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## **Private Public Space: The Transformation of Rattanakosin Island**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to explore Rattanakosin Island and the transformation of its spatial structure, in both its practical and theoretical aspects. It intends to examine the changes within the city fabric and public spaces during the past two hundred years focusing on the practical, functional, as well as representational and symbolic aspects. The research also involves an investigation into the concept of private and public spaces. It investigates ways in which we relate to the spatial structure of the city, whether the definition of our private and public spaces similar to those of the West, as well as the criteria for the creation as well as transformation of the city fabric in different social and cultural contexts. The research employs two interrelated methods of historical-literature studies and physical surveys of actual street and space patterns in Rattanakosin Island. It is found that for the spatial uniqueness for Rattanakosin Island, being a part of the public means being a part of a specific community, rather than being a part of a city as whole. Public does not mean universal but refers to socio-cultural specificities of each community. Public space for the Thais in Rattanakosin Island is thus an extension of private domain, separate from it, yet closely linked and connected. It is the type of public that allows one to truly share and exchange personal contacts, rather than to observe and remain unseen as that of the West. Only when we understand these issues, can we begin to explore the possibilities to design architectural constructs that are truly embedded within our city fabric.

### **Keywords**

Rattanakosin Island, City Fabric, Public Space, Private Public Space

## **Introduction**

During the late nineteenth century, urban development schemes of many European cities, while criticized for its destruction of existing order and establishing a new systematic fabric within the city devoid of real human activities and scale, have been replicated and followed by many cities in Europe, South American as well as Asia. Bangkok is one of such cities to partly employ the nineteenth century European redevelopment scheme.

Between 1880s until the beginning of the twentieth century, many city planners laid claim to a scientific discourse focusing on functional and technical aspects of the city. But their unsubstantiated incantations were limited to the affirmation of the scientific nature of the city in general and their own proposals in particular (Choay, 1997). The result is that architects and planners produced only the linguistic indicators of scientific language. Most of the nineteenth century regulated city plan for urban development remained a testament to this method. The system of grids, uniformed building blocks, linear or radial extensions were employed, often emphasized by main thoroughfares in differing forms of circumferential ring streets or arterial boulevards. This system of circumferential street and arterial boulevard, when imposed on old city fabrics, have generated much changes in socio-cultural characteristics of city life.

With the 19<sup>th</sup> century urban transformation, the space of the city was seen as an infinite extension to be subdivided, thus the art of building cities became the art of subdividing city blocks. Space meant what was left in-between after self-contained and highly articulated spatial bodies were inserted. The buildings and the space remained two separate entities independent from one another. The nineteenth century cities thus created a large break between their time and any other before it. They were the cities that could be designed, regulated and recreated or restructured, using formal language. London, Paris, Vienna and many other European cities exemplified such radical transformation (Olsen, 1986). And the nineteenth century Bangkok was not exempted from such changes.

This paper is a part of a research that aims to explore Rattanakosin Island and the transformation of its spatial structure, in both its practical and theoretical aspects, focusing on the changes within the city fabric and public spaces during the past two hundred years, notably since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The paper involves an investigation of the concept of private and public spaces. It investigates ways in which we understand to the spatial structure of the city, whether the definition of our private and public spaces similar to those of the West. Questions that the research aims to answer are: to what degree our usages of private and public space differ, what is the relationship between the nature of the city fabric and public life in the city, what are the pretexts and criteria for the transformation of our city fabric, whether symbolic or pragmatic? Understanding these issues can help us explore different possibilities in which architectural constructs can be truly embedded within our city fabric.

## **Research Methodology and Framework:**

**The research employs two interrelated research methods.**

- A. Literature study of historical facts and accounts about the transformation of Rattanakosin Island during the past two hundred years.

The first method of this research is literature study which is divided into two interrelated parts.

Part 1 is a study of historical developments of Rattanakosin Island since the Reign of King Rama I. This part gathers information from historical accounts and maps of Rattanakosin Island produced during the past two hundred years, both by foreign and local surveyors. It aims to understand the transformation of transportation network as well as land use within Rattanakosin Island. By comparing maps of both foreign and local surveyors, concluding maps will be drawn to speculate the changes and transformations of the city fabric.

