

A CITY BUILT BY KINGS

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of cities is always governed by many complex factors. These may be geographical, historical, economic and social imperatives. East Asian cities developed in a particular kind of environment, where the demands of survival in a water-dominated environment as well as historical events, shaped the fabric of cities. Bangkok, or *Krung Thep* is one such example. This paper studies the physical and historical evolution of Bangkok, the various factors which shaped the city, and the direction in which it is growing today.



An Old Image of the China Town. (Source: Steve van Beek.)



EXCERPT FROM THE TEXT

Today's Bangkok is defined by its many high-rise office and apartment buildings, an extensive network of elevated highways and expressways, and one of the densest vehicular traffic in East Asia. Upon first glance it is very difficult to find traces of the old Bangkok, but like the many and complex layers of its history, the city also has many hidden dimensions. The old and the new co-exist, albeit uneasily, in a city populated by six million people, but it is the new which dominates. Modern development in Bangkok is defined by a vertical growth of the city.

It is not merely the buildings which are growing upwards, but the public and circulation spaces as well. Highways, tollways and an elevated skytrain system have overshadowed a large part of the city. Some argue that there are good reasons to build these in Bangkok namely that the city has limited buildable land due to its location on the silty delta of the Chao Phraya River, it is already over-crowded and the public transportation system on the ground is choked with serious traffic problems.

The above-mentioned unprecedented growth has destroyed most of the city's traditional transportation which operated earlier in an elaborate network of canals and small streets.

From a water city, Bangkok is now becoming a 'sky city'. The old network is today still very much in use by the city's poor i.e. those who can not afford the elaborate cost in tolls and tickets of the massive overhead concrete structures. The 'upper city²' thus also reinforces a class division already very stark in Thailand.

