

The Fall, Existence and a Restoration Model of Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the history of the community bazaars along the Thachin river, to analyze factors that caused the collapse of some bazaars, to analyze factors that helped sustain the existence of some bazaars and to propose an appropriate model for restoration of the bazaars. The research findings revealed that there were 16 community bazaars along the Thachin river in the area of Suphanburi. All of them existed and prospered in the time that the river was used for main transportation some 100 years ago. The bazaars functioned as merchandise exchanges for local agriculture products and consumer goods such as soap, toothpaste, detergent and clothes from Bangkok. The external factors causing the collapse of some bazaars were the development of land transportation, the construction of the bridge across the Tha Chin River, the rise market fairs, the emergence of commercial retail establishments and convenience stores, and the policy of community leaders and local administrative organizations which paid no attention to the traditional bazaars. The internal factors were a lack of unity and selfishness among the members in community, lack of participation of those involved and migration of people in the community. The external factor that helped sustain the existence of some bazaars was the collaboration from outside networks, while the internal factors were the cooperation among the people in community, strengths of each bazaar and uncompromising policy of community leaders. An appropriate model for the restoration of the bazaars along the Tha Chin River in the Suphanburi area puts great emphasis on the liveliness of the bazaar, the cooperation and the sustainable incomes of the sellers. The model suggested in this research consisted of 4 steps: a) analyzing self-potential and sharing the vision of the bazaar, b) analyzing purchaser's needs, c) creating the network for mutual learning both inside and outside the community; d) having a plan of action with clear and strict implementation and formative assessment at certain times for resolution and improvement on the foundation of community culture.

Keywords: markets, Tha Chin River, conservation, restoration, community, culture, development

1. Introduction

The Tha Chin River lies to the West of the Chao Phraya River in Thailand in Suphanburi Province, a province with a long and rich history dating back to the Neolithic period, or New Stone Age. Evidence and traces of communities from all periods of history since the New Stone Age have been discovered in the areas around the Tha Chin River (Walipodom, 1997, p. 25-26). These areas in modern Suphanburi Province cover the ancient center of U-Thong City and also the legendary Suwannaphum. The city of U-Thong was developed as a center of administration, economy and culture during the seventh and eighth Buddhist centuries. The development was permitted due to the strong trade links with India, China and other Eastern kingdoms, as well as the location of U-Thong in the foothills surrounding the Chorakhe Sam Phan River (a tributary of the Tha Chin River). The location was particularly important as its height prevented flooding and it was surrounded by low-lying plains. The city of U-Thong was also near the point where the Chorakhe Sam Phan River met with the Gao tributary, a continuation of the Tawa tributary from the North. These two tributaries then joined with the Suphanburi tributary, which allowed the ancient communities to have a wide communications network and reach the sea via the modern-day Tha Chin River (Walipodom, 1997, p. 27).

As a result of war with Burma, Suphanburi was a relatively deserted city from the middle of the Ayutthaya

Kingdom until a revival under King Nangklao (Rama III). Communities were primarily established around the river where people could trade and sell goods. Thus, the lifestyle of the locals was intrinsically linked to the waterways and a number of riverside markets emerged. Land further from the riverside was converted into farmland, and further afield was wild jungle. People living in these parts would use carts to transport their wares to the market centers (Silpakorn University, 2003).

Communities around the Tha Chin River are linked to the communities around the Mae Klong and Chao Phraya Rivers due to their proximity and connections. Between the reigns of Rama the Third and Rama the Fifth, there was an increase in river transportation of people and goods. The people using the river were largely Thai, Chinese, Laos and Mon people. Habitations would be established along the riverside, causing the periodic formation of communities scattered along the length of the river. Prior to free trade established under the reign of Rama III, the locals lived in a subsistence economy. The Bowring Treaty of 1855, which liberalized foreign trade, caused further growth, although the Tha Chin riverside area did not expand as fast as other parts of the central region. The reason for this was the increasing importance of rice farming and relocation to the fertile Tha Chin river basin. During the reign of Rama V, the abolition of slavery saw the development of more communities and, although the expansion of trade was gradual, markets were established along the length of the river (Jindamaneerot, 1989, p. 50-57).

