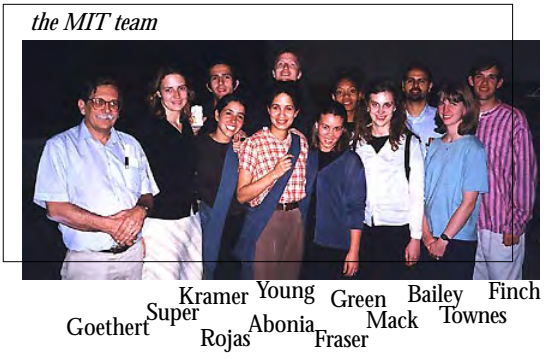


Reflections from the Chiangmai Workshop



Thailand
January 1999

SIGUS - Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement
School of Architecture and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 USA



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foreword

This booklet contains brief impressions from the MIT participants who participated in a 2-week workshop in ChiangMai, Northern Thailand. The participants were challenged to build on their workshop experience and pursue their individual interests in an imaginative and creative way.

The workshop itself tackled issues and problems facing small squatter communities 'hidden' throughout ChiangMai. The methods for exploring the issues and identifying interventions were based on a 'community action planning' approach which is community driven, participatory, fast and adaptive. Eight interdisciplinary teams were formed, each with responsibility to search for creative ways of tackling the more urgent problems facing communities as well as their underlying causes. These teams worked directly with the communities during the 2-weeks and were charged with presenting their findings to the community and to outside professionals. Many of the ideas proved to be very workable and some of the projects have continued toward implementation.

Several principles guided the workshop:

- Hands-on testing of methods for participatory planning and field surveys, while working in multidisciplinary and multicultural groups.
- Ways of identifying community leaders and other stakeholders as working partners for project development and implementation.
- Reflection on the concept of community and on the relationship between 'outsider' and 'insider' when deciding interventions.
- Identification of an effective institutional framework for project development and to look at ways of influencing policy through community-level projects.
- Development of presentation skills to suit a variety of settings and audiences.

This is the eighth in the workshop series 'Building Communities' involving architects, planners, social scientists, lawyers, nurses and engineers. This workshop was a collaborative effort of SIGUS-MIT, CENDEP (Centre for Development and Emergency Practice), Oxford Brookes University, England, and the ACHR (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights), Thailand.

The SIGUS graduate assistant for Fall 1998 - Spring 1999 was T. Luke Young. He is a third-year dual degree student pursuing a Master in City Planning and a Master of Science in Architectural Studies. His primary research interest is the impact of international bank lending for revitalization on low-income communities in historic cities.

We would like to thank our hosts – the AHCR: Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and the director Somsook Boonyabantha – for the generous support which contributed to the success of the workshop. We especially appreciate the kindness and extra effort of Patama, Poo, and Maurice, whose participation made the workshop enjoyable as well as successful!

– Reinhard Goethert

SIGUS – Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement – offers an umbrella for research support, workshops, and courses focused on low income communities, stressing participatory method in promoting affordable and equitable housing. A key goal is to explore and define the new professionalism emerging from the challenges of today and tomorrow. Established in 1984, SIGUS grew out of the rethinking of method, practice, and teaching in the housing field driven by the concerns of the rapidly expanding informal sector in developing countries.

SIGUS is directed by Dr.-Ing. Reinhard Goethert, assisted by graduate assistants from the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies. In its activities it draws on faculty from throughout MIT and from national and international agencies in exploring the new professionalism.

About the authors

Jennifer Mack is a third-year dual degree student pursuing a Master of Architecture and a Master of City Planning. She is particularly interested in housing for the low-income and urbanism. She did her undergraduate studies at Wesleyan University.

Maggie Super is currently an urban designer for Goody, Clancy & Associates in Boston, Massachusetts. She holds a Master in City Planning from MIT (1999), an MSc in Urban Design from the Edinburgh College of Art (1998) and a BA in Architecture from Yale University (1995).

Francisca Rojas is a second-year Master of City Planning student in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. She received her BA at the University of Michigan and studied abroad at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile.

La Tonya Green is a second-year Master of City Planning student in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning and is exploring ways that government agencies and community-based organizations can collaborate to effect community change while taking into account the voice of youth. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of California, Berkeley.

Zachariah L. Kramer is a second-year Master of Architecture student. He did his undergraduate studies at Swarthmore College and has travelled extensively throughout the world.

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Reflections from the **C**hiangmai Workshop

signs of globalization

– Jennifer Mack



Your travel agent will tell you that Thailand is “The Land of Smiles,” “The Final Frontier,” “The Land of Enchantment,” or even “Amazing Thailand.” These phrases convey the primary marketing concept of the tourist industry for the country, that visitors will encounter a world of traditional culture, friendly locals, and authenticity unavailable at home. Thailand will get you closer to the essential, they say. You will experience life before the daily complications associated with “modernization,” “development,” and “Westernization” took place.

What is this essential culture? How can it really exist in a world that is so well connected?

In pursuit, I went to some of the major tourist destinations in Thailand. Included were the Chiang Mai Night Bazaar, Doi Suthep Monastery, The Royal Palace, and Wat Po. These places, in addition to their scenic qualities, offered some clues about just how this “traditional culture” has responded to its influx of tourists. Although they are also seen by Thai visitors, the signs that I documented, primarily in the English language, served to mediate between foreigners and the authenticity many of them

were seeking. As such, they were interesting by-products of the tourist industry, worthy of note for their own temporally and culturally specific presence. Juxtaposed with phrases taken directly from tour books and

guaranteed... (*right*)... This poster advertises the trekker tours available from Chiang Mai, promising that those who join will see only authentic hill tribe people rather than other tourists on the same journey.

sponsor... (*below*)... This warning, placed at the entrance to the monastery temple at Doi Suthep, urges entering visitors to consider the appropriateness of their attire before offending the Buddhists inside.



tourist websites (as seen on the bottom left of each page), the words of these signs tended to convey a meaning that was independent of the places to which they were responding and referring. It was this concept that fueled my project, in which globalization became the major actor.



wat po...(*above*)...The entrance to Wat Po in Bangkok is marked by this sign, leaving little for visitors to question.

opium...(*right*)...Pepsi and opium poppies converge to announce the entrance to the National Opium Park on Doi Suthep Mountain near Chiang Mai.



walkway...(right)...This pedestrian path is parallel to Kao San Road, a major tourist area in Bangkok.

no drinks...(below)...The Royal Palace in Bangkok has strict regulations for its visitors.



