

ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่ของชุมชนละแวกบ้าน ในเขตเมืองประวัติศาสตร์เชียงใหม่

A ‘Sense of Place’ of the Neighbourhoods in Historic Cities: The Case of Chiang Mai, Thailand

ปรานอม ตันสุขานันท์* และ วิทยา ดวงธิมา**

Pranom Tansukanuna and Wittaya Daungthima

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้เป็นส่วนแรกของชุดโครงการวิจัยเกี่ยวกับ ความแตกต่างของ “ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่” โดยนักออกแบบ-นักวางผังเมือง กับประชาชนคนท้องถิ่น เนื่องจาก “ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่” นับว่าเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญในการออกแบบและวางผังเมือง แต่บริบทของกระบวนการออกแบบและวางผังเมืองโดยภาครัฐของไทย มักไม่ให้ความสำคัญกับประสบการณ์ และ “ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่” ที่เกิดจากคนท้องถิ่น

บทความนี้เน้นที่การตรวจสอบชุมชนละแวกบ้านในเมืองประวัติศาสตร์เชียงใหม่ ทางภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย การศึกษาได้ใช้วิธีการของ Punter (1991) ในการสำรวจโดยนักวิจัยในฐานะนักออกแบบและวางผังเมืองท้องถิ่นเพื่อขีดขอบเขตและสะท้อนลักษณะเฉพาะของชุมชนละแวกบ้านในเขตพื้นที่ศึกษา ปัจจัยที่ใช้ในการตัดสินใจสามประการได้แก่ กิจกรรม (Activities) องค์ประกอบทางกายภาพ (Physical Attributes) และความหมาย (Meanings) การศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่า การเปลี่ยนแปลงองค์ประกอบทางกายภาพย่อมมีผลต่อกิจกรรมที่สามารถเกิดขึ้นในพื้นที่ได้ และส่งผลต่อความหมายของพื้นที่นั้นที่มีต่อคนด้วย นอกจากนี้กลุ่มคนที่อยู่บนพื้นที่ใดๆ ยังมีส่วนในการกำหนด “ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่” ของสถานที่นั้นๆ ด้วย ดังนั้นนอกจากกิจกรรม ลักษณะเฉพาะทางกายภาพ และความหมายของชุมชนละแวกบ้านจะมีความสำคัญแล้ว การคงอยู่ของผู้คนในชุมชนเหล่านั้นก็นับเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญต่อลักษณะเฉพาะทางประวัติศาสตร์ของเมือง อันจะนำไปสู่ “ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่” ที่มีความหมาย และเมืองประวัติศาสตร์ที่ยั่งยืนต่อไป

ABSTRACT

This paper is an introductory part of a serial research on the differences between the locals’ and planners’ ‘senses of place’. ‘Place’ is viewed as one of the significant issues in the design and planning of cities but the local residents’ experiences and points of views have not always been

* Associate Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
E-mail: kaipranom@yahoo.com, pranom.t@cmu.ac.th.

** Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design, Maejo University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
E-mail: w.daungthima@gmail.com

of interest in the bureaucracy planning process in the Thai context.

The paper focuses on the investigation of neighbourhoods in the historic city of Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Adopting the components of a ‘sense of place’ by Punter (1991): activities, physical attributes and meanings, it reveals the neighbourhood boundaries in the study area, at this stage, in the views of the researchers as local urban designers and planners. The paper also elucidates the past and present neighbourhoods characteristics. It suggests that, on the one hand, the changed settings has a strong influence on the types of possible activities and eventually lead to the different place meanings, on the other hand different groups of people also affect a ‘sense of each place’. Thus, not only the physical settings, activities and meaning of the neighbourhoods are important but also the existence of the local residents are vital for the historic characteristics leading to the real essence of place and a ‘sustainable’ historic city.

คำสำคัญ: เมืองประวัติศาสตร์, ความรู้สึกเป็นสถานที่, ลักษณะเฉพาะของชุมชนละแวกบ้าน เชียงใหม่

Keywords: Historic City, Sense of Place, Neighbourhood Characteristics, Chiang Mai

Introduction

Cities are said to be the greatest creation of human civilisation. They play an important part in general human orientation and experience (see Mumford 1997, Jacobs 1961, Whyte 1980, Gehl 1996, etc.). Cities, like all social reality, are historical products, not only in their physical materiality but also in their cultural meaning (Castells 1983: 302 cited from Askew 2002: 3). And it is this physical materiality and cultural meaning that brings cities to become the identity of a place.

It is just to say that places in cities are significant for human experience, identity and cultural meaning. For Schulz (1980: 6-15), place is of great significance for the existence of the human-being in terms of orientation and identity. Orum and Chen (2003) also point out that a sense of place is essential, especially for a city, as it is an emotional and mental bond for its people with different places in the city. Furthermore, for Montgomery (1998: 96), the notion of urban quality is bound up in the social, psychological and cultural dimensions of place. Thus, it is necessary to investigate and maintaining a ‘sense of place’ in historic cities.

Nevertheless, in the Thai context, during the past decades the bureaucratic planning process has not always been interested in finding nor maintaining the essence of a ‘sense of place’ in historic cities. Though having designated ‘conservation areas’, many other regulations have not been considered to promote a sense of that place, both in terms of physical features as well as activities and functions. Thus, historic cities lost their meanings for their people. For Chiang Mai, without the strong protests of its citizens, streets in historic neighbourhoods, i.e. Wat Ket, the square city wall, etc., would have been widened by the new comprehensive plan. Another painful truth for

conservationists in Chiang Mai is that there is no height limitation for buildings in the area between the city wall (conservation area with 12 metres building height limitation) and Wat Ket neighbourhood (reserve for residential area with 9 metres building height limitation). Road width in historic area and building height are ones of the most significant physical features contribute to a historic 'sense of place'. There are countless of similar examples elsewhere in the country.

This paper argues that a 'sense of place' creating in a historic city - here, the case being that of Chiang Mai, by historic neighbourhood characteristics together with the presence of the local resident, is vital for the design and planning of the city for a more liveable and sustainable future.

Starting with the outlining of the concept of 'a sense of place', the paper proceeds to give a brief historical background of Chiang Mai City and its context. This is to give some ideas of the characters that pass on to the present day. It then moves to the identification of and discussion on urban neighbourhood and district characteristics as urban places. The paper ends up with conclusions and lessons learned for other medium-sized multifunctional historic cities. Hopefully, this adds the notion of 'place', which derives from the subtle neighbourhood characteristics, to the design and planning of historic cities, especially for developing countries where the challenge to change is the most extreme.