Trade and export would originally be conducted using mail boats from Chainat Province, which would pass through Suphanburi, Nakhon Pathom and Samut Sakhon Provinces on their way to Bangkok. The Suphanburi Transportation Company was the largest water transportation company of the first half of the twentieth century from 1942 until 1957, when it stopped business as a result of the increase of automobile transportation (Chompunit, p. 127-131). One of the biggest causes for change was the first National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966), which stipulated the development of roads along the Tha Chin river, causing a stark decline in river transport and having a knock-on effect to the markets (Pipatwong, 2004, p. 2).

A market is generally understood to be a collective center for the trade of goods, but in reality is also a collective center for the trade of culture and social concepts. It is a center for the community and related to the local lifestyle. These things are all reflected in the goods that are sold. Aside from this, the market is also a place for the local community to meet and converse with one another and exchange opinions, which is one way to strengthen relationships (Ditpan, 2009, p.27-28).

For a length of one-hundred and sixty kilometers, from the northernmost district in Suphanburi, Doem Bang Nang Buat, to the southernmost district, Song Phi Nong, there are sixteen markets along the banks of the Tha Chin River. These are Tha Chang Market, Nang Buat Market, Baan Teung Market, Baan Kwak Market, Samchuk Market, Si Prachan Market, Baan Krang Market, Pothi Praya Market, Kao Hong Market, Bang Pla Ma Market, Kaw Wang Market, Bang Maemai Market, Bang Sakae Market, Baan Kum Market, Bang Sam Market and Bang Saw Market. This is not including Suphanburi Market, which was originally named Phi Liang Market and is the center of trade, economy, society and culture of Suphanburi Province. These markets were the centers of trade in the communities, but with the current existence of three convenient supermarkets across the province and the change in communications market trade has declined and a number of the markets have been forced to close, which is illustrated in figure 1 below.

