



The John Turner Archive:

Klong Toey, Bangkok. A slum community's thirty-year struggle in Thailand.

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A slum community's thirty-year struggle in Thailand

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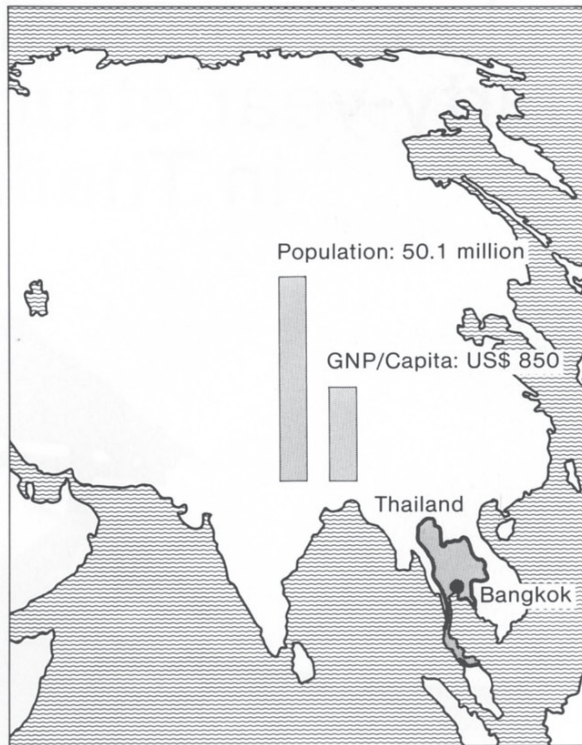
Klong Toey

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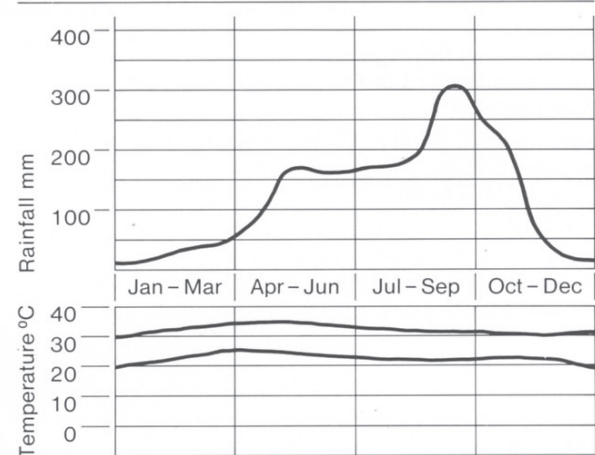
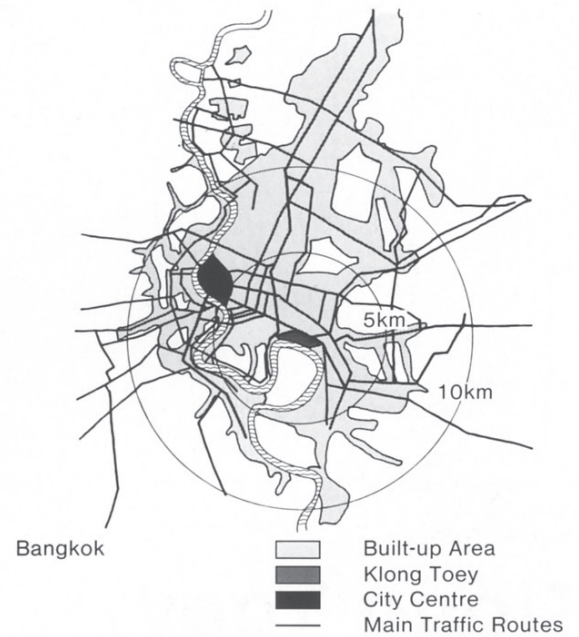




Population Bangkok (1985): 5.5 million
Population Klong Toey (1986): 40,000

Income Distribution:

In 1981 the average monthly household income in Klong Toey was \$US64 per month, compared to about US\$226 in the Inner Bangkok Metropolitan Area. In Klong Toey about 28% of households earned less than US\$35 per month, 16% between US\$35 and US\$70; 26% between US\$70 and US\$140; and 9% more than US\$140. The figures for the Inner Bangkok Metropolitan area are respectively: 1%, 5%, 21% and 73%.



