

Report of research results

## **Understanding Wrong-Way Driving from Anthropological and Geographic Perspectives**

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### **1. Summary**

This research examines wrong-way driving (WWD) in Bangkok from anthropological and geographic perspectives, challenging the conventional view that treats the phenomenon solely as an issue of driver misconduct or traffic law violation. While existing research and policy responses tend to focus on engineering solutions and legal enforcement, this study explores the broader urban and socio-spatial contexts that shape everyday mobility practices.

Preliminary findings suggest that WWD in Bangkok is closely associated with motorbike mobility and occurs most frequently along large arterial roads and peri-urban corridors characterized by long distances between U-turn points, frontage-road systems, and limited integration between land-use planning and transport design. Thai-language media reports, online discussions, and preliminary site observations indicate that motorbike riders often justify WWD as a pragmatic response to infrastructural constraints, such as long detours and unsafe crossing conditions.

These findings suggest that WWD cannot be fully understood through individual behavioral explanations alone. Instead, the practice reflects deeper structural conditions embedded in Bangkok's urban form and transport system. The study highlights the importance of integrating social and spatial perspectives into traffic safety research and proposes that future policy approaches should pay greater attention to the everyday mobility practices of motorbike users and the infrastructural environments in which these practices occur.

### **2. Aim of Research**

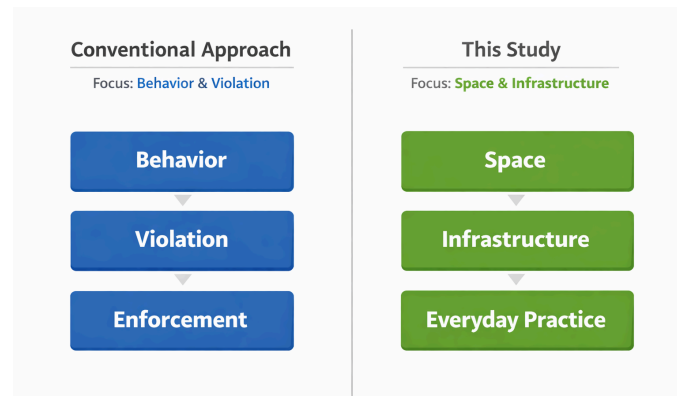
The primary aim of this research is to develop a new analytical framework for understanding wrong-way driving (WWD) in Thailand by moving beyond engineering-centric explanations and incorporating anthropological and geographic perspectives.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine how existing policies and approaches conceptualize and address WWD.
2. Identify socio-cultural and spatial factors that contribute to the occurrence of WWD in Bangkok.

3. Explore how motorbike riders perceive and navigate urban road environments where WWD frequently occurs.
4. Highlight how urban planning, road design, and mobility practices interact to produce conditions under which WWD becomes normalized.

By reframing WWD as a socio-spatial practice rather than merely a traffic violation, the research aims to contribute to more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to road safety.



*Figure 1: the study's approach*

### 3. Method of Research & Progression

This research employed a qualitative and exploratory methodology combining policy review, discourse analysis, and preliminary field observation.

First, a policy and literature review was conducted to examine existing approaches to WWD prevention. Relevant government reports, traffic safety studies, and engineering-based analyses were reviewed to identify dominant frameworks used to explain the phenomenon.

Second, Thai-language media reports and online discussions were analyzed to understand how WWD is represented in public discourse. These sources provided insight into both moralized narratives surrounding traffic violations and everyday explanations offered by road users.

Third, preliminary spatial analysis and site observation were carried out in selected Bangkok corridors where WWD has been frequently reported. These sites include major arterial roads and peri-urban corridors characterized by high motorbike usage and complex road geometries.

Throughout the research period, data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring spatial patterns, infrastructural features, and narratives related to WWD behavior.

