

Chapter 3

Rama V and the Architecture of Chakri Reformation, 1868 – 1889

At the tender age of sixteen, in 1868 Prince Chulalongkorn ascended to the throne and became King Rama V, the fifth monarch of the Chakri dynasty. Amidst great internal political instability, the young king (Figure 3.1) had received training through the first six years of his reign under the tutelage of Chuang Bunnag, the Regent. The Regency period ended in November 1873 when Rama V went through the second coronation and became king in his own right, at least in theory. Subsequently, the young monarch feverishly spent a whole decade building up his political power, treading a precarious balance between the various power cliques within the kingdom while simultaneously playing diplomatic games with the encroaching European powers in Southeast Asia.

A key element in this formative period in Rama V's reign was the Chakri Reformation, a series of administrative reforms that the king initiated during the 1880s, especially the 1888 re-organization of the entire cabinet.¹ As historians of Thailand have pointed out, simultaneous reforms in provincial administration, legal system, postal service, and transportation also helped characterize the Chakri Reformation as modernization through centralized bureaucratic system.² Armed with the newly

¹ David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 200.

² See, for example, Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966); Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*; 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); Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

centralized political and fiscal power, Rama V was able to create the public image for the new Siam for both local and international audiences.

In this chapter, I would like to begin with the analysis of the ways architecture and urban space was instrumental in the king's designs for the Chakri Reformation.³ A central argument is that it was not only European-style edifices that defined Rama V's early reforms, but rather a mixture of the indigenous and the foreign. While the Siamese aristocrats readily embraced European architecture in their palaces, public offices and pleasure gardens, traditional Siamese-style temples were also constructed. The ability to move deftly between the Eastern and Western realms of architecture was crucial to the modern Siamese aristocracy's public image. As we shall see, architectural styles were strategically deployed, sending out mixed signals to local and global audiences. Siam's modernization was made manifest, yet her traditional cultural forms were selectively maintained.

A central point of this chapter is that architecture and urban space of the Chakri Reformation was made possible by Siam's semi-colonial status, which opened up opportunities of creative collaborations between the Siamese patrons and their builders, European and Siamese alike.⁴ Unlike their colonized counterparts, the Siamese aristocrats were free to choose their builders and styles of buildings, in order to create the *siwilai* setting for the Chakri Reformation. After looking at the creative output in the architecture of the Chakri Reformation, this chapter examines another level of collaboration: the relationship between the Siamese aristocrats and their master builders. The first generation of European builders who came to Siam in the 1870s were mostly Italian adventurers of uncertain educational backgrounds, all of whom had to work their way through traditional Siamese patronage system. At the same time, Siamese patrons and royal master builders had to learn the ways European builders worked. In no time, some European builders learnt to design and construct Siamese-style structures, while Siamese and Chinese builder-contractors began to build European-style buildings.

³ For a full analysis of the Chakri Reformation, see Nigel Brailey, ed., *Two Views of Siam on the Eve of the Chakri Reformation* (Arran, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1989).

⁴ For the analysis of Siam's status as a semi-colony, see Lysa Hong, "Stranger within the Gates: Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials," *Modern Asian Studies*, 38, no. 2: 327 – 354. See also Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand*.

Furthermore, during the Chakri Reformation many of the major building projects were collaborations between the royal master builders and their European counterparts, such as Wat Niwet Thammaprawat (Joachim Grassi and Prince Praditworakan, 1878), Chakri Throne Hall (John Clunis and That Hongsakul, 1882), and the cremation structures for Prince Sirirat Kakutthaphan (That Hongsakul and Stefano Cardu, 1887).

Nonetheless, these European builders were equipped with a fairly limited design repertoire of neo-classical and neo-Gothic styles, which might have been good enough in the beginning. But soon enough, Rama V and the Siamese aristocrats raised their expectation of *siwilai* building closer towards European originals. In conjunction with the Chakri Reformation's tendency to centralize and modernize, the aspiration for European standard and taste led to the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1889. All architectural and engineering works hitherto scattered among the various departments within the old bureaucratic system were thus monopolized by the PWD, staffed at first by European architects and engineers already working at private firms in Bangkok, later to be superseded by Italian architects and engineers directly imported from Turin. As the Siamese aristocracy's taste turned largely Westernized by the end of the 19th century, both the first-generation European builders and the Siamese royal master builders lost their businesses to the PWD Italians.

3.1 Architecture and Authority of the Chakri Reformation

On the eve of Rama V's coronation in November 1868, Bangkok was still a semi-aquatic town in the middle of a muddy deltaic plain of Chao Phraya River. After the signing of the Anglo-Siamese Bowring Treaty in 1855, King Rama IV and the Siamese aristocrats gradually changed the city and its architecture.⁵ Change, however, was slow and piecemeal. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Rama IV's modernization effort was limited to the construction of roads, shophouses, and Phra Aphinaowaniwet, the royal apartments in the Grand Palace. On the western side of the river, the extremely wealthy and powerful Bunnag family spent their fortunes on a few major temples, but the

⁵ John Bowring, *The Kingdom and the People of Siam* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969).

area remained largely undeveloped. As for the foreign settlement in the port area of Bangrak, south of the walled city area, foreign residents had yet to make any significant impact on the urban landscape.⁶

Yet, the impact of the West was already felt by the Siamese elite, especially after the First Anglo-Burmese War, which began in 1824. Since its foundation in 1826, Singapore, the British colonial creation, had almost virtual control over Siam's import and export trades. The expansion of the British India and Dutch East Indies was also closely observed by the Siamese aristocrats. Towards the end of Rama IV's reign, Siam sent her envoys on inspection tours to the newly colonized states of South and Southeast Asia; younger members of the Bunnag family were sent by Rama IV on diplomatic missions to Britain and France. Furthermore, the Siamese elite began to employ Europeans for their knowledge and expertise in modern matters. Such was the atmosphere from which Rama V grew up with. Since young he studied with Anna Harriet Leonowens, the English governess; later on he continued his studies with Francis George Patterson, a Scottish tutor.⁷ Through embassy reports, print media, and the foreign residents in Bangkok, the Siamese aristocrats began to absorb information about Europe and her civilization.

3.1.1 The Young King and the Scottish Architect

For the first six years of young Rama V's reign, the kingdom was ruled by Chuang Bunnag, the Regent (Figure 3.2), who set up a training program for the young king. The king not only observed the Regent's daily audience, but also studied with Patterson, the royal tutor. A year after Rama V had ascended to the throne, the Regent also presented the young king with two pavilions, Munsathan Boromma-at and Sommottithewarat Upabat Halls (Figures 3.3 – 3.4). Built at the very heart of the Grand Palace, the pavilions were used as reception halls. Designed by the royal master builder That Hongsakul (1828 – 1888), the one-storey buildings were neo-classical in style,

⁶ Anonymous, "The Map of Bangkok," in *The Bangkok Calendar for the Year of Our Lord 1871* (Bangkok: The Press of the American Missionary Association, 1871), 146 – 157.

⁷ Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Ratchakan thi 5 [The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fifth Reign]* (Bangkok: Phraepitthaya, 1963), 313.

though the construction techniques remained traditional load-bearing wall system.⁸ Built like small Greek temples atop an elevated platform, the two halls managed to blend well with the Siamese tradition of vertical hierarchy of space. Traditional social structure was manifested through vertical stratification of space; one's social status could be determined by the relative height of his or her space.

Nonetheless, the European-style halls must have served well as an object lesson for the young king on how to be *siwilai*, at least to his foreign guests. Later on, Rama V adapted one of the halls for his living quarters, a nucleus for a set of neo-classical style royal apartments of Chakri Mahaprasat. Soon enough, the king's interest in European norms of living steadily increased. In March 1871, the Regent sent the king on his inspection tour of Singapore and Dutch Java. As the first Siamese king to travel outside the kingdom, Rama V was obviously impressed by the spectacles of civilization in Singapore, Batavia, and Semarang, that he and his entourage saw during the month-long trip.⁹

During his journey in Singapore, the king spent a week at the Government House, a neo-classical, two-storey building designed by Major John McNair, the Executive Engineer and Superintendent of Convicts in the Straits Settlements (Figure 3.5). Within a week after his return to Siam, the king asked Tan Kim Ching, his Chinese agent in Singapore, to have a wooden model of McNair's Government House made and sent to the king in Bangkok.¹⁰ Five months later, the Royal Siamese Government hired John Clunis as its first and only Government Architect. Scotland-born builder of unknown educational background, around 1850 Clunis took his journey out to work in Singapore

⁸ Pirasri Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam, ton phaendin Phraphutthachaoluang [European Builders at the Kingdom of Siam during the Early Years of King Rama V's Reign]* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2005), 84.

⁹ On March 28, 1871, the king visited Gymnasium Willem III, a Dutch model school in Batavia. In a welcoming speech by H. D. Levyssohn Norman, a school board, the supremacy of Eurocentric civilization was emphasized: "For national supremacy on sea and land, we wage war no longer; but another and more honourable rivalry has been kindled between us, and we now vie with each other in extending to the countries of the East, so highly favoured by nature, the benefit of the light of Western civilization." Kannikar Sartraprun, *A True Hero: King Chulalongkorn of Siam's Visit to Singapore and Java in 1871* (Bangkok: Tana Press, 2004), 89.

¹⁰ National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL-KT 3/154. Letter from Tan Kim Ching, the Siamese Consul, to Chaophraya Bhanuwong, the Phra Khlang, dated April 21, 1871.

for a number of years.¹¹ In October 1871, the 41-year-old builder began working mainly for the young king who wanted to modernize his palace. Clunis' first assignment was to design a new hall between the locally-designed Munsathan Borommaat and Sommottithewarat Upabat Halls. Later named Borommaratchasathit Maholan, the hall was to be used as a banqueting and reception hall (Figure 3.6). Clunis designed a simple three-room hall with rectangular plan that connected the two existing halls together, forming a small court with a grand flight of steps leading up to the new hall (Figure 3.7). The interior was filled with classical columns on high bases, pedimented doorways, crystal chandeliers, and imported furniture (Figure 3.8). To match with the new European-style hall, Rama V ordered the male members of his court to dress with the new style of attire inspired by British frock coats.¹² The new banqueting hall became the scene for the king's fancy dress parties for the princes and the noblemen held on New Year's eves, while the royal family enjoyed playing croquet in the front lawn adjacent to the forecourt leading towards the Borommaratchasathit Maholan Hall (Figure 3.9). General Ulysses S. Grant was received by King Rama V in one of these new halls during his 1876 tour around the world. General Grant remarked: "A wide pair of marble steps led to the audience-room and on each side of the steps were pots with blooming flowers and rare shrubs. The audience-hall is composed of two large, gorgeously decorated saloons, that would not be out of place in any palace. The decorations were French, and reminded you of the Louvre."¹³

In May 1871, Rama V asked D K. Mason, the Siamese consul in London, to get for him plans of "all of Queen Victoria's many palaces," together with detailed drawings of Her Majesty's state coaches and carriages, if possible.¹⁴ By October of the same year, Mason managed to send to the king plans of Buckingham Palace, and in November, those of Windsor Castle.¹⁵ Probably inspired by the plans, around the end of 1871, Rama V

¹¹ "Death of Mr. John Clunis," *The Bangkok Times*, July 21, 1894.

¹² Kongsin, *Chotmai het hon [Horological Chronicles]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Thammabannakan, 1962), 91.

¹³ Joel Taylor Headley, *The Life and Travels of General Grant* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1879), 367.

¹⁴ National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL-KT 3/170. Letter from Chaophraya Bhanuwong, the Phra Khlang, to D. K. Mason, the Siamese Consul in London, dated May 31, 1871.

¹⁵ National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL-KT 11/82. Letter from D. K. Mason, the Siamese Consul in London, to Chaophraya Bhanuwong, the Phra Khlang, dated October 6, 1871. R5 RL-KT 11/85. Letter

planned a grand tour to Europe, perhaps in anticipation of his second coronation that was scheduled for 1873. The Regent, however, decided against the plan on grounds of national security.¹⁶ Instead, the king was offered a state visit to British Burma and India, which he took in February 1872.¹⁷ Organized by the British colonial government, the two-month journey showcased the major colonial cities: Singapore, Penang, Moulmein, Rangoon, Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi, Cawnpore, and Bombay (Figure 3.10).

3.1.2 Concordia Hall and Saranrom Gardens

After his return to Bangkok in March 1872, the nineteen-year-old king began to expand his building projects beyond his own residence. Concordia Hall, a new social and entertainment space for Bangkok's elite, was constructed in the same year. Located in the outer section of the Grand Palace, the building presented to the public the king's public image as patron of the modernizing society. Named after Concordia Club, the first military and social club of Dutch Java that the king visited during his 1871 trip (Figure 3.11), the plan of the building was perhaps inspired by European banqueting halls, with two simple rectangular, double-height rooms sharing a single foyer with projected porch (Figure 3.12).¹⁸ A nod towards the tropical climate was made through the design of wrap-around, covered verandah. Rows of Corinthian columns running the full height of the hall supported the parapet with balustrades atop the verandah, thus creating an image of a flat-roof, European style building, a startling change from the steep gable roofs with wide overhanging eaves of traditional Siamese architecture.

Originally, Concordia Hall was used as a social club for the First Infantry Regiment, the king's Royal Bodyguards, a group of young Siamese aristocrats that the king personally formed in 1870. Dressed with European-style attire, the young princes

from D. K. Mason, the Siamese Consul in London, to Chaophraya Bhanuwong, the Phra Khlang, dated November 28, 1871.

¹⁶ Pirasri Povatong, "Somdet Phra Phutthachaoluang kap kan Sadet Praphat Thawip Yurop pho so 2423 [Rama V and the Proposed Journey to Europe, 1880]," *Sinlapawatthanatham* 29:9 (June 2008): 118 – 133.

¹⁷ Paisarn Piemmettawat, *King Chulalongkorn's Journey to India 1872* (Bangkok: River Books, 2000), 1 – 51.

¹⁸ Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Khwamsongcham [Memoirs]* (Bangkok: Sinlapa Bannakhan, 1973), 262. See also, Kannikar Sartraprungs, *A True Hero: King Chulalongkorn of Siam's Visit to Singapore and Java in 1871*, 106.

and sons of noblemen hosted dinner parties and receptions, intermingling with the invited foreign residents. Its location on the outer area of the Grand Palace provided Concordia Hall with a sense of exclusivity; still under the aegis of royal authority, yet open to the genteel public. Concordia Hall's neo-classical language of architecture represented Rama V's message to the public, outlining the direction towards which Chakri Reformation would be heading in the following decade.

On November 17, 1873, 20-year-old Rama V was crowned again in a grand re-coronation ceremony, which also marked the end of the Regency period (Figure 3.13).¹⁹ Chuang Bunnag, the ex-Regent, let the young king exercise his royal authority in ruling the kingdom. During the king's first audience, Rama V and his entourage were dressed in the new European-influenced attire. The king also issued an important proclamation abolishing the centuries-old practice of crawling and kowtowing during the king's audience. According to an eyewitness to the event, after the young monarch finished his proclamation, the entire audience rose to their feet in unison, "like the turning of one page to another."²⁰ The Siam Repository reported:

As His Majesty finished reading the Royal Edict and Proclamation the assembled Siamese Princes, Ministers of State, and Noblemen, civil and military, simultaneously repeated the respectful and reverential demonstrations as at first, then in perfect order, manfully, gracefully and with beaming countenances the prostrate mass of people stood upright, in the most natural position, and respectfully bowed.²¹

Such was the importance that the king gave to costume and court decorum in the manifestation of progress during his reign. Architecture, of course, was also a powerful medium to send out the message about the new era:

The palace grounds are daily crowded with numerous artificers of every description. Painters, gilders, moulders, plasterers, carpenters and a numerous class of nondescripts, who are busily engaged from morning till eight in completing P'laph'lah sung, and the à la European Audience Hall, in that vicinity within the palace walls, and the Royal pleasure lawn in front of the new palace building. The improvements that are being made at the P'laph'lah sung are great, and the ornamenting of the ceiling of the new Audience Hall when complete will

¹⁹ "Re-Coronation, *Siam Repository* 6:1, January 1874, 68 – 69.

²⁰ Prince Damrongrachanuphap, *Khwamsongcham [Memoirs]*, 313.

²¹ "Re-Coronation," 110.

be grand; the designs, mouldings and gilding show that “Young Siam” has gathered valuable ideas from the visits of its fraternity to Netherlands and British India.”²²

Rama V’s modernizing reforms, however, did not stop at the superficial level. Within months after re-coronation, the king set up two advisory councils: the Privy Council, and the Council of State.²³ In effect, old power cliques began to lose their power over the court, while the king gradually increased the political influence of his allies. The growing tension led to the Front Palace Crisis of December, 1874, a power struggle between the young king and Prince Bowonwichaichan, the Viceroy, with many of the old powers behind him. After the skirmishes between the Grand Palace and the Viceroy’s Front Palace reached the boiling point, the Viceroy left the Front Palace to seek for political refuge at the British Consulate. After months of political stalemate and an intervention by Sir Andrew Clarke, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, the crisis was ended. The Viceroy was stripped off his power, and Rama V survived the first internal crisis of his reign.²⁴ More importantly, however, the Front Palace Crisis demonstrated to the Siamese elite clearly the sphere of political power the British had over Siam, even though she was not formally colonized.

With the political crisis averted, Rama V continued his building program to modernize the monarchy’s public image. In 1874 the king turned Concordia Hall into the Royal Museum, the first public museum in Siam.²⁵ With an encyclopedic scope, the exhibits at the Royal Museum turned Concordia Hall into a didactic space, with everything for everyone. Foreigners learnt about natural resources, flora and fauna, history, industries, arts and crafts of Siam, while locals were also shown exotic objects from around the world, stuffed foreign animals, state gifts presented to Rama V, and the scientific and technological marvels from Europe and the United States. Thousands of locals visited the Royal Museum annually, with special opening dates on the king’s

²² “Re-Coronation,” 68 – 69.

²³ “Proclamations on the State Council and the Privy Council,” *Siam Repository* 6:4, October 1874, 488 – 491.

²⁴ ML Manich Jumsai, *History of Anglo-Thai Relations* (Bangkok: Chelermnit, 2000), 148 – 177.

²⁵ “Exhibition,” *Siam Repository* 6:4, October 1874, 608.

birthday.²⁶ The monarch maintained his leading role as the patron of education, even though the means had changed.

Also in 1874, Rama V expanded his *siwilai* building program by opening Saranrom Gardens to the public. Located immediately east of the Grand Palace, the Gardens occupied a prime urban location; its south entrance opened directly on Charoenkrung Road, one of Bangkok's few major roads and its busiest thoroughfare. On the Gardens' eastern side was Rachini Road, the canalside promenade that the king constructed after seeing the streets, canals and bridges of Dutch Batavia during his 1871 trip (Figure 3.14). The roads formed a sort of circuit around Saranrom Gardens, allowing Siamese aristocrats and genteel foreign residents to enjoy evening carriage rides.²⁷ Fannie Roper Feudge, an American lady who visited Bangkok in 1874, complimented on the king's civic improvement projects: "Now broad highways and paved sidewalks have taken the place of wretched lanes, within the walls two new streets and a handsome public park have been completed."²⁸

An open public park, Saranrom Gardens was first laid out as a formal landscape design with a wide lawn at its center, surrounded by European-style parterres, ponds, fountains, pavilions and bandstands (Figure 3.15). European music was offered every afternoon, from 1 pm till 4 pm; foreign troops visiting the city of Bangkok often sent brass bands to play for the public, and the Gardens became very popular for the elite residents of Bangkok.²⁹ Even female members of Rama V's court were allowed to leave the Grand Palace to temporarily enjoy fresh air in the Gardens. After Queen Sunantha, Rama V's consort, died in a tragic boat accident in May 1880, the king built a marble monument in memory of the late Queen at Saranrom Gardens, allegedly because it was the place where she spent her most joyous moments in life (Figure 3.16). Later on, the king hired Henry Alabaster, formerly an interpreter at the British Consulate, as the Superintendent of Saranrom Gardens.³⁰ Alabaster turned a part of the Gardens into a botanical garden, with a conservatory showcasing exotic orchids, roses, and other plants.

²⁶ "Prakat hai ru thua kan [Notice]," *Ratchakitchanubeksa* 3:25, 1876, 197 – 198.

²⁷ "Prakat Suan Wang Saranrom [Proclamation on Saranrom Gardens]," *CPRW*, vol. 1, 16.

²⁸ Fannie Roper Feudge, "An Oriental Moarchy," *The Galaxy*, 18:6 (December 1874): 803.

²⁹ "Suan Saranrom [Saranrom Gardens]," *Sayam Samai*, 1:3, October 1882, 4.

³⁰ "Suan Saranrom [Saranrom Gardens]," *CPRW*, vol. 12, 64.

An aviary and a small zoo were also constructed. The king himself frequently visited Saranrom Gardens, and soon the park became a social scene where the elite population of Bangkok intermingled. Indeed, the Gardens and its features became so popular among the public that plants and animals began to be stolen, and unruly behaviors occurred in the Gardens. Alabaster asked the king to temporarily stop public access to Saranrom Gardens until the plants and other features were restored, and after that, to open the park to the public only twice a week.³¹

The king's early attempt to civilize his populace through architecture and civic space was readily applauded by many, especially the foreign community in Bangkok. In 1871 Dr Dan Beach Bradley, an American Presbyterian missionary and a long-time resident, summarized the Siamese elites' urban amelioration effort:

Not only the royal palace of the 1st King [the Grand Palace] was greatly improved in the late reign [Rama IV], but also many other parts of the city and suburb of Bangkok. Several new streets were made within the citadel, and a continuous block of buildings nearly half a mile in length, was erected on each side of one of them. ... And we feel happy to say, that His Majesty the present supreme king is giving many tangible proofs that he is determined to continue the spirit of improving the city, which his illustrious sire and predecessor inaugurated, and that in our opinion he will speedily make great and cheering changes in the appearance of it.³²

3.1.3 The Bangkok Centennial Projects

While working on the Concordia Hall and Saranrom Gardens, by 1876 Rama V was already planning a really major building program that would set the milestone for the first part of his reign. Anticipating the centenary of the foundation of Bangkok and the Chakri Dynasty, the king came up with a series of architectural projects: the first Siamese National Exhibition, the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and the Chakri Throne Hall (Figure 3.17).³³ The planning and construction of the Centennial projects presented a very explicit example of the ways architecture and urban space was

³¹ National Archives of Thailand, R5 NK14/106. Letter from Henry Alabaster to King Rama V on the improvement plans for Saranrom Gardens.

³² "The Map of Bangkok," *The Bangkok Calendar for the Year of Our Lord 1871* (Bangkok: The American Missionary Association, 1871), 150.