Climate Graph Bangkok (10m)



Aerial view of Klong Toey and harbour in the 1970s.

PHOTO : PGCHS KULEUVEN, BELGIUM

KLONG TOEY

Klong Toey is the largest of Bangkok's over 1,000 slum and squatter settlements. Approximately 6,000 households have settled on 65 hectares of land belonging to the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT), next to the international harbour and less than 10 kilometres from central Bangkok.

For more than a quarter of a century, Klong Toey settlers have struggled for survival and for the right to stay in the city. Today, they have gained recognition as city dwellers, with full legal rights to stay in the heart of Bangkok, through a land-sharing agreement.

Abbreviations

NHA National Housing Authority
PAT Port Authority of Thailand

A Bangkok slum as symbol

Klong Toey is more than just a squatter area. To some people, it signifies the evils of a decaying social sector in a slum; to others, a creative, even heroic community in a struggle to house itself. Politicians, social workers, researchers and opportunists have all made their own use of Klong Toey, while the inhabitants have endured the changes in attitudes, social norms, policies and experts' views on low-income urban housing during the past decades.

Not only has Klong Toey changed from a rejected squatter settlement to a government show-case, but, more importantly, from the 'unwanted urban poor' to a powerful community, organized at the grass-roots and gaining increased ability to lead other participatory changes in the city.

In 1950, only 200 families lived on the edge of the marsh land. Now around 40,000 people have a home in



The developed village before removal, showing the well-maintained main walkways.



After land-sharing: dismantling a building for re-assembling on a new site.

PHOTOS: PGC-HS KULEUVEN, BELGIUM

KLONG TOEY

Klong Toey; some are migrants from the provinces, others urban residents evicted from other slums. Most families in the community earn their living from various activities related to the harbour. The squatter settlement has, over the years, become one of the largest 'markets' for cheap urban housing for the poor.

Struggle for survival and the right to stay

The constant struggle against eviction by the PAT, together with the formation of a particular 'slum subculture' developed from a spontaneous to a progressively well-organized, community-based movement, strengthened in the early '70s by the involvement of several voluntary agencies. Piecemeal housing solutions had been tried in Klong Toey, from threats (including arson) and sporadic eviction with no rehousing offered, to attempts at resettlement and the construction of 2,098 units in five-storeyed flats by the National Housing Authority (NHA) between 1976 and 1980.

These solutions failed, and only resulted in strengthening the community, as the Klong Toey people learned from their struggle for survival.

The final result of the long struggle came in January 1983, in the form of a unique land-sharing agreement with PAT, granting the dwellers a 20-year, legal lease.

Land-sharing: respecting the rights of slum-dwellers and landlord

Land-sharing has been used since 1982 as a compromise technique, to resolve eviction conflicts between slum-dwellers and landlords in Bangkok. Basically, land-sharing is a plan to partition the former slum areas into two parts: one for re-housing and the other for the landowners' developments. Through recognizing both claims as legitimate, the plan seeks to resolve the conflict by negotiation, to defuse a potentially volatile confrontation, which could lead to social unrest, by taking full advantage of the development potentials of the site, creating conditions where all may benefit. Obviously, land-sharing is a compromise solution.

A land-sharing agreement is the result of a long process of negotiation, rather than a simple, straightforward plan for redeveloping a site. Land-sharing needs strong community organization, as well as the solid support of other agencies, so that the costs of evicting settlers become prohibitive for landlords. Such an agreement is a concrete result of inhabitants' participation and co-operation.

Low-income housing and tenants' legal rights have been secured as the result of a power struggle between



conflicting interests: rights of tenure for the squatters against the technical, legal rights of the landlord; the right to stay against development plans of the authorities.

Land-sharing in Klong Toey

The National Housing Authority (NHA) is the government body responsible for housing development, in co-operation with the people's organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and others concerned. The scheme, which began in 1981, includes the construction of 1,440 new dwelling units, the relocation of 2,352 dwelling units, the provision of services for those moved, and changing the layout in the settlements not moved, thus creating 2,465 units. This makes a total of 6,257 units.

Population density has increased by more than half, and so has the expenditure on housing, resulting in an overall improvement in living conditions. The settlement is now better organized and has improved infrastructure. Nearly every household has its own unit, floor-area per household has increased by 77 per cent, and the value of the houses has almost doubled. Land-sharing in Klong Toey has brought an end to the eviction struggle and has provided the poor with the opportunity to use their energy and initiative to develop permanent housing in their settlement.

