

Maneepong, C., & Walsh, J. (2013). A new generation of Bangkok street vendors: Economic crisis as opportunity and threat. *Cities*, 34(October), 37-43.

Abstract

In 1997, the financial crisis seriously damaged the Thai economy and led to the closing of many companies. Previously, it had been believed that laid-off workers would mostly return to rural employment or part-time urban tasks. However, research among street vendors in Bangkok reveals that many of the retrenched workers preferred to, and did, remain in the city and put to use their latent business and entrepreneurial skills to practice by establishing their own informal businesses. This group of vendors tends to dominate these activities, often through business savvy, with experience in the formal sector. Instead of the “street” image of vendors being that of domestic migrants, the “new generation” of vendors is evolving into something more complex. The paper focuses on documenting and understanding the phenomenon of new generation street vendors. We attempt to derive lessons from the 1997 economic crisis to improve the transition of vendors from the formal to “new” informal sector under current, and likely worsening, economic conditions. This paper analyses how and why these two groups express themselves and how they respond differently to the socio-economic and political forces that have an impact on the urban space they share. It then considers whether policy makers should regard street vending as a viable part of the economy which is not transitional but more permanent and should be regarded as an important part of the urban economy of industrializing nations such as Thailand.

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