Visitors should dress neatly in all respectful climates.
**They should never go shirtless, or in shorts,
hot pants or other unsuitable attire.**
-Thailand Tourism Authority Website

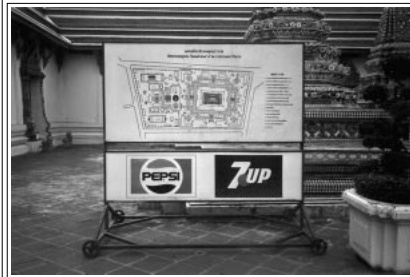
Owning one of Chiang Mai's traditional crafts is a sure way
to take back tangible memories of your visit to Chiang Mai.
Whatever it is you are looking for - be it a keychain or Thai silk
- Chiang Mai offers the shopping facilities for you to find a lot that you will be pleased with.
-Thailand Tourism Authority Website

Thailand remains one of the few nations in Asia
where modernization has failed to triumph
over local traditions.
-Thailand Handbook



fortune teller... (left)...A directory at Wat Po in Bangkok helps tourists to navigate the complex.

mapping... (below)...Pepsi and 7-Up ads complement the plan of a temple in Bangkok.



pickpockets. (left) A warning for those visiting the Reclining Buddha in Bangkok.

fantasy discotheque... (right)
 A tuk-tuk (three-wheeled taxi) in a squatter community in Chiang Mai displays advertising for a local nightclub.



For pure holiday-making magic, Thailand's islands and beaches
 are working definitions of **heaven**
 (once you get out of the shadows of the Evil Multinational Hotels).

-lonely planet-

You may want to think twice about joining such an excursion
 if you have qualms about interrupting the traditional patterns of life in hill-tribe areas.
 The part of Thailand is considerably over-touristed
 and some hill-tribe villages have been turned into
 little more than human zoos.

-lonely planet-

There is more visible historical evidence of past eras in Thailand than in any
 other South-East Asian country, so if you're interested in ruins,
 temples, and deserted cities, this is
 the place to go.

-lonely planet-

one day in Erawan: January 15, 1999

– *Maggie Super*

The following project documents one day in the squatter community of Erawan, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Erawan is a small community of 72 families living on public land near the historic city center. During the course of our ten-day project, I was impressed by the rich public life and strong social networks in Erawan. While many photographers and journalists have effectively documented the poverty and problems endemic to squatter settlements, fewer attempts have been made to portray the complex and often vibrant social life of these communities. I was interested in capturing this aspect of Erawan, and chose to spend one day photographing the activities taking place in the public area. The images shown here are excerpted from a larger exhibit of twenty-four photographs.

Project Background

Like many squatter communities, Erawan is struggling with myriad problems, from public health to lack of infrastructure to illegal land status. Perhaps the most serious problem in Erawan is the stagnant canal full of garbage and sewage waste, over which half of the houses are built. As a result of exposure to the canal, residents frequently suffer from dengue fever and upper respiratory infection. Most households do not have tap water and must rely on contaminated well water. The risk of fire is exceptionally high due to the density of buildings and combustible materials, as well as unsafe electric lines. In addition to these issues, Erawan has been devastated by HIV. The rate of infection is estimated at fifty percent; some parents have lost all their children, and some children have lost both parents. Prostitution and drug use, particularly the use of amphetamines, are also prevalent.

In spite of these problems, however, people carry on with daily life much as they do everywhere else in the world: they buy groceries, gossip, and care for

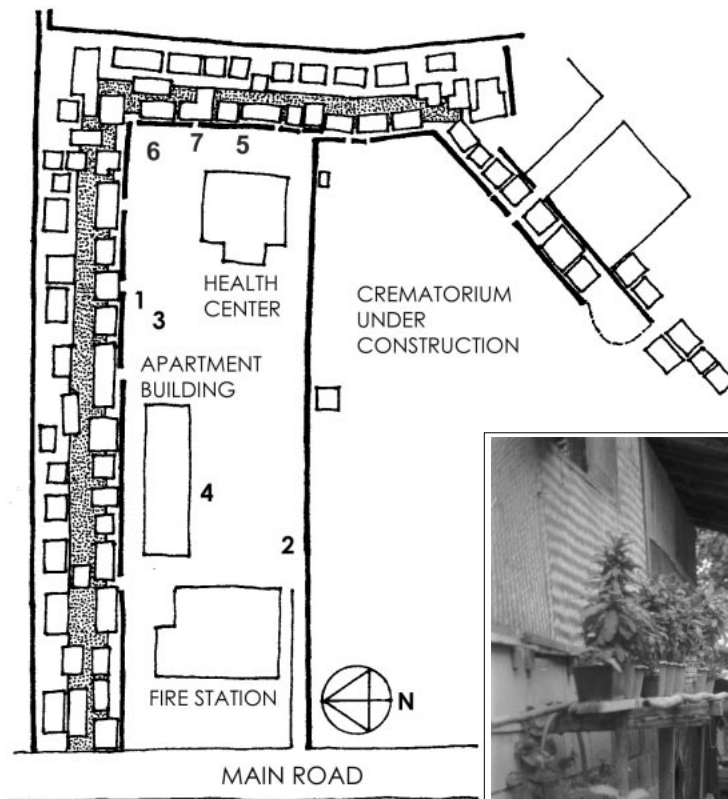
their children; they work, play, and celebrate together. Most residents earn a living through the informal economy, often by selling food and crafts at the night market. One of the most visible activities in the community is the production of rope dragons and other animals. These dragons typically take two days to make, and sell for 240 baht (approximately seven dollars) in the market. Other forms of micro-enterprise include a taxi service, a chicken farm, and a helium balloon wholesaler.

Erawan is fortunate to have a large area of open land immediately adjacent to the houses. This land is occupied by a health center and fire station serving the larger community, as well as an apartment building for firefighters and their families. The community is bounded to the north by a hotel and residential buildings, to the east by empty lots and warehouses, to the south by a large site with a crematorium under construction, and to the west by a busy road.

The following photographs were taken in the public area between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm on January 15, 1999. They demonstrate the rich social life and the variety of daily activities that take place in Erawan. It is the vibrancy of this community life, in the context of such overwhelming hardship, that I found most compelling.

Photographs are numbered in sequence, with each number corresponding to a number on the map. The number indicates the location of the photograph.

