

CHAPTER III

SHOPHOUSES IN BANGKOK'S CHINATOWN

3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SHOPSHOUSES IN CHINATOWN

Most of the people who live in this area are Chinese. There are also other nationalities, such as Pakistan and Indian, who run their business selling clothes or jewelry or lease their properties [land and building] to the Chinese. But they are minor groups, and most of them do not sleep in these shophouses. They run their business during the daytime and go back home outside this area.

From this research it is found that in some parts of Chinatown there are shops that nobody lives in. Most of these shophouses were textile shops in which the textile chemical is dangerous to human beings. Others functioned as warehouses and offices.

Bangkok's Chinatown has been the center for Chinese immigrants, where they form their own community. Chinatown also plays a key role in being the center to exchange information concerning business opportunities.

"...Up until the early part of the 20th century, the Chinese left China in search of a better life and wealth. At first, as sojourners, the search for the wealth was of survival and the extra income was sent back to China. Later when it was not desirable to return to China, the overseas Chinese remained marginalized, served as middlemen and faced the dilemma of either returning to the homeland or staying on in the host country..."¹

The settled Chinese made an imprint through the architecture and design patterns seen in the shophouse in Bangkok's Chinatown. Over the century, the design and construction characteristics of the early shophouses are:

¹ Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun (eds.), Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand (Singapore : Brill Academic Publishers ; Times Academic Press, 2001), pp. 102-103.

- 1 to 2 windows on upper floor
- 2 storeys-low elevation proportions
- Minimal ornamentation, if used, from ethnic immigrants sources
- Doors and windows made of timber
- Shelters-boards/ panels/ louvers
- Rectangular / circular tents
- Comices/ horizontal/ mouldings along beams gate appearance
- Orders adopted are normally Tuscan or Doric

At present, the overseas Chinese and the people of Thailand have learned to live with each other. They became symbiotic. The Chinese became part of the Thai society. In fact, they integrated into the Thai society where maintainly.

“...As society evolved, both the Thais and the Chinese made adjustments. The Thais were forced into the capitalistic development ideology, first, for survival and then for economic and social advancement. Now the globalization process of the postmodern era makes it possible for descendants of Chinese settlers in Thailand to form their own identity, while having a Thai nationality and Sino-Thai culture. They belong to modern Thailand and are loyal to the country. At the same time, they themselves have been involved in the development of Thailand. The Sino-Thai have a sense of belonging to Thailand, while Chineseness is seen as a cultural identity. ...”²

“Shophouses” are defined here as multi-storey row buildings. Most of them are shops on the ground floor. The upper floors are used as residence and populated mostly by Chinese.

² Ibid., p. 104.

The architectural evolution of this type has taken on various forms through out the world.

Since the Roman Period, the Roman atrium houses for example, developed as a commercial alternatives to the single-family house, a shop or workshop with openings to the street located in part of a house. The houses in many European Medieval and Renaissance towns were one of the most dramatic forms in the architectural history. They were the development of Italian Renaissance “Palazzo; which had its beginning in the basic functional arrangement described above also developed into a monumental form of building that later became purely residential.

Especially in Southeast Asia, the Chinese are generally more likely than non-Chinese to have this “SHOPHOUSE” as the residence combined with business. Usually their businesses vary from food shop, coffee stand and selling daily supplies etc.

This study identifies the major characteristics of shophouse residents and buildings using direct observations, user satisfaction and their perceptions of problem associated with shophouses.

There are two types of “shophouses”, in Bangkok. Building combining residential and commercial activities make up a significant portion of the housing in Bangkok. Building combining residential and commercial activities make up significant portion of the housing in Bangkok. Residential shophouse is a single family dwelling which has production or income earning as a secondary function. Commercial shophouse is different from residential shouphouse. On the other hand, has a business as the primary use while the residence is secondary.

