



# Cultural identity of waterfront community markets along Tha Chin River: A case study of Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom Provinces

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## Abstract

The objective of this research was to study the general condition, structure, and cultural elements of waterfront community markets along Tha Chin River: A case study of Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces. The study covered 24 waterfront community markets for both physical and non-physical characteristics. The results of the study indicate that Bang Luang Market is the waterfront community market that is most complete in cultural elements. Therefore, this market was selected for in-depth study at a specific area level. Additionally, the market has the most outstanding cultural structure, “community structure characteristics”, and the most striking cultural element, “the value of non-physical elements”, to promote physical elements (architecture) to be outstanding in quality. It can be concluded that the “socioeconomic characteristics” is the unique characteristics in remembrance of the market through the use of building and the reliance on the physical structure of the community. However, understanding the cultural identity of waterfront community markets should be the first mechanism for sustainable conservation and development planning.

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## Introduction

Tha Chin River is an important river in the central region of Thailand. Due to the convenience of water transport, waterfront communities were established. In addition, trade activities that attracted migration established many well-known waterfront markets along Tha Chin River. Currently, these waterfront community markets attract people in architectural aesthetics, trading activities and lifestyles different from the general market in the city area. The research on the physical identity of waterfront

community markets along Tha Chin River: A case study of Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces indicates that waterfront community markets have unique physical characteristics: architecture, building model, and plan, which all have a variety to meet a group of people's needs for living and the environment (Haocharoen, 2017). However, the charm of the markets does not only arise from physical elements, but it also consists of cultural elements arising from lifestyle, trade styles, beliefs, traditions, and cultures with the history that helps to boost the markets. From the above reasons, the researcher understood the importance of this study on cultural structures and elements of the markets to the conclusion of cultural identity of the markets along Tha Chin River in Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces. It is hoped the

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study will help preserve and develop sustainable cultural identity.

## Literature Review

The researcher applied variables from theoretical concepts and related research to create the research framework. The framework focused on a study of the cultural structures and elements both physical and non-physical characteristics as follows:

1. Cultural structures: The study of identical concepts, characteristics, and perceptions of the city is to understand the identity of places from three factors including (1) views of the natural environment (2) cultural characteristics and (3) feelings experience (Garnham, 1985). In short, the waterfront community markets may have different uniqueness depending on community elements as five elements of imagery: (1) path, (2) edge, (3) district, (4) node, and (5) landmark (Lynch, 1960). Additionally, physical elements can easily reflect cultural identity. Therefore, this research began to study the overview of the waterfront community market from cultural structures which are four physical characteristics: (1) community structure, (2) landscape, (3) landmark, and (4) perspective characteristics.

2. Cultural elements: The study of the markets points out that water sources are the geographical factor as the beginning of waterfront community markets leading economic activities and social activities (Panin, 2002). Likewise, cultural elements can probably be studied from the culture that appears in the community: (1) natural environment 2) man-made environment, and 3) people, groups, and social activities (Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, 2005). Thus, community culture consists of physical elements and the elements of activities that help humans to live in a society (Inkapatanakul, 2005). It can be concluded that the study of cultural elements has considered two points: (1) the value of physical elements (Architecture)—emotional and cultural values (Feilden, 2003) and (2) the value of non-physical elements—cultural value and way of life, and value in relation to the external environment.

## Methodology

This research applied the qualitative method by starting from a survey of existing waterfront community markets along Tha Chin River in Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces covering all 24 markets. In this regard, the study was divided into two levels as follows:

1. A study of the whole area level of markets covering 24 waterfront community markets in two aspects as follows: (1) physical characteristics—the physical elements

consisting of context location and settlement, transportation network, building architecture, activity area, and the historical evidence that remains and can be observed; and (2) non-physical characteristics—the economic elements consisting of trade styles and product types; and social and cultural elements consisting of societies and groups of people, traditions, cultures, and beliefs.