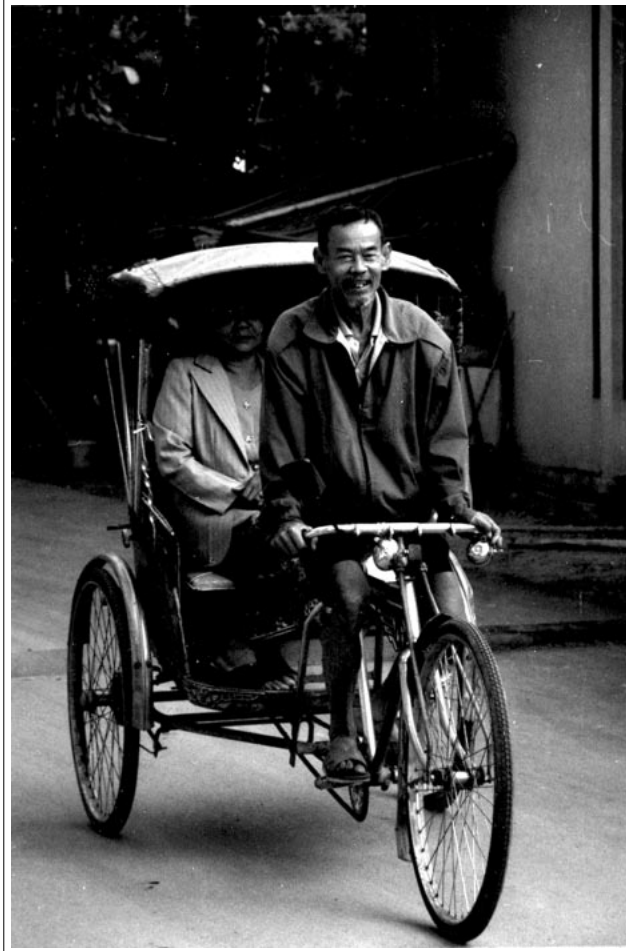




Typical passage



1. 8:30 am
Women talking



- 2 9:00 am
Rickshaw driver leaving with first passenger



3. 12:00 noon
Street vendor selling soup from a cart



4. 1:00 pm
Woman hanging laundry



5. 1:30 pm
Brother and sister eating sticky rice in banana leaves



6. 3:00 pm
Woman making rope dragons



7. 4:30 pm
Woman returning with empty baskets

does tourism pay?

– *Francisca M. Rojas*

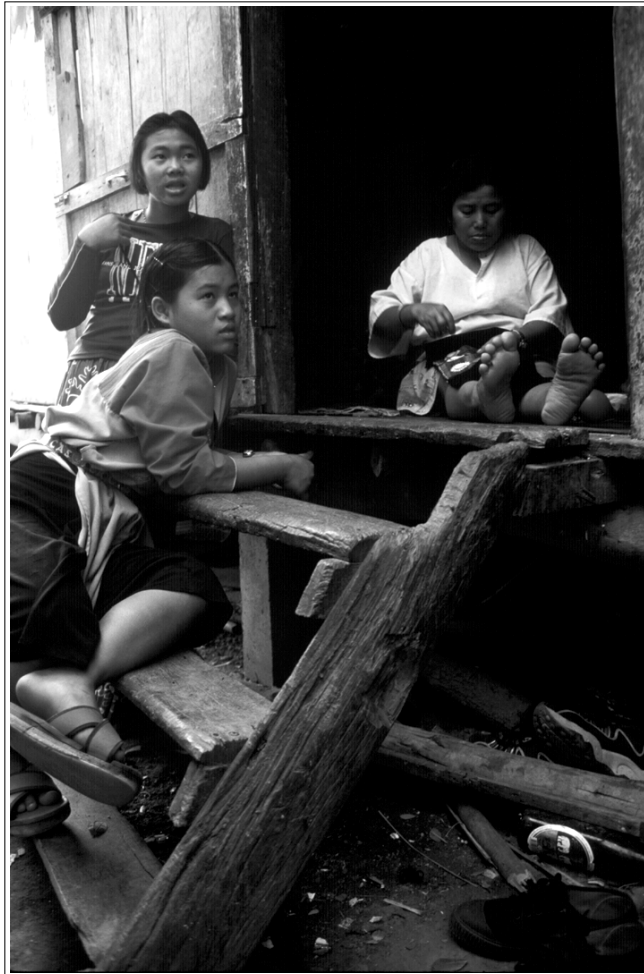
Chiang Mai, Thailand is considered the ‘Rose of the North’. As a gateway for trekking tours and the notorious Golden Triangle, and a destination in its own right, countless tourists filter through Chiang Mai’s more than 300 temples, numerous massage spas, restaurants, and markets. Not surprisingly, tourism is Chiang Mai’s primary source of outside revenue and appears to control the functions of the city and its people.

While working with the Kam Paeng Ngam community I noticed that even the ‘invisible people’ of Chiang Mai, the residents of the city’s squatter settlements, are intricately involved in the process of tourist consumption. Many of the poorest residents of this community, both young and old, earn a meager living working at one of Chiang Mai’s most popular tourist attractions – the Night Bazaar.

Made up of an agglomeration of stalls and street vendors - selling everything from Gucci watches to hill tribe hats - the Night Bazaar is a sprawling night market crawling with eager tourists.

Having encountered Kam Paeng Ngam residents as they worked at the Night Bazaar, I became interested in their experience of the market. More importantly, since tourism is being seen by many as a desirable development strategy adjustment to the post-industrial service economic system, I sought to find whether the tourism industry actually benefits the most economically disadvantaged people in Thai society.

I shadowed Ame, Jong, and Ashan – three young residents of Kam Paeng Ngam - as they negotiated the Night Bazaar in hopes of selling the bags, bracelets and hats made by Archu, Jong’s aunt.



Archu Maryer came to Chiang Mai ten years ago from the hills of Mae Aye, Chiang Mai province, where she once worked as a rice farmer. Archu makes the hill tribe crafts that her family and friends sell at the Night Bazaar. On this night, Jong (on right), 11 years old, and Ashan, 12, will take the traditional hill tribe crafts made in Kam Paeng Ngam to the Night Bazaar.



It takes Archu two days to sew one bag and it costs her 100 baht in materials (roughly US\$3). The selling price of most bags is 150 baht (US\$5), though they expect to bargain with tourists to roughly 130 baht (US\$4). The most intricate bags cost 400 baht, around US\$10, and takes Archu four days to make.

Archu obtains the cotton, patterned fabric and aluminum shingles (displayed by Ame) from other hill tribes at the Central Market in Chiang Mai. The coins on more elaborate bags come from Burmese traders that visit Kam Paeng Ngam twice per year.





Every day at 5pm, the hill tribe women gather their crafts and begin their short walk to the nearby bazaar.

Archu's husband arranges the various hill tribe crafts along a rented space on the sidewalk in a remote corner of the Bazaar. Vendors without stalls must



nevertheless rent the sidewalk space and street light electricity they occupy from the corresponding shopowner.

