

BANGKOK, THE CHANGING SKYLINE

INTRODUCTION

BANGKOK: THEN AND NOW

Today, Bangkok, the exotic city, is filled with a mixture of concrete and glass skyscrapers that compromise with the picture of a global city. Sitting on the rooftop of a luxurious five star hotel in the downtown Bangkok, while listening to the sounds of cars and sky trains, the experience is on par with a bustling metropolis, just exactly like the scenes of a futuristic Sci-fi film. As our eyes escalate slowly down to the street level, in contrast, is packed with dense old shop-houses and shanty slum-like buildings scattered between modern skyscrapers and global high-end shopping malls. The traffic in this city consists of a mess of extravagant European cars, rusty old trucks, colourful loud taxis, and enormous groups of noisy motorcycles. This mixture creates an extraordinary, complex and unique form of this organic city. This is Bangkok, in the 21st century, as one of the most well known metropolises in the world.

Bangkok (pronounced in Thai as [bā:ŋ kō:k]) was an agricultural water-based village on the Chao Phraya River delta, which is the present day capital city. It once gained its nickname as “Venice of the East” by the westerners who came to the village. Bangkok followed its ancestral prototype capital, which was ‘Ayutthaya’. During the earlier years of the new ‘Rattanakosin Kingdom’ (1982), Bangkok was made up of complex branches of canals all over the capital. Instead of steam and diesel land-based vehicles, people in the past travelled by boats. In addition, houses were built along the canals and rivers for easier access to the boats. The tip of beautiful pagodas and temples blend with tropical trees creating a beautiful background of the town. It can be said as a prosperous era of Bangkok as it held unique characteristics and was one of the most beautiful and peaceful places in the Far East.

What about Bangkok today? In the present day, there are little traces left on how Bangkokian lived in the past. Many of the canals were transformed to roads while the rest became polluted. This beautiful tropical city now became a concrete jungle, and obviously the skyline of Bangkok has changed completely. Over the past two centuries, Bangkok has been through different eras and moments from westernization, urban sprawl and the latest influx of “Manhattanization” (The process of making or becoming similar in character or appearance to Manhattan). Skyscrapers and busy traffic quickly replaced the picture of “Venice of the East” and is now a characteristic of Bangkok.

On a bigger scale, many cities around the world have been through similar situation as Bangkok is today. Newer generations tend to adopt the American culture of building high-rise buildings to their own cities, both as a solution and competition. In the East and South East Asia, where the cultures are completely different to the western world, has been changing towards international-like hybrid city from the effects of globalisation, westernisation and colonisation. It reflects on the city like Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore. Middle-eastern countries such as UAE and Qatar are highly competitive in architecture in a global scale. Even in Europe, where people are more preservative about the old buildings, started to develop empty plot of lands into high-rise financial district.

Following most parts of the world, Bangkok has been part of the homogenisation of creating a Manhattan skyline. What role should Thai play if they know that Bangkok has been destroyed by Manhattanization? What will be the most sustainable solution?

THEMATIC

MANHATTAN: THE BEGINNING OF NEW CENTURY

In the 21st century, most developed and developing countries skylines are filled with identical skyscrapers, which becomes a playground for architects. Competition as a tallest building were held

after the Empire states building were built in Manhattan and remained the tallest for almost 40 years. The Burj Khalifa from United Arab Emirates (UAE) is now the tallest building in the world with the megatall height of 829.8m. The trend has been developing over the decades from supertall to megatall, owing to the more advanced technology.

Manhattanism is the urbanistic ideology that has fed, from its conception, on the splendors and miseries of the metropolitan condition, hyper-density, without once losing faith in it as the basis for a desirable modern culture. Manhattan's architecture is a paradigm for the exploitation of congestion. (Delirious New York, 1994, p10) Manhattan Island, in New York, transformed from a colonial city to a metropolis serving as a playground for architects and new technology experimentations. The strong characteristic of the city influences the world direction of urban development.