³³ Samuel J. Smith, *Bangkok Centennial Held at Bangkok, Siam, 1882* (Bangkok: The Siam Weekly Advertiser, 1882), 12 – 15.

instrumental in Rama V's designs for the Chakri Reformation. A mix of traditions and modernity, Siamese-style architecture and neo-classical designs, the Centennial projects sent a strong message to local and global audiences.

First and foremost among the Centennial projects was the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Figure 3.18). No matter how *siwilai* Rama V might be, he still had to maintain his traditional role as the defender of faith. As a palatine chapel containing the most sacred Buddhist icon in the kingdom, by the 1870s, however, the century-old buildings of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha were in a state of disrepair, thus providing the young king with a great opportunity to fulfill his royal duty. Intentionally, the king started the renovation project in the traditional manner; the whole project was subdivided into small parts, each of which was supervised by a prince. For this particular project, Rama V assigned the supervisory tasks to all of his brothers and half-brothers. The intention, as the king stated in his personal correspondence to the princely brothers, was to show that the sons of Rama IV had come of age, and was ready to undertake the important matters of state like their forebears.³⁴ The king even prophesied that, had the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha not been completed in time for the Centennial celebrations in April 1882, the power of the House of Chakri would cease, just within a hundred years after Rama I had established the dynasty (Figure 3.19).³⁵

As for the architectural practice, the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was extremely significant as an opportunity for the royal master builders and their craftsmen to practice their crafts. Carpentry, lacquer work, mother-of-pearl inlay, woodcarving, sculpture, and painting were just a few of the crafts needed to restore such an important group of traditional-style buildings. The king himself inspected the Temple site regularly on a fortnightly basis; the royal attention brought together the best traditional artists and craftsmen of the kingdom.³⁶

³⁴ Letter from King Rama V to Prince Bhanurangsi, dated December 23, 1879, in Natthawut Suthisongkhram, *Somdetchaophraya Borommaha Sisuriyawong* (Bangkok: Phraepitthaya, 1973), 518.

³⁵ Letter from King Rama V to Prince Bhanurangsi, dated December 24, 1879, in Natthawut Suthisongkhram, *Somdetchaophraya Borommaha Sisuriyawong*, 1768.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

While the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was completely traditional both in design and execution, the second element in the Centennial projects, the First Siamese National Exhibition, was completely foreign in concept. After national and international exhibitions had become one of the most potent invented traditions of 19th-century Europe, the Siamese elites soon joined the global trend during the 1860s by sending Siamese exhibits to various international exhibitions. In 1867 king Rama IV sent the first set of Siamese exhibits to the Second Exposition Universelle that was held in Paris (Figure 3.20). Siam's participation in subsequent international expositions quickly followed.³⁷ Therefore, in 1881, while preparing the program for the Bangkok Centennial, the Siamese aristocrats decided to hold the first national exhibition as a part of the event. Indeed, the concept of the national exhibition must be so new and foreign that there was no Siamese word for it. In a royal proclamation dated September 16, 1881, Rama V used the transliterated form of the word, *ekshibichun*, for exhibition. In the same proclamation, the king explained the concept of the *ekshibichun* for the benefit of the general populace, who might not understand fully what it was. According to the king, the idea of the *ekshibichun* was to showcase products, resources, and tools of trades and industries each country had. Accordingly, an international exhibition was a sort of competition among the many nations through their material culture. As for Siam's first national exhibition, the intention was to simply show to audiences local and foreign the kingdom's products, resources, and tools, most of which had become widely available only after the establishment of the Chakri dynasty back in 1782.³⁸

Like the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the First Siamese National Exhibition was actually organized in a traditional way. Organized by an Exhibition Committee, with the king's younger brother Prince Bhanurangsi as its President, the whole exhibition was subdivided into small parts, each of which was supervised by a prince, or a nobleman. In a very traditional way, Rama V first ordered all provinces and dependencies of the Siamese kingdom to submit specimens of local

³⁷ Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 144.

³⁸ "Prakat Kansomphot Phranakhon [Proclamation on the Bangkok Centennial]," in *Somphot Phranakhon khrop roi pi [Bangkok Centennial Celebrations]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Rungruangrat, 1973), 18.

products, resources, and tools of trades and industries. After that, the Exhibition Committee classified everything into fifty-five sections, covering a diverse range of subjects: “No. 8. Implements used in the arts of embroidering, sewing, weaving and braiding. No. 9. Jewelry, and utensils, gold, silver, pinchbeck, inlaid, plated, and decorated with diamonds and precious stones. No. 10. Perfumery large and varied assortments. No. 11. Specimens of woods.”³⁹

As for the planning and construction of the National Exhibition, the Exhibition Committee decided to use the Sanam Luang, a trapezoidal-shaped, multi-purpose grounds immediately north of the Grand Palace. A stone’s throw away from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the construction of the National Exhibition at Sanam Luang would juxtapose nicely with the historic grandeur of the restored temple. As a temple to economy and commerce, the National Exhibition was meant to be spectacular and vibrant. Joachim Grassi, an Italian builder-contractor, provided the designs for the exhibition pavilions.⁴⁰ Grassi placed rows of exhibit rooms along the four edges of the Sanam Luang, forming a sort of cloister around the enclosed, trapezoidal-shaped exhibition grounds (Figure 3.21). At the center of the cloister was the main theatrical hall, a round-shaped building lit by gas lights exclusively made for the event (Figure 3.22). On the four cardinal directions of this hall were more exhibit rooms, altogether forming a cruciform-planned structure that reached from one end of Sanam Luang to another, leaving the four corners of the cloister as open courtyards. Artificial ponds and fountains were added to the courtyards, not only to create the pleasant atmosphere, but also to provide water supply for the steam engines.⁴¹ Mary Louise Cort, an American visitor to the 1882 Exhibition, commented on its architecture: “The buildings, of course, were but temporary, made of wood and bamboo, but they were well planned, light and airy, and being painted and ornamented in the highest style of Siamese art, they presented a fine appearance.”⁴²

³⁹ “Departments,” in Samuel J. Smith, *Bangkok Centennial Held at Bangkok, Siam, 1882*, 31.

⁴⁰ National Archives of Thailand, R5 NK17/163.

⁴¹ “Centennial Exhibition. Quiet Days at the Exhibition,” in Smith, *Bangkok Centennial Held at Bangkok, Siam, 1882*, 45.

⁴² Mary Louise Cort, “Siam’s Centennial Exposition,” in *Siam: or, the Heart of Farther India* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1886), 232.

In retrospect, the First Siamese National Exhibition represented the Siamese elites' hopeful vision of *siwilai*, modern Siam. As the rooms of exhibits were arranged and classified in terms of industry, the message was clear that national economy and commerce was the rationale guiding the new direction of progress. Goods and produce from each province were compiled, classified, and repackaged as products of Siam. In order to strengthen the image of one progressive nation, the Siamese elites juxtaposed things new and old, indigenous and the foreign. Room No. 9, for example, displayed the ancient crown jewels of the Chakri dynasty, while Room No. 13 nearby showcased the latest "telephonic and telegraphic implements and machinery." In one room, the kingdom's wealth and history was featured; in another, its technological progress. In other rooms, the old and the new were compared and contrasted for didactic purposes: "Room No. 54. Contains specimens of the modern style of dress in vogue in Siam now. The style is mainly modern, European and past old Siam. The pahnung (waistcloth) is old Siam. All the rest is European. The style is quite becoming to the Siamese and they appear quite natural in it."⁴³ The First Siamese National Exhibition thus became a hybrid space, which juxtaposed both indigenous and foreign elements in an uneasy balance. Unlike Siam's participation in international exhibitions, the 1882 National Exhibition was meant purely for domestic consumption, its hybrid architecture enhanced the Siamese aristocrats' vision of modern Siam as a kingdom rooted in its past, yet open for the advance of European civilization.

The notion of hybridity in architecture was even more pronounced in the third and the final element of the Centennial projects: the Chakri Throne Hall (Figures 3.23 – 3.24). As early as 1874 the king ordered John Clunis, the Government Architect, to design for him a new set of state rooms, an audience hall, a banqueting hall, a smoking room, among others.⁴⁴ Occupying the wide lawn where the royal family used to play croquet, the Chakri Throne Hall was essentially a new public façade that the king added to the three European-style, one-storey halls that were no longer adequate for the king's modern public image. In 1875 Clunis presented the king with a plan for a seemingly

⁴³ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁴ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 88.

simple three-storey building of Italian Renaissance design.⁴⁵ The strictly classical plan consisted of a central tower that acted as a foyer to the main audience hall directly behind it, with two symmetrical wings of reception halls and state rooms that ended with side towers, not unlike the Government House at Singapore.

What made Chakri Throne Hall quite unique, however, was the design of the roof of the three main towers. In the original design, like the Singapore Government House, the towers were to be topped with steep Mansard roofs. Construction of the building began in May 1876.⁴⁶ By the time construction reached the upper floors in March 1878, however, suddenly Chuang Bunnag, the ex-Regent, decided to voice his concern to the king that the Mansard roofs would make this important building totally European in style, which might not fit well with other major throne halls of the Grand Palace. Following the ex-Regent's advice, Rama V stopped the construction of the Mansard roofs, even though the iron structures for them had already been shipped from Singapore.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the king ordered That Hongsakul, the royal master builder, to design the traditional Siamese-style *prasat* spires for the building instead. That Hongsakul did his best to adjust the proportion of the wooden-structured spires to fit with the Clunian-designed Italianate bases (Figures 3.25 – 3.26). The result was visually striking, a startling hybrid of two very different architectural styles in one single building.⁴⁸ Indeed, architectural hybrids were fairly common with European architects working in late-nineteenth century Asia. An example was the 1888 design competition of the Imperial Diet building, the Japanese national parliament, in Tokyo. Hermann Ende, a German architect working in Meiji Japan, submitted a design of a German Baroque building that was topped with traditional Japanese wooden roofs.⁴⁹ Another example was Henri Maclaine Pont's design for the Bandoeng Technische Hoogeschool in Bandoeng, Dutch

⁴⁵ *Nangsu court khao ratchakan [The Court Gazette] Vol. 1* (Bangkok: Rongphim Thai, 1923), 415.

⁴⁶ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁸ Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, 81.

⁴⁹ Dallas Finn, *Meiji Revisited: The Sites of Victorian Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1995), 98 – 99.

Java, in which elaborate Javanese roof structure was applied to the modern body of the building.⁵⁰

In the case of the Chakri Throne Hall, however, hybridity went beyond the matter of roofs. Clunis' three-storey façade was in fact quite a sham, as the traditional Siamese belief in vertical hierarchy of space was still going strong. Essentially, the Chakri Throne Hall was one-storey building raised atop a rusticated base; grand exterior staircases led distinguished guests up from the front lawn to the first-floor foyer, not unlike the spatial organization in typical Siamese house (Figures 3.27 – 3.28). While the ground floor rooms were used by the royal bodyguards, pages and servants, the second floor rooms were practically unused. Only the second-floor room in the central tower was used as a sort of columbarium where ashes and relics of the previous Chakri monarchs were kept. The rest of the whole floor was unused, due to the traditional belief that the king's head should not be beneath the level of anybody's feet.⁵¹

Hybridity also appeared in the interior design of the Chakri Throne Hall as well. While Clunis gave the king the best neo-classical interior possible, complete with marble columns, Baccarat chandeliers, oil portraits of kings and queens, and £43,144-worth English furniture, the epicenter of the building—the throne—was still the traditional Siamese-style royal seat that was set under the *sawettachat*, the nine-tiered Umbrella of State.⁵² Other Siamese symbolic elements were also deployed by Prince Praditworakan (1828 – 1885), another royal master builder, who obviously had to collaborate with Clunis in finishing up the interior design of the great audience hall (Figure 3.29). Right behind the throne, for instance, Prince Praditworakan designed a sort of flattened canopy, the top of which was surmounted by gilded sculptures of Siamese-style *thevada*—angels—holding up the *Phra Maha Phichai Mongkut*, the Victorious Crown of State. In addition, atop the side doorways where the king would enter the audience hall, Prince Praditworakan deftly put the sculpture of *Airawan* celestial elephants, their heads holding

⁵⁰ Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 43.

⁵¹ MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (Bangkok: River Books, 1996), 90.

⁵² National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL3/1. Letter from King Rama V to MC Prisdang Jumsai, Siamese ambassador to the Court of St. James, dated July 31, 1881.

up the *Phra Kiao*, the princely crown that was Rama V's personal insignia. The whole ensemble was placed between the scrolls of the doorway pediment, the curvy lines of the celestial elephants complimented nicely with the curves of Clunis' scrolls. Other rooms of the Chakri Throne Hall, especially the banqueting hall and the reception rooms, also featured hybrid interior design as well (Figures 3.30 – 3.31).

Henry Norman, an English journalist who traveled to Bangkok in 1893, neatly summed up the architectural and political impact of the Chakri Throne Hall:

The Royal Palace itself has been cleverly contrived by an English architect in collaboration with Siamese artificers to combine Oriental picturesqueness and pinnacles with European comfort and solidity. ... The arrangement of the Palace and its buildings is an embodiment in brick of the policy of King Chulalongkorn's reign—which has been to draw the power, and consequently the wealth, from the hands of the once great nobles and old family dignitaries, and to concentrate it in himself alone; to delegate it to members of his own intimate family circle, and to them only, at his own sovereign will and changing pleasure. By this means he has attained the very quintessence of centralisation, and realised in the completest sense a State in which the King is *de facto* as well as *de jure* the sole source and repository of power.⁵³

In terms of architectural practice, the construction of the Chakri Throne Hall was also a collaboration. Rama V ordered his younger brother Prince Bhanurangsi to supervise the project, aided by Chaophraya Bhanuwongse (Thuam Bunnag), the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As both an architect and a contractor, Clunis could not undertake the whole project by himself, and had to subcontract various parts of the construction to Siamese and Chinese contractors. The project was thus wrought with misunderstandings between the Siamese and the Europeans, which led to some serious delays (Figure 3.32).⁵⁴

Nonetheless, by 1882, the Chakri Throne Hall was complete, a centerpiece of the Centennial projects, which altogether sent strong architectural messages about the new, civilized Siam. After so many years of planning and construction, finally the various

⁵³ Norman, Henry, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1895), 412 – 413.

⁵⁴ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 96.

architectural projects would be celebrated together during the week-long event, scheduled for April 1882.⁵⁵

On April 17, 1882, the Bangkok Centennial ceremonies began with the re-consecration of the newly restored Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Two days of great festivities followed, and on April 19, 1882, the king paid respect to the statues of the preceding sovereigns of Chakri dynasty. On April 21, after a grand state procession around the city, Rama V laid foundation stones for two other building projects: the new Courts of Justice, and a monument to king Rama I, the founder of Bangkok and the Chakri dynasty. Subsequently, on April 26, 1882, the king declared open the first Siamese National Exhibition.⁵⁶ Finally, after the closing ceremony of the Exhibition, on September 6, 1882, Rama V presided over the inauguration ceremony of the new Chakri Throne Hall.⁵⁷

The year 1882 was indeed quite a milestone in Rama V's reign. Within fifteen years of rule, six of which were under the aegis of the Regent, the king managed to form and lead a group of Siamese aristocrats inculcated with progressive minds. Fully aware of global changes and their effects on Siam, the 29-year-old king and the Siamese elites came up with various strategies to cope with change while maintaining their status quo within the Siamese society. A mix of traditions and modernity, Siamese-style architecture and neo-classical designs, architecture was conceived of as an effective tool to send out messages to local and global audiences. The ability to move deftly between the hybrid worlds was crucial to the modern Siamese aristocracy's public image, a logical response to the Siamese elite's dual needs: to maintain their social dominance within the kingdom, and to create an image of "civilized" Siam for global audience.

It should be noted, of course, that this was an early phase of social and cultural transformation in Siam. Changes initiated by Rama V and the Young Siam clique were still piecemeal and seemingly on the trail-and-error manner. Chuang Bunnag, the ex-Regent, passed away in January 1883, but Rama V and the progressive Siamese

⁵⁵ National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL2/1. The Bangkok Centennial Celebration Program.

⁵⁶ Samuel J. Smith, *Bangkok Centennial Held at Bangkok, Siam, 1882*.

⁵⁷ National Library of Thailand, Cho. R5 93/7. The Inauguration of Chakri Throne Hall Program.

aristocrats still had to wait their time for the full effects of the Chakri Reformation to appear. In 1880, David B. Sickels, the United States Consul at Bangkok reported to Washington D.C.:

The Siamese are vast projectors and their ideas in the beginning are large, but their plans taper very much and very abruptly as the charm of novelty passes away and demands on the purse increase. ... The party of progress, "Young Siam," appreciate the value of the old adage, "The more haste the less speed," and their policy is to move slowly and gradually, temporizing rather than raising bitter issues, abiding their time, until its efflux shall have removed the more acrid and influential members of the old conservative party and left the field clear for the introduction of more modern and more enlightened ideas. The King is young; the contemporaries and counselors of his father are old. He has all the advantage on his side and can afford to wait.⁵⁸

3.2 The European Builders and the Royal Master Builders

After examining *what* were built by the Siamese elites during the early years of Rama V's reign, let us now look at *how* these architecture and urban space of *siwilai* were made. The central argument here is that the hybrid nature of the Chakri Reformation's building projects did not end at only stylistic or formal level. As change was occurring in Siamese architecture, the Siamese architectural practice itself underwent significant changes.

For their part, the Siamese royal master builders still maintained some control over some major architectural projects, especially traditional Siamese-style buildings like temples, cremation structures, or temporary ceremonial pavilions. However, as the Siamese aristocrats' taste grew increasingly Europeanized, the royal master builders had learned to build in the European styles, but with traditional techniques of construction and building materials. As already discussed in Chapter 2, during the early days of Rama V's reign, the royal master builders still enjoyed the fairly high social status, the monopoly over major governmental projects, and the privileges that came with the royal master builders' positions in the traditional bureaucracy. By the 1870s, however, they began to lose the privileged position. As the Siamese-designed European-style buildings

⁵⁸ A Correspondence from David B. Sickels to Mr. Payson, dated March 18, 1880. "Siam," in Department of the Interior. Bureau of Education, *Progress of Western Education in China and Siam*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1880), 12.

were no longer good enough for the Siamese aristocrats' taste, European builders and architects began to offer their service as an alternative, providing the progressive patrons with the seemingly more authentic European design. Eventually, the demands for the royal master builders' service were decreased.

3.2.1 That Hongsakul and MC Prawich Jumsai

Of all Rama V's royal master builders, the most significant was That Hongsakul (1828 – 1898; Figure 3.33). A son of Ket Hongsakul, the most prominent master builder during the reign of king Rama III, That Hongsakul began his career as a royal page. At the same time, he also learnt the ropes of traditional building trade through apprenticeship with his father Ket. During the 1850s, That became his father's assistant in major projects that required the skills and expertise of Hongsakul master builders, especially the *phra meru*, ephemeral structure erected for royal cremations.⁵⁹ However, around 1857 That designed one of Bangkok's earliest European-style buildings, Itsaret Rachanuson Hall (Figure 3.34). Built within the walls of the Front Palace for Prince Chuthamani, Rama IV's younger brother, the two-storey building was novel in its rows of rectangular windows, gently-sloping lines of the gabled roof, and the neo-classical ornamental details.⁶⁰

After Rama V ascended to the throne, That Hongsakul was elevated to the rank of Phra Wisutyothamat. He continued building projects both in the traditional Siamese and Europeanized styles, such as Bamrungmuang Road shophouses (1871; Figure 3.35), Bang Pa-In Palace (1872), and Wat Thepsirin (1876; Figure 3.36). It was perhaps at Bang Pa-In Palace, Rama V's summer residence eighty miles north of Bangkok, that That

⁵⁹ "Pwat Phraya Ratchasongkhram [Biography of Phraya Ratchasongkhram]," RKNBS 15, 95 – 97.

⁶⁰ Frank Vincent, an American visitor to Bangkok, described the building and its interior: "Ascending a very narrow marble staircase, we were met at its top by the King himself, who cordially shook hands with us all, each being introduced in turn by Mr. Chandler. We were ushered into a small parlour, having in the center a table, around which we seated ourselves in comfortable arm-chairs, the King with us. The walls of the room were hung with Chinese pictures, a chandelier for candles depended from the ceiling, a Brussels carpet lay upon the floor, a small book-rack stood in one corner, a Japanese lacquered *étui* in another, two guns with cloth covers in another, and two umbrellas in a stand at one side and a large gilt spittoon by the table completed the furniture of the room." Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and Scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, Publishers, 1874), 148 – 149.

Hongsakul first worked in collaboration with a European builder, Joachim Grassi. During the early 1880s, That took a leading role in the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (1879 – 1882). He also collaborated with Joachim Grassi again in the National Exhibition project (1882).⁶¹

After the Centennial projects, however, That's career gradually came to its close. Although he was granted with the top royal master builder title of Phraya Ratchasongkhram in 1885, since then he had not receive any substantial building commission from the government, except for the *phra meru*, temporary crematoria erected for royal cremations. That was the master builder for the last two *phra merus*, one for the funeral of Prince Sirirat Kakutthaphan (1888), the other for Princess Naphachon Chamratsi (1889), the last examples of traditional-style large *phra merus*, the architectural tradition that could be traced all the way back to sixteenth-century Ayutthaya (Figures 3.37 – 3.38). On April 16, 1898, That Hongsakul died of lung cancer at the ripe old age of seventy-six.⁶²

The life and career of Mom Chao Prawich Jumsai (1847 – 1925), another royal master builder who had served Rama V, also shared a fairly similar fate. His father was Prince Jumsai, a very prominent royal master builder of the 1830s, whose expertise—in stonework and the *chang sip mu* [the Ten Crafts]: painting, sculpture, modeling, moulding, gilding, mother-of-pearl inlay, and other traditional decorative arts—was largely inherited by Prawich (Figure 3.39). During the late 1850s Prawich grew up watching Prince Jumsai worked on the design and construction of Phra Aphinaowaniwet, Rama IV's new suite of apartments that were built in Europeanized style; after Prince Jumsai died in 1868, Prawich became a member of young Rama V's group of progressive elites. In 1871 he traveled to British Burma and India as a member of Rama V's entourage.⁶³ For twenty years Prawich was responsible for so many of the king's design projects, especially interior decoration of palaces and temples, royal insignias, medals and coins, jewelry, monuments, and small decorative structures. Unlike the Hongsakul

⁶¹ “Pwat Phraya Ratchasongkhram [Biography of Phraya Ratchasongkhram],” RKNBS 15, 95 – 97.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Piemmettawat, *King Chulalongkorn's Journey to India 1872*, 59.

royal master builders, Prawich seemed fully open and exposed to the styles and trends of European decorative art and architecture. His most important works included the official insignia of the Kingdom of Siam (Figure 3.40), interior designs for the Borommaratchasathit Maholarn Hall (1871) and the ordination hall of Wat Ratchabophit (1872; Figure 3.41), scaled model of Angkor Wat (1882), and various monuments to deceased members of Rama V's family in the Royal Cemetery at Wat Ratchabophit. With great stylistic versatility, Prawich's designs ran the whole gamut from neo-classical and neo-gothic to Khmer-inspired styles.

