

Building *Siwilai* :
Transformation of Architecture and Architectural Practice in
Siam during the Reign of Rama V, 1868 - 1910

by

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Notes and Abbreviations

A Note on Romanization

The Romanization of Thai words in this dissertation follows the Royal Institute of Thailand General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai characters into Roman but without diacritic marks. The names of major historical figures and contemporary scholars are given in the Romanized form adopted by the individuals themselves or by general consensus of contemporary academia. All other names are Romanized according to the simplified form of the Royal Institute system used for words.

Abbreviations

NAT	National Library of Thailand
NAT	National Archives of Thailand
R5	Records of Rama V's Reign
R6	Records of Rama VI's Reign
B	Bettalet; Miscellaneous
NK	Nangsu Krapbangkhomthun
KT	Krasuang kan Tangprahet; Ministry of Foreign Affairs
N	Krasuang Nakhonban; Ministry of Local Government
RL	Krom Ratchalekathikan; Office of His Majesty's Secretary
YTh	Krasuang Yothathikan; Ministry of Public Works
PWD	Krom Yothathikan; Public Works Department
RKNBS	Ratchakitchanubeksa; The Royal Gazette
BKKT	The Bangkok Times

Chapter 1

Introduction

The reign of King Rama V, from 1868 to 1910, was a period of remarkable change in Thai history. The transformation of a traditional polity to an absolutist, centralized state that thrived on the ever-growing global flows of trade and culture led to dramatic changes in all aspects of Thai culture. This dissertation analyzes major changes in Siamese architecture and their builders during this transformative period, with the assumption that *siwilai*—the indigenized conception of civilization and progress—was the rationale underneath those major changes in architecture and architectural practice.

Since ancient times, architecture and urban design was always a key media through which the Siamese aristocrats projected their self-image, political legitimacy, and consummate control over the hierarchical social structure. Traditionally, power and legitimacy was made manifest through architectural representation of Indic cosmology; later on, as regional trade with China, India, and the Arab world became intensified, power and legitimacy was maintained through the control of new and foreign forms of culture. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the old *axis mundis mundi* of China, India, and the Arab world began to succumb to Europe's colonial powers, and the Siamese aristocrats shifted their attention towards Europe as the new *axis mundi mundus*. Since the reign of King Rama IV (1851 – 1868), architecture of the Siamese elite began to conform to contemporary European norms of civilization. At the same time, elements of ancient Siamese architecture were selectively deployed, in order to maintain the non-Western self-identity in the increasingly globalized world. However, as construction techniques, building materials, and the architectural practice remained traditional, the early architecture of *siwilai* was limited to the external appearance.

By the reign of Rama V, however, the Victorian colonial *ecumene* increased its impact on Siamese architecture in more significant ways. Firstly, architecture of the Siamese aristocrats became increasingly Westernized, inspired by travels and printed images of the colonial world. Secondly, Siamese elite began to employ the service and expertise of European builder-contractors, whose presence in Siam significantly changed the local architectural practice. Finally, the Siamese elite undertook simultaneous reforms in so many institutions, with a tendency to centralize and modernize in the name of civilization. Accordingly, the so-called the Chakri Reformation drastically changed the local architectural practice; the royal master builders lost their share of architectural commission to the newly established Public Works Department.

After the traumatic Franco-Siamese Crisis of 1893, and Rama V's first journey to Europe in 1897, architecture and the architectural practice in Siam underwent yet another phase of dramatic change. The two momentous events pushed the Siamese aristocrats towards an even more Eurocentric civilizational ideal. For the local architectural practice, the king's Dusit Park project brought to the forefront the Public Works Department's central role in the manufacture of 20th-century, "civilized" Siam. The final curtain came down for the royal master builders; their expertise in ancient art and science of architecture no longer of much use to the Siamese patrons. However, as architecture of the new Siam became increasingly civilized and modern, old spatial practices persisted, and the disparity between the two became increasingly palpable and unsettling. In the end, in spite of their best intention, the Siamese aristocrats' carefully orchestrated *siwilai* and modern architectural images were actually rested on the supposedly uncivilized or traditional norms.

Because of the extent and magnitude of these changes, the period has attracted considerable scholarly attention. The first generation of scholarly studies was concerned mostly with the reforms of administrative system, finance, education, and foreign relations.¹ Building on these standard accounts of the Chakri Reformation, the recent

¹ David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915: The Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rajanubhab* (Singapore: Oxford

“cultural turn” in Thai history has resulted in a number of revisionist works that effectively use some “close reading” of the cultural products of the period as a means to re-interpret the process of change during Rama V’s reign. Maps, museums, exhibitions, playhouses, fashions, or even family laws, are studied by these recent works, of which this dissertation seeks to be a part of.² As for the existing studies of Thai/Siamese architecture, the transformation during the reign of Rama V is too often simply characterized as Westernization undertaken by Italian architects working for the Siamese monarch. The dissertation attempts to go beyond this delimiting framework in many respects. Firstly, looking beyond the East/West binary, the dissertation examines the total architectural output of the period. Interestingly, traditional Siamese-style architecture was still constructed, and their construction and design tells as much about the Siamese aristocrats’ Eurocentric civilizational ideal. Vice versa, in examining the Europeanized architecture of the period, this dissertation seeks for traces of old, “uncivilized” spatial practices. The argument here is that, the reign of Rama V is particularly interesting and paradoxical for the ways in which each of these traditions, Siamese and European, was mutually altered through collaboration, adaptation, and accommodation.

Secondly, the dissertation examines the architectural output of the reign of Rama V in its entirety as a process. Instead of offering mere interpretations of the external appearances of the iconic buildings, the dissertation asks not only *what* were built, but also *how* they were built, and *by whom*. Beyond the façades, the dissertation explores the buildings’ floor plans, zoning, boundaries, and functional arrangements, all of which are equally telling. Furthermore, by looking at the architectural practice, the dissertation looks at architecture as a social, cultural, and economic product. Transformations in architectural practice—from the royal master builders and the *corvée* system, to the first-

University Press, 1977); Ian Brown, *The Elite and the Economy in Siam, 1890 – 1920* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988).

² Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Lysa Hong, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984); Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

generation European builder-contractors, to the Public Works Department bureaucrats—were as telling as any iconic architecture from the period which frames this dissertation.

Chapter 1 examines the literature on the correlation between civilization, architecture, and the building practice. In Chapter 2, the dissertation explores the historical context of pre-modern Siam and its architecture. After outlining the correlation between architecture and authority in traditional context, the dissertation moves on to discuss *how* architecture of authority was built, with a particular focus on the role of the *chang luang*, the royal master builders, the patrimonial system, and the dynamism of traditional bureaucracy. Chapter 2 also describes changes towards cosmopolitanism and traditionalism in architecture during the reign of King Rama IV (r. 1851 – 1868), in order to identify changes in the civilizational thoughts, and the ability of the traditional building practice to accommodate stylistic changes.

Chapter 3 explores the correspondence between civilizational thoughts, architecture, and changes in the building practice during the first half of King Rama V's reign (1868 – 1889). After describing the historical context that shaped the Siamese elite's ideals of reformation, the dissertation examines the 1870s building program that led to a grand culmination in the 1882 celebration of the Centennial of the city of Bangkok. The chapter then moves on to discuss the role of the first-generation European builders and their collaboration with the Siamese royal master builders. After analyzing the process that led to the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1889 as a part of the Chakri Reformation and the re-organization of Siamese bureaucracy, Chapter 3 concludes with a brief discussion on the royal master builders and their professional demise.

Chapter 4 examines the impact of the PWD on architecture and the architectural practice in Siam during the latter half of Rama V's reign, from 1889 to 1910. As Bangkok underwent another phase of physical transformation, the Italian architects of the PWD prolifically served the Siamese elite's need to broadcast their modern public image through architecture. Large-scale building and rebuilding programmes were made possible in the wake of the Chakri Reformation; yet, it was the Reformation itself that

brought the centuries-old professional service of the royal master builders to its demise. I conclude Chapter 4 by looking closely at the conflicting nature of Siamese modernity through the designs of princely residences, spectacular civic pageantry, and modern Buddhist temples. While the PWD Italians did their best to present their Siamese patrons at their most civilized and modern selves, the carefully orchestrated architectural images were often rested on the supposedly uncivilized, traditional norms.

In conclusion, the dissertation highlights the central role of the Siamese elite's concept of *siwilai* that underpinned their efforts to transform both their capital city and their public image. Although Siam was not colonized, the Eurocentric nature of the concept of *siwilai* links Rama V's remaking of Bangkok to nineteenth-century urbanization and modernization of colonial cities around the world. As it was the Siamese themselves who initiated reforms, the colonizer-colonized binary was absent from the story. Instead, this was a story of collaboration between Siamese elite and their builders—Siamese and Italian—who did their best to define what it mean to be Siamese in the modern world, through architecture.

1.1 *Siwilai* and Architecture

Underlying progressive changes in the physical spaces of Bangkok were simultaneous changes in the city's society and culture. In his 1907 address to the people of Bangkok, on the occasion of his return from a grand tour in Europe, King Rama V remarked: "The time which has elapsed since I came to the throne has been a remarkable period in the World's history, a period distinguished by rapid progress in many fields. It has always been my endeavour that Siam should share in the progressive movement which is the distinguishing characteristic of the age in which we live. One generation is but a short space of time in the history of a nation, but there is a great difference in the Siam of to-day and the Siam of a generation ago."³

The attention to the world's progress was nothing new to the Siamese, especially the elite and other inhabitants of Siam's capital city, as cultural syncretism and

³ *The Bangkok Times*, November 18, 1907.

cosmopolitanism had always had an important role in the formation and transformation of the kingdom's culture and society.⁴ But the time during which Rama V's progressive movement occurred was a particularly tumultuous time. As the city of Bangkok was integrated into the colonial world system, its preexisting cultural conditions converged with the process of absolutist state-building, the expansion of capitalism, mass media technologies, and modern bureaucracy.⁵ This led to the need for the Siamese elite to conceptualize their ideas of civilization as the ideological framework to cope with "this remarkable period in the World's history," to use Rama V's phrase.

According to historian Thongchai Winichakul, the idea of civilization began its career in Siam during the mid-nineteenth century with the coinage of a Siamese word, "siwilai," a transliterated form of English term "civilized."⁶ Denoting a state of progress and development, the term *siwilai* was often put to use in conjunction with a much older term with similar meaning, *charoen*. With completely different etymological origins, by the late nineteenth century both *charoen* and *siwilai* became key terms in the Siamese elite's discourse on development, progress, and modernity.⁷ The word *charoen*, for example, was featured in practically every royal proclamation and decree as the ultimate objective for various state actions. Rama V also frequently used the term in his annual birthday speeches, describing achievements made in the past year and visions for the next.⁸ In the press, *charoen*—in the modern sense of the term—was mentioned as early as 1865 in the first issue of *The Bangkok Recorder*, as the newspaper's primary mission.⁹ In

⁴ Craig J. Reynolds, "Globalization and Cultural Nationalism in Thailand," in *Southeast Asian Identities*, ed. Joel Kahn (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 120-22; Adrian Vickers, "Modernity and Being 'Modern': An Introduction," in *Being Modern in Bali: Image and Change* (New Haven: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Yale University, 1996), 4-6.

⁵ See Scot Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead, "The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of London, 2000); Pasuk Phongpaichit and Christopher John Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995); Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966).

⁶ Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 529-30.

⁷ *Charoen* is etymologically Khmer in origin, and its presence in Thai vocabulary can be traced back as early as the fourteenth century. Ibid.: 531.

⁸ Chulalongkorn, *Phraratchadamrat Nai Phrabat Somdet Phra Chunlachomklao Chaoyuhua [Rama V's Speeches]* (Bangkok: Praphai lae Phraya Ratchaphinitchai, 1915).

⁹ *The Bangkok Recorder*, November 1865.

1883 the word *siwilai* was prominently featured in letters to the editor of *Sayam Samai*, a local newspaper, in a heated public discussion whether a new kind of theatrical performance was civilized or not.¹⁰ According to Thongchai, common usages of both *charoen* and *siwilai* by the Siamese to mark their sense of transformation into the new age would gradually expand after the turn of the twentieth century, as the growing urban middle class began to question the royal elite's dominant role in the appropriation and localization of *siwilai*.¹¹ By the 1920s, the Bangkok press became the primary forum for discussing Siam's progress, reflecting the growing social turmoil that would eventually lead to the overthrow of Siamese monarchy in 1932, a key event in modern Thai history.¹² The most important point, therefore, is that *siwilai* constantly changed, and was changed by, the local and global contexts of its time.¹³

By examining not only *what* were built, but also *how* they were built, and *by whom*, I discover that changes in the Siamese elite's concept of *siwilai* corresponded to contemporary architectural changes. In addition, I discover the intricate connections between cultural changes and the building practice : the professional organization of builders or architects, and the process of getting things built. The period which frames my dissertation was a period during which the Siamese aristocrats strove to transform Bangkok into a "civilized" capital city of a modern nation state via a series of architectural and urban reforms. The dissertation examines how narratives of "civilization" were fabricated, broadcast, and received at a range of different scales in the built environment of the city.¹⁴ The architecture and urban space that I will examine represents some of the processes through which Siam's sovereignty was maintained

¹⁰ *Sayam Samai*, November 21, 1883.

¹¹ Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'," 530.

¹² For a pathbreaking study of the social and intellectual contexts of the period 1910-1932, see Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*. Barmé's work is partly based on an excellent study of the period's politics by Nakharin Mektrairat, a Thai historian; Nakharin Mektrairat, *Kanpatriwat Sayam Pho. So. 2475 [Siamese Revolution, 1932]* (Bangkok: Munnithi Khrongkan Tamra Sangkhommasat læ Manutsayasat, 1992).

¹³ Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'," 529.

¹⁴ The terms "civilization" and "civilized" here refer to the Siamese sense of progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I put the quotation marks around these terms to emphasize the Siamese-centered meanings of the terms that were partly based on an indigenous concept of progress and partly influenced by Western/colonial ideas of "civilization." I will generally not put quotation marks around these terms in the rest of this essay, now that they have been marked.

under a semi-colonial condition, while its economy and culture were subordinated to a range of Western colonial powers. In other words, the dissertation examines how the ideas of *siwilai* were given material definition through the urban landscapes of Bangkok during the reign of Rama V. It examines the transformative processes of Bangkok's physical and social realms that gave the urban inhabitants a sense of becoming modern. In tracing the genesis and evolution of the ideas of *siwilai*, I seek to develop a fuller understanding of the Siamese elite's double position of defenders of tradition and arbiters of modernity; I am interested to examine how they were able to selectively appropriate colonial or Western architectural and urban forms in response to Western colonial hegemony while simultaneously maintaining their status quo through strategic deployment of civilizing initiatives. Many of the causes and effects of transformations in Bangkok's urban landscapes were similar to what have elsewhere been associated with modernity—the rise of professional architects, increasing use of mass-produced tools and materials, and the growing bureaucratization in urban administration.

In a more general sense, this dissertation is an examination of a localized engagement with modernity that both drew on and departed from its counterparts in the West. I choose the concept of *siwilai* to serve as an index for the Siamese discourse on modernity that indicated an awareness of becoming part of a new age and a new way of life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Siwilai* marked a Siamese sense of change that partly resonated with an indigenous concept of progress (*charoen*) and partly resonated with Western ideas of “civilization.”¹⁵ In this dissertation I use the term “civilization” to signify the diverse transformative processes aiming at improving, ordering, and rationalizing human conditions.¹⁶ This definition conforms to a broad

¹⁵ Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'," 529-31. The notion of indigenous/Western roots of “civilizational discourse” is also discussed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his study of Bengali elites. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 375-78.

¹⁶ I am influenced by the work of historian Lucien Febvre in formulating my usage of the term. Lucien Febvre, "Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas," in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Verso, 1973), 219-20. See, in addition, James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

meaning of the term *siwilai*—a progress from a savage state towards betterment—that was used in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Siam.

My dissertation examines how Bangkok and its architecture became part of the Siamese elite’s *siwilai* discourse—conscious and sustained attempts at self-improvement against the Western standards of “civilization”—that were manifested through the civilized spaces of Bangkok. Indeed, ideas and schemes on how to make Bangkok civilized ranged from the introduction of modern police to refined manners, from dress codes to fire codes, from modern forms of recreation to census surveys. My dissertation does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of these initiatives. Rather, I am interested in examining how architecture and urban design was instrumental in the Siamese elites’ definition and propagation of their ideals. I am also interested in investigating the social implications of the Siamese elite’s *siwilai* discourse, as civilizing processes inevitably involved a concentration of power in certain social groups, and disenfranchisement in others. Defining what “civilized” meant inevitably engendered debates on what values, whose views, and what means would be included in the establishment of civilized norms. This also led to the uneven topography of civilization, as some parts of the city became the showcases of civilized Siam, while others became either representatives of its uncivilized past, or sites of nostalgia.¹⁷

With its transliterated origin, *siwilai* was a concept that best captured the syncretic ways in which colonial and Western architectural forms were translated and localized by the Siamese elite under the semi-colonial conditions of Rama V’s Bangkok.¹⁸ By “syncretic ways” I mean the self-conscious, improvisational fusions of differing, seemingly incompatible components into a hybrid architectural product. Accordingly, my intention is not merely to identify a building or urban space as “hybrid,” but to

¹⁷ My interest in the uneven topography of “civilization” is instigated by recent scholarly interest on the issue of marginality in Thai studies. Rosalind C. Morris, for example, writes about the collaboration between spirit mediumship and modern imaging technology in the context of Chiang Mai, a regional capital city at the margins of the modern Thai nation-state. Rosalind C. Morris, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). See also Andrew Turton, ed., *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

¹⁸ By “semi-colonial” I refer to the indirect, subversive, and subtly hegemonic colonial relations between Siam and the West that allowed Siam to maintain her political sovereignty while subjected her economy and culture to those of the colonial world.

examine the different ways through which architectural hybridization occurred, and the processes that made such hybridity possible. I will also attend to the workings of power and agency inherent in the hybridization processes, viewing the transformation of Bangkok's urban landscapes during the reign of Rama V as part of the negotiation of identities and hegemonies in this particular situation. In other words, I am interested in seeing how a range of identities, including those of class, gender, and ethnicity, could be inscribed and re-inscribed in the new spaces of Bangkok.

Finally, I also seek to develop a fuller understanding of the role of tradition in the creation of modern Siamese architectural identity. In this study of an emergence of modernity in Siam, I find it useful to think of tradition and modernity not as two discrete stages of societal development, but as part of the same social experience that occurred in Bangkok during my period of interest. Tradition in my dissertation thus refers to a set of beliefs and practices derived from the past, yet not monolithic or unchanging. Tradition is capable of accommodating change, and subjected to value judgments.¹⁹ In analyzing the newly civilized spaces of Rama V's Bangkok, I am interested in considering how meanings of "tradition" (*prapheni*, in Thai) were defined and redefined through them. I am also interested in exploring how the Siamese elite made the distinction between *prapheni* and modernity, however artificial and unstable that distinction might be. In addressing these questions, I hope also to have a better understanding of the Siamese sense of related concepts such as authenticity, propriety, and, of course, "civilization."

1.2 Bangkok in the Reign of Rama V

By the mid-nineteenth century, after witnessing neighboring kingdoms succumb to various colonial powers, the elites of Siam began to calibrate their ideas of progress on a new scale, one in which Europe was at the zenith, with civilization as its ethos. Beginning in the reign of Rama IV (1851-1868), reforms in domains both large and small were gradually instituted to maintain Siam's sovereignty while simultaneously ensuring

¹⁹ In formulating my usage of "tradition," I am particularly influenced by the theoretical consideration of the term in Edward Shils's work. Edward Shils, "Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971). See, in addition, Talal Asad, "Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions: Interviewed by Saba Mahmood," *Stanford Humanities Review* 5, no. 1 (1995).

its progressive position within a changing world order.²⁰ During the reign of Rama V (1868-1910), Rama IV's successor, Siamese elites had constructed a centralized and powerful absolutist state through a series of modernization efforts and self-“civilizing” missions.²¹ Royal control, Chinese entrepreneurship, and forces of colonial economy led to the gradual but relentless growth of capitalism in the Thai economy. Simultaneously, Siamese society was significantly transformed, with the abolition of slavery, the growing bureaucrat class, and an influx of immigrant Chinese merchants, craftsmen, and laborers.²² As the kingdom's capital and major port, the city of Bangkok naturally played a crucial role in the formation of the new Siam. As the major port, the city became the contact zone where locals were exposed to foreign material culture, peoples, ideas, and customs. As the royal seat, Bangkok was the nexus of a newly centralized administrative power, the flow of revenues, and the cultural capital of the new nation-state.²³ Population in the city rose from 120,000 in 1882, to 628,675 in 1909, and the city expanded six times in area from its original 1782 boundary.²⁴

The transformative nature of Rama V's Bangkok was evident in its built environment that was modernizing while partly entrenched in premodern natural and cultural topographies. New streets radiated from the king's palace across the dense inner city neighborhoods to suburban residential districts beyond the city's walls. New princely palaces and residences for court nobles transformed rice fields north of the city wall into the aristocratic Dusit Park, while Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs turned orchard areas south of the city into Bangrak, a district of residential enclaves for foreign

²⁰ Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'," 529.

²¹ For my dissertation, “elite” refers in broad cultural terms to a power-holding social group; power might be political, economic, intellectual, or auratic. Adapting from Scot Barmé's model of Bangkok's social structure around the turn of the twentieth century, I consider the elite of Rama V's Bangkok to include members of the upper levels of royalty; the nobility and the upper-level bureaucrats; the leading entrepreneurs—ethnic Chinese, Indian, Siamese, or European; the diplomatic corps, and the Europeans in Siamese Government's employ. For more details, see Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, 7-8.

²² Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand, Economy and Politics*, 212-41. For the role of Chinese entrepreneurs, see G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957). Also see, for the rise of the bureaucrats, Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*.

²³ Marc Askew, *Bangkok: Place, Practice and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002); Porphant Ouyyanont, "Physical and Economic Change in Bangkok, 1851-1925," *Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (1999).

²⁴ Larry Sternstein, *Portrait of Bangkok* (Bangkok: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982), 78-80.

residents. Within the city's moated area, old princely palaces were turned into new offices for the growing bureaucracy—the Ministry of Defense, Courts of Justice, Royal Military College, Central Prison, and Royal Survey, Public Works, Post and Telegraph Departments—all of which were built in eclectic Western styles. By 1890, *The Bangkok Times* could proudly announce that “Bangkok [was] certainly passing through a brick and mortar epidemic.”²⁵ According to Henry Norman, a British journalist who visited the city in 1894, the urban landscape was transformed with “broad and well-kept roads, the rows of new-built houses and rapidly spreading shops, with the stuccoed walls of palaces and prisons, of barracks and offices, displaying the Hausmann-like changes that King Chulalongkorn I [Rama V] has effected in the outward appearance of his capital.”²⁶

1.3 Semi-Colonial Civilization

Although Siam was never formally colonized, the Siamese discourse on *siwilai* was inevitably influenced by cultural discourse from the colonial world. My dissertation, accordingly, is significantly informed by theoretical insights and methodologies from recent postcolonial scholarship. This scholarship seeks to theorize alternative narratives of modernity from non-Western perspectives by refining our understanding of colonialism and its cultural dynamics. Among a range of theoretical concepts from this scholarship, *hybridity* is one I find particularly useful to help me navigate through the complexity of Rama V's Bangkok.

A number of postcolonial theorists have pursued the notion of hybridity as the framework through which colonial cultural encounters can be more creatively explored.²⁷

²⁵ *The Bangkok Times*, November 29, 1890.

²⁶ Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East: Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaya* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1895), 412.

²⁷ Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 18. See also Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Nezar AlSayyad, ed., *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (India: Oxford University Press, 1999).

An example is Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993), a study of migration and cultural expression of the nineteenth-century African diaspora across the Atlantic.²⁸ Gilroy demonstrates through his study of syncretic literature and music of black settler communities in West Indies, Britain, and other corners of the Atlantic that modernity is essentially a transcultural and hybrid formation stipulated by conditions of the colonial encounter. Gilroy's interest in "the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms" originated by black people resonates with Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "transculturation."²⁹ In her work, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt defines "transculturation" as the operation through which colonized people select and invent cultural forms transmitted to them from the dominant metropolitan cultures.³⁰ The concept helps one see the dynamics of colonial culture as shared processes that transformed both the colonized and the colonizers alike. Pratt also points to the crucial importance of understanding the improvisational, interactive dimensions of colonial encounters, and thereby treating colonial relations "in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power."³¹

Pratt's insight on copresence is reflected in some recent works by scholars of colonialism, with the common idea that modernity was a worldwide phenomenon, so its cultural products were not produced exclusively by the West.³² Some scholars, including Paul Rabinow and Gwendolyn Wright, have also pointed out how modern technologies and institutions that are seemingly Western in origin were actually first developed or experimented with in the colonies.³³ Others have examined the hybrid origins of

²⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

²⁹ Ibid., 3; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

³⁰ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 6.

³¹ Ibid., 7. See also Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³² Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xi. See, in addition, Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

³³ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago:

modernity in the non-West from the standpoint of the colonized. Partha Chatterjee, for example, demonstrates in his study of the genealogy of nationalism in colonial Bengal the subtle ways through which the Indian elites appropriated the British Raj's hierarchy of civilization and incorporated that into their anticolonial ideology.³⁴ Chatterjee explains how that ideology was created through the division of the Bengali social worlds into material and spiritual domains, the former completely open to acknowledging, studying, and replicating the ways of the West, which were kept off limit from the latter. Only by doing so, Chatterjee argues, was the Bengali elite able to fashion a Bengali national culture that emerged outside of the West, a culture that was modern and national yet recognizably non-European.³⁵ Following Chatterjee's model, my dissertation will try to understand the Siamese elite's *siwilai* projects in their historical and cultural specificity, one that made a simple transposition of Western standards of civilization onto the city of Bangkok impossible. This does not mean that one should ignore transnational cultural flows and global historical moments; rather, by studying the copresence of the local specificity and the global dynamics which together gave shape to the civic reforms of Rama V's Bangkok, one begins to understand how modern urbanism comes about outside the West.³⁶

With theoretical insights from this growing body of work on the colonial world, I would like to specifically attend to the *semi-colonial* condition of Rama V's Bangkok. While the much-extolled independence of Siam through the colonial period has been

University of Chicago Press, 1991). Another work of interest is Ian Baucom's study of the construction and contestation of Englishness in spaces of the British Raj: Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

³⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). For an inquiry into the hybrid origins of Javanese identity, see John Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Another work of interest is Abidin Kusno's study of modern Indonesian architecture, in which he demonstrates how the Dutch colonial discourses of architecture and urban planning became appropriated and transformed by the postcolonial builders of the nation. Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³⁵ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 6.