Theoretical Background

This section tries to clarify the major concept used in the study, a 'sense of place'. It covers the ideas associated with a 'sense of place' and the components of a sense of place. These are to define 'places' as neighbourhoods and districts in the study area.

A 'sense of place'

A large number of fields used the concept of place in their studies. Orum and Chen (2003) believe that 'place' is the most fundamental social science of cities and should be the major concept to analyse cities and regions. According to them, the analysis should also incorporate how a place is constructed and the meaning of the place to its people. For Montgomery (1998: 96), a 'sense of place' contributes to the notion of urban quality. In addition, the significance of 'place' is proved by modern tourism that experiencing different places is a major human interest (Schulz 1980: 18).

'Place' is defined differently with elaborateness and complexity. However, almost all definitions share two major elements: geographic entity and meaning (Massey and Jess, eds., 2002). For Schulz (1980: 5), a 'place' is a space with distinct characteristics. Moreover, the meaning is what differentiates a mere geographic location from a 'place' (Amdur & Pliouchtch 2009: 148).

Lukermann (1964), sees concepts about place as consisting of location, elements of nature and culture, interconnectedness, localisation, emergence and becoming, and meaning (Relph 1976: 2-4). He sees a 'place' as a complex entity, a mixture of the past and the on-going nature and culture. (Massey 2005: 131)

Geographers have emphasized that place is created by people, both as individuals and in groups. It is infused with meaning and feeling (Gillian Rose in Massey and Jess, eds., 2002: 88). 'Place' is also viewed in an open-global sense with a socio-cultural aspect and as a continuous process (Massey 2005: 131). All places are connected with flows of people and goods. These flows of people are associated with the identity of place as Giddiness (1995) terms 'space-time routinisation', the social interactions of an individual through the daily routine in different 'locales'.

Interestingly, Massey (2005: 131) suggests that 'place' can be seen as 'meeting place', identifying it as a locus of activities and social relations of specific groups of people. Moreover, this process of events in place can be newly reconstructed from new arrivals bringing a new situation on the place at all time. In other words, place is always under construction (Massey and Jess eds 2000: 61-62).

In conclusion, the qualitative total phenomenon of the comprehensive atmosphere and the concrete things of space-defining elements constitute many meaningful 'places' in cities. Cities, as places, are interconnected, unfixed and pluralised of integrated phenomena or spatio-temporal events.

The theoretical framework of this research is setting up within the arena of the above mention concepts to see how the historic city of Chiang Mai is constructed through different places.

Components of a 'sense of place'

Many scholars have laid down the principles of place making. In summary, the identity or the 'spirit of place' can be distinguished through three main factors: (1) physical features and appearances; (2) observable activities and functions; and (3) users factors of memory, image, meanings and symbols (see, for example Schulz 1980, Garnham 1985, Relph 1976, Canter 1977 and Punter 1991).

Physical features and appearances, is the basic factor in creating the uniqueness of different places. This includes built forms, townscape, landscape as well as furnitures, locations and the relations between these components (see Figure 1). Physical features or the materiality of cities is of the essence for many scholars, especially urban designers (Bacon 1978, Cullen 1995, Kostof 1999, Day 1990, etc.). It is viewed as a tool to make distinction between 'places' (i.e. Relph, 1976), as well as the expression of selves and group identity (Rapoport 1990: 15).

Observable activities and functions is another significant factor creating a sense of place. Interactions between people and the place, as well as how cultural institutions in the society react to the place and how they use it, create a different sense of each place. It could be termed as land uses, pedestrian flows, behaviour patterns, noises and smells, as well as vehicle flows (Punter 1991; see Figure 1). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, 'place' can be seen as 'meeting place', identifying it as a locus of activities and social relations of specific groups of people. Thus, observable activities and functions is a part of the spatio-temporal social reproduction that creates a 'place'.

Memory, image, meanings and symbols are the abstract conception thoughts in creating place. These are the results from the intentions and experience of human-beings and they are more complex than the others. In truth, a place created through memory and meaning is also associated with physical characteristics as well as activities and functions of the place, but with the mental process of users in interpreting and memorisation. The image of a place is a set of feelings and impressions about that place (Spencer & Dixon 1983 cited from Montgomery 1998: 100). It is created based partly on individuals' values, beliefs and ideas, also on the societal values, beliefs and ideas. In other words, it is created from an amalgamated cognition and perception as well as the individual, group and cultural 'personality'.

These factors are used as major criteria, for researchers, to identify the different neighbourhoods and districts of the historic city of Chiang Mai.

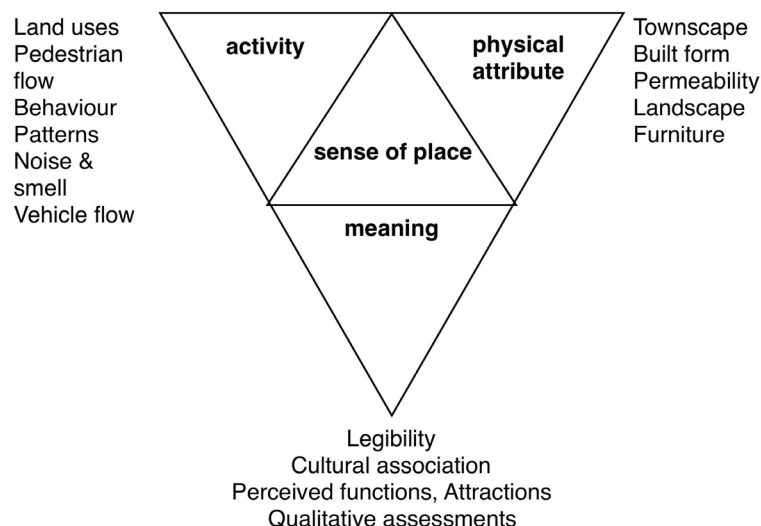


Figure 1 Components of a sense of place
(source: Punter 1991)

Methodology: Defining ‘place’, defining neighbourhood

Focusing on the smallest local unit of ‘place’ differentiate by *physical features and appearances, observable activities and functions as well as memory, image, meanings and symbols*, the boundaries of places in the name of neighbourhoods in the present days are drawn. Continuous neighbourhood characteristics are then grouped to bring about the different districts of the city. The neighbourhood characteristic in the past is also studied through the historical settlement analysis to give the whole picture of the areas as it is believed that no city study would be complete without studying the history of it (Rykwert, 1976).

