

# A Proxemic Study of Waterfront Shophouses at the *Hua Takhe* Market, Bangkok, Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

 Given that a physical environment is a manifestation of its socio-cultural context, this paper seeks to examine the development of the Hua Takhe settlement, the physical components of the community, the socio-spatial interconnection, and the spatial essences of the waterfront shophouses in relation to the ownership patterns. Based on field surveys, oral histories, and observations, the research employs Hall's theory of space to extricate the anthropological aspects of the case studies. It is noted that different types of ownership, i.e. inherited and long-term rental, affect the physical and spatial transformations as well as the social proxemics of the shophouses. This paper concludes the intimate space, the intermediary space, the spaces in space, the dialogical space, and the communal space as the key components of the waterfront dwellings in the new context.

**Keywords:** *Proxemics, spatial characteristics, Thai dwellings, waterfront shophouses, Hua Takhe market*

## INTRODUCTION

In retrospect, waterfront markets not only functioned as the centers of exchanging produce and transaction, but were also the sites of interaction reflecting the intricate relationship between the Thai way of life and the network of waterways. They also contained the multifarious whole of Thai dwellings. Nonetheless, pervasive industrialization and urbanization as well as the economic and socio-cultural changes during the past few decades have had enormous influences on the existence of these water-based communities. The nation's localism policy under the 1997 constitution (Silapacharanan, 2009: 5) along with the national development plan for tourism 2012-2016 and 2017-2021 have emphasized community-based tourism in response to the above-mentioned challenges. Such attempts have promoted the conservation and the revitalization of

the cultural environment of traditional communities, their way of life, and the local wisdom, of which the waterfront markets are an integral part. Though originated from seemingly similar environmental and socio-cultural circumstances, the revived traditional waterfront communities have witnessed a diverging evolution of their physical environs, spatial usage, and atmospheric quality in both private and collective residencies.

Preliminary surveys, executed during 2015-2017, indicated that regardless of their resemblance to the period of settlement and the geographical propinquity, the hundred-year-old waterfront markets evolved distinctly due to different socio-economic factors, types of inhabitants, and ownership patterns. These markets include the Khlong Suan market (or the KS market), the Luang Phaeng market (or the LP market), and the Hua Takhe market (or the

HTK market), located approximately 10 kilometers away from one another along the Prawet Buriram canal. This was the first government initiated canal that was successful in the efficient use of land development (Institute of Environmental Research, 1994: 9).

Divided into two administrative areas, the Samut Prakarn province and the Chachoengsao province, the KS market is owned by different proprietors. There are three culturally different inhabitants; the Thai Chinese, the Thai Buddhist, and the Thai Muslims. Despite the variation in rental rates of the shophouses, both administrations aim to sustain the nostalgic ambience of the old market and support the quality of the dwellers' lifestyles by providing basic amenities and collaborating with the local authority (Wongphyat, 2012: 22). The collective endeavor brings about the inhabitants' sense of belonging and contributes to the well-preserved physical and cultural environment of the market. In 2004, this living museum was given an outstanding architectural conservation award by the Association of Siamese Architects Under Royal Patronage. Yet, during the past few years, the KS market has witnessed a growing number of domestic and overseas tourists because of its proximity to the airport. The vibrant tourist business has instigated major transformations of waterfront spaces, from small wooden decks for household uses to expanding concrete platforms for commercial purposes.

Located on a border between Chachoengsao province and Bangkok, the LP market is managed by several different owners and occupied by various

types of residents. Here, different sorts of occupants contribute to the divergent situation of both sides of the market. The northern market is the home of local residents whose continuous habitation and efforts indicate sustained revitalization of waterfront businesses. The southern market, mostly rented by the low-wage labors with insufficient support from the authority, reveals the poorly-maintained living environs and a diminished vitality of the entire community.

Like its counterparts, the HTK market, situated to the east of Bangkok, is composed of two sub-markets; the southern market owned by private proprietors and the northern market owned by an educational institution. Nonetheless, unlike the top-down development led by the owners of the KS market, the revitalization of the HTK market is driven by the inhabitants' collaborative attempt; the bottom-up approach. In contrary to the distant connection between the local dwellers and the low-wage labors of the LP market, the solidarity between the old and the new HTK residents brings about the unique characteristics of its physical components as well as spatial uses. Starting as an important commercial center and hub of skilled craftsmen, the major portion of the market was converted into cheap accommodations for college students and alien labors since the arrival of the street-side settlement. At present, the HTK market is a renowned art market with an increasing number of adaptive shophouses. In this respect, the research selects the HTK market as the area of study that reflects the interrelationship with the evolving economic, social, and cultural condition (Figure 1-2).

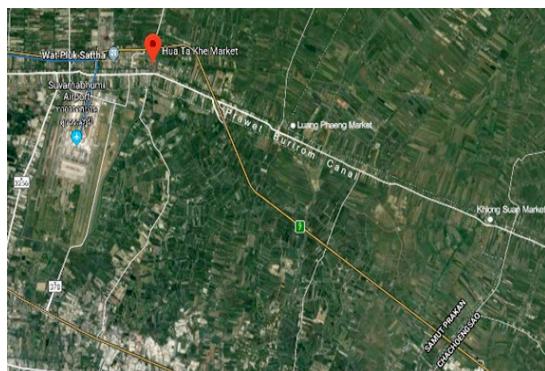


Figure 1:  
Map showing the locations of the KS market, the LP market, and the HTK market (Source: Google maps)



Figure 2:  
The Hua Takhe market and the Prawet Buriram canal

Considering that different socio-cultural contexts account for different proxemic patterns, this research aims to clarify how different types of ownership affect the physical transformation and spatial features of the waterfront shophouses at the HTK market. The objectives of the study are as follows: first, to clarify the historical development of the water-based settlement and changing ownership patterns, starting from the excavation of the Prawet Buriram canal to the present-day era; second, to examine the interrelationship between the types of ownership and the physical and spatial transformations of the case studies; and finally, to analyze the spatial essences and social proxemics of the HTK market in the context of shifting ownership patterns.

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE WATER-BASED SETTLEMENT AND DWELLINGS

Based on the literary reviews and interviews of a local researcher, the HTK committee and inhabitants, the historical development of the HTK community and the market's changing ownership patterns can be divided into three main stages: the origin and rise of the water-based community and waterfront market from 1880s-1970s, the decline of the waterfront market and living environs from 1970s-2007, and the revitalization of the waterfront market and dwellings from 2008 onwards (Figure 3).

### 1880s - 1970s: The Origin and Rise of the Water-based Community and Waterfront Market

Since the completion of Khlong Prawet Buriram in 1880, several communes, including the HTK community, settled along the waterway. The

southern market and its neighboring properties are owned by the Chinese Thai families with changes in their holdings. On the northern portion of the canal, an area of approximately 70 rai (112,000 square meter), on which the HTK community is located, was a part of the 1500-rai land originally owned by the director of the Prawet Buriram canal excavation project. Later in 1957, his descendant, named Liem,<sup>1</sup> donated the majority of her inherited land to the Ministry of Education for academic purposes (Department of Architectural and Design Education, 2007: 11, 13). It is important to note that, at the HTK settlement, only ten percent of the residents have permanent ownership of the land, while the rest are based on rental contracts.<sup>2</sup>

The early years of the HTK community witnessed the transition from a subsistence to a market-based, agricultural society. The merchants and farmers established close economic relationships.<sup>3</sup> Recognized as an important commercial district and a hub for skilled craftsmen, the southern market, with roughly 150 shophouses, offered a wide variety of products. These products included traditional Chinese and Thai medicine, farming and fishing equipment, pork and meat, vegetables and fruits, gold, and monks' supplies, along with services such as dressmaking and hairdressing. The northern market, with 58 shophouses, provided grocery items, craftsmen's tools, agricultural produce, confections, and services, particularly boat building and mending. Constructed by different craftsmen,<sup>4</sup> the shophouses in both markets reflect slight variations, especially in the commercial spaces at the front and the sheltering structures along the waterfront area.