³⁶ For the flow of colonial culture in the nineteenth century, see Carol A. Breckenridge, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989). Another work of interest is Vickers, "Modernity and Being "Moderen" : An Introduction." Vickers traces the pre-colonial regional flows of culture and trade in Southeast Asia, and demonstrates how Southeast Asian cultures had had a long history of hybridization, transculturation, and translation prior to the arrival of the colonial cultural flows in the nineteenth century.

repudiated by recent revisionist historiography as instead a case of semi-colonialism, potential theoretical implications of the idea have yet to be fully explored.³⁷ The idea of semi-colonial Siam was first deployed during the 1970s in the Thai communist rhetoric, describing the collusion between native “feudalism” and colonial economic and political dominance in Siam.³⁸ The idea has subsequently resurfaced in later and recent work which variously discuss the case of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Siam as “semi-colonialism,” “crypto-colonialism,” and “internal colonization.”³⁹ Benedict Anderson began to emphasize the concept of “semi-colonialism” in his seminal 1978 article “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” in which he defines “semi-colonialism” as a situation in which a state was able to maintain only nominal political sovereignty, while economically and culturally it was largely dependent on a global colonial system.⁴⁰ Through comparative analysis of political, military, and juridical developments, Anderson provocatively demonstrated that Siam during the reign of Rama V was indeed a semi-colonial state, not dissimilar in many respects to the indirectly colonized states of Southeast Asia such as Brunei, or the unfederated Malay states.⁴¹

Developed in the field of economic history, “internal colonization” is defined as a system of economic exploitation within a state, with an overwhelming dominance of the

³⁷ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” in *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History and Political Science*, ed. Eliezer B. Ayal (Athens: Ohio University, 1978), 199.

³⁸ Thadeus Flood, “The Thai Left Wing in Historical Context,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7, no. 2 (1975). For an example of Thai Marxist historical writing, see Aran Phromchomphu, *Thai Kung Muang Khun [Semi-colonial Thailand]* (Bangkok: Chomrom Nangsu Udomtham, 1973).

³⁹ Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies”; David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 1994); Michael Herzfeld, “The Absence Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002).

⁴⁰ Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies.” For example, according to Anderson, by the 1930s foreigners controlled 95 percent of the Thai export economy. For an attempt to theorize semi-colonialism using the case of China, see Jürgen Osterhammel, “Semi-colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis,” in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986). For more recent discussions of the Chinese case, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Bryna Goodman, “Improvisations on a Semi-colonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (2000); Shumei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semi-colonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” 199.

center—the capital city—over the peripheral regions.⁴² The concept works as an analogy of international colonialism, and it can be seen as an extension of Anderson’s notion of semi-colonial Siam: if Siam was in many respects a colonized state, Rama V’s role was accordingly not dissimilar to those of colonial governors. Rama V’s modernizing initiatives, Anderson argues, were in fact Siamese absolutism’s natural drive to centralization to facilitate an economic exploitation of the kingdom’s hinterlands that was similar to what was happening in other parts of Southeast Asia.⁴³

In his recent article on the correlation between semi-colonialism and anthropological work on Greece and Thailand, anthropologist Michael Herzfeld puts forth the notion of *crypto-colonialism*, “the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models.”⁴⁴ Refining Anderson’s arguments by pointing to the subtly concealed collusion between native elite and colonial forces, Herzfeld’s work helps direct my dissertation towards the understanding of the cultural implications stipulated by semi-colonial conditions in terms of their indirect, subversive, and subtly hegemonic nature, as opposed to the putatively more starkly coercive condition of formally colonized cases. My dissertation seeks to unravel the multiple strands of this semi-colonial process through a detailed examination of Bangkok, the epicenter of internal colonization, in order to understand how the hybridized “civilizing” process took shape and articulated changes to the built environment of the city.

Another kind of hybridity to be addressed in my investigation of Rama V’s Bangkok lies, I believe, in the copresence of “tradition” and “modern” in the urban landscape. Conventional historiography would treat the traditional elements as mutually exclusive from the modern ones; modernity replaced tradition through stages in the societal and historical development. According to this account, the phenomena of the

⁴² Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, 158-59.

⁴³ Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," 200.

⁴⁴ Herzfeld, "The Absence Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism," 900-01. See also Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai' ", from which Herzfeld derives many of his argument on the ways in which the native elite put civilizational discourse to enhance their social dominance.

traditional coexisting alongside the modern can be simply explained as the incompleteness of modernization processes, which left residuals of the past in the present.⁴⁵

One useful way of looking at this question is provided by a body of writings that address the efflorescence of newly invented rituals and spectacles, “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes,” that emerged as part of the rise of nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁶ In a book edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), the editors describe the crucial role tradition played in the inventions of modern national cultures, where the newly invented rituals emphasized the bonds between citizens and rulers of the modern nation while deploying norms and trappings of the past to legitimize and strengthen national unity.⁴⁷

However, several scholars have pointed out the inadequacy of the “invention of tradition” explanation, arguing that the idea is still nonetheless based on the idea of the unidirectional path towards modernity, and that the “invention of tradition” is just another stage of social development led by the West.⁴⁸ Janet Abu-Lughod, for example, argued that one should refer to “tradition” as a process, rather than as a product that exists only as the opposite of “modernity.”⁴⁹ This resonates with anthropologist Talal Asad’s view that tradition and modernity are not two mutually exclusive stages of societal development, but different aspects of a specific historicity; hence, tradition is not a timeless, static product, but a dimension of social life that is constituted by the same

⁴⁵ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, "Disappearing Dichotomies: First World - Third World; Traditional - Modern," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements* 3, no. 2 (1992): 8-9.

⁴⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), quoted in Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire 1808 to 1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (1993): 7.

⁴⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Studies that are influenced by Hobsbawm and Ranger’s “invention of tradition” concept include Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire 1808 to 1908." Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*. Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

⁴⁸ Asad, "Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions: Interviewed by Saba Mahmood," 1-2.

⁴⁹ Abu-Lughod, "Disappearing Dichotomies: First World - Third World; Traditional - Modern,"

tensions that define modernity.⁵⁰ With these insights in mind, I will seek to develop a fuller understanding of the role of tradition in the creation of modern Siamese identity. I am interested in considering how meanings of tradition were defined and redefined through the civic reforms of Bangkok. In addressing these questions, I hope also to explore the Siamese sense of related concepts such as authenticity, propriety, and civilization.⁵¹

1.4 The Reign of Rama V

The reign of Rama V has been generally accepted as the transformative period from which modern Siam/Thailand emerged. The transformation is often assumed to be a linear and unidirectional modernization through Westernization, and Rama V is often depicted as a “Prometheus-like figure who bestowed the gift of modernity on Thai society,” heroically saved the country from being colonized through his various modernizing initiatives.⁵² This had been the master narrative of the royalist-nationalist, state-endorsed historiography and generations of Thai historical studies until revisionist historians began to seriously question its validity in the late 1970s. In 1978, Benedict Anderson began to problematize the much-acclaimed uniqueness of Siam as the only uncolonized country in colonial Southeast Asia. Through comparative analysis of political, military, and juridical developments, Anderson demonstrated that the transformation of Rama V’s Siam was more similar to those of the indirectly colonized states of Southeast Asia than, say, Meiji Japan.⁵³ Around the same period, economic historians with Marxian perspectives began to bring into focus Siam’s semicolonial economic conditions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the

⁵⁰ Asad, "Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions: Interviewed by Saba Mahmood," 2.

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion on the modern Thai conception of “tradition” and “modernity,” see Michael Rhum, " 'Modernity' and 'Tradition' in Thailand," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996). Another interesting work is Morris, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand*. Morris specifically attends to the paradoxical coexistence of spirit mediumship and modern mass media technologies. See also Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁵² Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, 4. For a comprehensive overview of the dominant historical narratives and the emerging revisionist alternatives, see Thongchai Winichakul, "The Changing Landscape of the Past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995).

⁵³ Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies".

Siamese royal elite began to be viewed as brokers of colonial economy rather than benevolent modernizers, their modernizing initiatives seen as a consolidation of monarchical absolutism instead of civilizing missions.⁵⁴

Building upon these pioneering studies, some of the best historical studies of Thailand in recent years have continued this deconstruction of the royalist-nationalist master narrative by carefully examining ideological and cultural aspects of Siam under Rama V's reign. Some studies address the indelible imprints of colonialism on Siam's national identity and culture, while others expand our understanding of modernization processes in terms of their social and cultural implications.⁵⁵ For example, Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped* (1994) examines the emergence of modern Siamese national identity through the mediation of modern geographical knowledge.⁵⁶ In this study, Thongchai contends that through its imposition of cartographic technology, colonialism was not merely a threat to Siam's sovereignty, but an essential part in the construction of "Siam" as a modern nation-state. Disputing the one-sided view of the "threat" of colonialism and downplaying the role of the monarchy, Thongchai's account is a provocative departure from the standard royalist-nationalist narrative of the reign of Rama V.⁵⁷ Thongchai further explores cultural implications of colonialism in his recent study, *The Quest for "Siwilai"* (2000), which describes how the Siamese political and

⁵⁴ See, for example, Chatthip Nartsupha Chatthip and Suthy Prasartset, eds., *The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978); Chatthip Nartsupha, *Sethasat Kap Prawatsat Thai [Economics and Thai History]* (Krungthep: Sangsan, 1981).

⁵⁵ Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat Sayam Pho. So. 2475 [Siamese Revolution, 1932]*; Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy: Foundations of the Modern Thai State from Feudalism to Peripheral Capitalism* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994); Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*; Atthachak Sattayanurak, *Kanplianplaeng Lakkathat Khong Chonchan Phunam Thai Tangtae Ratchakan Thi 4 - Pho. So. 2475 [Changes in Worldviews of Siamese Elites from the Reign of Rama IV to B.E. 2475]* (Bangkok: Samnakphim Chulalongkonmahawitthayalai, 1995); Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*; Neil A. Englehart, "Culture, Choice and Change in Thailand in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn" (University of California, 1996); Turton, ed., *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*; Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam"; Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*; Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

⁵⁶ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*.

⁵⁷ "The Thai monarchs were merely the instrument of the new discourse. And Thainess was nothing but a construct of humble origin." Ibid., 12. For another work which directly analyzes the inextricable presence of colonialism in the allegedly uncolonized Siam, see David Streckfuss, "The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890-1910," in *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truth. Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail*, ed. Laurie Sears (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1993)..

intellectual elite formulated their ideas of *siwilai* by appropriating and localizing Western/colonial ideas of “civilization.”⁵⁸ Adding to his earlier study of maps as a mediator of national identity, Thongchai demonstrates how other kinds of civilizing mediators—museums, exhibitions, travelogues, and ethnographic writings—were strategically deployed by the Siamese elite to reposition themselves on the civilizational scale.

While Thongchai’s work is focused on the Siamese elite’s self-positioning through comparative definitions of their “others” on the civilizational scale, historian Maurizio Peleggi’s work, *Lords of Things* (2002), deals exclusively with the Siamese monarchy and the creation of its modern public image.⁵⁹ Focusing on the royal elite and their adoption of Western material cultures and social practices, Peleggi’s work is a pioneering departure from previous studies of Rama V’s reign that are almost exclusively concerned with institutional, political, or economic dimensions of the period.⁶⁰ Peleggi’s work contains considerable information on Bangkok’s changing urban landscape, yet its focus on the monarchy leaves much of the effects of these changes on the commoners and other social groups unexplained. This lacunae is partly filled by historian Scot Barmé’s recent work, *Woman, Man, Bangkok* (2002), an investigation of the contestation of the *siwilai* discourse in popular media culture of the reigns of Rama VI and VII (1910-1925; 1925-1932).⁶¹ Barmé demonstrates how the civilizational discourse of the royal

⁵⁸ Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam." The importance of civilizational discourse in Thai history has also been pointed out by historian Charnvit Kasetsiri since 1996. See Charnvit Kasetsiri Charnvit, "Siam/Civilization-Thailand/Globalization: Things to Come" (paper presented at the IAHA, Bangkok, 1996).

⁵⁹ Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

⁶⁰ Peleggi’s work should also be viewed as part of the recent scholarly interest on Thai material culture, most notably the studies by anthropologists Penny Van Esterik and Somrak Chaiyasingkananon. Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Somrak Chaiyasingkananon, *Rotniyom: Phasa Nai Sangkhom Thai Yuk Boriphokniyom [Taste: Language in Thai Society in the Age of Consumerism]* (Bangkok: Chulalongkonmahawithayalai, 2001).

⁶¹ Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*. For the few available studies of the commoners, the subalterns, or the everyday life during the reign of Rama V, see Lysa Hong, "Looking at Nineteenth-Century Siamese Women from Police Files. Between Wang and Muang: Palace Women at the Margins of Social Change" (paper presented at the The 14th IAHA Conference, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 20-24 May 1996 1996); Lysa Hong, "Indian Police Subalterns in King Chulalongkorn's Kingdom: Turn of the Twentieth Century Bangkok Pantomime," in *Khu Khwamphumchai: Ruam Botkhvam Wichakan Nai Wara Khrop Rop 60 Pi So Do Ro Chatthip Natsupha*, ed. Sampatchalit Sirilak (Bangkok: Sangsan, 2002); Monruthai Chaiwiset, *Prawattisat*

elite had been increasingly challenged by the voices of the emerging urban middle class that ultimately led to the demise of the absolutist regime in the 1932 revolution. Barmé's work is the most profound study of Bangkok's urban culture to date, and even though it does not directly address the reign of Rama V and its changes, many of the questions about class and popular culture raised by Barmé will be addressed in my dissertation as well.

Building upon these two lines of inquiry: elite/intellectual and popular/material histories, my dissertation explores how the city was an essential component in the Siamese elites' conception and propagation of their civilizational ideals. My assumption is that the civilizing process was not a monolithic juggernaut that evenly and thoroughly transformed Bangkok; indeed, there was no one single norm of civilization since the civilizational ideals themselves grew out of a changing power relations in Bangkok's urban society. My dissertation adds to Thongchai's work on the relationship between Siamese civilizational thinking and identity by taking the urban landscape as a kind of mediator through which modern Siamese identity was made and experienced, spatially and materially, in everyday life. Building on the convergence of Barmé's and Peleggi's studies, I will investigate a range of civic reform projects that partly represent the Siamese elites' self-image, and partly represent their view towards subordinate social groups.

With its focus on the reformative nature of the Siamese elites' civilizing processes, my dissertation seeks to view Rama V's Bangkok against paralleled civic reform efforts in cities of Europe and other parts of Asia.⁶² Through the nineteenth century, the European civic reform movements produced multifarious schemes to civilize cities and towns of Europe and its colonies. Rooted in the Enlightenment project for social emancipation, the underlying assumption of European civic reforms was that social

Sangkham-Waduai Suam Læ Khruangsukkhaphan Nai Prathet Thai [Social History: Toilet and Plumbing in Thailand] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2002); Porphant Ouyyanont, "Bangkok's Population and the Ministry of the Capital in Early 20th Century Thai History," *Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (1997); Takashi Tomosugi, *Reminiscences of Old Bangkok: Memory and the Identification of a Changing Society* (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture University of Tokyo, 1993); Phanni Bualek, *Kuli Lak Rot Kap Prawattisat Raengngan Thai [Rickshaw Coolies and the Thai Labor History]* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1999).

⁶² Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 1-2.

order could be improved through rational reordering of built environments.⁶³ In his study of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century French reforms, Paul Rabinow points to the French process of “constructing and regulating a new social field of everyday relations in an industrial, scientific, and democratic—i.e., modern—world, of regulating the normal.”⁶⁴ As urban historians have shown, this project of “regulating the normal” generated a broad range of activities in the European city, from infrastructural projects and construction of civic buildings, to cadastral mapping and census surveys.⁶⁵ As pointed out by Nancy Steiber, the important thing is that, embedded in the rationalistic and normalizing nature of European social reforms were the coercive forces of knowledge and power that controlled one’s social life through the application and maintenance of norms.⁶⁶ This leads to the question of agency: Who were the “social engineers”? What was the expertise or intellectual capacity that legitimized their control over social norms?

For non-western cities, the shaping of civic reforms introduced an even more complicated problem of “regulating the normal.” As recent scholarship on colonial cities demonstrates, colonial settings were terrains or laboratories for trying out civic reforms that might not be made immediately possible in the metropole.⁶⁷ Yet, despite the greater political control that Western colonizers had over colonial cities, the shaping of their civic reforms was never a simple imposition of Western norms over the colonized, but a

⁶³ Nancy Stieber, *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4-6. David Scobey describes the perceived link between social order and urban planning as “moral environmentalism,” the notion that “the natural and built environments exercised a profound tutelary influence on domestic and public life.” David M. Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 9.

⁶⁴ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, 171.

⁶⁵ Stieber, *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900-1920*. See, for example, Eleni Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Allan Richard Pred, *Lost Worlds and Lost Worlds: Modernity and the Language of Everyday Life in Late Nineteenth-Century Stockholm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁶ Stieber, *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900-1920*, 7.

⁶⁷ Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, 6-7. See, in addition, Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony*; Ole Johan Dale, *Urban Planning in Singapore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

transcultural process that was always determined by local conditions. As pointed out by Brenda Yeoh in her study of colonial Singapore, civic reforms in colonial cities were not merely an exercise of asymmetrical power relations of the colonial situation, but also a contested terrain of discipline and resistance that transformed both colonizers and colonized alike.⁶⁸ The indigenous, “Westernized” elite became a crucial factor in civic reform processes, as they could appropriate some of the policies of the colonial rulers to their advantage, selectively translating “civilizing” initiatives for their own purposes.⁶⁹

Drawing on many of the questions raised by this scholarship on civic reforms, my dissertation seeks to examine the Siamese elites’ transformation of Bangkok as a case of non-Western, non-colonial civic reform.⁷⁰ Without the ideological precondition of the Enlightenment project for social amelioration, how did the Siamese elites define their ideas of civic order and civilization? How did Siamese monarchical absolutism coexist with the liberative and rational nature of European-style civic reforms? What were the institutional apparatuses for the definition and implementation of civilized norms? Who were Bangkok’s social engineers? How did they acquire their expertise or license to determine how the city should be civilized?

In asking these questions, my dissertation also engages with an existing body of research on the history of Thai architecture and urbanism. Of particular interest to my dissertation is the work of Richard A. O’Connor, an anthropologist whose 1978 research on a Bangkok temple and its community posits a useful model of Thai urbanism and its

⁶⁸ Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, 10. See also Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁶⁹ Siddharatha Raychaudhuri, "Colonialism, Indigenous Elites and the Transformation of Cities in the Non-Western World: Ahmedabad (Western India), 1890-1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2001): 677.

⁷⁰ It is useful to compare Rama V’s Bangkok with non-Western, non-colonial (or semicolonial) cities, most notably Istanbul, Shanghai, Chengdu, and Tokyo. See Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); Kristin Eileen Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); William Howard Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996); Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

transformation through stages in Thai history.⁷¹ In a subsequent work, O'Connor demonstrates a more subtle way of reading the city as a patchwork of discourse where the royal and official narratives of power and civilization compete with the local, popular ones that are based on nature, community, and the everyday experience.⁷² Similarly useful to my dissertation is the anthropologist Marc Askew's recent work on Bangkok which describes the physical and ecological changes of the city since its foundation. For the reign of Rama V, Askew argues that civic reforms of the period were made possible only through a result of the complex interplay between the centralizing state power, commodification of land, and technological changes.⁷³

The existing scholarship on Thai architectural history is less useful to my research due to its adherence to a dated modernization paradigm and the limited use of archival materials. The analysis is largely confined to the stylistic identification of the hybridized or Western styles in the architecture of Rama V's reign with their "sources" in Europe, focusing mainly on the exterior of the buildings while ignoring both their spatial organization, building process, and social life.⁷⁴ An exception, however, is the work of the architectural historian Phutsadi Thipthat, whose research on Thai domestic architecture includes a careful documentation and examination of building plans and sections.⁷⁵ In her more recent work, Phutsadi also begins to address the questions of building practice, the employment of foreign architects, and the emergence of professional architects in Thailand, all of which is of great benefit to my dissertation's investigation of some of the key buildings of Rama V's reign.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Richard A. O'Connor, "Urbanism and Religion: Community, Hierarchy and Sanctity in Urban Thai Buddhist Temples" (Cornell University, 1978).

⁷² O'Connor, "Place, Power and Discourse in the Thai Image of Bangkok," *Journal of the Siam Society* 78, 2 [1990]: 70.

⁷³ Askew, *Bangkok: Place, Practice and Representation*.

⁷⁴ Clarence T. Aasen, *Architecture of Siam: A Cultural History Interpretation* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1998); Sukkata Pensupa, "Influences Occidentales Dans L'architecture Thaïlandaise" (Universite de Lausanne, 1998).

⁷⁵ Phutsadi Thippthat and Manop Phongsathat, *Ban Nai Krung Thep: Rupbaep Læ Kanpianplaeng Nai Rop 200 Pi (Pho. So. 2325-2525) [Houses in Bangkok: Characters and Changes During the Last 200 Years (1782-1982)]* (Bangkok: Chulalongkonmahawitthayalai, 1982).

⁷⁶ Phutsadi Thippthat, *Sathapanik Sayam: Phunthan, Botbat, Phonngan, Læ Naeokhit, Pho. So. 2475-2537 [Siamese Architects, 1932-1994]* (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects, 1996).

Chapter 2

Continuity and Change in Siamese Architectural Practice, 1782 – 1868

In 1854, king Rama IV ordered a new royal apartment built in the Grand Palace. As Siam was gradually opening up to diplomatic contacts with the West, the king argued that a new throne hall was definitely needed to showcase all the gifts that he received from European and American heads of states.¹ The new building complex consisted of two audience halls, three royal bedchambers, a banqueting hall, a small armory, a hall for Buddhist sermons, an observatory tower, and a pavilion for exhibiting gifts from foreign dignitaries (Figure 2.1).

The royal master builders, Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakul) and Phraya Samphopphai (Nu Hongsakul) were responsible for the design and construction of the new throne hall. The builders, whose forefathers spent their careers building for the kings of Siam since the mid-eighteenth century, freely exercised their imaginations of Western architectural orders through traditional Thai building materials and construction. Spatial organization still strictly followed Siamese royal protocol, while the architectural

¹ On the occasion of the royal housewarming ceremony, the king issued a royal decree stating the reasons for the construction of the new royal apartments, Phra Aphinaowaniwet: “The project was intended to be a future memento of honor for the present king, like the Phramahamonthian and the Dusit Throne Hall of King Rama I, the Phutthamahamonthian and the White Elephant Stables of King Rama II, and the Sutthaisawariyaprasat of King Rama III. In addition, the present king had maintained friendly relations with the major independent states in the land of Europe and the continent of America, which had presented to the king countless fine gifts. It would be inappropriate to put these gifts as devotional objects in the royal monasteries, since the ambassadors from these states often returned and inquired about the state of the gifts of friendship. And to use these gifts to decorate the traditional Siamese style throne halls was an eyesore; the incompatibility between the gifts and the setting would be ridiculed by the foreign dignitaries from Europe. Consequently, the king ordered to have Phra Aphinaowaniwet built in the manner of the European royal palaces; the new apartments would nicely accommodate the fine gifts from Europe, the constant reminders of the friendship and goodwill from the European rulers. The new apartments would be used for receiving foreign dignitaries as well.” Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Sathanthi lae watthu song sang nai Ratchakan Thi 4 [Built Projects of King Rama IV]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophon Phiphatthanakon, 1922), 15.

style was “in the manner of European palaces,” according to the pictorial and verbal descriptions of the “civilized” West that were brought to the builders by diplomats and traders of the time. The centerpiece of the compound was the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, the main audience hall which was first used to receive the Prussian embassy in 1861. A double-storey masonry structure with the main floor raised high atop a partially rusticated base, the hall’s t-shaped plan reflected its use. With the throne at the center, the princes and the nobles would sit on the right and the left wings, while the central hall was reserved for the guests of honor. Lined with tall but curiously unfluted Corinthian columns, the central hall was brightly illuminated with pedimented windows and gilded chandeliers (Figure 2.2).

Through architecture like the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, the Siamese elite began to express their need to redefine their self-identity, and their position within the world that, they began to realize, would be dominated by the West. In the words of Thongchai Winichakul (2000): “In order to survive, not from colonialism but from indignity and inferior existence, and to remain majestic, Siam needed a confirmation according to the new ethos of civilization that it measured up to other leading countries.”² In architecture, the process was not merely mimicry of the external appearance of Western norms and forms of civilization. The royal builders had to work through both traditional Siamese and European architectural vocabulary; a reference to Siam’s past was as crucial as that of the modern, civilized West, in the fabrication of the king’s dual image, since both the monarch’s traditional role as the celestial Lord of Life, and his new role as the worldly, English-speaking monarch, had to be simultaneously represented through architecture.

A generation later, Rama IV’s modernization initiatives were followed and expanded by his son, king Rama V. To be discussed in Chapter 3, during the king’s long reign (1868 – 1910), Siam’s passage to modernity was marked with iconic buildings of various Western styles. In 1882, for instance, Rama V commemorated the centennial anniversary of the House of Chakri in the construction of the Chakri Throne Hall

² Thongchai Winichakul, “The Quest for ‘*Siwilai*’: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 534.

(Figure 2.3). Located in the Grand Palace, the neo-Renaissance building compound was designed by John Clunis, the Royal Architect, although at the last moment the building's three towers were topped with traditional Thai spires designed by Phraya Ratchasongkhram (That Hongsakul, the son of Ket Hongsakul), instead of the planned Western-style cupolas.