2. A study at a specific area of a selected waterfront community market which was selected from a whole area level for the most complete cultural components of the community. The researcher identified two specific areas of the study as follows: (1) The cultural structure of the market—to examine the physical characteristic of the market; and (2) cultural elements of the market—to study the values of cultural elements consisting of physical characteristics (architecture) and non-physical characteristics.

## Results and Discussion

The results are divided into two levels: whole area level and specific area level as follows:

### *A Whole Area Level*

Analysis of general conditions and cultural elements of waterfront community markets along Tha Chin River in Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces—from the field survey, there were 24 waterfront community markets along Tha Chin River in Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom provinces that had different cultural elements in three areas: physical, economic, and social and cultural elements.

1. Physical elements—for “context location and settlement” of the market, some markets have a relationship with the natural environment through the connection of the waterfront area with pier, pavilion, and bridge—which is a unique element of the markets, and is historical evidence showing the expansion of economic activities and trade for living, which is the origin of the market along with the community. Moreover, for “transportation network”, most markets may retain the same pattern. Interestingly, the design for the front of the building connecting walkways with a tile structure protruding in front of the building is possibly related to the “activity area” for the use of the area in front of row houses as a public area for social work and economic activities. This demonstrates that the design of the building eases people’s way of life in markets. For the “building architecture”, there were only a few markets having the prominent building architecture illustrating the history of communities such as mills, market owners, and movie theatres showing beliefs, relationships in communities and their own cultural wisdom.

2. Economic elements—it was found that the markets operated in three “trading styles”: (1) trade in wooden row house buildings, (2) trade in market halls, and (3) temporary trade (trolley and stall). The markets also had “product types”, which may change to general goods and consumer products, as well as inheritance of traditional trading styles in the wooden row house, which may be available in a few markets.

3. Social and cultural elements—it must also be recognized that the markets have “society and group of people” characteristics as having more local people who still live there than outsiders who work as labourers. In preference to “traditions, cultures and beliefs”, most markets still have beliefs, and faith in a market shrine, the god worship, a large tree offering to the spirit as the community sacred ritual.

The result of the analysis led to the selection of study areas at a specific level from criteria set (Table 1). It could be concluded that the waterfront community market that was most complete with cultural elements was “Bang Luang Market,” for a study at the specific area level to finalize the cultural identity of markets in the structure and cultural elements.

#### *A Specific Area Level*

Analysis of general conditions and cultural components of the selected waterfront community market (Bang Luang Market)—two principal factors were analysed: the cultural structure and elements of Bang Luang Market, respectively.

1. Analysis of the importance of the cultural structure of Bang Luang Market

1) Community structure: In terms of “community structure relating to settlement characteristics”—Bang Luang Market has two forms of linear settlements which are parallel and perpendicular to Tha Chin River. In addition, it could be seen that Soi Thetsaban 5 is the main road leading to the bus terminal and main port of the market proving that the settlement of the community is in relation to the location of the transportation hub, which is in line with the concept of selecting areas for settlement of communities. Moreover, for the “community structure relating to traveling routes”, the main road of this community contains three remarkable characteristics: (1) physical features—a shortcut and alley connecting many alleys together; (2) economic highlight—a trade node in the community, and traditional shops with outstanding architecture on both sides; and (3) historical highlight—the road that is a significant route for trade connecting to the port, which is the main river transport.

2) Landscape characteristics: Bang Luang Market is outstanding for the feature of “natural landscape”,

namely, Tha Chin River and Bang Luang Canal, wooden row houses at the waterfront, a pier, a boat trip, a fishing boat, and a bridge. All create beautiful and charming scenery. Moreover, the “urban landscape” of this market is unique with wooden row houses arranged in parallel to create market segmentation based on construction phases, and it also preserves the old buildings of value in design.

3) Landmark characteristics: As can be seen from significant landmarks of the Bang Luang Market, the “man-made landmark” includes the shrine of the Empress of Heaven, an ancient building that is historic and contains exotic architecture (movie theatre and pentagonal houses), and traditional shops. All landmarks affect the recognition of the community and its history. Additionally, the “natural landmark” is Tha Chin River and Bang Luang Canal. They are remarkable landmarks that indicate the direction and proportion of the market by showing the relationship between the positioning of the building and the natural area.