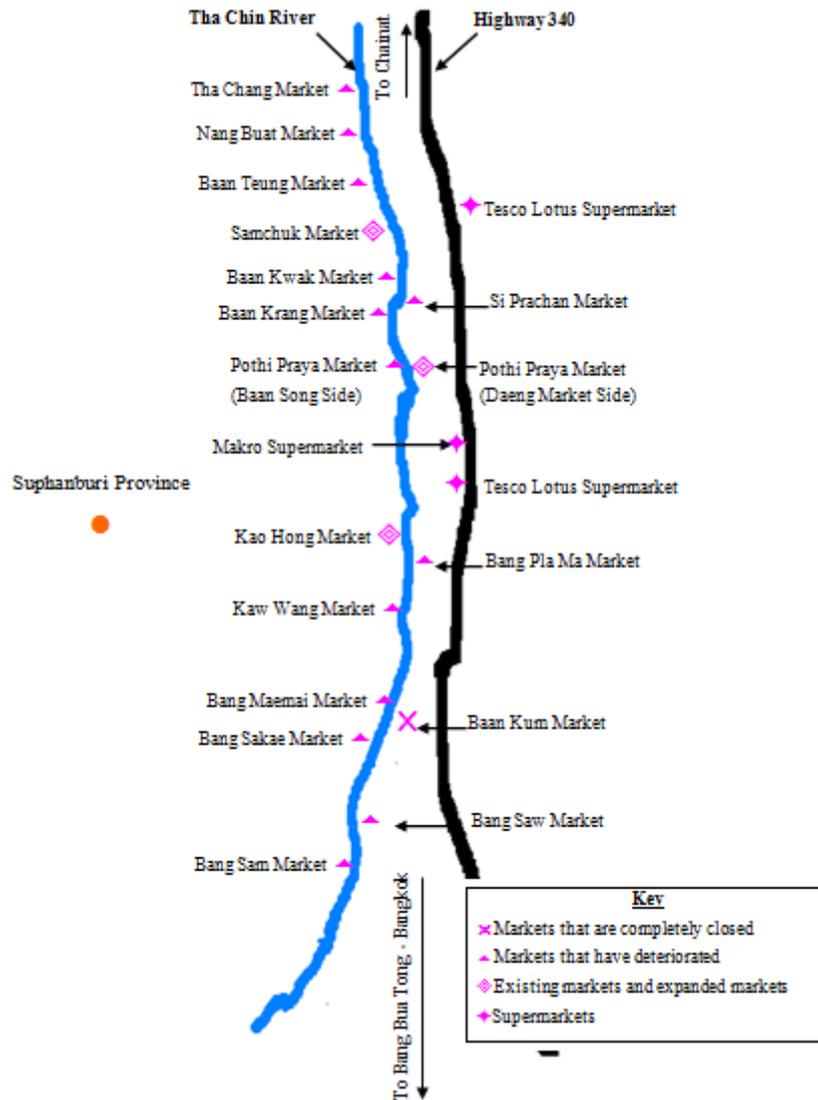


Figure 1. A map of the markets along the Tha Chin River in Suphanburi Province

However, these markets are dying out in the face of competition from the larger supermarkets and convenience stores in the area. The big superstores are able to offer a wealth of goods and a speed of service that the market tradesmen are unable to provide. However, the area in which the markets are able to outdo the supermarkets is in their relationship with the customer. Despite supermarket attempts to generate a more personal approach by instructing their employees to customarily thank and ‘wai’ the shopper upon purchase of goods, the majority of consumers are uninterested. In the markets, however, there is a more familiar and friendly relationship, which allows the merchants to build up good rapport with their patrons. The markets that have harnessed these qualities and sell historical, cultural or artistic goods not found at the supermarkets are the markets that have survived. The researchers thus deemed it necessary to examine the factors and conditions of the fall, existence and restoration of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River in order to create a lasting model of development and enable the markets to combine their past identity with adaptations to current local and social contexts. A revival of history, culture, customs and economy based on the local wisdom of Thai people is also supported by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand.

2. Research Aims

This research, *the fall, existence and restoration model of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River*, had four primary aims: a) to study and synthesize the history and background of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River until the present day; b) to study the factors and conditions causing community bazaars along the Tha Chin

River to deteriorate; c) to study the factors and conditions causing community bazaars along the Tha Chin River to continue and be restored; d) to present a model of restoration that is suitable for the continuation of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River.

3. Research Methodology

This study, *the fall, existence and restoration model of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River*, is a qualitative research and was conducted over a period of two years and ten months, from October 2008 until August 2011.

3.1 Content

The content of this research covered the factors and conditions causing community bazaars along the Tha Chin River to deteriorate and the factors and conditions that enabled a number of the markets to continue and undergo successful restoration programs. These factors were examined to determine a model of restoration that is suitable for the continuation and development of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River. The generation of a model required cultural understanding and, as such, the researchers were required to have a working knowledge of current cultural concepts. This research also analyzes the history and background of the markets alongside the Tha Chin River, the identity and unique selling points of the markets and internal and external factors influencing the development of the markets.

3.2 Research Area

Even though the Tha Chin River stretches for over three hundred kilometers, through four Thai provinces (Chainat, Suphanburi, Nakhon Pathom and Samut Sakhon, the researchers elected to center their investigation on the stretch of water in Suphanburi Province. Upon reading related documentary study, the research team discovered that for a length of one-hundred and sixty kilometers, from the northernmost district in Suphanburi, Doem Bang Nang Buat, to the southernmost district, Song Phi Nong, there are sixteen markets along the banks of the Tha Chin River. These markets are only separated by about ten kilometers each, leading the research team to focus their inquiry on the high concentration of riverside bazaars in this Province. The markets by name from North to South are Tha Chang Market, Nang Buat Market, Baan Teung Market, Baan Kwak Market, Samchuk Market, Si Prachan Market, Baan Krang Market, Pothi Praya Market, Kao Hong Market, Bang Pla Ma Market, Kaw Wang Market, Bang Maemai Market, Bang Sakae Market, Baan Kum Market, Bang Sam Market and Bang Saw Market. This is not including Suphanburi Market.

It is possible to divide these markets into three distinct groups, which are markets that have deteriorated, markets that continue to trade and markets undergoing restoration (Table 1).