As discussed in Chapter 4, another decisive moment of change occurred in 1899, with the monarch's construction of Dusit Park, the elite suburban enclave north of the old city. In 1900 Phraya Ratchasongkhram (Kon Hongsakul, the son of That Hongsakul), constructed the Wimanmek Mansion, a three-storey teakwood structure that Rama V used as both his temporary residence, and as a site office for the subsequent constructions of Dusit Park (Figure 2.4). Also in 1900, the king began the construction of Wat Benchamabophit, the palace monastery, a collaborative project between Kon Hongsakul, Prince Naris—the artistically talented younger brother of the king—and the Italian architects of the Public Works Department (PWD).

Apart from the mansion and the monastery, however, most of the buildings of Dusit Park were designed by the PWD Italians. Mario Tamagno, the Chief Architect of the PWD, led the mostly Italian team of architects, engineers, sculptors, and painters in the construction of the Moorish-style Abhisekdusit Throne Hall (1903), German Art Nouveau-style Ambara Villa (1907), and the Louis XVI-style Prince Urubhongse' Villa (1908).

A crowning moment in the PWD's history, however, was the 1907 foundation of the new Anantasamakhom Hall in Dusit Park, in anticipation of the great festivities that would have happened in 1912 on the aging monarch's sixtieth birthday anniversary. On the early morning of November 11, 1907, Rama V laid down the foundation stone of the new audience hall, a part of another festivity commemorating the fortieth anniversary of his reign (Figure 2.5). Allegedly costing fifteen million baht, roughly five times the annual budget of the kingdom, the monumental audience hall project's cost and architectural features met with fierce criticism since its inception. Accordingly, on March 8, 1908, a royal edict was published in the Royal Gazette, stating that the new

audience hall was needed, as its 1854 namesake in the Grand Palace was beyond repair.³ Furthermore, in his private correspondences Rama V also argued that the audience hall was indeed needed, as the century-old throne halls in the Grand Palace would not suffice.⁴ It was also stated elsewhere, that originally the king planned to have the new audience hall constructed in traditional Siamese style, so Kon Hongsakul, the fifth-generation royal master builder, was assigned to the task (Figure 2.6). Kon Hongsakul, whose forefathers spent their careers building for the kings of Siam, replied Rama V that he was unable to undertake the project of such magnitude in the limited time allocated. Accordingly, the king had to assign the project to the PWD Italians, who came up with such a non-Siamese design for the audience hall by necessity.

The stories of the two Anantasamakhom Throne Halls were just a small but telling aspect of the larger story of how the Siamese elite coped with historical changes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the social, economic, and institutional transformation of the Siamese state during the reign of Rama V (1868 – 1910) was indeed profound, the period has attracted considerable scholarly attention. The reforms of Siam's bureaucracy, education, economy, transportation, material culture, or even water management, have already been studied.⁵ In my dissertation, however, I will look

³ RKNBS 24:49, 1321. The edict, dated 8 March 1908, also suggested briefly that the new throne hall could have been built in the Grand Palace, but since the Grand Palace was already crowded with buildings, the monarch ordered to have the new Anantasamakhom erected in Dusit Park Palace instead.

⁴ King Chulalongkorn, *Samnao phraratchathalekha suan phraong Phrabat Somdet Phrachunlachomklao Chaoyuhua thung Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum) [Private Correspondences between King Rama V and Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum)]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Bamrung Tham, 1939), 28 – 29.

⁵ See, for example, Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966); David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1969); Craig J. Reynolds, "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai History, with Special Reference to Nineteenth-Century Culture Change." *Journal of Asian Studies* 35.2 (1976): 203-20; Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam, 1892-1915: the Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rajanubhab* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977); Chatthip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasartset, eds., *The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978); Neil A. Englehart, "Culture, Choice and Change in Thailand in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1996); Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam," 528-49; Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: the Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Ichiro Kakizaki, *Laying the Tracks: the Thai Economy and Its Railways 1885-1935* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2005); Han ten Brummelhuis, *King of the Waters: Homan van der Heide and the Origin of Modern Irrigation in Siam* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005).

at this transformative period through changes in architecture and the architectural practice, on the basic assumption that during this period the Siamese elite were actively engaged with the fabrication of modern Siamese identity through architecture. As the building practice was collaborative in nature, its transformation was never simply a transfer of Western architectural styles onto Siamese soil. European architects and engineers under Siamese employ had to work closely with their Siamese counterparts, like the Hongsakuls, in order to get things built accordingly. At the same time, the Siamese master builders also had to cope with dramatic changes in their practice, as exemplified in Kon Hongsakul's alleged inability to design the new Anantasamakhom Hall for Rama V.

Before going into the complexities of the transformation in the building practice during the reign of Rama V, however, I would like first to examine the tradition of building practice in Siam prior to the influx of European builders, a tradition which was capable of accommodating changes through the centuries of Thai architecture. A quick survey of major construction projects of Bangkok since the city's foundation in 1782 reveals that there indeed was a traditional building practice. Focusing on the royal master builders, I explore their social structure and position, their bureaucratic organization, their transfer of building knowledge, and their mechanism for coping with change. In addition, I also examine the transformation of their creative output : how Siamese representational architecture had developed from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, the culmination of which was Rama IV's Anantasamakhom Throne Hall.

2.1 Siamese Master Builders : Professional Structure and Practice

Architect as a profession did not emerge in Siam until the late nineteenth century. The English term was simply transliterated into Siamese vocabulary as *akhitek*, until king Rama VI coined the term *sathapanik* for professional architects in the 1920s.⁶ Prior to the advent of architects in the modern sense, architectural production in Siam was

⁶ Wimonsit Horayangkura et al, *Phatthanakan naeo khwamkhit læ rupbaep khong ngan sathapattayakam [Development of Concepts and Forms of Architecture]* (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects, 1993), x.

undertaken by *nai chang*, the master builders. The etymological origin of the term was actually all-encompassing; *nai* means master, while *chang* means crafts, or arts. Fields of artisanal specializations would be indicated, for instance, *chang mai* means “carpenters,” *chang sila* means “stonemasons,” while *chang khian* signifies “painters.” *Nai chang* was, of course, the master of all *changs*.

Since the Ayutthayan period, Siamese artisans constituted of close-knit groups of specialized practitioners. Contemporary documents suggest that there were guild-like groups of specialized artisans all over the ancient capital of Ayutthaya, supplying the urban populace with specialty construction materials like bricks, wooden wall panels, *attap* palm leaves, and rattan products.⁷ Likewise, the master builders were close-knit groups of the masters of building crafts. These men could be categorized into three groups according to their professional affiliations : *chang luang* “royal master builders,” *chang phra* “monk master builders,” and *chang chaloeisak* “private master builders.”⁸ The private master builders were those who could be commissioned by anyone to build; the monk builders mainly practiced their crafts through monastery construction and maintenance; the *chang luang* were the institutionalized groups of master builders who worked for the state through their service to the king, the princes, and the nobles.

What were the positions of the master builders within the traditional Siamese bureaucracy? Since the fifteenth century, the whole administrative structure of the kingdom of Siam was divided into the civil (*phonlaruen*) and the military (*thahan*) divisions. At the top echelon were the two most powerful ministries, the Kalahome and the Mahatthai, which had jurisdiction over the cities and towns of the Southern and Northern provinces respectively. As they controlled most of the kingdom’s resources in the early Bangkok period, the Kalahome and Mahatthai ministries played an important role in major construction projects as the supplier of construction labors and materials. Beneath these top-level ministries there were four other major ministries of slightly less

⁷ Chulathat Phayakhranon, “*Chang lae yan ban chang nai Krung Si Ayutthaya*,” [*Craftsmen and craft villages of Ayutthaya*] in *Ayutthaya: U Arayatham Thai [Ayutthaya: the Cradle of Thai Culture]* (Ayutthaya: Ayutthaya Historical Center, 1988), 1-58.

⁸ Kukrit Pramoj, “Forward,” in Joti Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects* (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects, 1977).

prestige : the ministries of the City, the Treasury, the Fields, and the Palace, none of which was directly responsible for architectural work.

In addition to these major ministries, there was a large number of *krom*, or departments, of varying degrees of importance. As explicated by Rama V in his 1887 speech arguing for the extensive overhaul of the bureaucratic system, traditionally the state's master builders were scattered among these various *krom*, all of which had direct line of command from the king. Some *krom*, like *krom thahan nai* (the Department of the King's Personal Army), *krom phra tamruat* (the Department of the Royal Police), and *krom lom phraratchawang* (the Department of the Palace Guards), offered the king's special security during wars and emergencies. Accordingly, given the king's trust and their closeness to the crown, these *krom* also provided the king with builders and craftsmen during the time of peace. During the Ayutthayan period, for instance, the Department of the Royal Police was responsible for the construction and upkeep of the various thrones, royal residences, chariots, armories, library, elephants and horses stables, and even pools and ponds in the royal gardens.⁹

Originally, building tasks were perhaps undertaken solely by the Department of the King's Personal Army. Phraya Ratchasongkhram, the directorial position of the Department, had as his personal seal the image of Wisnukam, the Siamese version of Vishwakarma, the Hindu god of architecture, engineering, and crafts. Wisnukam carries a plumbline in one hand, a bunch of peacock feathers in the other, signifying craftsmanship and supervision. The seal of Phraya Phetphichai, the director of the Department of the Palace Guards was in the form of a standing lion, while the seal of Phraya Aphaironnarit, director of the Department of the Royal Police, was Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god who was Rama's most trusted aide.¹⁰ While the seals indicated their

⁹ "Tamra nathi tamruat," [Manual for the Royal Police], in *Prachum chotmai het samai Ayutthaya phak 1 [Compilation of Ayutthayan-Period Documents, Volume 1]* (Bangkok: the Prime Minister's Office, 1967), 88 – 91.

¹⁰ The information on the seals is based on those dating from the mid nineteenth century. See "Tra Khom Wisakhabucha nai Ratchakan thi 4" [Seal-Lanterns for the Wisakhabucha Festival during the Reign of Rama IV], in *Latthi thamniam tangtang, [Various customs and traditions]*, (Bangkok: Khlangwitthaya, 1961), 353 – 374.

holders' powerful support of the crown, they did not directly deal with architectural or engineering crafts.

Another important department was the *krom chang sip mu*, the Department of the Ten Crafts, which provided the court with all sorts of artisans, from stonemasons to goldsmiths.¹¹ Considerably lower in rank beneath the three *krom* just mentioned, the Department of the Ten Crafts was actually a collection of small groups of specialized craftsmen : painters, carvers, sculptors, turners, founders, potters, moulders, gilders, coppersmiths, and plasterers, among others. The Department of the Ten Crafts thus provided a pool of highly skilled craftsmen whom the king sent to the various construction sites.¹²

How were the royal master builders ranked, comparatively? One standard measure of bureaucratic status was the *sakdina*. Since the fifteenth century, the Siamese society was organized according to an elaborate hierarchy called the *Sakdina* system, a pecking order starting from the highest-ranking prince with 100,000 *sakdina*, to the slave with 5 *sakdina*, so the *sakdina* became the indicator of institutional positions.¹³ Accordingly, the royal master builders of the various departments differed considerably in their bureaucratic importance.

¹¹ Chulalongkorn, King of Siam, "Phraborommarachathibai kaekhai kanpokkhong phaendin," [The royal address on the re-organization of bureaucracy], in Chaianan Samutwanit and Khattiya Kannasut, *Ekkasan kanmuang kanpokkhong thai B.E. 2417-2477 [Documents on Thai Political History, 1874 – 1934]* (Bangkok: Thai Watthana Phanit, 1975), 96.

¹² Horace Geoffrey Quaritch Wales, *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1934), 151.

¹³ Neil A. Englehart, *Culture and Power in Traditional Siamese Government* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 26.

<i>Sakdina</i>	Department of the Palace Guards	Department of the Royal Police	Department of the King's Personal Army	Department of the Ten Crafts
5,000	Director, <i>Phra Phetphichai</i>			
3,000		1 st Director, <i>Phraya Anuchitracha</i>	Director, <i>Phra Ratchasongkhram</i>	
3,000		2 nd Director, <i>Phraya Aphaironnarit</i>		
2,000		1 st Registrar, <i>Luang Mahamontri</i>		
2,000		2 nd Registrar, <i>Luang Mahathep</i>		
1,600	1 st Chief, <i>Luang Pidetsongkram</i>		1 st Chief, <i>Luang Wisutyothamat</i>	
1,600	2 nd Chief, <i>Luang Ramphichai</i>		2 nd Chief, <i>Luang Ratchayothatep</i>	
800	Deputy Director, <i>Luang Thepboribal</i>	1 st Deputy Director, <i>Chamun Thipsena</i>	1 st Deputy Chief, <i>Khun Phrommaraksa</i>	
800	1 st Deputy Chief, <i>Luang Ramraksa</i>	2 nd Deputy Director, <i>Chamun Rachamat</i>	2 nd Deputy Chief, <i>Khun Intharaksa</i>	
800	2 nd Deputy Chief, <i>Luang Uphaiiphithak</i>			
600				Director, <i>Phraya Chindarangsan</i>

Table 2.1 Sakdina Ranks of the Royal Master Builders. Source : Kotmai Tra Sam Duang [The Three Seals law] (Bangkok : Khurusapha, 1962).

As shown in Table 2.1., the director of the Department of the Palace Guards (*sakdina* 5,000) ranked at the top, followed by the directors of the Departments of the Royal Police and the King's Personal Army (*sakdina* 3,000). Considering that the

minister of the Kalahome, the highest-ranking government official, had a *sakdina* of 10,000 while his deputies had a *sakdina* of 5,000, the director of the Department of the Palace Guards ranked comparatively high up in the institutional structure. The high position reflects the royal master builders' closeness to the king, and the king's trust on them.

At the departmental level, the *sakdina* also provided its institutional structure. Each department was divided into the *nai* (official) and the *phrai* (labor) levels. The officials had their *sakdina* ranging from 5,000 to 100, while the labors had the minimum 5 *sakdina*. The essential officers of each department were the *changwang* (director), the *chaokrom* (chief), the *palat krom* (deputy chief), and the *samuhbanchi* (head registrar). Further below there were about a dozen of minor officials, each with *sakdina* of 100 – 200.¹⁴ After the brief customary service as the royal page, a royal master builder often started his architecture career as a deputy chief, then moved upward towards the higher positions along his career. Most royal builders stayed within a single department through their entire life, though a few of them moved from one department to another. Phraya Wiangnainaruban (Chek Ketuthat, 1859 – 1921), for example, began his career as a royal page in 1873, then became a deputy chief in the Department of the King's Private Army in 1876. In 1886 he became the chief of the same Department, but when he was promoted for the last time in 1893, he became the director of the Department of the Palace Guards.

2.1.1 Familial Connection

Through the centuries, each *krom* often became the domain of a family, as building crafts were passed on through generations of building practice. A son of a master builder usually began his service as a *mahatlek*, a royal page, as a confirmation of allegiance from his noble father. After learning the affairs of the court, the king would send these young men to their fathers' respective department so they could learn the building crafts through hands-on operation, a system of total immersion in the arts and crafts of architecture. Architectural texts and manuals were scarce, and were accordingly

¹⁴ Quaritch Wales, *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration*, 82.

closely guarded within the families. Accordingly, familial ties were crucial in the advancement of a royal master builder's career.¹⁵

During the early Bangkok period, the royal master builders came from three closely-related families : the Hongsakuls, Ketuthats, and Yamaphais. The first two families were descendants from Phraya Phetphichai (Hong), a royal master builder serving the Ayutthayan court in the mid eighteenth century. Hong's grandson Nu developed his building career through the normal channel : serving as the royal page during the reign of Rama II, then rose through the ranks of the *krom thahan nai* and eventually inherited the noble title of Phraya Phetphichai during the reign of Rama IV. Phraya Phetphichai (Nu) spent years of his career as the master builder of the *krom lom phraratchawang*, and so did his son, Rang (1839 – 1891), who was granted with the noble title, Phraya Wiangnainaruban, early in the reign of Rama V. Rang's son, Chek (1859 – 1920), spent the early years of his career at *krom thahan nai*, but eventually switched to *krom lom phraratchawang* after the death of his father Rang, and inherited the title Phraya Wiangnainaruban by the end of Rama V's reign. When surnames were adopted by the Siamese in the early twentieth century, Chek decided to name his clan Ketuthat.

Phraya Phetphichai (Hong) also had another grandson, That, who was yet another royal master builder who rose through the rank and became entitled as Phraya Ratchasongkhram. Phraya Ratchasongkhram (That) had three sons : Charoen (1857 – 1929), Kon (1863 – 1914), and Klue (c.1864 – c.1916), all of whom became master builder during the reign of Rama V. They assumed Hongsakul as their family name, in honoring Phraya Phetphichai (Hong), their great-grandfather.

Another family of master builders was the Yamaphais, descendants of Chaophraya Yommarat (Choei), an important nobleman during the reign of Rama IV.

¹⁵ National Archives of Thailand, R5 S4/2. Essentially, this document was a report from Prince Bhanurangsi, Rama V's younger brother, who was assigned by the king to organize a construction of a Phra meru, the temporary funerary structure for royal cremations, in 1900. The Prince expressed his belief that Phraratchayothathep (Kon Hongsakul), a royal master builder, was the only one who could design that kind of traditional wooden structure, as he was the only one among the Hongsakul brothers who inherited pattern books and manuscripts from their father, Phraya Ratchasongkram (That Hongsakul).

Choei's son, Wek (1839 – 1897), developed his career in the *krom phra tamruat*, the Department of the Royal Police, till he became Phraya Aphaironnarit during the reign of Rama V. Phraya Aphaironnarit (Wek) had a daughter, Ap, who married with Charoen Hongsakul, thereby connecting two master builder families together during the 1880s (Diagram 2.1).

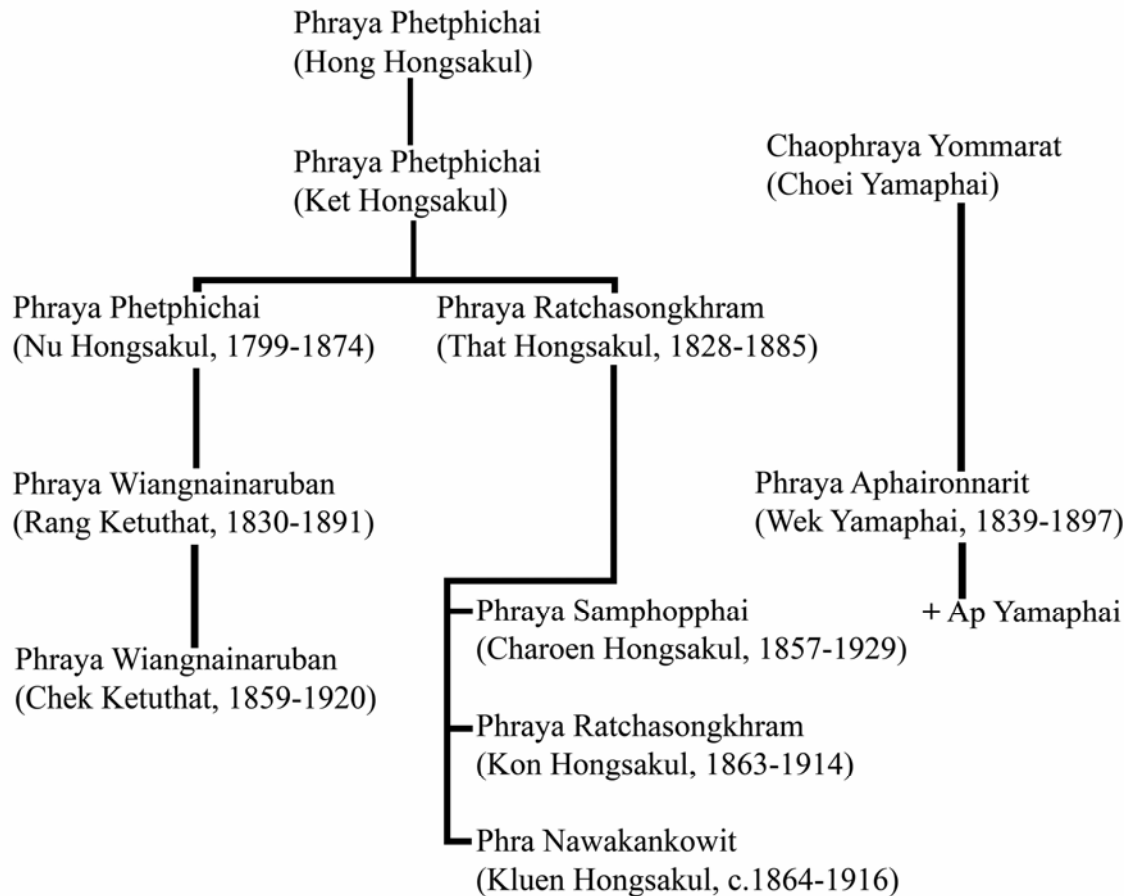


Diagram 2.1 Hongsakul, Ketuthat, and Yamaphai Familial Connections. Source : “Prawat Khun Prayong Hongsakul” [Biography of Ms Prayong Hongsakul], from Prayong Anuson (Bangkok : Mitnara Kanphim, 1975).

With such close-knit familial connection, these master builders served the Chakri monarchs through the nineteenth century. One of the reasons of such closeness was probably the restriction in traditional architectural forms. As dictated by sumptuary law, certain types of architectural forms and decorative elements were reserved for palatial

buildings, or temples that were built by members of the royal family only. The *prasat*, multi-tiered pyramidal roof decoration representing Mount Meru, for instance, could be built atop the king's throne halls only (Figure 2.7).¹⁶ With wood as the main material, the construction of a *prasat* spire required an extremely sophisticated knowledge in woodworking. An entire department, *krom chang mai soong*, was solely responsible for such specialized work, thereby keeping the esoteric building crafts among the selected few of the royal master builders.

As we shall see later, these families' role in the production of architecture grew steadily in decline by the end of the century. Rama V's reorganization of the bureaucracy during the 1890s did away with most of the traditional *krom* that these men were in charge. Their grandchildren pursued their careers in the newer branches of the government like the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force, leaving behind their forefathers' traditional building knowledge.

2.1.2 Princely Master Builders

During the early Bangkok period, a few high-ranking members of the royal family also showed avid interests in the building crafts, in addition to their customary role as the patrons of the arts. King Rama II (1767 – 1824) himself was a noted sculptor, while many princes with artistic inclination often became directors of the *krom chang sip mu*, the Department of Ten Crafts. However, a notable exception was Prince Jumsai (1816 – 1868, Figure 2.8), a son of Rama III who became one of the most prominent master builders during the reign of Rama IV. A trusted half-brother of king Rama IV, Prince Jumsai was one of the first generation of Siamese elite to open up to the ways of the West during the mid nineteenth century. His work constituted mainly of palaces and temples, the most notable of which include the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall (1854 – 1859), a

¹⁶ During the reign of Rama III, for example, a skirmish occurred between the king and the Uparaja [an extremely high-ranking member of the royal family, second only to the king], when the king visited the Uparaja's palace, the Front Palace, and found out that the Uparaja was constructing a new throne hall, a cruciform-plan structure that would be topped with a *prasat* spire. The monarch thus pointed out that traditionally only the king's abode could be graced with such a symbolic structure. Much displeased, the Uparaja had to donate the spire to adorn a temple that he was also building nearby. See Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Tamnan Wang Na [History of the Front Palace]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1925).

Siamese-European fantasy that Rama IV used as his audience hall to receive European guests. Prince Jumsai became the director of both the *krom chang sip mu*, the Department of Ten Crafts, and the *krom chang sila*, the Department of Stonemasons. As was customary of the period, the prince's palace became the center of building and artistic activities during the middle part of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Naturally, Prince Jumsai's sons inherited his artistic interests. M.C. Prawich Jumsai (1847 – 1925) became Rama V's favorite designer during the first half of his reign (Figure 2.9). He designed the first European-style royal crest of the Kingdom of Siam, together with other royal insignias and decorations. In addition, M.C. Prawich also worked as court painter and interior designer, collaborating with the first generation of European builders who worked for the Siamese court during the 1880s. A younger brother of M.C. Prawich, M.C. Prisdang Jumsai (1851 – 1935), went on to study civil engineering in England.¹⁸

Another example of princely royal master builder were the Uraiphongs. Prince Urai (1819 – 1873) was a son of Rama III who became the director of the Department of Stonemasons. His son M.C. Nilawan Uraiphong (d. 1900) not only inherited the office from his father, but also became one of the private contractors working during the reign of Rama V.

2.1.3 The Master Builder and the Construction Staff

With the limited number of master builders, princely or otherwise, the production of architecture in Siam was collaborative in nature, especially for large-scale building

¹⁷ Joti Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects* (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects, 1977), 42 – 45.

¹⁸ Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects*, 80 – 86. See also Songsan Ninkamhaeng, "Phraprawat Momchao Prawit Jumsai," [Biography of MC Prawit Jumsai], in *Silpakon*, 15/4: 87 – 97; 15/5: 58 – 82; 15/6: 65 – 86. MC Prisdang was a much more complicated figure. After studying engineering in England during the late 1870s, he became the first Siamese diplomatic representative to the Court of St James. Throughout his fast-rising career Prisdang became a vocal critic of Rama V's modernization effort, and was finally summoned back to Siam in 1885. After a brief service as the Director of the Post and Telegraph Department, Prisdang suddenly fled from the kingdom and became a monk in Ceylon. The disgraced prince was not allowed to return to Siam until the end of Rama V's reign. He died in 1935, an outcast among the royal family. See Nigel Brailey, ed., *Two Views of Siam on the Eve of the Chakri Reformation* (Arran, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1989).

projects. For the master builders who served the king and the princes, building commissions would come directly from their royal clients. Traditionally, in case of small construction or renovation projects, the master builder might have to serve many capacities : at once an architect, contractor, comptroller, and construction supervisor. In the first decades of the Bangkok period, royal master builders usually received annual stipends from the king's Privy Purse, together with fringe benefits that came with *corvée* labors and construction materials under their control.¹⁹ Turnkey construction projects were made possible since the royal master builders could control both manpower and construction materials needed.