Although the architectural appearance of residential shophouse differs from that of a commercial shophouse, their basic functions are the same. Generally, most commercial shophouses are used for a ‘shop’ as well as a ‘house’. Some of them, however, are used mainly for business while the business owners live some place else, and some are used only for residential purposes.

The convenience of having a combined work place and residence was the most important reason for the residents decision to live in both types of shophouses most favorably as a work place.

Locational factor was the important predictor in the residents' satisfaction with a shophouse as a work place. Neighborhood conditions were the most important predictor in the residents' satisfaction with a shophouse as a living place.

3.2 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DESIGN OF SHOPHOUSES IN BANGKOK'S CHINATOWN

The development of the "Shophouses" in Bangkok have changed throughout different periods dramatically. Significant change has been found in the function of the "Shophouses."

The development history of the "Shophouses", in Bangkok has been divided into 4 periods as the follows:

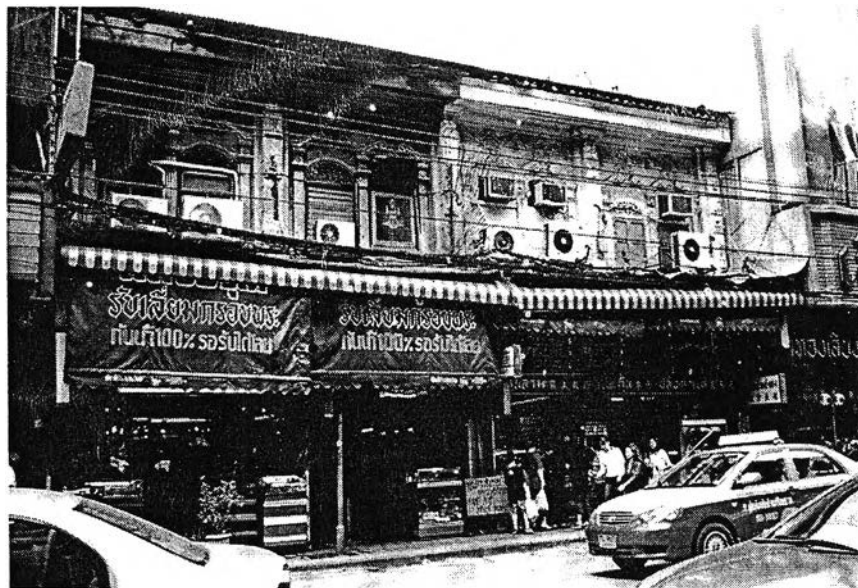
3.2.1 King Rama IV

There were the first "Shophouses" since King Rama IV's period. They were located around area of Talart Noi. The architectural was the mixed style, or "Sino-Colonial Style".

Originally the Renaissance Style was from Europe but since this region has a tropical climate, therefore the architecture has been adapted to fit the people living a different life-style. We can recognize these styles in the southern part of Thailand for example in the old town of Phuket Island.



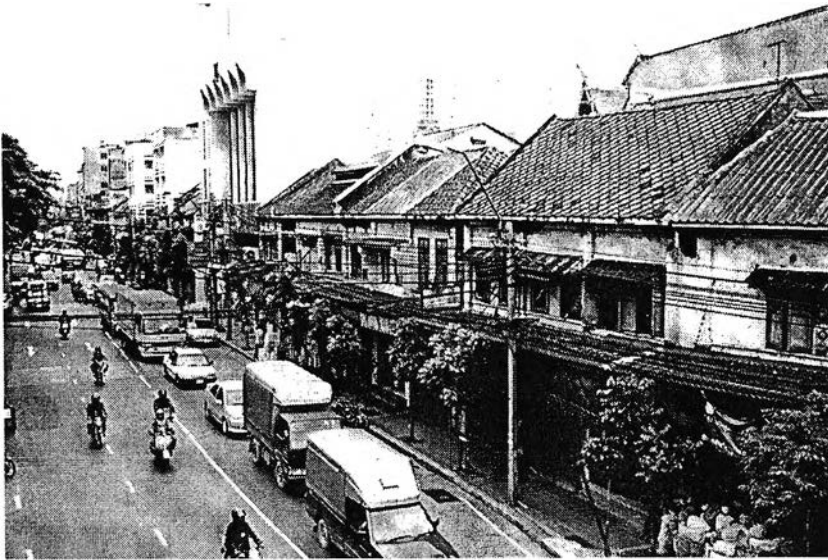
Picture 51 Sino-colonial style shophouses built during King Rama IV.



