkok also makes the city chaotic. The interests of the public are rarely considered to balance with the interests of clients. The design of buildings trends are to maximise advantages and to meet the requirements of clients, which in many cases are beyond the legal framework. Inappropriate architectural design makes Architecture in itself becoming a threat in built environment (Figure 1). There are also plenty of building stock in Bangkok but no adaptive usage for the stock. It seems that to build a new one is more preferable.



Figure 1: showing that some architecture as the threat of Bangkok built environment
Source: author, 3 July 2009



Infrastructure is one of the built environment experiences in terms of building culture. The entrance of Donmuang Toll Way at Dindaeng has many channels for the less traffic while the major traffic is on the ordinary parallel way. It may be connoted by the public that 'if you are ready to pay, you are welcome; if you are not, you have to fight outside'. The walk way along Chao Phraya River in front of Department of City Law Enforcement is another experience. The walk way is the new access to the Kuddeejeen community. In the meantime, it impairs the relationship between people in the community and the river. In other words, the walk way devalues the cultural association between people and natural landscape.



Figure 2: (left) showing sum khong, the arched gate, in a hotel (right) mimicked with the original at Wat Lhai Hin Luang, Lumpang
Source: author, 3 July 2007 (left); and www.lannaworld.com (right)

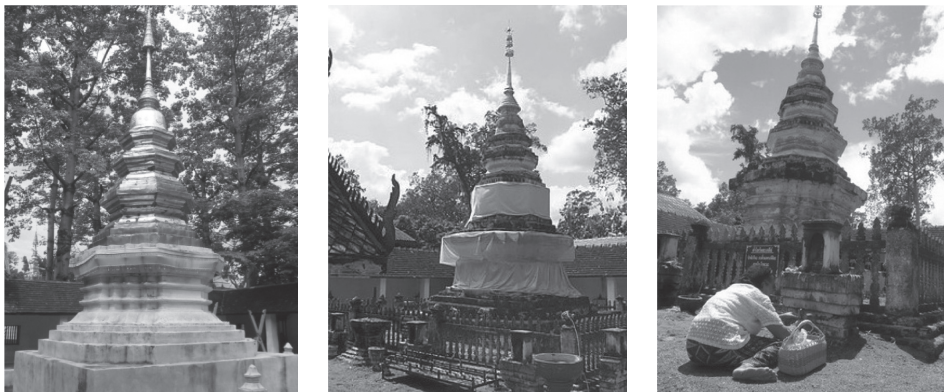


Figure 3: (left) showing chedi in the same hotel as in Figure 5 (centre and right) mimicked with the original at Wat Lhai Hin Luang, Lumpang
Source: author, 3 July 2007 (left); and www.lannaworld.com (centre and right)



Similar to Bangkok, Chiang Mai's urban area is fragmented. The local beliefs have been substituted by global trends like economic globalisation and westernisation. The morphological identity of the city is no longer in relation to the local Lanna beliefs; which are in the relation with the human body or the horoscope-based faith of Maha Tak Sa, a manuscript about the signs of horoscope. Komson Teeraparbong²¹ noted that the square shape of Chiang Mai city has connotative meanings, indeed represents more than 'a square'. It suggests the traditional belief in the model of spatial configuration, which is different from the current urban morphology that purely responds to the contemporary lifestyle. Chiang Mai is losing its identity through urbanisation, new uses, and global urban fabrics. The city is now re-identified by three-layer ring roads, which is distinguished from the traditional morphology. Chiang Mai built environment becomes a commodity to 'sale' to travellers. Glauber²² noted in his Chiang Mai guide book that:

Those [travellers] who think they will be the first to discover primitive tribes in the hills also will be disappointed when they learn that some tribes are discovered twice daily by organised tours. Even the more remote villages have become whistle stops on trekking tours arranged by Chiang Mai agencies.

