

## **Some Mutual Relations for Remaining Local Commercial Community in Ta Chang Market of Sing Buri Province, Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, many traditional commercial communities are required to develop themselves in order to compete against capitalism. Some communities that did not adjust themselves toward those changes no longer exist. Other communities have adjusted themselves, particularly in response to tourism. However, in many cases the process of becoming a tourism destination has caused the relationship between architecture and the ways of life in these traditional commercial communities to dramatically change, and thus lose their identity. This paper aims to present ways of adaptation for traditional commercial communities that will enable them to keep their traditional commercial activities as well as their unique architectural characters.

Ta Chang Market community of Sing Buri Province in Thailand was selected because many parts of their traditional activities and physical features still remain. Data used in this paper were derived from reviewing documents, conducting a field survey, and interviewing 12 community members. Data analysis included classification, content analysis and constant comparative analysis (Walisatean, et al., 2000).

This study found that the community of Ta Chang Market has changed to reflect the current economic conditions. Although most of the external architectural features have been maintained, the internal features have been adjusted to the current needs under the limitation of the land ownership. Spatial utilization has been managed by the committee of Wat Bot to ensure that the community areas are used effectively and orderly. In addition, there has been an expansion of the morning market, which helps the community. This study found that an important

factor for the existence of this commercial community was the mutual relationship between the community and the temple.

**Keywords:** Mutual relations, Existence, Shophouse, Local market communities, Tourism

## Introduction

Besides being a center for commerce and transportation, local market communities are also a residential and social space. Commercial character is determined by the local people, and differs from place to place (Canter, 1977).

In Thailand, commercial communities can traditionally be classified into two main types: market places along the watercourses and market places on land (Chaising-Kananon, 2006). In the past, most of the local market communities particularly in the central region were located along the river, which was a major route for transportation (Chai-Boon, 2006:419). However, since the major routes of transportation have shifted from rivers to roads, local market communities have changed significantly.

One aspect of road developments is that they have brought rapid economic development, to rural areas. Many communities have had to adapt themselves and react differently to such developments (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999). Some have changed to respond to tourism and to take advantage of the commercial benefits. As society changes, however, some communities are not able to adjust themselves, and thus have been disappearing (Chivakul, et al, 1982).

Many communities have been transformed into tourist destinations (Kanokpongchai, 2004). This, somehow, has been done by nonlocal businessmen, while local people have moved out from the areas. However, there are still some communities where traditional trading and ways of life have remained.

This paper aims to present how local market communities have adapted toward changes in economic and environmental conditions. Ta Chang Market community in Ta Chang district of Sing Buri Province was selected as a case study because it has been referred to the Buddhism instructor who was the psychological center of the community and Ta Chang Market was the place that King Chulalongkorn was visit in 1904 . Is considered as a cultural heritage site, where traditional shop houses and ways of trading still remain. Data were derived from reviewing history documents, and field surveys in the community. Observations and interviews were conducted from 2007 – 2009.

This paper begins with the history of the Ta Chang community. This is followed by a discussion of the changes in the architecture and activities of the community. Then, it will present ways of preserving this community.

## **History of the Ta Chang Market Community**

The Ta Chang-market community is located along Noi River in Tambol Thon Smor of Sing Buri province. The location is in between Ang Thong province and Chainat Province. This community is surrounded by rice fields with palm trees.

The community was first established during the early period of Rattanakosin Kingdom<sup>1</sup> near Noi River, 1 kilometer away from the current location on the north (Figure 1). Ta Chang<sup>2</sup> market community was named because it was a place where the mahouts bathed their elephants. In addition, the area was also used by Chinese merchants to dock their houseboats and to sell goods. Later on during the period of King Rama III (in the year 1824), a wealthy man named "Rut" owned the land and rented areas of Ta Chang to Chinese merchants to build their permanent shophouses.

Then in 1827, Rut donated some parts of his land plots located on the southern side of Ta Chang market to a monk named Phrakru Pitrthammasiri to build a local temple where there was an abandoned chapel on the plot. The temple was called "Wat Bot." When the construction of the temple was finished, the place was used by the monks to stay in during Buddhist Lent. Then, local people came to the temple to make merit and to take care of the place. In 1867, a growing number of residents began living close to the temple. These residents built stores and the houseboats, which later became a small market.