Jong and Ame, on the other hand, will hang bangs and baskets from their shoulders and walk the sprawling market until 11pm, when the vendors disappear from their stalls and the tourists retreat to their hotels.



The young girls from Kam Paeng Ngam tend to walk the Night Bazaar in a group. Their bright and intricate traditional clothing and adornments help them stand out among the chaos of the Night Bazaar, thus ensuring the tourists' attention and perhaps a sale.

After having walked the Bazaar for close to three hours, Jong, Ame and Ashan had not sold one bracelet or bag. Instead, they had caught the eye of a curious *farang* who offered each of them 10 baht (around 30 cents) to join him for a souvenir photo. These 10 baht became the total sum of income the girls earned after a six-hour night at the Bazaar - not a rare occurrence.



Clearly, for Jong, Ame, Ashan and Archu, tourism does not pay. The tourists at the Night Bazaar did not purchase any of the items made by Archu or peddled by the young girls. Even if those items had been sold, the tourists would have bargained the girls down to inconsequential sums – skimming any potential profit.

The results of this practice contribute to perpetuating the seemingly indestructible cycle of poverty within which the most economically disadvantaged are mired. Jong, Ame and Ashan do not attend school and probably never will; the girls' responsibilities lie in generating income for their families. With a limited education and a tourism-based economic system that offers little opportunity beyond the Night Bazaar, that income will probably not be substantial enough to aid the girls out of a life in the informal sector – in economic, housing, and social terms – and into a life that provides basic human rights and privileges.

youth of Kam Peang Ngam

– La Tonya Green

One of my most inner passions is youth. Often time their thoughts, energy, and imagination are under arrested development. One of the ways I have found to help youth escape mental incarceration by adults is to help them capacity build in their own communities. With a little assistance youth are able to understand how their community functions and use their energy to make a comprehensive plan to change it.

Kham Peang Ngam was the community I worked with in Chiang Mai. Kham Peang Ngam community is a squatter settlement community which started approximately fifty years ago. This community was settled on government land which means the residents are under the constant threat of being evicted. Most of the inhabitants are unskilled workers earning low and irregular incomes; quite a few residents in the community make crafts which are sold at the “Night Bazaar”, a famous location for tourists to shop. This community also suffers from flooding of a canal which borders one side of the community. This canal not only damages, and sometimes destroys, houses during the rainy season but also contributes to the poor living environment all year round. As a result of irregular garbage collection, waster is often dumped into the canal. This community also has a large drug problem and a significant number of H.I.V. and A.I.D.S. cases.



Jane drawing her community

Although I worked with this community only two weeks I became very attached. The most outstanding impression on me in working with this community was the children and youth. The youth were very energetic and often engaged in a conversation with me in broken English. They willingly talked about their community, and what was going on.



Vilwilaporn at home with her mother and a neighbor

One of the youth I became attached to was Vilwilaporn Yeepa. Vilwilaporn's family is part of the Hill Tribe of Northern Thailand. In 1987, near the beginning of the Asian economic boom, the Yeepa Family moved from the hills of northern Thailand to Chiang Mai in order to benefit from the new economic opportunities. Arma and Yapae, Vilwilaporn's mother and father, knew they would face considerable barriers because some Thai people view Hill Tribe people very negatively. Furthermore, they knew they would have language problems because Hill Tribe people do not speak Thai but have a language of their own. Moreover, moving to Chiang Mai became even more difficult than they had ever anticipated; just one-year later Vilwilaporn's father was sent to jail for 100 years. Yapae was convicted for being in the car of another man who was caught selling drugs. Arma was left to raise their three children—Vilwilaporn who was 2, Toongchai who was 4, and Sawat, who was 6.

Since Yapae has been in jail for the past 11 years Arma has been providing the family with the money they need to buy food and pay bills. Arma makes bracelets and tablecloths that are sold at the "Night Bazaar". Not only has Arma provided her family with the money they need but seven years ago she borrowed a small amount of money from each member of her family and worked two jobs in order to build the house her family now lives in. Arma hopes that one day she will not have to work so hard; she often sews for over 12 hours a day. She hopes her children will be able to receive a good

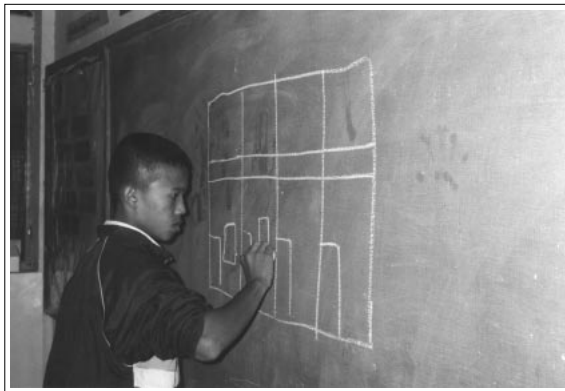
education so that they can live in a better place and have good jobs.

After spending a couple of days with the Yeepa family, I went to school with Viliwilaporn to see what kind of an education she was receiving. Moreover, I also went to Vilwilaporn's school to find out more about how her classmates viewed their communities and to see how the curriculum was either facilitating or inhibiting youth empowerment.

Sridonchail School is considered a lower class school, which I thought, would translate into a lower quality education and educational facilities. However, compared to a middle class school I visited in Bangkok, the students here seemed to be receiving a better education and the facilities were adequate.

So I went to Viliwiaporn's class. She is in the 7th grade. After telling them a little bit about what I was doing in Thailand I asked the students to draw their community. I did not give the students any other directions then "just draw your community." Once they completed the assignment I asked several of the students to explain what they had drawn and why. I wanted to find out if the students were drawing their neighborhoods as they are or whether they were drawing them as they would like them to be.

The drawings were mixed; some students drew their communities as they are and some drew them as they would like them to be. I then asked the



A student draws his community



students to envision the type of physical environment they would like to live in, explain why, and what steps were needed to get their community to change. Finally, the students were asked how the physical change of their community might change their lives in the future. The entire class was very engaged in the idea

of a connection between physical form and its psychological and social effects. They were very hopeful that their communities would get better physically while maintaining the strong social fabric. Their optimism was very inspiring.

I find myself drifting back to the youth of Kam Peang Ngam and the seventh grade class of Sridonchail School. I often wonder what will happen to them in the future. I wonder if the conversations we had about their communities and their futures will have any longterm impact on their lives. I think I began to help them understand that it is extremely important that they play a central role in the design and function of their community.