For large-scale construction projects, however, other personnel were needed. A *mae kong*, for instance, was the project manager. A master builder could also be a *mae kong*, but for projects of extreme importance, the position was usually taken by a high-ranking prince, as a powerful figure was needed to get labor and materials that the construction required. A project would then be divided into sections (*dan*), the construction of each section directed by a *nai dan*, or overseer. For example, a construction of a *phra meru*, a temporary funerary structure for a royal cremation, was usually divided into sections : the main structure, the king's pavilion, the monks' pavilions, pavilions of the retainers, theatrical and musical halls, fences and gates, architectural decorations, landscaping, and so on. Neither the *mae kong* nor *nai dan* needed to be a master builder, but both must be truly capable of controlling human and material resources.²⁰ Master builders thus maintained their crucial role only as architect-designers, leaving the problems of manpower and budgetary control to the *mae kong*.

As court officials, the royal master builders received *bia wat*, the annual or semi-annual stipends from the king, together with the usual tokens of service : noble titles,

¹⁹ “Kanruenroeng nai wan banchop rop phrachonmaphansa Somdet phrachao lukyathoe Chaofa Atsadang dechawut,” [Festivities on the birthday of H.R.H. Prince Atsadang Dechawut], RKNBS 8:8, 60 – 64. The report contains a transcript of Rama V's speech on the occasion, in which the king emphasized on the fiscal reform which allowed civil servants to receive steady salary, for the first time in Siamese history. Archival documents indicates that for other groups of royal master craftsmen, private commissions could be accepted during their spare time to augment their income, in addition to the annual stipends received from the Privy Purse.

²⁰ Chulalongkorn, King of Siam, “Phraborommarachathibai kaekhai kanpokkhong phaendin,” [The royal address on the re-organization of bureaucracy], 111.

imported cloths, and the place at the court during the king's audience. In addition, each was supplied with a steady flow of *phrai*, the corvée labor, who had to spend up to six months a year working for his master.²¹ For example, in 1829, Phraya Phetphichai, the Director of the Department of Palace Guards, had 2,469 men registered as *phrai* under his control. 1,932 of these were stationed in all thirteen forts along the Grand Palace walls, while the rest worked for high-ranking master builders.²² These corvée labor provided a central pool of skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen who worked for the royal master builders. During major construction projects, additional labor could be corvéeed. For example, in 1860 Rama IV ordered a construction of Phra Samut Chedi, a 38-meter high stupa, on an artificial island at the mouth of the Chao Phraya, south of the city of Bangkok (Figure 2.10). Men from the nearby town of Paknam were corvéeed to work on the stupa by Chaophraya Thiphakorawong (Kham Bunnag), the project supervisor.²³

While the state could procure corvée labor without a cost, they were relatively hard to maintain. Some simply fled to other provinces, while others got ordained and became monks, got sick, or gone mad.²⁴ In order to maintain a constant supply of labor, the Siamese bureaucracy came up with a *suay* system in which the corvéeed paid per capita tax, the *suay*, in lieu of their actual service. The tax could be paid in-kind, some of which were building materials; it could also be paid with money, which the treasury could spend on hiring skilled craftsmen and labors. Gradually, corvée labors began to be replaced by waged labors, which were more economical and easier to control.²⁵ Some construction materials could be obtained much more efficiently through purchase than through traditional corvée channels. As a result, construction business grew increasingly complex.²⁶

²¹ Kesboonchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 12.

²² “Banchi phrai luang krom lom phraratchawang,” [Roster of the Registered Phrai in the Department of the Palace Guards], *Chotmai het Ratchakan thi 3 Vol. 4 [Chronicles of the 3rd Reign, Vol. 4]* (Bangkok : The Office of the Prime Minister, 1987), 110 – 113.

²³ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1965), 488.

²⁴ “Banchi phrai luang krom lom phraratchawang” [Roster of the Registered Phrai in the Department of the Palace Guards], 110 – 113.

²⁵ Kesboonchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 24.

²⁶ National Archives of Thailand, R5 S4/313.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, the uninterrupted flow of lower-class immigrants from the southern parts of China to Siam provided the Siamese elite with a new pool of waged labor. For example, in the 1853 construction of Phra Pathom Chedi, the gigantic tumulus-shaped stupa at the ancient town of Nakhon Chaisi, Rama IV ordered corvée labors from the towns of Nakhon Chaisi, Samutsongkhram, Ratchaburi, and Phanatnikhom, who worked in conjunction with paid Chinese labors. Ethnic Mon brickmakers were also hired to produce bricks on-site (Figure 2.11).²⁷ In the 1860 Phra Samut Chedi stupa project, of the total construction cost of 24,744 baht, 3,856 baht was spent on wages for Chinese bricklayers, stone turners, sculptors, carpenters, and tile layers.²⁸

Soon enough, Siamese architecture was greatly influenced by Chinese craftsmanship and building materials by the first decades of the nineteenth century. Apart from the *mae kong* and the *nai dan*, the project manager and the section overseer, a large-scale construction also needed a *kongsi*, a comptroller in charge of accounting and purchasing.²⁹ Originally meaning a clan or an organization in Chinese, the term was simply adopted into the Siamese language, which indicates how construction business could become a complex organization. As for the labor force, three other Chinese terms also found their ways into Siamese construction jargon : *sai hu* “skilled labor,” *chap kang* “labor,” and *kuli* “unskilled day labor.”

Another curious term in Siamese building business was *thao kae*, a Siamese rendition of the Chinese/Malay term “towkay,” meaning a business owner, or an entrepreneur. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was a common practice to get Chinese building contractors, the *thao kae*, to build buildings according to the master builder’s design. Subsequently, the building practice had become increasingly complex by the mid nineteenth century, only to be further complicated by the influx of European builders, architects, and engineers of the latter half of the century.

²⁷ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 497.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 489.

²⁹ National Archives of Thailand, R5 S4/2.

2.1.4 Architectural Design and Construction Planning

After the decision to begin an architectural project was made, design process began. In case of the king's building initiatives, the royal master builders would be summoned to an audience with the king, who could either give a general design objective, or a specific design guideline. Architectural drawings had existed since the Ayutthayan period, although there is no strong evidence of their use in the design process; a few that remain to this day seems to be made for cost estimate and construction supervision (Figure 2.12).³⁰ Pattern books are known to be used by the master builders, closely guarded and handed down through the generations (Figure 2.13). For a new construction, sometimes scaled models were made for the king's inspection and comments. For example, in 1853 Rama IV asked the royal master builders of the Department of the King's Personal Army to make a scaled model of tumulus-shaped stupa, which was to be constructed atop an ancient stupa ruin at Nakhon Chaisi. When the half-finished stupa collapsed in 1860, a revised design was made in Bangkok by Prince Ratchasi, the royal master builder.³¹

After the final design was approved, the master builder had to calculate the construction estimate for use in the planning process. The itemized list of construction materials needed was then submitted to the *mae kong*, the project supervisor, so that building materials could be procured and sent to the construction site. With the corvée system, construction materials from all over the kingdom could be ordered, especially if the project was one of the king's initiatives. For example, in 1835 Chaophraya Rattanabodin (To Kanlayanamit) razed down his residence to build a major temple in its place. In appreciation of To Kanlayanamit's extreme piety, Rama III gave the temple a gigantic 15-meter tall bronze Buddha image, and subsequently brought the project under his patronage. In the following year, a royal command was sent to the provincial governors of Phitsanulok, Sawankhalok, Tak, Phichit, and Phichai, among others, for an expedite delivery of lumbers needed for the completion of Wat Kanlayanamit (Figure

³⁰ Chaiyot Itthaworaphan, "Ekkasan ngan phra merumat Krommaluang Yothathep poh so 2278 kap khwamsamkhan to kansuksa prawattisat sathapattayakam Thai" [Archival Documents on the Cremation Pyre of Krommaluang Yothathep 1735 A.D. and Its Importance on Thai Architectural Historiography], *Muang Boran* 23:1 (January-March 1997): 107 – 118.

³¹ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 506.

2.14).³² The order was quite extraordinary, considering that during that period the corvée system already brought the king almost four thousand lumbers annually for his various construction projects.³³

The master builder's estimating skill was extremely crucial especially in the case of *phra meru*, the temporary funerary structure for royal cremations (Figure 2.15). Constructing a *phra meru* could need as many as eleven types of wood, three kinds of bamboo, five kinds of rattan, and many other kinds of building materials, many of which had to be gathered from the forests of Siam. An immense wooden structure, a large *phra meru* could use nearly a thousand wooden piles for its foundation and main structural members, and thousands more for flooring, roofing, and finishing (Figure 2.16). To complicate the matter further, no wood that had already served other purposes previously could be used. As lumbers could be transported as rafts on the rivers only during the rainy season, a careful strategic planning for procuring them was obviously needed.³⁴

While the construction and demolition of the *phra meru* was usually undertaken in a few months, other types of public works often took years to complete. For example, the construction of Wat Pho, the royal temple south of the Grand Palace, was completed in 1801 after seven years' work. Construction cost amounted to 465,440 baht, and equivalent of 58,180 pound sterling, as calculated by the British envoy John Crawfurd, in 1822.³⁵ Thirty-one years later, Rama III ordered a complete renovation of the temple, which took eighteen years to complete.³⁶ Supervised by Chaophraya Siphiphat (That Bunnag) and Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakul), the entire project was divided into nine sections : general grounds, the ordination hall, the four cardinal halls, three great pagodas and scripture hall, minor halls and belfries, the galleries, gardens and pavilions,

³² National Library of Thailand, MRS R3 1/1198 No.6, quoted in Sakchai Saising, *Ngan chang samai Phra Nangklao [The Building Crafts during the third Reign]* (Bangkok: Sinlapawatthanatham, 2008), 76 – 77.

³³ “Tang chao phasi cho so 1191,” [Appointment of Tax Farmer, cho so 1191], in *Chotmai het Ratchakan thi 3 lem 4 [Archival Documents of the Third Reign, Vol.4]*, 114 – 119.

³⁴ Karl Doehring, “Lijkverbranding in Siam,” *Nederlandsch-Indie Oud & Nieuw* 9:8 (December 1924).

³⁵ John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830), 108.

³⁶ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Ratchakan thi 3 [The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Third Reign]* (Bangkok: Phraephitthaya, 1963), 313.

small pagodas, and the Hall of the Reclining Buddha (Figure 2.17). Each of these sections was supervised by a prince, according to his capability and resources.³⁷ As Rama III himself was in charge of the project, no expense was spared. Stones, for instance, were brought from Siamese cities and towns near and far : Chonburi, Sichang, Lopburi, Ratchaburi, Petchaburi, and Sukhothai. From China came stone guardian statues, garden decorations, statues, glazed ceramic tiles, and perforated ceramic blocks. Three 42-meter high pagodas, ninety-one small stupas, eighteen pavilions, two hundred and thirty-seven monks' living quarters, and countless other structures were constructed.³⁸ After eighteen years of constant building activities, the project was finished; Rama III celebrated the long-awaited completion with three days of unprecedented festivities.³⁹

2.2 Continuity and Change in Royal Master Builders' Architectural Production

With the service of these royal master builders, the Siamese rulers of the early Bangkok period expressed their authority through architecture, especially monumental structures of palaces, temples, and temporary funerary structures. After the establishment of the House of Chakri in 1782, the new regime had continuously shaped and reshaped the built environment at Bangkok and elsewhere in the kingdom to express its identity and aspirations. As architecture was one of the most powerful tools of communication, the royal master builders became quite instrumental in the elite's portrayal of themselves. The point, however, is that such portrayal was not something static and "traditional," waiting to be "modernized" by Rama V late in the nineteenth century. A close examination of major construction projects reveals that during the early Bangkok period (1782 – 1868), Siamese architecture went through a series of overlapping architectural trends which reflected not only the contemporary social and political contexts, but also the developments in construction technology and architectural ideals.

³⁷ *Prachum Charuk Wat Phrachatuphon [A Compendium of Inscriptions from Wat Phrachetuphon]* (Bangkok: Siwaphon, 1974), 36 – 37.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 13 – 37.

³⁹ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Ratchakan thi 3 [The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Third Reign]*, 313.

As both a capital city and the kingdom's major port, Bangkok had always been susceptible to foreign architectural influences since its establishment during the Ayutthayan period. The forts at Bangkok, for example, were built by the French military engineers in 1655 during the reign of King Narai, and were two of the earliest European-built edifices in the kingdom (Figure 2.18). By the late eighteenth century, European, Persian, and Chinese architectural influences left their imprints on temple architecture of the period, some of which were located in the Bangkok area. The new temple style was notable in its simplified, solid form of masonry construction. Flamboyant Siamese decoration was replaced by rounded tracery pattern in the stuccowork, the Siamese interpretation of Baroque and Rococo decorative elements (Figure 2.19). On the other hand, the Persian influence was most notable in the use of openings with pointed-arch, and the application of the tree-of-life pattern on temple pediments.⁴⁰ Such pediments were often decorated with Chinese ceramics, in whole pieces or in cut shards that were the specialty of southeastern Chinese craftsmen (Figure 2.20).⁴¹

2.2.1 The Taksin Interregnum (1767 – 1782)

After the fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese armies in 1767, the Siamese rallied around a half-Chinese provincial governor, Phraya Tak, who subsequently became King Taksin. After restoring the country's independence, Taksin chose not to restore the former capital at Ayutthaya, but decided to establish the new Siamese capital at Bangkok, seventy miles down the Chao Phraya, in 1767. Anchoring his new capital around the 17th-century forts, Taksin established his palace on the west side of the river, directly north of one of the French-built forts.

The selection of Thonburi as the new seat of power was indicative of not only King Taksin's significant alterity to the Ayutthayan elites, but also his connections to Chinese communities in Thonburi and elsewhere along the coasts of the Gulf of Siam. It was also an accommodating choice for both the emerging pattern of regional trade, and

⁴⁰ Chumphol Pheomsaengsuwan, "The Western Influence on Ubosathas and Viharas in the Late Ayudhya Period (1656 – 1767 A.D.)," *Na Chua* 1:1 (January 2004): 81 – 103.

⁴¹ Thaworn Sikkhakosol, "Attalak chin taechieu [Teochieu Chinese Identity]," *Sinlapawattthanatham*, 30:4 (February 2009): 162 – 169.

the existing agricultural and irrigation systems. The city consisted of two fortified parts separated by the river, each part attached to the remains of Ayutthayan forts. The more settled western part was chosen to be the dominant part of the city, with the king's palace, the city pillar, and the major monasteries. With the neighborhoods of the relocated Ayutthayans, it was mainly Siamese in character. The eastern part was inhabited mainly by Chinese immigrants.⁴² The city's neighborhoods, however, extended far beyond the confine of the city walls; to the south of the city on the eastern side was a thriving Portuguese community, together with a small Muslim neighborhood.⁴³

Well aware of his humble background as a commoner, Taksin did not care to establish his kingship through architecture. The king's palace was minute, in comparison with the extensive palace compound at Ayutthaya. Perhaps also due to shortage in building materials and craftsmen, the king's audience hall was a simple semi-open structure covered with minimally-adorned gable roofs (Figure 2.21). The *prasat*, multi-tiered pyramidal roof decoration representing Mount Meru, which graced over many of the ancient throne halls at Ayutthaya, was never erected during Taksin's reign. This act of un-building was of extreme importance, since the traditional layout and architecture of royal seats to represent Mount Meru had always been one of the major instruments of statecraft in Southeast Asia.⁴⁴ As Taksin was never properly crowned according to the centuries-old coronation rituals, it was quite understandable that the king chose not to crown his abode with such loaded forms of architecture.

As Taksin partly based his political power on the ethnic Chinese communities of the coastal towns, it was understandable that the king's Chinese blood was architecturally manifested through the construction of his personal residence in pure Chinese style. As the design and construction of the building was Chinese, the king did not have to use the Siamese master builders. Although the city steadily grew demographically and

⁴² Jean Gerard Koenig, "Journal of a Voyage from India to Siam and Malacca in 1779," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Straits Branch* 26-27 (January, October 1894): 157-158.

⁴³ Koenig, "Journal of a Voyage from India to Siam and Malacca in 1779," 158-159.

⁴⁴ Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, Data Paper no.18, Southeast Asia Program, (Ithaca : Cornell University, 1956).

economically,⁴⁵ the constant martial atmosphere prevented the Siamese from fully recovering the urban glories of Ayutthaya. And in spite of Taksin's accomplishment in recovering the kingdom's sovereignty, his reign ended with violence and civil unrest in 1782. Taksin's ministers charged him with fanaticism and lunacy, then had him executed. Chaophraya Chakri, Taksin's military commander, came to the throne as the first monarch of the Chakri Dynasty, Rama I (r. 1782-1809), effectively ending the transitory period of Thonburi.

2.2.2 The Early Bangkok Ideal : Restoration and Legitimization

Soon after he ascended the throne, Rama I ordered a new capital built across the river from Thonburi. The new city was bounded on the western side by the curve of the river, and on the eastern side by a new moat, curved to mirror the bend of the river. The overall configuration was irregular yet vaguely elliptical, not unlike the shape of Ayutthaya and other Siamese cities of the Central Plain region (Figure 2.22).⁴⁶ The river gave orientation to the city with its north-south flow: the major palaces and temples were located strategically upstream, while the port, the Chinese and other non-Siamese neighborhoods, were placed downstream (Figure 2.23). The Thonburi-period moat became an inner ring around the inner city area, which was dominated by the king's palace on the river. Two major canals joined the two ring-moats, altogether divided the city into islands. Corv ed Cambodian labour built these new canals, which were

⁴⁵ Adison, "Kanchaithidin nai khet Krungthep lae parimothon kon pi pho so 2325 [Land Use in Bangkok and Its Vicinity Prior to B.E. 2325]," 18-19. The ethnic Chinese community was largely responsible for the economic recovery through junk trade with China, which would become an important factor in the shaping of Bangkok in the nineteenth-century. For accounts of trade between Siam and China, see Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit : Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977). See also Jennifer Wayne Cushman, *Fields from the Sea : Chinese Junk Trade with Siam During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1993).

⁴⁶ Quaritch Wales (1969) attributed this irregular elliptical form to the earlier Dvaravati culture, as opposed to the regular orthogonal form of the Khmer-influenced cities. See Horace Geoffrey Quaritch Wales, *Dvaravati: The Earliest Kingdom of Siam (6th to 11th Century A.D.)* (London: Quaritch, 1969), 116-17. However, as noted by Pornpun (1989), the classification did not work for some square-shaped Dvaravati towns. See Pornpun Futrakul, "The Environmental History of Pre-Modern Provincial Towns in Siam to 1919" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1989), 41-42.

integrated into the existing natural waterway system.⁴⁷ The canals became urban armatures; their banks soon inhabited by a newly relocated population.

After the completion of the canals, corvée labour from Laos constructed the city wall along the river and the moat, encircling an area of 3.5 sq.km.⁴⁸ These formal demarcations of the city, however, did not actually limit the extent of the inhabited area. The section of river near the palace was lined with floating houses and shops, probably the most frequently depicted view of the city in nineteenth-century paintings and engravings. The aquatic neighborhoods continued not only further north, but also across the river, while the riverbank south of the walled area became Sampheng, the Chinese quarter.⁴⁹

According to the court chronicles, the construction of the new capital city was supervised by Phraya Thammathikon (Bunrot), and Phraya Wichitnawi, which indicated Rama I's strong intention to re-create the lost glories of Ayutthaya.⁵⁰ The commander of the Royal Navy, Phraya Wichitnawi was most likely instrumental in the survey and construction of city moats and fortification, given his knowledge of naval engineering and his command of labor. An old Ayutthayan nobleman, Phraya Thammathikon played a crucial role in Rama I's court as an advisor on court rituals, and of course, palace architecture.

Unlike Taksin, whose power was based on warlords from the various corners of the kingdom, Rama I came to the throne with the strong support of powerful noble families of Ayutthaya. Accordingly, the new king—whose father was a low-ranking court official during the Ayutthayan period—had to strive arduously in the construction of his public image as the rightful torch-bearer to the ancient monarchs of Ayutthaya.

⁴⁷ Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the First Reign. Vol.1* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978), 58-59.

⁴⁸ Rüdiger Korff, *Bangkok, Urban System and Everyday Life* (Saarbrücken: Breitenbach, 1986), 22.

⁴⁹ George Finlayson and Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The Mission to Siam, and Hué, the Capital of Cochinchina, in the Years 1821-2* (London: J. Murray, 1826), 211.

⁵⁰ Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the First Reign. Vol. 1*, 1.

Revivalism in Palace Architecture

The most potent instrument to broadcast Rama I's royal authority, of course, was the king's palace. Its sheer size, commanding location and magnificent architecture made concrete the conceptions of kingship. Covering an area of 61 acres, the palace was divided into four parts. The most important part was the Central Court, which contained the throne halls and the king's residence. The walled compound was bounded on two sides by large grounds, frequently used for state ceremonies and processions. The arrangement of the entire ensemble roughly corresponded to the plan of the royal palace at Ayutthaya.⁵¹

Underlying the Siamese conception of kingship was the Theravada Buddhist belief in the parallelism between the worldly king and Indra, the king of the celestial city of Suthassana on Mount Meru, the center of the universe.⁵² Therefore the palace was conceived as the worldly representation of Mount Meru, a microcosmos doubly nested within the capital city and the kingdom (Figure 2.24). Following the Ayutthayan model, cosmographical representation began at the naming practice. The first throne halls were named *Amarindra winitchai* and *Indrabhisek*, referring to the name of Indra, the lord of the gods. In addition, several palace buildings and places were named after other members of the Brahmanic pantheon⁵³ and the celestial place names.⁵⁴ The cosmography was architecturally manifested in the *prasat*, the pyramidal spire imbued with celestial symbols, while the royal power was made visible through lavish building materials :

⁵¹ This is despite the fact that the river in front of the Ayutthayan palace ran in the east-west direction, while the Chao Phraya flowed north-south at this particular section in Bangkok.

⁵² Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, 7-8. Heine-Geldern studied the plans of Cambodian and Burmese capitals and found that the temple formed the center of the former, while the king's palace invariably occupied the center of the latter. This reflects the dominance of Mahayanic and Theravada Buddhist beliefs in Cambodia and Burma, respectively. However, in the Siamese capitals of Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok, the king's palace did not occupy the city center, in spite of the Siamese subscription to Theravada Buddhism. This might be explained as either a result of the overlap of the two Buddhist sects, or simply the Siamese priority toward pragmatic rather than symbolic reasons in town planning.

⁵³ Such as Phrom (Brahma), Narai (Vishnu) and Siva (Shiva).

⁵⁴ Including *Dusit*, *Krailat* (Kailasa), etc.

mother-of-pearl inlay, gold lacquerwork, and colored glass mosaics, among others (Figure 2.25).⁵⁵

As the House of Chakri grew, sumptuary laws—written and otherwise—concerning the use of architectural forms and decorative elements, were put into effect. For example, only the *chaofa* (the royal prince born from a queen consort) could cover his hall of audience with two-tiered gable roof, with decorative finial (*cho fa*) at the top (Figure 2.26), while only the king, the uparaja, or the *chaofa*, could surround their palace with crenellated walls. Colored glass mosaic could be used only in the king's palace, and in the royally-sponsored temples.⁵⁶

In spite of the sumptuary laws, contestation of power through architecture was still possible. Known for the sibling rivalry with Rama I, the king's younger brother, Chaophraya Surasing, had a wife who was an Ayutthayan princess. Accordingly his palace, the Wang Na, was designed in the allegedly correct Ayutthayan manner, even more proper than the king's Grand Palace (Figure 2.27). The entire palace was lavishly decorated within the confines of the sumptuary laws. In 1782, for example, Surasing decided to construct a throne hall that was topped with a *prasat* spire. As construction barely began, the prince narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by two men, who were immediately killed near the construction site. Taking this as a bad omen, the prince recalled that during the Ayutthayan period only the kings could build *prasat* spires. Subsequently, he decided to abort the project, and donated the *prasat* spire to Wat Mahathat, a temple adjacent to the south of his palace.⁵⁷

Revivalism in Temple Architecture

Another revivalist act consonant with traditional kingship was Rama I's construction and restoration of various Buddhist temples within the city of Bangkok. The most important temple was the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the palatine chapel built

⁵⁵ MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 40.

⁵⁶ MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Ruen Luang [Royal Residence]* (Bangkok : Muang Boran, 1998), 15.

⁵⁷ Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Prawat Wat Mahathat [History of Wat Mahathat]*, (Bangkok : Rongphim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1918), 5.

for the most sacred icon of the kingdom, which the king brought across the river with great pageantry to the newly constructed temple in 1784.⁵⁸ The most important structure within the temple compound was the ordination hall (ubosot), which contained the Emerald Buddha (Figure 2.28). Accordingly, this was a significant departure from the temples of late-Ayutthayan period, which often gave architectural primacy to either the sermon hall (vihara) or the stupa (chedi). This could be interpreted as expressive of the monarch's subtle brand of revivalism that was not a mere act of reconstruction, but a rational re-interpretation of Ayutthayan culture and beliefs.⁵⁹ To assert the king's religious authority, the royal builders did their best in the re-use of Ayutthayan sculptural and pictorial forms. The Emerald Buddha was placed high atop an extremely elaborate gilded altar, surrounded by the large mural painting depicting the *Traiphum*, the ancient Siamese cosmogony (Figure 2.29). The king's traditional role as holder of the sacred source of power was thus reaffirmed through art and architecture.