Picture 52 King Rama IV Period

3.2.2 King Rama V to VI Periods

In the period of King Rama V to VI, the area expanded around the capital city of Bangkok such as Prasumain Road, Banglumpoo Road, Rama 4 Road, Silom Road, and the most famous road in Bangkok's Chinatown called "Yaowarat Road". Most of the buildings are two stories made with concrete structure decorated with stained-glass which has been influenced from the Western Style.



Picture 53



Picture 54



Picture 55

Picture 53 – 55 Building constructed during King Rama V to VI Period

3.2.3 King Rama VII to VIII Period

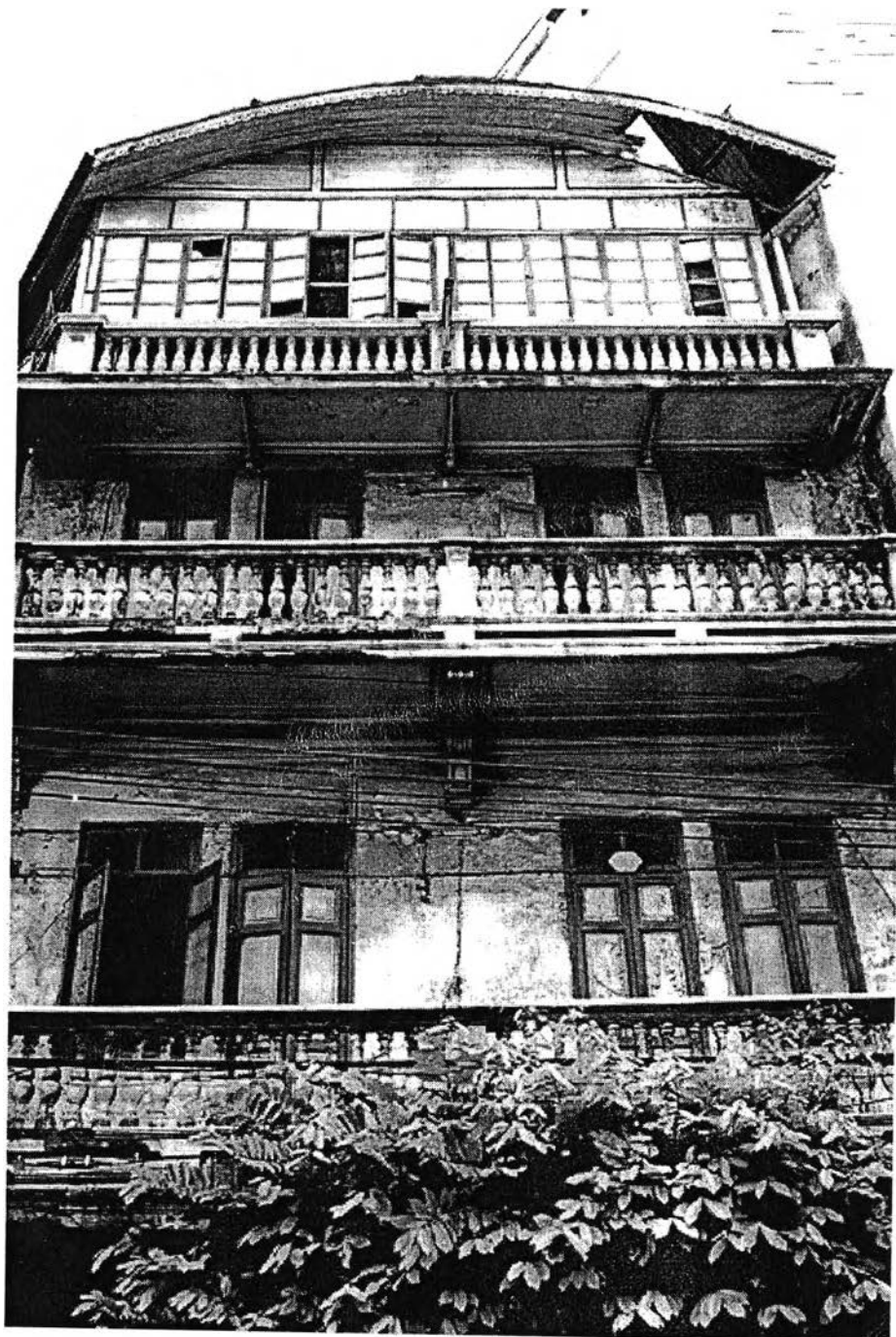
Since the period of King Rama VII to VIII the “Shophouses” developed according to the city-urban planning law. The law enforcement also indicated the size and height of the building. But there was no regulations or design. Most of buildings were constructed during the economic crisis after World War II, then lacked their own unique designs. But 3 – 4 storey buildings can be identified.