### 4. Results of Research

The study produced several preliminary findings:

First, official traffic safety frameworks tend to classify WWD primarily as a form of driver misconduct. In policy reports and accident statistics, WWD is typically grouped together with behaviors such as speeding or running red lights. This classification emphasizes individual

responsibility and enforcement but offers limited insight into the spatial contexts in which the behavior occurs.

Second, Thai media coverage frequently frames WWD through moral narratives, portraying riders as reckless or irresponsible. Such framings reinforce public perceptions that WWD is primarily a problem of discipline or law compliance.

Third, analysis of online discussions and vernacular accounts suggests that many motorbike riders interpret WWD as a pragmatic adaptation to infrastructural constraints. Common explanations include long distances between legal U-turn points, inconvenient road layouts, and the perceived danger of crossing multiple high-speed lanes.

Fourth, preliminary site observations indicate that WWD frequently occurs in specific types of urban environments, particularly:

- multi-lane arterial roads designed primarily for cars,
- corridors with widely spaced U-turn points,
- areas with frontage roads or parallel service lanes,
- peri-urban zones where urban sprawl and car-oriented infrastructure dominate.

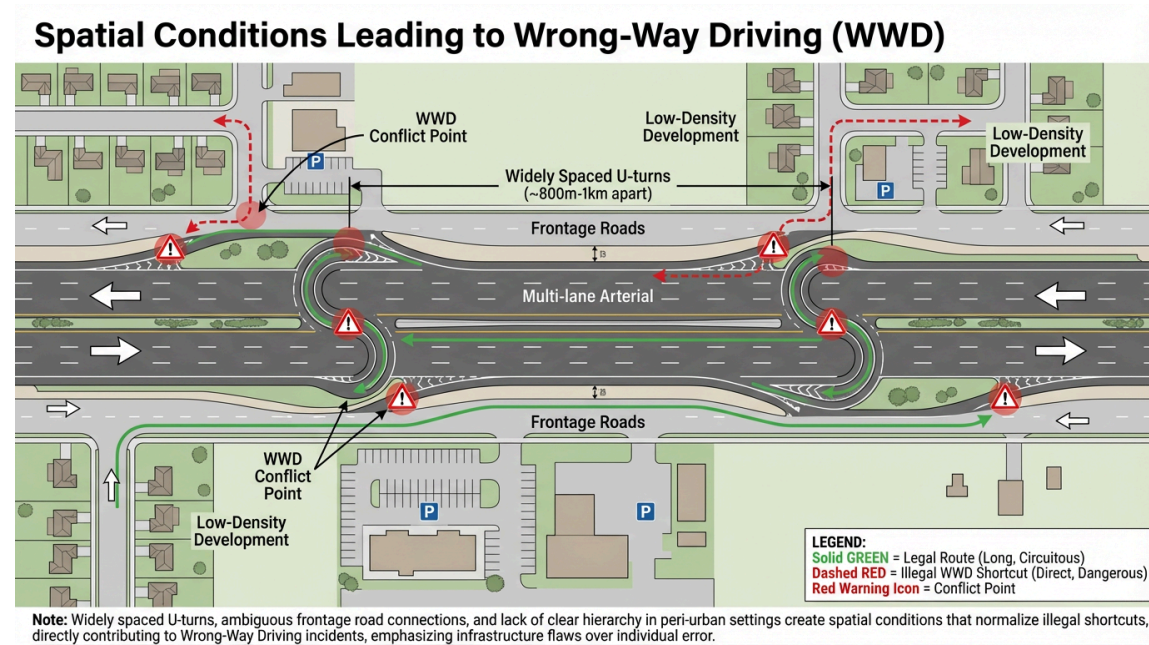
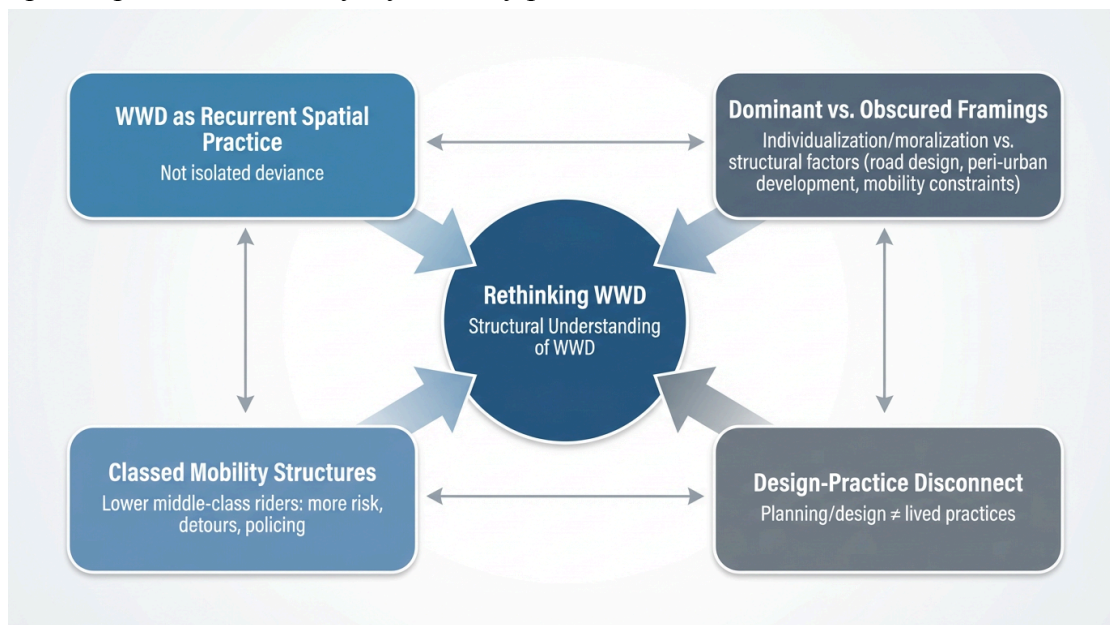