The judgement by researchers, as long-term residents, is made by moving through most, if not all, urban spaces to identify neighbourhoods and districts of the city. It is believed that moving through urban spaces is one mode of experiencing place and the city and people sensorially and reflectively interact with the urban environment while moving through urban spaces. This leads to a firmer relationship between people and the places (Wunderlich 2008: 125). Additionally, the character of a ‘place’ is determined by how things are and the only way to fully grasp the ‘spirit of the place’ is by investigation the basis of the concrete phenomena of our everyday life-world. For Schulz (1980: 7), the approach to defining a ‘place’ by ‘returning to things’ of a life-world or daily environment is predominantly important. Askew (2002: 5) also confirms that urban experience needs to be explored through detailed locality-focused field research focusing on varied people-space-environment, as it is grounded in the sociocultural processes and practices.

The detailed locality-focused field research was conducted in two periods; during the periods from June to September 2011 and March to June 2012. In doing this, it is fair to say that the gap between the points of view from the ‘height of tower’ of architects or designers is reduced because they come to the street level themselves.

In the next section, the paper will give a brief picture of Chiang Mai and its context for a better understanding of the places. It then reveals findings on the neighbourhoods’ and the city’s characteristics. The paper ends with conclusions and suggestions for other medium-sized multifunctional historic cities, especially for developing countries.

An overview of the case: Chiang Mai and its context

History

Lying in the inland Chiang Mai-Lampoon basin (Figure 2), Chiang Mai is a living historic city in the north of Thailand, renowned for its natural beauty and cultural assets. Founded in 1296 by King Mungrai, Chiang Mai became the centre of Lanna Kingdom¹, a united northern principality since.

Chiang Mai became a vassal of Bangkok after Siam and Lanna conquered the Burmese in the liberation war in 1782. Afterwards, the country turned into a more centralised nation during the

¹ **Lanna** is the name of a conglomerate of northern Siam principalities, mostly under the leadership of Chiang Mai. It covered the area of modern northern Thailand and extended its influence far into the neighbouring regions. Its golden period was over two and a half centuries from the late thirteenth to the mid sixteenth century AD.

'modern Siam' age between 1851A.D. and 1910 A.D. (Wyatt 1982: 181-192 and Aasen 1998: 133). In 1939 the country changed its name to Thailand, it then became strongly centralised. Chiang Mai which was once a unique and flourishing culture, is now developing into a mere province within a Thai nation-state (Davis 1984: 13). After the colonial era, Lanna was pushed into the mainstream of the internationalisation. Chiang Mai is becoming a fragmented living historic city of many cultures, religions and groups of people. The face of Chiang Mai is challenged in the post-modernisation age.



Figure 2 The Location of Chiang Mai without the country boundaries
(source: Penths, 1994)

The city's profile

Chiang Mai, the second city of the country after only Bangkok, is the primate city of the north, what with it being the centre of administration, economic activities, education, communication and also health services. Besides, the city is one of the major tourist attractions of the country. Chiang Mai is also the preferred place of stay for long term foreign residents, for example, Europeans, Americans, Japanese etc. Additionally, it is also the destination of choice for foreign labourers, especially the Tai people from Myanmar.

During the past decades, Chiang Mai has witnessed an astonishingly rapid growth from both governmental and non-governmental capitals. Mega projects, new developments, shopping malls, and high rises sprang up all over the city. This situation was at its peak during 2011-2013, before the Chiang Mai comprehensive plan was introduced in May 2014 after a vacuum of law for almost 7 years. Chiang Mai University, at the foot of Suthep Mountain, is one of the major attractions in

this area, influencing and affecting much of the city's structures and land-use patterns as regard the surrounding area (see Figure 3 and 4).

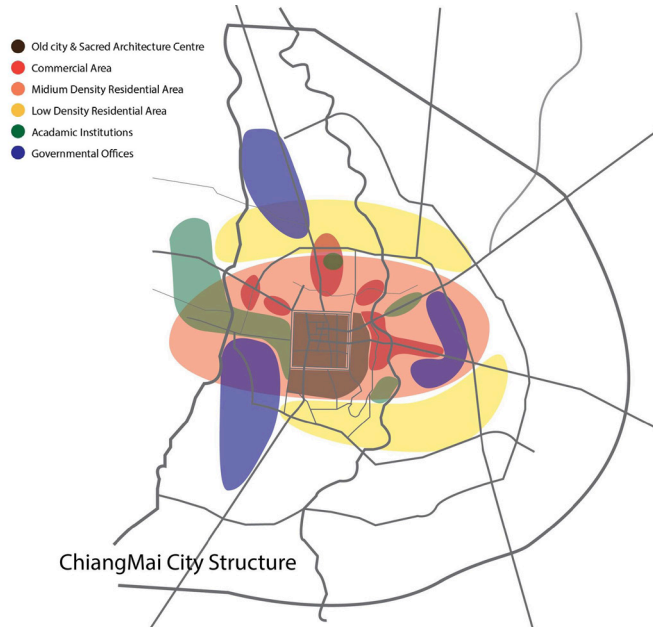


Figure 3 Chiang Mai city structure
(drawn by: Thanvimon Misanuch)

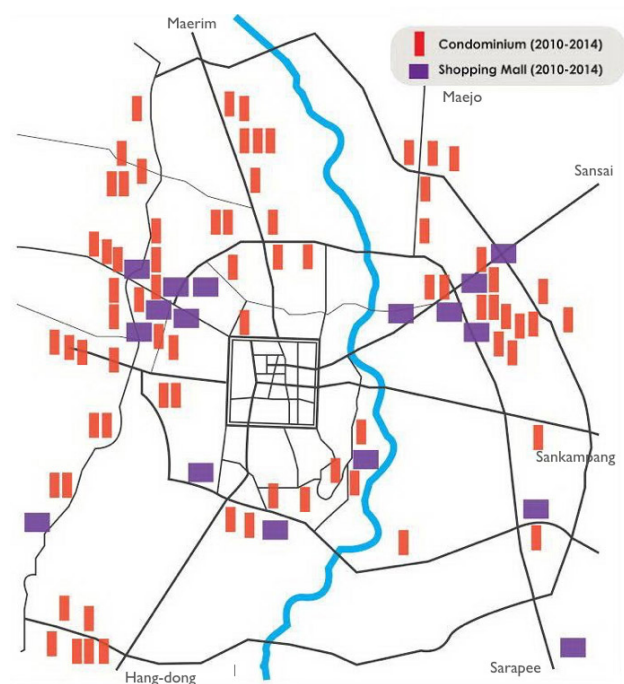


Figure 4 Chiang Mai city new projects during the 'no comprehensive plan' period (2007-2014)
(drawn by: Thanvimon Misanuch)

