

Life on transits: an analysis of metro malls versus street markets

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to make the composition of the street market visible in order to understand fundamental elements and local characteristics of street markets which emerge around new mode of transportations in tropical urban area. In terms of architecture, this study would like to understand some basic characteristics that give advantage and disadvantage to street market and metro mall. The author carried out a comparison between both type of markets from 5 locations in order to identify the characteristics. The multiplex ties of life and city appear in a form of street food markets. Street market represents the node of life in Bangkok and might as well Thai culture. architectural composition of street markets in tropical climate appear to be free and unstructured. As a result, not only appear exotic to the eyes of foreigners, Street market always offers special experiences of mingling with the sellers, price bargaining, unique quality of food and products. In Bangkok, there are new street markets emerging in the area closed to the latest mode of transportation – Bangkok Skytrain (BTS), which has a lot of impact on the way of living in Bangkok. Urban commuters adjust their pattern of travelling, daily food shopping, thereby, street vendors change theirs. According to the new infrastructure, activities around the BTS stations area create new events, new jobs, new markets. Local street market that attached to BTS station in Bangkok shows 4 characteristics that are; 1) Walk through market with certain degree of uncontrolled planning is proposed as first local characteristic. : 2) Adaptable and timely is the second characteristics: 3) Waiting space incorporate with the market is the third characteristic proposed : 4) The sense of free place. All of these ideas, can hardly be seen in every metro malls around MRT stations. It may be concluded that disadvantage of the metro mall is that the design detached itself from local cultural context and Thai people behavior.

KEYWORDS: Local context, Commercial area, Street market, Metro mall, Street Culture, Comparative analysis, Thailand



Fig 1 Aerial picture of Udomsuk street market

1. INTRODUCTION

The multiplex ties of life and city appear in a form of street food markets. Street market represents the node of life in Bangkok and might as well Thai culture. To foreign eyes, Bangkok street market is an exotic urban cult that world explorers must visit due to the ideas based on many studies that focused on *“food and drink consumption as a process imbued with symbolic meaning, especially when it is seen as an increasing exotic activity.”* (Norton.,W., 2006: 374)

Street food-market is one of fundamental elements in Thai culture. It is a place for the locals to sell and exchange things. It is a place for people to see if anything new would come up in the market. Composition of the market would adapt or design to suit the taste of customers. In all residential areas, there is always a market – registered or not, customers do not worry. It is a spirit of leisure fair with a very loose system. There is no doubt that market is one of the most important elements of Thai social structure. Architectural Order of retail trading place is much under the influences of the cold-climate culture of Western European countries. Enclosed and gridiron compositions of the markets is perceived as hygienic standard for modern markets that is well organized, controlled air-condition, registered sellers and often dominated by typical merchandises. Such places are for examples, department stores, shopping mall, franchised grocery, community fresh-market and metro mall. Nonetheless, architectural composition of street markets in tropical climate appear to be free and unstructured. As a result,

not only appear exotic to the eyes of foreigners, Street market always offers special experiences of mingling with the sellers, price bargaining, unique quality of food and products. Expected and unexpected vendors may be there or may not. The experience is increasingly seen as substandard and that the compositions of street market should be aligned with modern standard of sanitation and proper design space.

Even though there is a variety markets which located around Bangkok, the market that attached to node of transportation is the most dynamic and full of local characteristics. By nature, street market is an architecture program that changes in accordance with pattern of transportation. It involves all walks of life. In Bangkok, there are new street markets emerging in the area closed to the latest mode of transportation – Bangkok Skytrain (BTS), which has a lot of impact on the way of living in Bangkok. Urban commuters adjust their pattern of travelling, daily food shopping, thereby, street vendors change theirs. According to the new infrastructure, activities around the BTS stations area create new events, new jobs, new markets.

In Bangkok, workers spend 2-4 hours commuting time per day. Most of commuters, thus, have to maximize their time for other daily activities such as shopping, banking, dining, reading, etc. From Global Traffic Scorecard Report 2016 by INRIX,¹ the report revealed traffic congestions around the world. The report identified Thailand as the worst traffic congestion. Thai people on average waste 61 hours in traffic jam. Los Angeles waste 104.1 hours per year. In Bangkok, people waste 64.1 hours per year. Bangkok Sky Train and subway are one of the solutions to heavy traffic. There were 664,000 trips made via BTS per day in 2016.² Service providers, in this case Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, BTS company, were quick to grasp the opportunity to boost local economy. Street market at BTS stations are in the forms of metro mall, community mall and street markets. Metro mall is a shop within the station. Community mall is a group of shops, market that are designed closed to BTS for the nearby residential areas. Design of BTS stations intentionally provides space for metro malls and community malls however it does not make it impossible for street markets to emerge. Each type seems to serve its own target group.