By the early 1890s, as the king began to employ real Italian architects and designers for his projects, Prawich lost the king's favor; some sources said that he was an incurable opium addict, the practice of which was abhorred by Rama V. For a while Prawich made a living producing a theatrical show called The Indian Magical Society, and in 1897 returned to government employ, not as a royal designer, but as a drawing instructor for Teachers' College. He died in 1925 at the age of seventy-eight.⁶⁴

3.2.2 Joachim Grassi and Stefano Cardu

Let us now examine the lives and careers of European counterparts to That Hongsakul and Prawich Jumsai, the first generation of foreign builders and architects who worked for the Siamese elites during the early days of the Chakri Reformation. Apart from John Clunis, the Scottish architect who took the position of Government Architect in 1871, other foreign builders working in Bangkok at the time included three Italians, a German, and a Japanese. The most prominent, of course, were Joachim Grassi and Stefano Cardu.

Born near Trieste in 1837, Joachim Grassi (Figure 3.42) came to Bangkok around 1870, after a brief stint in Shanghai. An Austrian subject, Grassi began his Bangkok career working as a timber merchant for a French establishment.⁶⁵ In 1874 he entered construction business by establishing his own company, Grassi Brothers & Co. The

⁶⁴ Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong, *Prawat Sewok Ek Mom Chao Prawich [Biography of MC Prawich]* (Bangkok: n.a., 1929), 1 – 11.

⁶⁵ "Death of Mr. Grassi," *The Bangkok Times*, September 26, 1904.

company built its early reputation on residential works of various European styles, from neo-classical to neo-Gothic, both of which were represented in Grassi's first major work, Bang Pa-In Palace (1872 – 1877; Figure 3.43). Grassi spent most of the 1870s building palaces and residences for the Siamese princes and noblemen, most notably the neo-classical Burapha Palace (1876 – 1881), Bang Pa-In Palace (1878), and Wat Niwet Thammaprawat (1879). During the 1880s, Grassi's business expanded steadily, with five architects, two engineers, two draughtsmen, and twelve native clerks working at Grassi Brothers & Co. in 1882.⁶⁶ The firm also subcontracted its building projects to a number of Siamese and Chinese contractors, probably indirectly disseminated knowledge of Western architectural styles and building techniques among Siamese builders.⁶⁷

The 1880s marked a high point in Grassi's career in Siam, his company carried out important building projects such as the Barracks (1881 – 1884; Figure 3.44), the Crown Prince's Palace (1881 – 1884; Figure 3.45), the Courts of Justice (1882 – 1885; Figures 3.46 – 3.47), the Custom House (1884 – 1887; Figure 3.48), Assumption College (1887 – 1889), Hongkong and Shanghai Bank (1889 – 1890), the Bangkok Gaol (1889 – 1891), and Wat Atsadanganimit on Sichang Island (1892).⁶⁸ By 1893 Grassi's company became one of the largest foreign businesses in the city, the staff of twenty-three consisted of Italian, French, German, Danish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Siamese subjects.⁶⁹ Grassi himself was quite hybridized, since he gave up his Austrian nationality for a French one in 1883,⁷⁰ yet he was knighted by the King of Italy in 1889.⁷¹

Hybridity was also a key element in many of Grassi's major works. In 1879 he designed Bang Pa-In Palace, the king's summer residence on the Chao Phraya river, fifty miles north of Bangkok. A large plot of land on the river was turned into pleasure gardens, featuring lakes, canals and fountains, a complete change from the densely

⁶⁶ "Merchants, Professions & c.," in *The Directory for Bangkok Siam 1883* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Office, 1883), 313.

⁶⁷ Grassi spent a lot of his life in Siam billing the Siamese elite for the works he claimed he had executed. See, for example: National Archives of Thailand, R5 N99/1; R5 T5.1/27; R5 T12.4/7.

⁶⁸ Sran Tongpan, "Grassi and Western Architecture in Siam" *Muang Boran* 24:2 (April – June 1998): 9 – 21.

⁶⁹ "Merchants, Professions & c.," 313.

⁷⁰ National Archives of Thailand, KT(L) 9, 38/120. Letter from the French consul to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁷¹ "Locals," *The Bangkok Times*, December 14, 1889.

populated, walled mansions and residences within the Grand Palace at Bangkok. Somewhat free from traditional court restraints, the buildings Grassi designed for Bang Pa-In ranged in style, from neo-classical, Second-Empire French, Swiss *châlet*, to neo-Gothic. The centerpiece of the palace compound was Aisawan Thipphaya-at Pavilion, an open pavilion built at the center of a large lake (Figures 3.49 – 3.50). That Ratchasongkhram, the royal master builder, designed the traditional Siamese-style wooden structure, complete with layers of steep gable roofs and multi-tiered spire, while Grassi designed the pavilion's neo-classical arched base, supported by rows of rotund, classicized columns. Grassi also designed Wat Niwet Thammaprawat, the palatine monastery for Bang Pa-In Palace (Figure 3.51). A neo-Gothic fantasy, the temple was a complete break with tradition, a Buddhist temple with no Siamese-style building in sight. The most important building, the ordination hall, was shaped like a Christian chapel with a belfry. Inside, the wooden neo-Gothic altar contained images of the Buddha and the Buddhist saints; the arched window over the main gate was filled with a large stained-glass image of Rama V. The Gothicized designs of stucco wall decoration, rendered in pink, white, and gold, was the work of MC Prawich Jumsai, the royal master builder (Figure 3.52).⁷²

Apart from building the various European-style fantasies, Grassi also learnt to design and construct Siamese-style structures. An example was a monument to the late Queen Sunantha that Rama V erected at Saranrom Gardens in 1880 (Figure 3.53). Grassi designed and constructed a traditional Siamese-style pagoda with five spires, entirely made in marble. In 1882, he also designed a large Siamese-style *busabok*, an open aedicule with multi-tiered spire, to be put on top of the neo-classical edifice of the Courts of Justice.⁷³ Grassi had a Venetian foundry make the cast-iron *busabok* and shipped to Bangkok (Figure 3.54). At a distance, it looked as Siamese as anything the royal master builders did; only at close quarters that certain non-Siamese details were seen.

Another great example of Grassi's work was the ordination hall at Wat Atsadanganimit (Figure 3.55). In 1891 Rama V built another summer palace on Sichang

⁷² Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong, *Prawat Sewok Ek Mom Chao Prawich [Biography of MC Prawich]*, 11.

⁷³ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 12.

Island, eighty miles south of Bangkok. The king ordered Grassi to design for him a traditional Siamese-style, bell-shaped pagoda that would also be used as an ordination hall for Wat Atsadanganimit, the palatine monastery, to be built on top of a hill overlooking the entire palace compound.⁷⁴ Like the Wat Niwet Thammaprawat project at Bang Pa-In, this marked a startling break with tradition, since traditionally pagodas were built as solid structure symbolizing the great mound of earth that marked the spot where Buddha was cremated. Traditionally there would be no space at all within a pagoda, except perhaps for a dark, narrow niche containing sacred relics. Grassi came up with a hybrid design of a round neo-classical base that was topped with a hollow Siamese-style pagoda of smaller circumference. The round-shaped room directly beneath the pagoda was the main ordination hall, surrounded by a ring of aisle, brightly lit by neo-Gothic arched windows. With sophisticated structural techniques, the hollow pagoda was also pierced with many round windows letting in plenty of light and air, perhaps inspired by lunette windows of Renaissance-style domes.⁷⁵

After 1890, Grassi was awarded with fewer building projects from the Siamese government, most likely a direct effect from the establishment of the Public Works Department in 1889. Nonetheless, by then Grassi was the wealthiest foreign resident in Siam,⁷⁶ and from 1890 he turned his business interest to investing in large-scale infrastructural projects, including a scheme for providing Bangkok with potable water (1890), a railway line from Bangkok to Battambang (1892), and a mine at Sanamchaiyakheth (1893).⁷⁷ The most important undertaking was the Rangsit irrigation project, which Grassi initiated with a Siamese prince and two wealthy Siamese noblemen of Chinese origin. Grassi's idea led to the establishment of Siam Lands, Canal and Irrigation Company in 1889, and the construction of the irrigation canals in the early

⁷⁴ National Archives of Thailand, R5 W31/1. Letter from Prince Bhanurangsi to King Rama V, dated January 30, 1892.

⁷⁵ Pirasri Povatong, "Wat Atsadanganimit," in *Sathapattayakam nai Samai Phra Putthachao Luang [Architecture from the Reign of King Rama V]* (Bangkok: Advanced Info Service Company Limited, 2010).

⁷⁶ "Death of Mr. Grassi," *The Bangkok Times*, September 26, 1904.

⁷⁷ See, for example, National Archives of Thailand, KT 1/71; R5 Kh 21/1; R5 T 12.4/7.

1890s. The project turned vast jungle lands north of Bangkok into rice fields, and made Grassi one of the largest foreign landowners in the kingdom.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, Grassi's final years in Siam were marked with troubles. His brothers, Antonio and Giacomo, died respectively in 1888 and 1890.⁷⁹ One of Grassi's Bangkok landmarks, the clock tower at the Courts of Justice, became structurally unsafe and subsequently demolished in 1892.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the prolific number of works Grassi did in the 1880s became his financial problems when he allegedly did not receive proper payment from several of his Siamese clients.⁸¹

With these mounting problems, the Franco-Siamese crisis of 1893 was probably the straw that broke the camel's back for Grassi's career in Siam. His French nationality became problematic, and finally Grassi had to leave his businesses in Siam and returned to Italy in July, 1893.⁸² He died at Trieste in 1906, at the age of 60.⁸³

As for Stefano Cardu, the story was slightly different. Born in Italy in 1849, Cardu came to Siam around 1879 to work as a draughtsman for the Siamese government.⁸⁴ In 1881 he left the government and established his own architectural practice, S. Cardu & Co., which remained in business until 1900. Like Grassi, Cardu began his career building residences for the Siamese elite, including the palace for Prince Chaturonratsami (1879; Figure 3.56).⁸⁵ Unlike Grassi's, however, Cardu's business did not prosper as much, though he was able to maintain his office till his departure from Siam in 1900. At its most successful point, S. Cardu & Co. employed two architects, an

⁷⁸ Sunthari Asawai, *Prawat Khlong Rangsit [History of Rangsit Canal]* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1987).

⁷⁹ Tongpan, "Grassi and Western Architecture in Siam," 11.

⁸⁰ King Chulalongkorn, *Prachum phraratchahatthalekha Phrabatsomdet phrachunlachomklao chaoyuhua thi song borihan ratchakan phaendin phak thi 3 ton thi 2 [Compilation of Rama V's Letters on His Administration of State Matters, Volume 3 Part 2]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Samnak Thamniap Nayokratthamontri, 1971), 325.

⁸¹ See, for example, National Archives of Thailand, R5 N 99/1; R5 N 43.1/24; R5 Kh 21/1; R5 T 5.1/27; R5 T12.4/7.

⁸² Tongpan, "Grassi and Western Architecture in Siam," 11.

⁸³ "Death of Mr. Grassi," *The Bangkok Times*, September 26, 1904.

⁸⁴ "Alphabetical List of Foreigners in Siamese Employ," *The Directory for Bangkok Siam 1879*, (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Office, 1879), 313.

⁸⁵ National Archives of Thailand, R5 RL-NK 6/471; R5 RL-NK 12/317. Letters from Prince Chaturonratsami to King Rama V.

engineer, three draughtsmen, and five native clerks.⁸⁶ Like Grassi, Cardu had to work with Siamese builders and subcontractors. In 1887, for example, he worked with a Siamese subcontractor whom he hired to lay down marble floor tiles at Saranrom Palace. Conflict arose when the subcontractor tried to get a payment from Cardu, who reportedly kicked the Siamese in anger.⁸⁷ In addition, in 1888 he worked with That Hongsakul, the royal master builder, in constructing various European-style kiosks for a royal cremation.⁸⁸

In any case, Cardu's career in Siam was marked with a few large building projects, including blocks of Privy Purse shophouses in the city (1889), and the Royal Military College (1890 – 1892; Figure 3.57).⁸⁹ Apart from professional practice, Cardu also had an interest in Siamese antiquities. After his return to Italy to spend the rest of his life in Sardinia, in 1913 Cardu donated his collection of Siamese antiques and curios to the city of Cagliari, which later became the nucleus for the city's Museo d'Arte Siamese. Cardu died in Cagliari in 1933, at the age of eighty-four.⁹⁰

Of uncertain educational backgrounds, both Cardu and Grassi were slightly more of a contractor than architect, in the modern sense of the terms. They came to Siam at their own volition, searching for opportunities in the Far East. Probably educated through apprentice system, these Italian builders were equipped with a fairly limited design repertoire of neo-classical and neo-Gothic styles. Charles Buls, a Belgian visitor to Bangkok in 1900, gave some harsh comments on the works of these early builder-contractors: "All these building, constructed by German and Italian companies, are in poor European style, heavy and uniform. They show their bricks and their cement. The

⁸⁶ "Merchants, Professions & c.," 313.

⁸⁷ National Archives of Thailand, KT(L) 42/2.

⁸⁸ "The Coming Royal Cremation," *The Bangkok Times*, February 15, 1888.

⁸⁹ "Locals," *The Bangkok Times*, June 1, 1889.

⁹⁰ Sran Tongpan, "Stefano Cardu: Social Life and Career of the First-Generation European Builder," *Damrongwichakan* 3:5 (January – June 2004): 245.

joints are traced into the cement and then badly imitate large stones under their yellow whitewash.”⁹¹

As both Cardu and Grassi had their own businesses, they had to work their way through the traditional patronage system of the Siamese elite in order to get jobs. As there were limited number of architectural projects that required the service of European builders, competition among them were quite fierce. The Siamese adopted the design competition and bidding system, in order to get the most amount of work while paying the least. New terms were transliterated into Siamese vocabulary: *tendoe* (tender), *kompitichan* (competition), *kontrak* (contract), and *estimet* (estimate.) In some projects, the builder-contractors had to submit both a design and an estimate; in others the Siamese project owner might get someone to do a design, and called for tenders from all builder-contractors. Often, this process led to severe cost-cutting, back-room dealing, graft cases, and shoddy work.⁹²

An example here was the construction of a riverside residence for Prince Chaturonratsami, Rama V’s younger brother. In 1879 the prince asked Grassi to design the residence; within a month Grassi presented the prince with plans, and an estimate of 128,000 baht, an astronomical sum. Prince Chaturonratsami first negotiated by asking to buy just the plans from Grassi, with the intention of overseeing the construction work by himself. Grassi promptly declined the offer, so the prince gave Grassi’s plans to John Clunis, the Government Architect, who made some revisions to the design and submitted a considerably lower estimate. After Grassi learnt of this, he went directly to Rama V and asked for justice and some compensation. In the end, by some inexplicable reasons, it was Stefano Cardu who built the residence for Prince Chaturonratsami.⁹³ Another example of the competitive relationship among foreign builders was the Courts of Justice project. In 1881 Rama V ordered a construction of a huge edifice, an attempt to centralize the judiciary system. The minister first asked Grassi to make the design, then

⁹¹ Charles Buls, *Siamese Sketches* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), 12. The original French version of Buls’ travelogue was published in 1901. See Charles Buls, *Croquis Siamoise* (Bruxelles: Editeur Georges Balat, 1901.)

⁹² Pirasri Povatong, “Italian Builders and the Transformation of Bangkok, 1868 – 1889,” in *G. E. Gerini and the Mosaic of Genius*, ed. Luciano Gerini et al (Bangkok: GISSAD, 2005), 185 – 191.

⁹³ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 154 – 155.

he asked Grassi himself and two other major builders, Cardu, and Clunis, to submit bids for the commission. As it turned out, Cardu submitted the lowest bid of 193,456 baht, while Grassi's and Clunis's bids were 208,501 baht and 298,751 baht respectively. Grassi promptly offered a new estimate of 160,000 baht, so Cardu made a counter-offer of 152,000 baht. Eventually, Grassi got the commission, perhaps due to personal and commercial ties with the supervisor of the project.⁹⁴

In retrospect, the first two decades of Rama V's reign was a transitional period, both in terms of architecture and the architectural profession. As the Siamese aristocrats' taste grew increasingly Europeanized, both the royal master builders and the Europeans tried their best to serve their patrons' needs. On one hand, the Siamese royal master builders still maintained some control over certain major architectural projects, especially traditional Siamese-style buildings like temples or cremation structures, but the Italian builders had also tried their hands at designing Siamese-style buildings as well. On the other hand, some of the royal master builders learnt how to design and built in the European styles, as we have seen in the works of MC Pravich Jumsai. Architecture of the Chakri Reformation was thus not simply an imposition of European forms onto the Siamese soil, but a complex collaborative project between the Siamese aristocrats, their royal master builders, and the European architects.

As for the transformation of the building profession, this was also a transitional period when Siamese patrons and royal master builders had to learn the ways European builders worked. Large firms like Grassi's and Cardu's employed an increasing number of Europeans architects and engineers, some of whom would be crucial to the establishment of the Public Works Department in the late 1880s. In retrospect, the building profession was still unchanged in the sense that there was no central governmental body to control the design and construction of major building projects. A brief attempt was made in the creation of the Government Architect position for John Clunis, but that obviously did not work out. Competitions among builder-contractors and cost-cutting measures led to building projects of inferior quality, and the subjugation of European builders to the Siamese patronage system made the whole process graft-prone

⁹⁴ Ibid., 39 – 40.

and unaccountable. This, in conjunction with the Siamese aristocrats' increasingly high expectation of *siwilai* building to be as close to the European originals as possible, led to the establishment of the Public Works Department, in 1889.

3.3 The Establishment of the Public Works Department

During the late 1880s, Rama V initiated a series of reforms that collectively amounted to a thorough modernization of Siam's bureaucracy. In 1886 slavery and corvée system was abolished and replaced by per capita taxation and conscription system. In September 1886, the king began the bureaucratic attempt to ameliorate and modernize the physical structures of Bangkok through the establishment of the Local Committee. After Pince Phutharet, the king's younger brother who was in charge of *Krom Phra Nakhonban*, the Department of the Capital, became ill, Rama V set up the Local Committee to oversee municipal matters such as police, fire brigade, garbage, roads, bridges, and buildings.⁹⁵ Led by Prince Nares, the king's younger half-brother, the Local Committee toyed with different ideas to regulate urban growth, and to improve the quality of buildings in Bangkok. By 1887 Rama V began to think of setting up a Public Works Department to deal with these architectural and engineering matters, and to centralize design and construction activities, at least for the governmental projects.⁹⁶ In the meantime, the Local Committee's work was still limited in scope, and appeared uncoordinated. Physical changes were made in a piecemeal manner, as *The Bangkok Times* editorial observed on February 29, 1888:

We regret that a few Government officials seem to think that no radical reform is necessary, but that all we need to is to make spasmodic efforts in the way of improvements here and there in the city, trusting to some device to supply the funds that are needed for such improvements. ... [It] is our conviction that if the present Municipal System is to last, Bangkok thirty years hence will be hardly distinguishable from what it is now.⁹⁷

A few months later, *the Bangkok Times* pushed the matter further:

⁹⁵ RKBBS, 3:27, 218.

⁹⁶ King Chulalongkorn, *Prachum phraratchahatthalekha Phrabatsomdet phrachunlachomklao chaoyuhua thi song borihan ratchakan phaendin phak thi 3 ton thi 1 [Compilation of Rama V's Letters on His Administration of State Matters, Volume 3 Part 1]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Samnak Thamniap Nayokratthamontri, 1971), 113.

⁹⁷ "Possible Improvements in Bangkok," *The Bangkok Times*, February 29, 1888.

When will the Siamese, in their own interest, establish a Public Works Department? If they at present had such an office they might economize thousands every year, to say nothing of the tens of thousands which would have been saved in the past. If proof of this be required we simply ask anyone to pay a visit to one or two of our latest public buildings and express, if they can, a favorable opinion on the way in which these have been run up.⁹⁸

Almost as a response to the Bangkok Times comments, in October of the same year, the king sent a group of young Siamese officials on an inspection tour of the British colonies of Singapore, Penang, and Rangoon, with particular focus on the public works. The key member of the group was Prince Naris (1864 – 1947), a younger half-brother of Rama V (Figure 3.58). At that time, the 24-year-old prince was the Comptroller-General of the Siamese army, but he had already shown his avid interest in fine arts, design and architecture since the 1882 renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. By 1888 Prince Naris was already on the Local Committee, and upon his return the king established the Public Works Department (PWD), with Prince Naris as its first director.⁹⁹

3.3.1 The Siamese Public Works Department

Modeled after the British colonial PWDs, the Siamese PWD first consisted of five Sections: Engineering, Architectural, Roads, Canals and Creeks, and Buildings. In the beginning, the PWD's focus was on the improvements of roads, bridges, and other engineering works. The Bangkok Times, of course, rejoiced: "We notice with very great pleasure that the Public Works Department is up and doing,—evidently making up for lost time with a vengeance. We never remember to have seen so many men at work on the roads as now, and it is quite a pleasure to see the smoke belch from the chimney of the steam roller."¹⁰⁰

As for the Architecture Section, in 1890 Prince Naris recruited Carl Sandreczki, a German architect who had been working in Bangkok since 1887, to be the PWD's first Chief Architect. Sandreczki first worked for a German contractor, Egon Mueller, but soon left the firm and since 1888 had been a partner at Stefano Cardu & Co. For the

⁹⁸ "Locals," *The Bangkok Times*, April 14, 1888.

⁹⁹ RKNBS 6:313, 339.

¹⁰⁰ "Locals," *The Bangkok Times*, May 10, 1890.