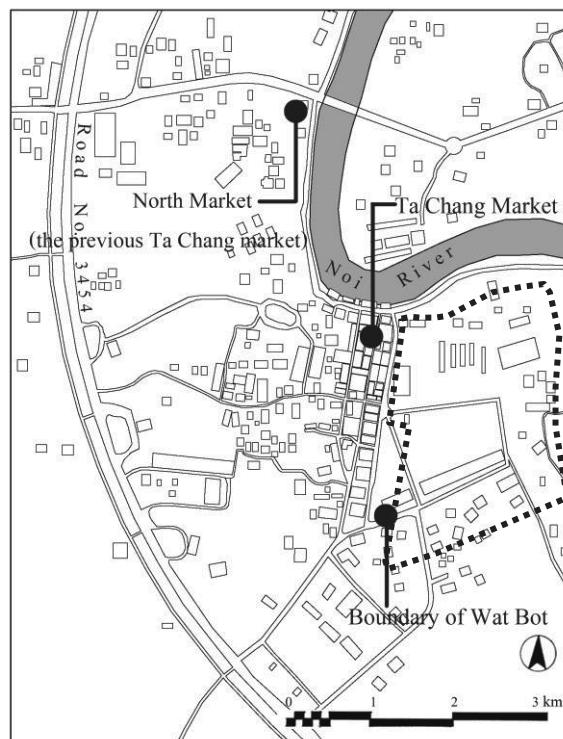
In 1872, there was a venerable monk whose name was "Yud" who came to stay at the temple and later was appointed as the abbot. This made many non-locals start to come to Wat Bot to make merit. Because there was an increasing number of people who came to the temple more trading activities started in front of the temple. The temple then, allowed the merchants to rent the land on the western side of the temple in order to build wooden-row houses. Thus, there were 2 market places in the area – the old market, located on the northern side of Wat Bot, which

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<sup>1</sup> Rattanakosin Kingdom was the traditional centre of power in Thailand after the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Thonburi Kingdoms that preceded it. It was founded in 1782 with the establishment of Bangkok as the capital city.

<sup>2</sup> In Thai, "Ta" means port or the location near the watercourses, and "Chang" means an elephant.

then was called “North Market”, and another one next to the temple, which was called “Ta Chang market” instead of the old market (North Market).



**Figure 1** Locations of the previous market (North market) and the current Ta Chang market

The main reason the market was moved to a new location was because there were a growing number of people who came to make merit at the temple. The western side of the temple was rented out for commercial purposes. North market, then, started to fade away. Also the land owners wanted to use the North market for other purposes; therefore, the stores in the old market gradually closed down.

In 1877, the temple committee and the local people built a statue of the venerable monk “Yud” after his death. This made the faithful people outside the community still come to pay respect to his statue. The Ta Chang market community, then, became more popular, and the North market was eventually closed down, leaving only an old Chinese shrine “Pueng Thao Gong Ma” existing. The market community next to Wat Bot has become the commercial center of the city and played an important role in areas economy since then.

## Characteristics of the Ta Chang Market Community

Shophouses in Ta Chang market community were normally built on land allocated by the temple, and located along the river shores on the western side of the temple. Because the area by the river was very limited, only a few shophouses could be built there. Most of them were constructed toward the land away from the river and aligned on the north-south direction. Those built by the river were single-storey shophouses, while most buildings on the land were two-storey wooden houses. There were 3 rows of shophouses, and each row had about 4-6 shophouses. The single and the two-storey shophouses were divided by the road along the river. Shophouses at the Ta Chang market community are very unique due to their various compositions such as the charming details of doors, windows and ventilators, as well as wooden and metal works (Figure 2). In 1963, Wat Bot built a roof to cover this road, enabling local residents to use the covered space for trading activities in the morning and a “morning market” started.