Picture 56



Picture 57

**Picture 58****Picture 56 – 58 King Rama VII to VIII Period**

3.2.4 The Modern Period

Today “Shophouses” has been developing to the larger sizes with more spaces for several purposes. Different kinds of the building materials have been introduced at this period.



Picture 59



Picture 60

Picture 59 – 60 Shophouses of the Modern Period

3.3 TYPIFICATION OF THE “SHOPHOUSES”

The “Shophouse”, can be classified into 5 types as follows :

3.3.1 Residential mixed-use “shophouses” are the shophouses in which “living” is the primary function and “other users” are secondary. This type of “shophouses” are mostly found in a high density community such as commercial areas. “Shophouses” of this type include: dormitories, flats and apartments.

3.3.2 Commercial mixed-use shophouses are the shophouses of which the primary function is commercial and other uses are secondary. They are usually located in dense business centers. “Shophouses” of this type include department stores, shopping centers.

3.3.3 Industrial mixed-use “shophouses” are the shophouses which are used for factories and installed machines more than 2 H.P. or which required more than 7 employees. This type of shophouse is used for industrial productions include printing, and steel work factories.

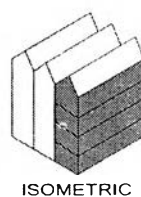
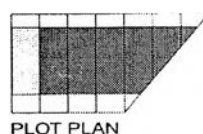
3.3.4 Service mixed-use “shophouse” is used for service businesses such as hotel, massage parlour, night-club, restaurant, clinic, vocation school and general office. In this case, serial shophouse units are connected within the building and remodeled in order to suit their new uses.

3.3.5 Another type of mixed-use shophouse is the shophouse which is used for mixed-activities. Besides those mentioned above these include wholesale storage, bus station and parking garage together with commercial and residential activities.

3.4 SPACE UTILIZATION IN “SHOPHOUSES”

Designs for utilizing space in “shophouses” include the following:

3.4.1 General Rowhouses: The most common type of “shophouses”, in which space can be used by the owner from the ground floor up to the top floor.



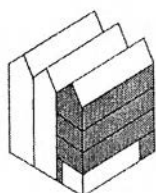
SCALE 1 : 350

Picture 61 General Rowhouse

3.4.2 Space-separated Rowhouse: This design divided the space for commercial tenants, with commercial uses in mind. It was common in the prime business locations of inner-city Bangkok such as Pahurat, Sumpheung, Silom and Pratunum.



PLOT PLAN

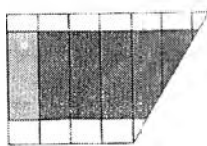


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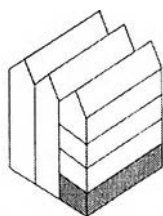
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Picture 62 Space-separated Rowhouse

3.4.3 Stacked Rowhouse: A design that divided the space for residential tenants or other purposes because the owners were unable to use all of the space themselves.



