

Forgotten Heritage in Rattanakosin*

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Abstract

In order to safeguard the decreasing out traditions and the history of a city, it is necessary to promote documentation and recording of forgotten heritage for the progress of an urban context. In particular, the aim of the study is to raise public awareness of cultural significance of Rattanakosin which includes ancient palaces (wangs) and shophouses that would be endangered by the development of urban projects while lack of good management has made the properties deteriorate. Especially, some of historical buildings in Rattanakosin Island which is the Crown Property Bureau's asset are neglected and have deteriorate. The results and findings of the research, depicts that heritage buildings are being demolished and replace by new concrete modern building. The main conclusion drawn in this paper is that; *“If the heritage buildings continued to be replaced or added with present day modern material structures, in the near future the whole prosperous past of the historic buildings of Rattanakosin may be faded away”*.

Introduction

“Heritage: A Gift from the Past to the Future”

*Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today,
and what we pass on to future generations.¹*

The “ PAST ” is the Foundation of the “ PRESENT ”

which leads to the growth of the “ FUTURE ”

if nothing is left of the “ PAST ” ...

... How can the “ FUTURE ” survive?²

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¹ World Heritage Information Kit, UNESCO World Heritage Center, June ,2008, Page5.

² Shinawatra Weerapan, Architectural Heritage in Thailand, 2002, Page7.



Figure 1 Wang Bang Plu.

Source : An illustration from the Fine Arts Department.

It is now widely accepted that the meaning of tangible cultural heritage has been derived from archaeological sites and great works of art to the everyday-life built environment in both urban and rural settings³. The impact of globalization and changes in our contemporary world has brought about conformity to everyday environment and triggered identity loss that affects the spirit of place.⁴ Also, in Asian cities where high development pressure and rapid urbanization prevail, many cultural heritage sites are being degraded or even destroyed at the fastest rate compared to other regions.⁵ Bangkok is one of Asia's most interesting, varied, controversial and challenging cities. It is a city of contradictions, both in its present and its past.⁶

³ Feilden, B. M. & Jokileto, J. (1998), "Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites", Second edition, Rome: ICCROM, Page 11.

⁴ Tippawan Tangpoonsupisiri (2013), "Visual Culture : The Interpretation of Bangkok's Historic Streetscapes", *วารสารวิชาการ Veridian E-Journal*, 2013, July-December, Page 1.

⁵ Stovel, Herbert, "Approaches to managing Urban Transformation for Historic Cities" in Lung, David (ed.), *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao: Instituto Cultural do R.A.E. de Macao, Cultural Institute of the Macao S.A.R. Government.* pp107-108.

⁶ Marc Askew (2002), "Bangkok: Place, Practice and Representation", First published, London: Routledge, Page 1.

Manuel Castells has argued that “...cities, like all social reality, are historical products, not only in their cultural meaning.”⁷ As a part of the evolution of the city with its unique character, many sites on Rattanakosin Island (*Koh* means island in Thai, while the whole name means island of Indra’s jewel) are especially significant. These lie at the heart of Bangkok and its perimeter, such as Sanam Luang, the Temple of Emerald Buddha, the Giant Swing and the Temple of Dawn, and have figured prominently in various chapters of Thai history. Now they are undoubtedly a significantly living cultural heritage sites of Bangkok. Therefore Bangkok is one of Asia’s most interesting, varied, controversial and challenging cities. It is a city of contradictions, both in its present and its past.

