

Shifting “Reproductive Work” to the Public: “Nakorn Chum Retro-Market” and  
“Traditional Foods” Selling as Space of Aging Women in Kamphaeng Phet  
Province, Thailand

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Abstract

“*Nakorn Chum Retro Market*” is a type of walking street market and held at the beginning of every month. To construct nostalgic sentiment, the retro market is held in the area of “*Nakorn Chum*” ancient city where was ever the center of commerce in the past century. The nostalgic sentiment of the retro market are composed of cultural components such as dressing in the traditional Thai costumes, Thai dancing shows and local handicrafts etc. but the highlight of market is “*Traditional Foods*”. Cooking “*Traditional foods*” is required skill and knowledge from the aging persons who can claim the “original recipe” especially women. So, can be seen that the most of food sellers in the retro market are aging women who use their cooking skill which always seen as “Reproductive Work” in Domestic Sphere to do in the Public and in the space of retro market, economic and cultural value were added into reproductive work, such cooking “Traditional Food”. In this paper, “*Nakorn Chum Retro Market*” is considered as social space of aging women. The paper aims to explore the roles of aging women in “*Nakorn Chum Retro Market*” and argues that in the structure of power, women are not merely passive victims but they are active agents. They try to negotiate their position as much as they can under the limitations. They use feminine attributes and skills from reproductive work in domestic sphere which they are familiar to be advantage for themselves in public space such the retro market that why author titled “Shifting Reproductive Work to the Public: “*Nakorn Chum Retro Market*” as Space of Aging Women in Kamphaeng Phet Province, Thailand”.

Keywords: *Retro Market, Social Space, Aging Women, Reproductive Work*

1. Introduction

Long time slumbered city was waked up again. More than 700 years “Nakorn Chum” city where ever been the commercial junction is being colorful again because of the “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” held in the area of ancient city. At first sight when entered to the market one will see the plenty of “Traditional Foods” sellers in Thai Traditional Costume who are cooking, selling and talking each others. The scenery of ancient Thai-styled wooden houses encourage the feeling of nostalgia. These nostalgic sentiment attracts many customers/tourists from both inside and outside the province. Certainly, it also can pull a lot of money from customers and tourist’s pocket.

In the context of tourism promotion, many government organizations play crucial role for sponsoring and supporting the market, but the main organizations are seemingly DASTA (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration(Public Organization) and “Nakorn Chum” Municipality. DASTA grants the money for market’s committee for doing projects to improve the market such as “Low carbon Market” and Municipality is working closely together with market’s committee and sellers.

The highlight of the market is many kinds of “Traditional foods and desserts”. So can be seen that the most of sellers are women especially aging women, their age between 50-80 years old. The most of them are low educated, 4<sup>th</sup> year primary - secondary school. Under the limitations, the ways they can earn money not too much. So the most of them are sellers in normal market. Therefore selling in the retro market is only supplement income because the retro market is held only 3 days per month.

It not only they play a crucial role as “Traditional Foods” sellers, but they also play a crucial roles as cookers of community, market’s committee etc. consequently, in the paper “Nakorn Chum” Retro Market is considered as space of aging women. This paper was written from a part of collected data from field work before doing the research project. So the following points are only primary notices of author.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Women and Works*

The sexual division of labor, the arrangement of work into clearly gendered public and private spheres or spheres of production and reproduction, has been theorized particularly by Marxist, materialist, and socialist feminists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their analysis is rooted in Friedrich Engels’ “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the state (1884), which added an understanding of the sphere of reproduction and women’s work to Marx’s largely gender-blind division of labor analysis. Recent work of feminist ethnographers has also suggested that virtually every known society exhibits such a gendered division of labor, although specifics vary from culture to culture. “Women’s work” is always devalued, although the work itself may vary.

In “The Origin of the Family, Engels argued that “the worldwide defeat of the female sex” occurred at the moment at which early societies were able to produce surplus value (i.e., more wealth than the community or family needed to subsist) consolidated as private property. The