Findings: Neighbourhoods' characteristics

Neighbourhoods in the past

This section gives a concise picture of the characters of the Chiang Mai's neighbourhoods in the past, considering that this, more or less, is passing to the present characters. The characteristics of Chiang Mai's neighbourhoods are described in association with its stages in history from the ancient times to the city establishment stage, and from the revival of the city after the war with the Burmese to the modern Chiang Mai after the country changed its name to Thailand (Figure 6).

The city's neighbourhoods and districts in the first stage were constructed through the 'macro structure' of religious beliefs and the kings' acts. As a result, the early city was clearly designated as follows: the inner city walls were for the kings and his fellowships and the outer city walls were for the artisans, while the areas out of the city walls were for lay persons and agriculturalists (Figure 7). It is interesting to see a number of small walled areas; Wieng Suan Dok, Wieng Jed Lin and Wieng Bua, were located outside the city walls, a result of the early defensive system (Figure 5).

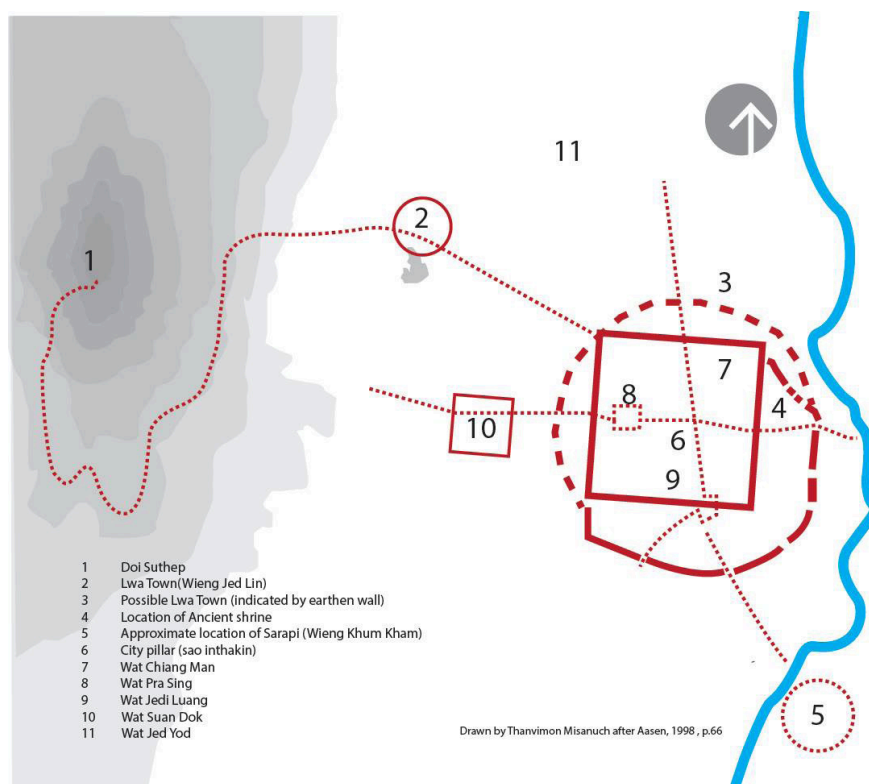


Figure 5 The early map of Chiang Mai
(source: drawn after Aasen, 1998 by: Thanvimon Misanuch)

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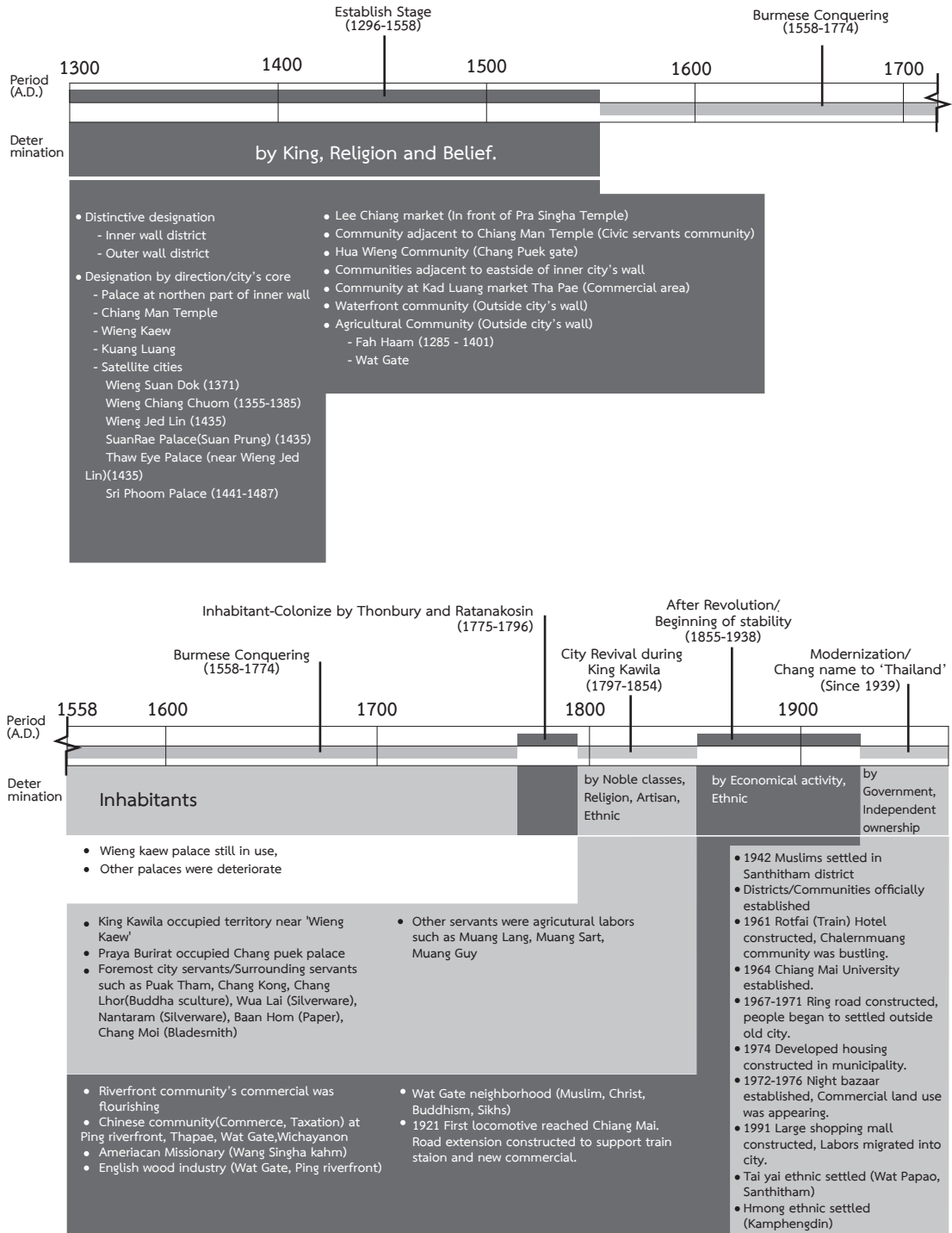