Later in his reign, Rama I also ordered to have many more temples built or restored, the most important of which included Wat Pho, and Wat Suthat. Wat Pho was a small Ayutthayan temple located adjacent to the south of the Grand Palace. In 1789 the king began an ambitious project of renovating and enlarging the temple with the earthwork undertaken by 20,000 corv ed men. In the following year, Rama I spent 20,060 baht on additional foundation work, after which construction of the new temple began. Like the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the temple complex of Wat Pho had at its centre the ordination hall, surrounded by four viharas, a ring of gallery, and various other structures. To the west of the ordination hall was a 41-meter tall stupa, the cella of which contained the remains of Phra Sisanphetchadayan, the most sacred icon of the city of Ayutthaya that was largely destroyed during the fall of the former capital. In addition, 1,248 Buddha images were brought from all over the kingdom, restored, and 872 were chosen to be placed in the various halls and galleries of Wat Pho (Figure 2.30). Construction took seven years, five months, and twenty-eight days. The project cost for Rama I was 302,824 baht : 295,180 baht for construction materials, and 7,644 baht for

⁵⁸ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the First Reign. Vol. 1*, 64.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of Rama I's subtle ecclesiastical reform, see David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 146 – 148.

the purchase of 224 men, whom the king presented to the temple for service and menial jobs. On April 10, 1801, Rama I attended the re-consecration ceremony of the temple, which concluded with a grand festivity that cost the king an additional 154,416 baht.⁶⁰

Towards the final year of his reign, Rama I initiated yet another major temple project of Wat Suthat. The king's wish was to build a grand temple at the geographic center of the city with a major Buddha image that would be a spiritual anchor to the city, like Wat Mahathat at the ancient capital of Sukhothai, or Ayutthaya. After the king ordered to have an 8-meter-high, 14th-century Buddha image transported from Sukhothai to Bangkok, construction of the temple began in 1805. After Rama I's demise in 1809, his son King Rama II completed the vihara housing the ancient Buddha image, with Phraya Aphaironnarit, the royal master builder, as the project supervisor (Figure 2.31).⁶¹ A very large gabled hypostyle hall, the building was raised high up above three levels of platforms to emphasize its symbolic importance in the urban context. As the temple was named after Suthassa, the celestial abode of god Indra, the building's main gable-board was adorned with a sculpture of Indra riding on Erawan, the 33-head elephant that was his vehicle.

Revival of State Pageantry Architecture

In addition to palace and temple architecture, the royal authority was also spatially manifested through various state pageantry, some of which required the construction of extremely elaborate temporary structures. One such state ceremony was the tonsure ceremony, the grand initiation rituals concerning the cutting of the top-knot of princes and princesses who came of age. As the reigning king had to perform the role of god Shiva in this Hindu-influenced ceremony, the tonsure became a spectacular pageantry. In 1808, when his daughter Princess Kunthon came of age, Rama I decided that since the foundation of Bangkok there had never been a tonsure ceremony for a *chaofa* that was fully performed according to the rituals of the court at Ayutthaya. The king thus asked Princess Phinthuwadi, the only surviving Ayutthayan *chaofa* in the

⁶⁰ *Prawat Wat Phrachetuphon [History of Wat Phrachetuphon]*, 14 – 22.

⁶¹ Princess Narinthrathewi, *Chotmai het khwamsongcham [Memoirs]*, (Bangkok : Rongphim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1916), 386.

Bangkok period, to revive the state ceremony in the Grand Palace.⁶² The royal master builders erected a 40-foot high model of Mount Kailasa, the heavenly abode of god Shiva near the Dusit Throne Hall in the Grand Palace. With a hollow structure of bamboo poles, the artificial mountain was strong enough to support the royal pavilion at its top where princess received blessings from the god/king, a crucial part of the elaborate ceremony (Figures 2.32 – 2.33). The whole structure was covered with gold and silver tinsels, and profusely decorated with royal regalia.⁶³

Another spectacular civic pageantry was the royal cremation. According to the ancient Siamese customs, the remains of the high-ranking members of the royal family would be cremated at the phra meru, the temporary funerary structure made to resemble Mount Meru, the sacred center of the universe. Erected on the public grounds adjacent to the royal palace, phra meru was actually a complex of buildings, the most prominent of which was the crematory structure. Raised high above a series of terraces, the cruciform plan-structure was topped with either a tall *prasat* or *prang* spire. At its center was a smaller, heavily gilded aedicule where the royal remains would be placed, and the cremation performed (Figure 2.34). Adjacent to the phra meru was phrathinang songtham, the royal pavilion where the king performed various religious ceremonies during the cremation, which lasted at least a week. In addition, there were numerous other temporary structures : galleries and pavilions for the attending monks and the royal retinue, theatre houses for public entertainments, food and refreshment pavilions, among others, all located within the compound of about an acre (Figure 2.35).

As each phra meru had to be built anew for every state cremation, often during the dry season, phra meru construction became a major building project that required careful logistical planning and collaboration, in spite of its temporary nature. The funeral pyre, for instance, was an enormous structure that could be as tall as 60 meters, supported by four immense logs that had to be brought over from the forested provinces. Numerous other building materials, like bamboo poles, woven bamboo mats, rattan, and attap, were

⁶² Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the First Reign*. For a thorough account of the history and procedures in the royal Siamese tonsure ceremony, see : Horace Geoffrey Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function* (London: B. Quaritch, 1931), 126 – 136.

⁶³ Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function*, 127.

also needed. Rama I's own phra meru, for example, used 896 wooden piles, 5,500 wooden logs, 2,800 woven bamboo mats, and more than 400,000 bamboo poles, all of which were ordered, together with other building materials and construction labors, through the corvée system in 1811.⁶⁴

The construction of a phra meru thus became an affirmation of the royal authority, since the king would send out commands to all cities and towns in the kingdom to submit building materials for the project. Ministers and court officials had also had to show their respect to both the deceased and the king through pledges of help, human and material resources. For example, Somdet Phrasisulalai, the dowager queen whose son was king Rama III, passed away on October 17, 1837. On the following day, in their attempt to show the king their sympathy and loyalty, Chaophraya Bodindecha (Sing Singhaseni), the highest-ranking minister, pledged to procure two of the four huge logs needed for the main tower of the phra meru, while two other court officials pledged for the other two. Four days later they left for the provinces to locate these logs and other building materials needed. Six months later, the phra meru for Somdet Phrasisulalai was complete, and her state cremation was held with great pageantry on May 6, 1838.⁶⁵

Well aware of the state ceremony's spiritual and political importance, Rama I was quick to revive the full state cremation for the remains of his father, Thongdi, in 1795. A phra meru was constructed on the grounds north of the Grand Palace. Seven state chariots, which were needed to carry the royal remains in the grand procession from the Grand Palace to the cremation grounds, were also constructed because all state chariots of Ayutthaya were destroyed during the fall of the city, and none was built during the Thonburi period.

Through the early Bangkok period, state cremations were held regularly, which perhaps contributed significantly to the refinement of the royal master builders' crafts. Given each phra meru's size and complexity, the royal master builders played a central

⁶⁴ "List of building materials for Rama I's Phra meru, cho so 1171" in *Chotmai het ratchakan thi song, cho so 1171 – 1173 [Archival Records of the Second Reign, 1809 – 1812]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Khurusapha, 1970).

⁶⁵ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Ratchakan thi 3 [Dynastic Chronicles of the Third Reign]* (Bangkok : Phraepitthaya, 1963), 183.

role in the entire process. Right after a prince's or a king's death, the royal master builder must come up with a design, together with a detailed estimate of construction materials needed so that a royal commands for them could be sent to the vassal lords and provincial governors (Figure 2.36). During construction, the master builders had to provide constant inspection, checking if the princely supervisors managed to get their assigned parts finished appropriately. During the actual cremation, they had to be on constant alert to ensure that the structure was safe and grand enough for the king and the royal family who attended the days-long rituals. And finally, they had to dismantle the structure as soon as the cremation was complete.

Given its temporary nature, the phra meru also provided a space where the royal master builders could deploy their architectural and artistic experiments, which led to subtle changes in phra meru architecture over the decades. For instance, the court chronicles noted that the phra meru for Rama III's cremation in 1852 was especially equipped with large windows on its walls to allow more light for the interior. 6-meter tall "lighthouses" were also placed on the four corners of the phra meru structure to provide nighttime illumination.⁶⁶

Through the architecture of palaces and temples, Mount Kailasa and phra meru, the early Bangkok monarchs manifested their authority and legitimacy in the public realm. Ayutthayan architectural and ritualistic forms were revived, reviewed, and reinterpreted, with the help of the royal master builders. The corvée system supplied the master builders with constant flow of materials and labors, while the constant need for state pageantry and temple maintenance kept the craftsmen in continuous employ. The Chakri kings validated their authority and legitimacy through revivalist architecture, which, in turn, led to the constant and lively transmission of building crafts through the generations.

⁶⁶ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 81.

2.2.3 Chinoiserie and Europeanized Architecture

As the Siamese royal traditions dictated, one important sign of kingship was cosmopolitanism, which could be measured in the king's ability to procure and deploy the exotic and the foreign. As entrepôts, Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Bangkok thrived on the flows of international trade, so it was quite natural that the Siamese monarchs had to be at the forefront of fashion, since they were in charge of the kingdom's foreign trades. During the Ayutthayan period, imported goods from India and China became significant markers of status.⁶⁷ Gifts from heads of states of the foreign land that came to the palace at Ayutthaya were duly appreciated by the Siamese court.

Accordingly, after the early Chakri monarchs were contented with the revival of Ayutthayan glories at Bangkok, they soon began also to appreciate foreign material culture which returned to Bangkok after the kingdom's consolidation. While Rama I encouraged junk trade with China to enrich the royal treasury through royal monopoly, it was his son, Rama II, who began to explore foreign architectural and artistic forms that came with Chinese trade. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, European colonial powers began to make their presence in the region, and the Siamese court at Bangkok soon began to enjoy the "farang" (foreign, of Western origin) luxury goods.⁶⁸

Influences of Chinese and European architecture began to appear first in Bangkok architecture as royal garden pavilions during the reign of Rama II. Later on, as both the trade with China and Siam's relations with the West grew, Chinese and European architectural influences soon spread to palace and temple architecture, especially during the reign of Rama III. The royal master builders worked hard to enlarge their architectural vocabulary; traditional construction techniques were rigorously adapted to accommodate the foreign architectural forms. By the reign of Rama IV, as the neighboring kingdoms began to succumb to Western colonial powers, European architectural influence in Siam intensified. The influx of European settlers and their

⁶⁷ John Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998); see also John Guy, *Oriental Trade Ceramics in South-East Asia, Ninth to Sixteenth Centuries* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ The term *farang* was an umbrella term describing the "white" people. *Feringgi* in Malay, the term was probably derived from the word *frank*, used by the Muslim traders of the Indian Ocean to describe the Christians.

lifestyles gradually transformed the Siamese elite's value of *farang*, from exoticism to technological and cultural superiority.

Early Chinese and European Architectural Influence on Palace Architecture

In 1818, Rama II ordered a major construction project at the heart of the Grand Palace. Suan Khwa, "the Right Garden," was formerly a Siamese-style palace park east of Phramahamonthian, the king's residence. According to the court chronicle, earlier that year the Siamese embassy to the court of Peking returned to Siam. During the audience with Rama II, the ambassador told the king of the fabulous Chinese gardens that he saw. Upon the ambassador's narrative, the king decided to transform Suan Khwa into a Chinoiserie fantasy. With Prince Chetsadabodin, the future Rama III, as the project manager, construction of Suan Khwa took almost a year. The garden's main feature was a large artificial lake, 128 meters long and 96 meters wide. An underground conduit supplied this lake with freshwater from the river, a minor engineering marvel for the muddy subsoil of Bangkok. Boulders were brought from all over the kingdom to create artificial isles, hills and mounts; mature flowering and fruit trees were transplanted in the new garden.⁶⁹ The increasing trade with China gave the royal master builders some new architectural vocabulary to work with in the construction of Suan Khwa. A two-story music pavilion "in the farang style" was built; forty-five *keng*, Chinese-style open pavilions, were also constructed. Affluent members of the royal family each decorated a pavilion with imported Chinese porcelain and European glassware. Rama II spent the early part of his day supervising builders and craftsmen on various Suan Khwa matters,

⁶⁹ M. Bruguere, a French bishop who had visited Suan Khwa, gave a description which lucidly reflects the Siamese elite's new appreciation in the exotic and the foreign: "In the third enclosure, which is committed to the female guard, is a remarkable garden, very large, and containing in miniature a representation of the world at large, woods, mountains, cultivated fields, a sea with islands, vessels of war, and merchantmen of every nation, barks, a city, a village, a bazaar, a market held by the ladies of the palace, a fortress with cannon, religious temples, manikins representing all the different nations of the earth, in their costumes, all quadrupeds and birds, and all the rare trees and plants they can produce. They call it Suam-ut' ajam, i.e. Garden of Delights, or terrestrial paradise; it is on the model of that of Peking. As there are persons inclosed here who have never seen the world and never will see it, they have thus an imperfect notion of it." M. Bruguere, "Notices of the Religion, Manners, and Customs of the Siamese," *The Chinese Repository*, 13:4 (April 1844): 208-209.

and spent nights there with his female entourage for theatrical performances, regattas, and other pastimes.⁷⁰

Suan Khwa was demolished in the 1830s by Rama III, who was not given to diverting himself with gardens and amusements. The garden's contents were largely recycled and donated for use in the construction of the numerous monasteries around the city. The king's two-story music pavilion was removed to Wat Bowonniwet, an important monastery to the north of the palace. A floor was probably added underneath the old structure so the pavilion became three-storey, and was used as a monastic residence for the princes (Figure 2.37).⁷¹

Nothing like this had ever existed in Siamese architecture before.⁷² The strikingly novel features included the austere, monolithic feel of the masonry structure, accentuated by the heavy cornices that separated the building floors, the Chinese-style roof, and the lack of overhanging eaves. These architectural features were deliberate departures from the traditional Siamese house. Yet, the most daring architectural innovation in the music pavilion was its double-storey, a common feature of Chinese and European architecture as perceived by Siamese master builders.⁷³

Two other structures that were probably removed from Suan Khwa and reconstructed at Wat Pho, the royal temple south of the Grand Palace, were garden pavilions : open structures with Chinese-style roofs. Curiously, one of these was called Tuk Farang, "European edifice," while the other was called Keng Chine, "Chinese pavilion." Tuk Farang's roof was accentuated by several pediments, completely covered with Chinese porcelain mosaics, with random Roman alphabets, as opposed to the simple

⁷⁰ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 580 – 586.

⁷¹ Wachirayanawarot, *Tamnan Wat Bowonniwetwihan [Stories of Wat Bowonniwetwihan]* (Bangkok: Wat Bowonniwetwihan, 1997), 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷³ In traditional Siamese building, space was hierarchically defined in vertical dimension. For instance, one's head was considered sacred, the locus of the mind and spirit, while the feet were deemed low and profane. As it was inauspicious to have someone's feet higher than one's head, walking underneath a raised-on-stilts house was considered inauspicious as well. Consequently, double-storey spatial pattern was extremely rare in traditional Siamese architecture. The spatial taboo was compromised in the music pavilion by the use of exterior staircase leading directly to the first floor, thereby treating the ground-floor space as non-space.

sloping roofs of the Keng Chine (Figure 2.38). Images of Europeans were painted on the pavilion's walls, while the lacquered ceiling featured Western-style patterns. Keng Chine, on the other hand, had scenes from the Chinese epic, the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, painted on its wall (Figure 2.39).⁷⁴

Another significant departure from traditional building customs was the pervasive use of masonry in palace and temple architecture during the reign of Rama III. According to contemporary records, the major reason for this change was that by the time the king ascended to the throne, the wooden structures erected by Rama I were nearly fifty years old and had begun to deteriorate. The king's solution was to replace them with masonry structures, given the latter's relative permanence. In 1830 the replacement began in the king's palace, where the king's apartments, the throne halls, residences of the inner court, and the palace gates were made over with masonry construction.⁷⁵ Phrathinang Amarintharawinitchai, the king's main audience hall, was thoroughly transformed from an open hall with rounded pillars into an enclosed hall with square-shaped masonry piers (Figures 2.40 – 2.41). Similar masonry application appeared in the monks' living quarters of the royal monasteries.⁷⁶ Prince Damrong (1961) argued that the new masonry construction greatly changed the building structure, but not spatial organization.⁷⁷ Yet he also described the story of the monks at a royal monastery, who found traditional wooden structures more comfortable than the masonry ones and asked to move back to the old wooden quarters.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Prachum Charuk Wat Phrachetuphon* (Bangkok: Sivaphon, 1974), 32 – 33.

⁷⁵ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Ratchakan thi 3 [Dynastic Chronicles of the Third Reign]*, 13-14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 163-173. See also Chaiwichit, *Yo Phrakiat 3 Ratchakan [Eulogy of the First Three Reigns]* (Bangkok: Mun Yothamrong (Chek Sarasut), 1916), 33; Mi, *Klon Phleng Yao Sanrasoen Phrakiat [Eulogizing Poetry]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophon Phiphatthanakon, 1919), 22-23.

⁷⁷ Letter from Prince Damrongrathanuphap to Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong, dated May 27, 1941, in Naritsaranuwattiwong and Damrongrathanuphap, *San Somdet [Princely Correspondence]* (Bangkok: Ongkankha khong Khurusapha, 1961), vol.22: 72.

⁷⁸ Letter from Prince Damrongrathanuphap to Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong, dated October 27, 1940, in Naritsaranuwattiwong and Damrongrathanuphap, *San Somdet [Princely Correspondence]*, vol.20: 23

Chinese and European Influences on Temple Architecture

From the royal master builders' perspective, perhaps this turn to masonry could also be explained as a constructional necessity. As the country's wealth grew after the ever-increasing trade with China, the extremely pious Rama III channeled its surplus towards construction and embellishment of temples.⁷⁹ During his reign, nine major temples were constructed (five by the king, four by princes and nobles), while sixty others were restored or expanded. With this construction book, the influx of immigrant Chinese craftsmen and labors certainly was timely. While many temples were constructed in the traditional Siamese style, others were built in the hybrid Sino-Siamese manner. Soon enough, Siamese architecture began to absorb Chinese craftsmanship and building materials. Sometimes called "baep phraratchaniyom"—the Royal Preferred Style—as it was popularly believed to be Rama III's favorite, the new style's most notable feature was the freely expressed solidity and monolithic feel of masonry structure, as opposed to the curvaceous weightlessness of traditional Siamese style (Figure 2.42). Instead of elaborately carved wooden gable-board and finials, the new style featured solid masonry gable decorated more soberly with patterned porcelain mosaics, an influence from Southeastern Chinese building craft (Figure 2.43).⁸⁰ Huge square columns supported the building's eaves, instead of the wide overhanging eaves supported with graceful eave brackets. Although masonry had been used in Siamese architecture at least since the fourteenth century, its solidity was usually disguised through various architectural techniques, in the process that might be called *transmaterilization*. Traditionally, wood were gilded and covered with glass mosaics to resemble gold and jewels; masonry piers were fluted on their corners, emphasizing their verticality, and painted over with colorful patterns that derived from textiles. It was only during the reign of Rama II that Siamese builders began to enjoy the new sense of exoticism through Chinoiserie architecture.

⁷⁹ Walter F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III, 1824 – 1851* (New York: The Association for Asian Studies, 1957), 44. The king's piety could be seen as redemptive, as he was not the rightful heir to the throne but was the most powerful and highly respected. The rightful heir, Prince Mongkut, became a Buddhist monk throughout Rama III's reign, waiting for his chance to ascend to the throne.

⁸⁰ Thaworn Sikkhakosol, "Attalak chin taechieu," 169.

The earliest example of Chinese-influenced temple architecture was Wat Ratchaorot (Figure 2.44). Built by Rama III when he was still Prince Chetsadabodin, the temple was located outside the city of Bangkok, on the Thonburi side. Its suburban location, and the prince's access to Chinese craftsmen and building materials, led to the artistic freedom that gave shape to the temple. Construction began in 1821, three years after Prince Chetsadabodin supervised the construction of Suan Khwa, and took fourteen years to complete.⁸¹ The expansive temple grounds, the formal clarity and monumentality of temple buildings, and the profuse use of Chinese-derived architectural decorations of Wat Ratchaorot were indicative of the things to come during the reign of Rama III. Other princes and nobles soon followed Prince Chetsadabodin's initiative. In 1822, when Rama II ordered a construction of a fortified new town south of Bangkok, his son Prince Sakdiphonlasep was sent, together with Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakun), the royal master builder, to supervise the construction. Prince Sakdiphonlasep constructed a new temple, Wat Phaichayonphonlasep, while Ket Hongsakun built another, Wat Protketchettharam, both of which were also greatly inspired by the new architectural style (Figure 2.45). As both Prince Sakdiphonlasep and Ket Hongsakun were certainly involved in Rama II's Suan Khwa project, it was quite natural.⁸²

It must be emphasized, however, that during the reign of Rama III the traditional Siamese architecture was still going strong. Of the sixty-nine temples constructed during the period, only eighteen had the main buildings, the ordination hall and the sermon hall, in the Chinoiserie style.⁸³ Wat Pho, for example, was completely renovated between 1831 and 1848, in largely traditional Siamese style – perhaps as a gesture of respect towards the existing buildings constructed by Rama I. In addition, in accordance with the Ayutthayan tradition of building gigantic Buddha images to be spiritual anchors of the kingdom, in 1831 Rama III ordered that a large Reclining Buddha constructed at Wat

⁸¹ *Prawat Wat Chaiyaphrukmal Wat Ratchaorasaram Wat Chaloeprakiat [The Historical accounts of Wat Chaiyaphrukmal, Wat Ratchaorasaram and Wat Chaloeprakiat]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Phrachan, 1963), 35 – 40.

⁸² Sakchai Saising, *Ngan chang samai Phra Nangklao [The Building Crafts during the third Reign]* (Bangkok: Sinlapawatthanatham, 2008), 76. For a thorough stylistic study of the Chinese-influenced temple architecture, see Khaisaeng Sukhawattana, *The Chinese-Influenced Thai Buddhist Monasteries of the Early Rattanakosin Period* (Bangkok: The James H. Thompson Foundation, 1982).

⁸³ Khaisaeng Sukhawattana, *The Chinese-Influenced Thai Buddhist Monasteries of the Early Rattanakosin Period*, 17.

Pho, with Chaophraya Siphiphat (That Bunnag, the Minister of the Treasury) and Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakun, the royal master builder) as project supervisors.⁸⁴ As the Buddha image was forty-six meters long and fifteen meters high, constructing the hall housing it became a challenge to the Siamese master builders. Nonetheless, Ket Hongsakun managed to complete the Buddha image and its edifice in traditional Siamese style by 1848, and the building became one of the largest structures in the city (Figure 2.46). Another example of Rama III's conservatism was the great pagoda at Wat Arun, the royal temple on the Thonburi side of the city (Figure 2.47). Following the Ayutthayan tradition of building landmark pagodas on the river, the king ordered the royal master builders to construct a 66-meters high pagoda, surrounded by four smaller pagodas. Completely covered with Chinese porcelain mosaics, the pagoda was also decorated with sculptures of god Indra and the various celestial creatures, in attempting to portray Mount Meru and the Four Continents.⁸⁵ Through Chinoiserie and Chinese building crafts, the Siamese master builders represented the traditional cosmography (Figure 2.48).

A good example of the coexistence of Siamese and Chinese building traditions was the complete reconstruction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, which Rama III undertook in 1831. As the most important temple in the kingdom, the king himself was in charge of the renovation project. Phraya Phetphichai and Phraya Aphaironnarit, directors of the Departments of Palace Guards and the Royal Police, were the master builders for the project. Although the general architectural features remained traditional, Chinese decorative elements were prominently added to the structure : porcelain wall tiles painted with flowers and landscapes, glazed ceramic statues of Chinese warriors, and Chinese stone lions were deployed to embellish the *phra ubosot*, the main structure housing the Emerald Buddha (Figure 2.49).⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Sakchai Saising, *Ngan chang samai Phra Nangklao [The Building Crafts during the third Reign]*, 253 – 257.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 142 – 154.

⁸⁶ *Chotmai het ruang patisangkhan Wat Phra Sirattanasatsadaram khrang Ratchakan thi 3 [Record of the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha during the Third Reign]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophon Phiphatthanakon, 1900).

2.2.4 Early *Siwilai* Architecture

Another strand of transformation in early Bangkok architecture appeared during the mid nineteenth century. Simultaneously shaped by internal politics and regional geopolitical situations, during the reign of Rama IV many of major architectural projects took a decidedly historicist manner. Unlike the revivalist architecture of the earlier reigns, palaces and temples of this period showed an acute need to create an architectural genealogy that went beyond Ayutthaya.

Towards the end of Rama III's reign, Sino-Siamese trade began to decline after the Opium War and the Nanking Treaty (1842). British traders in South Asia and Southeast Asia began to take control of regional trade, with the colonial port of Singapore as its center. As Burma, Siam's traditional archenemy, had succumbed to the British colonial might during the first Anglo-Burmese War as early as 1824, the Siamese elite was well aware of the forthcoming changes in world order. With the signing of the Anglo-Siamese Bowring Treaty in 1854, Siam was fully linked with world economy of the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Simultaneously, the Siamese elite felt threatened ideologically by the West. "Civilization" was now measured against the Euro-American norms, rather than Indian, or Chinese. The Siamese elite's frantic attempt to re-position themselves in relation to a swiftly changing world was reflected in the architecture of the period. In attempting to create the "civilized" façade for the Kingdom of Siam, some turned to the West and created European-derived architecture, while others went through Siam's architectural history to fabricate architectural genealogy.

Historicism in Palace Architecture

Foremost among the Siamese elite in the fabrication of "siwilai" architecture was Rama IV, who ascended the throne in 1851. The 47-year old monarch spent twenty-seven years as a monk, which provided an ample opportunity for him to travel widely in the kingdom, and to learn the ways of the West from the early Western settlers of Bangkok. But his long absence from secular life also left Rama IV with acute political

⁸⁷ Kesboonchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 25 – 37; Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 182 – 190.

insecurity, as the actual economic and political powers were in the hands of the noble families, especially the Bunnags, rather than the crown's. A learned man, Rama IV was quick to use historiography to alleviate this political handicap. He traced the ancestry of the House of Chakri back to the reign of King Narai, the 17th-century Ayutthayan monarch, in attempting to establish hereditary legitimacy for his rule. While still a monk, Rama IV discovered the 13th-century Ramkamhaeng inscription at the ancient ruins of Sukhothai, and realized its importance as a key to the fabrication of Siamese national history.⁸⁸ Through history, the king strongly emphasized the few kingly traits that the nobles did not have : dynastic legitimacy, and the historical ambience of the Siamese crown.