In addition to its commercial activities, the HTK community has been renowned as a significant educational district consisting of Chirdjirm Silp Primary School, Marialai Primary School, Prot Pittayapayat Secondary School, The College of Fine Art, and King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. Furthermore, the construction of a

<sup>1</sup> Derived from the name of the land doner, Liem, and her husband, Prot, the old HTK community is officially known as Luang Prot-Tan Liem community. Luang refers to the title of government officers; Tan refers to the honored title of their spouse.

<sup>2</sup> Interview, Umbha Bunyaket, August 7, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Umbha Bunyaket, June 7, 2016 and July 27, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The shophouses in the southern market was constructed by the Teochew and the Mon, whereas those in the northern market was built by the Thai craftsmen from Ayudhaya province, Interview, Umbha Bunyaket, January 17, 2018.

number of religious buildings; the Taoism's and the Confucianism's vegetarian halls, the Chinese shrines, the Catholic church, and the Mon temple, in and around the settlement reflect its culturally diverse residents. Nonetheless, the decline in the reputation of the Ha Heng Tua vegetarian hall and the 1967 fire in the southern market threatened the existence of the HTK market and its dwellings.<sup>5</sup>

## From 1970s – 2007: The Decline of the Waterfront Market and Residential Environments

The construction of the On Nut-Lad Krabang road during 1974-1977 marked the arrival of the street-side settlement and the inhabitants' changing ways of life. Moreover, the establishment of the Lad Krabang Industrial Estate in 1978 affected the HTK community in many ways. It generated environmental pollution, a degradation in the quality of residents' lifestyles and encouraged the emigration of the young HTK residents vis-à-vis the immigration of the foreign labors. It is noted that the distant relationship between the old inhabitants and the new comers contributed to the deterioration of the HTK physical environment.

The construction of the motor way connecting Bangkok to Suvarnabhumi Airport and to the eastern provinces as well as the construction of a series of water gates built along the Prawet Buriram canal greatly accounts for the disconnected water network and thereby the decline of traditional water-based society.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the 1998 fire in the southern market destroyed two thirds of the shophouses. This incidence engendered the functional changes of the shophouses from commercial to residential, it also brought about the physical modifications, from semi-indoor/semi-outdoor spaces to outdoor spaces. These factors also encouraged new types

of inhabitants, i.e. the low-wage workers, to settle on the southern bank, which brought about the deprived buoyancy of the overall waterfront market.

## From 2008 – the present day The Regeneration of the Waterfront Market and Dwellings

It is evident that, in contrary to the majority of the revived waterfront markets in Thailand, the HTK community has not only managed to survive the macro-scale threat of urbanization, but also unveiled different dynamisms in response to the ever-shifting socio-economic context. The community has established itself as an art and creative district that claims to enhance the quality of its built environment and its inhabitants' well-being. Furthermore, the community seeks a balance between encouraging an awareness of its past while embracing possible changes in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Since its darkest years in terms of the community's physical environment, the relationship among the inhabitants, along with the drug problem in 2008,<sup>8</sup> the HTK community inaugurated the revitalization program of the market and the participatory action research in collaboration with academia from different institutions. Successful feedback from the pilot study of the community-based tourism during 2009-2012, known as the weekend art market, has contributed to the increasing reputation of the HTK market and the sustainable development of the community (Department of Architectural and Design Education, 2007: 47, 50).

Although the fire in 2013 and 2014 severely damaged one fifth of the shophouses in the northern market, this crisis prompted the residents to realize the importance of a sense of belonging and of the quality of their living environment. Not only has the present-day HTK community witnessed the resettlement of the local

<sup>5</sup> This vegetarian hall kept an old statue of a revered Chinese Saint, which acted as an important spiritual anchor for not only the HTK inhabitants, but also all the devotees in the Southeast Asian countries, Interview, Umbha Bunyaket, June 7, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, Saowanit Sangrung, January 17, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Umbha Bunyaket, January 17, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, Jamnong Yangrakrojkul, June 14, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> "We may earn less money than when we were in the city, but here we can stay with our family, siblings, and neighbors," Interview, Rungtiwa Sakultasri, June 8, 2015.

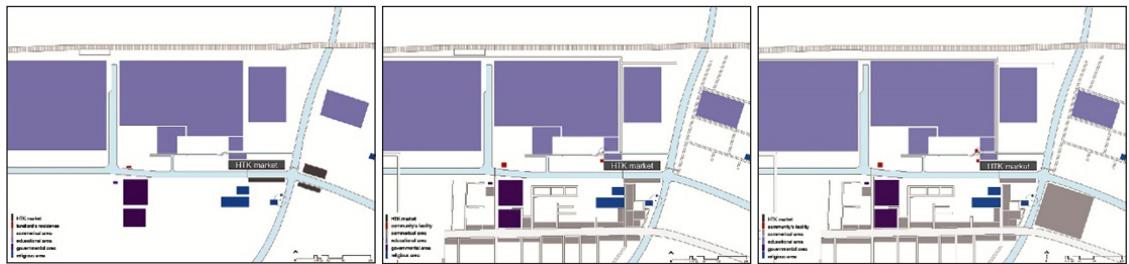


Figure 3:

Historical development of the Hua Takhe settlement and dwellings: The first stage: the four-cornered waterfront market (left), the second stage: the declining waterfront market vis-à-vis the bustling street-side business (middle), and the present stage: the revitalized waterfront market (right)

inhabitants,<sup>9</sup> but also realized the mutual collaboration between the original dwellers and the new comers who, unlike the previous eras, are active participants in communal activities. Moreover, the HTK market community has initiated the growing number of cultural and communal facilities; the waterfront event space, community learning centers, and art galleries.

## THE PHYSICAL COMPONENTS OF THE HTK COMMUNITY AND MARKET

### The HTK Community

Based on the components of the city (Lynch, 1973), the HTK market is enclosed on three edges by waterways; the Prawet Buriram canal in the south, the Lam Pla Tiew canal in the east, and a narrow ditch in the north. These soft territory definers act as barriers preventing direct access from automobiles, which helps preserve the traditional environment of waterfront structures. Apart from the Prawet Buriram canal that serves as the main artery of the waterfront communities, there are two other accesses to the market, i.e. the On Nut-Lad Krabang road and the eastern railway line.

Inside the market, there are two main areas of movement or traffic flow; the front and the back

passages. Approximately 1.5 meter wide, each allows for human-powered transport of pedestrians, bicycles, and bikes. Despite the similarity in size, the front passage is used more frequently by both inhabitants and visitors due to its location and atmospheric quality.

Situated in the educational district, Marialai School in the east, Chirdjirm Silp School, Protppittayapayat School, and The College of Fine Art in the north, and King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang in the west, the HTK market serves multiple functions for students. The front passage acts as a thoroughfare and the waterfront space as an outdoor classroom as well as a dining and chilling out area. In addition, the community's creative platforms act as important venues of interaction between the original and the new inhabitants as well as the old and the young generation. These creative enterprises include the waterfront event space and the learning centers, together with privately owned art-and-culture-related properties; the Si Yeak Hua Takhe Café and Guesthouse,<sup>10</sup> the Panfan Homestay, and the water wheel-turned-art gallery, that, on certain occasions, can be converted to workshop or exhibition space.