Figure 6 Definers of Chiang Mai's neighbourhood's characteristics in history
(drawn by: Nuttasit Srinurak for this study)

There was little concrete evidence showing how the areas of Chiang Mai were functioned during the Burmese conquest. However, it is most likely that it was the same as that during the previous stage. The city was empty for almost 30 years during the war. After the conquest of King Kawila and his alliance, Siam. Chiang Mai city revived again in 1797 (Aasen, 1998). During the revival stage, the city neighbourhoods and districts were still being constructed through the 'macro structure', as in the previous stage. Furthermore, ethnic groups and social status, that is, craftsmanship or career structure, were also significant factors. Figure 8 shows the locations of the different craft communities most of which were located in the outer city wall area.

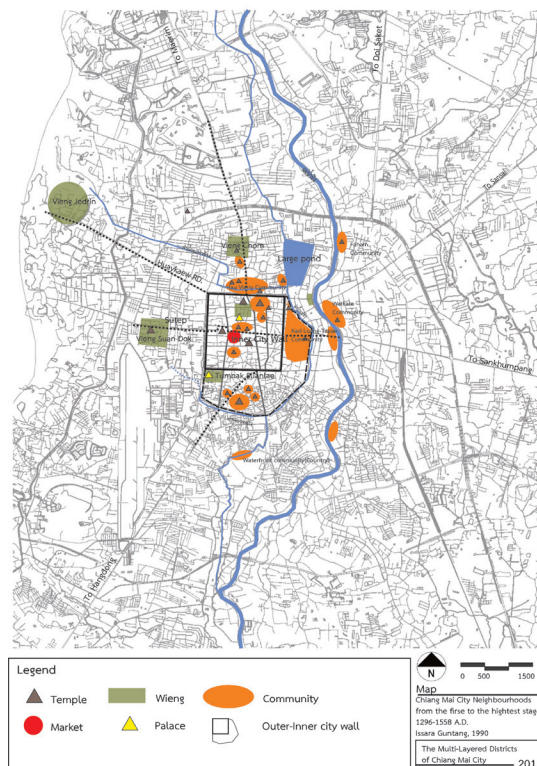


Figure 7 Chiang Mai city neighbourhoods from the first to the greatest stages
 (source: drawn after Isara, 1990)

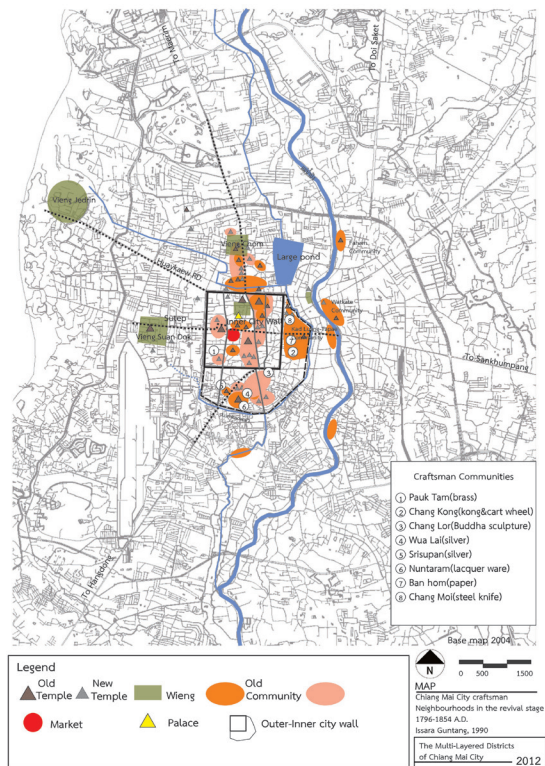


Figure 8 Chiang Mai city craftsman neighbourhoods in the revival stage
 (source: drawn after Isara, 1990)

During the modern era of Siam after the dramatic political change (1855-1939, from King Rama the V to the VII), the city started to get settled and was revived through various economic activities. Many groups of foreigners entered and resided in Chiang Mai. In fear of the outsiders, the rulers of Chiang Mai designated foreign residences outside the city walls (Saraswadee Ongsakul, 2014). The neighbourhoods and districts at this stage were constructed in proportion to not only the 'macro structure' of religious beliefs and the kings' acts, but also ethnic groups and economic activities.

Figure 9 shows that there were Chinese communities along the Ping River: Wat Ket, Wang Sing Kam and Chang Moi-Kad Luang-Thapae, the American Missionary communities to the east of the Ping River - adjacent to the Chinese community of Wat Ket, as well as the British and the British colonies to the south of the outer areas.

These pictures show the divisions of groups of people in the old city. However, it would be just to say that proximity among different groups of people is the distinct characteristic of the city as a whole. The city has truly been a mixture of ethnicities, cultures and identities for a long time.