The history of New York started with an island known by local as Manhattan. The Indians Weckquaesgecks in the south and Reckgawawacks in the north were the first human settlement on the area. Manhattan was discovered in 1609 by Henry Hudson in his search for "a new route to the Indies by way of the north" on behalf of the Dutch East India Company. Four years later, Manhattan accommodates four houses among the Indian huts. In 1623, thirty families sailed from Holland to Manhattan to plant a colony. Cryn Fredericksz was an engineer who carried written instructions on how the town should be laid out. In 1614, the Dutch constructed a rude fort on the southern part of the island, which was the beginning of "New Amsterdam".

After the sail of English lead by General Nichols to New Amsterdam, aimed to claim for this land from Dutch, the jurisdiction of the territory had passed into the hands of England. New Amsterdam was later changed to "New York" in honour to the Duke of York. During the period under British colony, In 1807 Simeon deWitt,

Gouverneur Morris and John Rutherford were commissioned to design the model for the occupancy of Manhattan. Four years later they propose to separate the known part from the unknowable part of the city – 12 avenues running north-south and 155 streets running east-west. They described the city as $13 \times 156 = 2028$ blocks. Since then the city is characterized by “The Manhattan Grid”.

The skeleton of the 1909 theorem postulates the Manhattan Skyscraper as a utopian formula for the unlimited creation of virgin sites of single urban location. Since each of these sites is to meet its own particular programmatic destiny beyond the architect’s control, the Skyscraper is the instrument of a new form of unknowable urbanism. In spite of its physical solidity, the Skyscraper is the great metropolitan destabilizer. It promises perpetual programmatic instability (Delirious New York, 1994, p87). In the era of staircase, the floor above the second was not suitable for commercial purpose, while the floor above fifth was not habitable. Since 1857, modern day elevator was invented by Elisha Otis and was first installed at 488 Broadway, New York. It leads the way to the development of skyscraper in the later years. Elevators also establish a direct relationship between repetition and architectural quality.

“In situation of (Manhattan’s) financial district with rivers on either side forbidding skill to find room aloft for the vast interests that demand office space in the heart of the New World.” In other words: Manhattan has no choice but the skyward extrusion of the Grid itself; only the Skyscrapers offer business the wide-open spaces of man-made Wild West, a frontier in the sky. (Delirious New York, 1994, p87)

In 1902, the Flatiron Building was a model of sheer multiplication. Nothing was more than its triangular site, made accessible by six elevators. This building remained “the most famous building in the world,” and was the first icon of the double life utopia. Thirteen years later, the Equitable Building repeated its site thirty nine

times. When the building was completed, even the builders were stunned by this phenomenon. The Equitable was promoted as a “City within a City”. This ambition made the Metropolis a collection of architectural city-states, all potentially at war with each other.

“I’ve a cozy little flat in/What is known as old Manhattan, We’ll settle down/Right here in town.”

“We’ll have Manhattan, The Bronx and Staten Island too.”

“It’s very fancy/On old Delancey/Street you know. The subway charms us so, When balmy breezes blow/To and fro.”

“The great big city’s a wondrous toy/Just made for a girl and boy -- We’ll turn Manhattan/Into an isle of joy.” In 1925, the song “Manhattan”, with lyrics by Lorenz Hart and music by Richard Rogers, summed up the era’s positive view of New York.

Building at the time filled up perfect grids of Manhattan, forming futuristic utopia skyline of steel and concrete skyscrapers. The Chrysler Building was designed by architect William Van Alen for a project of Walter P. Chrysler. When the groundbreaking occurred on September 19, 1928, there was an intense competition in New York City to build the world’s tallest skyscraper. Chrysler Building later surpassed by the iconic Empire State Buildings as the tallest building in the world. The current site of Empire State Buildings on the middle (Fifth) Avenue between 33rd and 34th Streets located a Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Later the hotel came to an end because it represented a paradoxical tradition of the last world. The only problem was Waldorf was not a skyscraper. Thus it gave the way to Empire State Building instead. Empire State is the last manifestation of Manhattanism as pure and thoughtless process, but in the ideology of Manhattanism is constitutes a double liberation (Delirious New York,1994, p86). In 1931, the Empire State Buildings were finally built and became the landmark of New York as well as the tallest man-made in the world for nearly 40 years. “Empire State

seemed almost to float, like an enchanted fairy tower, over New York. An edifice so lofty, so serene, so marvelously simple, so luminously beautiful, had never before been imagined. One could look back on a dream well-planned.” (Delirious New York,1994, p87)