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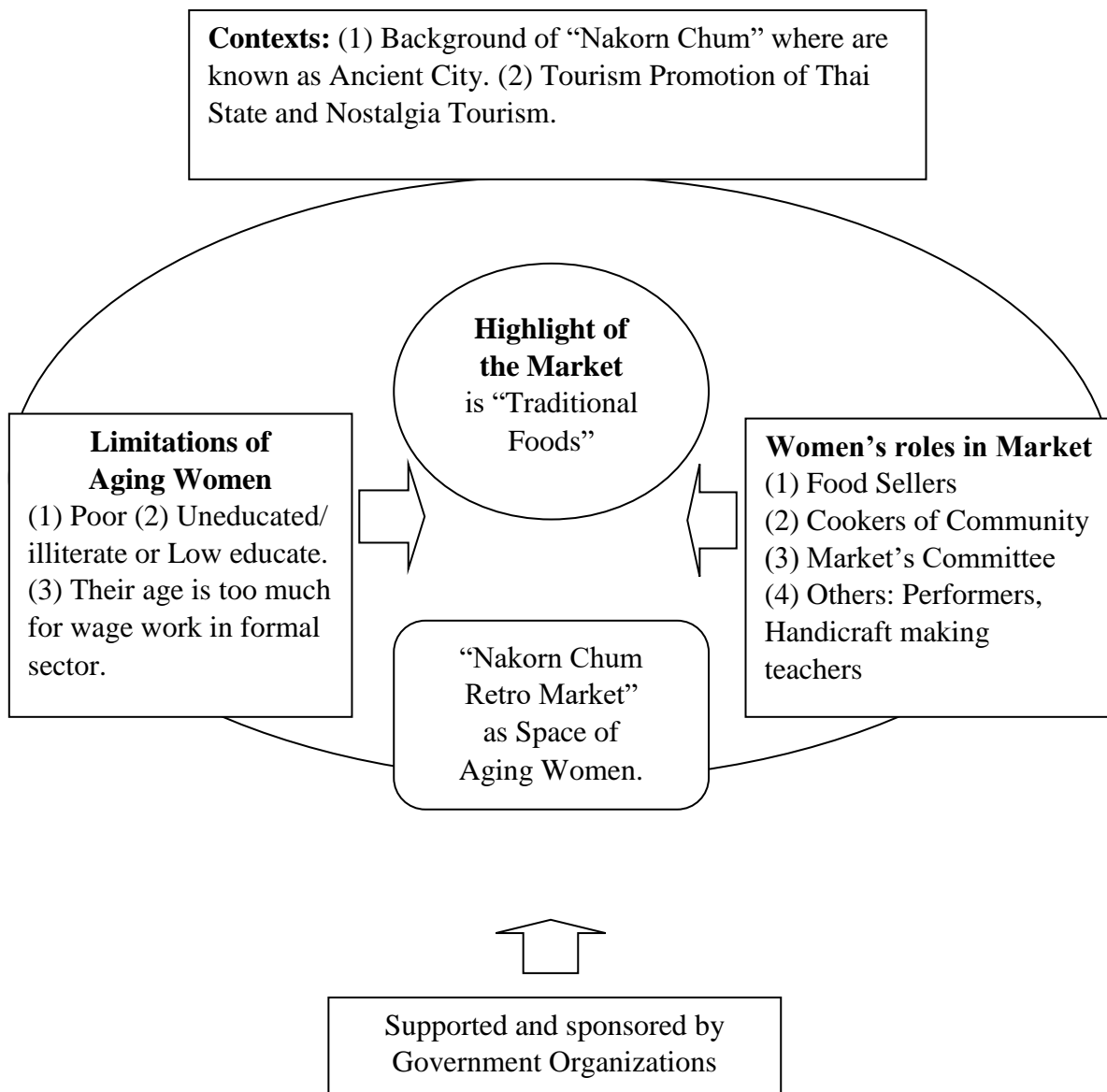
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need to pass private property on through inheritance, then, necessitated the control of women's sexuality and thus the confinement of women in the family, the private sphere of reproduction. This division of labor serves the goals of industrial capitalism well, as women's unpaid labor in the private sphere is exploited by capital to reproduce and sustain the workforce.

Feminists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries extended this division of labor analysis as a primary tool for understanding the gendered division of the work of child rearing as well as occupational segregation of the paid workforce and the division of psychological and emotional labor in the family and society. Alexandra Kollontai note the class bias of this ideology, which valorizes middle-class women's motherhood while not protecting pregnant working-class women from drudgery as household servants. Later, Shulamith Firestone argued that the division of reproductive labor is the cornerstone of the sex/gender system. Other radical feminists and cultural feminists have suggested that women's separate sphere can be a retreat, a resource, a place of safety for women, an entirely separate culture.