This critique shows Lanna built environment is solely a commodity for tourism. Hotels and resorts also utilise Lanna's identity as a corporate identity of their products. The most controversial cases are the replica of religious and sacred places in hotels and resorts (Figure 2 and 3). On one hand, these cases are the utilisation of spiritual places in inappropriate function and that also compromise the authenticity of the original places. On the other hand, they provoke the sense of cultural heritage conservation and raise questions to the stakeholders regarding the conservation and representation of Lanna's identity.

Emphasising in economic and financial benefits through hospitality industry and tourism, part of Doi Suthep-Pui National Park has turned into Chiang Mai Night Safari and Phalad Tawanron Restaurant. What crucial is how much percentage of the revenue actually goes back to the local community to compensate for the loss their natural environment.

Different from Bangkok and Chiang Mai, the urbanisation of Phuket did not originate in the town's historic district; but from the marginal coasts around the island. The coasts were developed for tourism, whereas the old town of Phuket served as the location for the administrative functions of government and business agencies. Resulting from the tourism boom in 1980s, there was a high demand of housing, commercial and resort development. The land price in Phuket increased rapidly. Land-ownership in Phuket has been transferred from the local people to outside investors. Phuket is now not only the prime location for international business enterprises; but also the ideal place for retired people around the world. Doosadee Thaitakoo²³ noted that urbanisation that originated from tourism has been the major threat for Phuket's built environment.



Figure 4: showing a high-ended development project in Phuket
Source: Royal Phuket Marina

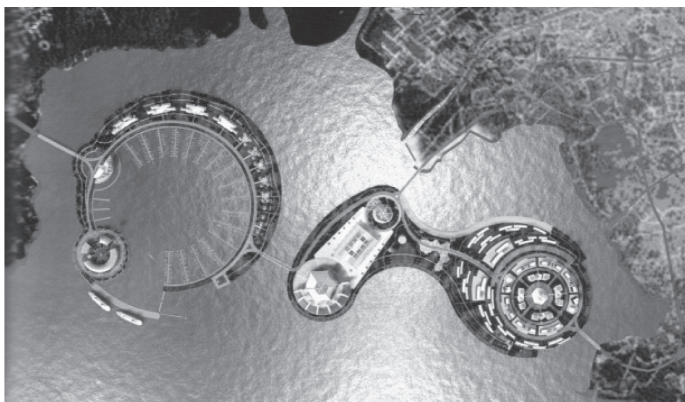


Figure 5: showing Phuket Bay Cyber City and Ocean Resort Project
Source: Niran Kalayanamit²⁷, Governor of Phuket

Phuket town is a historic district with a distinctive urban character. Due to its remote location and its different cultural context, Phuket town is more similar to other towns in Strait of Malacca, a narrow stretch of water between the Malaysian Peninsular and Sumatra Island of Indonesia, than to other towns in Thailand. The built environment in the town is recognised as ‘Sino-Portuguese’, which is not only the term for the buildings that show the mixture of Chinese and Portuguese influences²⁴; but is also used for the colonial European style buildings that were built by Chinese or Chinese-Malay labours during colonisation period.²⁵

Related to tourism, the property market in Phuket is in rapid growth. New projects are both tourism-associated facilities and housing estates. The tourism-associated facilities are hotels, service apartments, commercial centres, and conventional centres such as the project of Royal Phuket Marina, a project for high-ended investor who love yachting and sailing (Figure 4). The housing estates are focusing in international investors and immigrated people from other provinces. High-end houses and second homes after retirement are the demands of the international investors, while low-medium price apartments and townhouses are the targets of the immigrating people from other provinces. High price and limitation of land are the key factors for the new projects. Vertical expansion of the projects is developed for higher returns. The



Figure 6: showing the condition of Ban Chinpracha
Source: author, 22 September 2008



Figure 7: showing the construction and the advertisement of three-story shop-houses in front of Ban Chinpracha in 2008, and the same site in 2011
Source: author, 21 September 2008 and 15 January 2011





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วารสารวิชาการ คณะสถาปัตยกรรมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