Part 2 is a study of literature focusing on contemporary situation of Rattanakosin Island, which include current socio-cultural aspects as well as physical aspects, through existing researches and reports from both governmental and non-governmental agencies. Similarities as well as discrepancies between these researches and reports are taken into account.

- B. Architectural surveys of current city fabric and the nature of public spaces within Rattanakosin Island.

This second method is an actual site survey. Different sections of Rattanakosin island are extensively surveyed through architectural mapping tool to collect data on actual street network pattern, land use and land occupation.

These two methods are then synthesized through comparisons of street networks, street and open space patterns as well as land use, between current state and various crucial states of changes during the past two hundred years. It is to determine directions of change and transformation of spatial patterns and formal configuration of buildings in relation to both streets and open or “public” spaces within different areas of Rattanakosin Island.

Through this relationship between historical study and contemporary physical survey, the research is resulted in a thorough understanding of factors generating changes as well as actual needs and spatial requirements that have led to current configurations of Rattanakosin Island today.

## **Research Framework**

The theoretical framework of this research is an exploration into the meaning of public and private that are manifested in different types of spatial usages within the city. Thai abstract concepts as well as realistic manifestations of urban privacy and urban publicity are investigated, in relation to those of the West. Through this theoretical framework, spatial fabric of Rattanakosin Island is examined, focusing on actual usages of space, both private and public.