Metro malls around BTS stations are beautifully designed or well-built. The mall provides people with a place for meeting, nice atmosphere for relaxing,

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-39038498>, accessed 29 March 2018,

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https://www.krungsri.com/bank/getmedia/440cd33f-85cc-46f6-8975-2b97fd2f1d90/IO_Mass_Transit_2017_TH.aspx, access 29 March 2018.

convenient stores, pastries. Many metro malls conformed to an architectural composition, reflecting high standard of sanitation, open space and brightness. Most often we see the use of large glass windows and wall, terrace and natural appearance. The characteristics of metro malls become popular for new image of community fresh-markets in Bangkok residential areas. Formal pattern of mall planning can be easily understood by most urban residents across cultures. Thai Street-markets, on the other hand, do not require architecture to exist, however, the sellers' stall and vendors lend themselves as temporary structure of the market. The stalls and vendors occupied space in a specific way in which collective image of street-market architecture market could be perceived. Ontological structure of the street market may be referred as architectural order: compositions: or in practical terms as planning.

Architectural image and business profit are unnecessarily correlated. The metro malls appeared with good planning and architectural design. However, business prospect of the street market seemed to be promising. Regardless of product's price, type and brand image, street markets make a lot of profits. It is also a charming place to walk along. There is an argument against unorganized markets and proposed that proper design should be applied to street markets. Some street markets do cause pedestrian blockage, thus many prefer metro mall.

This study is an attempt to make the composition of the street market visible in order to understand fundamental elements and local characteristics of street markets which emerge around new mode of transportations in tropical urban area. In terms of architecture, this study would like to understand some basic characteristics that give advantage and disadvantage to street market and metro mall. The author carried out a comparison between both type of markets from 5 locations in order to identify the characteristics.

2.COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STREET MARKET AND METRO MALL.

The analysis between market and metro mall is based on data collected from survey of the markets and malls around BTS stations.

2.1 Comparative Table

A comparative table shows a similarity and differences of the two types of markets based on 4 criteria.

First, **circulation**: this criterion is the most fundamental to market. It reflects the way in which people are physically experiencing merchandises. To compare planning and walkway between the market and metro mall, it should help us perceive what is the concept of street market planning structure.

Second, **time and types of product**: this is to

compare about the existence of the place (when) and the type of market (What). It helps us understand the sense of place and core ideas that make market and mall unique in their own ways

Third, enclosure: it is to compare the type of the structure that is being used between both places. It helps us understand physical form of the places. Fourth, Site plan: it is to compare the location and the way in which commercial activities happened in local contexts

2.1.1 Comparative Table Plan and Circulation

	Charoenkrung market	Udomsuk market	Samrong market	Metro Mall Chatuchak	Metro Mall Phaholyothin
Plan/Circulation	<p>Locate not too close to entrance of BTS station. Mostly the market links the surrounding hubs that is the transition space between Train, boat, and Bus in the area. The circulation of market is linear: mostly located on the footpath along the road.</p>	<p>Zigzag and unpredictable of movement. The entrance and exits are not clear defined. People can move in and move out at any points. Very easy to access. Sometime people cannot resist to access or enter the area without intentions because the markets blended with the main street. Chaotic of events. Commuter's circulation is shaped by the market.</p>	<p>The Samrong market usually happen along the footpath. This is not a big market but compromise the pedestrian to make space for business. It is most common street market.</p>	<p>The metro mall has standard circulation and gridiron pattern. Shops are in specific zoning. Sometime the layout of the metro mall is come along with different shape such as Oval shape or curvy shape. But still divide it by grid pattern</p>	<p>The metro mall has very clear circulation and grid planning structure. All of the shop locate in the middle of MRT Phaholyothin station but the metro mall do not locate in the main area of circulation people can be able to prevent the walk path</p>

2.1.2 Comparative Table Time and Product

	Charoenkrung market	Udomsuk market	Samrong market	Metro Mall Chatuchak	Metro Mall Phaholyothin
Time/Product	The market usually opens all day but expand in the evening to serve large stream of commuters during that time.	Non clear peak time. Each shop has different strategy of selling time, depending on the products and time of demand (food at lunch or evening). Low cost of the product because of the low cost (low land rent rate) . the product that sale in the market mostly relate to the fundamental need of people. The product such as fresh food and basic goods	The market in Samrong area are mostly fresh products and food. So it is busiest in the evening as well as rush hour and declined in late morning but we can still see some shop still operate.	The metro mall in each area provide ‘morning coffee and snacks for for rush hour. It’s convenient – ready to go into office. It operates with specific open hours. Higher price of similar or the same products that street markets due to buildings and operation system. Brand names and standardized products are available.	The product in the area are mostly fashion, snack, Toys, tutorial for students, etc. It operates with specific open hour

