

BANGKOK HOMELIFE

A STUDY OF THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY THAI DOMESTIC INTERIOR

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Abstract (500 words)

'*Baan*' or home in Thai contains a complex interplay of personal subjectivity and cultural ideal. Given the huge significance of *baan* (home) in Thai culture, there is comparatively little work on this meaning. Similar to other cultures, home certainly cannot be defined by any of its functions. The meaning of home appears to be indeterminate and saturated by cultural history therefore difficult to study empirically. The interior which is used in the domestic sense is also no better studied.

Given the lack of studies of home in Thai culture, the paper first analyses the concept of dwelling by dealing with a 'semantic field' within which are grouped a number of terms which in English might be translated as a field signifying house, home, dwelling, inhabiting, residence, and compound. From the semantic analysis, this paper unfolds the idea of home as a realm cultivated by its architecture, its interior and life in that place.

However, when the domestic interior (the inside of a house) emerges specifically in the context of modernized (westernized) domesticity, academic interests have shifted solely to the study of how such interiors have been decorated and what they represent. What missing is the study of the relation between ideal domestic interiors and the actual living conditions which is the main investigation of this paper.

This paper presents photographic evidence from the author's research findings. The photographic documents show the differences between the lived domestic interiors and the ideal ones: physical outlooks, orientation, how people use such interiors and how such interiors become important aspect of home life. When Thais say that 'home is cultivated' rather than built, they acknowledge an interweaving of cultural ideology, personal identity, and lived relationship. From this perspective, what has ended is the physical apparatus of the traditional Thai house but traditional ideology continues to inscribe in Thai mentality through the use of language and articulations. *Baan* is no longer a space of tradition but the tradition helps maintaining it. Although the emergence of domestic interior in Thai culture is problematic when what we look for is the actual living atmosphere, we know for certain of how to study them: how it is made and what it represented. The research findings, on the one hand, reveal original resources and insights into contemporary home lives in Bangkok. It reflects not only the home life experiences of forty individuals but also reflects the diversity of domestic interior as it is lived. On the other hand, the complexity that the research evidence brings about is overwhelming, hence leaving many issues concerning Thai domesticity unresolved.