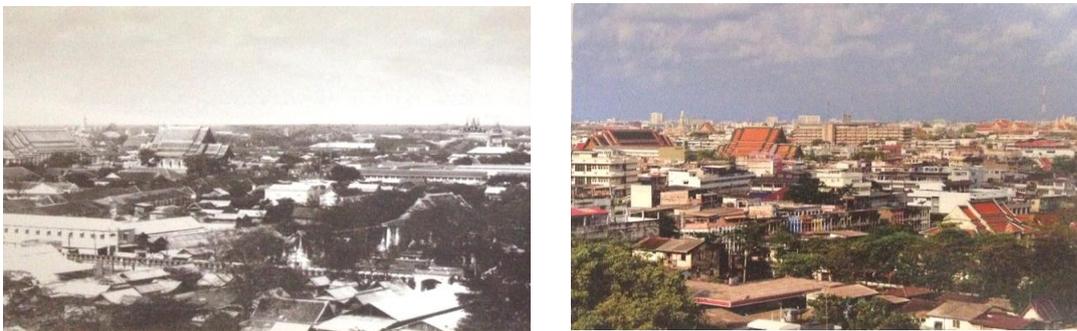


Figure 2,3 Looking west from the Golden Mount, one sees few differences over a century other than that most buildings have grown one story or more. The row roofs reflect an ancient law still in effect that buildings in the vicinity of royal palaces cannot be constructed higher than seven stories. To the right of the centre, the Grand Palace crowns the horizon; Wat Arun raises on the left. Near the centre of photograph is the Giant Swing and Wat Suthat. Source: All illustrations from “*Bangkok Now and Then*” by Steve Van Beek, 1999.

One reason is that when mentioned of Rattanakosin Island, most people would simply refer to the Grand Palace, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Sanam Luang, Wat Pho and few more tourist spots in the heart of old Bangkok. Not many would also includes places like Banglamphu, Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the Brahman Giant Swing, the bustling Pahurat retail node, the Sam Prang community and the abundant and unique architecture and cultural legacies of old neighborhoods. Especially, the architectural heritage of mansions (the Thai name is *wang*) has been mostly destroyed, either because they were thought unsuitable for adaptive reuse or merely to give way to new buildings as they were considered too old. There are other areas within Rattanakosin which display what might be called peripheral architectural heritage but where *living* heritage still survives.

⁷ Castells, M. (1983) “The City and the Grassroots”, London: Edward Arnold, Page 302.

Much of this has been lost and is mostly ignored in public policy which fails to acknowledge that Krung Rattanakosin is not only Wat Pra Keaw and Wat Pho. Thailand's capital city has many gems shrouded in obscurity due to mis-management. However, because of this lack of adequate public awareness and concern, the loss of such heritage is likely to continue unless in-depth study and conservation programs are established.

The historic city has become more or less “frozen” and is on the road to decline. Therefore preservation efforts need to be introduced as soon as possible, safeguarding the *cultural environment* of this historic city as well as its monuments.



Figure 4-6 Some buildings in Rattanakosin Island are seen to be the forgotten heritage.

Photograph by L. Piyamas

Materials and Methods

This is informative research which remarks chronicle of status and what we know of the stage in the present day. The aim of these research is to raise public awareness of the cultural significance of Rattanakosin. Object are identified as follows:

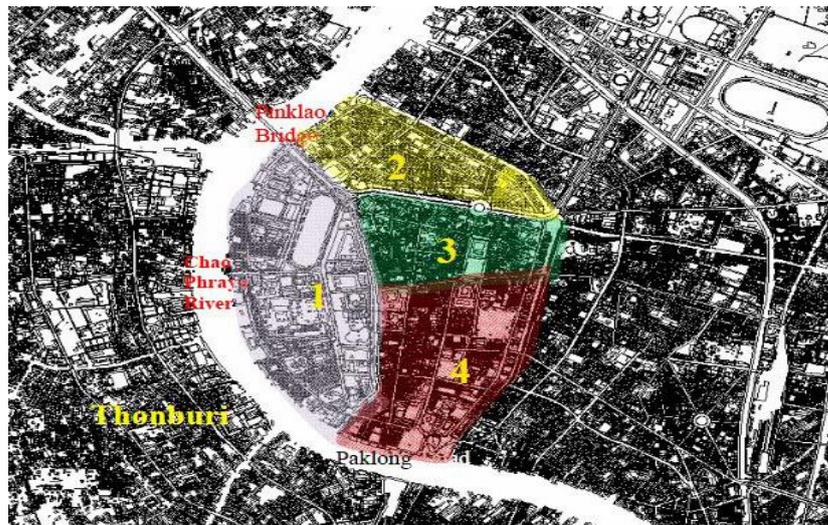
First: To study the origins of the forgotten heritage of Rattanakosin.

Second: To study the important factors that account for its being forgotten in public policy.

Third: To study who are the significant stakeholders and how do they presently act.