Engels' solution to women's oppression under capitalist patriarchy was both to bring women into the public sphere of labor and to abolish the family as primary economic unit. Socialist feminists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have offered similar solution. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, proposed turning all of women's unwaged labor into paid labor through communal nurseries, and kitchens; other socialist feminists have proposed that women be paid "wages for housework." Psychologists Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, who saw the roots of inequality in the sexual division of child-rearing labor, argued that moving men into the private sphere to share the work of parenting equally with women will ultimately end inequality. (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005)

Figure 1: Framework



### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Emerging of “Nakorn Chum Retro Market”

##### *The rise and fall of “Nakorn Chum” Ancient City*

In 1200 A.D.”Nakorn Chum” city was built by the monarch in Sukhothai Era. It was the center of commerce and junction of water transportation, because of the city was built along the river and canal, “Ping” river and “Klong Suan-Maak” canal. Thus “Nakorn Chum” was the most prosperous for 200 years (around in 1200-1400) after that it fell down and people moved

to the opposite side of “Ping” river (Kamphaeng Phet Province in present) because of the effect of river bank erosion that collapsed the “Nakorn Chum” city’s wall. After that “Nakorn Chum” city became a small city where subjected to the Ayuttaya’s monarch.

In 1780, at the begin of Rattanakosin Era, the prisoners of war from Vientiane (Lao PDR in present) were forcibly moved to “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” (Nakorn Chum area in the past). At that time, “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” was just a small community but plenty of natural resources and suitable for settlements. Consequently, people from different places and diverse ethnicities such as Karen, Tai, Mon and Chinese for example migrated to “Baan Klong Suan-Maak”. Unfortunately, the smallpox and other diseases were scourged in “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” so a lot of people died and the rest of them were afraid of and moved away. Therefore, the village became quiet until in 1906 King Rama V came to “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” to encouraged his people. After that the situation got better and people moved back.

In 1913, the status of “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” was changed from “Village” to “District”. In 1939, the name of “Baan Klong Suan-Maak” district was changed to “Nakorn Chum” district. “Nakorn Chum” district became the center of commerce and water transportation again. The most of villagers transported by many kinds of boat. Until around in 1950, the road from Bangkok to Lampang province was constructed. For that reason, water transportation was seldom used and in finally people changed to use land transportation. Since then “Nakorn Chum” district was not center of commerce and transportation anymore and it became abandoned town. The most of educated youths have moved to the city or other province to study or find the job opportunity and aging people are leaved stay at home. Under the context of tourism promotion, in 2000 government tried to revived the “Nakorn Chum” district again so in 2011 “Nakorn Chum” mayor tried to established “Nakorn Chum Retro Market”.

### *3.2 Nostalgia Tourism in Thailand*

After “Tom Yum Kung” economic crisis in 1997, the nostalgic phenomenon was emerged and widespread in Thailand. It’s clearly manifested in retro popularity such as retro fashion designs, retro books and cinemas, retro market and etc. Such phenomenon is called ,by Anchalee Chaiworrarn, “*Nostalgic Sentiment*”. She noted that such sentiment occurred from the worse situation of economic life suddenly from the economic crisis. People realized that the capitalism and Western-modeled development does not work. Therefore, people try to

revive the traditional or customary institutions or “*Thainess*”. In Thailand the nostalgia is closely referred to the idea of nationalism (Kittiarsa, 2003).

Eric Hobsbawm noted that “Invented tradition” is a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. Inventing Traditions is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition (Hobsbawm, 1983). In this paper “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” is considered as “Invented tradition” where full of producing and consuming the symbolic and ritual. In retro market where occurred from nostalgia, individual do not only consume and exchange based on object utility but on symbolic consumption and exchange. Namely, to fulfill the emotional desire, social imagination and identity and aesthetic the symbolic consumption is not only for response the physical needs, Baudrillard calls “Logic of Meaning” (Kittiarsa, 2003). To construct the “ancient” for “Nakorn Chum Retro Market”, it is established from various cultural elements.

The retro market was organized in 2011, just like a temporary walking street market. At the beginning, it was held along the road near Mae Ping River for 3 days per week. Two years later, it was moved to “Nakorn Chum” area and the number of sellers was increasing from 40 to 100 but market place is preserved for the sellers who live in Nakorn Chum Community only.

Moving the Retro Market to the area of “*Nakorn Chum*” ancient city, where was ever the center of commercial area in the past century (more than 700 years) and plenty of ancient Thai-styled wooden houses making sense of nostalgia. To construct the nostalgic sentiment sellers dress in the traditional Thai costumes (similar to the period of King Rama V), Thai dancing shows and local handicrafts etc. but the most highlight of the market is “*Traditional Foods*”. In the context of nostalgia tourism, Nakorn Chum Retro Market became the space of aging women. This is because of the markets are public space where women familiar to and cooking is skill that women are expected from society as well.