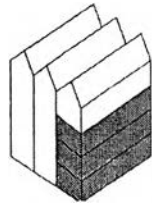
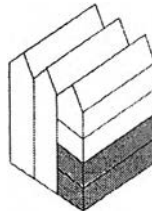
PLOT PLAN



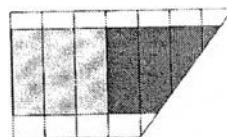
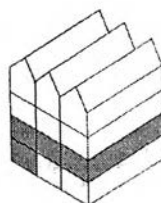
1-FLOOR STACKED

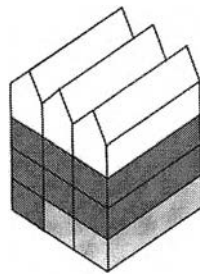
SCALE 1 : 350

Picture 63 Stacked Rowhouse

**3-FLOORS STACKED****2-FLOORS STACKED****SCALE 1 : 350****Picture 64** Stacked Rowhouse

3.4.4 Combined Stacked Rowhouse: These rowhouses were partitioned into many space that opened to one common entrances. Most of the owners kept the ground floor for their own use and then rented the upper floor. For example, the ground floor might have been used as a mini-mart or restaurant, while the upper floor was made into a serviced apartment or a small hotel.

**PLOT PLAN****COMBINE STACKED ROWHOUSES ISOMETRIC****SCALE 1 : 350****Picture 65** Combined Stacked Rowhouse



COMBINED STACKED ROWHOUSES ISOMETRIC

SCALE 1 : 350

Picture 66 Combined Stacked Rowhouse

3.5 SHOPHOUSES IN BANGKOK'S CHINATOWN IN DETAILS

The first row of shophouses in Thailand was built by during time of King Rama V [1868 – 1910]. Most of them were built along the streets, roads or alleys. The distinct culture of Chinatown “SHOPHOUSES” itself are in the form of tall, narrow which serves as both business and living quarters. From the book:

In the book “*Double Identity*” *The Chinese in Modern Thailand*, Coughlin described the Chinese home from early periods as the follows:

*“...The typical Chinese house in Bangkok, and indeed in virtually all urban countries in Thailand, is a two or three-storey ‘row-house’ built of unpainted wood or of brick and concrete. Each house is but one compartment or vertical section of a long building which may extend the entire length of the street. Built directly on the ground, each house abuts immediately on the sidewalk, a feature which facilitates its use for business. In Chinese neighborhoods one solid row of shops and stores line the street on both sides from one intersection to the other...”*³

³ Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong : Oxford University press, 1960), p. 68.

The interiors of those typical Chinese houses were described in detail as follows:

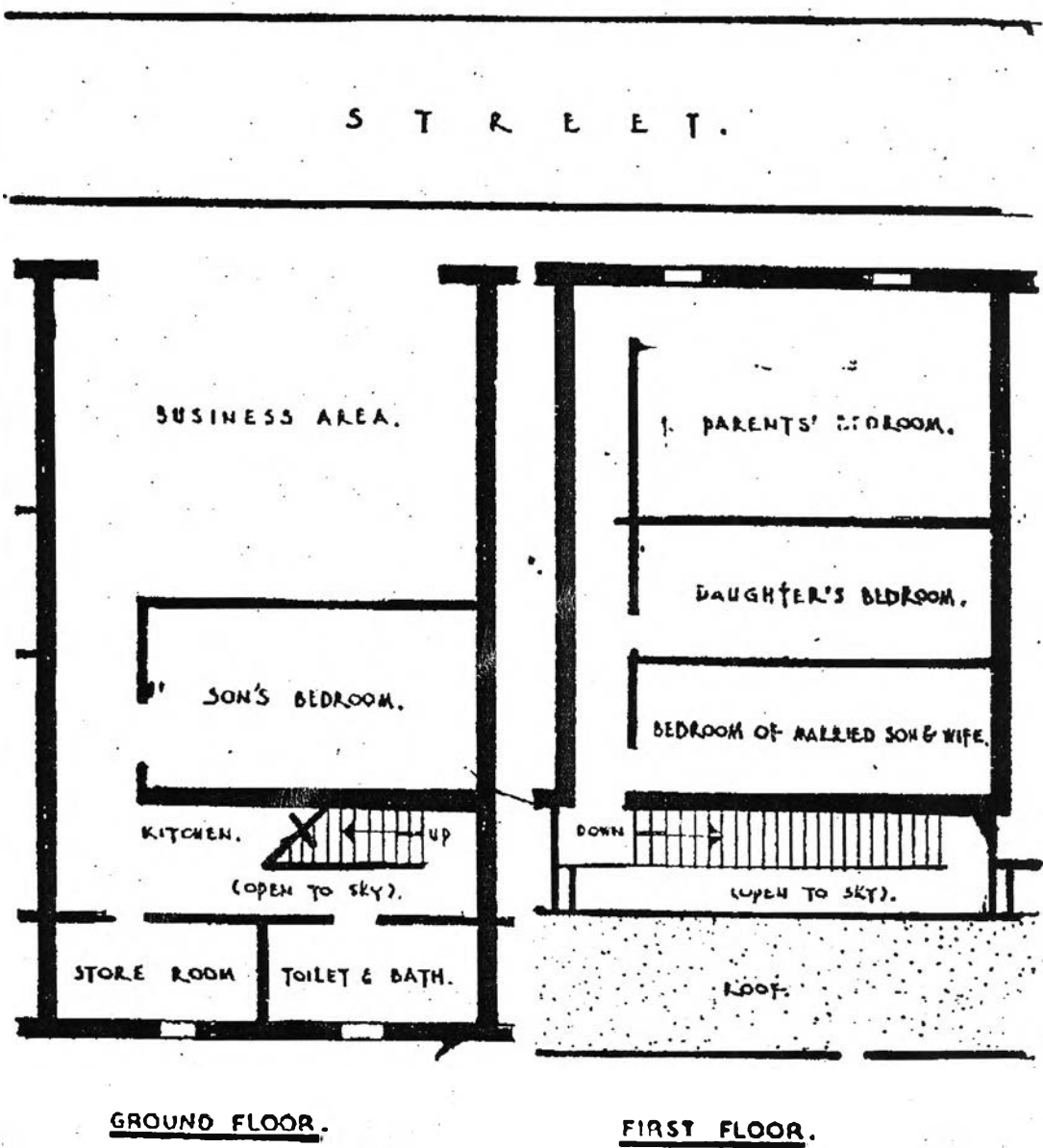
“...Interiors of these Chinese houses vary, depending on the social and economic situation of the family, but in general conform to the accompanying sketch. The family shop or business occupies the front part of the ground floor. Behind this one finds an open area for cooking, and the storerooms and toilet. Bedrooms are located on the second and third floors. By Western standards furnishings are sparse : a few tables, wooden chairs or stools, and beds. Floors are of dull red tile or rough concrete, Plaster walls are frequently unpainted, and cobwebs may festoon the ceiling and light fixtures. The construction of these houses provides windows only at the front and back, consequently interior rooms are dark, damp, and airless.

During the day the shop area is the lightest and airiest part of the house because the partitioned wall facing the street is removed entirely, providing a “door” as wide as the house itself. Few shops have plate-glass windows; only a counter or a low step stands between the shop proper and the sidewalk. The front room is an all purpose area. Here the family eats and if the business is substantial, here the several employees will be served their noon meal at the round table that invariably is found in these shops. Here the family gathers to gossip and chat with friends and neighbors, while their children play on the floor.