Fourth: To explore the management of these historic sites of cultural heritage.

There are several issues that this dissertation aimed to study ; however, the main focus has been to find out the process of management and conservation of these forgotten heritages of Rattanakosin.



Map1. The study area. Base Map Source: GIS database 2006, Department of City Planning, BMA.

The total land area of Rattanakosin Island is Four point one square kilometers or two thousand and fifth hundred sixty three Rais which is divided into the Outer and the Inner areas of Rattanakosin Island. While both Outer Rattanakosin and Inner Rattanakosin comprise *wangs*, temples, ancient remains, old neighborhoods and Unique shophouses, this study focuses only on property of the Crown Bureau's Property's Assets (we can called CPB). The CPB manages all the King's properties as a Semi - government agency that has responsibility for a variety of cultural heritage. Especially, today the traditional and functional whole of a historic town is often threatened, especially in developing countries. Historical structures and sites are threatened not only by pollution but also development changes and infrastructure laying (roads, mass transits) are factor that lead to constant destruction. Bangkok is one of the town that effected by the development trend. Many urban area face embarrassment.

Also Huo Xiaowei and Qixiaojin⁸, described their experiences in conservation of an old district called Shangxiahang in Foochow city, China. Not only did they examine the value of historical buildings but also tried to explore the memory of the area with the local community. They said that *"the kind of change happened, with minimum change in facade,*

⁸ Huo Xiao gradullwei and Qixiaojin (2013), "Bring History Back to Community-Oral History Practice in Historical District Preservation in Foochow", Full paper for ICOMOS Thailand International Conference 2013 - Asian Forgotten Heritage: Perception-Preservation and Presentation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October, 15-16.

with the unnoticed changes inside, the life style changed with the end of local people chatting and finally the memory absolutely was lost”.

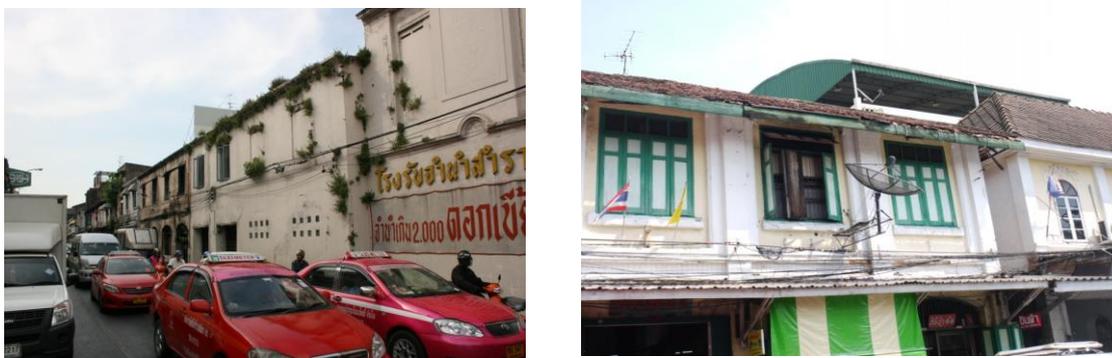


Figure 7,8 The heritage buildings with altered structure to fulfill the growing needs of the occupants in the Bangkok old town. Photograph by L. Piyamas

Corresponding with the study of Mrs. Tania Ali Soomro⁹, conservation architect of Heritage Cell, Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan, there are recommendations in documentation and recording of forgotten heritage: case study of the historic core of Karachi¹⁰. The main conclusion drawn in this paper is that; *“If the heritage buildings continued to be replaced with present day modern concrete structures, one day the whole glorious past of the historic core may be lost.”* Hence, she defined the terms of *“forgotten heritage”* referring to an elapsed memory that has been overlooked or ignored over an incalculable stretch of time, and time wipes out every bits of memory passed on to it. Therefore preserving a heritage is essential as it entails fortification of the dying out trend effected by the changing cultural patterns.

In the example mentioned above, it can be seen that many urban areas in the world face embarrassment. Besides, instead of demolishing the heritage buildings, physically reminiscent of the past, they find the best way to solve the problem by conserved, preserved, protected, redeveloped, restored and managed places as a legacy for present and future generations. Wherewith, the heritage city becomes an urban collective of memory sites.

