

The navel of Southeast Asia

Walking through Bangkok, I suddenly came across a market.

Everything under the sun can be found at the market called “Talat”, from fresh groceries to clothing, accessories, sundry goods, food, pirated DVDs, and toys, and the sheer quantity of goods lined up in such a narrow display was dizzying. The prices were also very reasonable, with one t-shirt for 100 baht (¥350). My first impression of life in Bangkok was that these markets are very close to residents.

Thailand is second only to Singapore in terms of economic strength among Southeast Asian countries. Like Singapore, its location in the “navel” of Southeast Asia has made it a logistics base. Products made in the factories of neighboring countries gather here, where the transportation network has been developed. In addition to Thailand itself being an industrialized country, a variety of things gather here from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar.



In November 2015, ASEAN launched the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community), which will promote ever more active trade in Southeast Asia, expanding exports to neighboring countries and further growth of the ASEAN region.

Bangkok has also witnessed remarkable growth of large shopping malls. New commercial facilities were opened during my stay in Siam, and I was able to see some of this. However slight, I did feel the energy from the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community.

When I started research on the Thai market in advance, I found many articles on purchasing in Thailand. What I saw of markets in Bangkok gave me a certain feeling that some of the products we find all around us would come from this base.

In my animation “Super Market”, I hope to develop a story from imagining where the products we see on shelves actually come from, and this served as a great inspiration.

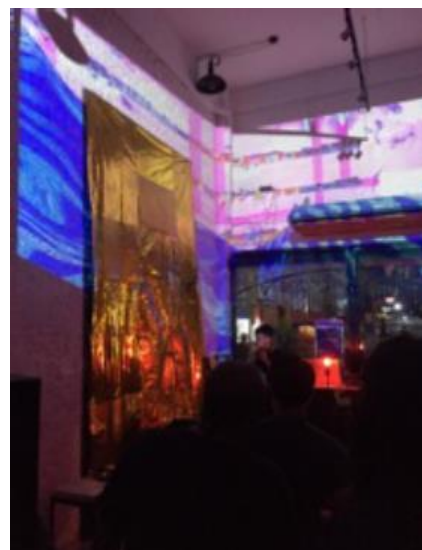


Bangkok Pop Culture

My host Pahparn was the curator of a gallery in Bangkok called “The Jam Factory”.

The Jam Factory is a very fashionable spot in Bangkok, which also has a shop and café featuring assorted goods and books, and attracts many young people in Bangkok who are interested in art. Pahparn told me about the state of art in Bangkok, nearby galleries, and independent animators who we have almost no information on in Japan. I was not able to hear about anyone animators doing activities which I had expected.

I heard that on the night after I visited Pahparn, an event titled “The Creative District Gallery Hopping Night” would be held at galleries across Bangkok. There are a great many art galleries in Bangkok, and this event allows people to have fun going from gallery to gallery that night. I could feel energy and familiarity through such an event.



▲ Events such as performances and DJ shows are held at night in Bangkok galleries.

At Bangkok Gallery Hopping Night, I watched a performance by Plearn Pan Perth which mixed classical Thai instruments and electronic instruments. I could feel the great enthusiasm of young Thai artists who gathered at the event.

At the event, I also met Takeshi Ueda, who was my upperclassman at university and works in lighting design in Bangkok. He introduced me to artists and musicians from Bangkok, and I was able to have an exchange and form bonds with local artists.

It was a very stimulating stay, as they introduce the latest Bangkok pop culture to me, including the girl band YELLOW FANG, who are extremely popular on the Bangkok indie music scene.

I was impressed to find that Bangkok residents interested in art and music have highly refined knowledge, fashion, and sensibility, and that they are all enthusiastic learners. I believe that I obtained a new perspective and sense of values through my exchange with people involved in Bangkok’s pop culture, as well as its artists and musicians. This was the most important of anything that I found during my stay.



▲ A variety of events are held every weekend in Bangkok, so getting information and keeping up with them all is difficult. The picture is of YELLOW FANG, a popular indie band in Thailand.

Through the film history of Thailand

Independent animators can be found around the world. However, I had never heard of independent animators in Thailand until now. During this stay, I had an opportunity to learn what Thai animation is, including Thai film history, at the Thai Film Archive.

There is a museum for studying Thai film history from before WWII in the Thai Film Archive. I learned that Thai and Japanese films have been related from the beginning, including the fact that the first permanent movie theater in Thailand was started by a Japanese entertainer. I also learned that the works of the famous Thai film director Apichatpong "Joe" Weerasethakul has been restricted by the government and could not be distributed to and shown at regular movie theaters (apparently because the government thought it was not good to have a scene in which a Buddhist monk plays an electric guitar).

I also saw a room in the museum which recreated the studio of Payut Ngaokrachang, a leading figure in Thai animation.



▲TAHI FILM ARCHIVE



▲Various materials concerning Thai film history

The Thai Film Archive holds the Thai Short Film and Video Festival, and there is an animation division at this festival. I had an opportunity to speak with Sanchai of the Film Archive, who told me about independent animators in Thailand, and the circumstance they face. Nearly all of the applicants who submit animations to the Thai Short Film and Video Festival are art college students, and honestly, many of the works were not of great quality.



▲ The photography platform of Payut Ngaokrachang, a leader in Thai animation

Also, it seems that even people who create animation at art colleges rarely continue after graduation. I felt that this was due to the same conditions that we face in Japan, in which producing animation takes a very long time, but does not earn much money.

One great result of my stay was learning of activities of the Thai animators Chanon Treenet, Kraisit Bhokasawat, and Twatpong Tang.

Through my stay in Singapore and Thailand

For my stay I chose Bangkok and Singapore, which are logistics hubs of Southeast Asia and have strong cultural elements, from my desire to create the work “Supermarket”.

Throughout my stay, I worried about how to include in this animation what I imagined about how the products we often see on supermarket shelves actually get there.

There were active markets overflowing with a surprising array of goods in both Bangkok and Singapore. It was a great experience to witness the colors, scenery, and atmosphere of these places in person.

The artists working hard in these countries, and my experiences with the vibrant pop culture around them were a great source of motivation for me to continue my future artistic activities.

Through this stay, I was able to gain a new perspective from what I had thus far. I hope to continue pushing forward toward completing my animation “Supermarket” by making use of the knowledge, exchanges, and experiences I gained during my stay.

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Siam Discovery

<http://www.siamdiscovery.co.th/>

THE JAM FACTORY

<https://www.facebook.com/TheJamFactoryBangkok/>

BANGKOK CITYCITY GALLERY

<https://www.facebook.com/bangkokcitycity/>

The Creative District Gallery Hopping Night BANGKOK

<https://www.facebook.com/galleryhoppingbkk/>

THAI FILM ARCHIVE

<http://www.fapot.org/en/home.php>