Considering its scale and history, the giant banyan tree, on which the old Chinese shrine, named Poon Tao Kong,<sup>11</sup> is situated, is the most apparent landmark in the neighborhood. Similar to the banyan tree in terms of visual field but different in terms of

<sup>10</sup> The Si Yeak Hua Takhe Café and Guesthouse was given the outstanding architectural conservation award by the Association of Siamese Architects Under Royal Patronage in 2016.

<sup>11</sup> The shrine has kept an old alligator's skull that represents the name of the community, i.e. hua means head and takhe means alligator.

scale, the waterfront event space (Figure 8) and the Si Yeak Hua Takhe Café and Guesthouse (Figure 6), which regularly serve communal activities, as well as the Ha Heng Tua and the Tien Poh Hook Tung vegetarian halls, at which the community rituals and celebrations take place, can be regarded as the points of reference for HTK inhabitants. Contrary to Lynch's theoretical framework, it can be argued that landmarks in Thai context are not necessarily obvious in the physical dimension of the built form, but in the psychological and/or social aspect of the dwellers (Figure 4).

## The HTK Market

The physical components of the HTK market consist of three key parts; shophouses, front passage, and waterfront space as outlined below:

### Shophouses

The HTK shophouses are two-storied wooden buildings with narrow frontages but great depth. Each

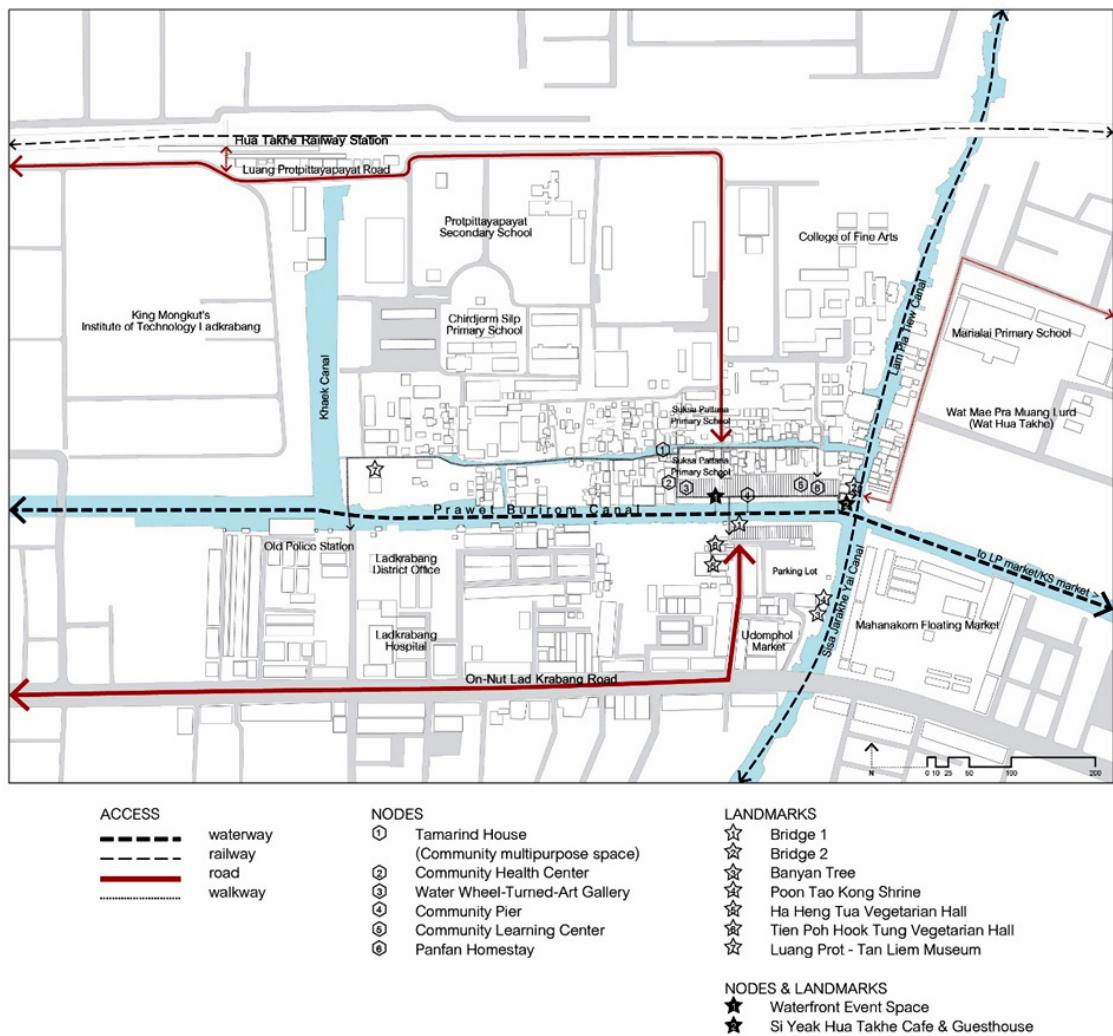


Figure 4:  
Physical components of the Hua Takhe community and market



**Figure 5:**  
The Prawet Buriom canal and bridge 1 connecting the northern and the southern markets



**Figure 6:**  
The Lam Pla Tiew canal and bridge 2 connecting the HTK market and the Catholic school

shophouse is three meters wide and approximately 25 meters long. The interior is basically composed of three sections; the commercial space at the front, the service space at the back, and the living space in the middle and on the second floor. The upstairs living space could be divided into two types; the front mezzanine and the back mezzanine. The entire interior is normally covered by two joining gable roofs due to its depth.

In the past, the shops selling agricultural equipment and those engaged in building boats and fixing farm engines, which accounted for 29.7 percent of the entire products and services, constituted the majority of the HTK shophouses. The shops offering household utensils and materials for daily use (27.0%) were ranked the second in the number of the commercial shophouses followed by those providing services such as dressmaking, hairdressing, and dental care (13.5%), dwelling (13.5%), foods and drinks (10.8%) including old-style recreational activities such as musical folk performance and opium smoking (5.4%).

Nonetheless, surveys of current merchandized goods and services reveal a different scenario. The shops selling foods and drinks as well as those functioning as dwellings comprise the largest number of the units. Together with the shops providing household equipment and materials for everyday use, the shophouses used for the emerging art and culture-related activities are ranked the second;

each with the percentage of 14.3. The shops offering services, accommodations, as well as the empty shophouses are ranked the third, each with the percentage of 6.1. It is interesting to note that, in contrary to the previous era, the shops engaged in craftsman work are ranked the lowest with the percentage of 4.1.

### Front passage

The front passage has a 1.50 meters wide concrete floor serving as the primary corridor of the market (Figure 7). Sheltered under high-pitched roofs, the main passage is well ventilated and protected from direct sunlight.

### Waterfront space

Oriented towards the south, the transitional area between the passage and the waterway is naturally ventilated throughout the year. The waterfront space has an approximately six-eight meters wide wooden floor sheltered under the gabled roof, half of which is shared by the passage way, with broad extended eaves. Its spatial features could be categorized into three types; open, semi-open/semi-closed, and enclosed. The first two types are often seen among the old shophouses (Figure 8), whereas the last one has been found among the contemporary shop units.