⁹ Tania Ali Soomro (2013), *“Document and Recording of Forgotten Heritage: Case Study of the Historic Core in Karachi”*, Full paper for ICOMOS Thailand International Conference 2013-Asian Forgotten Heritage: Perception-Preservation and Presentation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October, 15-16.

¹⁰ **Karachi** is the largest and most populous metropolitan city of Pakistan. The city of Karachi Initially was divided into several quarters (the word *“Quarter”* refers to an historic area) Originally, the city grew as a fortified wall city currently know as the *“Old Town Quarter”* with several fringe areas during British era.

Cultural heritage needs to be conserved like a cultural root of the urban community. It not reflects the progress of the society but also the prosperity of individualism. Hence, the term “*forgotten heritage*” refers to “*ambiguity and the absence or ignoring of memory from modernization passed on to it. So, the lost of memory deprives the future worsted with the degenerated of the construction status. When the urbanization process leads to the loss of old memory, it will face the risk of being devalued and abandoned, finally fading away its spirits – forgotten heritage.*”



Figure9 In this picture, it is another property of the Crown Property Bureau, the major tenant is Thongyai’s royal family. In the present day, the two buildings are in very poor condition due to lack of awareness and reconditioning by the tenant and the Crown Property Bureau. It is loss of old memory. Photograph by L. Piyamas

Besides, the first conservation of historic district movement in Thailand started in 1976 in Bangkok’s Rattakosin historic core area by National Authority. Especially policies and laws related to Rattanakosin Island Monuments and sites in Thailand are protected under the Monuments and Sites, Antiques, Art objects and National Museum Act enacted in 1934 and updated several times.

Then, the master plan for conservation and development of Krung Rattanakosin was implemented in 1980, a series of negative impact has been taking place by focusing on the national monument alone. Especially, the heritage building which situated near the Grand Palace rather than living heritage. The master plan overlooked the local dwellers lack of collaborative interaction between the local stakeholders both government-to-government, local-to-government and local to local collaboration.



Figure 10 Symbol of conservation organization in Thailand which are responsible sectors in Rattanakosin Island.

The following presents the organizations which have been active in architectural heritage management. They comprise government agencies, private organizations and voluntary organizations, especially the Crown Property Bureau Organization, that are involved in or that may influence heritage management decisions in Rattanakosin Island. Each department is likely to have or be given its own agenda, policies and priorities as well as adhering to national policy and legislation issued by different government departments, and it is not surprising that conflict arise. By the way, the next topic will described briefly urbanization of Rattanakosin.

History and urbanization of Rattanakosin

In the Ayutthaya period the Rattanakosin area, which is known as Bangkok and is located along the Chao Phraya River, included Bangkok Noi, Bangkok Yai and the Phra Nakhon bank. After the loss of Ayutthaya to Burma in 1767, when it had been damaged beyond restoration, His Majesty King Taksin established Thonburi as the capital of the central government during the Thonburi Period. About the end of Thonburi period, the area of Royal Palace and Thatian area situated by now, were the settlement places of Chinese and Vietnamese. Furthermore, Ayudhya was an archetype for the later establishment of Ratanakosin where the beauty and grandeur of Ayudhya was recreated in all expects including not only urban planning, layout but also three types of palaces, namely: Grand Palace, Bavorn Sathan Mongkol Grand Palace or “*Wang Na*” and Bavorn Sathan Pimuk or “*Wang Lang*”.