Figure 2: spatial conditions leading to WWD

These spatial conditions create situations where legal routes may require substantial detours, while informal shortcuts appear more efficient or safer from the perspective of motorbike riders. Finally, the findings highlight that WWD is closely linked to motorbike-based mobility, which plays a central role in Bangkok's transportation system, particularly for lower-middle-income populations. As a result, the risks and enforcement pressures associated with WWD are unevenly

distributed across social groups. Taken together, these findings suggest that WWD should be understood as a phenomenon emerging from the interaction between road design, urban development patterns, and everyday mobility practices.



*Figure 3: rethinking WWD*

## 5. Future research directions

Several directions for further research and policy development emerge from this study.

First, future research should examine WWD through site-specific ethnographic studies that document how riders interact with particular road environments, including U-turn points, frontage roads, and intersections.

Second, more attention should be given to motorbike mobility as a central element of urban transportation systems in Southeast Asian cities. Policies and road designs that assume car-dominated mobility may inadvertently create unsafe or impractical conditions for motorbike riders.

Third, urban planning and transport planning should be more closely integrated. In Bangkok, rapid suburban expansion and land-use patterns have produced road networks that prioritize high-speed vehicle movement while providing limited safe turning options for motorbikes. Finally, future policy discussions should move beyond purely punitive approaches and consider how infrastructural design and spatial planning contribute to everyday traffic practices.

## **6. Means of Official Announcement of Research Results**

The findings from this research will be disseminated through academic and professional channels. The researcher plans to develop the research findings into a journal article for submission to an international interdisciplinary journal focusing on urban and transport studies, such as the *Journal of Transport Geography* or *Environment and Planning*. In addition, the findings will be presented at academic conferences and research seminars related to urban planning and mobility studies. Acknowledgment of the Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Welfare Foundation research grant will be included in all resulting publications and presentations.