Figure 7:  
Lively ambience of the front passage



Figure 8:  
Multifunctional waterfront event space located in front of  
Suksa Pattana School

## THE SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HTK SHOPHOUSES

### Types of Ownership

As earlier noted, approximately ninety percent of the HTK settlement are of the rental contract arrangement. Within this rental system, there are two major types of ownership; the inherited shophouses and the long-term rental shophouses.<sup>12</sup> The inherited type includes the shophouses owned by the same families from generation to generation. The long-term rental category encompasses the shop units whose ownerships were transferred from the original owners to the new owners. Here, the inherited shophouses account for 36.2 percent of the shop buildings (or 31.4 percent of the total number of shop owners). Categorized into the shops owned by the HTK inhabitants and those by the new comers, the long-term rental units are composed of 58.6 percent of the HTK shophouses (or 65.7 percent of the total number of shop owners), that is to say, approximately two times larger than that of the first ones.

Besides the difference in ratio, each type of ownership reveals different types of products and services. While most inherited shop units engage

in old style merchandized goods and services, the long-term rental ones appear to be increasingly focusing on offering art-related activities and accommodations along with foods and drinks (Figure 9).

### The Relationship Between Social and Spatial Aspects of the Case Studies

Considering the research hypothesis, different types of ownership affect the physical and spatial transformation of the shophouses differently, the study selected nine shophouses with differing types of residents (old and new), ownership (inherited and long-term rent), including products and services as the case studies (Figure 10).

As shown in Table 1, nine case studies are categorized into the inherited shophouses (HTK1-5) and the long-term rental shophouses (HTK6-9). Divided into four main parts; the shop/front space, the living/middle space, the service/back space, and the waterfront space, the analysis of each shophouse comprises the physical condition and the spatial usage. Each aspect includes three different degrees of alteration—that are, original, slightly modified, and heavily modified.

<sup>12</sup> There is a small amount of the sub-leased shop units, which constitute 5.2 percent of the entire shop buildings (or 2.9 percent of the total number of the shop owners).

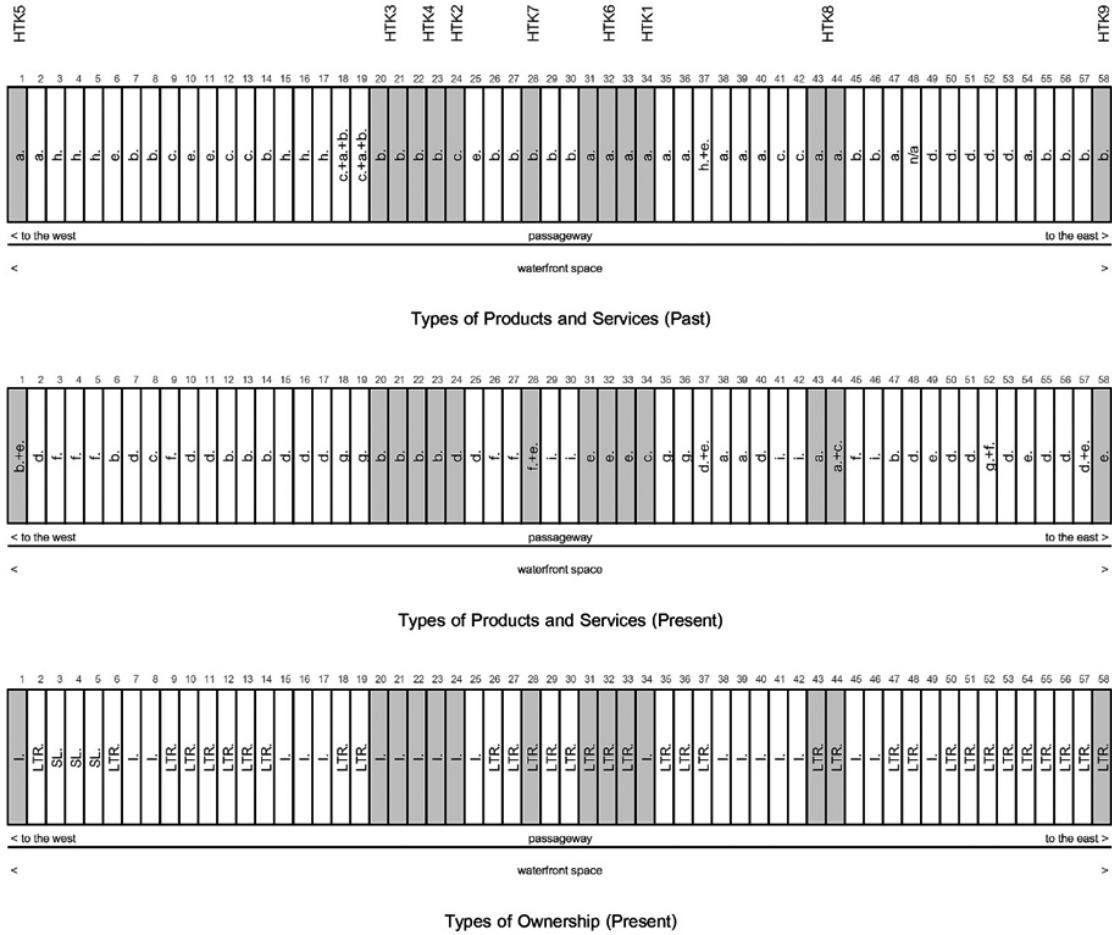


Figure 9: Diagrams indicating types of products and services (past and present) and types of ownership (present) of the Hua Takhe shophouses and selection of the case studies (highlightened in grey)

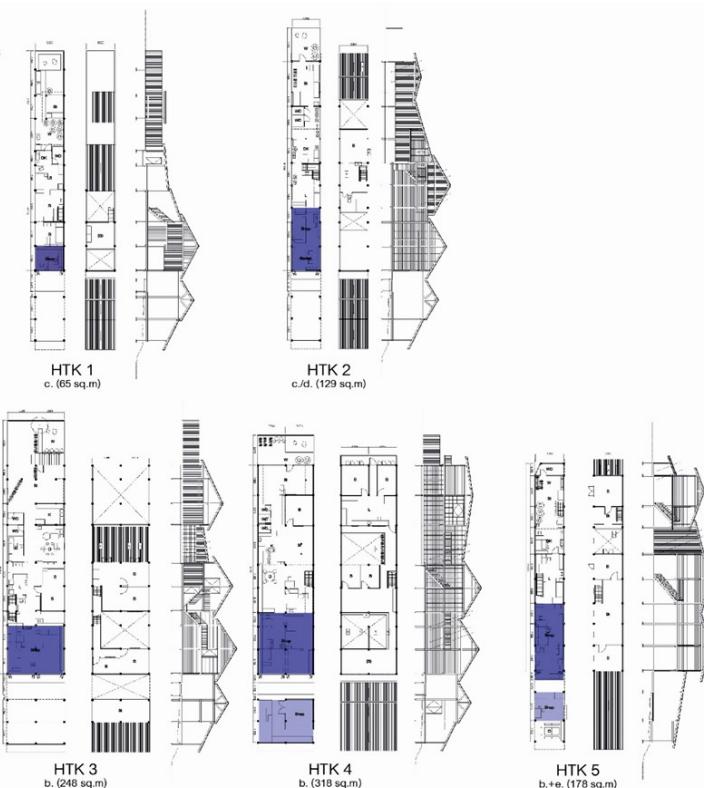
## The Inherited Shophouses

The inherited shophouses have largely maintained the original condition of physical components, spatial usages, as well as merchandized goods and services. Of the four parts, the waterfront space is the most preserved area, both in terms of physical and spatial aspects. The waterfront space of these shophouses can be divided into two types; the open and the semi-open/semi-enclosed structure. Without any spatial barriers, the open waterfront space is utterly flexible. It can be utilized either as a rest spot for the HTK inhabitants and visitors, as shown in HTK 1-3, or as a flexible space for communal uses. With

the semi-fixed spatial feature, the half-open/half-enclosed waterfront space serves more specific uses and users compared to the open one. It functions as an additional shop and storage, as in HTK4, and an extensional living area, as in HTK5, both of which are reserved for the household members.