In the evening the room becomes a garage, with on auto or small truck driven in and parked there. At night the opening to the street is firmly closed with stout wooden partitions, and the house is then completely shut off from the rest of the world... ”⁴

Today most of the shophouses in Bangkok’s Chinatown have been demolished. But there are others which are still around, and some people are still living in them.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 68-69.



FLOOR PLAN OF TYPICAL CHINESE HOUSE
IN BANGKOK'S CHINATOWN.

Picture 67 Floor plan of typical Chinese house in Bangkok's Chinatown

3.6 THE TYPES OF DWELLERS (CLASSIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD)

This study seeks to bring together both the objective and subjective attributes of shophouses. The questionnaires had been developed. Enumeration was carried out by two research assistants who had been trained.

There were four types of dwellers:

3.6.1 Household members

The average family size is six to twelve members.

The result serves to be contradictory to the traditionally perceived Chinese household structure, where there should be more than one family in each household. The married son should remain with the parents following Chinese tradition. Nowadays, most of the married sons moved to their new houses either in the city or in the suburbs to have their private lives and also they were having their own career, and did not follow their parents' tradition.

According to the survey some of them come back during the day in Chinatown to help their parents in their shophouses. It has been found that the majority [76%] of the shophouse families operate their businesses at their shophouses.

3.6.2 Maid

Times have changed because in the old days the Chinese in Bangkok's Chinatown, were not used to hire the maids to help them for cleaning, instead they helped each other. Today, all of these maids stay with their employers. Most of them are Thai girls from other provinces. Most of the respondents complained that they faced the problems of seeking new maids as the old ones stayed for a short period and left. There were four to seven persons in the shophouses which had two to three maids.

3.6.3 Workers

According to the field work results, there were very few workers who slept in the shophouses where they worked. The average were 5 workers and the

maximum were 15 persons but most of these shophouses in Bangkok's Chinatown. From the field survey there are at least 1 or 2 persons living in the shophouse. Most of them were the workers who worked in these shophouses so the owner of the shophouses let them stay there to look after the building as the household members did not live there.

3.6.4 Sub-renter

There were nine respondents who leased some part of their shophouses to sub-renters. The nine respondents consisted of these respondents whose sub-renters rented the area for residences.

3.7 FUNCTIONS OF SHOPHOUSES IN BANGKOK'S CHINATOWN: ATTITUDES OF RESPONDENTS

3.7.1 Level of satisfaction with physical conditions

Shophouse residents were asked why they chose to live in a shophouse as "a place to live" as well as "a place to work". The central issues included the question, what factors contributed to make them residents? It was considered essential to find out how strongly residents felt about each factor, and how their satisfaction was affected by particular factors. For example, does dissatisfaction with the neighborhood cause a resident to be dissatisfied with the shophouse as a place to live? And if so, does dissatisfaction with the neighborhood have an influence on residents' satisfaction with the shophouse as a place to live than dissatisfaction with the physical conditions of the shophouse?

From the result of the survey it is important to bear in mind the distinction between the residents' level of satisfaction with particular aspects and their overall satisfaction. For example, though many residents complained of lack of space for parking.

In this study, the result shows that the levels of satisfaction with the shophouses are reported both as "a place to live" and "as a place to work". The residents were

asked to indicate whether they were satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with their shophouses as "a place to live" as well as "a place to work".

SHOPHOUSE SATISFACTION (%)

Rating	Satisfaction With	Satisfaction With
	Shophouse As A Place to Live	Shophouse As A Place to Work
Satisfied	68	77
Not very satisfied	31	23
Not at all satisfied	1	-
Total	100	100
Number of respondents	60	60

The survey from the above here shows that 68 percent and 77 percent of the residents indicated that they are satisfied with their shophouses as "a place to live" and also as "a place to work".

It was also found that satisfaction with the neighborhood was the most important predictor of residents' satisfaction with the shophouse as a place to live. The physical satisfaction of the residents' conditions, including family size and ownership of both land and building were also variables that increased the explained variation of satisfaction.