The skyline of Manhattan remains futuristic with the idea of rebuilding everything high up in the air reaching the heaven. However, this new form of the city skyline also has a socio-cultural impact in the coming century around the world known as “Manhattanization”. In 1930, Cole Porter wrote the duet “Let’s Fly Away” for the musical show “The New Yorkers”. It gave some negative comments on the towering skyscraper of the city.

He: I’ve such a hate on Manhattan lately, That I’d gladly die.

She: Your conversation excites me greatly, For so have I . . .

He: I’m tired of the Paramount’s gaudy gilding.

She: I’m tired of looking up to the Chrysler Building.

He: There’s only one solution, dear.

She: Let’s calmly disappear.’

CASE STUDY 1

SAN FRANCISCO: THE BIRTH OF MANHATTANIZATION

Around 2,000 miles away from New York on the west coast of United States of America (USA), San Francisco is one of the most influential cities in the country. Famous for multicultural and beautiful landscape, San Francisco was the first to mark the start of the coin term “Manhattanization”.

Like many other cities in the country, San Francisco history was once associated with the native ‘Ohlone people’. San Francisco history continued untouched by Europeans until 1579 when Sir Francis Drake, the decorated English looter of Spanish galleons sailed past the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. In 1775, Spanish who was long having a strong hold of the California, travelled north

on a “Sacred Expedition” led by Gaspar de Portola. A year later, the Spanish founded the Presidio Army Base and the Catholic Church after capturing the San Francisco Ohlone population.

The beginning of San Francisco’s modern history started from the gold rush period. In 1849, James Marshall discovered gold dust in a Sierra saw mill. Since then, San Francisco was overrun with “Gold Fever”. In less than a year, over 50,000 people came to San Francisco looking for a fortune. As a result, many buildings were built up that made San Francisco grew lawless and lively. After the Gold Rush of San Francisco, the city started to change to the true San Francisco form. The city’s Victorian houses were built during changes from chaos to organized. They are regarded as 1800s form of urban sprawl and is beloved as a treasure. Later the iconic cable car was introduced and marked the change of San Francisco’s history.

In 1978 - 1988 during the administration of Mayor Dianne Feinstein, San Francisco saw a development boom called “Manhattanization”. Many large skyscrapers were built forming the Financial District. This boom also included high-rise condominiums in some residential neighborhoods. An opposite movement is among those who felt the skyscrapers ruined views of San Francisco bay and destroyed its unique character. Due to the skyrocketing of downtown, the city was forced to embed height restrictions that slowed down the Manhattanization. Nevertheless, between 2000 and 2007, housing pressures have led to master plan changes, which allowed new construction of high-rise structures. One Rincon Hill and The Embarcadero in the South of Market district are the results of the changing plan. “The prospect of a 550-foot waterfront office building blocking the view of the bay has stirred a fury over what has come to be known as the Manhattanization of San Francisco.” ‘High-rises are like heroin,’ Gardner Mein, a former planning commissioner observed, ‘Once you start you can’t stop except by drastic means and by then it’s too late.’ (Toledo Blade Jan 24,1971)

San Francisco was regarded as the beginning of changing skyline dominated by high-rise office buildings and apartments. Furthermore, This trend was brought to other parts of the countries. Seattle was among the rapid change of the downtown area. Tall towers had cut out city views of the nearby mountains and Puget Sound. "Some residents have seen enough skyscrapers and have pushed an initiative to a Tuesday vote that would set height and density limits on new downtown buildings...While the [38-story] Smith Tower was a source of pride, the 975-foot Columbia Centre, now the West Coast's tallest, has come to symbolize what some feel is runaway growth downtown at the expense of the rest of the city. That Manhattanization is the target of the citizen's initiative, which sets a 10-year limit on downtown development and clamps a 450-foot lid on new buildings." (The Bulletin May 14,1989)