Similarly, the shop at the front, which constitutes an area of approximately 1:3 to 1:5 of the entire ground space, clearly shows the original condition of architectural components and use of space. Owing to the fact that the traditional form of merchandize requires a certain amount of built-in furniture, shelves, or fitted cabinets, the interior space of the

## 1. The Inherited Shophouses



## 2. The Long-Term Rental Shophouses

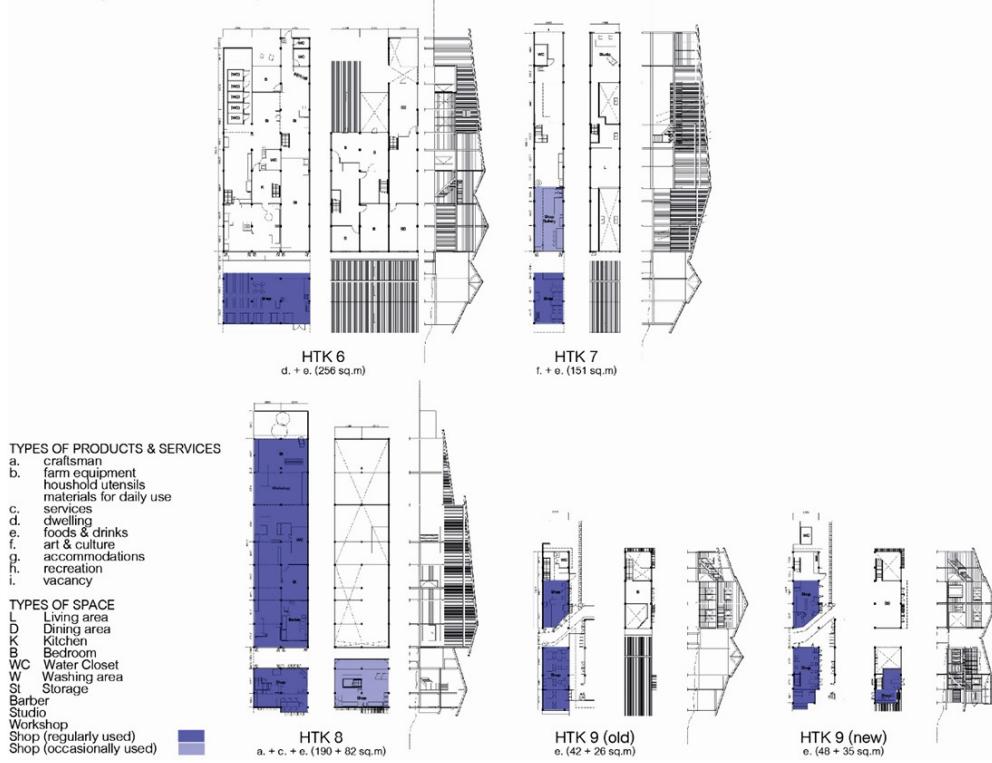


Figure 10:

Physical condition, spatial usage, and types of products and services of the inherited shophouses (HTK1-5) and the long-term rental shophouses (HTK6-9)

**Table 1:** Types of ownership, physical condition, and spatial usage of the case studies

types of ownership	case studies	front/shop space		middle/living space		back/servic space		waterfront space	
		physical condition	spatial usage	physical condition	spatial usage	physical condition	spatial usage	physical condition	spatial usage
1 Inherited shophouses	HTK1	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	◆	❖	❖
	HTK2	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖
	HTK3	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖
	HTK4	❖	❖	❖	❖	◆	◆	❖	❖
	HTK5	◆	❖	◆	◆	◆	◆	❖	❖
2 Long-term rental shophouses	HTK6	◆	❖	◆	◆	◆	◆	❖	◆
	HTK7	◆	◆❖	◆	◆❖	◆	◆❖	❖	◆
	HTK8	◆❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	◆	❖
	HTK9	❖	◆❖	◆❖	◆❖	◆❖	◆❖	◆❖	❖

- ❖ original condition
- ◆ slightly modified
- ❖ heavily modified

shop quarter is rather fixed. Given the small and fixed feature space of the shop quarter vis-à-vis the close relationship among the local inhabitants, the interaction between the shopkeepers and the customers is in the intimate distance to each other.

Although the living quarter in the middle section of the shop unit remains comparatively unchanged, the service space observes modifications of architectural components as shown in HTK3 and HTK4 and changes of spatial uses as shown in HTK1, HTK4, and HTK5. It is however noteworthy that such alterations aim at enlarging living/sleeping spaces for the growing number of household members. In case of the multi-unit shophouses, this extensional living space would occupy the area above and/or the ground floor of the service quarter. Whereas the

single-unit shophouses reveal numerous extension methods, ranging from constructing mezzanine(s) over the service area, to utilizing household furniture such as closets and a bed to define additional sleeping corner(s), and to employing lightweight and moveable items such as a mat and a mosquito net to create a temporary space for rest and relax at night. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the living space of the inherited shophouses constitutes a variety of spatial features—be it, fixed, semi-fixed, and flexible space, and that the more the limited space is, the more flexible, adaptable, and multifunctional the space should be. In this regard, the living with intensity, with no absolute sense of privacy but intimate relationship among the family members, reveals a resemblance to the essential characteristics of Thai dwelling in the past.

## The Long-Term Rental Shophouses

The long-term rental shophouses observe a higher degree of modifications, especially the spatial feature and usage, than their counterpart. Compared to other areas, the shop and the waterfront spaces portray the most-preserved physical condition, whilst they are the most-transformed, at an accelerated pace, in terms of spatial usage. In case of the shops owned by the HTK inhabitants whose houses are situated in the community, the commercial space is often relocated from the interior of the shophouses to the waterfront area, while the frontal part of the shop building is converted either to an extension of the family's living space as in HTK6 or to new types of usage such as an art gallery in HTK7.

By contrast, the shophouses owned by the new comers no longer function as the integrated shop and dwelling places as they did in the past. In other words, the shophouses act more like shops than houses. Here, the owners of HTK8 and HTK9 commute to work at the market; the shops' staffs are not necessarily household members, but, as in the case of HTK9, local residents who live close by. Focusing on commercial purposes, not only does the shop space occupy the entire ground floor of the shop building, but also extends to the waterfront area.

Situated adjacent to the canal intersection that affords a good view of the Prawet Buriram canal and the Sisa Jarakhe Yai canal, this waterfront space, as manifested in HTK8 and HTK9, is often modified from the semi-indoor/semi-outdoor flexible space to the two-story building in order to accommodate more customers. In emphasizing food and drink businesses along the waterway, a number of the previously multifunctional waterfront spaces have been incessantly transformed into the compartmentalized semi-fixed and fixed-feature space. In the past, these areas were at times used for communal purposes. Though the physical features of these long-term rental shophouses are in harmony with the old context, particularly in terms of scale and building materials, the changing uses and users have caused the social interaction between the vendors and their customers to become more distant compared to the interaction within inherited shop units.