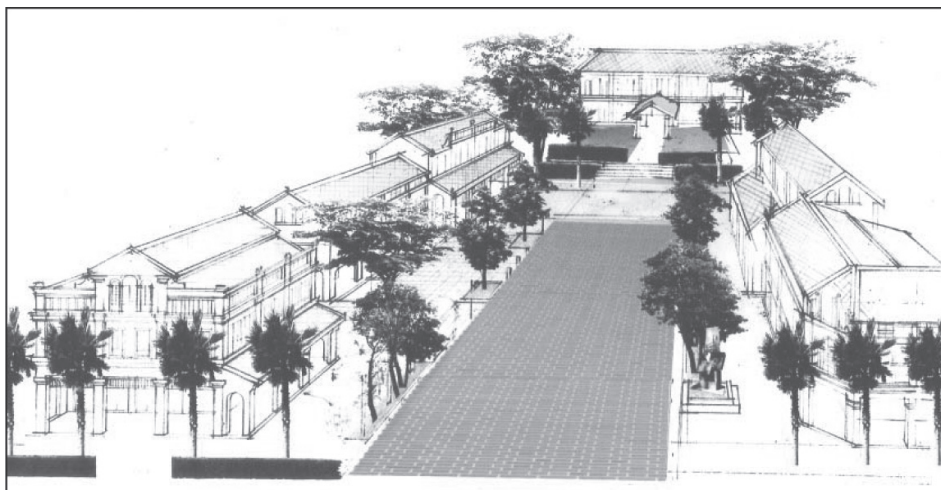


Figure 8: showing Ban Chinpracha after the conservation project
Source: Jaroonrat Tantavanit



Figure 9: showing Super Cheap and Super Cheap 24 in Phuket
Source: author, 15 January 2011





height of building is controlled by laws and regulations. Due to laws and regulations, building height is more strictly controlled in coastal areas rather than, in town area. Development projects tend to be in the town area. Phuket Town, therefore, is now threatened by high-rise projects. For future, Phuket has been planned to become a special economical zone, and also a global hub of tourism. The island will have international business connections through mega projects including Phuket Bay Cyber City and Ocean Resort Project (Figure 5), and the Free Trade Zone Project at Phuket Deep Sea Port. The Phuket Bay Cyber City and Ocean Resort Project has been initiated by the Central Government. It will be completed within five years if it is approved.²⁶ These development projects will introduce a new experience not only to tourists but also the local people of Phuket. It is critical that the environmental and social impact assessment has been conducted to ensure the acceptable outcomes.

In the old town of Phuket, the real estate development is a challenging experience to the local community. Ban Chipracha, a Phuket architectural heritage (Figure 6), is dealing with the development. New three-storied shop-houses have been built in front of the heritage (Figure 7). The practice compromises the cultural values of the place, as well as the associative values between the place and the people. The critical issue is why the new development could not be in a ways that promotes the heritage. The alternative ideas are to incorporate low-rise shop-houses in front of the mansion. The alignment of the shop-houses will not hide the mansion from the public, but it will let the mansion be the focus point of public view. The alignment will allow the open space to accommodate social activities (Figure 8).

In Phuket, there is also a remarkable experience of building culture. The experience is that local people attempt to negotiate with transnational corporation by employing built environment. Super Cheap and Super Cheap 24 have been established by a local fruit vender, and has become famous among the local community (Figure 9). The former is a mega store for both retail and wholesale trade. It is to share the market with Tesco and Carrefour. The latter is a convenient store that distributes products directly to final buyers/consumers. It challenges international brands such as 7-Eleven and Family Mart. This phenomenon points out that built environment being employed to express the efforts of negotiation and resistance.

The experiences from the three urban areas around Thailand demonstrate that built environment is not only a tangible outcome from creative thinking, design processing and planning procedure. However, the built environment is also a cultural product, which can be elucidated by the structures of denotation and connotation, as well as of syntagm and paradigm. Built environment is no longer the world that is to be reserved only for architects, designers, or planners; it has become a discursive matter of public realm to perceive and to interpret upon their agency. There is neither absolutely right nor absolutely wrong for perceiving built environment. It depends upon 'the built environment of whom'.