Another classic case found in USA cannot be anywhere else but Miami, Florida. The history of high-rises began in 1912 with the completion of six-story Burdine's Department Store. Freedom Tower, built in 1925, is Miami's well-known early skyscraper and is also the icon of the city. From the mid-1990s through the late 2000s, Miami went through the largest building boom in the history, coined the term "Manhattanization of Miami". By the time, there were around sixty structures of condominiums and office buildings proposed, approved or under construction in the city with the height over 150 m. Miami later has one of the largest skylines in the United States only behind New York and Chicago. This boom however ended around 2008 due to the crash of real estate market. By 2011, the market began to return with new condominium projects. According to an article in the Miami Herald by Peter Zalewski, the guy that runs 'Condo Vultures', there are 100 new condo towers planned in the South Florida market.

In Canada, the city of Toronto is now facing heavily Manhattanized owing to the demands of living in the central Toronto. Recently, prices for single detached homes and townhomes are projected

to go up 30 to 50 per cent in the next decade, while condo prices are expected to rise only moderately. This situation makes condominium living the only housing option for those who want to remain in the central. It is a phenomenon that real estate mogul, Brad Lamb refers to as the “Manhattanization” of Toronto. “In New York City, even if you’re an investment banker making \$1 million a year, you still can’t afford to buy a house in Manhattan, so you’re buying a condo,” “If you want to live in central Toronto, you’re going to have to live in a condo. Families will be forced to buy into high-density living. It’s the natural evolution of a city,” (Brad Lamb: interview by CBC News, 2012)

CASE STUDY 2

LONDON: AMONG THE CHANGING OF SKYLINE

Manhattan gave the rise to tall buildings in the world, followed by San Francisco, Toronto and Miami. Other cities around the world started to adopt this trend to solve their population issues as well as modernising their cities. However, people do not realize that once they start building high-rises, they would overtake authentic forms of these places. Today, European cities are among the gradual change of skyline. Even though the original idea of preserving the old buildings is still practiced throughout Europe, at the same time, demolition is happening on a different level. The idea of new towering financial district has been adapted to the capitals and minor cities.

London is one of the most well known cities in the world in terms of history, preservation and diversion. Furthermore, London is a trendy, yet traditional place that can provide a cosmopolitan city life as well as being a world cultural hub. Many architects tend to get their hands on London projects creating various styles and trends of architecture forms. As a result, skyscrapers have been added to this capital in the past decades effecting the change of London skyline.

This ancient city dates back to AD 43 when it was first established as a civilian town of Roman Empire called Londinium. London, like Rome, was founded on the point of the river where it was narrow enough and the location of the city provided easy access to Europe continent. Londinium occupied a small area around the size of Hyde Park. In around AD 60, it was destroyed by the Iceni led by their queen, Boudic. The city was quickly rebuilt as a planned Roman town and recovered after ten years. By the 410 AD the Roman occupation of Britain came to an end. The city later went through the Anglo-Saxon period where the Anglo-Saxon settled outside the old Londinium wall in the west, which is now Strand. The research also shows the evidence of Anglo-Saxon Cemetery in Covent Garden. Later Norman Came to London established their city on the south bank of the Thames on the opposite of Anglo-Saxon's London town. According to some accounts there was a subsequent violent clash when the Normans reached the city. Having occupied London, William was crowned king in Westminster Abbey, marking the start of Medieval London.

During the Medieval London, the city started to sprawl out of controlled characterized London as an unplanned city. Many landmark buildings such as Tower of London were built during the regime characterized new skyline of London. Habitants were said to be the one who moved this city forward and planned the city themselves related to their habit and activities.