With such mastery over Siamese history, and a thorough knowledge of the kingdom's cities and towns, it was natural that Rama IV was the first Chakri king to build palaces outside the capital city of Bangkok. After the ascension to the throne, Rama IV continued his traveling habit, a significant departure from tradition that was partly helped with the advent in steamboat navigation in Siam. In 1854, before the signing of the Bowring Treaty, the king traveled to the ancient capital of Ayutthaya and chose to restore Chantharakasem Palace, the 16th-century palace for an uparaja, as his Ayutthaya residence. Prince Jumsai, the princely royal master builder, was responsible for the design and construction work, consisting of a royal apartment, a hall of audience, an observatory tower, and various service buildings (Figure 2.50).⁸⁹ Although the site was steep in history, Prince Jumsai's design was low-key. Most of the palace buildings were masonry structures raised on high bases, also of solid masonry construction. The observatory tower, however, was given a little European treatment, with its arched openings and a pedimented top (Figure 2.51).

⁸⁸ Coverlee Cary, "In the Image of the King: Two Photographs from Nineteenth-Century Siam," in *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora A. Taylor (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2000), 132.

⁸⁹ Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects*, 42. See also, Chamrat Kiatkong, "Phraratchawang Chantharakasem," in *Phraratchawang lae wat boran nai changwat Phranakhonsiyutthaya [Ancient Palaces and Temples of Ayutthaya]*, (Bangkok: Rongphim Samnak Thamniap Nayok Ratthamontri, 1968), 17 – 20.

Two years later, Rama IV visited another ancient city, Lopburi. Dated back to the 12th century as a stronghold of Angkorian Empire in the Chao Phraya river basin, Lopburi reached its apogee in the 17th century, during the reign of King Narai. The Ayutthayan monarch constructed a spectacular royal palace that combined Siamese palatial order, Persian architectural features, and French hydraulic engineering, made possible only with the cosmopolitan nature of the late-Ayutthayan culture (Figure 2.52). After Narai's reign, however, the palace fell into ruins, only to be rediscovered by Rama IV. Instead of restoring the historic ruins, Rama IV chose to build a simple suite of apartments in one corner of the palace grounds, consisting of two- and three-storey simple masonry structures (Figure 2.53). Prince Jumsai, the royal master builder who designed Chantharakasem Palace, was also responsible for this Lopburi project, later named Narairatchaniwet.⁹⁰ As building materials and labor were scarce, the construction of these provincial palaces were of a rather crude quality; the new palatial buildings were rather humbly designed, a token of respect towards the layered history of the sites.⁹¹

Historicism in Temple Architecture

With his twenty-seven years as a Buddhist monk, it was natural that Rama IV's interests in Siamese history had reshaped temple architecture of his reign as well. As a monk he considered himself a purist, and spent years transforming Siamese Theravada Buddhism back to the allegedly purer doctrines of Sri Lanka and India. In 1833 the monk prince established the Thammayut sect, a reform movement aiming at Buddhist orthodoxy through canon purification, strict monastic disciplines, and ritualistic reforms.⁹² During one of his proselytizing trips, the monk prince visited the ruins of the 4th-century stupa at Nakhon Chaisi. After a thorough examination of the ruins and historical documents, the prince determined that it was not only the largest stupa in Siam, but also the most ancient, as the locals called the stupa Phra Pathom Chedi, or "the First Stupa." Subsequently, the monk prince asked Rama III to properly restore the stupa, but his request was ignored till the end of Rama III's reign.

⁹⁰ Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects*, 42.

⁹¹ Due to the lack of comfort, Rama IV stayed at Narairatchaniwet only once. See Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 530.

⁹² Walter F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, 37.

Right after he ascended the throne, accordingly, Rama IV ordered a complete reconstruction of the great Phra Pathom Chedi. After the king's idea, the royal master builders of the Department of the King's Personal Army constructed a scaled model of the stupa (Figure 2.54).⁹³ With a round tumulus form, the stupa's original design was based on an architectural reference dated back to the tumulus form of the Great Stupa at Sanchi (3rd century BC), or the Ruwanwelisaya Stupa (1st century AD). Construction of Phra Pathom Chedi began in 1853, with Somdetchaophraya Borommahaprayurawong (Dit Bunnag) as the project supervisor, and upon his death, Chaophraya Rawiwong (Kham Bunnag). As the stupa was more than a hundred meters high, the project was an enormous undertaking. Corvée labors from the towns of Nakhon Chaisi, Samutsongkhram, Ratchaburi, and Phanatnikhom took turns working on the project, at the rate of 200 men per month. They were joined by paid Mon and Chinese workers, and slaves who wished to repay their debts through construction labor. A new canal, Chedibucha, was constructed, in order to provide transport to and from the stupa site.⁹⁴

However, on July 1, 1860, the half-finished stupa structure collapsed after heavy rains, since the foundation platform could not support the immense load of the tumulus-shaped superstructure. Rama IV convened an emergency meeting with Prince Bowonrangsi, the archbishop of the Thammayut sect, and Prince Ratchasi, the princely master builder. Their decision was to transform the tumulus-shaped stupa into a bell-shape, round-plan stupa (Figure 2.55). Still with the gigantic size of 120 meters height, the stupa's bell-like body could transfer vertical load much better than the tumulus form. A dramatic departure from the square-plan, elongated stupa with redented corners that were the norm of the early Bangkok temple architecture, the bell-shaped, round-plan Phra Pathom Chedi could claim as its formal reference the bell-shaped stupas that were built during the rise of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms. Construction soon resumed with full support from Rama IV, who sometimes climbed up the scaffolding to lay bricks with his own hands.

⁹³ Constance M. Wilson, "State and Society in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851 – 1868: Thailand on the Eve of Modernization" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1970), 423.

⁹⁴ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 519.

The reconstruction of Phra Pathom Chedi paved the way for other temple projects that were built according to Sukhothai or Ayutthayan typology, often featuring bell-shaped pagodas as their centerpiece.⁹⁵ At the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the king ordered a construction of a bell-shaped stupa, Phra Srirattanachedi, with the Ayutthayan stupas of Wat Phra Srisanphet as its reference (Figure 2.56). Another prominent project was the Phra Samut Chedi, a 38-meter high stupa that was constructed on an artificial island at the mouth of the Chao Phraya in 1860, replacing the square-plan, 20-meter high stupa that Rama III built earlier (Figure 2.57). After expressing his strong distaste for square-plan stupas, Rama IV sent the royal master builders to the ruins of Ayutthaya to measure the dimensions and proportions of ancient bell-shaped stupas.⁹⁶ The great nobles followed the king's preference of historical styles of temple and stupa architecture. In 1855 Chaophraya Sisuriyawong (Chuang Bunnag) ordered a construction of a bell-shaped stupa at Wat Prayurawong, the temple under the Bunnag patronage. Located on the west bank of the Chao Phraya, the stupa was 60 meters high, just slightly shorter than Rama III's great pagoda at Wat Arun. At the nearby Wat Phichaiyat, another Bunnag temple, Chaophraya Borommahaphichaiyat (That Bunnag) built a gigantic stupa flanked by two smaller ones, all set atop a high base, allegedly following the 14th century stupas of Sukhothai (Figure 2.58).

Rama IV's quest for architectural historicism did not stop at bell-shaped stupas, though. By the late 1850s, he began to have an avid interest in ancient Khmer ruins after they began to be "discovered" in 1858 by Henri Mouhot, the French naturalist.⁹⁷ In 1859 the king sent two men, Phra Suphannaphisan and Khun Chatwicha, to survey the ancient Khmer monuments and see if any of them can be dismantled, and sent to Bangkok. The men returned and reported that in Siemreap there were two 12-meter high ancient Khmer towers that would suit the king's wish. Subsequently, the king sent Phra Suphannaphisan back to supervise the dismantling, with 2,000 corvée labor from local Cambodian towns

⁹⁵ For a thorough analysis of temple architecture during the reign of Rama IV, see Somkhit Chirathatsanakun, *Rupbaep phraubosot lae phrawihan nai samai Phrabatsomdet phrachomklao chaoyuhua [Patterns of Ordination and Sermon Halls during the Reign of Rama IV]* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 2004).

⁹⁶ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 488.

⁹⁷ For further details on Mouhot's journeys, see Henri Mouhot, *Voyage dans les Royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos et Autres Parties Centrales de l'Indo-Chine* (Paris: L. Hachette & cie, 1868).

of Battambang, Siemreap, and Phanomsok.⁹⁸ However, on April 30, 1860, when Phra Suphannaphisan just began to dismantle the ruins, local Cambodians came out and promptly killed Phra Suphannaphisan, his son, and another Siamese official. Upon learning of the incident, Rama IV was even more intent on getting the Khmer ruins, ordering Phraya Aphaiphubet and Phraya Anuphaptraiphop, two of his army commanders, to get both the Cambodian rebels and the stone monuments. Before things got out of control, the cabinet convinced the king to abort the project, citing practical difficulties and the need to protect the king's reputation.⁹⁹

Six years later, John Thomson, the British photographer, followed Mouhot's footsteps to Angkor and took the first photographic records of the ancient site, after obtaining permission to travel from Rama IV, who still ruled over those parts of Cambodia. Thomson's photographs certainly rekindled the king's interests in Khmer ruins; about a year after Thomson's return, Rama IV sent Phra Samphopphai, a royal master builder, out to Angkor to measure the monument. Phra Samphopphai returned with enough information to build a scaled model of it at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, which remains to this day (Figure 2.59).¹⁰⁰

2.3 Siwilai Architecture : On the Threshold of a New Era

With so many strands of architectural change, it seems that by the mid nineteenth century the Siamese elite could come up with multiple "civilized" façades for the New Siam. Looking for design possibilities, the elites and their master builders searched through architectures of China, Europe, Sri Lanka, India, and the ancient kingdoms of Siam. From the revivalism of ancient Siamese styles to the exoticism of Chinese and European arts, apparently early-nineteenth century Siamese architecture was far from something static and "traditional." Since the foundation of Bangkok as the capital city,

⁹⁸ According to Penny Edwards, the Cambodian local folklore stated that it was the ruins of Ta Phrom and Ta Nei that was to be dismantled by the Siamese, with help from a Cambodian mandarin. See Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860 – 1945* (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 24.

⁹⁹ Chaophraya Thiphakonwongmahakosathibodi, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign*, 226.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

architecture and the architectural practice had gradually but continuously changed. The growing network of Eurocentric world order forced the Siamese to re-consider their self-identity, with “civilization” as the new benchmark, the ideological challenge. Yet it also provided the Siamese elite with new possibilities in cross-cultural experiments, an artistic challenge to the Siamese master builders’ ingenuity and adaptability.

An example of such experiment in the architecture of “siwilai” was Phra Aphinaowaniwet, the new set of royal apartments that Rama IV began in 1854 (Figures 2.60 – 2.61). As described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, royal master builders, Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakul) and Phraya Samphopphai (Nu Hongsakul) did their best to produce architecture that was “in the manner of European palaces,” yet still distinctly Siamese. In architecture, so it seems, Siamese identity was more strongly defined when the West began to make their presence felt in the kingdom. Until the reign of Rama III, as the traditional polity and cosmological beliefs were still going strong, Chinese and European architectural forms were treated as novelty items. By the reign of Rama IV, however, European architectural forms took on a new role as a measurement of “civilization,” as local and regional political and social situations changed. In the curious situation when the Siamese elite had to work hard on both their claims of historical legitimacy and their mastery of Western norms and forms of “civilization,” the royal master builders had to double up their efforts. On one hand, they had to explore and study the ancient Siamese and Khmer ruins, in the rigorous search for the roots of mid-nineteenth century Siamese architecture. On the other hand, they studied “civilized” architecture of the West, through verbal narratives, prints and photographs, searching for icons of “civilization” that could be built locally, using *corvée* labor and hired Chinese coolie.

In addition, the Siamese aristocrats began to form their nascent taste in things European. Prince Chuthamani, Rama IV’s younger brother, was one such man. An English visitor to Prince Chuthamani’s Bangkok residence in 1862 reminisced : “A spirit of Anglomania appeared to pervade the second king’s mind; his palace was furnished with carpets, sofas, easy-chairs, footstools, chandeliers, and all the appurtenances of

European civilisation. One of the rooms was fitted up as a library, with English books of science and history, mathematical and astronomical instruments &c.”¹⁰¹

After Rama IV’s death in 1868, Siam entered yet another era. A foreign visitor to Bangkok observed the passing of an era : “The days of old Siam, indeed, –the days of the good old elephant on shore, and of the padding canoe by water; the days which seemed as if they had come down to us unaltered from the golden prime of good Haroun al Raschid, – were already numbered when their late majesties, the first and the second kings, began to deal with nineteenth-century science, and to manifest a fondness for the civilization of the Occident.”¹⁰² As the pace of change in the world order accelerated, the Siamese aristocrats were in the increasingly precarious position. In architecture as well as politics, the Siamese elite had to deal with colonial predominance from Britain, France, and other superpowers.

¹⁰¹ E. B. Lewis, “Recollections of a Visit to Bangkok in 1862,” *Bentley’s Miscellany* 24:13, (April 1867): 632.

¹⁰² Anonymous, “In and Around Bangkok,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 15:8, (May 1872): 425.



Figure 2.1 Phra Aphinaowaniwet (1854), viewed from north. Architects : Phraya Phetphichai (Ket Hongsakul), Phraya Samphopphai (Nu Hongsakul). Source : NAT

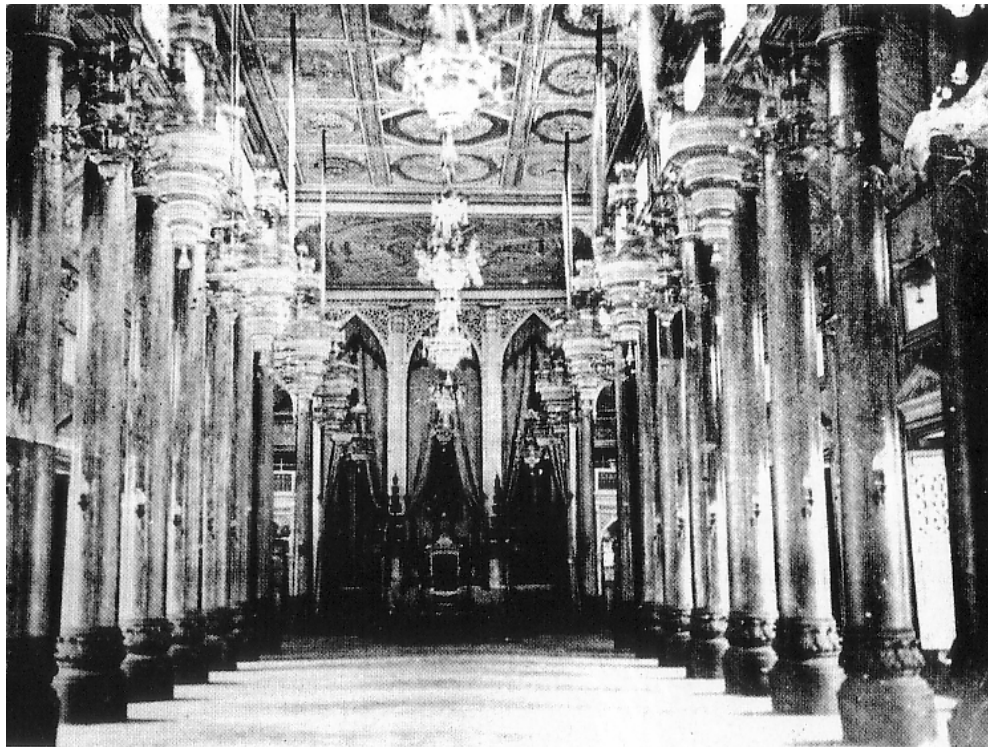


Figure 2.2 Interior view of Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, Phra Aphinaowaniwet (1854). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.3 Chakri Throne Hall, Grand Palace, Bangkok (1882). Architects : John Clunis and Phraya Ratchasongkhram (That Hongsakul). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.4 Wimanmek Mansion, Dusit Palace, Bangkok (1900). Architect : Phraya Ratchasongkhram (Kon Hongsakul). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.5 Anantasamakhom Thron Hall, Dusit Palace, Bangkok (1907). Architects : Mario Tamagno and Annibale Rigotti. Source : *Picturesque Bangkok & Siam* (Bangkok : Phrom Photo Studio, c.1933).



Fig. 2.6 Phraya Ratchasongkhrum (Kon Hongsakul). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.7 *Prasat* spires, Dusit Mahaprasat Throne Hall, Grand palace, Bangkok (1789).
Source : MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok* (Bangkok : River Books, 1996).



Figure 2.8 Prince Jumsai (1816-1868). Source : NAT.

Figure 2.9 MC Prawich Jumsai (1847-1925). Source : NAT.

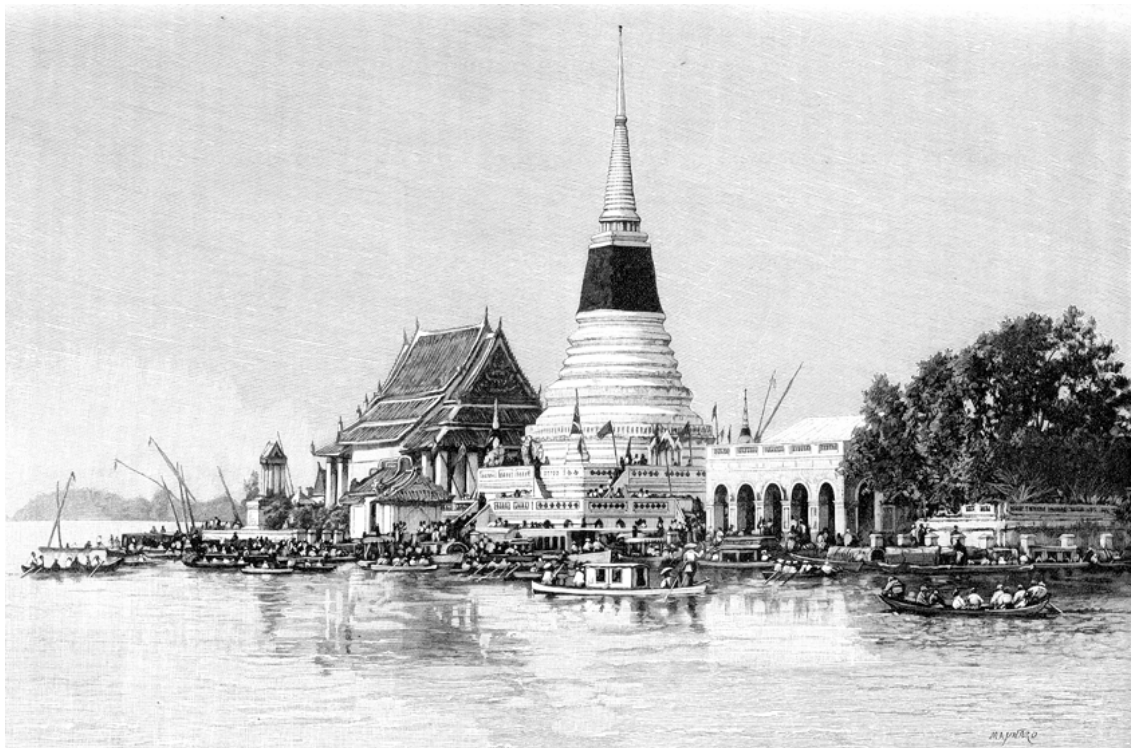


Figure 2.10 Phra Samut Chedi, Paknam (1860). Source : Fournereau, Lucien, "Bangkok," *Le Tour du Monde*, vol.68, 1894.



Figure 2.11 Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom (1853). Architect : Prince Jumsai.
Source : Karl Doehring, *Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam*.

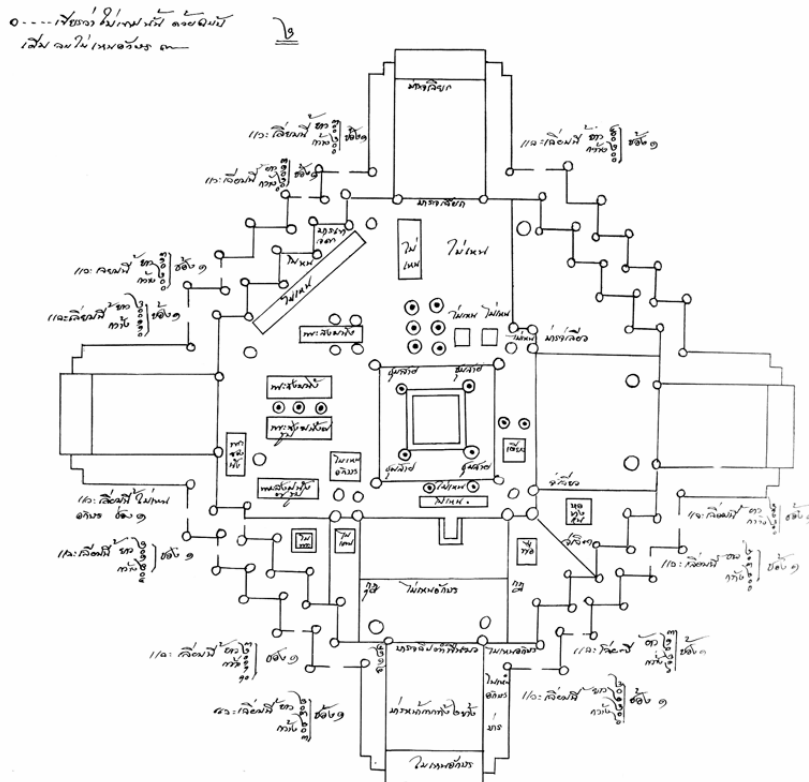


Figure 2.12 1735 Plan of the Phra Meru for the Cremation of Princess Yothathep, Ayutthaya. Source : *Prachum Chotmai het Samai Ayutthaya Phak 1 [Compendium of Ayutthaya Documents, Vol.1]* (Bangkok : The Prime Minister's Office, 1967).

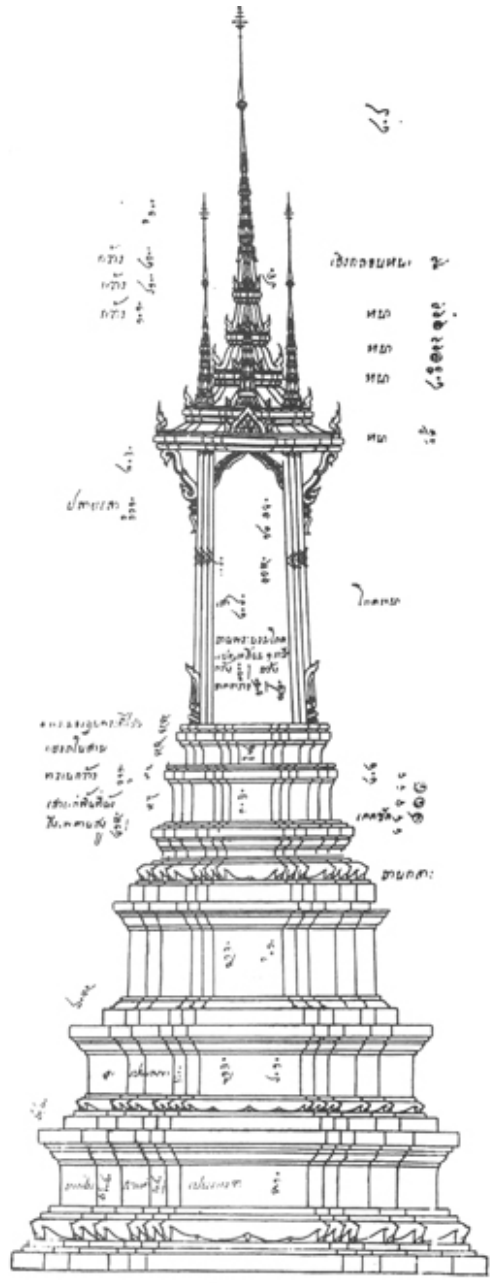


Figure 2.13 Early Bangkok Period Drawing of a State Bier for Royal Funeral. Source : Joti Kalyanamitra, Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects (Bangkok : ASA, 1977).



Figure 2.14 Wat Kanlayanamit, Bangkok (1835). Source : NAT.

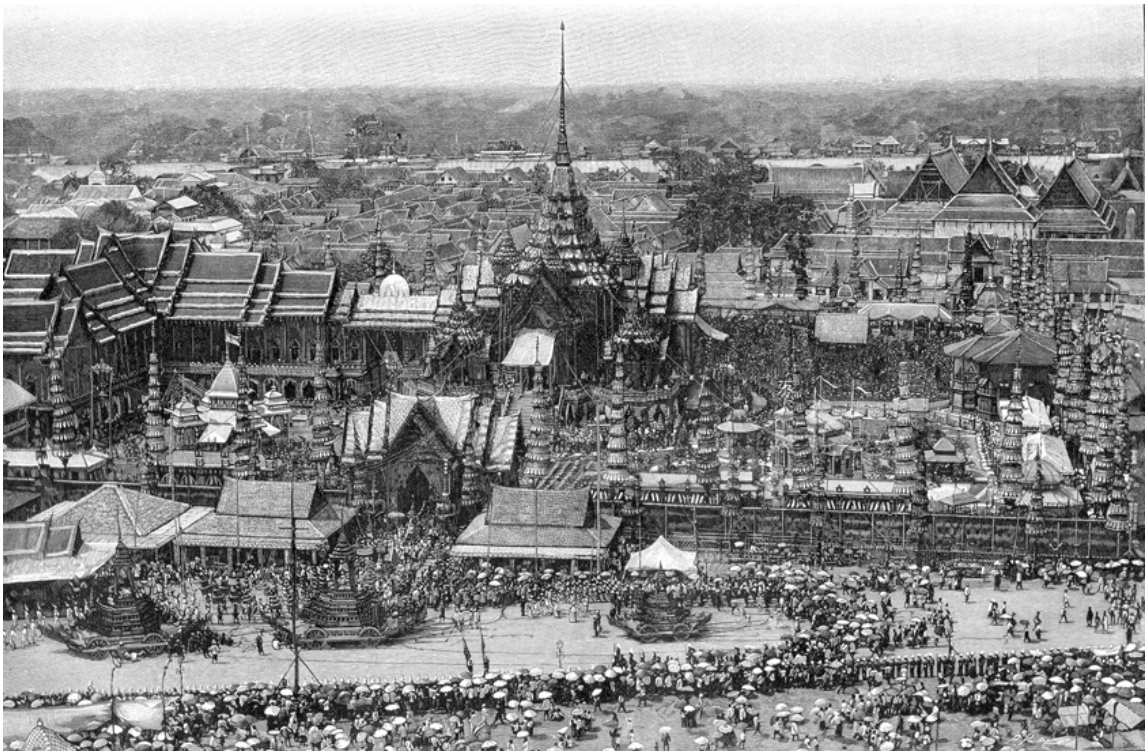


Figure 2.15 *Phra Meru* for the 1890 Royal Cremation of Prince Sirirat Kakutthaphan, Source : Fournereau, Lucien, "Bangkok," *Le Tour du Monde*, vol.68, 1894.