Table 1. The state of riverside bazaars along the Tha Chin River in Suphanburi Province

The state of riverside bazaars along the Tha Chin River in Suphanburi Province	
Deteriorated Markets (12)	Tha Chang Market, Nang Buat Market, Baan Teung Market, Baan Kwak Market, Baan Krang Market, Bang Pla Ma Market, Kaw Wang Market, Bang Maemai, Bang Sakae Market, Baan Kum Market*, Bang Sam Market and Bang Saw Market * Baan Kum Market has closed trade and is no longer functional.
Existing Markets (2)	Samchuk Market and Pothi Praya Market
Markets Undergoing Restoration (2)	Si Prachan Market and Kao Hong Market

3.3 Research Population

The research population was selected in four groups according to the four aims of the research and the context of each market. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a group of sixteen community leaders in each market area to be key informants. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select twenty-eight senior members of the markets and their communities as casual informants. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select nine traders as general informants for the research. Accidental sampling was used to select groups of customers from the existing markets and those markets undergoing restoration, namely

Samchuk Market, Pothi Praya Market, Si Prachan Market and Kao Hong Market.

3.4 Research Tools

The data for this research was collected by documentary analysis and field research. A number of research tools were used for data collection. The research tools included survey, questionnaire, participant and non-participant observation, field notes, photographs and sound recordings.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data was validated using methodological triangulation according to the steps outlined by Supang Jantawanit (1999). If anomalies were discovered in the research data, the researcher returned to the field to collect further evidence. Data was analyzed using an analytic induction method and is here presented as a descriptive analysis.

4. Research Results

4.1 The History and Background of Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River Until the Present Day

For a length of one-hundred and sixty kilometers, from the northernmost district in Suphanburi, Doem Bang Nang Buat, to the southernmost district, Song Phi Nong, there are sixteen markets along the banks of the Tha Chin River. On both sides of the river, the markets flourished and thrived during the period when the river was used as the primary method of communication and transport, over one-hundred years ago. The markets were born out of trade between communities and also acted as community docks. The main products found at the markets were agricultural goods such as rice, tamarind paste and charcoal that the local people would come to sell and exchange with product from other areas, including dried chilies, coconuts and sugar. Other products were also found at the markets that had come from Bangkok, including soap, toothpaste and cloth. The method of sale was called *ka kraai, ka man* and meant that traders did not use any promotions to attract business and take customers from their fellow merchants.

4.2 The Factors and Conditions Causing Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River to Deteriorate

The biggest external factor and condition causing bazaars along the Tha Chin River to deteriorate was the changing face of communication and transport. Originally, the markets were established to attract trade from the waters of the river and the agricultural and industrial merchants that passed through Suphanburi. As time passed, river transport lost its importance with the increase in fast and convenient land transport. Additionally, bridge construction connecting the two sides of the river meant that communities became less reliant on the goods from one market or one trader and could travel further afield to buy their products.

The increase of market fairs also caused the river bazaar trade to decrease. The market fairs were previously held once a week but increased in frequency due to popularity and sponsorship from institutions in the local area. This competition had an influence on river market businesses and, coupled with the establishment of convenience stores and supermarkets, the popularity of the Tha Chin bazaars began to wane. This was not helped by the lack of planning and policy-making from local leaders into the conservation and restoration of the existing markets, as well as central government policies of relocation. It was customary in the past for government officials to visit the markets after their day of work. However, with the focus of transportation shifting to the land, so the government institutions relocated to be near the roads. This official who moved with them thus had no convenient access to the markets they once worked next to and after a hard day's work would return home rather than travel to the market. Additionally, the establishment of new communities around the road links led to the construction of more convenience stores to compete with the markets.

Internally, there is a lack of unity and understanding between market members, causing conflict. One group of traders wishes to restore the markets to their previous state, while another group sees such a transition as impossible and wishes to continue in the current state. There is a lack of participation and effort towards restoration and development of the markets and if just one group lacks the energy to drive the project then there will be an overall lack of propulsion. These problems have also caused the traders to abandon the markets and find work elsewhere.