In the year 1666, The Great Fire of London destroyed the city. It started from inside the Roman wall and covered the area of central London. It consumed 13,200 houses, 87 parish churches, St Paul's Cathedral. Following the Great Fire of London, Sir Christopher Wren had grand plans to impose a grid system on the capital, to bring order from chaos. However, landowners rebuilt on existing plots before the plan started. They maintained the essential medieval layout for large parts of the city. It gave the organic unplanned urban form to the characteristic of London that will later be easy to

adjust to new changes.

Thereafter, during the economic boom of the early 21st Century, United Kingdom (UK) was experiencing a longer period of economic growth, than any other times over the 100 years. London was becoming the world's pre-eminent financial centre, and needed modern buildings to reflect its new image. Skyscrapers have long been associated with the financial services industry, and also demonstration of wealth. As a result, London was skyrocketing.

Croydon, a southern London town, was a result of the government in need of building new satellite for London despite it was not successful at the end. Later, Canary Wharf was set to be the new high-rise major business district instead following the master-planned by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The site contains around 1,300,000 square metres of offices and retail space, of which around 7,900,000 - 730,000 square metres. Canary Wharf was built on the previous site of Docklands where it used to be the busiest port in the world. After which, a set of new high-rise buildings was rapidly built in the area and was served with new light rail system DLR.

Due to the unplanned organic form of the city, Bishopsgate, the area in central London was under development and was planned to be another financial centre, giving the rise to Manhattanization. NatWest Tower (now Tower 42) was built in 1980 and became London's first genuine skyscraper. After a short time, the high-rise office buildings and accommodations started to dominate the skyline of the capital. In this 21st century, many of the buildings on this site have subsequently been given affectionate nicknames - notably the Gherkin (or more properly known 30, St Mary Axe), the Cheese Grater (122 Leadenhall Street), the Walkie Talkie (20 Fenchurch Street) as well as the Pinnacle or Helter Skelter (Bishopsgate Tower). In early 2013, Renzo Piano's the Shard ranked the tallest building in UK at 310m on the site of London Bridge Station

just right opposite Liverpool Street. As a result, all those buildings shaped the London skyline dramatically and enhanced the role as leading multi-cultural capital of the world.

In summary, every city has its own charm. London has magnificent classic low-rise buildings, while New York has a futuristic high-rise building skyline. It is true that London was growing according to lifestyle resulting in easy adjustment to the new architecture and cultural trends. The capital has been performing well in terms of preserving their heritage and cultural places. High-rises are being constructed within the same area. London, in fact, has already entered the Manhattanization process, just like other big cities in Europe such as, Rotterdam, Frankfurt and Warsaw. Should anyone give the height restrictions of high-rise buildings to those cities?

CASE STUDY 3

BANGKOK: THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

Europe is now experiencing the changing of its skylines, while the countries from Southeast Asia are by far heavily Manhattanized. The capitals of the five largest ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) economies (Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Philippines) characterized by wide spread of gleaming skyscrapers cityscape. The third largest and populated metropolis in the ASEAN, Bangkok, as mentioned before, is already in the midst of Manhattanization.

The area of Bangkok dates at least to the early 15th century, when it was a village on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, under the rule of Ayutthaya the previous Kingdom. It gained the important role during the period due to the prime location. After the war between Ayutthaya Kingdom and Burmese, King Taksin moved the capital down south while fighting the Burmese troops. He established the capital on the west side of the river, which is now

known as Thonburi on the former “Bangkok Village”. The capital is later moved to the east bank of the river during the reign of King Rama I that was the start of Rattanakosin Kingdom period.

Ayutthaya Kingdom was once called “Venice of The East” due to the topography as a river island and the people lifestyle in the past. Bangkok on the first era followed Ayutthaya Kingdom as a prototype. It can be clearly seen by the first settlement on the downtown core of the city. Bangkok was a water-based city responsive to seasonal swelling of Chao Phraya River. The canals or Khlong, both natural and dug served the capital as a military purpose and also as a major transportation. Bangkok original landscape is a swampland with low-lying rice paddies, ponds, extensive canals and mangrove forests.