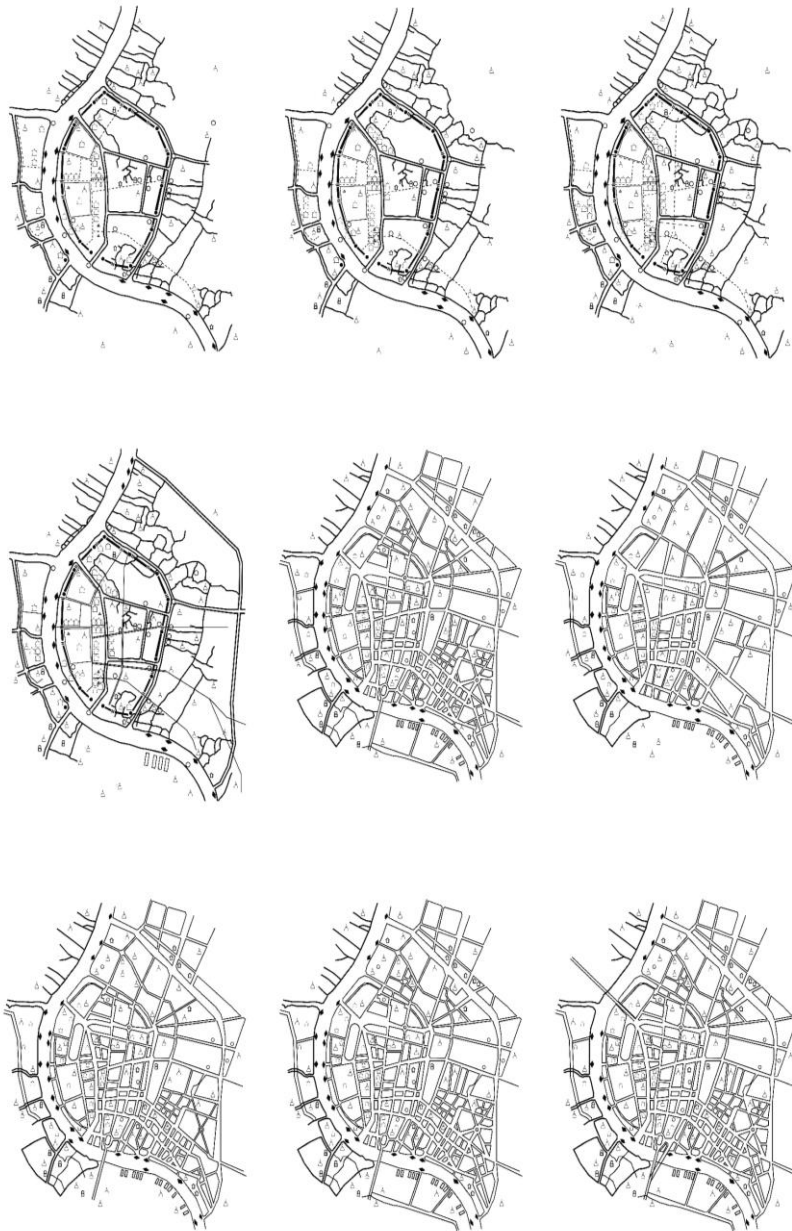
## **Historical Review**

### **The research began with a historical review of Rattanakosin Island.**

Back to the pre-historic age, the area of Rattanakosin Island was a part of the gulf of Thailand. Only at the beginning of historic age that land had started to form, becoming the basin of Chao Praya River. During Ayutthaya period, the area called Bangkok included both sides of Chao Praya River, the Pra Nakorn area as well as Thonburi areas of Bangkok-Noi and Bangkok-yai. Originally the areas were not divided by the river but were bounded together, with Chao Praya River circumventing it. Between 1534-1547, a canal was cut through the make a short cut for boats, causing the river stream to shift. This canal later became the main water path of Chao Praya River. With the river and intricate networks of connecting canals, settlements had been formed in the area since Ayutthaya period. The types of early settlements were those of small agricultural communities along the waterways. Because most traveling trips and communications were done by boats, via the networks of canals, houses were either built on the banks of canals and rivers, or on rafting platforms creating floating communities along the water paths (Cultural Heritage, 1994).

### **During the Reign of King Rama I-III**

After Ayutthaya lost to Burma in the war of 1767, it became completely destroyed beyond the point of any transformation. The capital city of Siam, was thus moved to Thonburi in the reign of King Taksin. Later in 1872, Chakri dynasty was established and the Rattanakosin period began. With the new dynasty, the capital was moved from the west side of Chao Praya River to the East side, giving birth to Rattanakosin Island and its subsequent extensions known as Bangkok today (Saksri, 2013). (Figure 1)



**Figure 1** Rattanakosin Island During the Reign of King Rama I-III

**Source:** Drawn by authors based on historical-literature study of Cultural Heritage Atlas of Rattanakosin (1994) Bangkok: Thailand Cultural Environment Project with Danish International Development Assistance.

Along with new palaces and buildings, a new ring canal was constructed circumventing the old one in order to extend the perimeter of the city. New city walls and 14 fortifications were built. A new canal name Klong-Lod was constructed in order to join the new ring canal with the old one. In addition to the canal network, new roads were built, 9 within the perimeter of the old ring canal, 3 reaching out beyond towards the north, the south and the east. These three roads are now known as Chakrapongs, Bamrungmueng and Banmor road. During the reign of King Rama III, additional canals were constructed, further extending the canal network. Settlements during this period were similar to that of Thonburi, congregated along waterways. Later extension of the city to the east began with the building of new royal and aristocratic palaces, residences as well as temples, creating various communities with different social and cultural specificities (Cultural Heritage, 1994). (Figure 2)



**Figure 2-3** Maps showing road networks during the reign of King Rama I-III and IV-VI

**Source:** Drawn by authors based on historical-literature study of Cultural Heritage Atlas of Rattanakosin (1994) Bangkok: Thailand Cultural Environment Project with Danish International Development Assistance.

### **The Reign of King Rama IV**

During the reign of King Rama IV, Siam began establishing commercial exchanges with foreign countries especially those in Europe. After the Bawring Treaty, commercial exchanges between Siam and foreign countries began to expand widely. And with expanded commercial exchanges, the city itself began to transform. With socio-economic as well as domestic changes, the physicality of the city including its structure and its appearance had to

change. Western models of urban development were consulted, resulting in a more systematic restructure of the city. During the reign of King Rama IV, three main roads of Chareonkrung, Bamrungmuang and Fuengnakorn were built, becoming commercial centers for both Chinese and European traders. Shop houses for commercial purposes were extensively built along those new roads. Gradually the old canal or water-based communities began to make ways for new land-and-road-based communities, while the architectural styles became the mixture of Thai, Chinese and European (Saksri, 2013). (Figure 3)

#### **From the Reign of King Rama V**

During the reign of King Rama V, Siam and its neighboring countries were deeply affected by Western colonization. With political, economic as well as socio-cultural pressure, the face of the country needed to transform to represent both the ruling power and the concept modernity. The city became a means of representation, communicating both the advancement of the country and the cultural specificities that belonged to no one else. In order to improve both the functional and the representational aspect of the place, King Rama V devised a scheme to both expand the road networks and enlarge the existing ones. New roads were built, while existing ones were widened. It was a plan influenced by the many European models he experienced while traveling in Europe. In addition to new roads, the new Dusit palace was built in the north of Rattanakosin, away from the old grand palace, thus needing new thoroughfares to connect them (Cultural Heritage, 1994). Rachadamnoen-Nai, Rachadamnoen-Klang and Rachadamnoen-Nok were built linking the two palaces together, creating continuous and grand boulevards not unlike those in Paris or Vienna. The web of mass transit networks of trains and tramways were constructed.