4.3 The Factors and Conditions Causing Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River to Continue and Be Restored

The two markets that are in a continued state of existence and have been successfully restored are Samchuk Market and Pothi Praya Market. These two markets differ as Samchuk is where people buy food to eat, items to use and generally spend the day visiting. Pothi Praya is reserved for the sale of fresh produce and prepared food.

The main external factor for the success of these markets is sponsorship from organizations outside the community that participate, exchange knowledge, study the markets, creatively intervene and allow for

participation between communities, homes, temples and schools so that there is a local curriculum with the community at its center.

Internally, the primary factor for the success of development and restoration is member participation in terms of product sale and location. This helps retain existing customers and generates interest for new customers whose objectives of visiting the markets has changed from purely purchasing to tourism and study of community culture and history. Another factor is the policy-making from the local community leaders and the priorities they place on development and conservation.

4.4 A Model of Restoration That Is Suitable for the Continuation of Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River

The model of restoration that is suitable for the continuation of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River was developed by taking into consideration the local economy, existing community structures and suggestions of related personnel. The model consisted of 4 steps: a) analyzing self-potential and sharing the vision of the bazaar; b) analyzing purchaser's needs; c) creating networks of knowledge exchange both inside and outside the community; d) having action plan with clear and strict implementation of the plan and conducting formative assessment at certain times to provide data for adaptation and development (Figure 2).

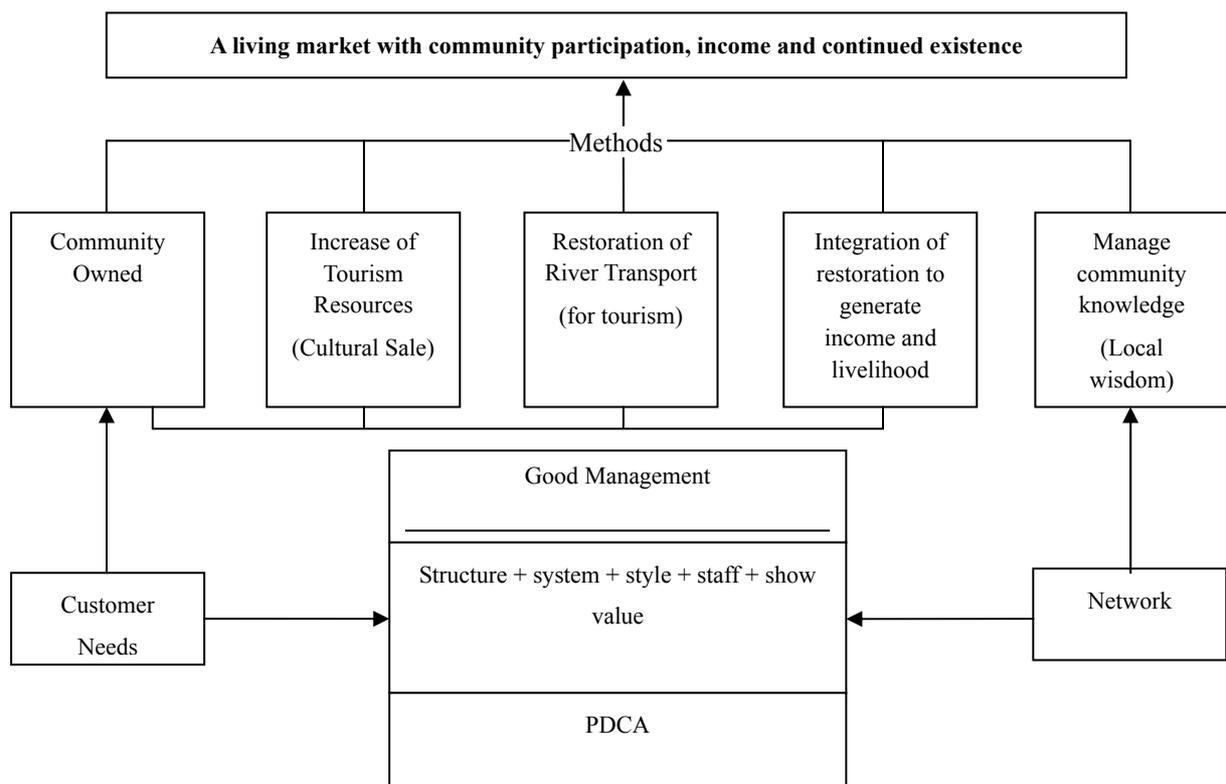


Figure 2. A model of restoration that is suitable for the continuation of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River