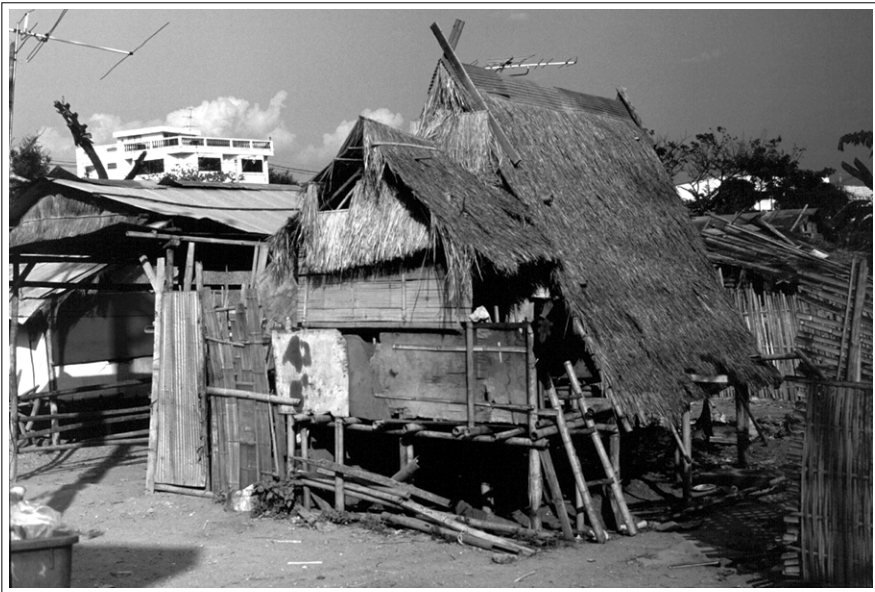
There is a strong correlation between the physical environment you grow up in and your potential for future success. It is my intention as a city planner to help youth be agents for change in their communities. Youth can be capacity builders in their communities if they are given an opportunity and some guidance.



*Some youth from
Kam Peang Ngam.*

joint detailing and material usage
in Chiang Mai squatter communities

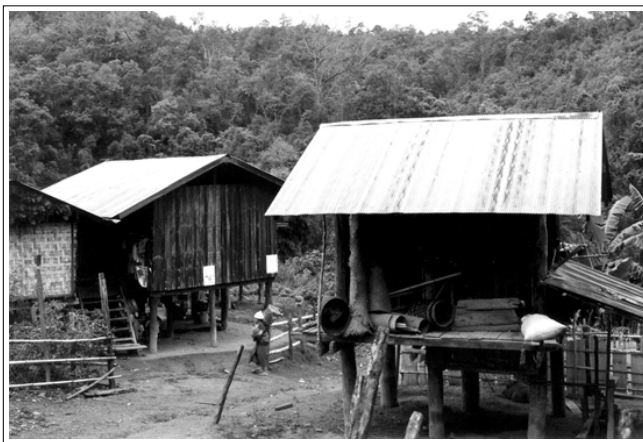
– *Zachariah L. Kramer*



As a carpenter, I am interested in the structure of squatter community buildings. In an attempt to document and analyze the materials and methods of joinery used, I photographed houses and details in three of the communities in Chiang Mai: Central, Kam Paeng Ngam, and Tippanet. These houses, usually judged dilapidated by western viewers, show amazing strength considering the poor quality of the materials that compose them, and to me are an inspiring reminder that structures of all types, built by unskilled labor, can be both economic and usable.

The building materials employed depend primarily on the availability of free or cheap material. Re-used lumber (rough, not surfaced at the mill), bamboo, concrete block, brick, and all varieties of fasteners are common. Corrugated metal panels, usually partially rusted, are common roof and wall material—often they are joined to other materials within the same roof or wall.

The Central community is distinct because of the predominance of bamboo construction. As in the hill-tribe villages surrounding Chiang Mai (composed of emigrants from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and China) bamboo is the material of choice for houses in the Central community. This style of house, with a bamboo frame, unrolled bamboo floor, and cladding of woven panels often appears in the other communities, but in the Central community it is the dominant type (see cover photo).



Typical hill-tribe houses



Failing reinforced concrete post



Post with half-lap joint

I focused on posts and joists and their inter-connections. Posts are made from a variety of materials from reinforced concrete to bamboo, and are usually pieced together from short segments. Often wooden posts have joints in critical locations that show signs of failure and subsequent repair, but mostly the post splices seem to work. Reinforced concrete posts are used—frequently they have lost the outer layer of concrete that covers the reinforcing wire, showing that the post was not cast properly. (Precast reinforced-concrete posts are commonly available in Thailand, however, they can rarely be salvaged and are usually too expensive for the residents of these communities.) Post failure was rare, yet many posts looked as if much effort had been taken to forestall failure, such as joints wrapped with wire or reinforced with additional nails. Common joints in milled lumber (not in bamboo) were the half-lap joint and simple butt joints secured with nailed wooden joining plates. When a wooden post meets a concrete footing it is secured by friction and not a mechanical fastener [the weight of the post holds it in place].

Milled lumber and bamboo are the only materials used for joists—like posts they are built up from smaller members, causing joints within the span of the joist. Failures of joists are common, yet rarely cause catastrophic collapse, perhaps because of support from the floor plate. In contrast to posts, that are only bamboo in the hill-tribe style of house, many joists in all three communities are bamboo. At the junction of the joist and the supporting sill, a bamboo joist often sits on a conventionally milled sill.

One common feature of these structures is that they are houses on stilts. Though the original reasons for building this way are unknown (possibly flooding, ant resistance, storage space) the houses that I looked at in detail were built with load-bearing posts and infill walls. Even concrete houses depend on posts to bear the load of the roof—concrete blocks are used as infill only and do not carry weight.

Observations and Conclusions

I believe that these houses set an example for builders in the developed world. Though in developed countries new materials are readily available from a multitude of suppliers, the squatter buildings prove that there are ways to build that take advantage of re-usable materials. The Thai squatters have no choice but to build with materials recovered from trash or demolished structures, but the houses show that solutions are possible



Bamboo joists



A broken joist beneath a kitchen

with even these limited resources. Surely there is some middle ground between trash and our excessive daily consumption of fresh-from-the-factory products.

Furthermore, simple construction standards could be introduced in these communities that could make the houses more durable and less prone to leaning or collapse. The houses are mostly built by their occupants, thus the quality of construction varies greatly. In Samakee Patana, another Chiang Mai community, one house belonging to a construction contractor is reminiscent of a suburban tract house—the adjacent house lists severely to one side, all of its timbers out of square. By a sharing of technical knowledge, possibly accomplished through meetings of the community builders or community building projects, effective construction techniques could be spread throughout the community. Simple principles of joint design and fastener locations, load bearing systems, and material usage could be of much benefit though requiring only minimal education or instruction. These could also accommodate the great variety of materials employed.