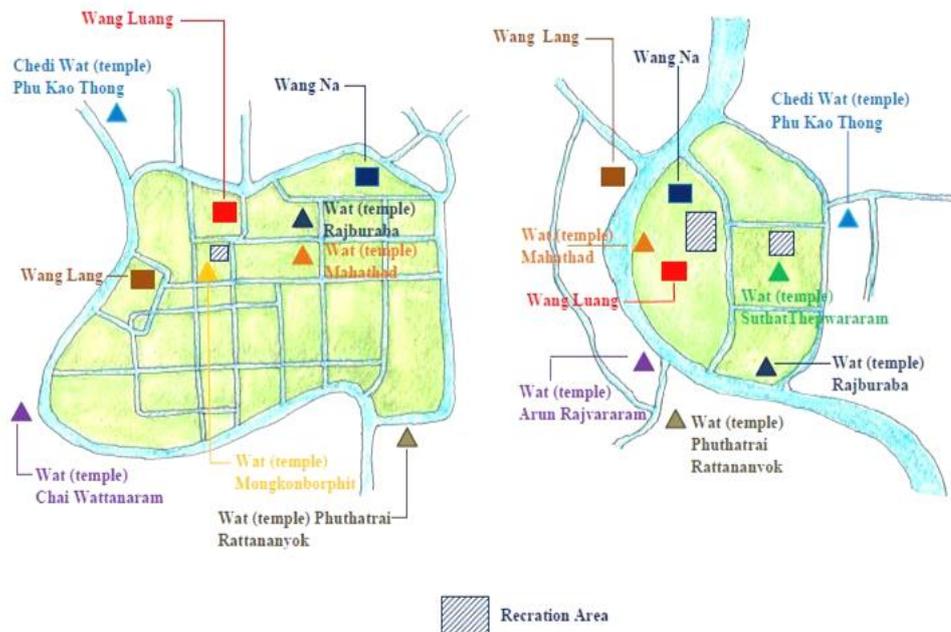


Figure 11 Ayudhya compared to Rattanakosin (Bangkok) in planning concept. Drawing by L. Piyamas.

Besides, The pattern of the army was used as a model for the establishment of a palace and extended to the location of the Grand palace and other palaces in relation to city protection. Especially, the criteria to select the city location in the reign of King Rama I, were complied with to secure a strategically located place. The scheme was based on the treatise on war strategy referred to as “*Nak Nam*” So the location of palaces in the early Rattanakosin was considered in relation to the need to protect the city, for example near a fort, moat and other places that considered important.



Figure 12 Ayudhya compared to Rattanakosin (Bangkok) in planning concept. Drawing by L. Piyamas.

The Palaces and Wangs in the reigns of King Rama I-III

In the early reign of King Rama I, Grand palace and Bawon Sathan Mongkhon Grand Palace were built in the same period of city establishing and followed the pattern of Ayudhaya with Wang-Na at the North, Wang-Luang on the center and Wang-Lang at the South. During the latter period of King Rama I, he built palaces around the Grand palace when his sons and grandchildren were old enough to leave the palace and as an extension of the Royal Family. Later, in the reign of King Rama II, he built more palaces for his sons to prepare the government for the reign of King Rama III. Therefore, the reign of King Rama III had commanded construction of many palaces for his sons who needed to live in their own palaces. Some princes got a new palace while others got palaces built in the reigns of Kings Rama II and III. It was noted that the naming of palaces changed from the reigns of Kings Rama I-III when they were called according to important places such as fortresses, canals and bridges.