4) Perspective characteristics: There are distinctive features of perspective, that show continuity and boundaries, namely, “the arrangement of the row houses”, which promotes the market landscape to show the continuity of the community in a straight line along three roads leading to the main port; and the “Tha Chin River and Bang Luang Canal” which play an important role in determining the market boundary and the shape of the market plan according to the direction of the river and canal.

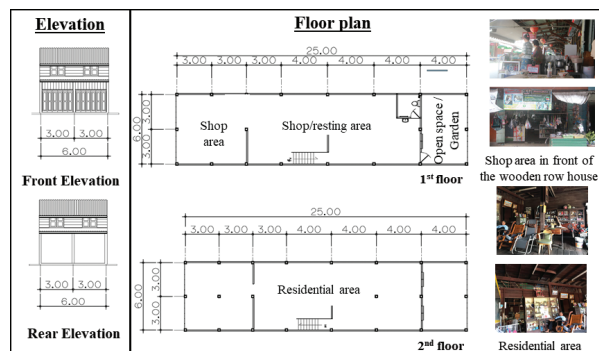
From the analysis, it can be concluded that the elements of the market, which are physical characteristics such as community structure, landscape, landmark, and perspective characteristics, probably reflect the identity of cultural structure of the market in terms of settlement history, trade activities, architecture, and cultural beliefs by having the distinctive structure of the community as a medium.

2. An analysis of the importance of cultural elements of the Bang Luang Rama 122 Market—there are two points of consideration: value of physical (architecture) and non-physical elements, which are elaborated as follows:

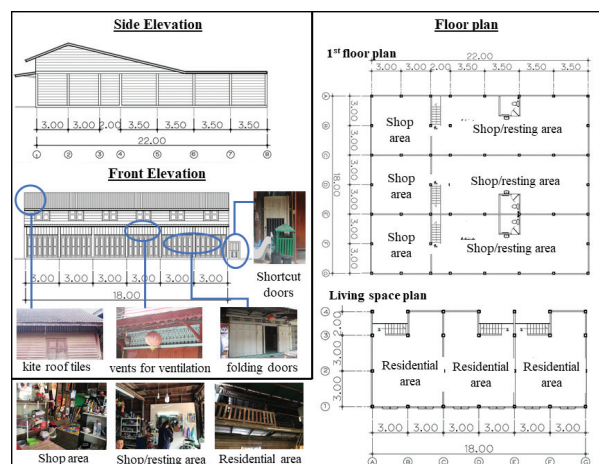
1) Values of physical elements (architecture): Bang Luang Market has preserved an old wooden row house building called “Lao Teng Mai”, which refers to a two-story row house in Chinese. Its architecture contains many outstanding features that create several values. First, “Emotional value” involves three issues. (1) The wonder is created by architectural features and building history, which causes community history interaction with visitors that create unique features for the place (Garnham, 1985). (2) Continuity can be seen from the front of most wooden row houses in that they are approximately 3.5–4 meters wide and about 6 meters (or 2 floors) high, and all are of



similar height making the wooden row houses arranged continuously. (3) Spiritual and symbolic values may originate from the first established group of buildings. These buildings have become landmarks referring to the era of construction. Next, for “cultural value”, the study centred on three following issues. (1) Historic value, from economic historical values, including the opium mill (no longer available in the market) and ancient movie theatre, which has been preserved until now, in representing the economic prosperity of the market in those days. (2) Age, architecture can clearly reflect the ancient waterfront community market from building materials and usable space utilisation (Figure 1). (3) Authenticity, most of the buildings in the market still retain the original material, which is made from wood. The internal structure has now been renovated and plaster used to increase strength. Furthermore, the original design could be seen from the building structure—kite roof tiles, folding doors, vents for ventilation, and mezzanine floor, which illustrate the design responding to living, increasing living space, and improving safety (Figure 2). As for the originality of the



**Figure 1** The division of living space and the interior element design of the Bang Luang Market



**Figure 2** The original design of the wooden row house of Bang Luang Market

locality, this can be seen from the original location and the building, the original location and the wisdom of building design, and the original location with the division of space within the building.