Thai in the central part people believe that the river is the birthplace of a part of their cultures and customs. It can be seen by the way they built their houses in the past, mostly raised on stilts or floating on rafts. Moreover, many of them stood on the riverbank and connecting to the river piers for easier access to the canals. This way of living is suitable for the aquatic environs (DTCP, 1990, p95) and the annual flood. “The centre of the population, as it had been right from the outset, was Chao Phraya River itself, which together with the canals network, was said to contain some 7,000 floating houses or a floating population of 350,000 people” (Jumsai 1997, p169). This was an organic city synchronized with natural location, settlement patterns, architecture, and building technologies designed to mitigate the hot, humid climate for inhabitants (Dick and Rimmer 1999, p310). Nevertheless, Bangkok has entered the period of western colonization that forever changed the characteristics of this fluid city.

During the 1800s, Bangkok was introduced to new forms of the city.. By the time the King and the people of Bangkok, also known as Bangkokians, were aware of western colonization in the region.

Westernisation seemed to be the final method to make the country look civilized. Contacting the European powers led the Bangkok towards the superior land-based culture and industrial technologies that will permanently transform the city. The construction of the roads began in the downtown core of Rattanakosin Island, adopted from the western urban planning systems. Initially, road systems did not cover much parts of the city, and the canals still played the important role as a transportation mode, which remained Bangkok as a hybrid city. However, soon later, the cars started to take over the streets of Bangkok. Light rails and trams were later been built to serve the city, but those vehicles usage were limited to the upper class Bangkokians only. Earlier roads were built along the canal system. But as preference shifted ever more towards land-based settlement patterns, canals began to get filled for road construction. The increasing traffic reduced the drainage capacity and led to the eventual loss of an attractive traditional open space typology (Sternstein, 1982, p87 1982: 87). Land-based architectural typologies such as the shop houses, introduced by the Chinese, and mansions on the ground, bought in by Europeans, began to hold sway over the traditional aquatic counterparts (Jumsai, 1997, p170-171).

The road started to expand throughout out the city creating the endless ribbon developments along those new roads. Superblocks (a vast area between 4 main roads mostly overtaken by numerous small alleys) were the effect of unplanned and out of controlled growth along with the sharp rising of population. Many rice fields patterns within the superblocs were transformed into the concrete buildings and small alleys (or Soi), often leaving a huge enclave of inaccessible lands and dead end alleys. It can be as large as 20km. It became the era with the most drastic land transformations and started the urban sprawl.

The erasure of pre-existing settlements by newer patterns of development has never been coherent. The west bank of the river has weak road system due to the original water based systems,

while the old town Bangkok, on the opposite side, has stronger road system as they were constructed during the early automobile period. This area evidences densely settled urban grid. Further away from the core, the road system became weaker. It has heavily been through the process of leapfrog developments along road corridors. Shop houses also became popular during the urban sprawl. This unstoppable growth of shop houses and the superblock pattern soon took over the whole metropolitan area of Bangkok.

“Banking facilities, hotels, a hospital and a nursing home, a university and several secondary schools, a library and a museum, one of the finest race-courses in the East, and a number of social-cultural-athletic clubs were among the amenities provided for ‘modern’ living, Still, the majority of the half million people of Bangkok lived a very much less-than-modern life” (Sternstein, 1982, p23 1982:23).

From the 1980s to 1990s, marked the age of construction boom. Many high-rise buildings were added to the skyline of the capital, giving the rise to “Manhattanization”. The locals’ lifestyle oriented towards the more modern and globally. The areas along the boundary of super blocks became investment area for both locals and foreigners. In inner Bangkok, individual houses on large plots of land were knocked down to give space to the development of high-rise condominiums. The development was supported by heavy infrastructure, such as elevated expressways and mass transit systems including BTS sky train (1999) and MRT underground train (2004). On outskirts, the low-rise housing real estate developed by private developers started to dominate the areas forming communities. This period were described as the prosperous period, which caused drastic changes to both the physical and the socio-cultural tissue of the city.