## THE PROXEMIC STUDY OF THE HTK SHOPHOUSES

Given that different cultures address spatial uses differently, the proxemics is employed to understand the essential characteristics of the HTK shophouses. The analysis includes the fixed feature space, the semi-fixed feature space, and the informal space. The research looked at the distance in the residents' approach to space, which comprises intimate, personal, social, and public distance. Owing to the similarities in physical and environmental aspects of the waterfront dwellings and the differences in types of dwellers and ownership patterns, the five qualitative uses of space disclose the shared attributes with varying details between the inherited and the long-term rental shophouses. These spatial essences included the intimate space, the intermediary space, the spaces in space, the dialogical space, and the communal space.

### The Intimate Space

The intimate space is the most fundamental feature shared by the inherited and the long-term rental shophouses at the HTK market. Given the small spaces of the dwellings and the close relationships of the dwellers, it connotes not merely the physical, but also psychological and cultural aspects of a concentrated living situation. As manifested in HTK3 and HTK4, the adaptive use of the unfinished nature of structural and architectural components; wall brackets, beams, joists, rafters, rails, and open ladders, of the wooden buildings, the addition of mezzanine(s) along with various means of stacking, hanging, and hoisting are used to manage and multiply spatial usage on a limited footprint (Figure 11-12).

As evident in the living quarter of HTK1 and HTK6, three generational members live closely together. Through continual habitation, the family's belongings, the small Chinese shrine of Earth God, ancestral worship shelves, and family portraits, altogether shed light on the dwellers' sense of rootedness. In addition, the shoe-off socio-physical custom essential to the Thai way of living helps enhance the home-like rather than the commercialized atmospheric quality of this waterfront market (Figure 13-14).

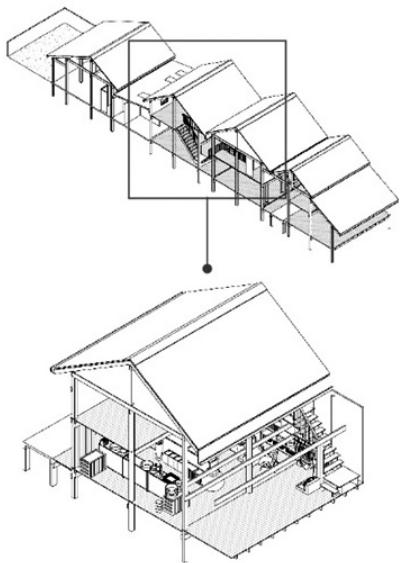


Figure 11:  
Hanging and stacking technique at the shop space of HTK3

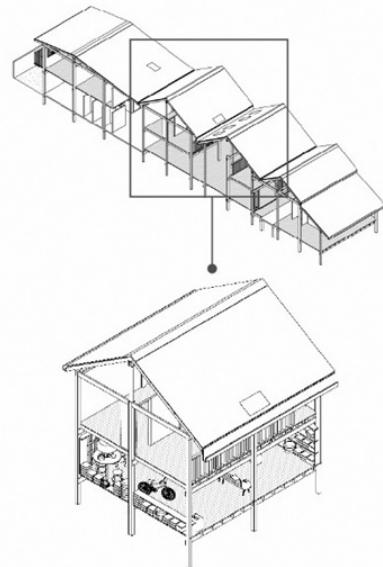


Figure 12:  
Hoisting technique at the living space of HTK4

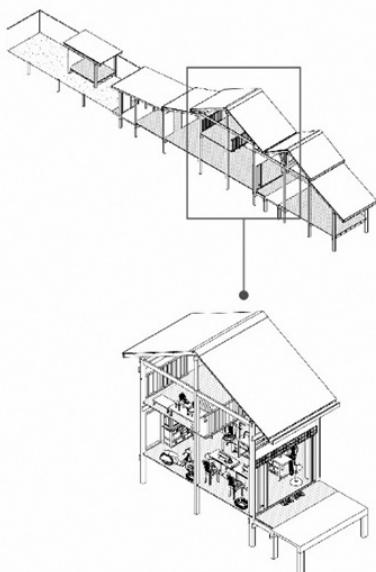


Figure 13:  
Shoe-off lifestyle and the intimate relationship between work and living space at HTK1

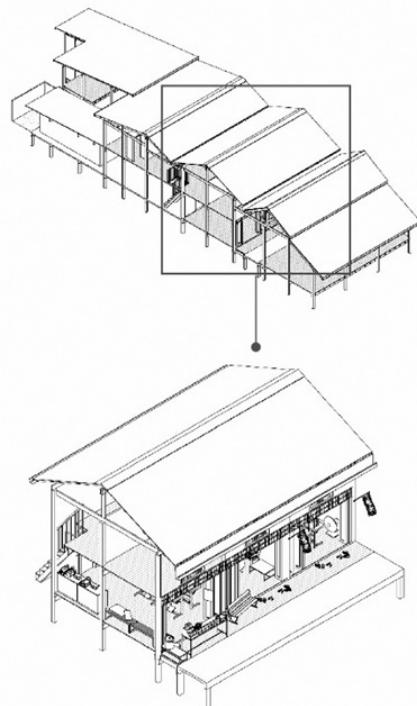


Figure 14:  
Shoe-off lifestyle at the shop-turned-living space of HTK6

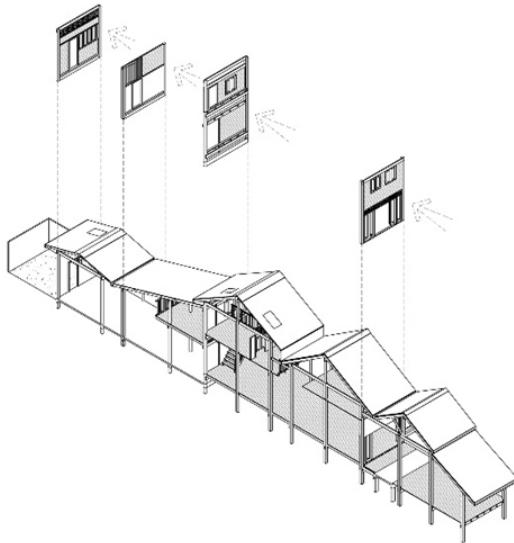


Figure 15:  
Breathable partitioning elements of HTK2

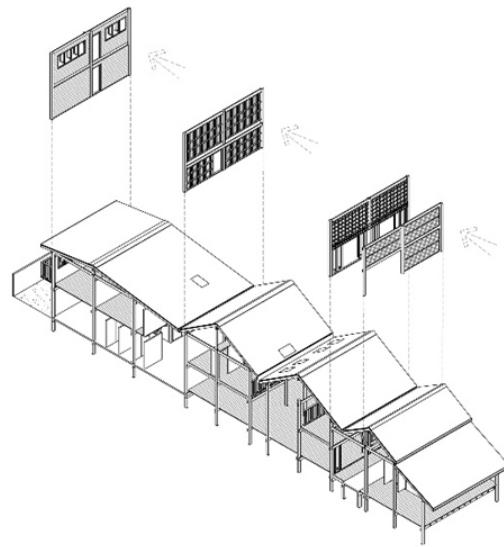


Figure 16:  
Breathable partitioning elements of HTK4

## The Intermediary Space

Regardless of types of ownership, the use of intermediary space is an essential strategy employed to improve the quality of the small inhabited space within the limited exterior surface. Its key concept involves the use of open space, openness, and opening. Bringing the outside in, the open well above the shop quarter, as shown in 77.8% of the case studies, and the open well above the service quarter, as shown in 88.9% of the case studies, with the skylight installed on gabled roofs, as shown in 55.6% of the case studies, help increase indoor light and ventilation. Furthermore, the ingenious use of the openings, such as folding wooden panels at the front, as evident in 77.8% of the case studies, and breathable partitioning elements along the depth of the shophouses, as evident in 88.9% of the case studies, contributes to the improved cross ventilation from the waterfront space to the rear part of the shop unit (Figure 15-16). Bringing the inside out, the small green space in forms of pocket and suspended potted gardens affords a view to the outside world (Figure 17). Therefore, it is noted that the procurement of light, air, and view perceptually enhance a sense of openness amidst the densely inhabited suburban setting, thus helps heighten the inhabitants' quality of life.