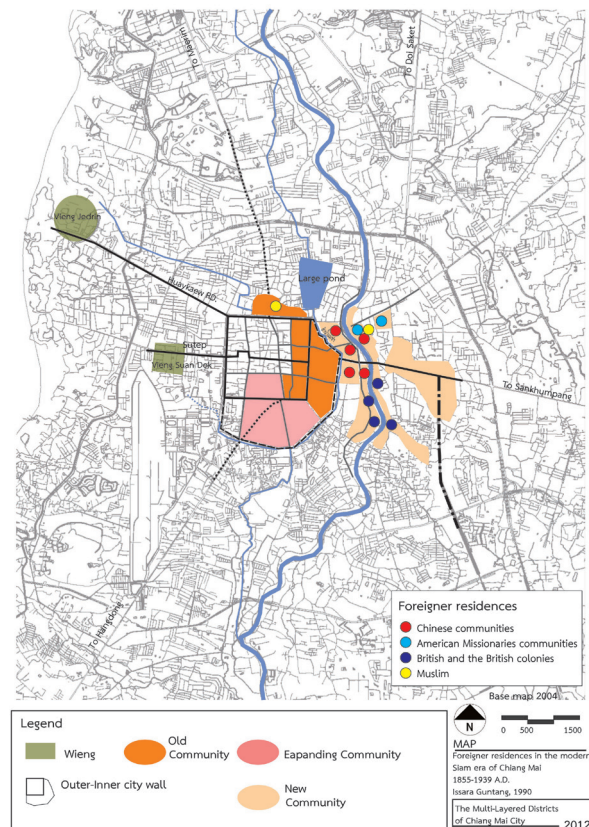


Figure 9 Foreigners' residences during the modern Siam era of Chiang Mai
(source: drawn after Isara, 1990)

Neighbourhoods and districts at present

Staying in Chiang Mai as local resident for decades as well as experiencing by moving through almost all urban spaces in the study area to identify places of the city, the researchers found out that Chiang Mai consists of many small neighbourhoods, as other living historic cities. There are as many as over a hundred neighbourhoods in the study area, when combining similar characteristics neighbourhoods, there are fourteen districts (Figure 10).

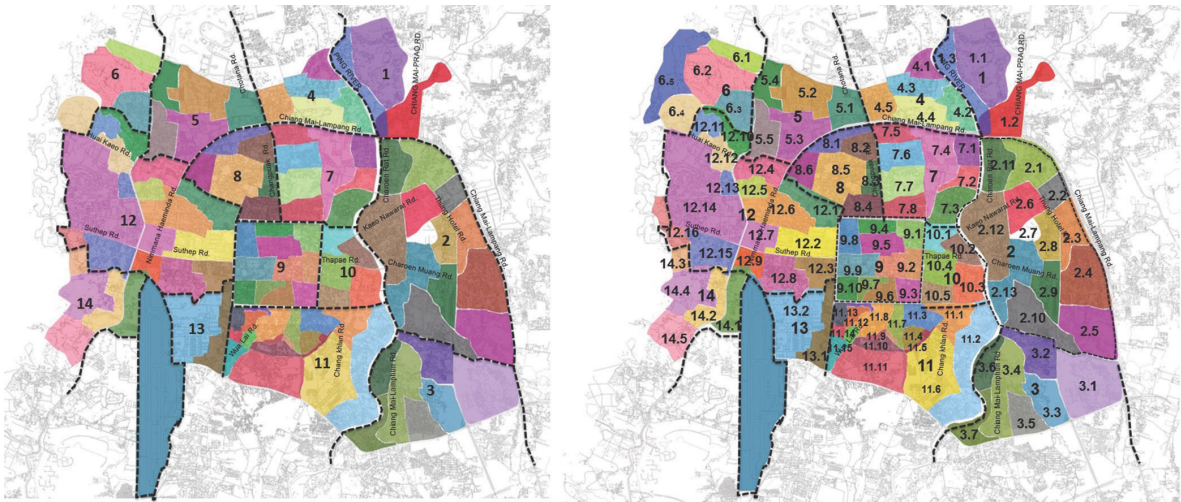


Figure 10 Chiang Mai's neighbourhoods and districts
(source: from the survey)

Three districts are located to the east of the Ping River: (1) Langka-Kajao, (2) Wat Ket-Faham-San Pa Koi and (3) Baan Den-Nong Hoi, while eleven districts are located to the west of the river where most historic elements are located. These eleven districts were significant in the history of Chiang Mai in different times, also had different roles for the city. For example; the districts at the heart of the historic area - (9) the inner city wall and (10) Chang Moi-Kad Luang-Thapae - were very important in the past and have maintain their importance up till now, thus, they have strong historic characters; (11) Chang Klan - Pra Too Chiang Mai - Suan Prung is located in the districts in the significant directions of the city, although locating in the outer city wall; (8) Santitham and (7) Wang Sing Kam-Pa Pang-Wittayalai Kru to the north of the old city - also has historic characters, though in a lower degree than the first group; and last but not least, the former further afield *sacred forest* districts - (12) Chiang Mai University, (5) Jed Yod-Chiang Kian and (6) Wieng Jed Lin - do not have historic characters except in some old neighbourhoods, because they were sacred greenery of the city and had a lot of rooms for new developments. At present, the districts have been heavily bombarded with high rises (comparing to the original skyline of the city) because the need to stay in the area is high since they are near Chiang Mai University and Ratchamongkol Lanna University where many thousands of students reside in the area. They are also a location for having views to Suthep Mountain, one of the very best views of Chiang Mai, staying in theses districts has become a privilege.

The east of the Ping River, only some neighbourhoods near the river in the (2) Wat Ket-Faham-Sanpakoi that have historic characters and are a part of the historic city at present, i.e. Wat Ket (2.12), Faham (2.11) and Sanpakoi; the other neighbourhoods further from the river have been developed during the 60s after the modernisation era of the country, i.e. the Railway Station

neighbourhood (2.9), the Kawila Camp (2.10). In addition, some other traditional neighbourhoods are Langka-Kajao (1.2), Tasatoi (2.13), Wat Muang Kai (3.2) and Wat Muang Sart Noi - Muang Sart Luang (3.3), while the neighbourhoods near the Super-Highway Road are mostly new developed.

It should be noted at this point that Chiang Mai, as other living historic cities (including London - Ling & Johnson, 1943), is gradually evolved. It consists of many small traditional neighbourhoods and during the past decades, developments have been filling up vacant plots of land between those old communities. The city has also grown outwards the fringes and the near by districts. Not until fairly recently, a lot more undeveloped vacant lands within the city tissues are paid no attention.