Engineering Section, first the position of the Chief Engineer was filled by E. F. W. Wilkinson, an Englishman, but in 1894 Prince Naris recruited Carlo Allegri (1862 – 1938; Figure 3.59) to take over the position. Born in the Algerian town of Costantino to a contractor’s family, Allegri studied civil engineering at a school near Zurich, Switzerland. At the age of twenty-nine, in 1889 he went out to the Far East.¹⁰¹ After a stint at a goldmining company in Singapore, in 1890 Allegri came to Bangkok to work as an assistant civil engineer at Grassi Brothers & Co. until he left the firm to join the PWD in 1894.¹⁰²

Accordingly, on one hand the first-generation European builders provided the newly-established PWD with its staff members, who had already been working for some years in Siam. On the other hand, it was the establishment of the PWD that brought an end to many of the careers of the first-generation European builders. John Clunis, the Government Architect, left the government employ in 1889 and died penniless in 1894. Joachim Grassi sold his business and turned to deal in real estate and railway concessions for a while until he left the Kingdom of Siam in 1893, while Stefano Cardu quit his business and left in 1899.¹⁰³

Since its establishment in 1889, the PWD steadily grew. In 1892 King Rama V pushed forward a major reform of the administrative system. The various ministries and departments that had functioned since the reign of Rama I had been totally reorganized into twelve ministries. A cabinet of twelve equal ministers was formed. The Public Works Department was elevated into a Ministry of Public Works.¹⁰⁴ Apart from the Administrative Office, the new Ministry consisted of five Departments: Public Works, Railways, Post and Telegraph, Goldsmiths, and the Ten Crafts.¹⁰⁵ After a grace period of three years, the new PWD was now ready to undertake all of the Siamese government’s building projects.

¹⁰¹ Paolo Piazzardi, *Italians at the Court of Siam* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 1996), 35 – 49.

¹⁰² “Merchants, Professions & c.,” 313.

¹⁰³ Povatong, *Chang farang nai Krung Sayam*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ RKNBS 9:25, 313.

¹⁰⁵ RKNBS 9:266, 313.

3.3.2 Bureaucratic Modernization and the Fate of the Hongsakuls

Perhaps inadvertently, Rama V's modernization of Siamese bureaucracy produced several adverse effects on the royal master builders and their traditional building practice. Firstly, the abolition of *corvée* system halted the flow of labor, who used to take turn learning the building crafts under the royal master builders. Left with only paid Chinese coolies unaccustomed to Siamese crafts, the royal master builders suddenly had no skilled labor under their employ.

Secondly, the 1892 re-organization of provincial government led to the decline of the traditional patronage system through which construction materials were procured gratis from all corners of the kingdom. The royal master builders lost their free and inexhaustible sources of building materials; almost everything had to be purchased through modernized procurement and budgetary systems.¹⁰⁶

To make matters worse for the royal master builders, their patrons' taste turned largely Westernized by the end of the 19th century. New governmental buildings, palaces, or houses were almost all built in the various Europeanized styles. The royal master builders were left only with temple renovation projects, garden pavilions, and a few ephemeral structures for traditional-style pageantry. Eventually, even the construction of *meru*, huge temporary cremation structures for deceased royals, was discontinued due to costs, so the royal master builders lost their final chance to practice their centuries-old crafts.

Finally, the older generation of royal master builders passed away while their sons and nephews left the design profession and worked for the navy, or the Ministry of Public Instruction. That Hongsakul, the royal master builder, passed away in 1898. He had three sons who inherited his crafts: Charoen Hongsakul (1857 – 1929), Kon Hongsakul (1863 – 1914), and Klun Hongsakul (1864 – 1916). Like his father, Charoen Hongsakul (Figure 3.60) began his career as a royal page while apprenticing with his father, rising gradually through the ranks and files of the traditional bureaucratic system. His specialty was traditional Siamese woodwork, especially those used in temples and cremation

¹⁰⁶ Lysa Hong, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 313.

structures. However, as by the 1890s there was not much opportunity to work on both, Charoen did not prosper much career-wise.¹⁰⁷

Kon Hongsakul, Charoen's younger brother, had a slightly better career path (Figure 3.61). He inherited his father's skills in naval architecture, and spent an early part of his career in the Royal Siamese Navy. He also helped his father That in various projects as well. Later he became one of Rama V's most trusted courtiers, and became a Privy Councillor. The king sometimes personally entrusted him with the planning and supervision of some important building projects like the Dusit Park (1900), Wimanmek Mansion (1900), and Wat Benchamabophit (1901). After That Hongsakul passed away, Kon Hongsakul was the most knowledgeable person in the ancient arts of Siamese-style building and construction.¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, when Rama V came up with the idea of having a grand cremation structure built in 1900, for the cremation ceremonies of many high-ranking members of the royal family, the task of designing and constructing the ephemeral wooden structure went to Charoen and Kon Hongsakul. After learning of the king's wish, the Hongsakul brothers told the king that they were unable to undertake the project. Unlike their forebears, they did not have much opportunity to practice traditional Siamese architecture. When the last of such structure was built for the 1889 cremation of Princess Naphachon Chamratsi, their father That Hongsakul was still in charge; the brothers humbly told the king that back then they had only assisting roles, and did not really fully master the sophisticated arts of Siamese architecture and carpentry. In addition, there were no skilled labor under their employ to undertake such a vast project anyway.¹⁰⁹ After a long fight, traditional Siamese art and science of architecture was lost, due to the well-intentioned Chakri Reformation, and the Siamese aristocrats' increasingly Europeanized taste.

¹⁰⁷ For a brief biography of the Hongsakuls, see, Joti Kalyanamitra, *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists & Architects* (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects, 1977).

¹⁰⁸ Prince Damrongrathanuphap, "Prawat Phraya Ratchasongkhram (Kon) [Biography of Phraya Ratchasongkhram (Kon)]" in *Prachum kap he rua*, (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophophiphatthanakon, 1917), 10 – 16.

¹⁰⁹ National Archives of Thailand, R5 S4/2.



Figure 3.1. Young King Rama V. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.2 Chuang Bunnag, the Regent. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.3 Munsathan Boromma-at Hall, viewed from northwest across from the front lawn. Chakraphatdiphiman Hall, the traditional Siamese-style royal apartments built since 1782, could be seen in the background. Source : NAT.

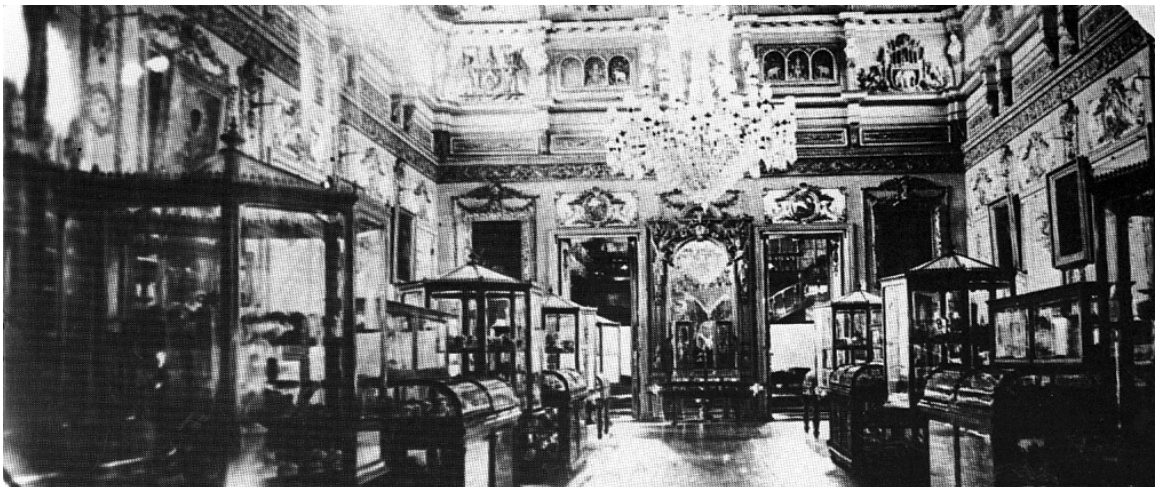


Figure 3.4 Sommottithewarat Uppabat Hall, interior. Some times later in Rama V's reign, the Hall was turned into the king's private museum. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.5 Singapore Government House. Source : The Istana.



Figure 3.6 Borommaratchasathit Maholan Hall. Source : NAT.

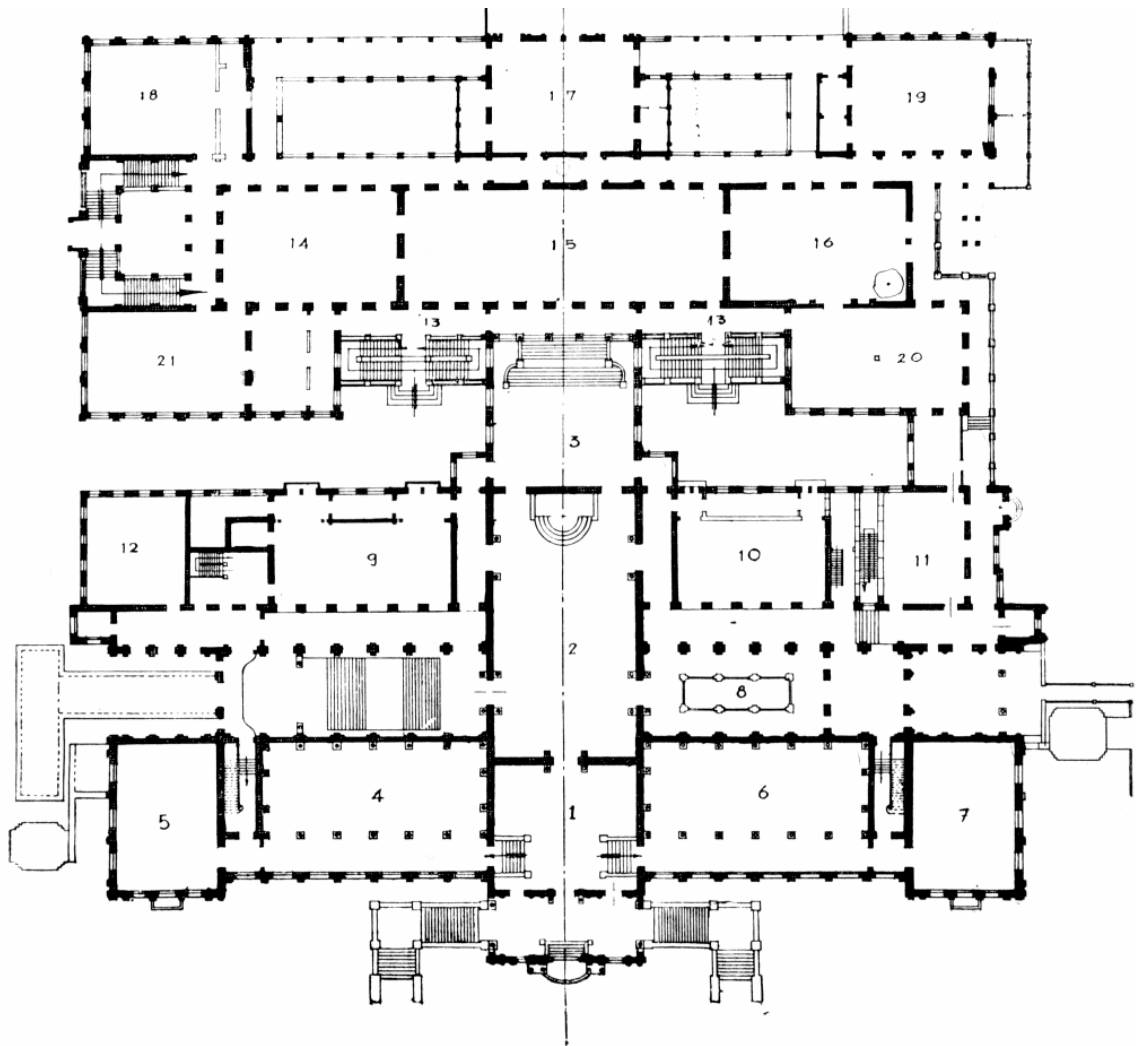


Figure 3.7 Plan of the Chakri Throne Hall building complex, showing the major rooms : Munsathan Boromma-at Hall (9), Sommutthithewarat Uppabat Hall (10), Borommaratchasathit Maholan Hall (14 – 16), the King’s Bedchamber (17), and the Chakri Mahaprasat Hall (1 – 7). The main throne hall is (2). Source : MR Saengsun Ladawan, *Phramahaprasat lae Phraratchamonthian Sathan nai Phra Borommaharatchawang* (Bangkok : Rongphim Phrathan, 1964).



Figure 3.8 Interior decoration of the Borommaratchasathit Maholan Hall. Source : NAT.

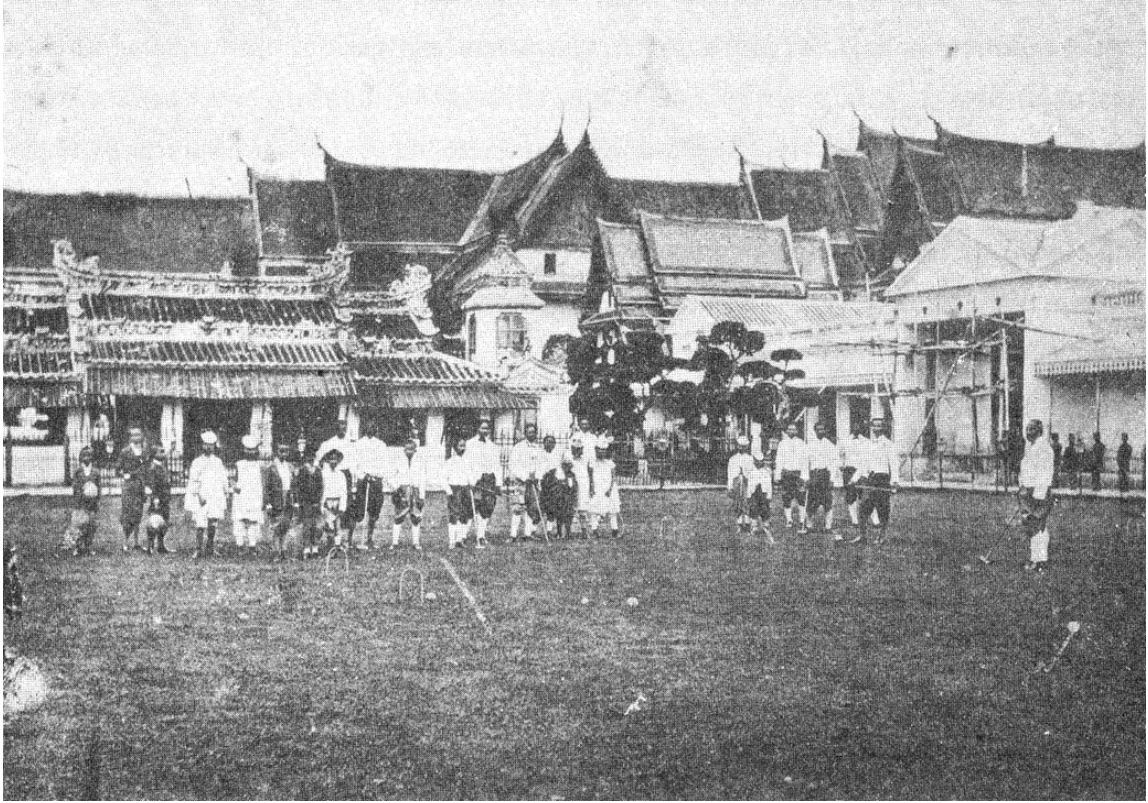


Figure 3.9 The royal croquet party at the front lawn, Munsathan Boromma-at Hall (right). Source : NAT.

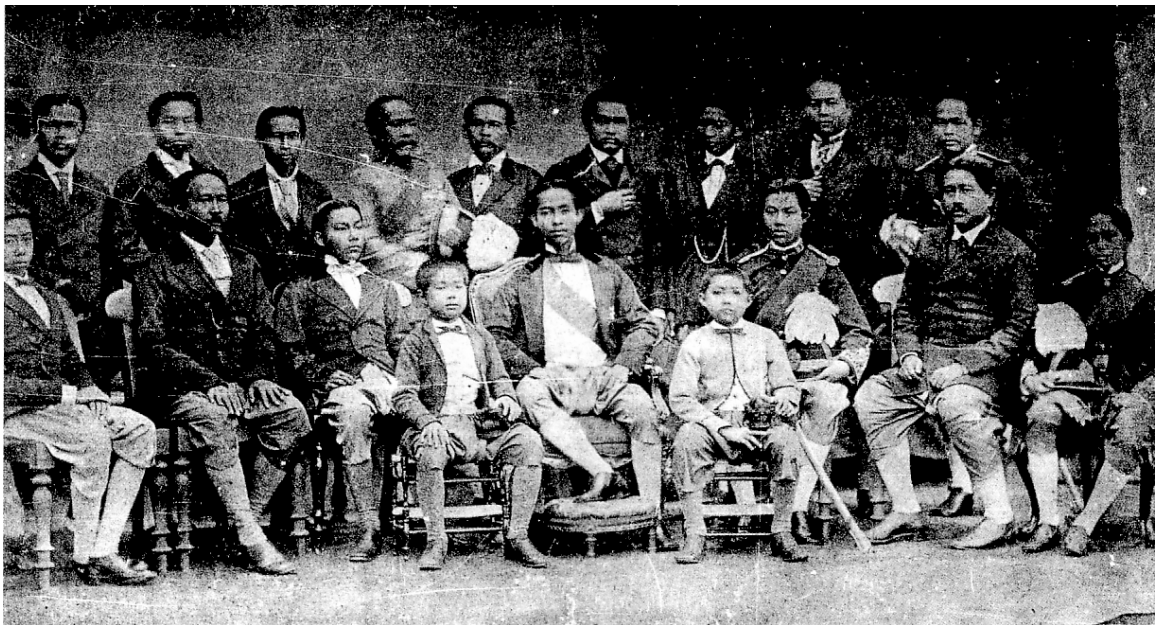


Figure 3.10 King Rama V and his entourage during the 1872 visit to Calcutta. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.11 Concordia Club, Batavia. Source : Scott Merrilees, *Batavia in Nineteenth-Century Photographs* (London : Routledge, 2000).

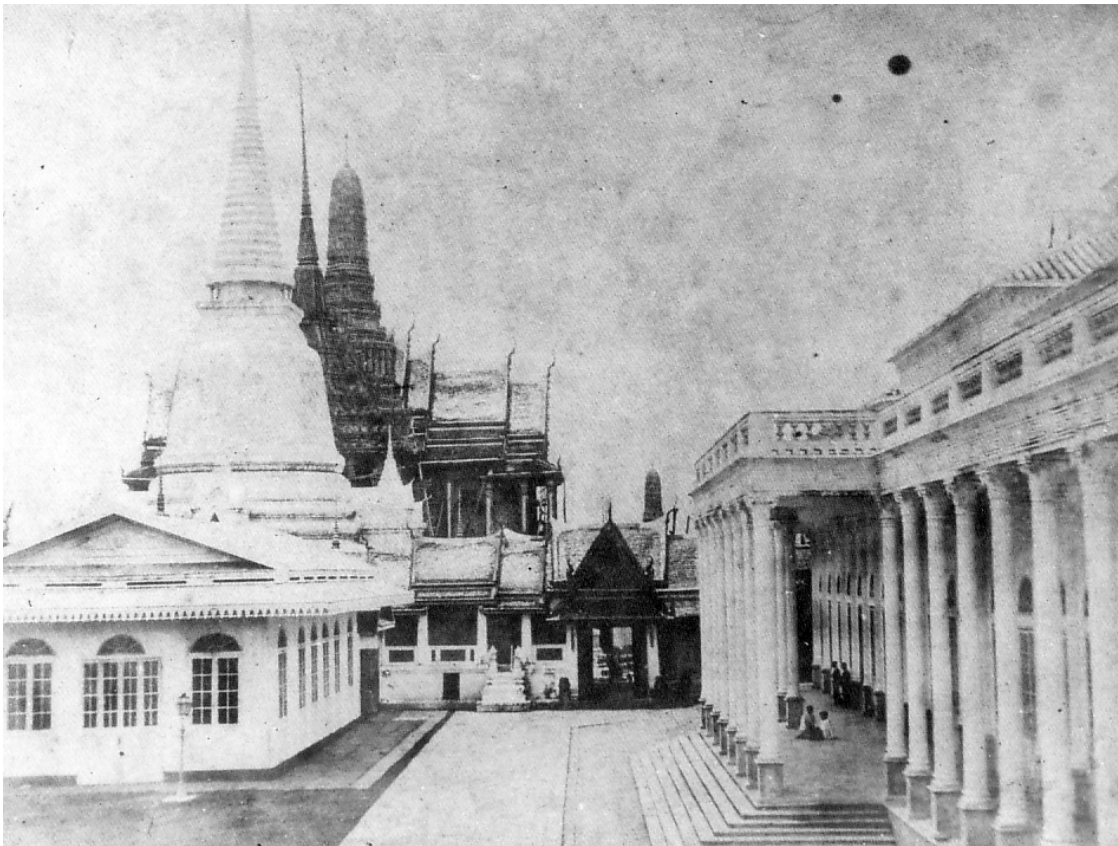


Figure 3.12 View of the Outer Court, Grand Palace, Bangkok. Concordia Hall is on the right. Source : NAT.

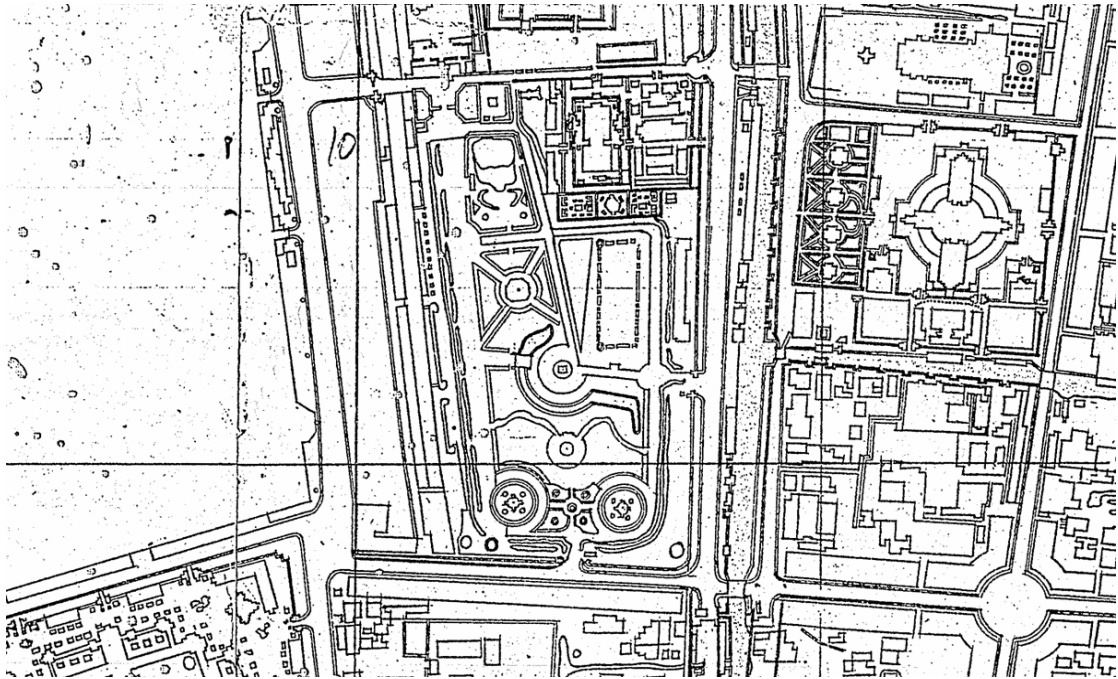


Figure 3.13 1887 Map of Bangkok showing Saranrom Gardens and its vicinity. Source : Damrongrathanuphap Library, Bangkok.