Figure 2.160 *Phra Meru* for the 1870 State Cremation of Rama IV. Source : Phiphat Phongraphiphon, *Panorama of Bangkok in the Reign of King Rama IV*, (Bangkok : Muang Boran, 2001).



Figure 2.17 Aerial View of Wat Pho, Bangkok (1774-1831). Only the *phutthawat* [Sacred Precinct] is seen; the monks' living quarters are further on the left. The Grand Palace wall is seen on the right. Source : NAT.

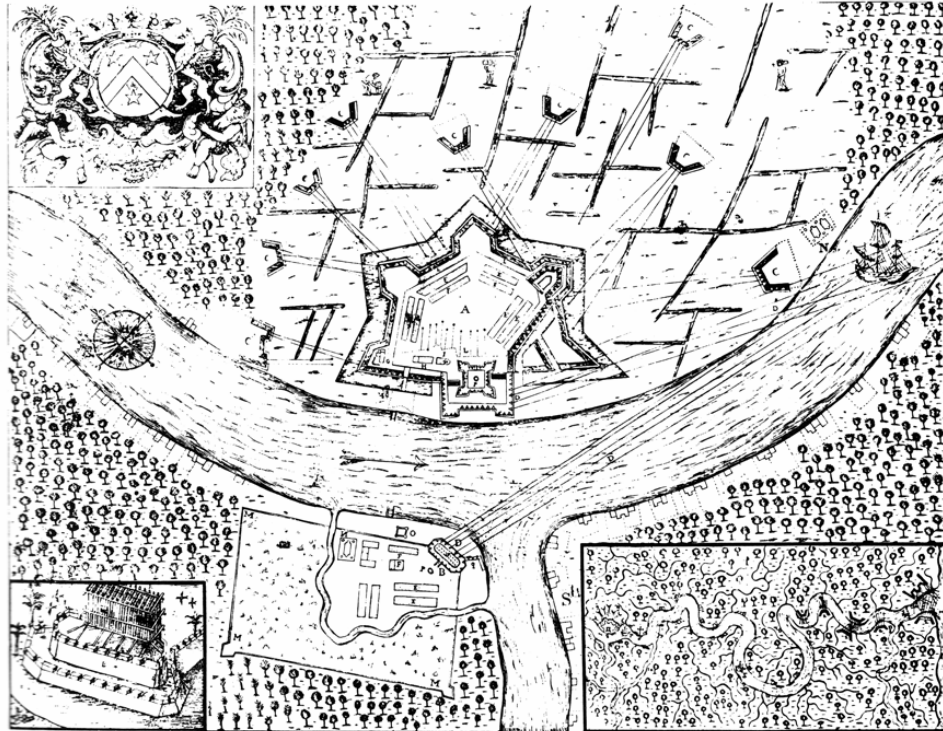


Figure 2.18 1688 French map showing the forts at Bangkok. Source : Larry Sternstein, *Portrait of Bangkok*, (Bangkok : The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982).



Figure 2.19 Ordination hall gable, Wat Tawet, Ayutthaya (18th Century). Source : Muang Boran Archives.



Figure 2.20 Ordination hall gable, Wat Klang Worawihan, Samutprakan (18th Century).
Source : Muang Boran Archives.



Figure 2.21 King Taksin's Throne Hall, Thonburi (1770). Source : *Sathapattayakam nai phramahakasat* (Bangkok : The Prime Minister's Office, 1997).

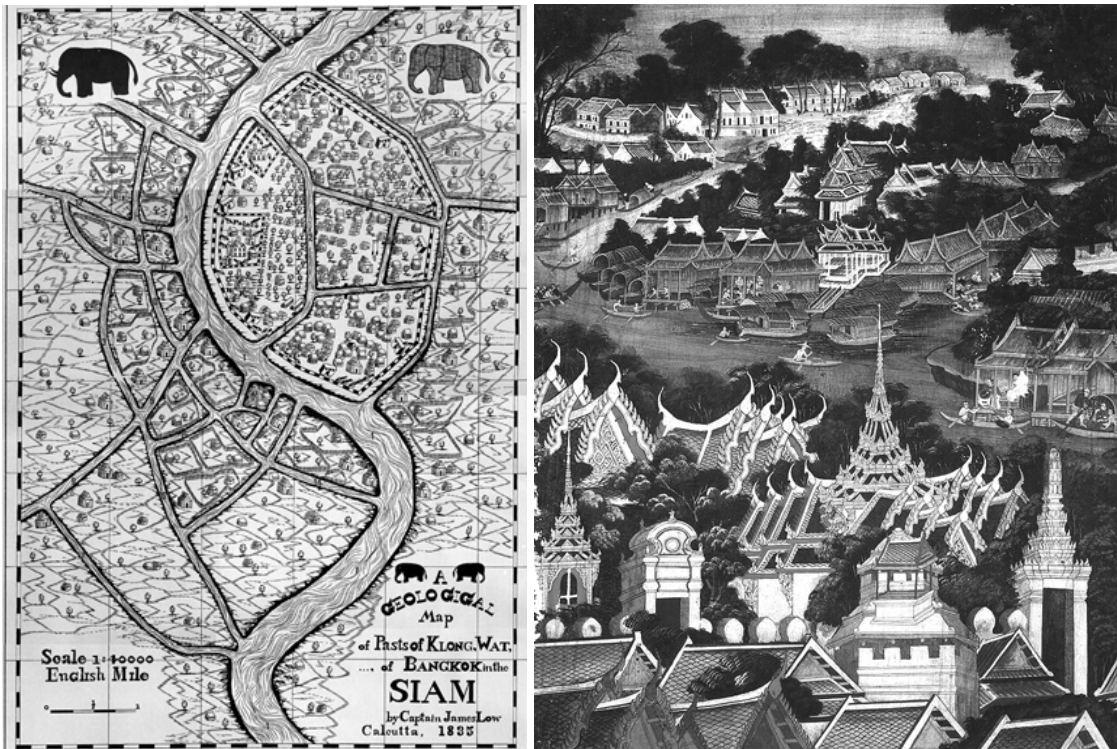


Figure 2.22 1835 Map of the City of Bangkok. Source : Tonchabap.
 Figure 2.23 Mid-19th century mural painting, showing the major urban elements of the early Bangkok period. Source : *Chittrakam Krung Rattanakosin* (Bangkok : The Department of Fine Arts, 1992).

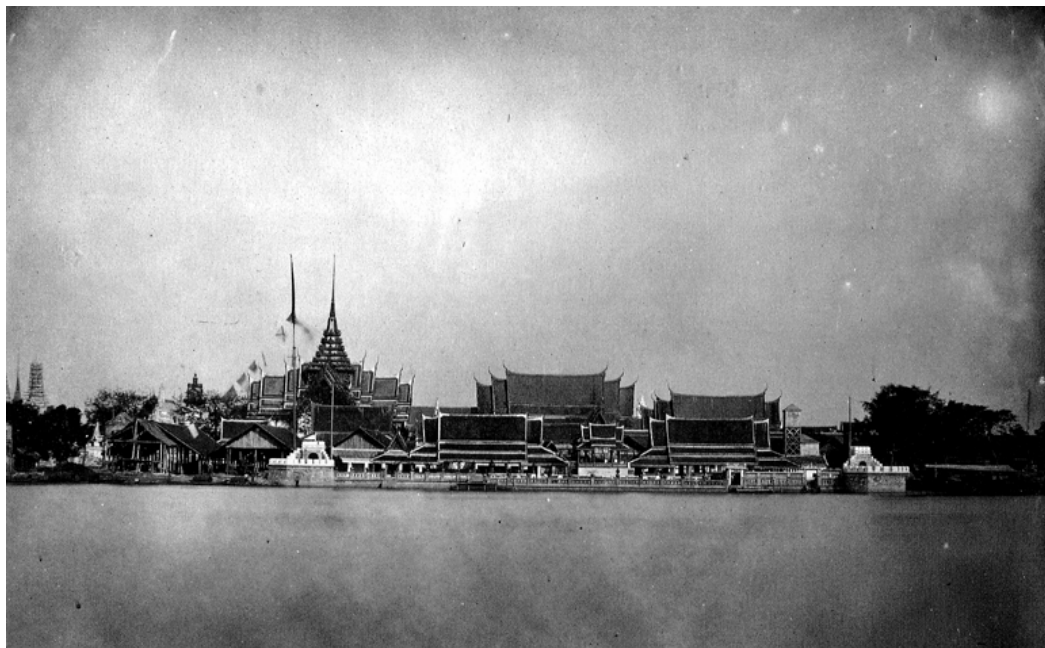


Figure 2.24 The Grand Palace, viewed from the river during the 1860s. Source : Muang Boran, 2001).



Figure 2.25 Roof decoration, Dusit Mahaprasat Throne Hall, Grand palace, Bangkok (1789). Source : MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok : Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (Bangkok : River Books, 1996).



Figure 2.26 Audience hall for a *chao fa*-level prince. Tha Phra Palace, Bangkok.



Figure 2.27 Wang Na, the Uparaja's residence. 1946 aerial photograph. Source : *Bangkok, 1946 – 1996* (Bangkok : The Department of Fine Arts, 1996).



Figure 2.28 The Ordination Hall, Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Source : MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok : Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (Bangkok : River Books, 1996).

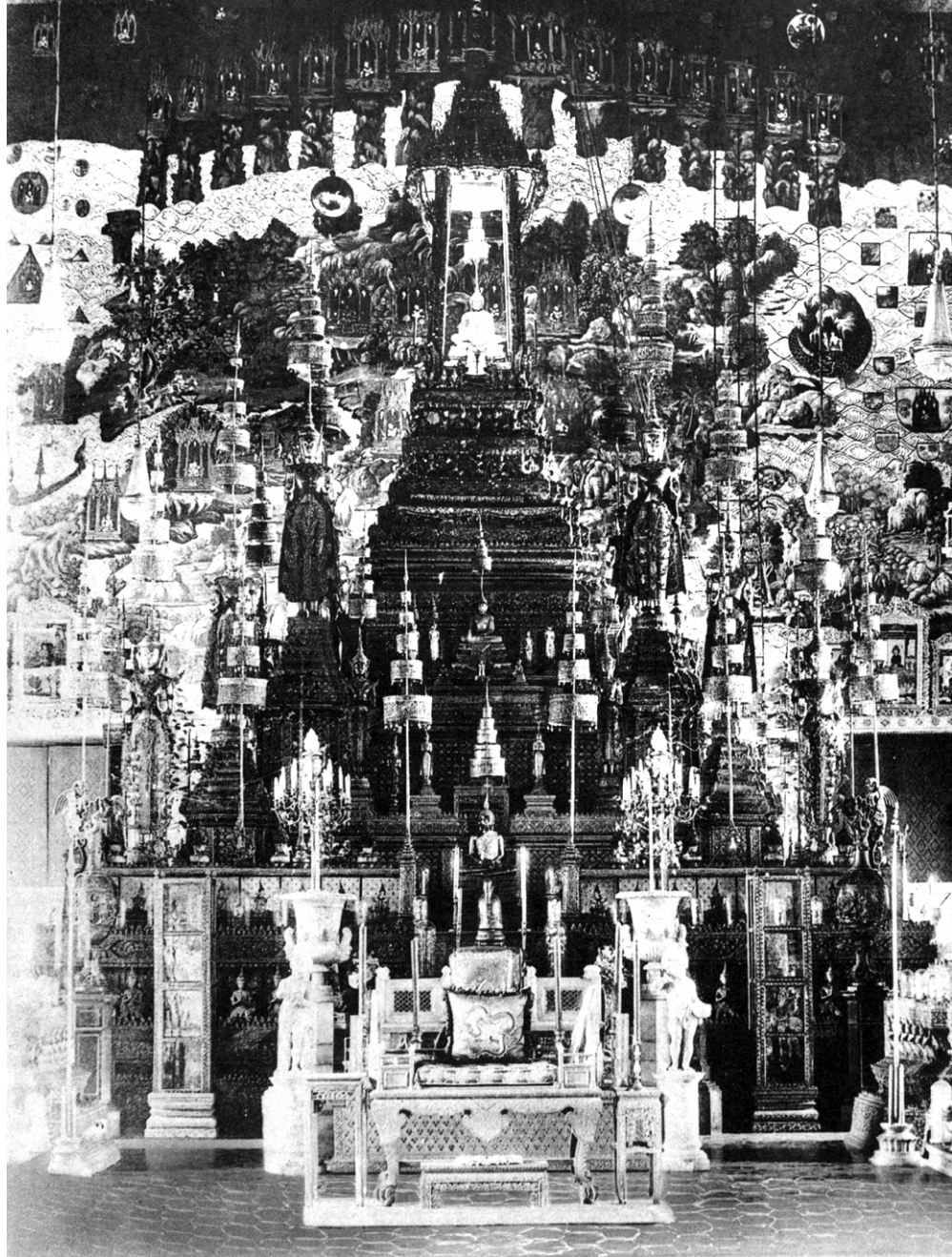


Figure 2.29 The Altar of the Emerald Buddha, the ordination hall, Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Source : Karl Doehring, *Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam*.

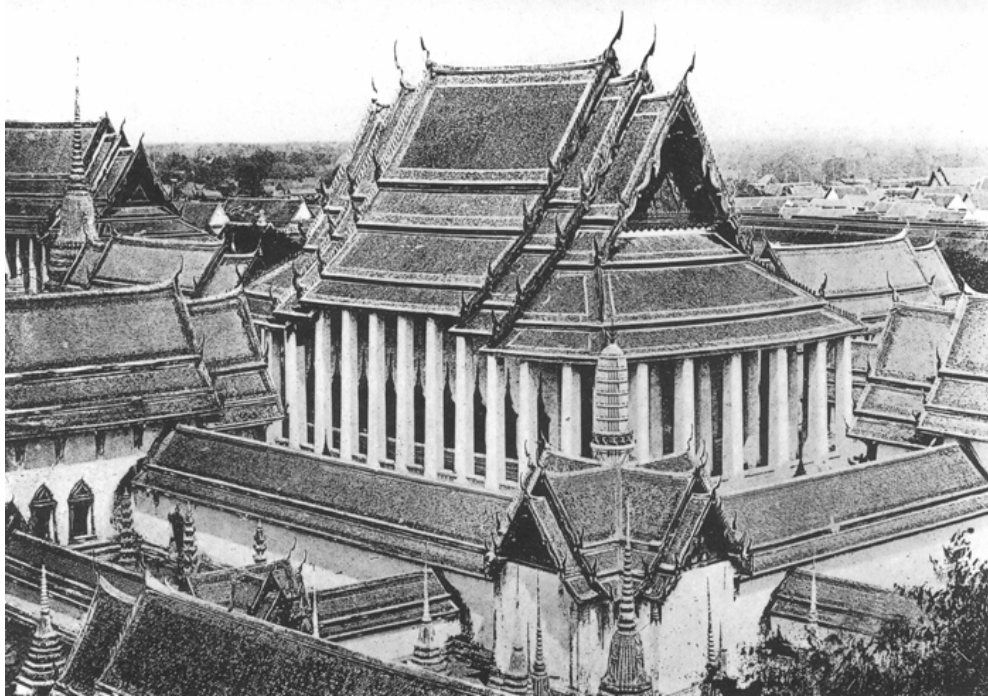


Figure 2.30 The ordination hall, Wat Pho. Source : *Karl Doehring, Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam.*



Figure 2.31 The ordination hall, Wat Suthat, Bangkok (1805). Source : Phensupha Sukhata, *Alangka Sathapat* (Bangkok : General Engineering, 2003).

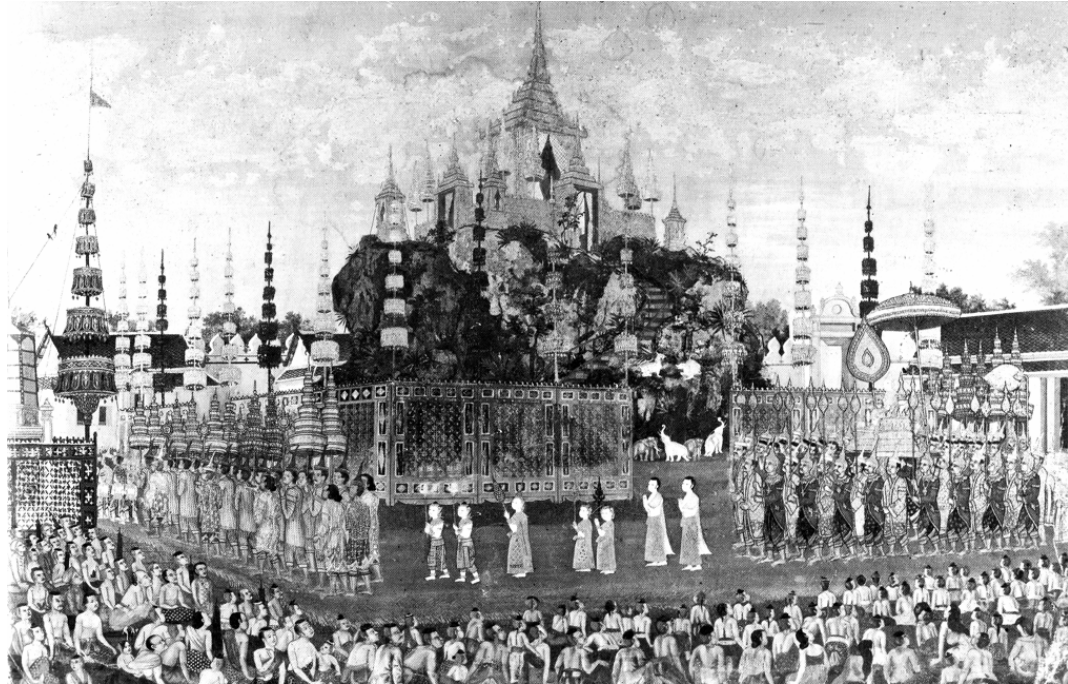


Figure 2.32 Sokan pageantry for Princess Kunthon, 1808. Source : Natthaphat Nawinkchiwin, *Phratchaphithi sokan* (Bangkok : DFA, 1975).

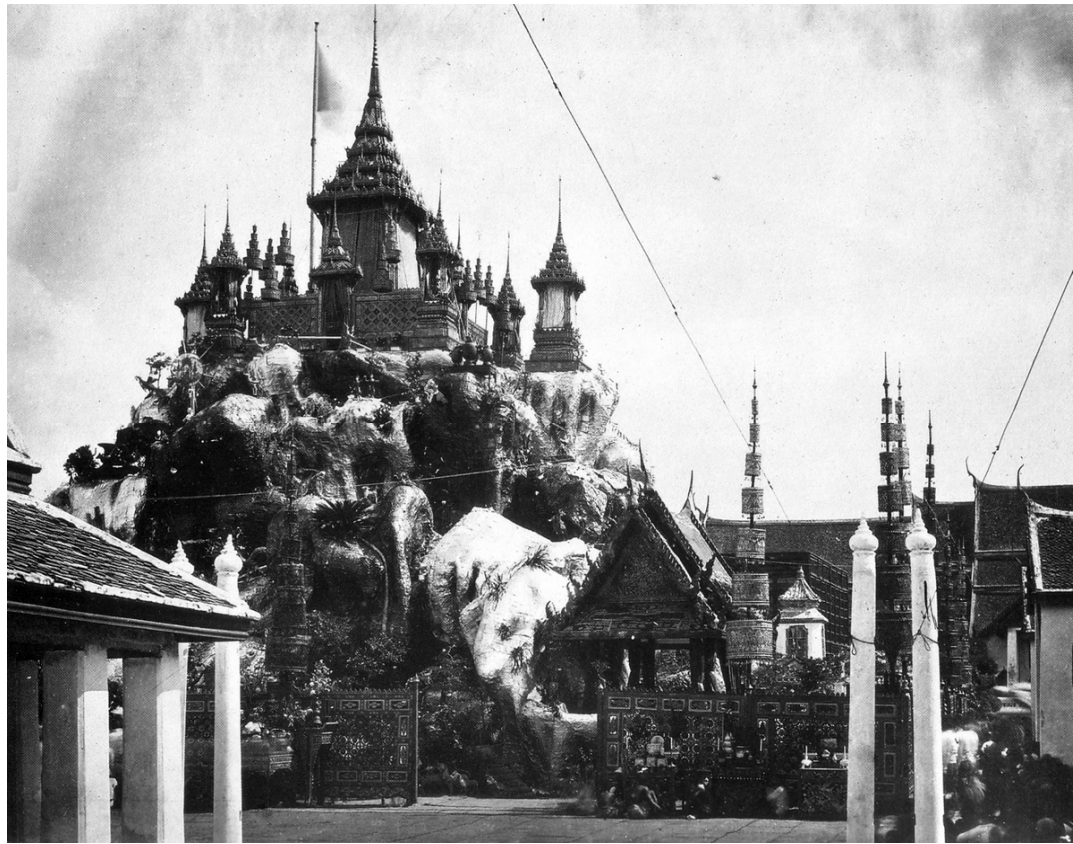


Figure 2.33 Mount Krailat for Prince Chulalongkorn. Source : NAT.

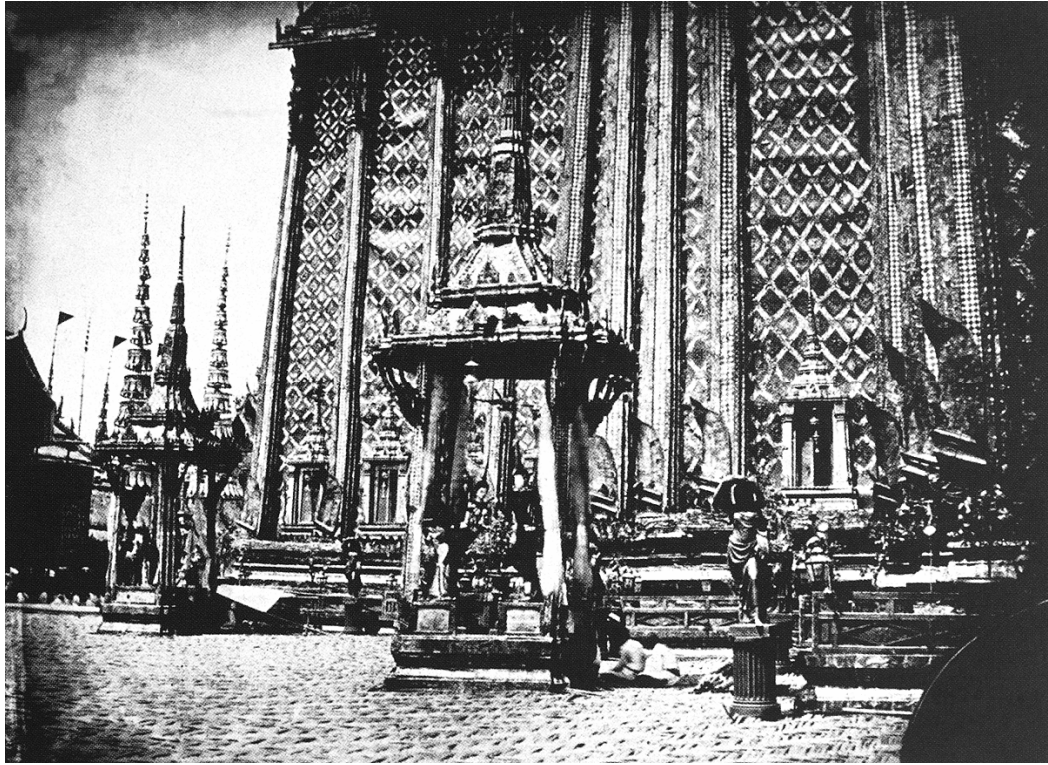


Figure 2.34 Detail of the Phra Meru for Rama IV's cremation (1869). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.35 The Phra Meru grounds during Rama IV's state cremation (1869), showing one of the State Chariots. Source : Muang Boran.

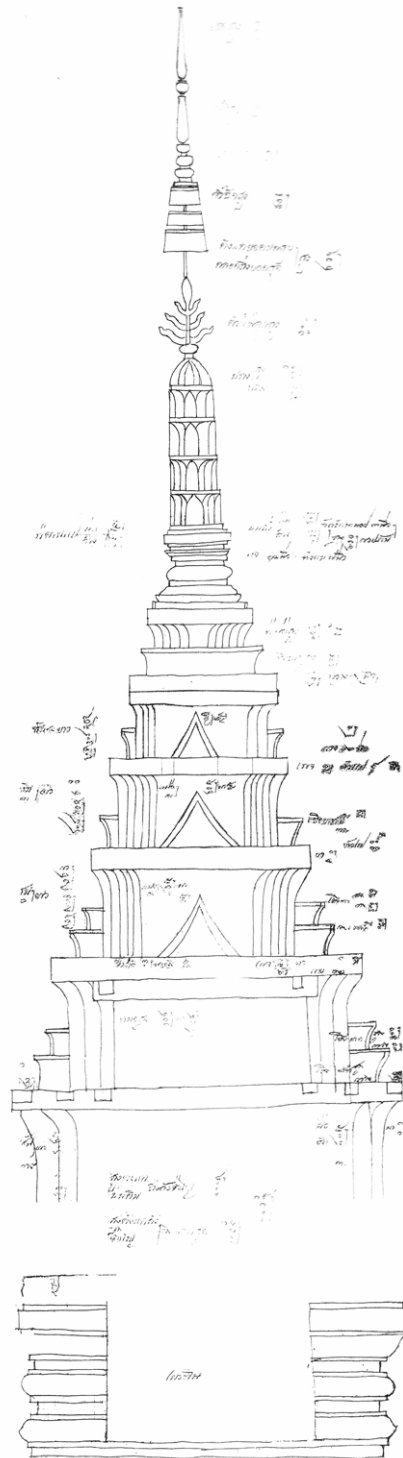


Figure 2.36 Architectural drawing of one of the towers of the Phra Meru for Rama IV's cremation. Source : NLT.