The houses reassembled in new location.



Combining the roles of the actors

The success of Klong Toey depended on the co-operation of many parties: the people's organizations in their struggle for housing, the NGOs in their supporting role, government agencies as a force for compromise, the landlord, politicians, academics, individuals and the general public. The inhabitants of Klong Toey, in their thirty-year struggle against eviction by PAT, have learned how to survive the sporadic evictions, and how to negotiate. They achieved this despite partial disorganization and the multitude of scattered groups.

In the absence of government services, the role of the NGOs in this project was significant. They reacted directly to the people's problems, on occasion becoming trapped into being day-to-day social relief organizations. However, a particular and very significant type of slum-oriented organization has also emerged, which developed during the process and became community-based organizations. It is interesting to note that some of these well-co-ordinated organizations scattered about the slum area have been transformed into community-based NGOs (CB-NGO). These CB-NGOs have a particularly important role in organizing the people, as they live and work in the slum and are thus able to respond directly to the problems and to develop with the process of struggle. The CB-NGOs, combined with the people's organizations, have become the backbone of the Klong Toey community.

The work of academics helped to publicize the situation during the early '70s. Academic research was followed by the setting up of a student workshop in the slum, and by the first community centre. In this way, politicians, international agencies and the general public learned of Klong Toey's problems and the findings of a study even had an impact on the orientation of the NHA in 1973.

The NHA has broadened its understanding of the range of possible low-income housing solutions from its work in Klong Toey, where it has been involved in the construction of dwellings since 1973, as well as in resettlement and land-sharing. The NHA has no direct political power, nor is it a property developer, but it has, in its role as a third party, mediated in negotiations between landlord and the people's organizations.

In this case the landlord, being ultimately the state, had particular difficulty in evicting people, especially in order to use the land commercially. The growing number of people in certain areas threatened PAT's development project, but its various attempts to evict them failed.



As Klong Toey is the biggest slum, it has always been able to attract the attention of the media, and has used this, combined with the popular movement, to great effect.

The engagement and co-operation of all these people has gradually led through adjustment and direction to a solution. The people of Klong Toey accept the solution, as they themselves have played a role in its formulation.

Impacts of development

The right of the poor to stay in the city

Since Klong Toey has long been a symbol for the slums of Bangkok, the gaining by its people of the right to remain will have a significant effect on the struggle and the rights of squatters elsewhere. It constitutes a landmark in the struggle for recognition of the right of the poor to stay in the city, and will add to its momentum.

Continuity and step-by-step development

In greater Bangkok, more than sixty major and occasionally violent evictions over the years have not succeeded in eliminating the slums. Long-term Klong Toey residents have themselves been evicted an average of 5 times during the last 30 years, managing somehow to reappear in other parts of the area. Evictions only strengthen the resolve of the people and the NGOs not to give up. Later, the problems of sporadic eviction were tackled in a more organized way. Community work assisted by NGOs became problem-oriented, rather than strictly plan-oriented, and problems were solved area by area, case by case, with a consistent and gradual approach. Both the people and the NGOs were able to

digest and to learn from this gradual process, in which their achievements and morale have increased little by little. After the first resettlement, the people's organizations underwent a considerable change, with a move towards legalization. Success in the struggle to remain has promoted further organization and work. After relocation in the land-sharing scheme, the Klong Toey group became the focal group in the organization of 18 other groups in the area, uniting them in the Union of Klong Toey. Later, this Union engaged in various important activities, such as the creation of a drug-free zone.

Negative impacts

Land-sharing in the Klong Toey Project has marked the end of the long and tough struggle for the 'right to stay' in the biggest slum in Bangkok. However, the legal agreement also underlined the change from informal to more organized reconstruction with better facilities. Such a formal change, on the other hand, not only placed an increased economic burden on the people, but it also meant that wealthier people from outside began to show an interest.

Redevelopment by land-sharing may turn out to be another method of eviction, especially in the case of weak people's organizations, by gradual market mechanisms. In Klong Toey, the 'right to stay' is sometimes being sold for about 100,000 Baht, which is about 2 times higher than the 'right for flats'. (Thai Baht 26 = US\$1.) Klong Toey people may be faced with a strong financial incentive to sell out their right. This may become the new challenge for the Klong Toey people to answer.