The settlements during this period had already changed from water-based communities to land-based communities along roads and streets. Residential architecture during this time ranged from traditional Thai to Chinese as well as Western styles, with additional building of low-income residents that later became flats and apartments. In addition to residential buildings, shop houses continued to spring up over the city, causing increasing density in many areas. Eventually the inner part of Rattanakosin became dense, causing the expansion to take place outside the wall. During the reign of King Rama VI, new roads were built towards the north and the east of the city. Parts of city wall were demolished, giving ways to further expansion and connection between the old city and the new outlying areas.

From the reign of King Rama VII, and the beginning of democracy, the area of Rattanakosin Island was still densely populated, with more roads built as well as bridges connecting the east part of Chao Praya River to the west. New building activities inside the first ring canal were mostly developed for governmental and municipal purposes. Between the first and the second ring canals, shop houses were still being constructed. But within the

first stage of democracy, the styles of buildings began to transform. Architecture became a means to represent the new ruling system as well as the government aspiration. (Figure 4)



**Figure 4** Map showing road networks during the reign of King Rama VII

**Source:** Drawn by authors based on historical-literature study of Cultural Heritage Atlas of Rattanakosin (1994) Bangkok: Thailand Cultural Environment Project with Danish International Development Assistance.

### **Analysis of the City Fabric of Rattanakosin Island**

Like so many other places, from the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of a modern “city,” referring to the development of its functional-technical aspects, had informed the transformation and extensions of Rattanakosin Island, which had become the capital of Siam since the Reign of King Rama I in 1782. As the serpentine network of canals has gradually been replaced by roads and streets, uniformity gradually took hold, which was a phenomenon forced by increasing urge of systematic industrialization not unlike many other nineteenth century cities (O’Neil, 2008). The results of such industrialized forces, however, managed to transform the face of many cities. For Rattanakosin Island since the reign of King Rama V, the symmetry, the regularity and the uniformity of the beautiful façades of the streets would easily render satisfaction admirable to the eye. In addition to Temples, Palaces and grand civic buildings, most of the Rattanakosin Island’s streets were lined with shop-houses. Two or three storied hybrid of Chinese and Western influences, these shop-houses has formed the face of the city. The orderly city of Rattanakosin presented an image of streets and spaces for civilian, military and monarch ceremonies. It has set the urban value



in which many areas of Bangkok have followed, with regularity of outline and the courtly uniform pattern of facades. Similar to Paris, this practice had created an ordered street line as well as building façades. Lining or enclosing the streets with uniformed façades has been a widely used method of the nineteenth century urban planning to create order and identity, and the case of Rattanakosin Island was not different.

Since Bangkok was founded as the capital of Siam, the social and economic organization of Rattanakosin Island was determined by the presence of the ruling monarchs and their palaces. But as the nineteenth century progressed, such order was shifted. As Siam became Thailand and the ruling monarch has been replaced by democratic government in 1932 the structure of the city was shaped by official governments, military, artisans and growing commerce. The change from the royal capital to a governmental and commercial one entailed the adoption of what tended to be recurrent building typologies throughout the urban area once enclosed by fortifications. The common building types, besides existing temples and royal palaces, were new governmental quarters and commercial shop-houses (O'Neil, 2008).

Although the straight roads allowed for uniformed shop-houses to be built, the relationship between the form of the streets and the form of the buildings in this case are reciprocal. In many ways, the need to install or build new repetitive shop-houses for commercial purposes also called for the creation of a more uniformed and straight streets. Both, however, resulted in a more systematic grid after the Western model, never seen before in Siam. The city, with previous sense of heterogeneity, became more homogenous as a result of the uniformity of both building typologies and systematic grid road network. Each part of the city can be seen a module to be replicated, subdivided or extended

The adoption of the Western city planning model to create a uniformed city was also convenient from the technical and economic point of view. New drainage and water system could be constructed and incorporated into a systematic network, allowing a healthier and convenient life. Although there have been no planning regulations during the reign of King Rama V, the scheme was clearly modeled after that of the West resulting in similar forms and systems. Axes, alignment, grid and symmetry became keywords to restructure the city.