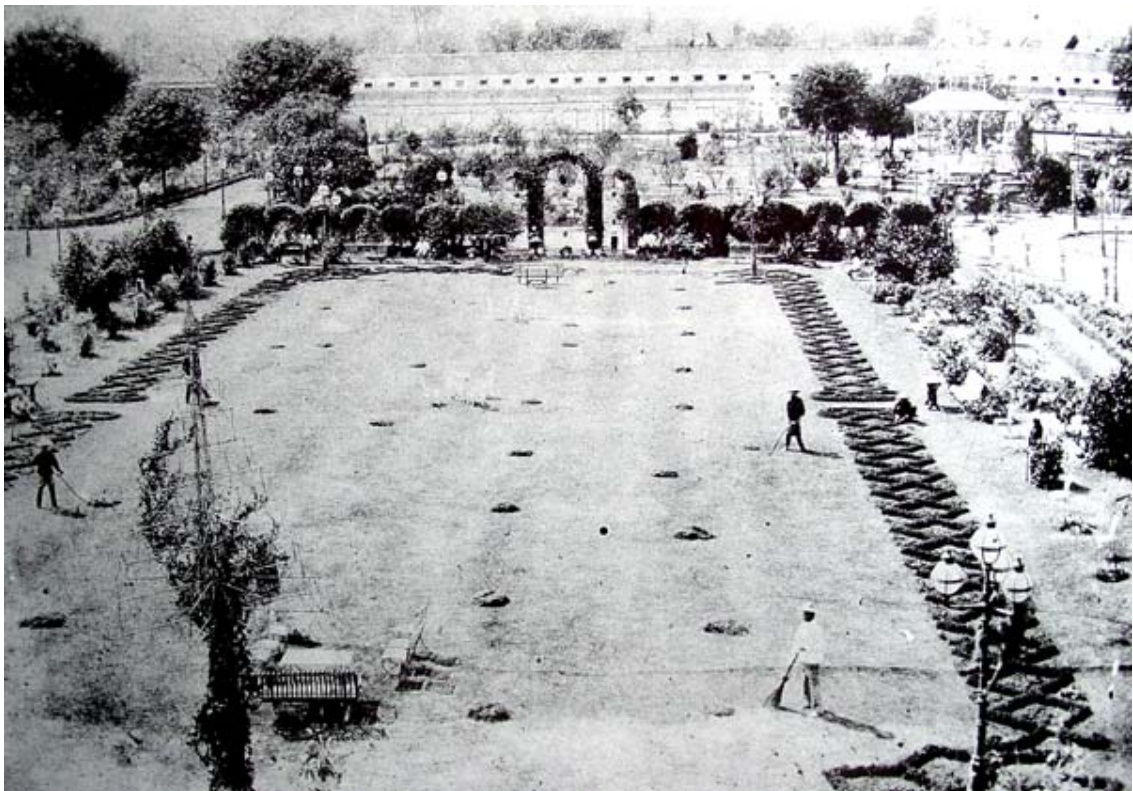


Figure 3.14 Saranrom Gardens, early 1870s. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.15 Saranrom Gardens during the 1880s. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.16 Queen Sunantha Memorial, Saranrom Gardens. Source : MR Narisa Chakrabongse, *A Pictorial Record of the Fifth Reign* (Bangkok : Amarin, 1997).

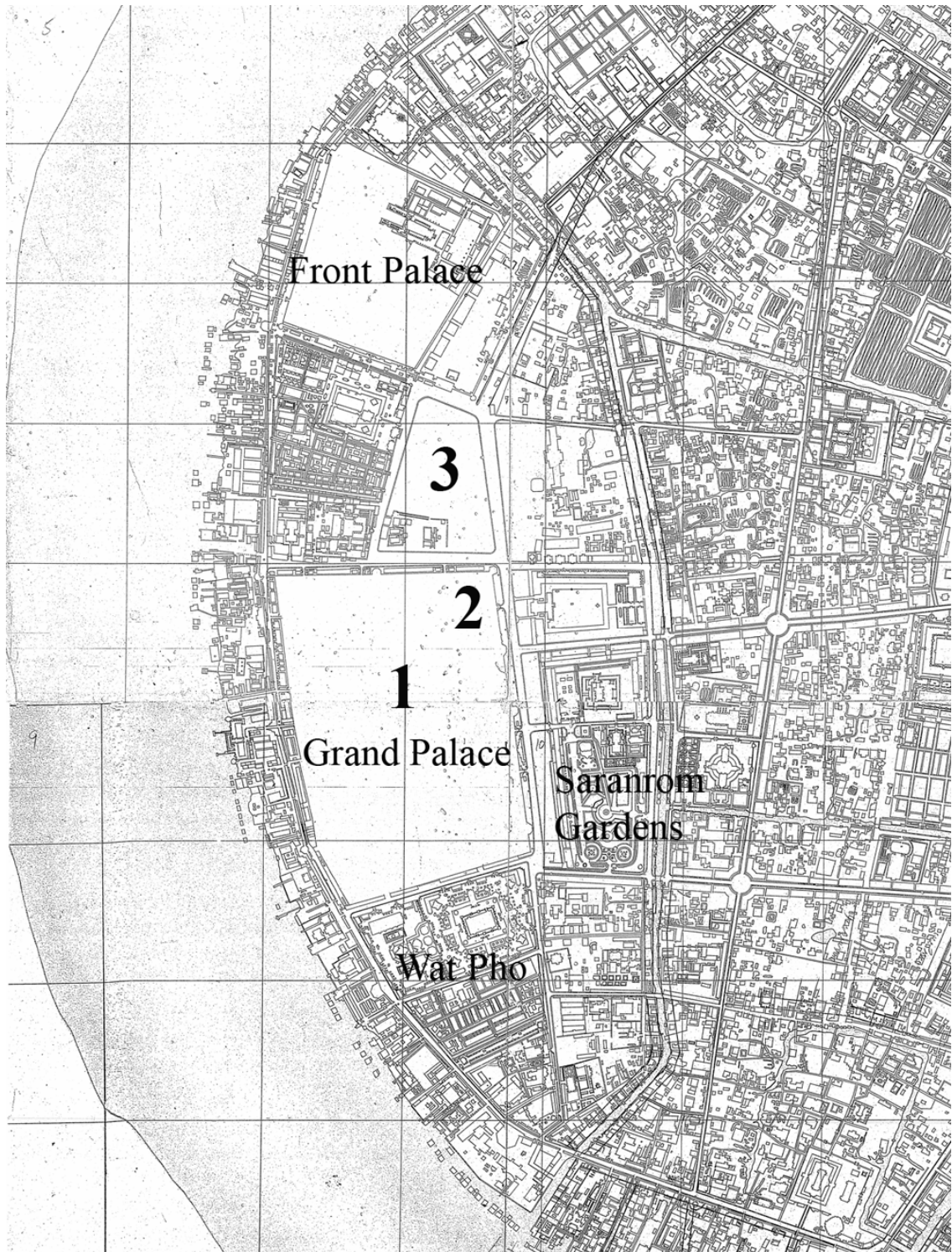


Figure 3.17 1887 Map of Bangkok showing location of the Bangkok Centennial Projects: The Grand Palace and the Chakri Throne Hall (1), Temple of the Emerald Buddha (2) Siamese National Exhibition (3) Source : Damrongrathanuphap Library, Bangkok.



Figure 3.18 Aerial view of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, looking south, with the rest of the Grand Palace behind it, towards the river. Source : NAT.

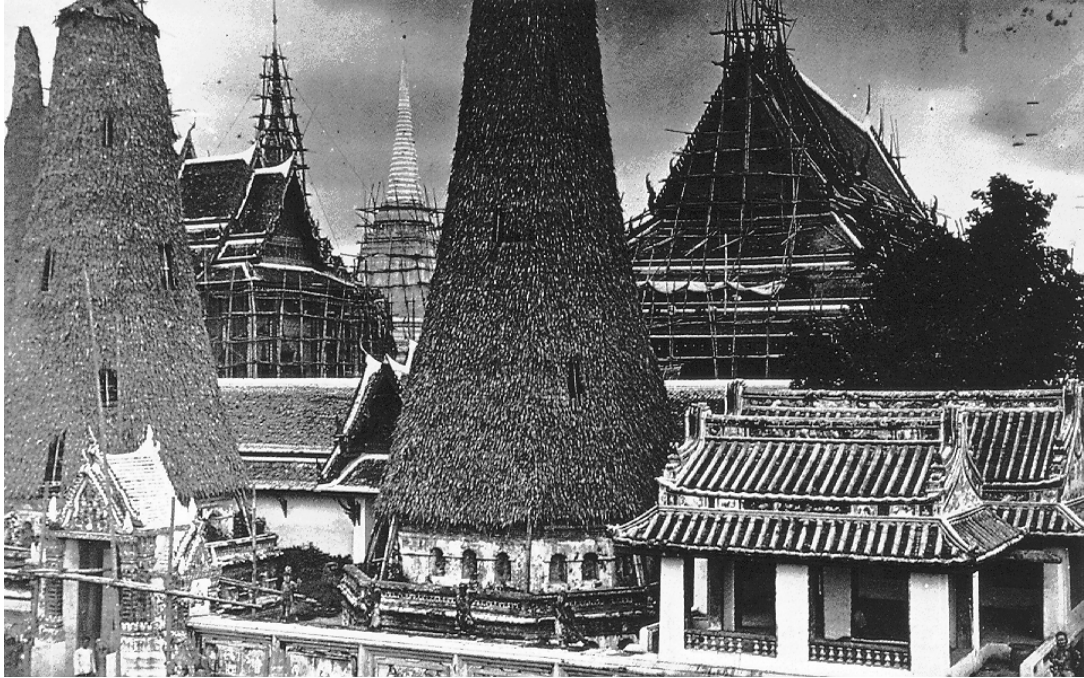


Figure 3.19 Temple of the Emerald Buddha during renovation for the 1882 Centennial Celebrations. Source : NAT.

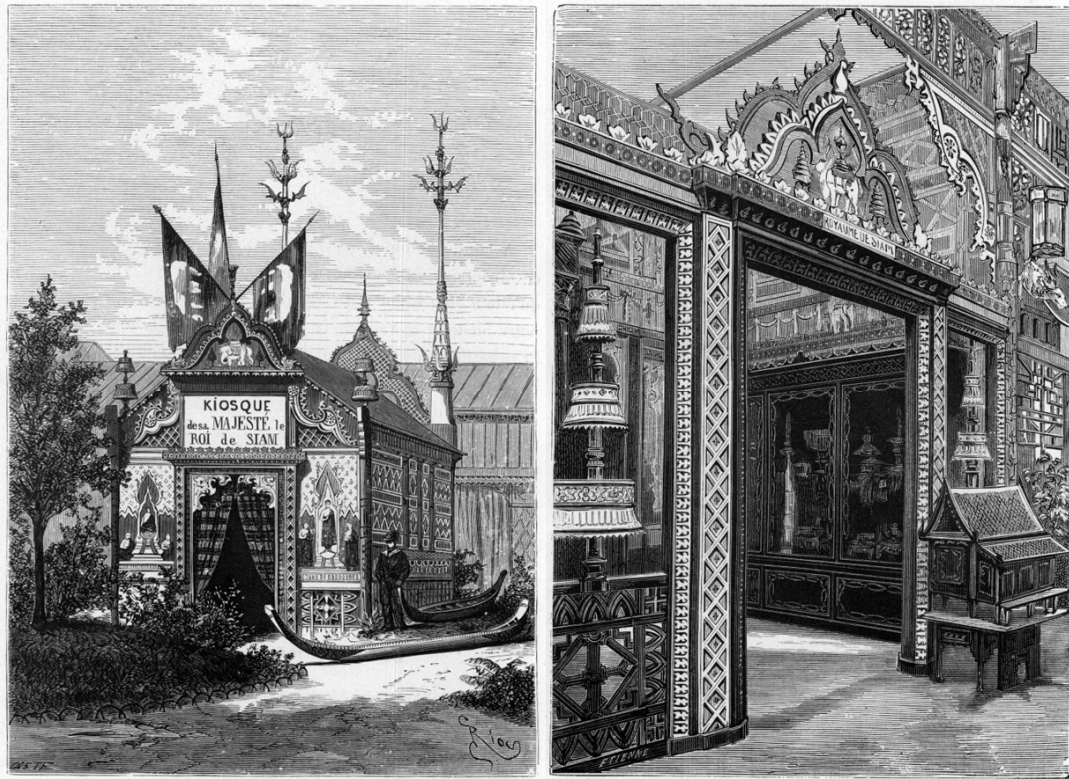


Figure 3.20 Siamese Pavilion at the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1867 ; right) and Le Havre (1868 ; left). Source : M. A. De Grehan, *Le Royaume de Siam* (Paris : Simon Racon, 1868).

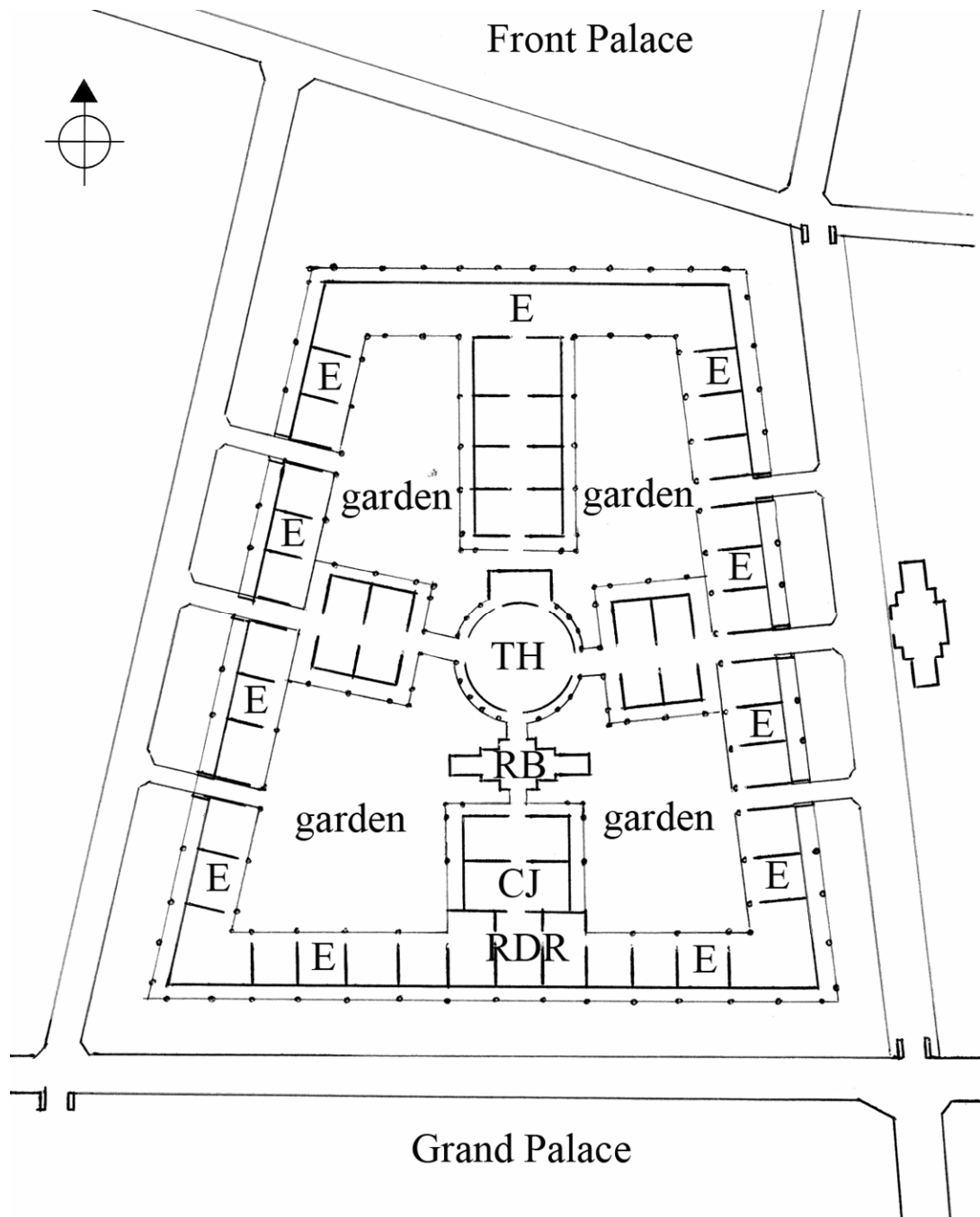


Figure 3.21 Plan of the Siamese National Exhibition, 1882 : Theatrical hall (TH), Royal Box (RB), Crown Jewels (CJ), Royal Drawing Room (RDR), Exhibits (E). Source : Drawn by the author based on Samuel J. Smith, *Bangkok Centennial Held at Bangkok, Siam, 1882*, (Bangkok : The Siam Weekly Advertiser, 1882).



Figure 3.22 View of the Siamese National Exhibition, 1882. Source : NAT.

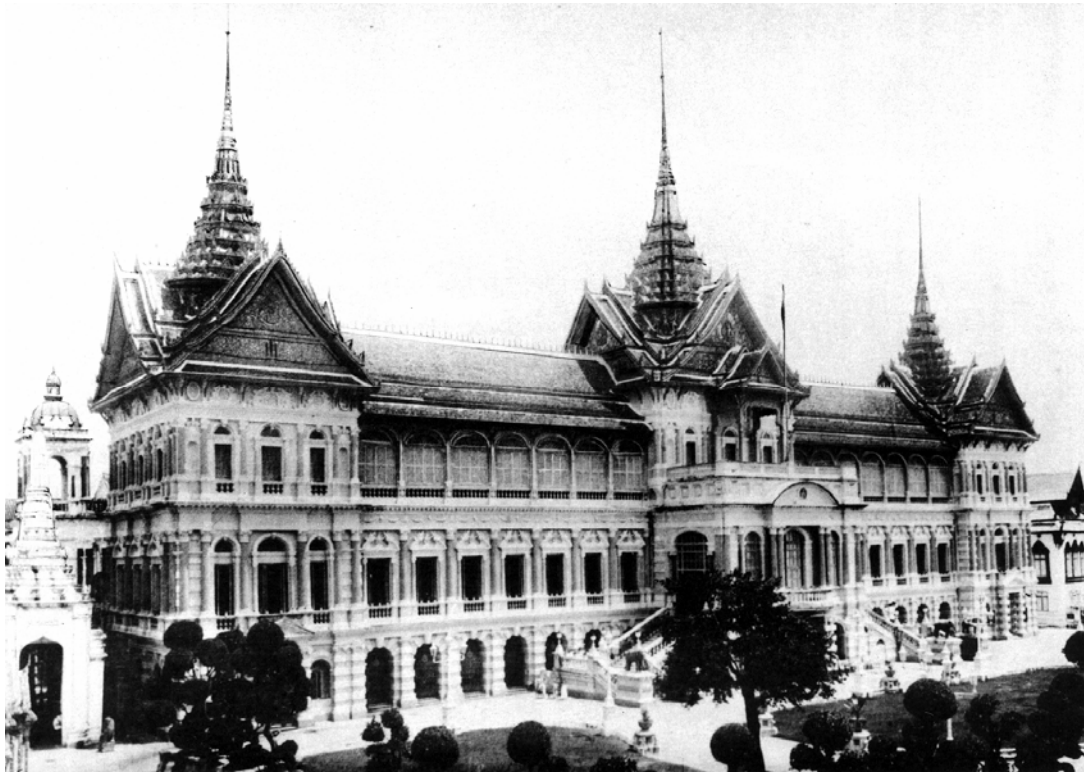


Figure 3.23 Chakri Throne Hall. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.24 Chakri Throne Hall, viewed from northeast, together with the traditional Siamese-style architecture of the Grand Palace. Source : Karl Doehring, *Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam*, (Berlin : Asia House, 1916).

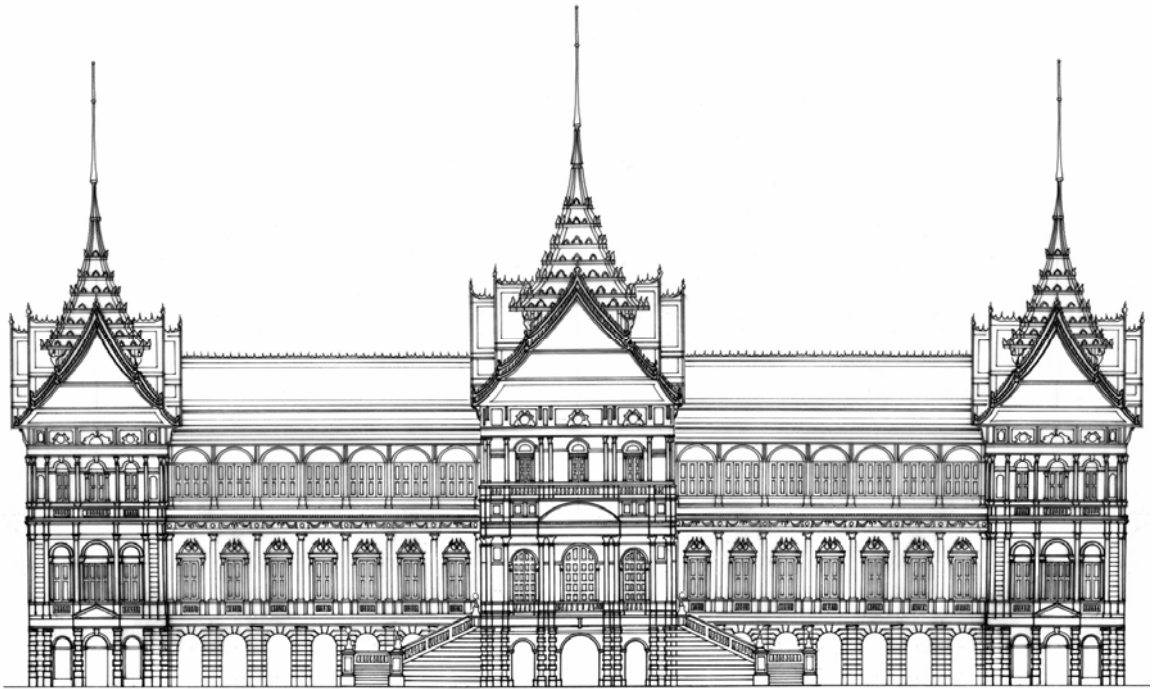


Figure 3.25 North façade, Chakri Throne Hall. Source : Drawn by author.