After the introduction of BTS sky trains along Sukhumvit, Sathorn and Silom road, more condominiums and office buildings

were rapidly built to serve the cosmopolitan lifestyle. Many younger generations tend to live in the core where it is easier to access the more modern facilities. Lands along Sathorn and Silom road were transformed into 2 main financial centres in juxtaposition with the communities between those roads. Modern shopping centres became favourite hangouts for city people as they are situated in many corners of the roads connecting to the mass rapid systems. Some old buildings were demolished and given way for the newer and more modern foreign luxurious hotels. To sum up, Bangkok still remains its zeitgeist, but the city life is very much dominated by modern technologies and tall buildings.

ANALYSIS

MANHATTANIZED BANGKOK: THE IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS

Bangkok transformed from a sleeping water-based village to a capital mega city with the success of service and tourism. In the past decades, there has been a large influx of rural Thai people as well as people from Indochina, such as Indians, Pakistanis, Persians, Burmese, Cambodians, Laotians, Indonesians, Nepalis, Filipinos, Chinese, and others emigrating to Thailand. They make up 6.5 millions population within Bangkok, not including the nearby five adjacent provinces of Nakhon Pathom, Pathumthani, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan and Samut Sakhon. Those provinces including Bangkok form the Bangkok Metropolitan Region where it is a home of ten millions people.

Bangkok has been heavily urbanized when the population reached two millions in 1960s. The areas, which were once independent towns in the five adjacent provinces were suburbanized and slowly merged into Bangkok Metropolitan region due to the extremely dense population in the core area. Due to the lack of zoning law and the dense population in the city, the area in central Bangkok, such as Sathorn and Sukhumvit has seen skyrocketing. The influx of skyscrapers seemed to spread further out of the boundaries

as seen in the development plan of 3 new financial districts (e.g. RamaIX, Bangsue and Bangna).

As mentioned above, the idea of building skyscraper and extraordinary urban planning were results of human ambition to solve urban issues and the dream of utopia. The buildings were built higher, more complex and with newest trends in the past century in New York. It generated the idea of downtown or financial district look that later brought to other cities in the USA and other parts of the world. Skyscrapers were said as a symbol of wealth and modernity, while they actually impacts the society.

San Francisco was the pioneer of shaping the skyline with Manhattan style downtown. The gleaming skyscrapers reflect the wealth of the city. In fact, it became a disgraceful and the black history of the USA when the office buildings and luxury condominiums replaced old buildings and blocked the bay view. It resulted in homeless issue, owing to the high cost of the living in the downtown core. This incident reflects Bangkok in 1960s when the skyscraper boom in the downtown area started to black out glittering Buddhist temples. Although those buildings make Bangkok more modernized, people with lower income cannot afford to live in such places, resulting in scattering slum neighborhoods in central Bangkok.

The organic form of urbanism in Bangkok gives the strong characteristic to the city, while it affects the excessive rise of tall buildings. From the study of London growth, in 20th century, London has been experiencing the heavily change of skyline. Many tall buildings were constructed in the Liverpool street area forming a financial district. Due to the unplanned form of London, the area in the west was easily adjusted to the new change. The old buildings were still under the shadow of those tall buildings creating complex neighborhoods with rich cultures. It relates to leapfrog development along Sathorn Road in Bangkok. Old buildings were torn

down and gave the rise to new office buildings and condominiums. Comparing London to Bangkok, London is still experiencing the rise of Manhattanization, which is similar to Bangkok in the 60s. However, Londoners seem to be aware of the frightening change of their city's skyline same as San Francisco. As a result, the speed of Manhattanization in London is much slower than Bangkok. The 150 years London underground train systems is key to this situation. There are more choices for Londoner to find cheaper rents in the suburban area with the easy access to the core. This resulted in apartments built in the core with lower height.