During the early period of the twentieth century, when the royal monarch's rule was replaced by democratic government, the face of the city has slightly been transformed. The grand avenue, such as Rachadamneon Boulevard that was once used for royal precession has become a symbol for democracy. As the place for the people, buildings along the Rachadamneon Boulevard adopted a remarkably more somber face. Highly uniformed, almost fascistic, buildings lined the Rachadamneon Boulevard seemed gigantic compared to the miniscule commercial shop-houses around them. Compared to the façades of the earlier era, these buildings are considerably less expressive in terms of ornamental details and

motifs, yet their blankness makes them noticeable and even severe. They stand out as prominent urban objects, lined the street, yet separated from it, refusing to blend with any other structures around it. Along with other governmental buildings of the era, they have created an ordered façade type throughout the Rattanakosin Island that represented the imposing order and the new ruling class, the democratic government (Cultural Heritage, 1994).

### **Contemporary Fabric of Rattanakosin Island**

According to Apiradee Kasemsook's study on Bangkok's spatial system via Space Syntax computing program, it confirms the semantic readings of the city's transformation. Because Space Syntax addresses issues of networking and connectivity, in this case it can be used to read into the intertwined fabric of both roads and spaces. This syntactic study offers two different maps showing the configuration patterns of streets and roads which explains the connectivity as well as the integration values of those streets (Kasemsook, 2007).

With map A showing global integration of street networks between the inner part of Rattanakosin Island and its surrounding areas, it shows major thoroughfares running north-south and east-west attempting to connect to streets in further afield. The darker lines means that they are more integrated. Being the integrated means having other roads connected to it. In this map which shows street connection in a large scale, lines that run diagonally are only ones that are made to connect other major streets, in other words, north-south and east-west axes were made to work together to form a macro scale grid pattern of different hierarchical values. Kasemsook's study shows that most of the lines which are both aligned to and located along the three ring canals are globally integrated.

The map thus shows that the streets dissecting through communities as well as the ones running along the ring canals are the most integrated, with the longest Dinsor Road cutting north-east through many local areas (Kasemsook, 2007). The longest east-west and the most integrate line is Chareonkrung Road, the first paved street of Bangkok and the heart of commercial area since the time of its construction till today. (Figure 5)

With map B of local integration, it shows the patterns of the grid system within Rattanakosin area and further afield. The same study by Kasemsook shows that the grid patterns of Rattanakosin area are different in types. The grid of the central and east area has an orthogonal grid structure, which means that the grid structure is formed by a number of roads connecting one another at right angle. Meanwhile, the structure of the grid of the west and the north is more broken, meaning that the grid is formed by a number of roads that are connected to a few more roads, creating open or broken grid rather than a closed or

complete one (Kasemsook, 2007). Yet despite the differences, the two types of grid show similar systematic efforts to connect and align roads together into a coherent and uniformed pattern. (Figure 6)



**Figure 5** Map A

**Source:** The Configuration Map of Bangkok: The Road Network and its Relationship to the City's Evolution. (Kasemsook, 2007)



**Figure 6** Map B

**Source:** The Configuration Map of Bangkok: The Road Network and its Relationship to the City's Evolution. (Kasemsook, 2007)

## Discussion

Results of architectural surveys of current city fabric and the nature of public spaces within Rattanakosin Island are as follow:

From architectural surveys of current city fabric, it is worth noting that most major or large scale grids within Rattanakosin area are orthogonally complete and uniformed, while the broken characteristic occurs within a micro scale of the interior of those grids. Each street, boulevard, intersection, square or plaza is enclosed with uniformly aligned buildings, giving the “exterior” public space complete and clear geometrical forms. Considering in a macro scale, the efforts to create a sense of uniformity and symmetry are revealed, giving the city a coherent characteristic planning system not unlike that of the West. This is also shown in map C (Figure 7), demonstrating uniformed large scale grids but completely broken micro scale grids.



