

3 bridges/ 3 periods/ 3 stories: revisiting socio-spatial quality and the role of "Kua" or "Sa-parn" over Ping River's communities, Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

Grounding the concept of Bridge as a connector for in-between communities, places and cultures, is a point of departure for this investigation. The paper examines the role of 3 bridges over Ping River in Chiang Mai city, the primate regional city in the northern Thailand, which formulated their important roles for the communities both physically and symbolically to their place-making contexts. Each of the bridge has a sharing history from one to another that cannot separate them from each other. Also it links to the narratives of history of the city as a whole.

From the early history of the city at the beginning, there was the only bridge (Kua Tae) made from bamboo that connected the "foreign" community of the outer side of river bank to the original town called "Wieng Chiang Mai". The other two bridges (Sa-parn Nawarat and Kua-Lekh), which constructed by using teak wood originally, then steel structure before changing to the concrete structure in later years, had their significant roles in the early 20th century for socio-economic reasons that was related to the teak industry as well as the festival and flooding times. Moreover, the bridges were used as part of the political reasons which saw Chiang Mai under the rule of Siamese power, especially during King Rama the 5th and 6th, and also during the World War times. The paper unfolds their historical evidences, stories and aims to identify the role of these 3 bridges throughout the history and towards the shaping of modern life along Ping River's communities within the contemporary urbanism in Chiang Mai.