Factors such as the air pollution, lack of private parking, inadequate ventilation in the building, lack of recreation area, are given for lack of satisfaction.

Problems related to the shophouse living environments were overwhelmingly reported by the majority of the residents, almost all of them reporting more than one problem. Nearly a quarter of the shophouse residents reported having made some improvement to the living space in their shophouse in accordance with the problems they mentioned. About 20 percent of the residents who reported having problems with ventilation, traffic / air pollution and also noise installed air conditioners or exhaust fans to help those problems.

Most of all the shophouse residents were aware of the problems existing in their shophouses and in the surrounding environment. Among 45 percent said they did not think those problems were serious, 16 percent reported that problems of their neighborhood conditions were beyond their control. Respondents said they did not improve their shophouse conditions because they did not own the buildings and some said the owner did not allow them to make a renovation. The remaining residents did not improve their shophouses because there was no room for expansion. Last but not least of the problem was the lack of funds for any improvements.

3.7.2 Physical improvement of shophouses

The physical improvement of shophouses within the last decade is classified into two categories. The first category is a shophouse with improvement and the second is shophouse with obstacles to physical improvement.

The physical factors of shophouses involve the design, construction and arrangement of shophouse facilities which will adequately provide the occupants with a healthy and desirable environment. These are the following:

1. Provision of private parking
2. Lack of recreation area.
3. Inadequate ventilation in the building.

3.7.2.1 Priorities for improvement

From the survey, most respondents felt that improvement was not so necessary for their shophouse. For those who want improvement, the priorities for improvement of their shophouses are: interior decoration, add a new storey to their shophouses and the last is to demolish the existing shophouse and build a new one.

From observation and also combined with respondents' opinions, most of them agreed that there should be physical improvement in their communities. The priorities for improvement should also include: fire protection and parking space as nowadays there are few parking spaces.

Fire was a serious problem in Bangkok's Chinatown for a long time due to the crowding of the shophouse storage units as their warehouses, and no accessibility in some places. The respondents seem to be fully aware of these serious problems, but the land value in Chinatown is so high that they have to utilize it as much as possible.

All of the respondents had no problem with the public services and utilities in the sense of what can be done individually.

The main problem of Bangkok's Chinatown is flooding during the rainy season or the monsoon season. Drainage systems do not work as Chinatown is close to the Chao Phraya River, and all main drainage pipes are connected into it. During the rainy season, the river level is higher than the level of drainage pipes and the level of the ground. Therefore, most of the shophouses which are located on the river bank are flooded every year.

As for home recreation, apart from business activities in the shophouses, residents' daily activities during leisure time also were investigated.

This study examined how the residents perceived their environment such a deficiency of physical environment as a problem. If it was a problem, how they managed to cope with the problem, and how they spent their leisure time elsewhere.

In Bangkok's Chinatown, it was obvious that a large majority had their children playing on the sidewalks, in front of their shophouses, or inside the buildings. Also, the study showed that of those residents who mentioned their lack of home recreation areas, one-third of them spent their leisure time outside their shophouses.

However, more than half of them usually stayed home.

3.7.2.2 Strategies for improvement

Among the main strategies for the improvement of the shophouses, one aspect that will encourage the dwellers to improve their shophouses is a good environment.

First of all, the following priorities for physical improvement in the community should be considered:

Fire protection

Water supply terminals should be provided in every important area. The building code for fire protection should be followed according to the regulations for the new constructions. The proposed building site without a good accessibility should not be permitted to be built. The law imposes certain regulations on storage of inflammable materials in the warehouses in the Bangkok's Chinatown area. A large part of the fire problem can be solved only by making the laws effectiveness.

Parking space

Instead of permitting the construction of other buildings such as hotels or offices, the new parking facilities should be first priority. A strict code of parking areas for each kind of building should be raised for the proposed buildings.

Flood control

Along the Chao Phraya River, a road should be built which would serve a dual functions, and these should be the responsibility of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority.