



Fine Arts International Journal
Srinakharinwirot University

Vol. 15 No. 1

January - June 2011

Community Flea Markets and Manner of Consumption in Urban Context

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the evolution, existence and survival of community flea markets in the context of modern urban consumption of which traditional retailing businesses have gradually been replaced by emerging modern trade enterprises including convenience stores, supermarkets, hypermarkets and department stores with more standardized commodities and efficient tools to respond to the consumer needs. Indeed, the research also emphasized the role of flea markets regarding consumers – both in terms of physical and psychological needs based on the intimate relationship between buyers and sellers. Moreover, it also explores the unique characteristics of flea markets that affect its existence and survival in modern society.

A comparative study of two community flea markets, i.e., a morning flea market in a middle-class residential area and an evening flea market for the working class located next to a main street, based on observation and in-depth interviews, revealed that the markets represented very important roles in generating three dimensions of consumption experiences among consumers including: 1) consumption of goods and services, 2) consumption of experiences and 3) consumption of social and cultural interactions. These consumption experiences emerged from the involved individuals within the flea markets – the buyers with other buyers, the seller and other sellers and the buyers and the sellers as well.

The present existence of flea markets in the modern urban context has resulted from a process by which the markets have been transformed into consumption venues provided with goods and services that cannot be found in modern trade enterprises. The close relationships between buyers and the sellers enable and assure consumer loyalty that eventually demonstrate considerable influence on the markets' adaptation in responding to rapid-changing and never-ending needs of the consumers.

Keywords : Culture, Commodity, Consumption, Flea Market

Introduction

It is difficult to deny the reality of the process of economic development that began after the end of World War II by adhering to the guidelines of the liberal capitalist economy of developed countries. As a result, this process has transformed a city into a center of comprehensive development in various dimensions including economic, political, and sociocultural lifestyle patterns. The phenomenon that occurred was a consequence of urban development and rapid growth. To be more specific, Bangkok's rapid growth, which has continued to date, has been caused by government policies that focus on strengthening and developing infrastructure to support the growth of the city as the hub of the country.

The phenomenon has caused changes in the context of the urban areas of Bangkok in many aspects, both positive and negative directions. Among the various aspects, the evidence has been quite clear that one of the poorer performances of government policy is its urban management plan. The increase of population in urban areas is mainly due to the factor of migration. This is evident from the survey statistics on the number of people living and working in Bangkok. These include the proportion of people who migrate from the rural areas. This ratio is very high when compared with the actual number of Bangkok residents. As a result, Bangkok has become the largest city in the country with the most substantial and widespread growth in the neighboring provinces such as Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani, and Nonthaburi.

Among these massive changes, it seems difficult for both the ordinary Bangkok residents and regional immigrants who have migrated to seek better career opportunities to avoid urban

economic changes, which is a factor that can directly affect the daily life of people. In this case, the urban economy can be divided into three main sectors consisting of ordinary agricultural, modern economic and industrial and the informal sector based on the self-employed. It has been found that the latter kind of formal economy has grown at a substantial rate while the ordinary agricultural sector has gradually declined as proportions of farmland have been purposively used to allocate land for residential, commercial or other types. Furthermore, even the modern economy, business and industry has heavily declined, especially in the labor input due to the current global economic crisis.

In this case, obvious evidence resulting from economic changes includes changes in spending patterns in the daily life of the urban population, and we know very well that this activity is at the center of the community or market area, which is a place for trading activity and exchanging various goods in daily life such as processed food, fresh food and goods on the market. It also acts as a central area in the surrounding communities for people to come together and exchange information frequently creating a distinct culture making it even more recognizable. The markets are not only places for barter trading activities only. They are also areas of life where people interact in different ways and without people doing activities in the market areas; they would only be empty places.

The word 'market' may be defined in broad definitions. From the widest scope, this term means the system of supply and demand in economic context. The definition of the market, based on an understanding of the majority is associated with the dimension of space as follows:

‘Places for transaction and exchanges of goods and services among Thai people have changed and developed in terms of forms, types of products, physical environment, economic, social, political, and technological surroundings.’

However, the modern trade economy resulting from the influence of capitalism and globalization over the past several years has created an enormous impact on the existence of many small markets and shops in urban areas as well as physical and sociocultural space invasion of modern trade (with its modernized and westernized image accompanied with standardized products and prices) have become the prominent treats. Consequently, small and medium local markets in the Bangkok metropolitan area have to be closed down because they cannot compete with the modern trade and discount stores. At the same time, values and behaviors of consumers about the products on the market have changed dramatically. In addition, consumer perception on the images of the market has often been associated with negative views, for example, dirty, unpleasant surroundings, poor-quality products and unstandardized prices.

While many markets are facing a great loss, including efforts to struggle in the midst of strong competition, in one aspect, we have seen the growth of the market in urban areas; clearly, that is, the growth and expansion of market goods, flea markets in town, weekend markets and community flea markets. However, the details may have varying elements of the goods or services offered to consumers. It also has some similar or common characteristics, such as a wide variety of products, or may include other services, along with the style of the product that do not differ very much from a fresh food market. However, these markets are often characterized

by the time and place of the market that is quite often flexible. Furthermore, it is something like an understanding between the mind set of buyers or consumers and vendors to know where their regular stores are located and when it will be open.

It may seem surprising, but nowadays, these community markets can survive in quite a stable context involving the consumption context of consumers in various stages and decision-making process. Fraught with complexity as a result of numerous factors, this research aimed particularly to study the development and existence of community flea markets especially in urban residential areas, based on how the insights and analysis from both views of the sellers and buyers, which are considered as elements within the context of consumer culture. Finally, this research will generate much understanding in depth about the importance and role of the market response to the economic system and way of life of those living in urban areas.

The purposes of the research:

1. To study the development and existence of community flea markets in the urban context
2. To view attitudes and behaviors of those involved in the community flea market, especially on the part of buyers and sellers well as the influence of the consumer culture

The scope of research:

This research will focus on the extent to which the synthesis of various documents involve achievement of a clearer picture about developments in the past and present in the formation and persistence of the community flea market. The study design involves n-depth interviews and observational field data according to the nature

of the phenomenon so that the image of the phenomenon and the behavior of buyers and sellers in the context of a case study of community flea markets, especially in the suburbs area are presented clearly.

Research methodology and data collection:

Step 1: Collecting data from various sources:

1) Information and documents that have been collected by individuals and organizations. It includes the study of books, articles, short documentaries and more literature associated with the development and history of the market in various categories. In addition, these also include data from other types of media such as television documentaries about the life and well-being of the people.

2) Observational study and indepth interviews involving stakeholders of community flea markets in Bangkok suburbs. The groups for data collecting were divided into two groups comprising of forty vendors and consumers.

Step 2: Data analysis used to synthesize the information and classification. Accordingly, types of data to analyze the framework of the core concepts of the research show the development existing today. Views of consumption and the interaction that occurs between individuals in the context of the market were drawn from the perspective of anthropology and cultural studies.

The analysis was divided into four steps, i.e.,

- Describing information systems
- Separating categories by themes and topics
- Finding the options to describe the data
- Writing a research report

Step 3: Information obtained from the data collection. Data were synthesized and analyzed to describe the sociocultural phenomena associated with the topic of research.

Results of the study

To understand complex social relationships among the involved stakeholders of the community flea markets in this research, two types of flea markets were compared on the basis of the time dimension. Consequently, a 'morning market', began with the placement of goods from the early morning and various commercial activities. Near to midday, the market started to close when the vendors generally cleared and cleaned the stalls to prepare for the next trading day. On the other hand, the evening market usually started around 11:00 pm, for which trading activity started up in the afternoon. It was very lively in the evenings, and the trade activity may continue until the evening. However, the market may not last more than 9 pm, when the market was cleared and cleaned with the same trade as well as the morning market. If the market was to trade until late at night it was considered another category of market, which is not mentioned here.

1. The morning market: Amornpan 9 Village

The recent community flea market phenomenon has demonstrated the potential to survive and develop in an increasingly positive manner. Also, the popularity of a buyer's market has not disappeared over time. In the case of Amornpan 9 Village, the location of the flea market only used a sports field or multi-purposed spaces for several events. Firstly, it did not have many shops or food stalls. There might be trading in the retail or grocery items including a few carts selling noodles. The retail shops opened were

usually adapted from the first floor of the residential houses. The grocery stores in this manner, in addition to selling consumer products for everyday life, may sell food, fresh fruits and vegetables for the convenience of customers who lived in villages there.

1) Patterns of Goods Consumption Aspects

When asked about the price of goods sold in the market, they could be split into two parts: the part of the seller and the buyer. In terms of the vendors, as it was quite acceptable that most buyers had high purchasing power, and products sold at the market were focused on quality rather than quantity. However, when it became like that, several kinds of products would not differ from those in convenience stores or retail stores or the modern trade locations.. For an explanation in this regard from vendors' views, what made this product on the market of goods in the stores mentioned above was the sense of a 'real market' to make sure that happened. In fact, some products that could be bought at the market were some kind of condiments that are not so far reached the market may have to travel to Chinatown. In the case of prepared food vendors were linked to it. The materials and workmanship were intended for cooking full meals rather than large shops competing with each other.

2) Patterns of information and social interaction consumption aspects

To walk in the morning through the markets was similar to the action of reading the newspaper, to check the daily news, with many people who were willing to act as sources of information. The appearance of such behavior was considered on a regular basis in Thai society. The aggregation of the parties in order to exchange

information, may also be classified as activities and interests between genders as well, namely, the case of men tending to have conversations occurring at sport fields, Ready-cooked food shops, noodle stalls used the general term 'coffee talk buddies', usually adult and elderly members mainly discussed issues related to Thailand, especially in politics or economics, etc., while women's groups often included gossip groups at the retail shops, bookstores, or conversations regarding a purchase. The incidents often did not cite the source or sources, and this aspect allowed the news topic in the discussion of the market to spread quickly.

3) Patterns of consumption experiences.

The consumption experiences that occurred in this case meant that consumer spending was to confirm the identity of middle-classed consumers in the context of the city, who were themselves looking for symbols to strengthen their identity.. Good sense and impressions were formed by use of a tout in an atmosphere or environment that was familiar. The friendly and relaxed ambiance made shopping comfortable, especially in seeking bargains rather than purchasing goods from retail stores or shopping malls, with a modern look and casual atmosphere. The consumption experience was also uncertain, as some consumers were reported to have purchased quality products at a satisfactory price while others did not. Such a view is quite clear from the consumer groups often associated with adults or the elderly.

2. The evening market: Ladprao-Wanghin Road

1) Patterns of Goods Consumption Aspects

Malls and convenience stores have become tools that create a new benchmark for

consumers regarding the standardization of products, places of distribution, forms of service and the price of a product that can attract consumers; however, in daily life, flea markets continue to serve as an important option for consumers in the most substantial ways. The availability of fresh products ensures that more buyers and sellers can interact and communicate with each other closely and the buyer and seller base is quite similar. As a result, the market serves as a place to return to the context in which they are familiar and is relevant. The consumers' characteristics, and local accent can be found on several occasions. The presence of food and other supplies that sometimes cannot be purchased from general stores adds a distinct flavor to the consumer experience. They could feel, taste, touch and experience differently.

2) Patterns of information and social interaction consumption aspects

Perceived as a place for the exchange of goods and services, the community flea market has become a symbol of the area of consumption (Space of Consumption) by another which implies the meaning of consumption not meaning to use, purchase, or receive services. However, there are limits to the consumption of particular aspects that do not belong in the category of products and services, such as climate, location and environment of the consumer, although few buyers would say that price was the most important reason. Consumption experience involves the atmosphere of the time and space (Consumption of time and space) and 'Shopping' (Shopping) implies a consumer pursuant to this definition as well.

The evening flea market as well serves many functions in terms of relaxation (leisure space) for people who spend the same time.

However, considering that the market begins to be vibrant in the evening after people have finished work. This might include various types of people, both in terms of sex, age, occupation, educational background, lifestyle, as well as different tastes and preferences. In fact, flea markets provide a distinctive environment and atmosphere in contrast to the modern shopping malls or convenience stores entirely. The utilized space was not designed to attract consumers with luxurious elements, to be beautiful to attract pedestrians passing through it. The reasons a consumer will like the market rests on its different meanings. The experience of walking through the flea markets may involve different aspects apart from buying in the common understanding and is shielded by a description of the different words that the experience reflects. Although the purchase (Shopper) to the purchaser (Purchaser) is the same, they are often not relevant to the shopping experience (Purchasing) as some people may walk in their spare time. Observers in the market may have no intention of buying something specifically, but instead come to "window shop" (Browse).

Summary of key points from the study

The market always changes according to the context of time and place, associated with the ongoing evolution of the city. Whenever the city expands and the formation of a community where people live together in mass increases, markets often spring up as well as form infrastructure to meet the demands for consumer goods and services for its members in the current pattern of growth and are affected by the changes of the development process, in part, due to the expansion of markets, which have a permanent location and involve the establishment of proper laws and regulations, accordingly. Indeed, there have been

ongoing efforts to improve the image of the markets in the past. In addition, it may not look impressive, like a narrow corridor filled with dirt and food particles acting as carriers of many diseases. Products may not be the standard quality or sold at standard prices to form a more universal prototype.

However, the influence of the growth of convenience stores and shopping centers is a new format run by well-known large business enterprises. Both national and international levels further aggravate the existence of a market that will have created a particular image and process. However difficult, it is the same. The emergence of markets in the neighborhood, community or place of work has tended to grow in a stable manner with continual expansion. It is something that can be found everywhere in daily life and does not fade away amid the modern development of the guidelines.

The summary that appears in Chapter 3 of case study examples of markets is characterized by the two different roles and analysis of the existence of the relationship-oriented behaviors that occur between buyers and sellers within the context of the market. The emergence of the morning and evening flea markets have shown changes in two areas, namely, ideas about sacred spaces and public areas. However, the sacred space with the public will be separated clearly, both in terms of time and space dimensions. If the board makes the spatial dimension not clearly established an overlap of the two will arise. The existence of public space includes a duty to an empty space or space within the village as a multipurpose space to meet the objectives of the consumer. As a result, the control of market vendors is added in terms of the evening markets. In the meantime, the market is also a place for leisure activities and consumption.

Together with changes that are important to both of these imply that the change was in the aspect of people in modern times. It seems to be that individuals' spatial recognition has been more unclear. Unlike in the past, it indicates a pattern of life of people in today's changing environment in the city because this market has developed and expanded continuously. The implied principle is to meet the demand for consumer goods and services that will meet the needs of individuals very specifically, even as the market has become a part of their lifestyle. Urban daily lives are filled with complexity and become an opportunity to control and organize society for a while. By allowing the chaos to continue, no rules exist to be replaced. This makes people feel that they have been liberated from the obligation to continue on a regular basis. People shopping in the market may make sense in terms of processes and buying behavior; that is very simple and not complex and can occur quickly. This is based on the belief that the stock market is a product that can be bought on a regular basis. This is unlike shopping in a department store requiring decision-making processes and procedures that are increasingly complex.

In this case, activities involved within the flea market context are inevitably about shopping and spending for goods and services. Indeed, most of them are regarded as leisure in both morning and evening to create distance from the everyday normal context that is relatively fixed and has much more flexibility. Furthermore, these activities help brighten up boring and rigid daily routines. They help to relax the sense of boredom that accumulate throughout the day, before traveling back home in the evening. This is due to the fact that in everyday life, we all need to be courteous and polite in dealing with interactions between people, show respect and accept

the jurisdiction of the person who has the power to control our lives or our influential people including the boss and colleagues. Although we might not like them, we must behave in such a way to comply with accepted social norms as a member of the organization, group or society itself where the action is reasonable to indicate that social life is predictable and can lead to useless emotions. The market and its sphere of activities thus help to add something new to the lives of working-aged people extremely well.

In the view of consumption, which is part of the capitalist sociocultural context that surrounds the city of Bangkok; what emerges clearly is that capitalism is a tool that transforms culture into a commodity industry aiming to produce continual cultural commodities. The products result from the process and paradigm that is similar to this. Culture and other areas will be transformed into practices and behaviors. These issues become an important element of culture studies, or in other subjects. Involved in this case, the issues should be considered to be associated with the dimension of genuineness. Power will be consumed according to the difficulty in distinguishing the differences of each component. On the other hand; there is no way to know exactly what is true; however, if the dimension of consumption finally reveals the truth that we are now consuming that which exceeds our essential needs to survive throughout our lives.

The emergence of local markets amid the current economic context will result in changes in the city, especially in a large metropolitan city with the more important elements serving as alternatives to the needs of consumers. In particular, the use of free time in the morning and evening to experience shopping in another form; for some cases, a specific product category; for instance, specific goods which cannot be

purchased in stores or large department stores can be generally observed today. Moreover, the flea market also serves as a place where the wishes of the people are transformed into a concrete product and often times, the market reminds people of the past with nostalgia. Warm-welcoming atmosphere, and intimate familiarity between buyers and sellers are the most significant factors motivating the customers who typically are regional migrants from other provinces. Walking through the market, these buyers can feel like they are walking back to the familiarity of their homeland again reminded by the familiarity of the local food, local products or suppliers that can deliver goods and services in understandable local language.

In addition, this research reveals that the community flea market can represent a high level of potential to adapt for survival and grow under the context of the modern consumer society. It can be seen in terms of adapting the recognizable image. The market would be able to offer a product or a service level similar to or identical to that in the modern retail business, resulting in changes to the view of that market. It would not necessarily be a place where a product is suitable at low-cost or for low-income groups only. In the present, the market has expanded in terms of location, to appear in both urban areas and offices and is becoming more popular, especially for people working as a form of relaxation and leisure activity during the limited lunch time. Eventually, the selection of desirable products and services will meet the needs of the endless human desire, coupled with the need to create venues for relaxation. The atmosphere of the shop is filled with bustling chaos that is continually in parallel with the development of our society over a long period of time.

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