Figure 3.26 East façade, Chakri Throne Hall. Source : Drawn by author.

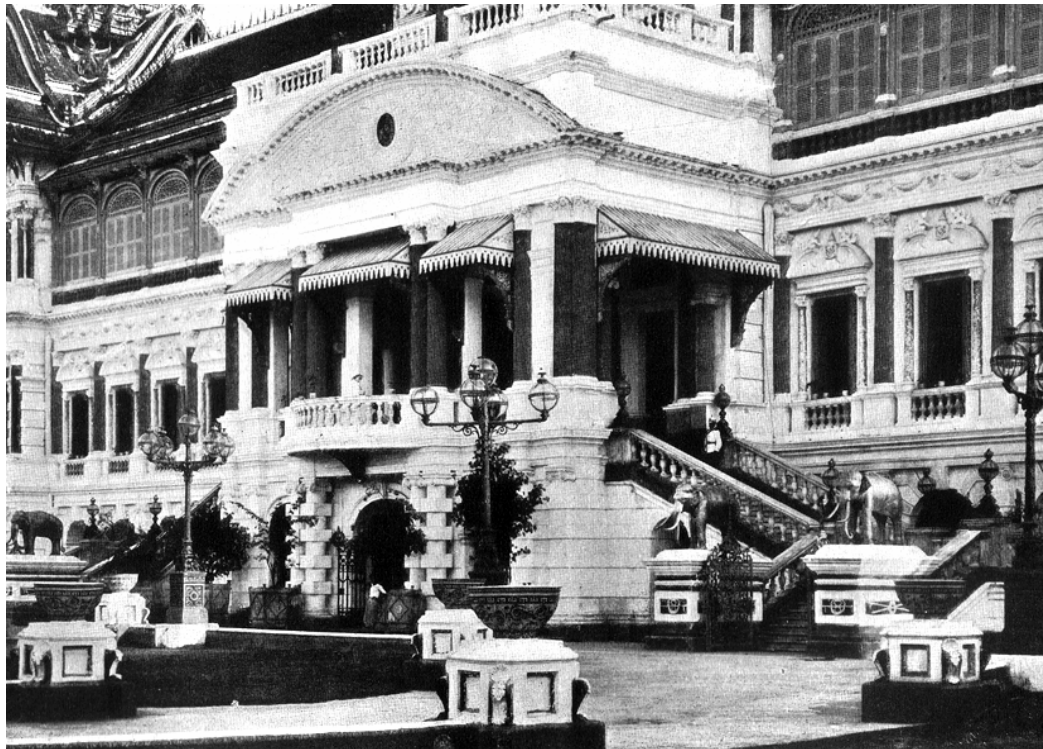


Figure 3.27 Exterior staircase leading up to the main foyer, Chakri Throne Hall. Source : Jacob T. Child, *The Pearl of Asia*, (Chicago : Donohue, Hennebury & Co., 1892).

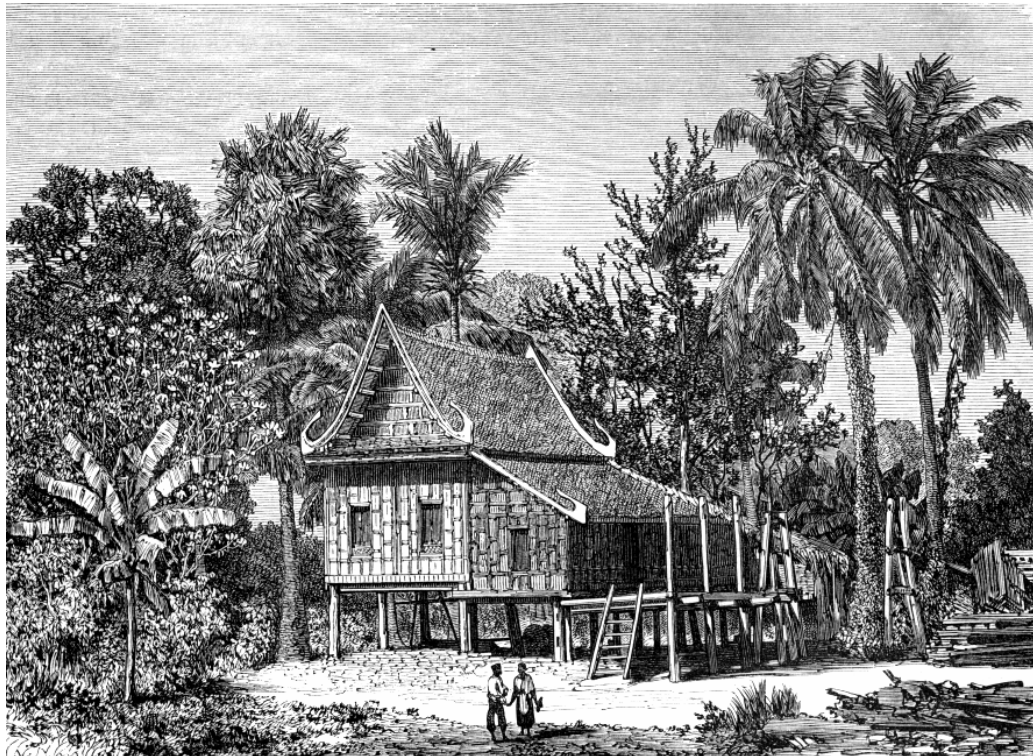


Figure 3.28 Traditional Siamese house, with a ladder leading up to the verandah. Source : Henri Mouhot,

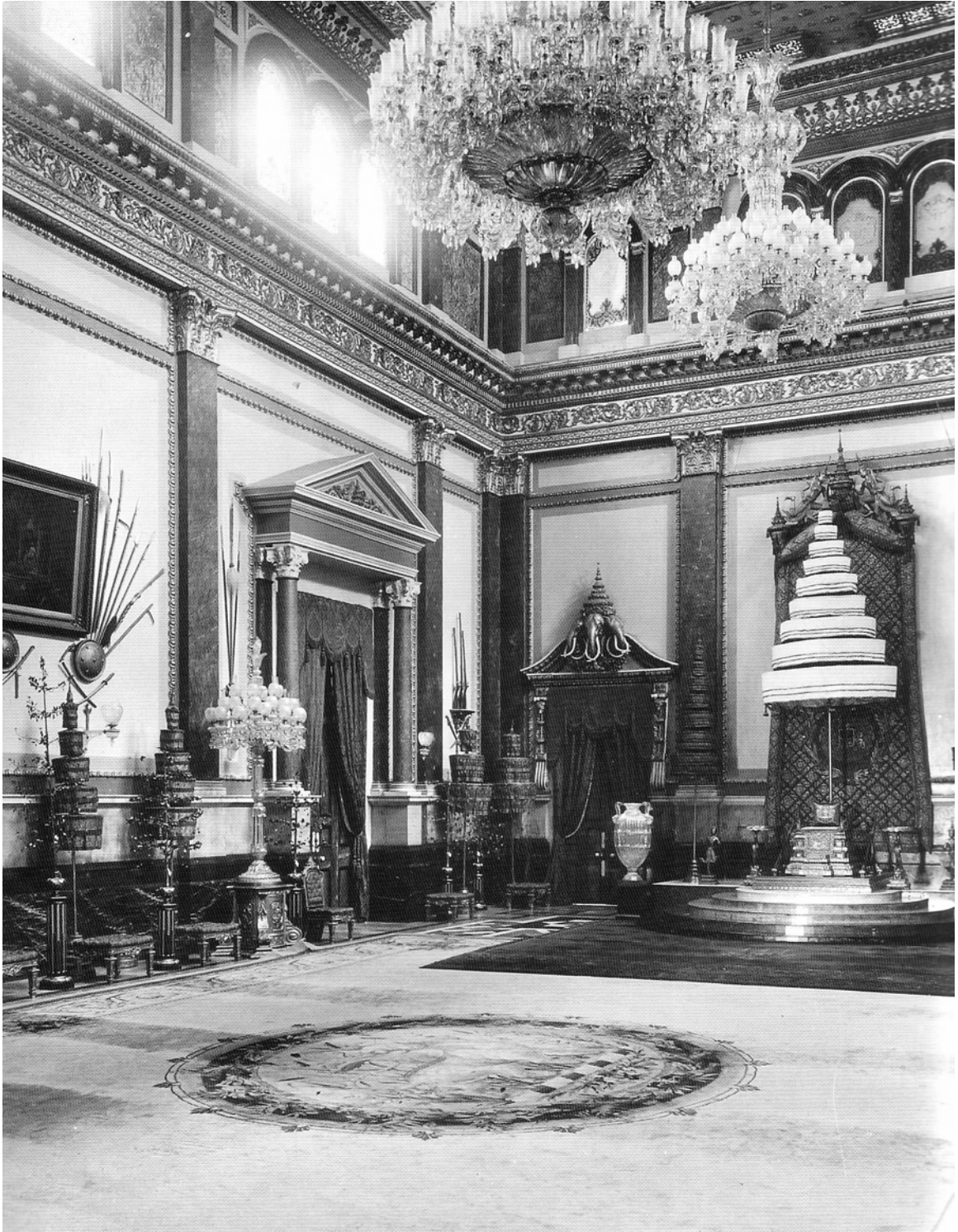


Figure 3.29 The Great Audience Hall, Chakri Throne Hall. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.30 Banqueting Hall, Chakri Throne Hall, featuring the elaborate European-style ceiling, designed by Prince Praditworakan. Source : NAT.

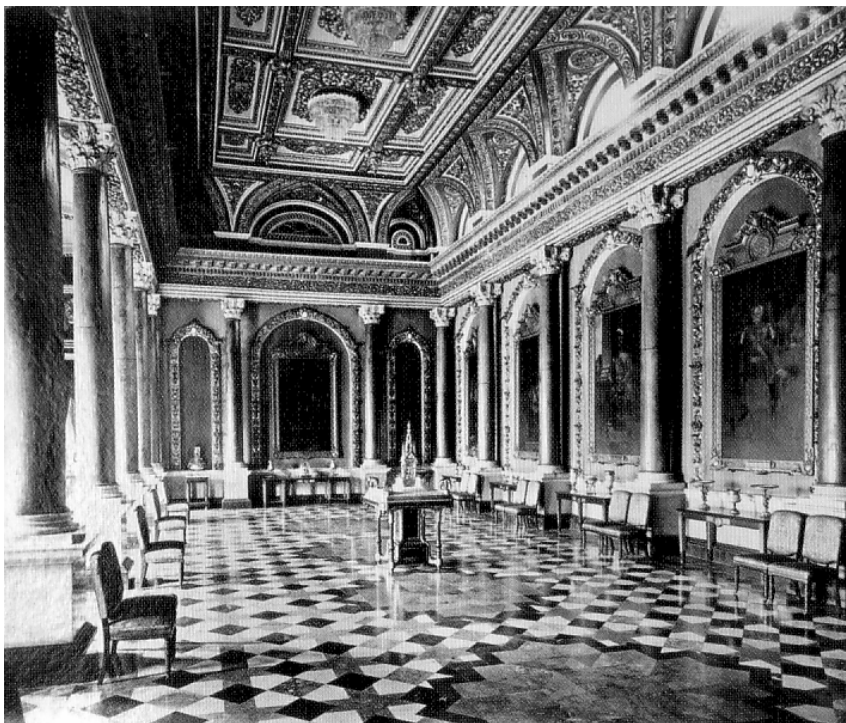


Figure 3.31 Reception Hall, Chakri Throne Hall. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.32 King Rama V (left, under the parasol) laying the foundation stone for the Chakri Throne Hall on May 17, 1876. John Clunis, Government Architect, stood to the right. Behind the king were the Siamese princes and noblemen, standing under a tent. Chinese and Siamese laborers stood to the right. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.33 That Hongsakul, royal master builder.



Figure 3.34 Itsaret Rachanuson Hall, Front Palace, Bangkok, an early Europeanized design by Siamese royal master builder, That Hongsakul. Source : Photograph by author.

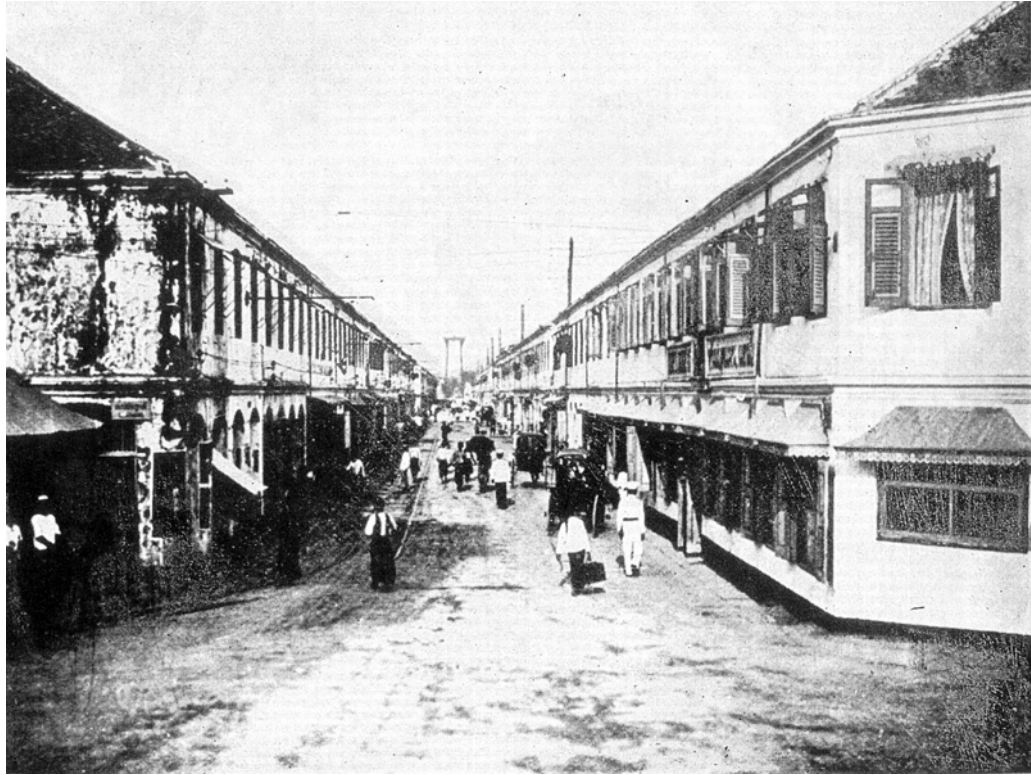


Figure 3.35 Bamrungmuang Road shophouses, designed by That Hongsakul in 1871.
Source : NAT.



Figure 3.36 Wat Thepsirin, the Ordination Hall, (Ubosot), designed by That Hongsakul in 1876. Source : Karl Doehring, *Buddhistische Tempelanlagen in Siam*, (Berlin : Asia House, 1916).



Figure 3.37 *Phra Meru* for the cremation of Prince Sirirat Kakutthaphan, designed by That Hongsakul in 1888. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.38 *Phra Meru* for the cremation of Princess Naphachon Chamratsi, designed by That Hongsakul in 1889. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.39 MC Prawich Jumsai. Source : Naritsaranuwattiwong, Prince, *Prawat Sewok Ek Mom Chao Prawich [Biography of MC Prawich]*, (Bangkok : n.a., 1929)

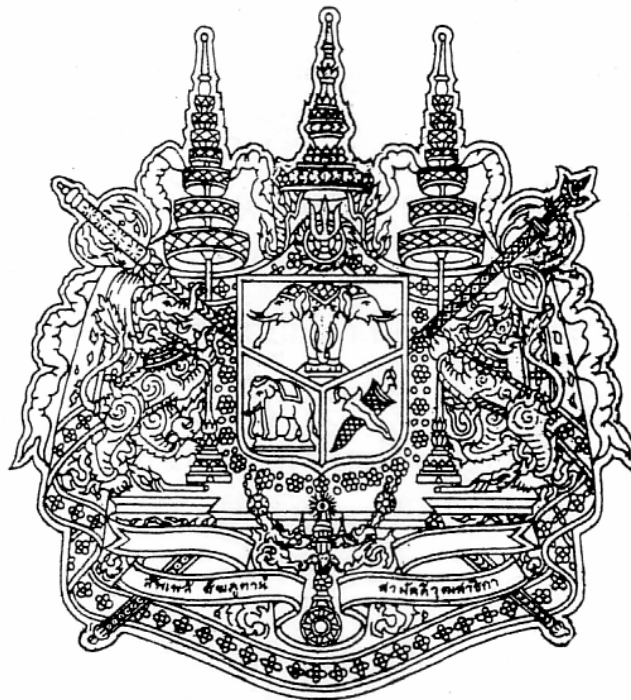


Figure 3.40 The official insignia of the Kingdom of Siam. Source : NAT.

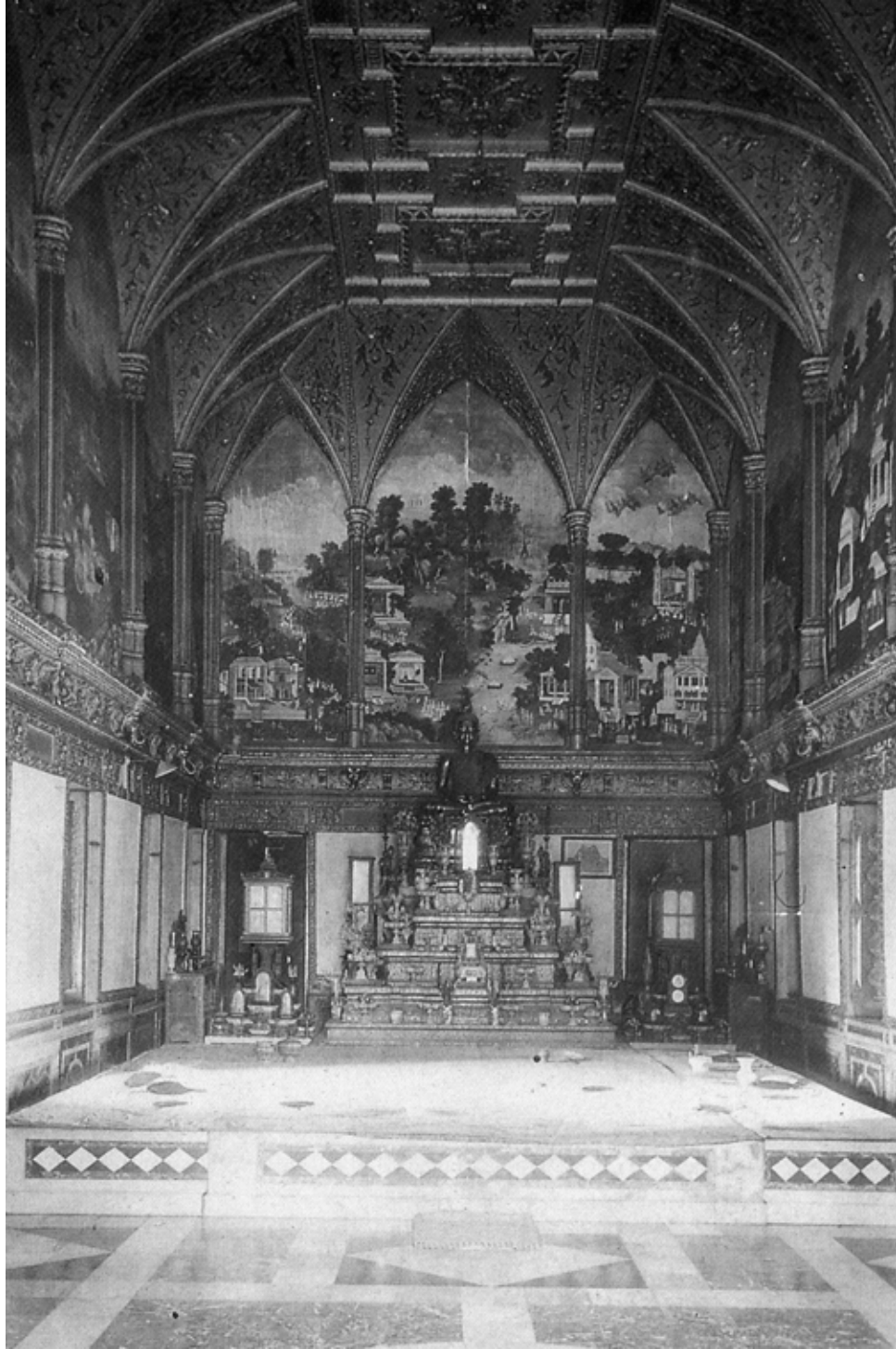


Figure 3.41 Neo-Gothic interior of the ordination hall, Wat Ratchabophit, designed by MC Prawich Jumsai. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.42 Joachim Grassi. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.43 Bang Pa-In Palace, Bang Pa-In. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.44 The Barracks (1881 – 1884). Source : NAT.

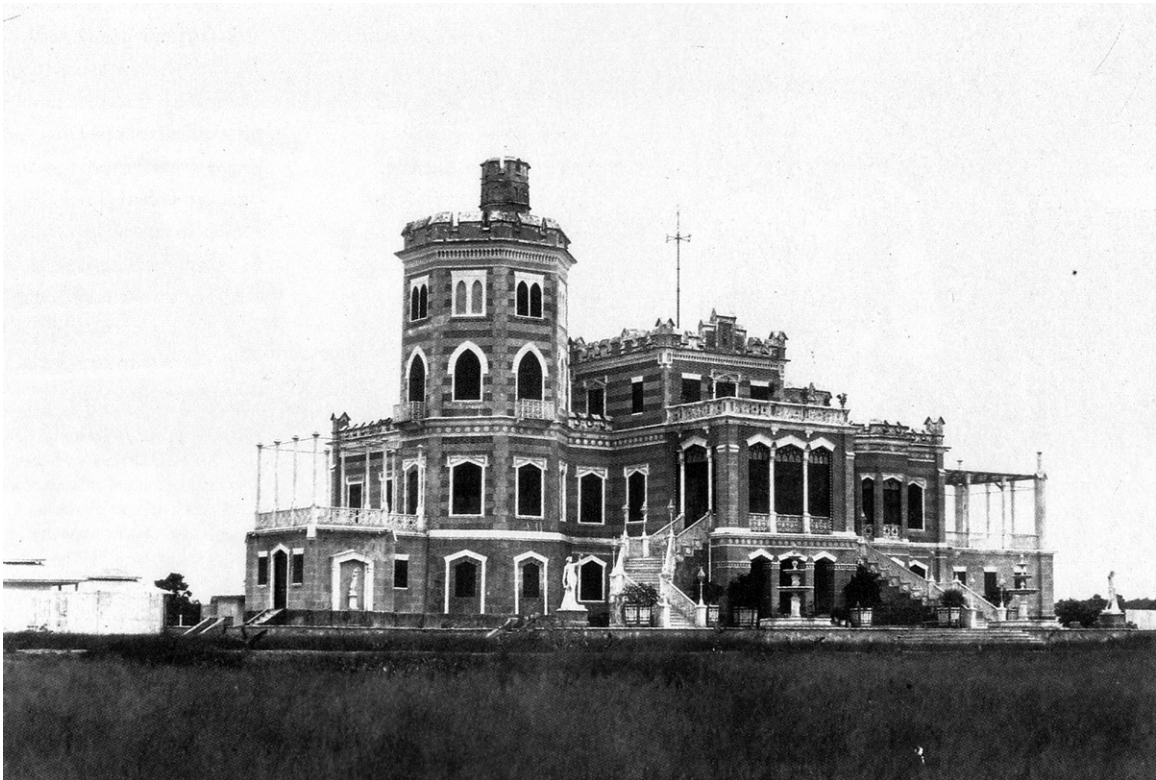


Figure 3.45 The Crown Prince's Palace at Sapathum (1881 – 1884). Source : NAT.