2.1.3 Comparative Table Location and Site Plan

	Charoenkrung market	Udomsuk market	Samrong market	Metro Mall Chatuchak	Metro Mall Phaholyothin
Location/Site plan	<p>It locate close to the Commercial zoning. Surround by old commercial business and department store in the area. this area also relates to creative district program that try to promote this area to become creative business hub area.</p>	<p>Surrounding building are rows house of residential and business area. Lack of department store but there is community mall locate in the area of BTS station. It also have new residential condominium project locate surround the area of BTS area.</p>	<p>Locate in the area close to the main road , the traffic are pretty congest with private car and public transportation. The area locate close to the residential area spreading around the site. Include with the commercial area like fresh market ,vendor shop, and large department store in the area</p>	<p>The MRT chatuchak closeby the area of Chatuchak market (one of the biggest and most popular in Thailand) it also close to the park and main transportation node of the central region.</p>	<p>The MRT phaholyothin station exist close to the most congestion area of Bangkok. The metro mall area locate in the overlap zoning with several department store. There are Central Ladphrao, Union Mall. It also close to the several office building in the area.</p>

2.1.3 Comparative Table Structure and Enclosure

	Charoenkrung market	Udomsuk market	Samrong market	Metro Mall Chatuchak	Metro Mall Phaholyothin
Structure/ Enclosure	<p>Temporary structure. Lightweight umbrella structure mostly design to be easy to assemble and easy to adjust according to the context of the area and the weather that change according through time. Outdoor and open air. Using empty space as a place for sale. It helps maintaining the low price of products. It allows the circulation to flow easily make people not feel dense much in the area</p>	<p>Similar type of temporary light weight structure</p>	<p>The structure of market mostly mixed up together. The Temporary structure mixed with Permanent structure in the area. The market located in the space that provided shelter that cover on the top but they do still have some small shop that is not located in the provided space. They use the temporary structure like umbrella and tent to protect they shop instant.</p>	<p>Permanent structure and superstructure connecting to the MRT station located underground. Indoor with air conditioning. Using artificial light because of the underground condition. This cause the uncomfortable feeling of the user when they access inside TV culture – watching people walking around</p>	<p>Permanent structure and superstructure connecting to the MRT station located underground. Indoor with air conditioning. Using artificial light because of the underground condition. This cause the uncomfortable feeling of the user when they access inside</p>

3. ANALYSIS THROUGH THE RESEARCH DATA

The comparative analysis of metro malls and street markets help us identify some local characteristics of street markets. The metro mall did not relate the conceptual composition of street market. Metro mall are: the rigid planning: attraction to the visitor become distraction from main route: the products also did not support to the fundamental need. Location and function of the malls were overlapped with department store in the surround area. Despite the absence of its physical form, street markets share common local characteristics when compare against the metro malls which represents standard pattern of 'market place' From the comparison table, it shows that the local characteristics of street market that attached to BTS stations are as follows;

3.1 Circulation : Uncontrolled planning and Surprise

The planning of the street-market seem match up well with Thai's lifestyle. Efficiency of grid pattern are not appealing to the way of people perceive the market. Planning is formed naturally in a way that sellers feel fit to their strategy and surrounding. Collective image of the market plan thereby appear in organic pattern. The only rigid pattern of street market is the circulation inside or outside the market is merged with the pedestrian that already exist in the area. People also be able to access the market in many ways because there have no exact entrance and exit way of the market it allows everyone to get in and get out of the market anytime, at any points, as they want.

In contrast the metro mall is already design the planning and circulation to respond to the needs of the modern lifestyle, however, the needs are served by zoning. All services are enclosed and sanitized. In the reality, the planning of the metro mall is better than the street market because it does not trespass into public circulation. Nonetheless, people have to walk directly to the mall it distracts to the commuters from their main route. This type of specific planning also create a ritual of buying and settling down to enjoy service, which take time. Therefore, this characteristic certainly disadvantaged the metro mall in terms of attracting customers. Walk through market with certain degree of uncontrolled planning is proposed as first local characteristic.