In the past 50 years of heavy urbanization in Bangkok along with drastic change of skyline, Bangkok has seen numerous social issues as one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Homeless and slum neighbourhoods are one of the major issues reflecting the vast social gap within the city. The difficult accessible alleys in superblocks, opens to the new world and hidden community forming the phenomenon of village in the city. Superblocks originally arose from modernist idea of urban planning for a more "pedestrian friendly". However, superblocks in Bangkok are far more complex and are one of the factors that cause traffic congestion on the main roads. It also causes the individuality lifestyle of living where wealthier families tend to build their mansions just right next to slum houses. These few examples resulted in crime issues in inaccessible alleys and many condominiums and real estates in Bangkok are often heavily guarded with security systems.

The city centre in Bangkok filled with people living in high-rise buildings, neighbourhoods in the superblocks and the slum areas cause the severe traffic issue as well as pollution. Those diesel-based vehicles are the only choice for city people to travel around. Many canals that are not in use are polluted with rubbish. Thus, the models from successful capitals can be a perfect solution to this populated Manhattanized city.

Looking at how Tokyo grew unplanned after World War II, the city has a distinct organic form. The dense population and the megalopolis size of the, result in villages in the city and the superblocks. These phenomena are very much the same as Bangkok. However Tokyo became one of the world cleanest and most organized cities with a haphazard growing route. Similar to London, Mass rapid system in the capital is the best solution to this. These enormous train systems are really well made to connect people from the superblocks to the downtown areas.

Bangkokian, nowadays, should realize the fact that Manhattanization destroys traditional ways of transportation, society and environment. On the other hand many cities in the world have shared the same issue, not only in Bangkok. From these researches and case studies, Bangkok should expand the Mass rapid systems from what already exists (BTS sky train, MRT underground) to facilitate life in the downtown core and solve the inaccessible area of superblocks. The system also connects the 5 adjacent provinces and suburban areas to the city centre. The construction of train systems also promotes the living in suburban neighbourhood and nearby provinces that can reduce dense issue in the downtown. In addition, building government flats in the suburban gives the start to effective slum clearance in the future.

Before the westerners influenced the city, local people lived differently. Their lifestyle often conformed to environment and topography. They knew the best way of travelling in the city. In consequence, learning from ancestors is a must. Even though the city has changed drastically, numerous canal systems still exist and should be brought back to modern city life. From the usage of “Khlong Saen Sab”, travelling with boat taxis in the canal is still an effective way to avoid the heavy traffic. Thus, keeping them clean and promoting this choice of transportation for other existing canals can truly solve traffic issue. It also brings back the character of Bangkok as “Venice of The East”.

There is no doubt saying that Bangkok is an extremely hot concrete jungle. To organize and beautify Bangkok cityscape along with solving air pollution issue. The study claims that there are only 3.3 square metres of green space per person, compared to an average of 39 square metres in other cities across Asia. They need to be more concerned with the greenery within the city. In order for the existing trees to grow, electricity wires should be laid underneath footpaths. Such change will also promote better air, as well as alleviating the heat in the capital.

CONCLUSION

TO THE PEOPLE OF BANGKOK

Manhattan started the utopic form of high-rise socio cultural in juxtaposition with rest of the world. Skyscrapers are indeed the expression form of wealth and modernity. Many new developing countries later adopt this idea resulting the rapid change of skylines. Bangkok, Thailand is a part of the movement together with neighboring ASEAN countries. Today “Venice of the East” only lives a little evident, while the character of the city is a mega concrete capital. In fact, Thai people themselves never realize how serious these problems are. They tend to enjoy the changing trends. Nevertheless, living the Manhattanization life in Bangkok is something challenging for the local. This diverse cosmopolitan city is a junction of traditional Thai culture, other Asian influences and the western world. It has been changing every year continuously. How to balance them? How to treasure Thai traditions and apply them to these issues? What we can learn from the success of other countries? These are questions that Bangkokian, these days should concern. Manhattanization might be a negative term; however, it might not be the worst if we beware and know how to live with it harmoniously and sustainably.

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