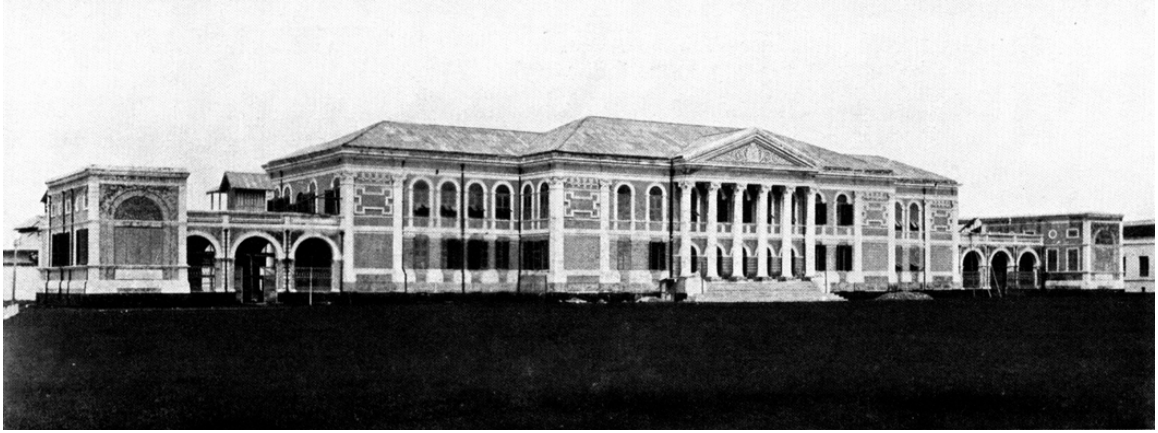


Figure 3.46 The Courts of Justice (1882 – 1885). Source : Arnold Wright, Twentieth Century Impressions of Siam, (London : Lloyd's Greater Britain, 1908).

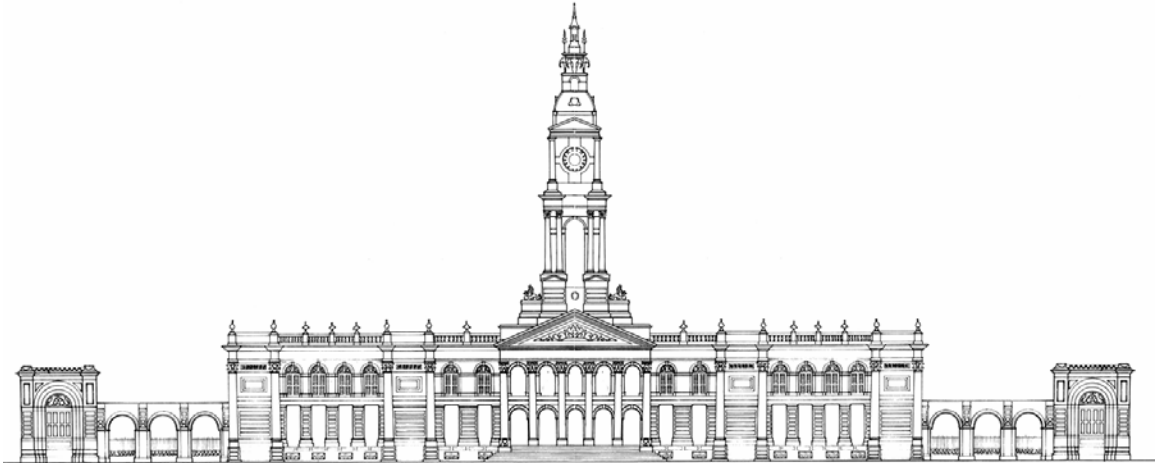


Figure 3.47 Front elevation, the Courts of Justice (1882 – 1885). Source : Drawn by author after Grassi's drawing, kept at the NAT.

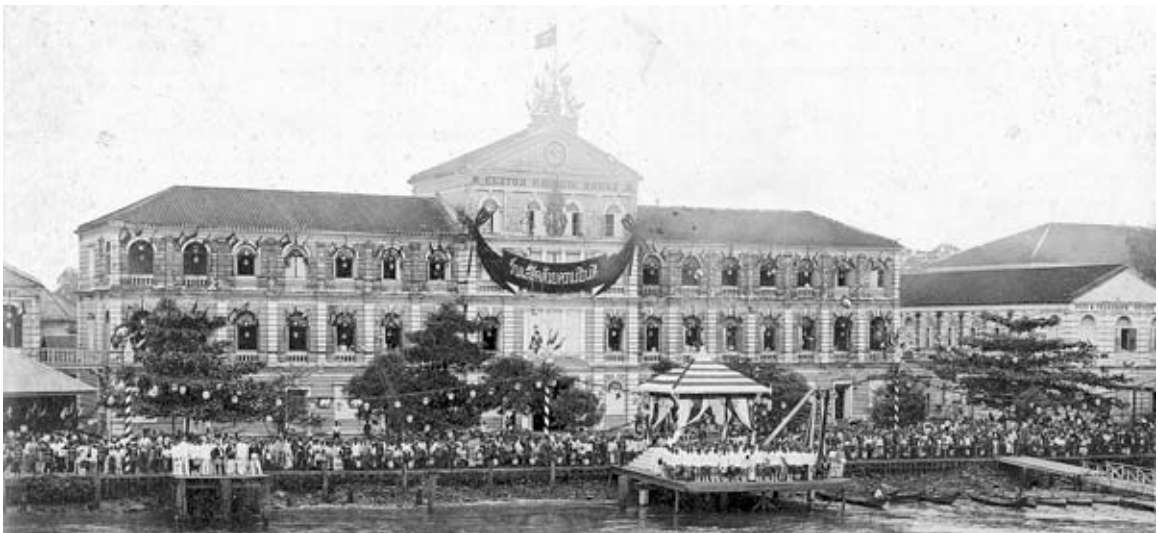


Figure 3.48 The Custom House (1884 – 1887). Source : Malakul Family Album.



Figure 3.49 Aisawan Thipphaya-at Pavilion, Bang Pa-In Palace. That Hongsakul and Joachim Grassi, 1879. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.50 Aisawan Thipphaya-at Pavilion, Bang Pa-In Palace. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.51 Wat Niwet Thammaprawat, Bang Pa-In Palace. Source : NAT.

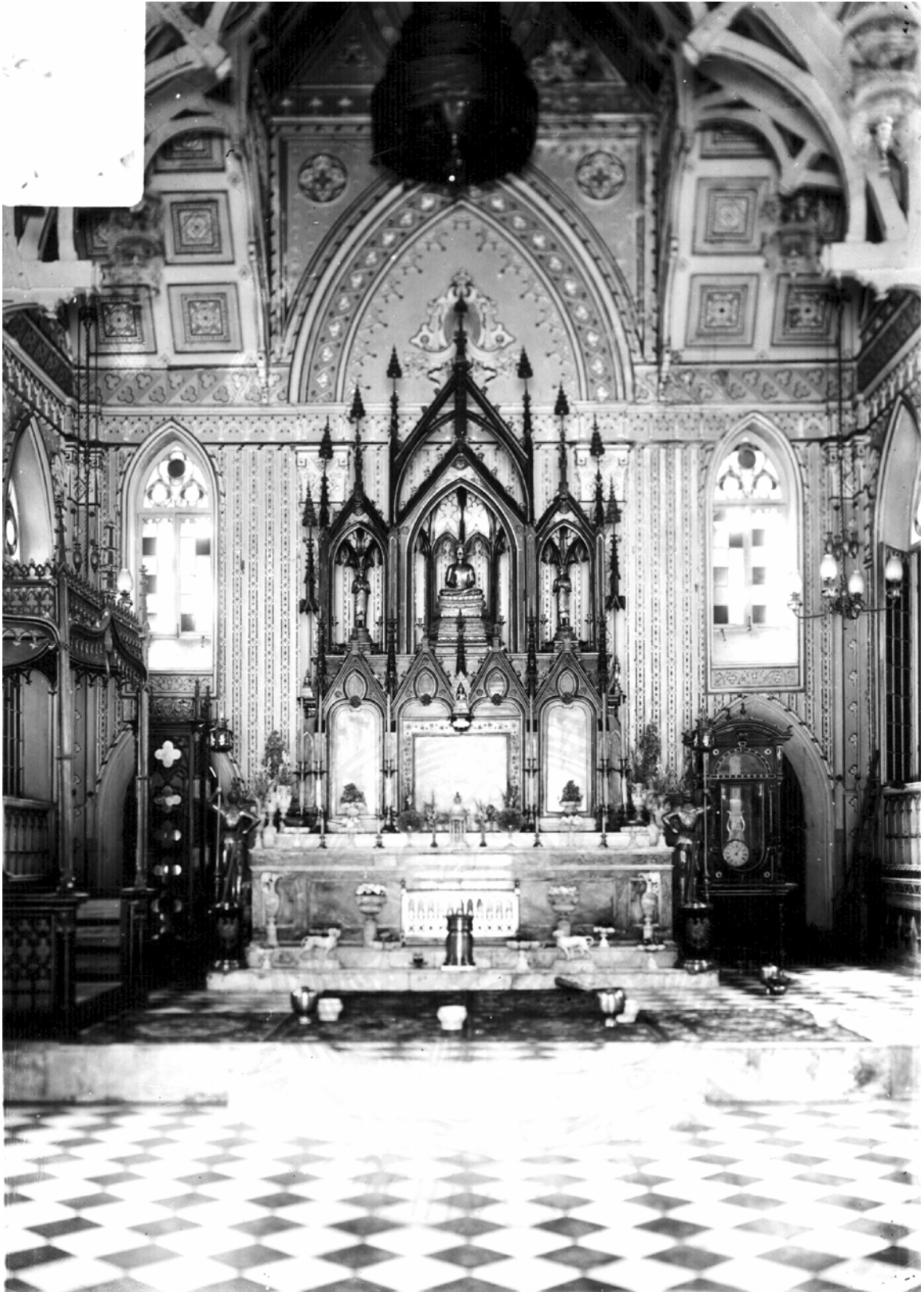


Figure 3.52 The altar of Wat Niwet Thammaprawat, Bang Pa-In Palace. Prawich Jumsai and Joachim Grassi. Source : NAT.



Figure 3.53 Queen sunantha Memorial, Saranrom Gardens, Bangkok. Source :
Photograph by author.

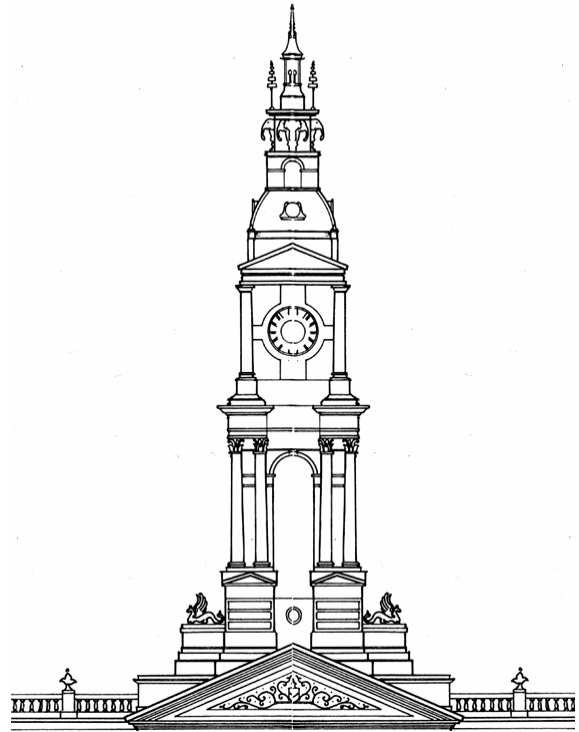


Figure 3.54 Detail of the aedicule atop the tower of the Courts of Justice. Source :
Drawn by author after Grassi's drawing, kept at the NAT.



Figure 3.55 Wat Atsadanganimit, Sichang Island. Source : Photograph by author.



Figure 3.56 Prince Chaturonratsami's Palace, Bangkok (right). Source : NAT.

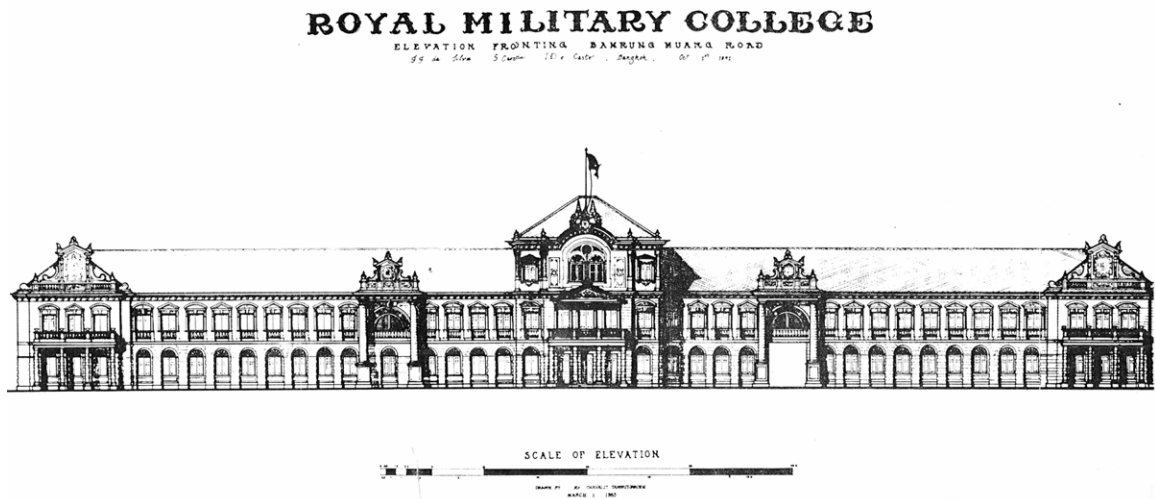


Figure 3.57 Royal Military College, Bangkok. Source : NAT.

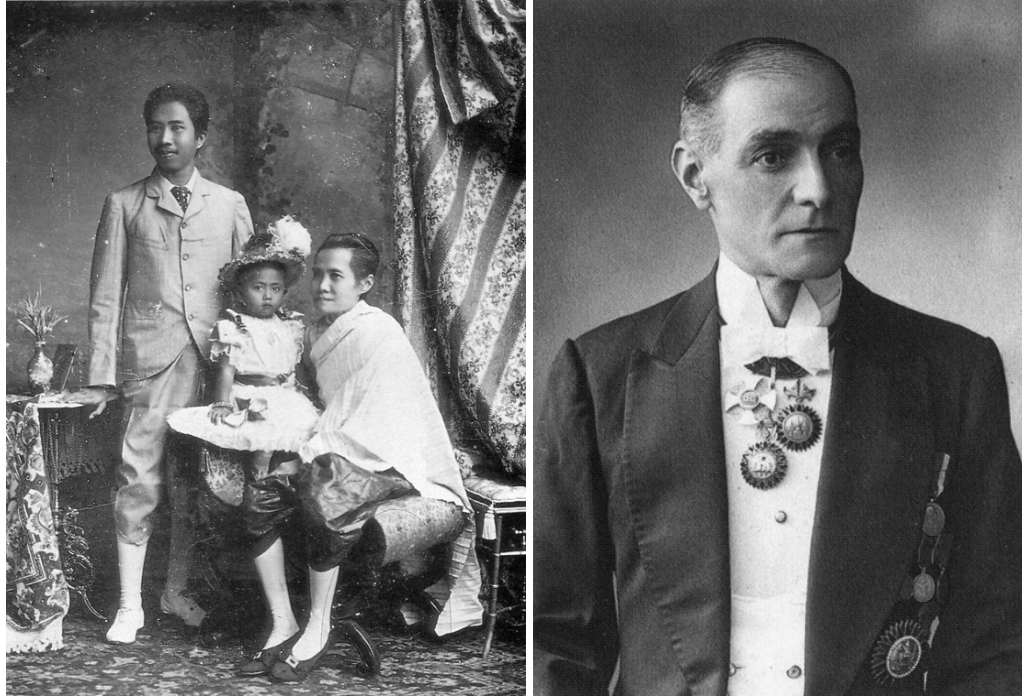


Figure 3.58 Prince Naris (left), with his mother, Princess Phannarai, and a daughter.
Source : NAT.

Figure 3.59 Carlo Allegri (1862 – 1938). Source : Piazzardi, Paolo, *Italians at the Court of Siam*, (Bangkok : Amarin Printing, 1996).

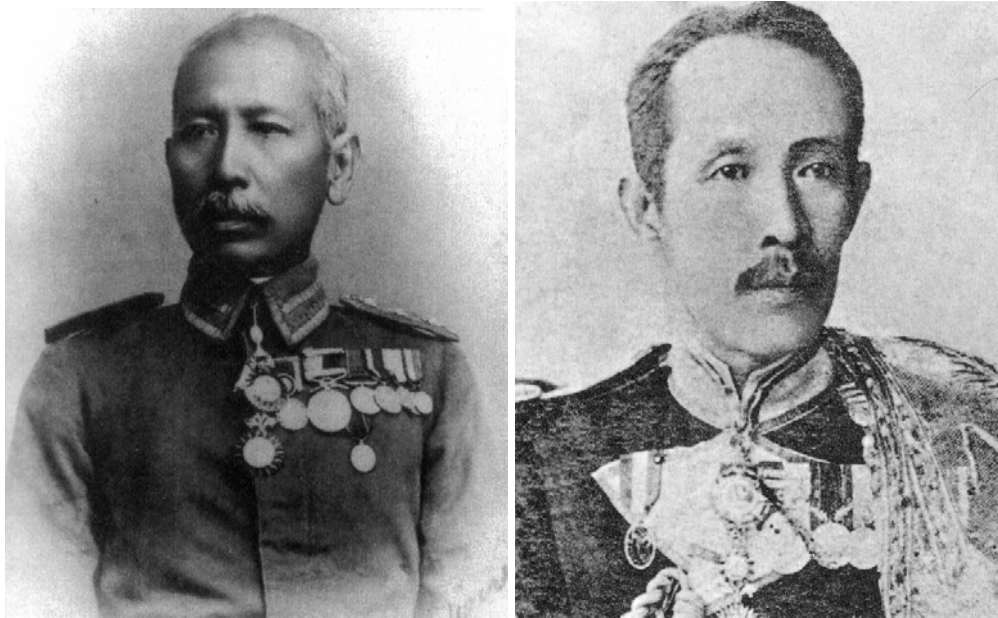


Figure 3.60 Charoen Hongsakul (1857 – 1929). Source : Hongsakul Family Archives.

Figure 3.61 Kon Hongsakul (1864 – 1916). Source : Hongsakul Family Archives.

Chapter 4

The Construction of Modern Siamese Identity, 1889 – 1910

By the early 1890s, Siam began to feel the effects of the Chakri Reformation. Rama V's modernization of the cabinet structure in 1892, the centralization of provincial administrative power through the *Monthon* system, and the emergence of export-oriented economy altogether set the new pace of development, and a sense of the new era.

That, however, was quite brought to an abrupt end in July 1893 in the Franco-Siamese Crisis. For the first time since the foundation of the capital in 1782, Bangkok was invaded by a foreign military force, even though it was just a couple of French gunboats. The naval blockade and the subsequent demands from the French government was quite traumatic an experience for the Siamese aristocrats. Siam lost an indemnity payment of three million francs, the whole of Laotian territory east of the Mekong, plus an occupation of Siamese seaboard provinces of Chanthaburi and Trat.¹ For the Siamese aristocrats the experience must be shocking; decades of *siwilai* projects and Chakri Reformation fell short of their promise of modern, sovereign Siam. Rama V himself was broken in spirit and health, and had to withdraw from public duties for many months.

In the long run, however, the 1893 Crisis was inevitable, as finally Britain and France had to settle their spheres of influence in Southeast Asia. Siam was left independent as a buffer state, and the Siamese aristocrats learnt how to maintain their status quo in spite of the semi-colonial status of the nation. The increasing influence of colonial economy in Southeast Asia brought Siam's economy closer into the growing network of international trade, and the Siamese aristocrats enjoyed some of the new economic surplus and splurged on another phase of building program.

¹ David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 203.

After the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1889, the next defining moment in the architectural transformation in Siam was not the 1893 Crisis, but rather the king's first journey to Europe in 1897. After spending eight months in European courts and capitals, Rama V returned to Bangkok and embarked on a huge project to remake Bangkok into a modern Siamese capital (Figure 4.1).

In this chapter, we will first look at Rama V's 1897 grand tour and its impact on the Siamese aristocrats' ideas of civilization. The main argument is that after "the journey in," the king and the Siamese aristocrats suddenly realized the full extent of "Europe" as a trope of civilization, way beyond what they had earlier seen in the colonial cities, or what they had learnt second-handedly through travelogues, consular reports, or the print media. In addition, they were also aware of the inferior and the dark side of the supposedly civilized, enlightened Europe. With this realization, the Siamese aristocrats embarked on yet another phase of self-civilizing mission through material culture, architecture and urban design. The court went on a shopping spree, purchasing works of art and furniture to fabricate their modern public image.² After Rama V's return from the 1897 trip, he began the Dusit Park project, an elite suburban enclave north of the old walled area of the city. With Dusit Palace as its center, Dusit Park was designed to be Bangkok's modern suburb, complete with gridiron streets, fine avenues and cast-iron bridges. Rice fields and orchard lands were turned into a showcase of the new *siwilai* paradigm, complete with villa-like princely palaces and residences of noblemen, electricity, tram lines, and clean water supply.