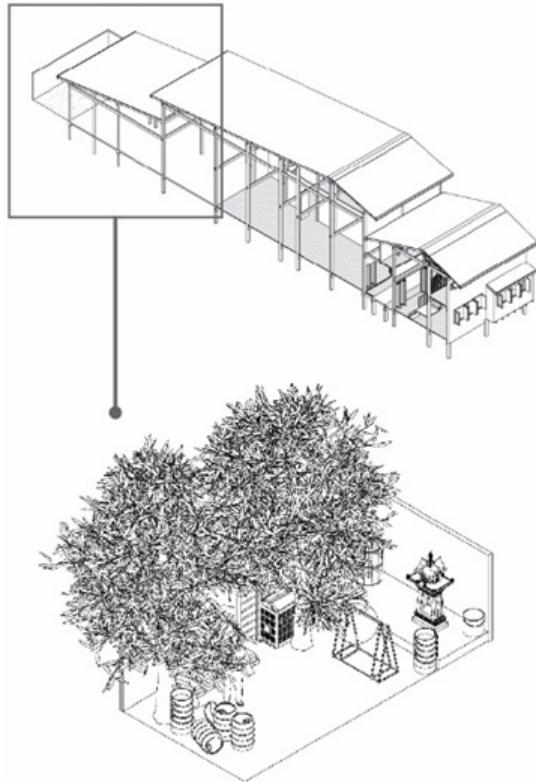


Figure 17:  
Green space at the back of HTK8

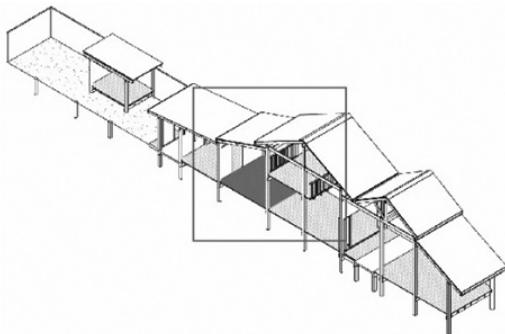


Figure 18:  
A sleeping area defined by moveable items at the living space of HTK1 (highlighted in grey)

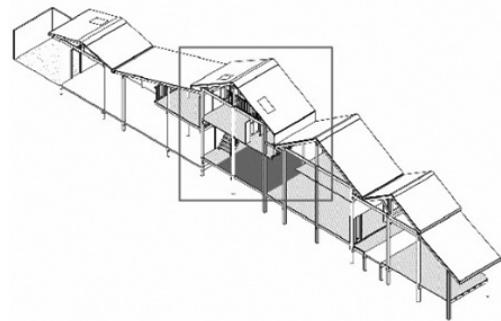


Figure 19:  
A sleeping area defined by moveable items at the living space of HTK2 (highlighted in grey)

## The Spaces within a Space

The spaces in space is another crucial attribute of these shophouse dwellings. In essence, it provides individuals the private (living/sleeping) spaces that concurrently afford a sense of relatedness to other household members. There are slight differences in how the personal space is defined between two types of shophouses. Constructed in forms of mezzanine(s) overlooking the ground space, the personal space of the long-term rental shop units, as evident in HTK5, HTK7, and HTK9, are rather fixed (Figure 20). By contrast, defined by such moveable equipment as a mat and a mosquito net, the personal space of the inherited shophouses, as seen in HTK1 and HTK2, is flexible and thus changeable as required (Figure 18-19).

## The Dialogical Space

It is noteworthy that the HTK shophouses serve not only for habitation, but also for social interaction. The location and dimension of the dialogical space varies according to the types of ownership, which closely relate to the types of products and services. The small commercial space at the front of the inherited shophouses, in which fitted shelves and products of daily use are tightly equipped, illustrate this social space. Besides their compactness, the intimate association between the shopkeepers and their regular customers brings about the comparatively closer socializing distance (Figure 11, 13). The dialogical space of the long-term rental shophouses is however evident in the waterfront space. Loosely furnished with tables and chairs, the waterfront space aptly accommodates a dining area for several kinds of customers; the HTK residents, the local students, and the tourists. A variety of visitors generate varying

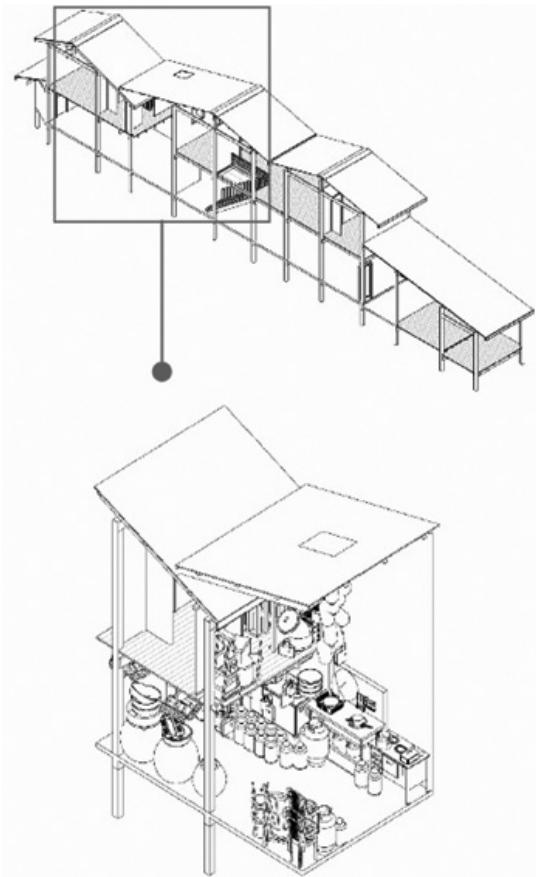


Figure 20:  
A mezzanine built above the service quarter of HTK5 to serve as an additional sleeping area

distance of social space that ranges from the close phase among the HTK inhabitants during weekdays to the relatively far phase among the tourists during weekends (Figure 21).