Figure 2.37 Phra Panya, Wat Bowonniwet, Bangkok (1818; altered 1830s).



Figure 2.38 Tuk Farang, Wat Pho (1818). Source : *Prachum Charuk Wat Phra Chetuphon* (Bangkok : Siwaphon, 1974).

Figure 2.39 Keng Chine, Wat Pho (1818). Source : *Prachum Charuk Wat Phra Chetuphon* (Bangkok : Siwaphon, 1974).



Figure 2.40 Amarintharawinitchai Throne Hall, Grand Palace, Bangkok. Source : MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok* (Bangkok : River Books, 1996).



Figure 2.41 Interior of Amarintharawinitchai Throne Hall, Grand Palace, Bangkok. Source : MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok* (Bangkok : River Books, 1996).

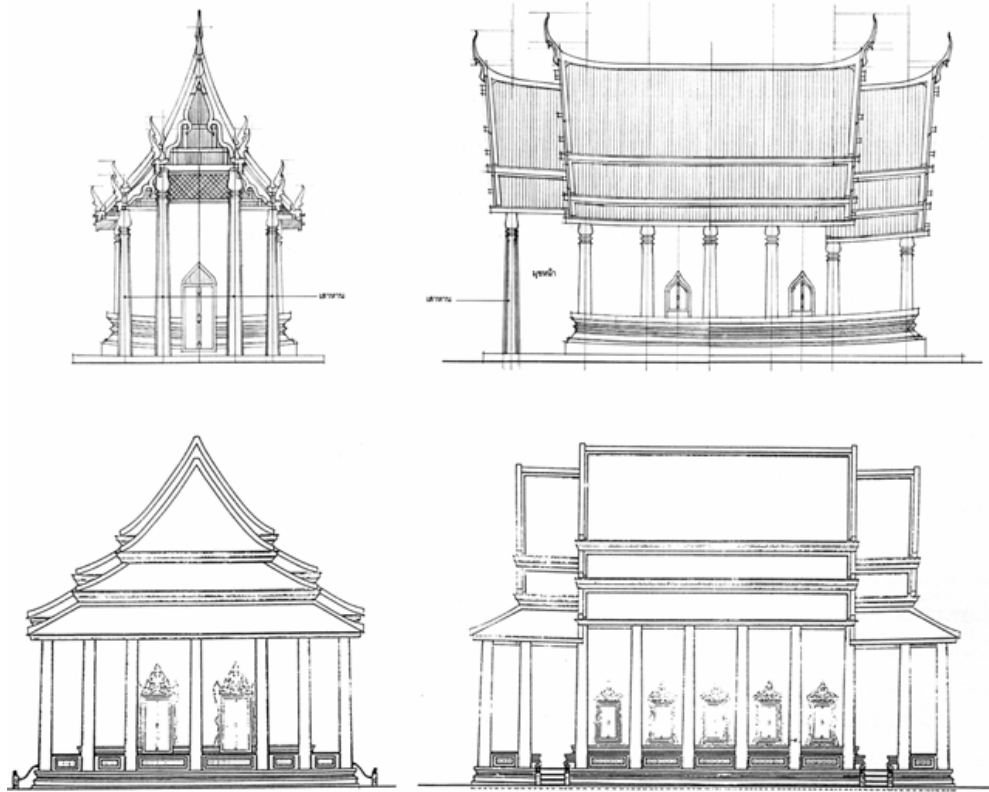


Figure 2.42 Comparison of traditional Siamese, and Chinese-influenced ordination halls.
 Top : Wat Chongnonsi (18th Century); Bottom : Wat Thepthida (1836). Source :
 Somchai Nimlek, *Ubosot : sathapattayakam Thai*, (Bangkok : Muang Boran, 2004).



Figure 2.43 Chinese-influenced gable design, ordination hall, Wat Mahannapharam, Bangkok (1850). Source : *Namchom Krung Rattanakosin*, (Bangkok, DFA, 1982).



Figure 2.44 Wat Ratchaorot, Bangkok (1821). Source : Phensupha Sukhata, *Alanka sathapat*, (Bangkok : General Engineering Public Company, 2000).

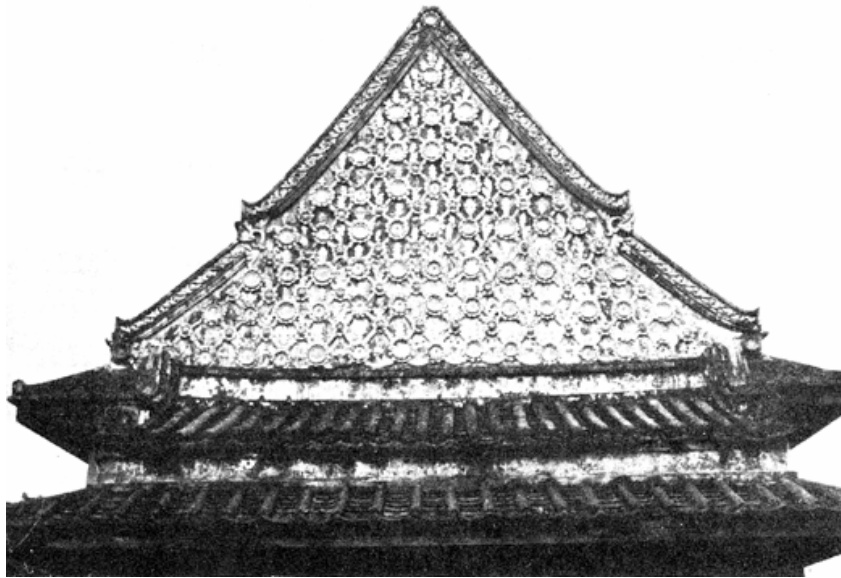


Figure 2.45 Gable of the ordination hall, Wat Protketchetharam, Samutprakan (1822).
Source : Khaisaeng Sukhawattana, *The Chinese-Influenced Thai Buddhist Monasteries of the Early Rattanakosin Period*, (Bangkok : James H. Thompson Foundation, 1982).



Figure 2.46 Wat Pho, viewed from Wat Arun. The Hall of the Reclining Buddha was on the left; to the right, the Ordination Hall, and the great pagodas. Source : Muang Boran.

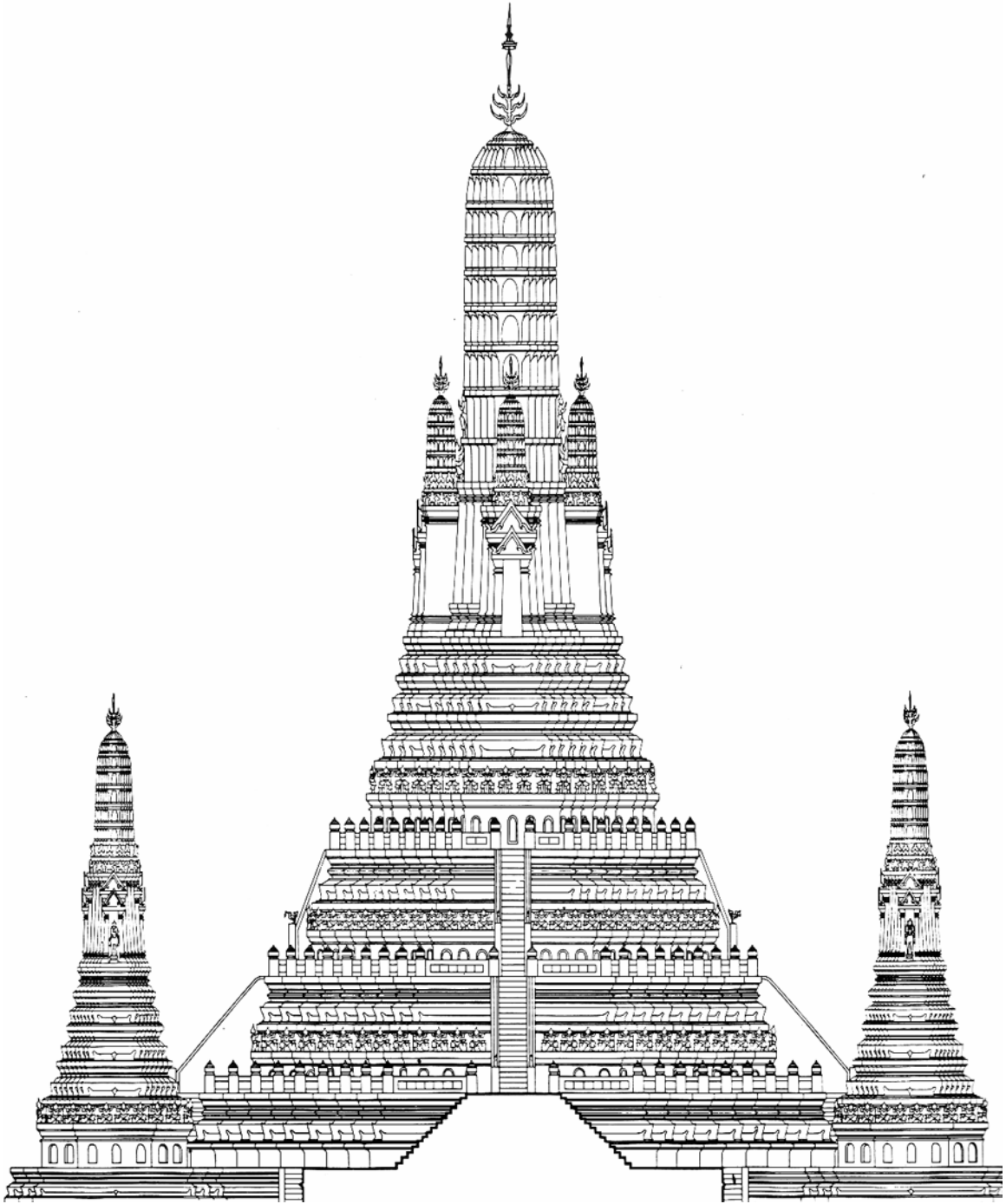


Figure 2.47 Wat Arun, elevation of the pagoda (1826). Source : DFA.

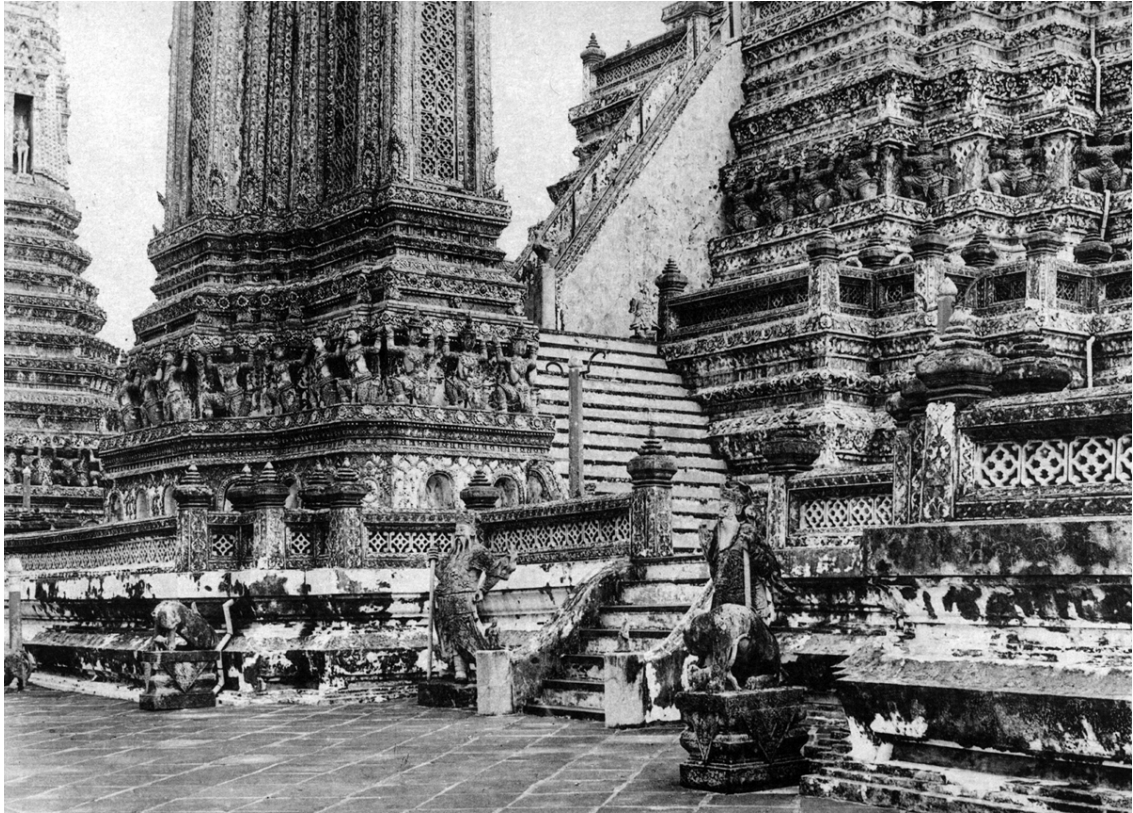


Figure 2.48 Wat Arun, the pagoda (1826). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.49 Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Details of the ordination hall, with Chinese porcelain wall tiles. Source : William Warren, *The Grand Palace*.



Figure 2.50 Chantharakasem Palace, Ayutthaya (1854).

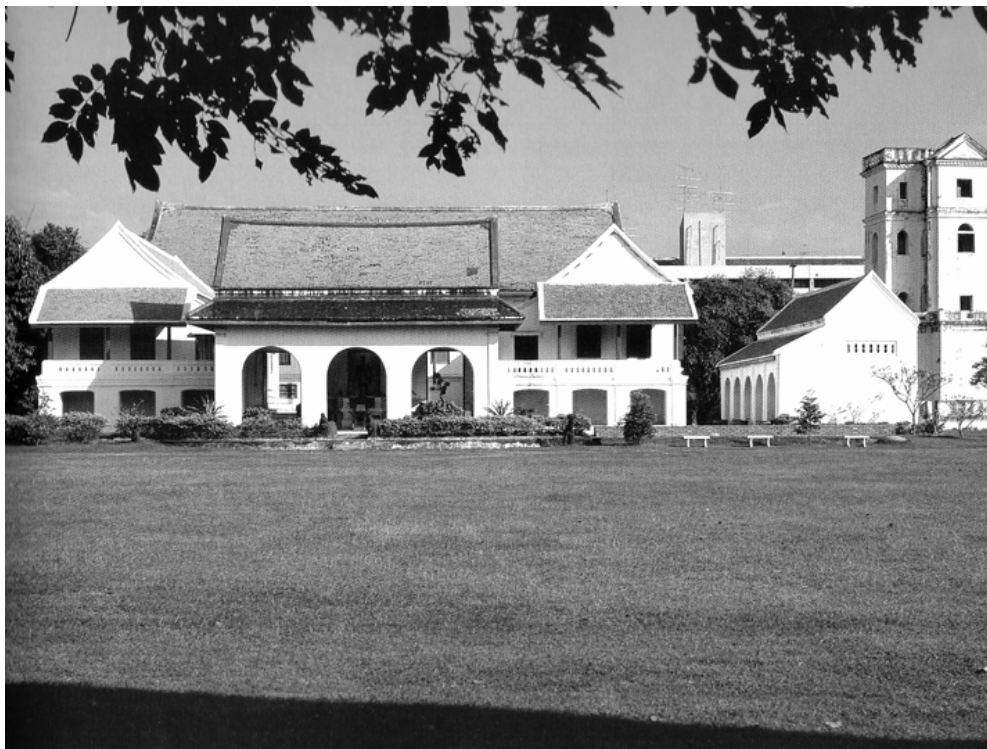


Figure 2.51 Chantharakasem Palace, Ayutthaya (1854). The observatory tower is on the right. Source : ASA.

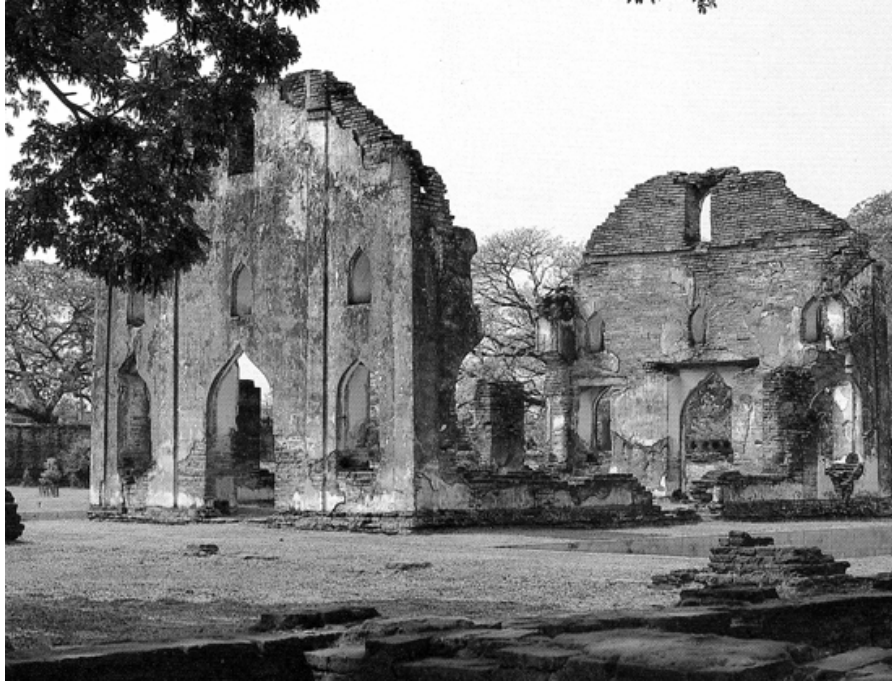


Figure 2.52 King Narai's Hall of the Ambassadors, Narairatchaniwet Palace, Lopburi (17th Century). Source : ASA.



Figure 2.53 Narairatchaniwet Palace, Lopburi. On the left is Rama IV's residence; on the right, King Narai's Hall of Audience, completely restored by Rama IV (c.1850). Source : *Sathapattayakam nai phramahakasat* (Bangkok : OPM, 1982).

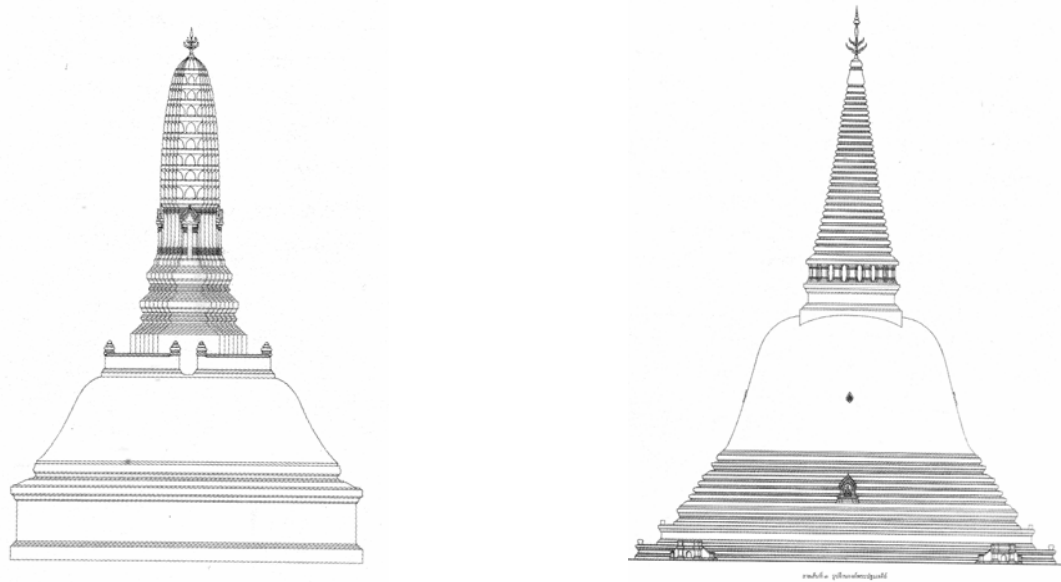


Figure 2.54 Phra Pathom Chedi: the original design (1853, left), and the revised design (1860, right). Source : Phiraphat Samran, "Khati lae sanyalak nai kanokbaep sathapattayakam khong Phra Pathom Chedi," Na Chua vol.5, September 2007).



Figure 2.55 Phra Pathom Chedi, the revised, bell-shaped stupa (1860). Source : NAT.



Figure 2.56 Phra Srirattanachedi, Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok.



Figure 2.57 Phra Samut Chedi, Paknam (1860).

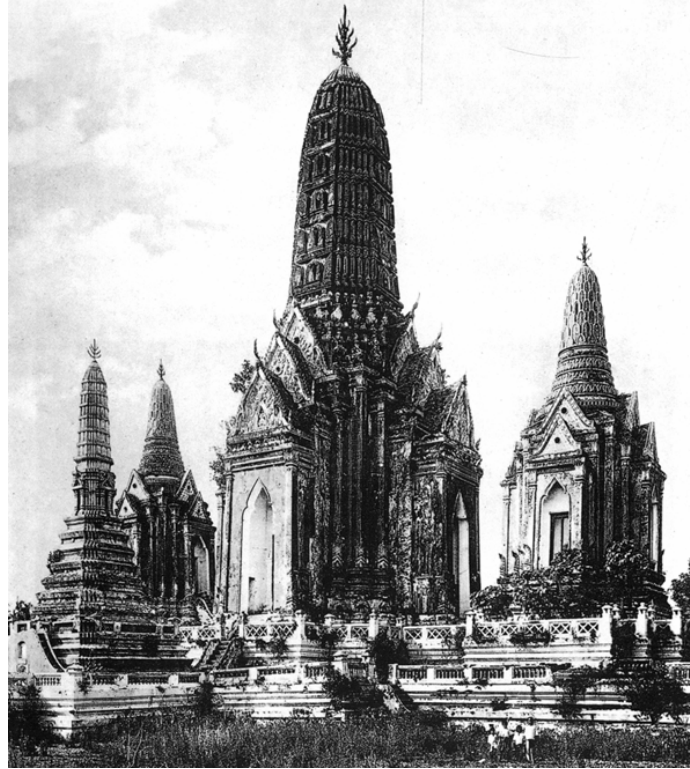


Figure 2.58 Wat Phichaiyat, Thonburi. Source : Karl Doehring, *Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam*, (Berlin : Asia House Publishing, 1921).



Figure 2.59 Model of Angkor Wat, Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Grand Palace, Bangkok (1867). Source : *Picturesque Bangkok & Siam*, (Bangkok : Phrom Photo Studio, 1933).



Figure 2.60 Entrance view, Phra Aphinaowaniwet. Source : NAT.

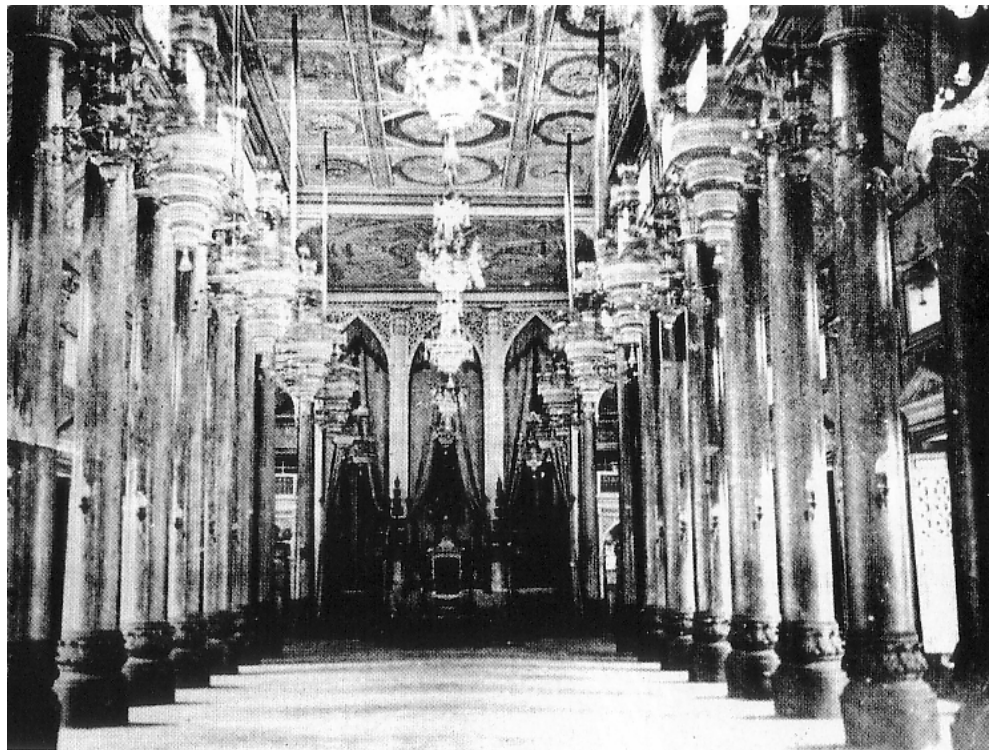


Figure 2.61 Interior view, Anatasamakhom Throne Hall. Source : NAT.