### 3.3 Aging women’s Roles in “*Nakorn Chum Retro Market*”

Ester Boserup’s statistical data indicated that women in South East Asia participate in the market in higher rate than in others. In Thailand, women around 56% were sellers but there are a few studies about women sellers in Thai society (Wongted, 2006). Warunee Bhusinsit (2000) observed that two important roles of women that invisible from Thai woman’s images are the

role as seller and the role in political arena. Even though the role as seller of Thai women was revealed in historical period since Ayuttaya Era. That is because of the image of women seller who stand among people, negotiable, considerable and can earn income by themselves (maybe also support the family) seem contradict to the Thai woman's image who is polite and obedient, that why the image of woman seller is invisible.

The rapid economic change in Thailand under the globalization and transnational capitalism, under the logic of "flexible accumulation", leads to the state policies which emphasis on the industrialization. In 1960, by financial supporting from USA the first "National Economic Development Plan" was issued and implemented. The government tried to promote the industrial sector and hoped to be a "newly industrializing country" in Asia. Consequently, the expansion of factory brought to the demand of massive labors. Young women from all parts of country, especially from rural area, were pulled out from the houses to be wage workers both in industrial and service sectors in urban. Women trend to participate increasingly in wage works in the public sphere. Higher education also bring them the working opportunities in public sphere. Many working women, both single and married, no time to do the reproductive works. Reproductive works were commercialized, can exchanged in the market and domestic workers, food sellers or laundry business emerged and became more important.

The most of "Traditional foods" sellers in "Nakorn Chum Retro Market" are women, especially aging women. An informant said, "*because women can sell more than men, (cooking and selling) is women's work, women seem friendly (more than men) to customers, so women can do this job better than men*". It's illustrated that market is a public space where women can come to experience and interact with outsiders and the place where women gain economic authority. Aging women play a vital role in "Nakorn Chum Retro Market" not only as "Traditional Foods" sellers but being the important element that fulfill the nostalgic sense of the "retro market".

### 3.3.1 Traditional Foods Sellers: Cooking Skill and the claim of "Original Recipe"

"Traditional Foods" and desserts are the highlight of "Nakorn Chum Retro Market". This is the reason why women play a vital role in the market. Formerly in Thai society, women are expected to be good at in cooking. Such a Thai proverb like "*Women who excellent in cooking they will be the beloved of her husband until he die*" or similar to English proverb like "*The*

*way to a man's heart is through his stomach*” the proverb illustrates that Thai women are expected and socialized in order to be “idealized woman” or to be a “good woman” for her husband. Even though in the present socio-cultural and economic change, Thai women are not expected to be good at in cooking for her husband because they are educated and having opportunities in working equally to men in public space. These are young educated Thai women, but for the old generation who are around 50-80 years old women are still uneducated or low-educated women. Consequently the aging women who are poor and uneducated/low-educated have limitations to access the wage works in formal sector. The most of them stay at home for caring the children or feeding their pets. In poor household, aging parents are seen as burden of family so they are leaved alone without any caring from their sons/daughters. The survey results of National Statistical Office illustrated that aging person who were leaved alone are increasing every year. In 1994, 3.6% and in 2007, 7.7% and in 2011, 8.6% of aging person were leaved alone.

A market's committee says that one of main purposes in establishing the Nakorn Chum Retro Market is to encourage aging persons to do activities and helps them gain extra-income because they gain allowance elderly about 600-1000 baht from government depend on their age. Thus, “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” becomes space of aging but in this paper focusing on aging women. In this space women can use their skill such a cooking skill usefully for economic, social and cultural space construction. Their status as aging person lead them can claim their “Original Recipe” that they learn from their ancestors and consumers seemingly believe. Indeed, the most of tourists may do not pay attention to the “Originality” of recipe or not because they only consume the symbolic of “ancient, oldness” to fulfill their nostalgic sentiment.

### 3.3.2 *Cookers of Community: “Plee Ya”<sup>3</sup>, cooking the “Khee-lek”<sup>4</sup> Curry” on 15th lunar month 12 (Loy Krathong Day in Thailand)*

Nakorn Chum's villagers believe that on 15th lunar month 12, all nutrients and medicinal properties will be pulled from all parts of Khee-lek tree to the treetops and flowers by influence of the moon, so people will gain much nutrients and medicinal properties if they having “Khee-

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<sup>3</sup> “Plee Ya” is a ritual for apologizing the spirits before picking the “Khee-lek” or Cassia Tree because villagers believe that there are holy spirits in “Khee-lek” trees.

**A.1.1 <sup>4</sup> “Khee-lek” or Cassia Tree or Thai Copper Pod is known as Thai herbal foods favorite in Nakorn Chum.**



lek curry” on that day. This is the reason why on 15th lunar month 12 in every year before the sunrise villagers will go to pick the Khee-lek’s treetops and flowers for cooking but before picking them they will conduct the ritual called “Plee Ya”. In the ritual women will play a vital role since “Plee Ya” till cooking the “Khee-lek” curry. They believe that women can communicate with holy spirits so that a woman will conduct the ritual by spotting three incenses and praying before picking “Khee-Lek”. After that they bring the treetops and flowers of “Khee-lek” for cooking. Villagers also believe that if they picking, cooking and eating all of “Khee-lek” curry within that day the “Khee-lek” is going to be the elixir herb that good for their life.

From the ritual it is may reflects that “cooking”, *as normal routine activity*, is ritualized and publicized. In other words, women can shift “reproductive work” which is the individual activity in household or in domestic sphere to public sphere that everyone in community can joint. This ritual became the “space” of women who play a vital role since “Plee Ya” to the cooking “Khee-lek” curry and in this ritual the cooking as reproductive work is added the social and cultural value.

### 3.3.3 Market’s Committee as a source of Political Power.

Besides of the role as “Traditional Foods” sellers, “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” is also the space where aging women can gain political power. Market’ committee are responsible for managing and improving the market. They work systematically by issued the regulations, in every month they arrange the committee meeting together with Nakorn Chum Municipality’s officers to plan for next month activities, to inform the important things and discuss the problem solutions etc.

Market’s Committee are consisted of a head of committee and 15-16 members. All of (or the most of) them are women who literated especially the head of committee. Such as the present committee’s head is 60 years old and retired government official (former teacher) and the other committee as well. Because of they have to responsible for managing, solving the problems and due with outsiders or government officers and sometimes they have to writing the project proposals to gain budget. Moreover, the most of them are well economic status, because there is no salary for committee, especially committee’s head she neither gain salary and nor sell anything in the market in order to prevent the conflict of interests and the good governance reason.

In addition, to construct and sustain “nostalgic sentiment” to attract the attention of tourists and continue the retro market on, they issued the regulations to manipulate the market order by evaluation the behavior of sellers such as sellers wearing the traditional Thai costumes all the times or not, they use the banana leafs instead of foam boxes and plastic bags, conduct the waste segregation or not. That is reason why “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” is the first Low Carbon Retro Market in Thailand. The regularity of coming to sell when the market held is an important evaluated criterion as well. It reflects that their role as “Traditional Foods” sellers is very important to the sustaining of the “Nakorn Chum Retro Market”. Namely, Without them the retro market may be quitted.

The motivation that reinforce the sellers to conform the rules is the chance to be selected to go to sell in annual fairs, the big annual fairs will be held twice a year in Kamphaeng Phet. The sellers who are selected to sell in annual fairs can gain much profit from selling “traditional foods” or they may be selected to join the special events that outsiders contract through head of committee. In general, sellers who are the member of “Nakorn Chum Retro Market” cannot go out for special event without permitted by committee’s head. This organizing structure, relationship between committee’s head and sellers indicated the power and the position of women in various levels within the market.

#### 4. Conclusion

Marxist feminist theory describes the relationship between sexual division of labor and women’s subordination to men. Capitalism leads to sexual division of labor, men’s work place is in public sphere and their works are productive and paid work. Contrast to the women’s reproductive work that is unpaid and devalued. They are confined to do the housework in domestic sphere. Following the theory, women trend to be considered as passive victims and I argue that in the structure of power, women are not merely passive victims but they are active agents. They try to negotiate their position as much as they can under the limitations. In this paper demonstrated that women use their feminine attributes and skills from reproductive works in domestic sphere which they are familiar to be advantage for themselves in public sphere. Namely, they can shift the reproductive work to do in the public. They can change the reproductive work, such cooking in this case, that unpaid in domestic sphere to be economic valued activity in public sphere and that why the author titled “Shifting Reproductive Work to

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