**Figure 2** Wood decorations on shop houses in Ta Chang market community

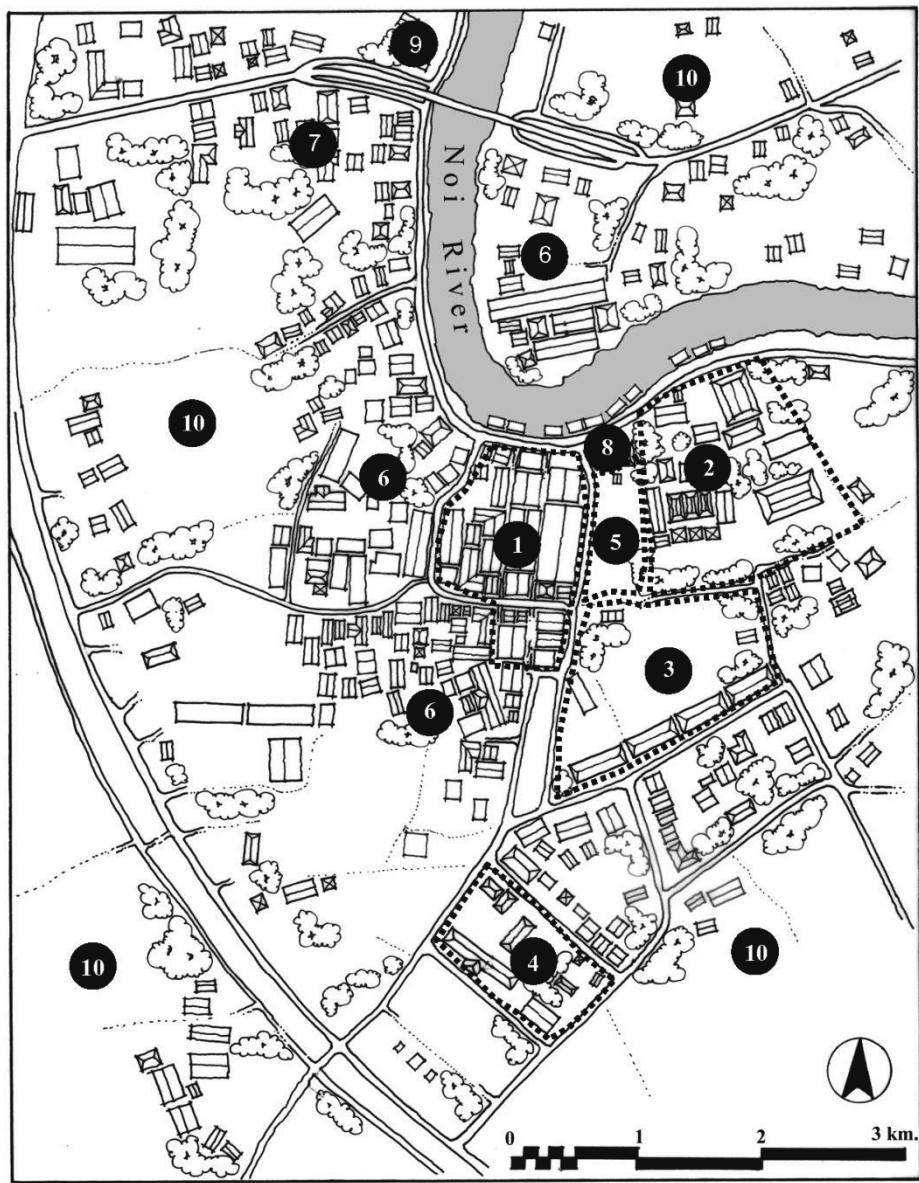
In the past the Ta Chang market community was a transportation hub for loading goods and also for people traveling between Bangkok and Northern Thailand. The community was quite popular not only because of the market itself, but also because of the land plots of the temple and surrounding areas. Having interviewed local residents who have lived in the community for quite a long time, I was told that transportation by the rivers was stopped when highway No. 3454 was constructed in 1982 (see Figure 1). Since then, the Ta chang market has not been a transportation center. However, there have been local buses in service for local people who desire to travel to nearby districts and provinces.

Shifting from water to road transportation has not had much effect on planning and architecture in the community because buildings and houses were constructed on rented land plots from the temple. Because of their long lease, ownership of these houses has constantly

changed. However, any change in composition of the rented houses must be reported to the temple committee. This has preserved architectural characteristics of the community .

In addition, there have been other elements around the Ta Chang market community (Figure 3). Most of them have been maintained as in the old days, particularly the shophouses.

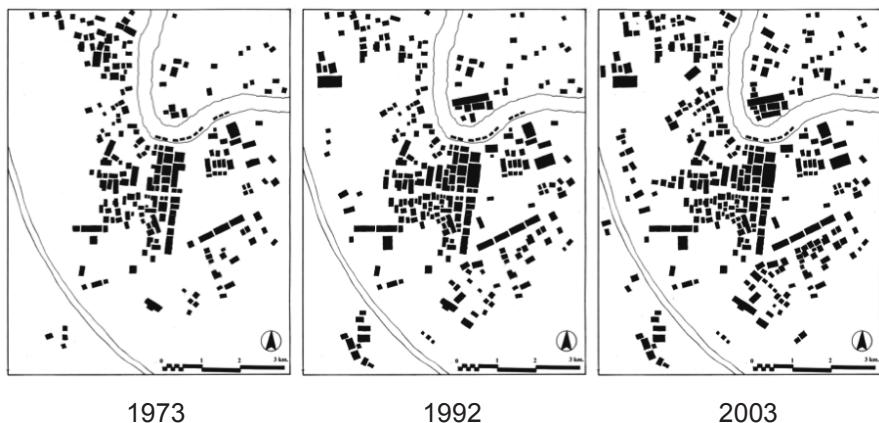
Densification of the surrounding communities was increased, and farmlands were changed into a residential area for land transporation (Figure 4). All of these still exist, except the rice mill that has not been operated, while the community has expanded towards and along the road development. This has influenced the increasing numbers of houses, while farmland areas have been vastly decreased. All these changes have helped the community to adapt and survive in the present day.



#### Details of the map

1. Shop houses	6. Houses
2. Wat Bot	7. North market
3. Wat Bot School	8. Ta Chang shrine
4. Ta Chang District Office	9. Rice Mill
5. Parking Lot	10. Gardens – Farms

**Figure 3** Other elements around Ta Chang market community



**Figure 4** Change of the Ta Chang market community (from 1973 to 2003)

### **Ways of Retaining the Ta Chang Market Community**

The Ta Chang market community is very unique. One of the reasons why the community is still a commercial center is because the area is quite far from the city center of Singburi Province (approximately 20 kms.). Also, there still has not been any development, such as departments stores or modern trade outlets around this community. Although this external factor has not affected existence of the community, internal factors have influenced changes to commercial activities of the community and its physical appearance.

### **Commercial Activities of the Ta Chang Market Community**

There has been a continuous adaptation of most people who live in and around the community. In the past, commercial activities in the Ta Chang market community could be divided into two main types: dried goods and fresh products. Dried goods were usually sold all day in the shophouses, while fresh products were sold only in the morning, on the road near Noi River, by the farmers who lived around the community.

Nowadays, these commercial activities have not changed much. The merchants who sell dried merchandise are still living in the shophouses, while fresh produce is still supplied by the farmers. However, these farmers also sell other household items, which is new in the morning market. Thus, the morning market has changed from a fresh market to a place where everything can be found. The areas for conducting trading activities in this community has also expanded from the road next to the river to the parking areas of the temple.

Nowadays, commercial activities can be divided into 2 areas. The fresh market by the river and the one at the temple's parking lot which run from 4:00 am – 8:00 am. and the shophouses which normally operate from 8:00 am – 17:00 pm. Commercial activities in both these areas have been like this since 1992 as the community must adapt themselves to serve the demands of people around the community.



5:00-8:00 am. Stores and stalls near Noi River



After 8:00 am. The road near Noi River that has stores and stalls from 5:00-8:00 am.

**Figure 5** The Ta Chang market community at different times

Commercial activities in the Ta Chang community have continued with the addition of products that serve the demands of a new generation. that does not have to travel to buy things at a department store in the city, which is far away from the community. Hence, the Ta Chang market still responds very well to serve the demands of local people. Wat Bot manages the merchants and their commercial activities both on the road by Noi River and the parking lot, which is considered an extension of the morning market. The extension of the morning market increases commercial activities. Wat Bot management has helped to remain all shophouses and to facilitate people ways of living in the community.

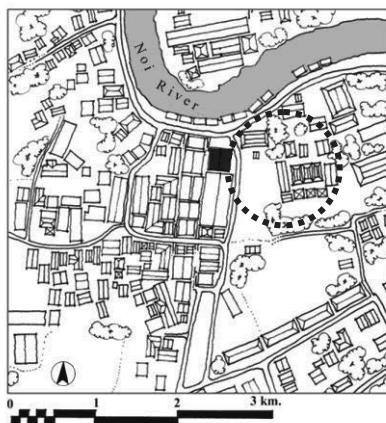
### Shophouse Changes

Besides the morning market, architectural features have also been adapted to be consistent with current functions. Although shophouses in the community have mostly maintained their exterior appearance, the interior space has changed.