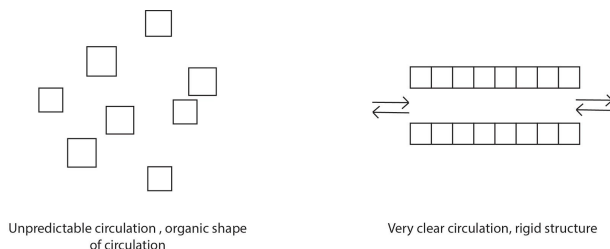


Fig 2 Plan and Circulation Diagram

3.2 Time and Product: Adaptable and timely service

The product in the metro mall is arranged based on what urban commuter may need on the way to work but street market serve mostly foods and drinks: the fundamental needs of the people in their daily life. Most of the metro mall's services relates to factory-based work-life - such as café - to stay awake; book store -to pastime ; and convenient store - to reboots energy during the day. All of this not support the bigger needs of life at home. Time of the day to prepare lunch and dinner, is the time that most people are on the road. Therefore, the service of food and at affordable price is most welcomed by commuters. Adaptable service is the key of local street market. At the same location, shops are there to serve with the products that people seem to need from early morning till midnight. Adaptable and timely is the second characteristics.



Fig 3 Time and Product Diagram

3.3 Site plan: Location

In this study we perceived that the program of metro malls attempted to respond to the need of the commuters such as office worker and people that involve with the MRT (subway train). The site planning of the metro mall are in the same area as shopping mall which causes the overlapping of programs. As a result, , commuters decided to go to the department store because of variety of product and comprehensive services. Business strength of the metro mall is comfortable space in the middle of bust-ness of urban life. Commuters and passerby would stop by the place to sit down. Products are merely a way to charge the fee of using the space. Such space – Sala or street pavilion – is a public service which have long been available in southeast Asian culture. The street markets locate in the transit area where the people interchange the transportation modes. Meeting/waiting points are much needed. Waiting space incorporate with the market is the third characteristic proposed.

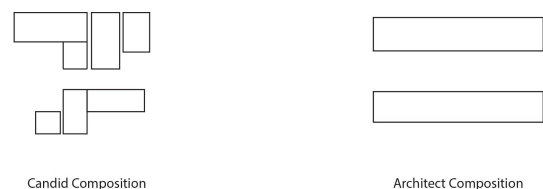


Fig 4 Location and Site Plan Diagram

3.4 Enclosed space and obligation to buy

Metro mall lack of local characteristic or the sense of 'free' place. It is a shop where you enter if you want to buy things. Comparing to the street-market, even the market doesn't have a clear management system, and good planning design. The marketplace is still popular to the people in Thai culture because the market is opened, psychologically, to anyone. The 'umbrella' structure provides shade and territory to sellers. Overhead plane defines space without vertical enclosure to separate people from the product. The sense of free place also happen when people walk around, stop by, buying goods. The atmosphere is created at specific time. The sense of place that can be found only in such area. Such a sense of place is not always perceived. According to our survey, Samrong's market or Udomsuk's market differed in significant way because both places enclosure and site plan. It is plausible to propose that the metro mall in Thai culture, may need to create a sense of free place – may be as a transition space into their enclosed space in order to attract more people to their business. Different. This is the fourth characteristic.

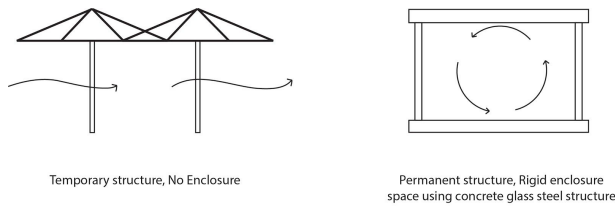


Fig 5 Structure and Enclosure Diagram

4. CONCLUSIONS

Local street market that attached to BTS station in Bangkok shows 4 characteristics that are; 1) Walk through market with certain degree of uncontrolled planning is proposed as first local characteristic. : 2) Adaptable and timely is the second characteristics: 3) Waiting space incorporate with the market is the third characteristic proposed : 4) The sense of free place. All of these ideas, can hardly be seen in every metro malls around MRT stations. It may be concluded that disadvantage of the metro mall is that the design detached itself from local cultural context and Thai people behavior.

It is not the intention of this study to turn all metro malls in to street markets. Each type serves its own target groups. However, an architectural design concept of modern street markets – for Thai commuter in a time of BTS as a main transportation – can be identified as mentioned above. Even though the metro mall is new to Thai culture, its nature is old. It is a result of old habit happening around the new mode of transportation. No doubt that in the future, this type of place will become more and more popular. The interconnection between modes of transportation in Bangkok will unveil a vivid and lively way of life on transit. Design of architecture to serve Thai cultural pattern may be successful more or less if to apply the four characteristics found in this study.

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