2) Values of non-physical elements: Bang Luang Market clearly preserves the culture and traditional way of life which is still deeply embedded in trade activities and traditions. The residents and entrepreneurs in the market carry on making these non-physical elements valuable to the market in various areas as follows. Firstly, values of “culture and way of life”, Bang Luang Market possesses unique cultural values and ways of life in three aspects. (1) Distinctive characteristic of cultural activities is trading activity. It is the main activity of the community, which preserves original shops, especially original food shops that have no other branches selling such as spring roll, Chinese stewed duck, and the Guay Jab Nam Sai (boiled Chinese pasta square). They become a conspicuous place, that makes people come to visit again. Additionally, they preserve the trading style in the wooden row houses, the Chinese shop sign, and hanging Chinese style lanterns. All are building elements that promote trade uniquely to the well-preserved ethnic heritage. Thus, food culture clearly creates a memorable attraction for the market. (2) Inheritance of cultural activities, there are Chinese traditions representing Chinese descendants including the tradition of the flag, Chinese New Year, and vegan festival. Importantly, the main road of the market is used to be a cultural road. The main road is surrounded by important religious places both Thai and Chinese. Moreover, there is the inheritance for the respect of the relatives through the Chinese surname system. (3) Remembrance of the old community is that people in that area may perceive through experience in events. All events are related to trading activities, water transportation, and the fire incident, which affected the physical change of the market.

Secondly, the values of “relations with the external environment” are divided into two areas. (1) Values of its utility for the city are in education, economy, and cultural tourism. This shows the relationship of Chinese descent that pays attention to the knowledge and values in education that their ancestors publicized. (2) Relations with the surrounding environment can be found from a role as a centre of many cultural activities and a community-level trading node.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

From the analysis of the cultural structure of Bang Luang Market through the physical characteristics of the market, the researchers found that “characteristics of the community structure” such as its location, arrangement of



the buildings, and architectural style are probably consistent with the traffic patterns within the market. At the same time, the community structure has a role to support “landscape characteristics” to create beauty of nature and cityscape. Additionally, the physical characteristics can possibly reflect “landmark characteristics” in terms of being a landmark, creating a memorable atmosphere in the community, indicating the direction and proportion of the market from the layout of the building in relation to the open space, which possibly makes each community unique (Burke, 1976). Also, transportation structures can illustrate the interaction between the wooden row houses in the market producing distinctive “perspective characteristics” as community remembrance.

In addition, the analysis of the cultural elements of Bang Luang Market pointed out that the physical elements (building architecture) are not only vital to “emotional values”, which are related to wonder, continuity, and spiritual symbol, but also in “cultural values” related to history, age, and community remembrance. Similarly, the value of non-physical elements can mainly reflect the value of “culture and way of life” from trading activities which can preserve the original stores, the respect of the relatives through the Chinese surname system, the tradition inheritance of community. Besides, there is the value of “relations with the external environment”, namely, education, economy, and cultural tourism. All could create a unique quality for architecture in the market.

From studying the relationship between structures and cultural elements, such can be classified into 3 categories: (1) physical characteristics, (2) economic characteristics, and (3) social characteristics. “Maintaining the traditional business—including the form of trading, product type, shop sign, product placement, and wooden row house decoration”—indicates that the economic characteristics seem to be the significant factor that most clearly demonstrates the uniqueness of the waterfront community market. Therefore, “economic characteristics” are probably the cultural identity of Bang Luang Market.

The results from this study provide an opportunity for the conservation and development of Bang Luang Market in the future regarding the market’s cultural identity especially the economy arising from the unique architecture of wooden row houses. The conservation and development should be based on an understanding of the people’s lifestyle in the community and linked to the development plan at each level to promote the perception of the cultural identity value. In addition, it is beneficial to create incentives to maintain the uniqueness of the waterfront community market and to relate to the sustainable development of community cultural tourism.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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