Another possible improvement is a more modular system of construction. These communities generally have no legal rights to the land that they occupy; at any time they may be asked or forced to relocate. The effort invested in the construction and customization of their houses will be lost if the evictions happen suddenly. However, with houses that can be easily dismantled, the community could move more easily when necessary, saving time and materials that otherwise must be invested anew. For example, a community might have a common house frame design: a standard mold for casting concrete posts with the same sill joint pattern and sills that match the posts. This would make the parts interchangeable, allowing easy movement of house frames. Each family could clad their house as they see fit, perhaps using a community pool of reversible fasteners—screws instead of nails, bolts instead of wire or twine. In such a way the cladding could be removable and easily transported. The hardware would be re-usable and thus portable, and investment made initially would not be lost.

As Claudia Abonia explains in this volume, these houses, dilapidated by western standards, are invested with meaning for their Thai and hill-tribe residents. Most houses are constructed with crossed first and last rafters (see cover page photo)—this is in the style of traditional Thai dwellings. The formal organization of these houses does not substantially differ from arrangements



found in more well-off Thai homes, and where possible teak or similar tropical hardwoods are used in the floor, the location of much family life. As evidenced by the force with which the communities have fought threatened eviction, there is much pride and sense of place invested in the houses. Though composed of found or discarded materials primarily, they give a sense of security, a sense that at the end of the day there is somewhere to return to.

Thus these houses that appear so flimsy to Western standards are durable, functional and quite invested with meaning. It would be a mistake to quickly assume that suggestions offered from a preliminary analysis would be beneficial—any such improvements can only be implemented in conjunction with the residents who build the communities. However, with slight modification at minimal cost, these houses might become even better suited to their occupants. Nonetheless, it remains inspiring to witness the accomplishments of necessity, and to realize just how much Western architects and contractors take for granted—ultimately, these are the lessons that these communities make so plain.



the ideas of many
– *Claudia Abonia*

Traveling around Chiang Mai squatter communities I was struck by how many different versions of the chicken coop there were. Only one of the coops shown here was designed by a licensed architect, the rest are coops in the vernacular. If I showed you more photographs of chicken coops you would begin to see a vast range of possibilities and approaches to chicken coop design that maybe you never really had the time to consider before. But better yet I felt that the coops represented the possibilities found when you begin to recognize the ideas or efforts of many individuals.

What had occurred to me was that in any one of the squatter communities we were working with there were already hundreds of solutions to the problems of building homes with found or recovered objects. There were also hundreds of solutions to the day to day difficulties of just living as a squatter. The point then it seemed was just to ask them what was and wasn't working inside their



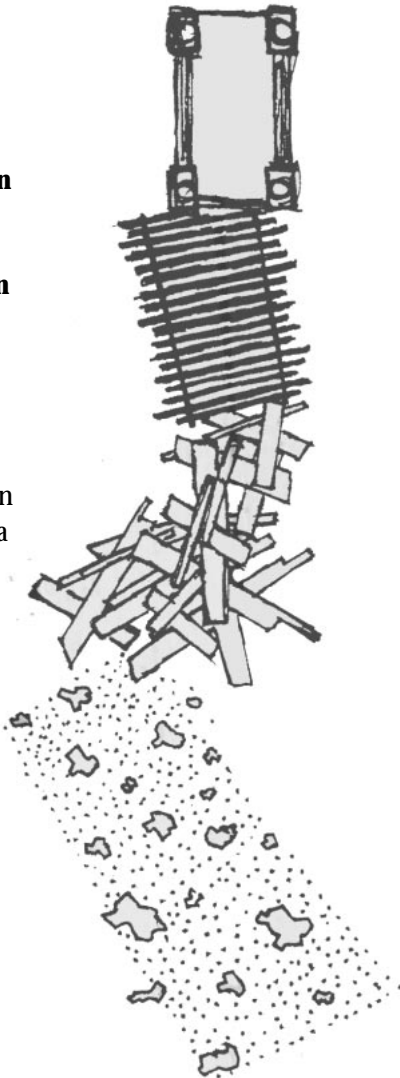
communities and why or why not. In sorting out the successful efforts of the Chiang Mai residents we all began to realize how possible future improvements to the community were. Their solutions were proven solutions, not well-meaning suggestions from an outsider. And what follows was probably the most significant lesson. Validating and championing the efforts of the Chiang Mai residents strengthened the community and their resolve to rely on themselves to improve their own lives regardless of whether outside help came or not. This in the long run is worth more than any gifted house, or road, or loan that we could have provided.

The more I learn the more I am convinced that solutions present themselves as long as you stay open-minded. Successful solutions in the end seem to me to be less about money and more about availability of information, or access to ideas. For many things, I believe the answers are right there in front of you.

mind your step
– Michael Finch

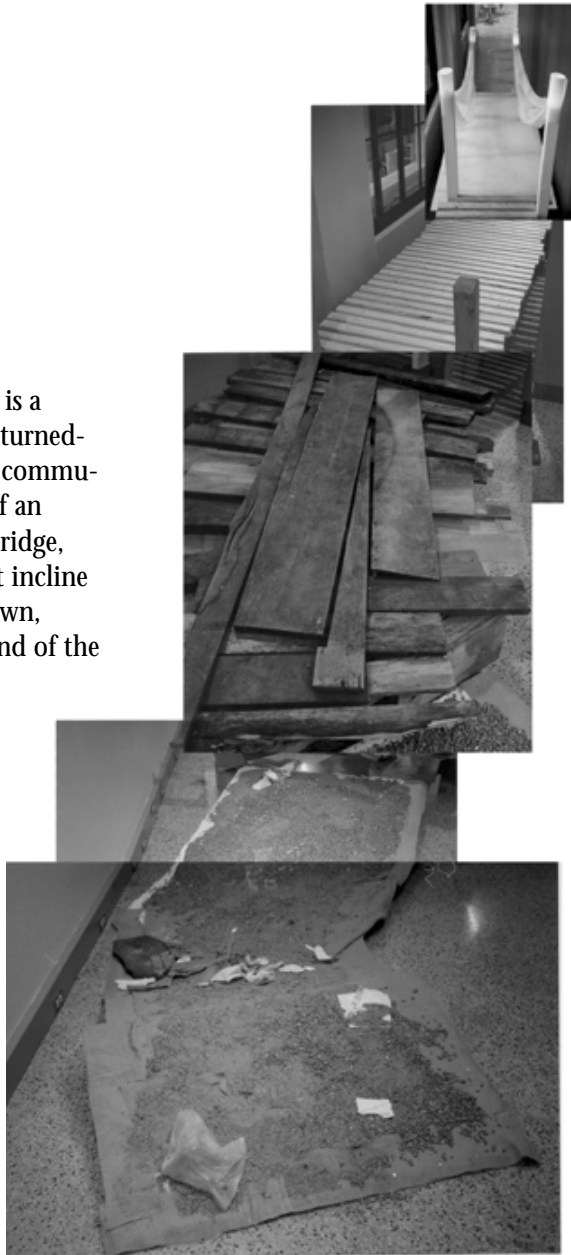
The bridge attempts to exemplify the beauty, daily challenges, and tourism-driven development that threaten the stability of the Tippanet community, the oldest and largest extremely low-income community in Chiang Mai. A collage of four different bridge styles, each section of the bridge is intended to convey a sense of movement of both people and place.