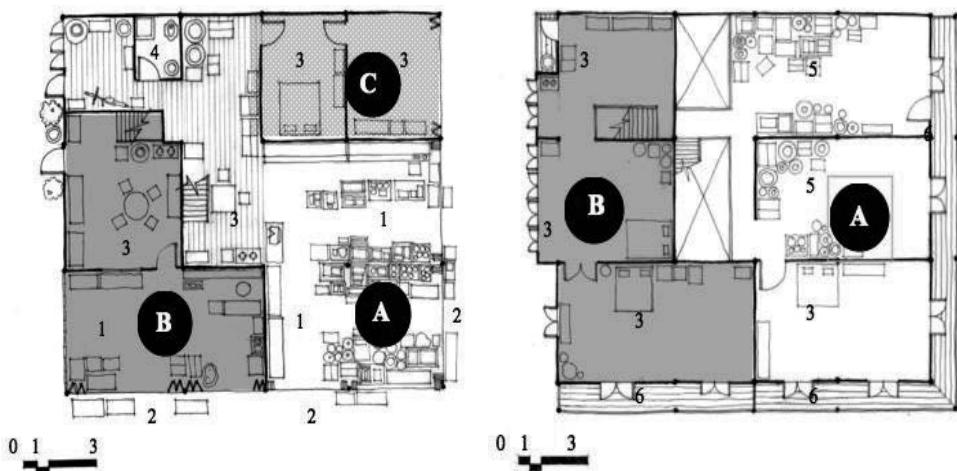
In the past, the structure of shophouses in the community were typically a rectangular shape, enclosed by walls on two sides aligned with columns from the front to the rear side of the building. This rectangular-shaped shophouse supported both commercial and residential activities. Particularly in two-storey shophouses, the ground level was mainly used for

commercial purposes, with private space on the rear side of the house. The second floor was a residential space.

However, this study found that the interior space of some shophouses in the Ta Chang market community, nowadays, have been altered with more complex space design than in the past. This was usually found with the changes of demarcation of interior spaces. This has occurred because some owners have subleased their homes to tenants. The demarcation features often depend on an agreement between the owner of the building and their tenants.



Location of the two-story shophouses in the Ta Chang market community



Ground floor plan

Second floor plan

**Figure 6** Example of the changing demarcation of interior space of A's house in the Ta Chang market community

Figure 6 is an example of how the internal space of a two-storey shophouse located near the river at the corner of the road is divided. In the past, the rooms in the two-storey

shophouse were divided in a rectangle shape, the lower floor was used mainly for commercial purpose while the upper floor was used as a residential space. At present, dividing spaces of shophouse have been redone as appeared in Figure 6 by the owner of the shophouse (A-the white area on the right). However, commercial activities today are not as lively as in the past; therefore, some parts of the building are re-divided for B and C to rent. The area (the grey area on the left) that B rented out is for residential and commercial purposes, while the renting area of C is for commercial only. However, at present, C is no longer being rented. Thus, the owner of the house (A) has transformed the room to be a residential space for their family. This expresses that for local people demarcating interior space have not fixed with the alignment of the structure columns, particularly, at the lower floor. It seems that although the exteriors of the shophouses of the Ta Chang community need to be fixed with traditional characteristics in mind, the interior space can be changed in any way the house owner wants (Tuan,1977). This represents the relationship between Wat Bot and the community that was able to manage a compromising utilization of public and private spaces that went well under a compromising negotiation, because the community residents understood that the area could subsequently make use of the consistency between inside and outside of the space (Li, 2007: 41-48). Those who have defined existential space as a relative stable system of perceptual schemata, or image of the environment (Norberg-Schulz, 1971).

Even though external appearance of the wooden shophouses has changed in minor ways due to regulations of the community, the internal space has become more variety pattern of shophouse. This illustrates how the architecture changes in response to the different requirements of residents (Kleinman & Ryan, 2009: 5-18).

## Conclusion

The Ta Chang market community has constantly changed along several factors such as transportation, economic and environment. However, the physical characteristics, particularly at shophouses, have still remained and kept their craftsmanship quality because of regulation within the community.

Even though the Ta Chang market community still exists, people in the community demand modern products. Thus, the morning market has expanded to respond to this new requirement in the community. This response is not only due to current economic development, but also requires internal space management to continue commercial activities within the community. The management of the community was created by local people who understood the usage pattern of the area that were defined existential space in the community (Norberg-Schulz,

1971). This shows a mutual relationship that creates an effective utilization of the community's resources and community care that are the main cause of this study.

Besides adapting to the commercial needs of the community, people must also adapt their living situations (Nattapunwat, 1998). Within the defined regulations of Wat Bot, adaption of the residential has expressed with flexibility of spatial utilization of interiors to serve different requirements. The Ta Chang market community has expressed both conservative and flexible aspects under the management ways with mutual relations between the temple, and the residents or tenants. This has brought about unique characteristics of existence concept. This provides a clue or alternative to retain traditional market community in sustainable way.

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