**Figure 7** Map C

**Source:** The Configuration Map of Bangkok: The Road Network and its Relationship to the City's Evolution. (Kasemsook, 2007)



**Figure 8** Map showing locations of major intersections

**Source:** Drawn by authors based on physical surveys of Rattanakosin Island

Yet, considering in a micro scale, a very different picture emerges. While the forms of the “exterior” public space generated by main thoroughfares are always geometrically pure, i.e. rectangular, square, triangular or circular, the forms of the “interior” public space hidden behind the façades of the main streets or within the nucleus of communities are highly organic. In contrast, the broken and seemingly incoherent characters are often hidden behind the main façades of buildings that lined the main streets. Organic, in this sense does not refer to a curve or fluid lines, but refers to a configuration that are variously configured and heterogeneous, allowing many different elements to be integrated into one ensemble of setting. Within or behind many uniformed street blocks, one finds a much more organic configuration of both spaces and architectural elements. These “interior” public spaces occur not only within communities but also to sacred compounds of temples as well as governmental and municipal compounds. The outlines of both buildings and spaces within the blocks are hardly in a complete geometrical shape, but ready to be broken at various ends, becoming interlocking spaces and forms. (Figure 9-10)

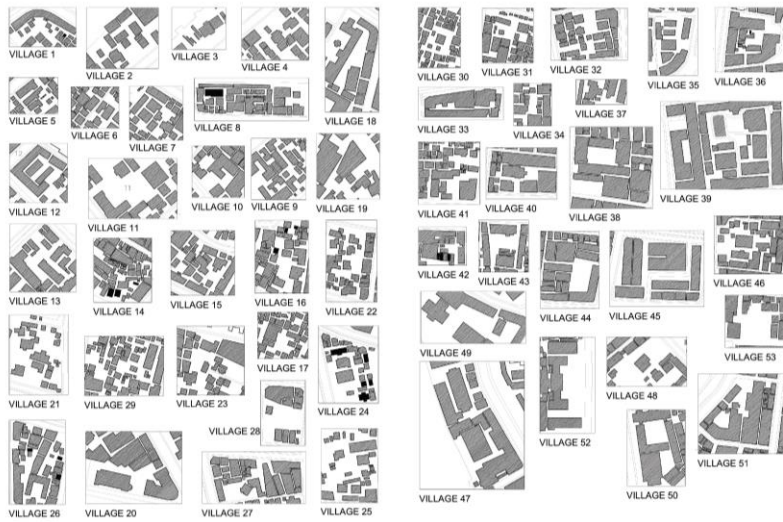


Figure 9 “Interior” or private public spaces

Source: Drawn by authors based on physical surveys of Rattanakosin Island

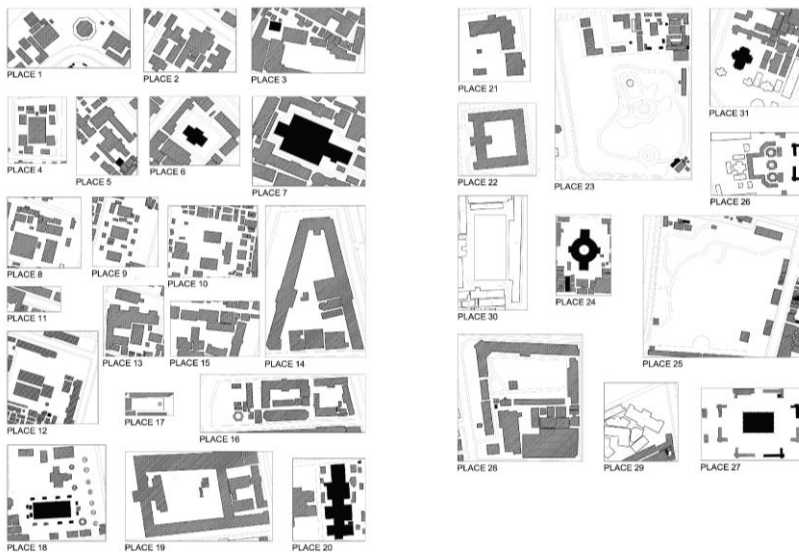
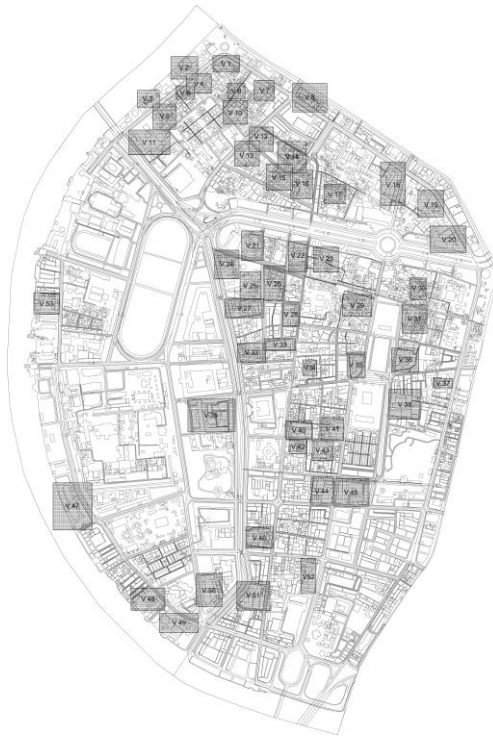