Extending forty-feet in length, the four-section contiguous bridge allows passers-over to gain a greater understanding of day-to-day living conditions and the gradual trend toward tourism-driven redevelopment and gentrification. In many ways, the bridges and paths within the Tippanet community represent the daily promises and pressures that people face in the squatter communities of Chiang Mai.



broken bridge

The first ten-foot section is a reproduction of a bridge-turned-walkway in the Tippanet community. Resembling more of an uneven walkway than a bridge, users will walk up a slight incline and then immediately down, before ascending to the end of the rock and dirt path.





bridge for walking

Stepping up to the second bridge, users will begin to appreciate the ingenuity within the Tippanet community. The second bridge is both functional in its construction and beautiful in its chaos, as scavenged pieces of wood are arranged in such a way to provide load-bearing support and a relatively smooth walking surface.





adjustable bridge

Modeled after one of the first internationally funded relief projects in Chiang Mai, the third ten-foot section of the bridge was designed by members of the community who had to constantly rebuild the bridges in their area each year after the rainy season. As the water in the nearby canal rose, two people could raise the bridge decking to a higher setting. This style bridge is both a functional solution to a long-time problem as well as a symbol of community status and permanency.



bridge for tourists

In contrast to the positive symbolic meaning associated with the adjustable bridge, the final section of the bridge is a sign of tourism-driven development and the central government's desire to eliminate squatting in areas visible to foreigners. This bridge represents a bridge at the edge of the community that is adjacent to the road leading to the Chiang Mai International Airport. Although still considered part of the community, the government vacated squatting families in order to create a park with "traditional" bridges.

the Klong Ngun photo voice project

– *Madeline Fraser*

Klong Ngun is a squatter community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Its name literally means the “silver canal,” which is ironic given that pollution of the canal is a major problem. It is a community that faces many of the same issues that slum communities face all over the world; namely housing problems, health and sanitation problems, lack of access to municipal services, and virtually no voice in the political system.

The community is approximately forty years old, and as a result of its tenure, does not see eviction as a primary concern. Community members do worry about the problems they face during the flooding season and their lack of access to public water mains and sewage systems. Despite the



sometimes squalid living conditions, the people of Klong Ngun see their community as one where lasting friendships have been made, where beauty can be found, and most importantly where there is hope for a brighter future.

What is Photo Voice/Photo Novella?

I chose to do a photo voice project (also known as photo novella) in Klong Ngun. Photo Voice is a social research methodology that incorporates the philosophy that Brazilian educator Paolo Freire called “education for critical consciousness.” In it, he rejects the idea of the teacher as the expert and the student as the “receptacle.”¹ Over the past twenty years several social scientists have incorporated photo voice into their



research. Among the most notable are Wendy Ewald, Jim Hubbard, Caroline Wang, and Mary Ann Burris. One of the premises of both Ewald’s and Hubbard’s work is that photographers who are fully integrated into the community they are documenting “is often imaginative and observant in ways that exceed more experienced photographers and photojournalists.”² Because of the way that this method lets communities tell their stories, it can be easily introduced to any type of community. Examples of photo Voice projects include homeless neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., communities in Appalachia, and peasant villages in China.³

Photo Voice is a way to give people at the community level a voice in the



assessment of what their community needs most. In this way, it switches the roles that studied communities and researchers in them play. It does this through photographs taken by community members and the dialogue that these photos facilitate between them and outside groups. Communities show us their areas of

concern, what they love about their community, and their everyday activities through their own lenses. They are not images that are filtered through the deep-seated ideas common to policymakers, researchers, and professional photographers.

The Self-Portrait of Klong Ngun

There were ten participants in the photo voice project in Klong Ngun. I was introduced to three photographers by an ACHR staff member. I was then introduced to the other seven by the original three. I gave the group two disposable cameras, and let them know of the purpose of the project. The only ground rules for the project



were that they take five pictures each and that they include a mix of people and places in their community. As can be seen by the results, they put much thought into the subjects of their photos. It is important to note that educational levels of the photographers or their experience with a camera in no way effected the quality of the photographs. In fact, for many, it was the

first time they had ever used a camera. This alone is a testament to the innate creativity that all people have regardless of their lack of training.

When the film was developed, I went back to the community to give the participants copies of the prints. We talked about what they thought about



the project in general, and what point they felt each photograph was trying to get across. They said that at first they did not really see the point of having to take pictures of their own community (especially since they were all so busy), but when they began taking the photos they began to see how their view was

unique to them. They saw that they were documenting places and activities that most outsiders never see. The participants were showing positive images of their community as opposed to the often negative depiction that is often generated.

The Photo Voice project in Klong Ngun was a learning experience for me and for the participants. In a small way their voices are being heard and their images are being seen. I went into Klong Ngun as the “expert” and humbly emerged as the student.

¹ Wang, Caroline, Burris, Mary Ann, “Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation,” *Health Education Quarterly*, 21(2), 1994.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Additional readings: VISUAL VOICES: 100 PHOTOGRAPHS OF VILLAGE CHINA BY THE WOMEN OF YUNNAN PROVINCE by Caroline Wang, SHOOTING BACK FROM THE RESERVATION: A PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEW OF LIFE BY NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH by Jim Hubbard, and PORTRAITS AND DREAMS: PHOTOGRAPHS AND STORIES BY CHILDREN OF THE APPALACHIANS by Wendy Ewald.*



uncertain crossings

– Mark Bailey

The three weeks that I spent in Northern Thailand in January presented a valuable opportunity to experience issues of development and planning within a city that was new to me and in a culture that is adapting to changing political and economic circumstances. There were many levels of learning involved in the Invisible People of Chiang Mai workshop and my own individual project. My particular interest was to observe and record some of the contemporary patterns of transition from rural to urban areas in northern Thailand. It was part of desire to understand how people who are most directly effected by larger processes of economic and social transformation understand the transitions that have occurred within their lives.