5. Discussion

5.1 Adaptation of Community Markets

This research found that if the markets were able to adapt to the cultural, economic and social contexts of their surroundings, they were able to continue. This is in agreement with the cultural ecology studies of Julian Steward. Steward analyzed human adaptation in the face of cultural and social changes and identified the *cultural core* as integral to the success of this adaptation. The cultural core, as presented by Steward is the set of customs and processes that are related to everyday life and the local economy (Steward, 1972). This theory necessitated the understanding of new technology or the advantageous use of the surrounding environment in order to adapt.

The research of Biral into the Balikesir region of Turkey indicated that the most prominent characteristic of trade and the market was the relationship between town structures and social structures. Biral found that the role of the markets was changing and they were losing importance as meeting places for the population. In the face of this

decline, Biral concluded that adaptation must be made in response to social demands and the relationship between the town and society. The markets must build paths and nodes for people to easily connect. The new roads will enable the people to access the markets easily. There must also be designated pedestrianized zones for people to walk safely and easily. The whole area of the market must be convenient for the consumer (Biral, 2008). By way of confirming this viewpoint, Benja Janthorn studied the development of Don Wai Market in Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province to create a cultural tourist attraction through community participation. The research found that Don Wai Market was prepared to be a tourist attraction due to its strong community participation, established facilities and conveniences, and the ease of access to the market. There was also found to be administration and management by local people and that there were three areas for the market to be developed: a) higher conveniences and the improvement of inadequate tourist facilities; b) education of locals in administration, service and reception of tourists; c) suitable management of the surrounding environment for a tourist attraction.

5.2 The Value of Community Markets

The markets are not only places of buying and selling but are also places where the community live and connect to one another, building relationships and bonds. The Catholic Education Council of Thailand conducted a study on behalf of The Catholic Organization for Joint Financing of Development Programmes (CEBEMO) of the Netherlands into the factors and causes of continued community existence in Chiang Mai. Their research highlighted three factors: a) people must live in the community; b) there must be relationships between members of the community that are helpful to that community; c) there must be community organizations that are responsible for helping the community (1990).

This research corresponds to the work of Sakkarin Saepoo, Nattawut Assawakowitwong and Montawee Jirawattawee (2007) in the area surrounding the Samchuk 100 Year Market. They discovered that the mechanism helping the conservation and restoration of the market was the participation of market members and local and provincial government organizations. Additionally, Pornsiri Gongnuan (2009) found that the tourist resources at Khlong Suan 100-Year Market, Samut Prakarn Province could be divided into three groups: a) natural tourist resources; b) historical and religious tourist resources; c) cultural tourist resources. There were found to be three groups responsible for the conservation of the market, which were the local government, the local people and the tourists themselves.

5.3 Integration and Combination between Existing Social Culture and New Culture

The reason for the success of Samchuk 100-Year Market among others is its promotion as a living museum that integrates the history of the area for the tourist to experience. This is also in line with the policy of the 2007 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand that stated the government must support and sponsor projects in line with self-sufficient economic policy on the basis of culture, customs and values of the Thai people and local community. There was also emphasis on the conservation, promotion and use of local and traditional Thai wisdom.

5.4 Development According to Individual Capacity

Pothi Praya and Samchuk Markets are the examples of identifying individual ability and potential and using it to further develop. The Pothi Praya Market has made use of its surrounding community and the local agricultural occupations to become a center for fresh foodstuffs and agricultural produce, while Samchuk has utilized its social and cultural history to draw in tourists. These are prime examples of how a model of restoration that is suitable for the continuation of community bazaars along the Tha Chin River can be successful and ensure the continued existence of this priceless community heritage for the future generations of Suphanburi Province.

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