The Thai Constitution 2007 has recognised the discursive matter of public realm. The constitution also addresses public awareness, community participation, and cultural rights. According to the constitution, Social Impact Assessment (SIA) together with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be conducted to assess policies, projects, social problems, and even natural phenomenon that course or may course direct and indirect impacts to the public or the community.²⁸ It is to ensure the public and community will get the change that they want, and to know possible positive and negative impacts from the change. Therefore, the projects that change built environment, which involves the community or the public at large, must conduct SIA before implementation. However, the next subtopic is a discussion in the concept to deal with the change of built environment.

Changing Built Environment: The Ways Forward

Key issue of changing built environment is the how one can identify and remedy what causes both the positive and the negative features of the change before they even come into existence. The issue usually involves the following questions:

- What to be changes?
- How to change?
- Who are the main users?
- How much the change cost?
- What to be expected from the change?
- What to be benefits and loss from the change?
- What to be possible impact from the change?
- Whom to be effected from the change?
- Will the change be permanent or reversible?
- Will the change allow options for future generations for their own needs?

The questions are not to deal only with artistic and economic dimensions. Environmental, socio-cultural and political magnitudes are to validate. In fact, the issue of changing built environment is not only reserved for professionals including Architects, Designers, Planners, Conservators, Scholars, Experts and Authorities; but also the issue of general public. The significance is not the actual practices of changes but the best measure of the intention, which focuses on unforeseen outcomes and public responses.

Point of acceptable change (PAC) for built environment is difficult to identify. The point is in-between what changes professionals foresee to introduce into a built environment; and what changes the public realises about or expects to have in the environment. Every change, therefore, should be maintained below the PAC in order to minimise possible impacts. The PAC depends upon its geographical, economical, socio-cultural, political context. However, SIA, EIA, and feasibility analysis can be em-



ployed to identify the PAC. There are two character of PAC: fixed and flexible. The fixed PAC always remains same, while the flexible PAC can be re-adjusted through time.

The fixed PAC is appropriate for fragile, relatively and undisturbed environment places that cannot accommodate intensification or the extensive changes, and spaces where a strong sustainability is needed. It is also useful when the PAC remains unknown, as well as to be a precautionary principle. This is one of the measures to manage places that have opposition or resistance to change from the public.

The flexible PAC is more suitable for relatively modified environment including urbanised areas, as well as manageable spaces. It is applicable to places with confidence in supporting intensification or the extensive changes. It is necessary even for the places that public support changes.

The ways forward of changing built environment is to shift the mindset of all Stakeholders involving the changing process. It is critical to change a built environment beyond the realm of a small group of Architects, Planners, Designers, Experts, Professionals and Practitioners to the General Public at large. The mind shift, however, is not to replace existing professional and institutional efforts in changing built environment; but it is to extend those efforts to the general public. In short, the change that the public need is the new fulcrum of changing built environment.

In closing, this paper is a small-scale study, which does not claim to be any representative of what happening at large; and it offers only possible account of the problem, observation and recommendations. It rather involves an interpretative commitment to processes of changing built environment, an approach to know-ledge, and building culture which sees this as open rather than closed. It definitely remains open to other critical insights.

Notes

- 1 Henri Lefebvre, **The Production of Space**, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. quoted in Irit Rogoff, “*Studying Visual Culture*” **The Visual Culture Reader**, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 1998. p. 22.
- 2 Bryan Lawson, **The Language of Space**. Oxford: Architectural Press, 2001. p. 2.
- 3 Leland M. Roth, **Understanding Architecture: Its Elements, History and Meaning**. Oxford: Westview Press. 1993. p. 3.
- 4 Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms, **Cultural Anthropology**. 9 ed. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth. 2007. p. 410-411.
- 5 Nanda and Warms, **Cultural Anthropology** p. 411-413.
- 6 Nanda and Warms, **Cultural Anthropology** p. 420-421.
- 7 Roth, **Understanding Architecture: Its Elements, History and Meaning**.
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