Figure 10 “Interior” or private public spaces

Source: Drawn by authors based on physical surveys of Rattanakosin Island



**Figure 11** Map showing interior or private public spaces within city blocks

**Source:** Drawn by authors based on physical surveys of Rattanakosin Island

This natural permutation of “interior” public spaces has a much wider implication than the hiding of something incoherence behind the uniformed façades. Before the systematic transformation of the city, Rattanakosin area consisted of various communities. Each community, though belonging to the city, formed the private nucleus of their public lives within the community, which was not much different from villages in rural areas. It is a place for social gathering as well as exchanges of goods in a micro scale of the community. It is a public space that only belongs to each private community, where each member of the community is considered more like a family rather than stranger. One feels at home and private within such public arena. Once migrated into the city, this type of daily life and habits still held true, resulting in efforts to create similar spaces for those purposes. It is a way of life transported into and retained within the city. It was, in many ways, a symbol of existence for each and every community.

This private public space is both practical and symbolic. While its practical function serves as a social nexus, it is also a symbolic representation of a sense of belonging and

affirmation of human existence. Within a community, one exists as an individual, yet being a part of an assuring social group, without which the city life becomes anonymous and empty.

As the city was transformed into something more uniformed and regulated, these practical and symbolic needs of community space are translated into the various types of private public spaces within the street blocks. A market, a playground, a multi-purpose lawn or plaza, are tucked behind the enclosing buildings and take whatever spaces and forms allowed by the existing configuration of the street blocks. It is retreat or retrieval of public space into the private arena. Public space in the sense of the Thais simply differs from that of the West.

While the Western model of the order and uniformity represent a statement of how each community should fit within the structure of the urban ensemble, it did not necessarily concern itself with the micro structure. When macro structure is laid out to improve many practical demands, the micro structure must be taken into account in order to create public spaces that belong to each community. Examples can be found in many historic towns where hidden pattern or language sustain each and every community. Although the sense of coherence is necessary in planning the city, but once the spatial pattern within a macro scale is conceived, it must accept alterations according to the needs of spatial structure in micro scale. Otherwise, the relationship between the large scale connectivity and small scale integration will be lacking.

The case of Bangkok confirms such needs. Behind the buildings with external uniformity, there exist seeming incoherent public spaces were choreographed to respond to both internal demands and external obligations, which represent an attempt to reconcile its inner configuration with the shifting axis of its urban setting. The sometimes-overlooked private public spaces of residential, commercial, or even religious and governmental quarters often reciprocate the interior pattern of inhabitation. Such spaces are a testament to the users' struggle to answer to both interior needs and exterior demands.

Small alleys and walkways have been added, altered, and carved out of existing structure. What has caused these alterations? As the blocks were originally designed with coherent and uniformed pattern, they have created a sense of urban order and given the city a tangible identity. The uniformed grids were designed to be viewed from the outside, to give the borderline to the space of the streets, or to be the demarcation between public and private life of the city. Yet, it is inevitable that behind the uniformed blocks, private communities also exist. Thus entries and exits to and from these communities are created while the spaces behind the blocks are transformed. Some have become seemingly haphazard, disordered, and even chaotic, when consider as a whole. These organic spaces within the large street blocks were not meant to represent the image of the city, yet they do form the identity of Rattanakosin Island. Consider as a whole, they are seemingly



un-composed and accidental, yet they all represent highly articulated public space, albeit more private thus radically different from the Western model. Each tries to communicate its own internal message, reflecting its internal usages. It is the kind of articulation that comes into being by the lives and activities behind the urban order.