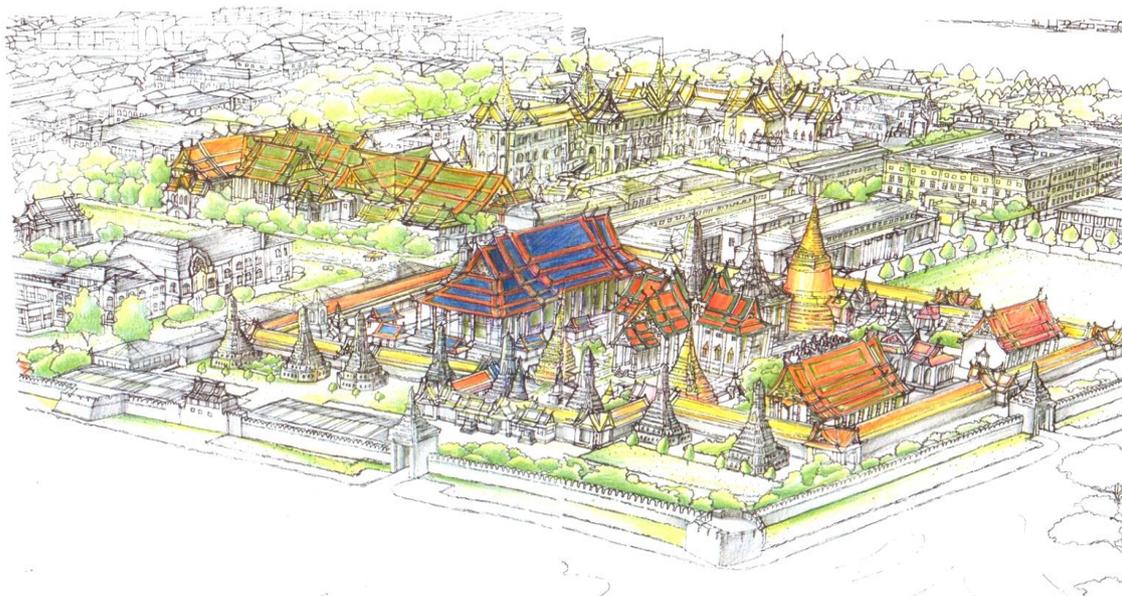


Figure 13 Phra Sri Rattanasasdam Temple or Wat Phra Keaw in the Grand Palace (Wang Luang) Source Phra Barom Maharajawang and Wat Phasri Rattanasasdam Book, Drawing by L. Piyamas.

The Palaces and Wangs in the reigns of King Rama V-IX

King Rama IV gave palaces to his sons by both building new palaces and renovating the older palaces. Besides, land was prepared for palaces in the reign of King Rama V, but it was particularly King Rama IV who built many palaces not only within the Greater Bangkok area but also in the provinces with different objectives.

The study has seen that in the reign of King Rama IV, most palaces were built for his sons and they were still in the inner area of the city walls which were extended from the old inner city moat to the east city walls. There were a lot of palaces in the reign of King Rama V. He initiated improvements in economic, social and political life. The reforms included selection of palace locations outside Rattanakosin Island. The palaces design for King Rama V's sons has been transformed to be Western style. King Rama VI had only one daughter and the tradition of building palaces to be given to children was reduced. Most palaces were renovated but there was no new palace in Bangkok as he preferred to build new palaces in the provinces instead. The only palace built in Bangkok was Phrayathai Palace which used to be a King Rama V farm when he passed away; King Rama VI's mother, Queen Sri Patcharintra stayed at Phrayathai Palace until she passed away. Later King Rama VII had no children, King Rama VIII passed away before marriage and King Rama IX has lived in Jitlada Villa Royal Residence until now. It may be said that since the reign of King Rama VI until now, personal palaces of royal kin are just like household construction of the common people and the importance of the idea of palace has faded away.

Also, the palaces built in the King Rama I period which are in the scope of this study and which are still utilized by the King, there is only the Grand Palace. The rest of them were all demolished and approximately 130 palaces of royal kin have mostly left no trace. Most are now transformed to be government agencies and private organizations and the remaining palaces are supervised by the Crown Property Bureau.

The list of Wangs in dangerous position

This is especially the case with the palaces located within Rattanakosin Island which can reflect the origin of Bangkok. Besides, some properties of the Crown Property Bureau in Rattanakosin Island have become ruined from the effects of environment. It can be said that the list of wang in dangerous position represents the lack of awareness of the buildings' value and there is a risk of their being forgotten in Rattanakosin Island.



Wang Krom Luang Prajak Silpakom. Wang Krom Phra Sommut Amornphan. Wang Preang Nara.

Figure 14-16 The list of wangs in dangerous position. Photograph by L. Piyamas

Analysis of cultural Heritage in Rattanakosin Island

Follow from study of the history and urbanization of Rattanakosin. It is disappointing, however, that historic buildings and places in Rattanakosin and elsewhere have been forgotten for a number of reasons. There is the lack of documentation and understanding of the architectural value, especially in the case of industrial heritage. Such heritage is frequently compromised and, it is often threatened by rapid economic expansion and social transformation. It was realized that some of the old heritage buildings in Rattanakosin Island were already destroyed either because it was thought they were unsuitable for adaptive reuse or merely to give way to new building. Some of them were destroyed simply because they were too old and in old sections of Rattanakosin Island. Some of the old palaces and old shophouses should not be left behind as time passes by or such a building will finally become just an old house that is not important to show value at all. Conservation status is rarely conferred on buildings that deserve preservation, let alone are they registered and then actively included in coordinated programs of historic preservation.