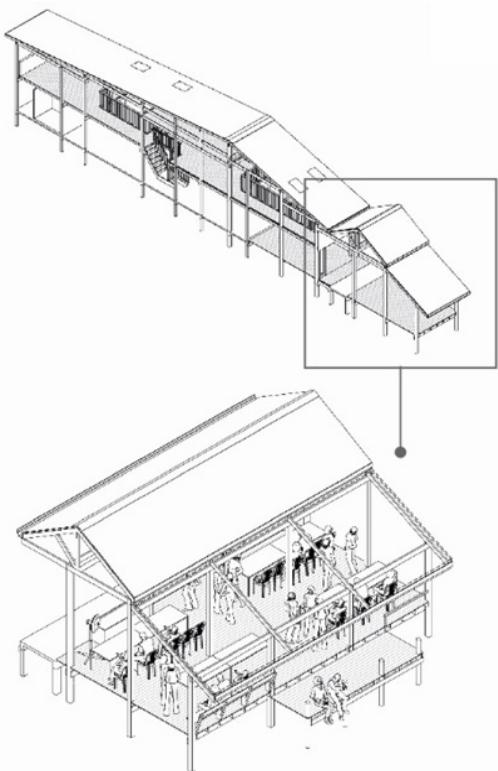


Figure 21:  
A dining area at the waterfront space in front of HTK7 and neighboring shophouses

## The Communal Space

On a broader scale, the HTK market offers communal spaces for collective dwellings. As well as art-related events community activities or congregating is made possible due to these communal spaces. It is interesting to note that different types of ownership generate different features of the community's public space. Owing to its open and semi-indoor/semi-outdoor nature, the waterfront event space in front of Suksa Pattana School and the waterfront space of the long-term rental shophouses owned by the HTK inhabitants, as shown in HTK7, can be utilized for such communal purposes as the community's workshops, annual celebrations, and religious activities (Figure 22). The waterfront space of several long-term rental shophouses owned by the new comers, as exemplified in HTK8 and HTK9; however,

has incessantly been converted from the flexible to the semi-fixed and, at last, to the fixed spatial feature that concentrates on commercial uses (Figure 23-25). In response to the decreasing functional versatility of the waterfront space, the ground floor of such multi-unit shophouses as the Si Yeak Hua Takhe Café and Guesthouse<sup>13</sup> can be switched to provide a temporary space for public uses.

## SUMMARY

The proxemics study of the waterfront shophouses at the HTK market was embarked upon with the core premise that the physical and spatial dimensions of the dwellings closely relate to the socio-cultural aspects of the dwellers. The research examined the dynamisms of the HTK water-based settlement and the types of inhabitants. The historical development of the HTK community and market can be divided into three main periods; starting from the flourishing four-cornered market, the deserted market with cheap accommodations and the revived market with creative spaces, thus providing the contextual understanding of the community.

Next, the research expounded the physical and the spatial transformation of the HTK shophouses in relation to the social aspect, i.e. the types of resident and ownership patterns, through nine case studies. The inherited shop units illustrate the functional and spatial essences of the shophouses in the past. These integrated shop and dwelling units comprise the rather fixed shop space, the flexible waterfront space, and the living quarter with a variety of spatial feature; fixed, semi-fixed, and flexible.

Nonetheless, the long-term rental units seem to emphasize on commercial purposes more, especially ones at the waterfront space, than the formerly integrated function of shop and dwelling. Being converted into two-story buildings, the waterfront areas of the shophouses owned by the new comers show a greater degree of modifications than those owned by the original HTK residents. With the emerging categories of services, the commercial space of the shophouses owned by the new comers extends to cover the entire ground floor. It is important to note that the type of ownership influences the function of the building—the HTK shophouses no longer serve as dwellings.

<sup>13</sup> Launched in April 2019, a fully renovated multi-unit shophouse, named the 274 Bed and Brew, offers an extra public space as required by the community.



Figure 22:  
Overall picture of waterfront space of the HTK market (no.19-58)  
(Source: Wisute Nuchnabe and Pitchaya Kointarangkul)

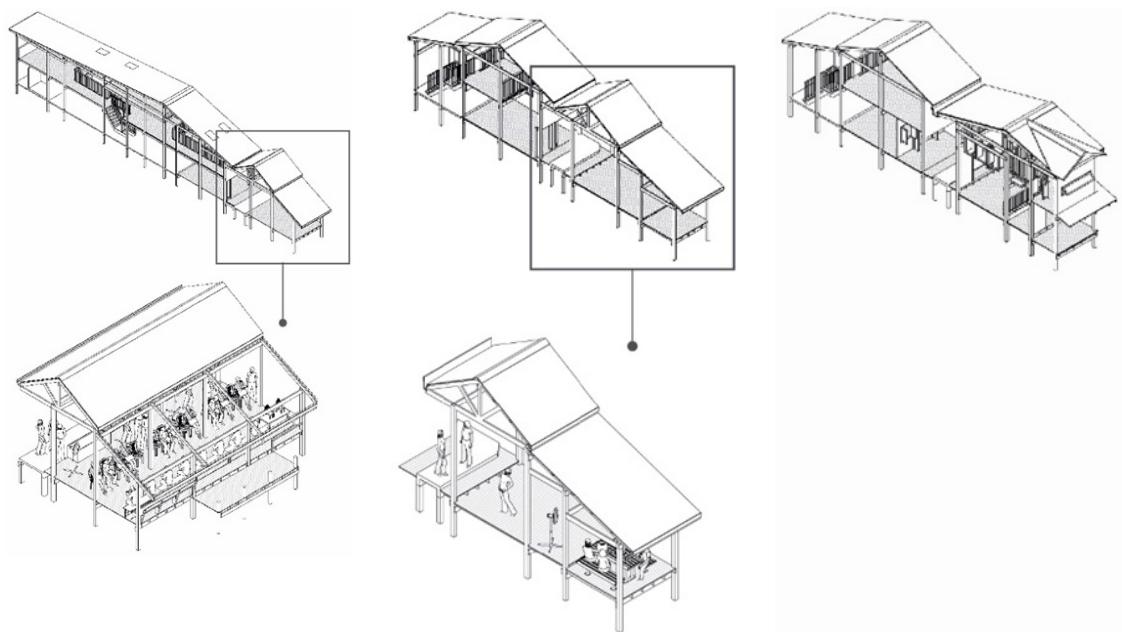


Figure 23:  
Religious activities at the waterfront space of HTK7

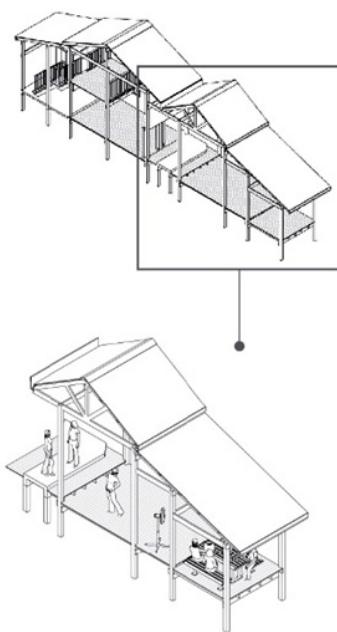


Figure 24:  
Art workshop at the open waterfront of HTK9 (before modification)

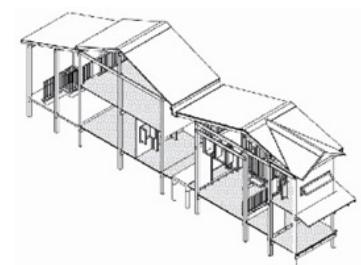


Figure 25:  
Enclosed waterfront of HTK9 (after modification)

Accordingly, the research analyzed the spatial essences of the HTK shophouses. These five essential characteristics—the intimate space, the intermediary space, the spaces in space, the dialogical space, and the communal space—are shared aspects with differing details especially in terms of social proxemics. Composed of both the private and collective modes of dwelling, they can be employed as key components to understand traditional communities in the evolving context, which could be adapted to the design of contemporary Thai dwellings.

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