## **Conclusion**

Every place needs a symbol of its existence. Much of modern city frustration has come into being because a symbol of the visual reason for its life is missing. Spatial structure of public space that harbors the city life is one of such symbol. In many ways, the creation of the city fabric and public space does not rest in the hand and the determination of urban designers. Space of the city is a vital aspect that is born along with the architecture, human lives and activities within a given place. The problem of designing the city's spatial structure and public space has been a major concern within architectural and urban disciplines since the nineteenth century. With industrial revolution, came the birth of modern city planning, whose aspirations have been marked by the rising functional, technical and economic demands. The definition of the public sphere was transformed; its symbolic and representational quality began to give ways to the new practical forces. The city fabric and public space was no longer born along with the place, but were designed and destined to be used in certain ways. Thus the task of designing spatial entities within the city becomes questionable. Many public spaces themselves became problematic.

In order to understand the city fabric of Rattanakosin Island and how it responds to actual usages and demands of Thai socio-cultural specificities, one need to understand first the forces of urban change importing from the West during the nineteenth century. During that period, many European metropolises were transformed, sending repercussions throughout the world. With it came the birth of modern city planning and many theoretical advocates. On one end of the spectrum the city is to be totally composed with coherent and systematic unity, allowing the development for all utilitarian factors. This gives the city a sense of uniformity capable of representing specific identities the city is aspired to communicate. In this school of thought, city planning is a result of coherent and proportionate unity. In this sense, space is quantified and measured as the regulated field that can be repeated or subdivided.

On the opposite way thinking, city is seen as many separate spatial entities that are fragmented rather than complete network. In this style of thinking, city planning is more of an assembly of both masses and spaces that is built up at the same time. The city is an assembly of rooms aggregated and unified by the relations between each particular setting.

While in the first way of thinking space is being expanded, in the second, space is being delimited (Panin, 2017).

As for Bangkok, the transformation of the city fabric, although influenced by urban reorganization happened in the West during the nineteenth century, had generated a very different outcome. The transformation schemes in European cities, while being criticized for the destruction of old order, were nevertheless capable of bringing about and regenerating public life of the city through the creation of public spaces embedded within the street network. As those public spaces such as plazas, squares, parks and gardens are created as a part of an extensive and interconnected network; it means that each and every public space belongs to the city as a whole, rather than to each specific community. The way these spaces are designed, placed and configured in relation to the street networks confirms the idea of universal public space. These spaces are brought out of the private realm, and placed onto the open expanses among the passing traffic, becoming the stopping points within the speedy network of vehicular movements. Rather than belonging to any specific types of community, they are anonymous, being endowed with more or less similar characters throughout the city. One can simply move through the network of public spaces without feeling like an intruder. In other words, they are intended to be universally public, welcoming anyone and everyone alike.

In Bangkok's Rattanakosin Island, the situations are radically different. While the city is being ordered and structured in the Western model, the public life occurred within the city can hardly be brought out to the "public." Universal or Western concepts of private and public urban space were hardly realized or fruitfully employed.

Most communities in Rattanakosin Island consist of population that had migrated to the city, yet the rural life styles still endured. It is the life centered on the social life of each private community. In other words, the concept of "public" for the Thais is fundamentally different from that of the West. Being a part of the public means being a part of a specific community, rather than being a part of a city as whole. Public space for the Thais is an extension of private domain, separate from it, yet closely linked and connected. It is the type of public that allows one to truly share and exchange personal contacts, rather than to observe and remain unseen as that of the West. This explains why public spaces design within Western typologies are not capable to serve as true sharing ground. When spaces of the city are ordered and structured into anonymous network, public lives are created and recreated within the nucleus of each community. In other words, the public is forced to retreat into the private, separated from the overall structure of the place it belongs.

Socio-cultural specificities are crucial for the design of public space within each and every city fabric. Either the theory of uniformity or fragmentation will not suffice. In order for public spaces to truly serve the public lives of a city, there exist many pretexts for the design

of physical structure. Only when one understands the implication of socio-cultural specificities of each place, can one begin to see the design not as the beginning, but a means and an end that is never fixed but can be transformed, shaped and reshaped by both individuals and communities living within the place.

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