Conclusion

The result of the study this information would not only be concerned with preservation awareness but it can be to provide a clearer view to the value of the traces of the surviving and non surviving architectural heritage situated in Rattanakosin Island, mainly focused on the architectural and cultural traces of the old part of Bangkok. Regarding the disappearance of the wangs in Rattanakosin Island, one can conclude that “*How does the Wangs lose*” as follows;

- The building was ruined
- To build infrastructure
- To build a temple
- To build the Royal Field (Sanam Luang)
- To build a new royal garden in a new wang
- The building was burned
- Changes in ownership or function On the other hand some wangs were sold to be demolished for transforming to be shopping centre or commercial buildings, such as a shopping area at Wangburapa district which used to be Wang Burapa. For other wangs occupied by heirs of the royal family, almost none are now utilized as a palace. There are only a few wangs whose main buildings still remain but are used by the public or as a private office.

Thus, it is unfortunate that most wangs which were built since the early Rattanakosin period have been demolished. Not only is there no historical evidence but also no plaque to introduced to the new generation or tourist to the task that these areas used to be palace previously. Some wangs remain in the present day. However, the public sector or semi government, especially the Crown Property Bureau, has no clearer policy to improve them to solve their problems. For example, follow from my confrontation interviews, I founded controversial on the issues of conflict with the tenant and the Crown Property Bureau. Such as Wang Preang Nara is a case of depute between parties respectively regarding the payment of the rent and they own planning to improve Wang's building that both parties understand but they do not match together. Also Wang Krom Lung Prachak Silpakom, although it is located behind the Rattanakosin Hotel but it is in very poor condition. The conservation division project of the Crown Property Bureau have no policy to improve it in the present time, so the division has a lack of information and an ability to explore the area, there for no details are available. Besides, Wang Krom Phra Nares Worarit at the office of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations is rented from the Crown Property Bureau, Although the researcher had a letter from Silpakorn University which asked to take photographs around the building, this was not allowed.

The contribution that Rattanakosin represents should not be easily forgotten, especially the old wangs and shophouses. However, when the researcher began to study the area for conservation and development potential, it was found that the glorious past of the district was almost buried by dust. There might be four reasons that can explain this oblivion of the city. Therefore it can be answered the question "*How does heritage become forgotten?*" as follows;

- The ambiguity of the Wang's name.
- The names could change.
- The urban development
- The location of building

A possible step towards creating better planning can be divided into two level, first a mundane level and second a spiritual level.