The Four Neighbourhood Characteristics

This section will describe a ‘sense of place’ deriving from *physical features and appearances, observable activities and functions*, as well as *memory, image, meanings and symbols* in terms of the districts’ historic characteristics. This leads to four groups of neighbourhoods and districts of the city as follows:

1 Neighbourhoods and districts with very strong historic city characters

As mentioned earlier, neighbourhoods and districts that have very strong historic characters are neighbourhoods in the historic core of Chiang Mai. They are the neighbourhoods within the square city walls (9) and the neighbourhoods in (10) Chang Moi-Kad Luang-Thapae. The area within the square city walls once was a sacred realm itself as the centre of the universe with significant temples and residences for the kings, the nobles and the fellowship. Nowadays, a sense of place of the district is a mixture of historic and institutional with a glimpse of tourism as most significant temples and some of the old residences are still in place, as well as the old street patterns are remained (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Strong historic appearance from significant temples and former noble residences in the old city wall: the former Burirat Palace (a), the City Pillar Pavilion and the ceremony every year in May at Chedi Luang Temple (b,c), and the *Chedi Luang* (d)

(source: authors)

However, some significant places have change their uses to conform with new developments, i.e. the noble residences to museum or governmental schools and offices.

One of the stimulating characteristics is the 'two contrast sense' of the district in which we term '*the world city and neighbourhood juxtaposition*'. On the one hand, the gridiron pattern and larger streets bustling with traffic flows and different groups of people; insiders and outsiders, Thai and foreign, the young and the elderly, as well as residents and tourists create a sense of an energetic historic city (Figure 12). On the other hand, small tranquil winding roads with old houses of the local residents create a sense of the local or traditional neighbourhood (Figure 13). These two senses of place give a pleasant surprise to anyone who experiences the area.



Figure 12 'The World City' : A global brand (a) next to Thapae Gate on normal day (b) and during one Sunday afternoon (c).

(source: authors)



Figure 13 'Local Neighbourhoods': Tranquil small alleys with the local resident houses (a, b and c) and modern shop houses (d) in the old city wall.

(source: authors)

Nevertheless, some parts of the old city wall, especially the eastern part, have been more and more altered their uses for tourists, since the area is so attractive. Many guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, pubs etc. are scattered not only on the main streets, but also in the small alleys of the old city wall. This brings the contest sense of place between the global and the local.

Another very strong historic character district is the area between the old city and the Ping River, the Chang Moi-Kad Luang-Thapae District (10). It covers the northern part of the outer city wall where artisans resided and the area to the east of the wall to the river where the big market - Kad Luang - has been at its heart for a long time. The district has always been mixed with different groups of people; Chinese, Indian, Burmese and the Tai Yuan², infused with different kinds of goods, activities and cultural events. It has also been the old commercial centre of the city, from then until now.

With lots of historic architecture: Buddhist temples and houses of the old elites as well as shophouses, the district is one of the best representations of the historic character of Chiang Mai (Figure 14). However, as many other areas, some new developments, with no caution of the historic skyline, have devalued the historic urban landscape of the city (Figure 15).



Figure 14 Buddhist temples (a and e) and shop houses (b, c) and the Songkran Festival (d) on Thapae Road the representation of the historic character of Chiang Mai city
(source: authors)



Figure 15 The high-rise along the eastern city moat (a and b), near small houses and is higher than the sacred realm (c)
(source: authors)

² Tai Yuan - the northern Thai ethnic group

2 Neighbourhoods and districts with strong historic characters

The neighbourhoods with strong historic characters are the in outer city walls (some neighbourhoods in District 11), as well as some neighbourhoods to the north of the city walls (District 8) and neighbourhoods along the east side of the Ping River (District 2) as shown in Figure 10. These neighbourhoods share the historical development of the city, and some physical appearances are still in place though in a lesser degree than the first group.

Among neighbourhoods in this group, Wat Ket neighbourhood comes at the front in terms of historic character (Figure 16). This is because not only its physical appearances, but also the strong social relation between members of the neighbourhood. Wat Ket is an old community previously taking its role as a commercial centre when the water-based transportation system was prominent. Wat Ket neighbourhood has been mixed with people of different religions: Buddhist, Christian, Sikhism and Islam, for a long time. The citizenship cooperation of the Wat Ket's local residents has made a new history of the city, a few decades ago, for many times. One of the most influential act was a successful protest to change the designated use from the commercial (red colour) to the reserve for residential areas (white strips on yellow colour) and to ban the road widening plans form the present Chiang Mai comprehensive plan declared in 2013. The other neighbourhoods derive their historic characters, again, from the physical appearances of old Buddhist temples, the winding street patterns and small alleys as well as low skylines and the greenery (Figure 17).



Figure 16 The Wat Ket neighbourhood to the west of the Ping River with old shophouses (a, c and d) and the Wat Ket Buddhist Temple (b)

(source: Dararat Thawino)



Figure 17 The Sanpakoi neighbourhood on Chareon Muang main road (c and d) and the small alleys (a and b)

(source: authors)

3 Neighbourhoods and districts with hidden traditional and historic characters

The neighbourhoods in this category are the ones previously in historic or traditional neighbourhoods and the ones with not very many built environments in the areas, the sacred forest to the west of the old city (Figure 18). They lost many of their physical appearances through the old building replacements or the infills of vacant lands with new buildings and uses, inconsequent, affecting the activities and the meanings of the place for its people. The new physical settings are not conformed with the historical characteristics, especially the fine-grain urban fabric and the low skylines. The high rises also block the views to Suthep Mountain, disconnecting the relationship between the people and the sacred mountain.

The old building replacements and the infills of vacant lands are intense in the areas near the central business district or the large magnets of the city, i.e. universities, colleges, schools and hospitals, as Chiang Mai is the centre for education of the north. Many new comers come to the city each year for their further education. This is true, especially for the west side of the city where Chiang Mai University, Ratchamongkol Lanna University and Maharaja Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital are located (Figure 18).



Figure 18 A view from the Maharaja Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital, to the west of the old city, to Suthep Mountain with lots of high-rises and big buildings of condominiums, apartments, shopping centres, etc.

(source: authors)

4 Neighbourhoods and districts with no historic characters

These neighbourhoods are in the outer parts of the city where there were no or very few settlements previously, such as the areas near or beyond the Super Highway Road within the following districts: the (2) District and (3) District - to the east, the (4) District, (5) District, (7) District and the (8) District - to the north as well as the (11) District - to the south of the old city. These also include neighbourhoods within the (13) Airport Plaza and the (14) Mae-hia districts, where traditional neighbourhoods are scattered.