Questions of transition

Typically people who live in informal or marginal housing settlements are assumed to have moved to urban areas in search of improved material standards of living. Beyond this neat typology I had questions of how individuals saw their past, their current situations and the future for their communities, families and themselves. I wanted to understand some of the individual and family considerations that informed the move from rural to

urban areas. Were these factors primarily economic? If they were did people feel that they had limited options: was this understood as a necessary decision? I also wondered whether people felt stuck in the places where they lived: do members of informal settlements feel that these places are transitory or places where they have created community? An what is their long-term horizon: what are their aspirations and what are they hopeful about, and what are they concerned about regarding their own and their family's future?

I knew that I could not reach any general understanding of these issues: there is such diversity of types of settlements, economic and social conditions and of individual experience. And my time in the field was much too short. What I could hope for was some understanding and insight into how a number of people, in a country that had benefited from economic globalization and was now having to adjust to the economic and social impacts of the Asian financial crisis, had experienced these changes in their lives.

The Ha Tan Wa Community

As would be expected some of questions were partially answered, some of my questions were somewhat misinformed and I started to articulate slightly different questions. In Chiang Mai I worked in the Ha Tan Wa community,





which is located a short distance south of the old city, along a narrow roadway between the remains of the “earth wall” fortifications and canal. This had been vacant royal land and was considered to be marginal: the wall

was an impediment to building and the canal flooded during the rainy season. The first informal settlers moved here approximately thirty years ago. The community is comprised of approximately one hundred households, of which two thirds are members of the same kinship group, the Somena family, who were among the first settlers. This kinship group live at the western end of the site and at the eastern end live a number of smaller family groups as well as nuclear households which are not part of larger kinship groups within the community.

The first thing that was observable in walking around the site on our first visit to the community was the differences in the type and quality of housing structures. There were more established single family dwellings constructed of brick and tile at the western end of the site, as well as a number of small blocks of dormitory rooms for rent. There was a greater range of housing structures and differences in quality of construction at the eastern end of the community: there were both what could be considered permanent and temporary housing structures. On the earth wall, at the eastern end of the site, were a number of temporary housing structures constructed of wood, leaves and galvanized iron.

As we spent more time in the community and undertook detailed family profiles it also became apparent that the eastern end of the community were

facing greater social, economic and health problems than were being reported by the more established western end. A larger number of household heads in the eastern end had recently become unemployed and children had been removed from school due to an inability to pay for uniforms, books and meals. In addition in the past few years a number of people from the eastern end of the community had died of HIV/AIDS related illnesses.

Members of the community

I conducted interviews with a number of people in the community. These included the community leaders as well as people that felt excluded from decision making

within the community. After speaking to the community

leaders the first

person I spoke to at

length was Thawee

Jakchai who first

moved to Chiang

Mai and to this site

22 years ago. His

elder sister had

gained a job a

Chiang Mai, and had

settled at this site, so

he and his father also

moved here from Chiang

Rai. They even brought



he and his father also moved here from Chiang Rai. They even brought their family house, which was constructed in traditional northern Thai style, and relocated it here. For twelve years he worked doing live voice-overs in Thai for English language films. This was a well paying job, but it ended when films with Thai soundtracks were introduced. In the following years he has worked as a driver, construction worker and since the economic crisis as a fisherman, catching fish in the canal and a nearby pond. He knew of seven households at the eastern end of the street that were in financial difficulty since the economic crisis.

Thawee has been married for fourteen years and has two sons. His wife was also from Chiang Rai district. His wife works as a cleaner in a hotel, this was now the major source of family income. Electricity to the house had been cut-off because they could not afford to pay. When they do not have money for rice he is able to ask his neighbors for help, it is a process of give and take. Thawee said that members of the community, in their preparedness to help each other in times of need, lived like village people. Nonetheless due to household debts he had asked his eldest son, who was 14 years old, to stop going to school. His was not the only family that had removed children from school: these were another six families who also could not afford uniforms, books and school meals. His major hope for the future was that he would be able to afford to send his son back to school. Thawee thought that HIV/AIDS was also a major issue for the community and knew of five adults that had died, and another two who were ill, as a consequence of the disease. He also showed me the photos of his two adolescent nephews who had died of HIV/AIDS.



One of the other members of the community who I spoke with was Jintana Wongtianchai who had moved to Chiang Mai from Chiang Lai six years ago when her stepfather died, her mother remarried and the family split up. Jintana, her husband and their two young children live in one of the blocks



of dormitory housing at the eastern end of the site. She works in the night market in a shop that sell antiques, mainly to foreign tourists and antique dealers, and her husband works in a printing shop on the outskirts of the metropolitan area. Jintana knew her immediate neighbors in the dormitory block but she did not know other members of the wider community. In particular she felt that she did not have much in common with people who lived at the western end of the community.

Jintana felt that Chiang Lai had been a better place to live, the people were friendlier and kinder, however Chiang Mai was a good place to work and earn money. Nonetheless some of the families that lived nearby only had one person working, which made life financially difficult, so the neighbors helped each other out. In this respect Jintana felt that they still lived like they did in rural areas. Her aspiration was to buy a plot of land near Pai, in far northern Thailand. Pai is an increasingly popular destination for tourists and Jintana and her husband planned to earn an income from both cultivating the land and from establishing a tourist related business. Jintana was concerned about the future for her two children: about the sort of jobs they could get and the bad influences to which they would be exposed if they were to grow up in the city. She felt it was necessary that they get a good education but also felt that it would be better for them to grow up in a rural



area where there were fewer problems than you encountered living in Chiang Mai.

Representation

Though the Ha Tan Wa community was in many ways quite established - many of the houses had electricity and connections to water mains and there was a regular garbage collection service – there were significant issues of both representation and inequality. These issues were both particular and general. There were the particular issues, as in many communities, of who were insiders and who were outsiders. This was reflected in who had access to

the municipal resources that were distributed through the community leader and council and the consequent difference in economic and social conditions. The elected community leader was a member of the Somona family and had close links with local politicians. These had been used to gain services municipal services which were then unequally distributed between the western and eastern ends of the community.

These particular issues were closely linked to the wider issue of the representation of informal communities. The Ha Tan Wa community was on the margins of established neighborhoods. As urban workers the members of the community have played a critical role in the economic growth of their city and society. However as squatters they are often



regarded as a social and environmental problem. As members of informal communities many of them had a somewhat hidden position within their society and uncertain futures. The community leader did have close ties to local politicians and members of the community participated in city cultural activities, such as the children's festival. However as a consequence of their conflicted identity within the city they often lacked political and economic voice and only had limited chances to participate in city decision making.