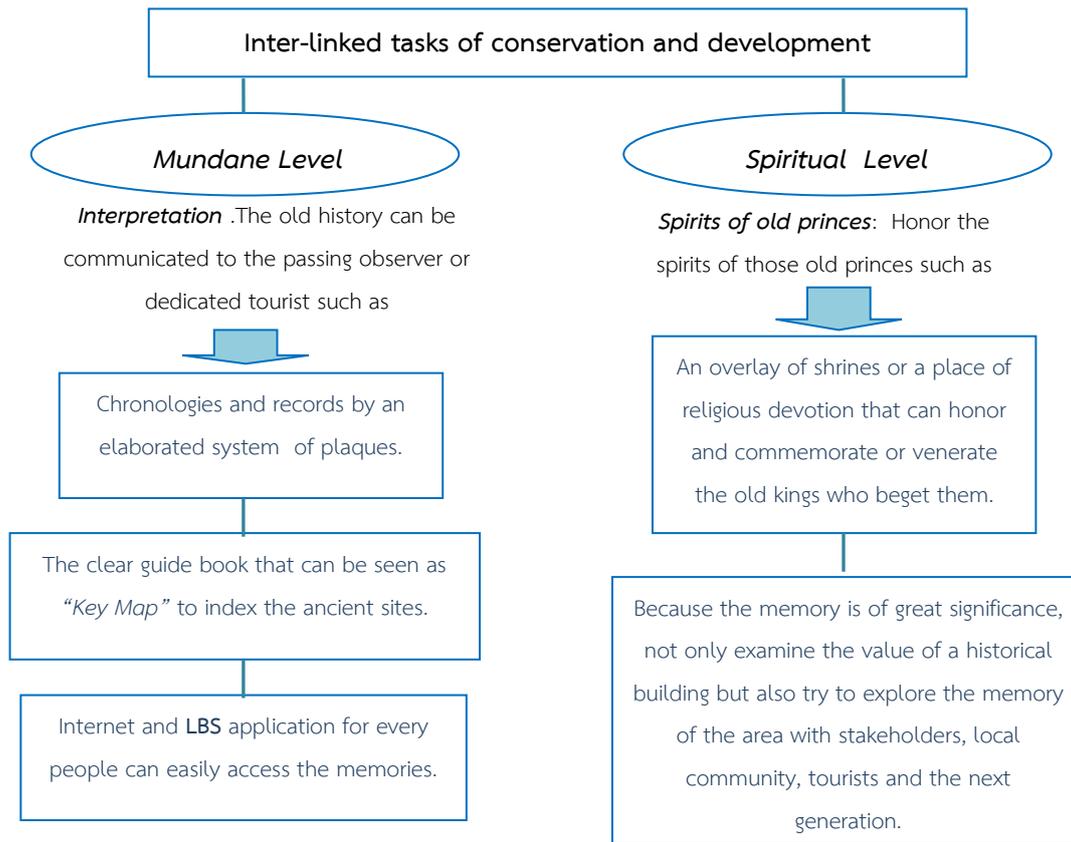


Figure17 Diagram explaining the planning for conservation and development of the cultural heritage in Rattanakosin Island.

At the mundane level, reinterpret the significance and the value of the architectural and cultural heritage in the Rattanakosin Island to the wang's tenant, local people and stakeholders, especially the young generation, to raise awareness and faith. So we come to the two, inter-linked tasks, of interpreting the heritage and of planning and designing within it. Including, the process of maintenance for preservation in the planning and design task is far more difficult than this job of labeling and mapping. Besides, with the internet and LBS (local Base service) applications in the future, residents, stakeholders, the Crown Property Bureau and tourists can easily gain access to the memories of this district. The researcher hopes that this may enhance the preservation of historic buildings which are neglected by stakeholders, especially the Crown Property Bureau as the owners of these valuable buildings in Rattanakosin Island. However, to improve the environment of a historic area in an inner city like Rattanakosin Island, the public sector is not able to accomplish real success without private co-operation. But working together on this matter is difficult because it needs mutual understanding.

Besides, at a more spiritual level are the spirits of the old princes, who might be another layer over this landscape: in the Thai manner, there is a need for an overlay of shrines that can honor the spirits of old princes, of the old kings who beget them, and of the girls who were traded in politics of that time and who mothered them. Furthermore, with rapid economic development and globalization, our important tangible and intangible heritage is lost or abandoned. Young generations prefer foreign culture more than they own culture from time to time. To protect heritage, we have to not only show the people that they lack knowledge in cultural value but also find the way to perceive, protect and present our heritage, especially for the next generation because children are the hope of our future.

Finally, from study in this topic, all author have learned that not matter how time passed by, the value of Thailand architecture through various eras to the present would become a legacy of ideas and art that still has charm and impresses every time of visiting. Especially, the idea of converting historic buildings into tourism accommodations has emerged an interesting trend in Bangkok over the past decade.¹¹ If we plan and manage these architectural heritages, there is beauty like this that might be increased and not remain merely ruins and traces of the old until there is merely the need to see them in the museum.



Figure 18,19 Chao Phraya Palazzo Hotel before restore and renovate. The mansion is steeped in history, the beginnings of which date back to 1923. The original building called "*Baan Bang Yee Khan*" is typical of the Paladio architecture of this period. Located right on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, its position was ideal as an observation point for the owner's custom duty as well as his home.

Figure 20 Chao Phraya Palazzo Hotel in the present day.

Source: All illustrations from www.prayapalazzo.com, Date March, 17, 2013.

¹¹ Ratanaphruks, Kritika (2012), "Heritage Accommodation in Bangkok: Development and Importance of Culture", *วารสาร Veridian E-Journal*, 2012, Vol.5, No.2, May-August, Page1.

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