The areas along the Super Highway Road are mostly affected by new developments as the accessibility is high and there are very few limitations for new developments. New small shopping malls, shopping centres and condominiums are also sprung up in the areas. From this and previously observations, researchers suggest that the historic characteristics of Chiang Mai city are confined within the first ring road (the Super Highway). The eastern part of the first ring road could act as a new development centre for Chiang Mai, if it needs one.

Conclusion: a sense of place of a historic city

At the end of the paper, the study draws a conclusion on a 'sense of place' of neighbourhoods and districts of Chiang Mai. It is true for Chiang Mai, as stated by Zakariya et al. (2015: 485), that the changed settings has a strong influence on the types of activities that people can do, which eventually lead to the different place meanings between different groups of people, for example between locals and visitors. Changes on settings or developments should be kept in mind that they will change activities and meanings of those places in historic cities. As a result, will change a sense of place of historic cities. This section ends with the observations on the city real essence of a 'sense of place' as follows:

The making of Chiang Mai neighbourhoods

Both the materiality and non-materiality of place play an integral part in the sense of historic city of Chiang Mai. This materiality that indicates the historic characters are small alleys, low building height or skyline, historic and traditional architecture as well as the greenery of trees and shrubs.

As a living historic city, Chiang Mai is full of religious hubs, especially Buddhist temples, and cultural heritages. According to records, the city has as many as 87 active and 72 abandoned Buddhist temples (Arunrat and Surapol 1993). The 'historical' characteristic is still of the essence today. The natural environment is also one of the significant characteristics of the city. Adjacent to Suthep Mountain and full of greenery within the city, Chiang Mai has been called a 'forest city'. Suthep Temple, on top of Suthep Mountain, has a symbolic meaning not only for the people of Chang Mai, but also for tourists. It adds significance to the mountain and becomes one of the most significant Chiang Mai's landmarks.

Narrow winding and inconsistent roads, together with small and old buildings are also the major physical features of the neighbourhoods in Chiang Mai. These bring 'close acquaintance' with one another as the social characteristic of the place.

Nonetheless, these physical characteristics are in the changing process affecting from the economic pressure and tourism. It seems true that the economic pressure on city development is high. Large and high-rise buildings sprang up all over the city, especially the area to the west of the

old city to Suthep Mountain where natural beauty is prime, due to the lack of awareness and the insufficient building codes and controls.

For the the co-presence of different groups of people in space-time, Chiang Mai neighbourhoods within the old city are normally diverse and overlapped among the locals and tourists in their daily routines and during different times of the day. The old city is still the centre of activities, both commercial and non-commercial, for example, schools, colleges, museums and markets. Also, numbers of local resident in the old city add a lot more activities to the area.

For the neighbourhoods outside the old city, though traditional, are normally quieter and there are not very many chances for the overlapping between different groups. Many of the areas, for example the areas along the Ping River to the north of the city centre, remain quiet during the days and only the locals are present at most times of the day. This brings a different sense of place from the old city. It is just to suggest that the presence of people also contributes to the characteristics of that place. This leads to the following final conclusion, the place of body and soul.

Contesting urbanism

One notable part in the making of a historic city is the contesting between the local and the global realms. Previously, the local-global relationship was conceived as the ‘opposite’ of the old and the new that are always, in conflict, from the smaller to the larger levels. Nevertheless, scholars suggest that the local and the global are not terms in counterposed opposition. In reality, they are interconnected and constitute each other (Massey & Jess 2000: 226-227). However, our experience shows that the local is, more or less, weaker than the global in terms of political, economic and social power.

The consequence of the globalisation process which lets local resident and tourists to be in close proximity with one another leading to one of the neighbourhood characteristics, ‘*high diversity*’. It also seems true that these processes point to the weakening of the economic efficiency and the deterioration of the legitimacy of national institutions (Habermas 1975, Castells 1997 cited from Alfas & Fenster 2013: 548). At the city scale, as individuals, the locals seem to have lost power to manage the practice, representation and use of public spaces; examples that can be cited include the outsiders, especially foreign tourists, entering sacred spaces with false behaviours or dresses according to the Thai norms; show girls on public streets within the traditional neighbourhoods; profane activities in buildings such as hotels, apartments and condominiums, are higher than the *stupas* or the assembly halls in the Buddhist temples; etc.

Another notion of contesting social space among social relations between different groups of people be interpreted over claiming and naming of particular envelopes of space-time, as suggested by Jess and Massey (2000:172), is the place name. The former Rincome Junction, naming

after the most stylish hotel during 1969-2011 ran by a local elite family, has changed its name to Maya Junction, naming after a new shopping mall investing by the outsider.

Place of body and soul

It is sufficient to describe Chiang Mai as the '*complexity of a locality*' as Askew (2002: 109) did for the *Yan*³ Bang Lamphu in the inner Bangkok, since Chiang Mai also consists of many 'multilayered neighbourhoods'. The term refers to the complex interconnections of the local history (of physical settings and people) and the ongoing forces of change on the global scale (public and private investments and international tourism). As a regional centre, Chiang Mai is flux with all kinds of activities, people and physical interpretations. Luckily, many neighbourhoods in the city are still places of residence for many local citizen. This made a big difference between desert places and residential neighbourhoods. The question raised for all good conservation plans is how to maintain the spirit of a 'place' not to keep only the physical forms of architecture or the city as appear in many world heritage cities.

It is not only economic pressure that adds up to the rapid changing of Chiang Mai, but also the state's or the public's attitudes, plans and investments. Many projects - for example, road extensions, and attempts to change the comprehensive plan regulations to reduce 'green spaces' or 'conservation areas' and to add more 'development zones', - are not only from the private sector but also the local governmental bodies.

For a developing country's city with the flux of diversity, it is important to 'plan' and act in accordance with its cultural assets to maintain a 'place' for everyone. The making of Chiang Mai, as a living historic city, relies much on 'place identity' which relies much on the existence of the locals in the city. It seems the only successful solution for the real 'places of soul' is through the forms of transformation and new modes of coexistence between activities and people and between global and local connections.

Finally, it can be stated here again that the local resident is the key factor in maintaining the spirit of a place in historic cities.

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³ *Yan* means district but the word is used to mean 'neighbourhood' in this paper

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