The Public Works Department (PWD), of course, had a central role in the creation of this huge building program. The second part of this chapter examines the way the king imported Italian architects, engineers, painters, and sculptors to fill the positions of the much-expanded PWD. Fresh from architectural schools, the PWD Italians enjoyed virtually a monopoly over not only all governmental constructions but also the king's personal projects. The main point is that, unlike the first-generation Italian builders, the PWD Italians' knowledge of latest architectural styles and construction techniques was

² Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 48 – 49.

matched by the Siamese aristocrats' willingness to purchase modern technology and building materials.

Accordingly, after the turn of the twentieth century, the Siamese elites' architecture became perilously close to those in Europe, at least in the external appearance. Meanwhile, old spatial practices persisted, and were even more glaringly obvious due to the disparity with the new external appearance. In the final part of this chapter, I will examine three sites in Dusit Park—royal residences, Buddhist temples, and state pageantry—in order to explicate how the Siamese aristocrats' carefully orchestrated *siwilai* and modern architectural images were actually rested on the supposedly uncivilized or traditional norms.³

4.1 Rama V's 1897 Voyage to Europe : The Quest for *Siwilai*

On April 7, 1897, king Rama V left the Grand Palace and embarked onto the new royal yacht, Maha Chakri. It was the beginning of his first journey to Europe.⁴ With two hundred and ninety-one entourage, the Siamese monarch traveled through fifteen countries in nine months. On May 14, the Maha Chakri arrived in Venice, and the king began the convoluted continental trip (Figure 4.2). Keeping Paris for last, the king went from Venice to Milan, Geneva, Turin, Rome, and Florence. From Italy, the king proceeded to Vienna, Budapest, and Warsaw, and finally met an old friend Tsar Nicolas II in St. Petersburg and Moscow (Figure 4.3). Scandinavia was next, with stops at

³ The analytical framework for my study of princely residences is based partly on a few recent work on spaces of colonial culture. See, for example, Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2005), especially the chapter on the mansions of Delhi; Swati Chottopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London : Routledge, 2006). On the modernization of non-Western domestic space, see Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, and Bourgeois Culture, 1880 – 1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). For the study of neo-Traditionalism in architecture, see Sibel Bozdogan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Discourse in the Early Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), especially the chapter on Ottoman revivalism.

⁴ During the 1897 journey, Rama V kept two major records of his experience. One was the correspondence he wrote to Queen Saowabha: King Chulalongkorn, *Phraratchahattalekha suan phraong nai Phrabat Somdet Phra Chunlachomklao Chaoyuhua khrao sadet phraratchadamnoen praphat Yurop Phutthasakkarat 2440 [Rama V's Private Correspondence during the 1897 Journey to Europe]* (Bangkok: National Library of Thailand, 1996). The other was a day-to-day official journal, kept by the king's secretary: Phraya Sisahathep, *Chotmai het sadet praphat Yurop Ro So 116 [Chronicle of the 1897 Journey to Europe]* (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1998).

Stockholm and Copenhagen. On July 30, the Siamese monarch arrived at Portsmouth. After visiting London, the king was received by Queen Victoria at Osborne, then went on to visit Edinburgh and Newcastle. Next, the king returned to the Continent and traveled through Cologne, Visbaden, Frankfurt, Dresden, Potsdam, Berlin, the Hague, and Brussels. On September 11, Rama V finally reached Paris. After a week in France, the king returned to England and visited Windsor, Oxford, and Eton. Returning to the Continent, the king made a private trip to Paris, Brussels and Baden. After state visits in Madrid and Lisbon, the king went through Nice, Monte Carlo, Florence, and Rome. On November 2, the king left Europe from Naples on the Maha Chakri. Six weeks later, on December 2, 1897, the king returned to Bangkok amidst great pomp and pageantry.

4.1.1 *Siwilai* at the Source

Apart from political maneuvering, sightseeing, and serious shopping, it seemed that the real purpose of the 1897 trip was for the forty-year-old Rama V to experience first-hand the source of *siwilai*. After years of reading and hearing about Europe, of visiting the simulacra of the West in their Asian colonies, for nine months the king was fully immersed in Europe's progress. In a private correspondence to Queen Saowabha, dated July 22, 1897, the king said there were four things that he enjoyed seeing on the trip to Europe—the life, the wealth and its source, the power, and the pleasures.⁵ The king also learned that not all European countries were uniformly civilized. Italy was rich in art, architecture, and history, but not in technology or military power. Russia warmly welcomed the king, but the disparity between the rich and the poor surprised him. Britain and Germany were equally impressive as a political, military, and technological superpower. Rama V was not impressed by the Scandinavian countries, and openly disdained Spain and Portugal as backwaters.⁶

Interestingly, the king also enjoyed seeing the dark side of “civilized” Europe. In Venice, the king was almost pleasantly surprised to learn that, just like Bangkok, the Venice of the East, there was no modern sanitation system to deal with night soil. Venice

⁵ King Chulalongkorn, *Phraratchahatthalekha suan phraong*, 151.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 192 – 194.

was still lit with gas-lights, while Bangkok had had electric street lights since 1870.⁷ Rama V was also very interested to see the life of the poor. After visiting lace manufactures on the island of Burano, the king stopped by a house of a wretchedly poor vegetable seller to inspect her living conditions: “There was a room to prepare the vegetables, and an utterly dark bedroom with just a small bed. When they are poor, the *farang* [Europeans] are actually extremely poor.”⁸ In London, the king also had a chance to visit one of the great metropolis’ vast slums. According to a contemporary observer, this would be a great object lesson for the Oriental monarch:

Let those who surround him, European and Siamese, look to it that the king has at least a glimpse of the dark as well as of the bright side of European civilisation. If he could see by some flash of inspiration the degraded conditions under which so many millions live in civilised England, and realise how necessary an adjunct some of these conditions are to the dazzling polish of “society,” would he be eager to transplant our customs to Siam, without counting the cost? Serfdom lingers openly in Siam; but there the poor man is never hungry and seldom discontented or vicious. Polygamy is legal; but no woman is outcast if faithful to her best feelings, and monstrous inhumanity to children is almost unknown. Alas! that all such evils should thickly crowd in the wake of much that is named “civilisation.”⁹

Rama V and the Siamese aristocrats thus quickly learnt that even in Europe there were varying degrees of “civilization;” not everything European was favorable, and neither were living traditions swept away or completely replaced by modern civilization.¹⁰ It was definitely possible, even natural, to be simultaneously civilized and barbaric, since everything was relative. By a little extension of this line of thought, it was, of course, possible, to be modern and civilized, yet still very much Siamese. The Siamese aristocrats could choose, at their own volition, the aspects of civilization that they thought were best for themselves and their subjects back home.

⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁹ B. A. Smith, “The King of Siam,” *The Contemporary Review* 71 (1897): 891.

¹⁰ Thongchai Winichakul, “The Quest for ‘*Siwilai*’: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59:3 (August 2000): 538 – 539.

4.1.2 Urban Vistas, Historic Architecture, and Civic Pageantry

Before returning to Bangkok, let us look, through the Siamese monarch's eyes, at the architecture and urban environment of Europe. While the king was away from the Kingdom, Queen Saowabha was a Regent, nominally taking care of state matters, and the king sent a stream of private correspondence to her, reporting his accounts of each day's events. The king's private secretary, Phraya Sisahathep (Seng Wirayasiri), also kept a detailed daily journal of the entire trip, complete with the king's comments and attitudes towards each place he visited. These correspondence and journal entries about the cities and towns of the fifteen countries the king visited reveal his preference towards three elements: urban vistas, historic architecture, and civic pageantry.

For the urban vistas, throughout the entire trip the king repeatedly complimented on European cities' wide avenues and boulevards. By 1897, old congested areas of most European cities were already regularized and ameliorated by the severe geometry of the boulevards. Rama V might have already seen the fine avenues of Calcutta and Rangoon in the 1870s, but those would pale in comparison with the Parisian boulevards. On September 11, 1897, after his arrival at the Gare du Nord, the king was greeted with one of nineteenth century's finest urban vistas:

The royal carriage went through Rue de Lafayette, a large avenue bustling with commerce. It was filled with crowds, even on the higher floors of the buildings, shouting "Vive le Roi!" in chorus. The royal carriage went on along Avenue des Champs Elysées, the grand tree-lined avenue with side promenades, then turned around a gigantic gateway called the Arc de Triomphe, and entered Avenue Hoche.¹¹

The king also bestowed extra compliments on the beauty of the avenues of Turin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg as well. Apart from enjoying the order and regularity, the king was also greatly impressed by the public life on the boulevards. On October 10, 1897, in the evening the king went, incognito, to see the Bois de Boulogne: "It was a large forested park west of Paris. Overlaid with roads and carriage-ways, the park was pleasantly adorned with fountains and fine trees. On evenings people come here and enjoy the

¹¹ Phraya Sisahathep, *Chotmai het sadet praphat Yurop Ro So* 116, 419.

leisurely rides; it is a great place to see the best carriages and the best-dressed Parisians.”¹²

In addition to the horizontal vistas along the boulevards, the king enjoyed immensely the panoramic bird’s-eye-views of the great European cities. Whenever possible, the king went up to enjoy the top-down view of the place, partly perhaps to comprehend the geometry and scale of the unfamiliar place, partly due to habit. On the first day he arrived in Venice, the king climbed up its tallest structure, St. Mark’s Campanile, and enjoyed the grand vistas.¹³ Other structures Rama V had climbed in 1897 include the dome of the Basilica of Superga in Turin, the tower of the Hôtel de Ville in Brussels, the dome of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. On September 12, 1897, the king went up the most famous tower of the nineteenth century:

After he reached the top floor, the king was received by the Eiffel Tower staff. Refreshments were offered, and the king signed the guest log. After that he enjoyed the panorama of Paris; due to the auspicious royal presence, the sky was so clear that one could see as far as forty-five miles around. The urban landscape of Paris was wondrously beautiful.¹⁴

For the king who was familiar only with the flat and fluid urban landscape of Bangkok, to see the enormity and geometrical complexity of Paris from such a vantage point must had been tremendous (Figure 4.4).

Another aspect of European architecture that Rama V seemed to be partial toward was its historic monuments and the historicized styles of the late-nineteenth century architecture. Although one of the key components of nineteenth-century European architecture was modern structural marvels, Rama V did not seem to care much. Apart from the Kiel Canal and the Eiffel Tower, the king did not show particular interest in modern architectural and engineering projects. In the description of Crystal Palace, only the entertainments and the dinner were mentioned. By contrast, Rama V gave lengthy descriptions of the ancient monuments of Europe : The Pantheon in Rome, the Basilica of

¹² Ibid., 469.

¹³ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴ Ibid., 423.

St. Peter in Vatican City, the Duomo in Milan, the Louvre in Paris, and the Palace of Versailles, to name but a few. An avid amateur historian, the king had an appreciation of Europe's history and historic architecture. During his visit to Holyrood Palace, an ancient landmark in Edinburgh, Rama V surprised the local staff by telling them episodes from Scottish history, relating them to the rooms and the artifacts displayed which he had just seen for the first time but had certainly read about.¹⁵

Similarly, the king enjoyed mostly the historicized styles of the architecture of his time. Descriptions in great details were given on various Beaux-Arts-style architecture of the nineteenth century : Buckingham Palace (1847), Osborne House (1851), the Wiener Staaatsoper (1869) and the Kusthistorisches Museum (1891) in Vienna, for example. Rama V's preference towards the historical, academic styles of architecture resembled his taste in art.¹⁶ More importantly, this would lead to the fabrication of revivalist and neo-traditionalist architecture in Siam, as we will see later in this chapter.

And finally, the king enjoyed civic pageantry and spectacles, especially those created in his honor, or anything that suggested strong ties between the European rulers and their subjects. The king was received with different levels of pomp and pageantry by fifteen governments and heads of states, and he learnt to appreciate the subtle language of international diplomacy : the decorations and illuminations of the city, the number of troops to be reviewed, the place of reception, and so on. For example, in Stockholm King Christian IX went aboard the Maha Chakri to welcome Rama V, then the two monarchs took a royal Danish barge to enter the city of Stockholm. At the landing area, the Siamese king walked through an elaborate gateway, especially built in the Siamese style, to commemorate this momentous event (Figure 4.5). The entire area was profusely decorated with flags and buntings, and the king was immensely pleased at the warm reception.¹⁷

Ten years later, Rama V would travel to Europe again for political and health reasons. However, it was the first journey to Europe that left a strong imprint on the

¹⁵ Ibid., 345.

¹⁶ Apinan Poshyanonda, *Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in Thai Royal Court* (Bangkok : Bureau of the Royal Household, 1993), 13.

¹⁷ Phraya Sisathap, *Chotmai het sadet praphat Yurop Ro So 116*, 300.

forty-year-old monarch's mind. As we shall see later in this chapter, urban vistas, historicist architecture, and civic pageantry were the key features of *siwilai* in architecture and urban design that the king would try his best to re-create in Bangkok in the last decade of his reign.

4.2 Remaking Bangkok : The Cast of Characters

On December 17, 1897, Rama V returned to Siam, and was warmly received by the joyous populace of the city of Bangkok.¹⁸ With Siam's political future secured, her modern administrative system up and running, the king was ready to re-fashion his capital city after the European visions of *siwilai*.

In fact, the attempt to regulate the physical transformation of the city began even when the king was still traveling in Europe. A month before the king's return, the Regent-Queen Saowabha issued a royal decree establishing Krom Sukhaphiban, the Sanitary Department, under the Ministry of Local Government.¹⁹ After the king's return from Europe, he appointed one of his most trusted courtiers, Phraya Thewetwongwiwat (MR Lan Kunchorn), as its Minister (Figure 4.6).²⁰ He also appointed a Belgian-American, Lieutenant Colonel Octave Fariola de Rozzoli, as the City Engineer. Working closely with the King, Lan Kunchorn and Fariola de Rozzoli came up with many experimental measures to improve Bangkok's physical conditions, like a new system for garbage removal, or the construction of public latrines and urinals. For architecture, there was an idea to create a building law, giving the City Engineer more control of the construction of new buildings, "since there are at present no rules to be complied with in erecting new buildings and everybody can pretty well follow his own sweet will."²¹ Drawings showing the proposed building's levels and height, sanitary system, and façade design must be submitted to the Office of the City Engineer, together with the

¹⁸ "Great Day in Siam. The King's Return. A Grand Reception," *The Bangkok Times*, December 16, 1897.

¹⁹ RKNBS, 14:34, 517 – 525.

²⁰ RKNBS, 14:44, 763.

²¹ "Proposed Building Law for Bangkok," *The Bangkok Times*, February 11, 1898.

specifications, before getting a building permit.²² Although this remained an unrealized idea, the proposed building law represents the Siamese aristocrats' vision of a clean and well-ordered city. In May 1898, the Sanitary Department took over the construction and maintenance of Bangkok roads from the Public Works Department (PWD), thereby increasing its role in the shaping of the city.²³

As for the PWD, although it was elevated from a department into a ministry in 1892, there was not much changes within the offices responsible for the Siamese aristocrats' architecture and urban design : the Architectural and Engineering Sections.²⁴ Carlo Allegri (1862 – 1938; act. in Siam 1890 – 1915) continued to be the chief engineer, while Carl Sandreczki (act. in Siam 1887 – 1910) remained the chief architect.²⁵ Perhaps responsible with more work, the Architectural Section was slightly larger, with a chief architect and three assistants; the chief engineer had only one assistant. The chief architect's salary was 1,200 baht per annum, while the chief engineer's was 600 baht.²⁶ Since the establishment of the PWD, the staff of the Architectural and Engineering Sections were mostly Italians, perhaps a consequence of the dominance of Italian builder-contractors of the 1870s and 1880s. Apart from Carlo Allegri, its chief engineer who used to work for the Bangkok firm of Grassi Brothers, the PWD also headhunted Paolo Remedi, who since 1888 had worked as a draughtsman at the same office.²⁷

But after Rama V's 1897 trip to Europe, the office of the PWD architects and engineers was significantly expanded after the order of Prince Sonabandit (1863 – 1913), Rama V's younger half-brother (Figure 4.7). The Architectural and Engineering Sections merged together into Technical Office (*Wen Baepyang*). With a Siamese as the chief inspector, the Technical Office consisted of two chief engineers and three chief architects. Allegri and Sandreczki remained on board, but the increasing number of chief architects and engineers suggested a new system of design team; in each project the

²² “Bangkok Sanitation Act, Ro So 116,” *Prachum kotmai pracham sok Volume 16*, (Bangkok : Rongphim Delime, 1935), 127 – 141.

²³ “The Bangkok Roads. Important Departure.” *The Bangkok Times*, May 7, 1898.

²⁴ RKNBS, 9:4, 25.

²⁵ “The Public Works Department,” in *The Directory for Bangkok Siam 1897* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Office, 1897), 313.

²⁶ National Archives of Thailand, R5 Kh 5.2/3.

²⁷ “The Public Works Department,” 313.

Italians worked together as a team, sharing both responsibility and credit. In anticipation of Rama V's major building programs, in 1899 the PWD recruited Mario Tamagno, an architect, and Emilio Giovanni Gollo, an engineer, directly from Turin (Figures 4.8 – 4.9). Recent graduates from the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti in Turin, Tamagno and Gollo came to Siam at Carlo Allegri's invitation.²⁸ Adventurously, they signed twenty-five year contracts to work for the Royal Siamese Government, from 1900 to 1925. Together they shaped much of the architecture of the last decade of Rama V's reign, and the entire reign of King Rama VI (r. 1910 – 1925.) Through their connections at the Accademia Albertina, they had also brought over architects, sculptors and painters, not simply from Italy, but very specifically from Turin region to work for Siam and her aristocrats : Cesare Ferro (1880 – 1934), Annibale Rigotti (1870 – 1968), and Ercole Manfredi (1883 – 1973), among others.²⁹ By 1910 there were almost twenty Italians—architects, engineers, painters, and sculptors—working at the Siamese PWD (Figure 4.10).³⁰

4.2.1 Mario Tamagno, Emilio Giovanni Gollo, and Annibale Rigotti

Let us now examine in more detail the lives and careers of three most prominent members of the Siamese PWD : Mario Tamagno, Emilio Giovanni Gollo, and Annibale Rigotti. A native of Turin, Mario Tamagno (1877 – 1941) studied architecture at the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti, the leading academy of fine arts in Turin. Very soon after graduation in 1898, Tamagno briefly worked at the architectural firm of Carlo Ceppi. As his Accademia Albertina was not enough for him to get a license to practice architecture, an alternative was to build up a portfolio of work.³¹ So when Carlo Allegri made an offer, through Carlo Ceppi, it was readily accepted by 23-year-old Tamagno, who was hired by the Siamese government in 1900 to replace Carl Sandreczki, a senior architect who was shuffled to work for the Privy Purse Bureau.³² Soon Tamagno was in

²⁸ Elena Tamagno, "Mario Tamagno: Twenty-Five Years Serving the Court of Siam as an Architect," *Muang Boran* 24:2 (April – June 1998): 31.

²⁹ Paolo Piazzardi, *Italians at the Court of Siam* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 1996).

³⁰ "The Public Works Department," 303.

³¹ Rachaporn Choochuey, "Bangkok Seven Tales of Modernity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Architecture, School of Engineering, University of Tokyo, 2002).

³² Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, 85.

charge of the key Dusit Park projects : Ambara Villa (1901 – 1906), Abhisekduisit Hall (1902 – 1904), Wat Benchamabophit (1902 – 1908), Bangkhunphrom Palace (1903 – 1905), and Parusakawan Palace (1904) (Figures 4.11 – 4.15). By 1904 he rose to the position of superintendent architect of the Technical Office, the highest-ranking officer for the design department, and was in charge of other plum projects : Prince Urubhongs’s Villa (1906 – 1907), Phraya Suriyanuwat’s Residence (1906 – 1908), triumphal arches for Rama V’s return from the second trip to Europe (1907), Anantasamakhom Hall (1908 – 1916), Wat Rachathiwat (1909 – 1912), and Suan Kulap Palace (1910 – 1913) (Figures 4.16 – 4.19).³³ In 1912, Rama VI split the PWD staff into two groups, the painters, sculptors, and some architects were sent to the newly-established Department of Fine Arts, while the rest of the architects and engineers, Tamagno included, worked under the Local Sanitary Department, Ministry of Local Government.³⁴ Nonetheless, Tamagno kept on working prolifically, both on government projects and private commissions, till the end of his Siamese employ in 1925. By then he became the doyen of the European expat community in Bangkok, and was highly regarded by the Siamese aristocrats for his design expertise. In May 1926 Tamagno left Siam and returned to Turin, where he lived until the end of his life in 1941.³⁵

Another interesting PWD figure was Emilio Giovanni Gollo (1873 – 1935). Born at the town of Cisano-sul-Neve in Liguria, Gollo studied civil engineering at the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti. In 1899, at the age of twenty-six he came to Siam to work for the PWD, in the position of chief engineer, working directly under Carlo Allegri. Like Tamagno, Gollo signed a twenty-five year contract of employment. He worked on the civil engineering part of practically all of Tamagno’s projects. In 1904 he rose to the position of superintendent engineer of the Technical Office, second in command only to Carlo Allegri, the chief engineer.³⁶ He had always kept an avid interest in modern construction techniques, especially prefabrication and modular systems, and ferro-concrete structural design. In 1913, with leading businessmen both Siamese and

³³ Mario Tamagno, “List of Work by Professor Mario Tamagno, Architect,” *Muang Boran* 24:2, (April – June 1998): 39 – 45.

³⁴ RKNBS, 28: K, 567 – 569.

³⁵ Elena Tamagno, “Mario Tamagno: Twenty-Five Years Serving the Court of Siam as an Architect,” 36.

³⁶ “The Public Works Department,” 298.

European, he founded Siam Cement Company, which subsequently became the Kingdom's largest supplier of construction materials.³⁷ Gollo was bestowed with a high Siamese court title of Phraya Sinlapasatsophit; he was also a prominent member of the foreign community in Bangkok, with a race-horse stable. He retired in 1924, and spent the rest of his life in Cisano-sul-Neve until he died in 1935, at the age of sixty-one.³⁸

The Siamese career of Annibale Rigotti (1870 – 1968) was relatively different from those of Tamagno and Gollo. Born in 1870 in the Piedmontese region, Rigotti studied architecture at the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti in Turin. With excellent academic records, after graduation he worked for a senior architect, Raimondo d'Aronco, whose work in Italian Art Nouveau brought Rigotti to work in Constantinople for two years, especially on the Ottoman National Exhibition.³⁹ After his return to Turin, Rigotti became very active in its architectural scene; at one point he won a competition for the restoration of the Mole Antonelliana—the highest masonry structure in the world, completed in 1889.⁴⁰ In 1902 Rigotti collaborated with Raimondo d'Aronco in the design and construction of Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna, in Turin. The Exposition marked the establishment of Italian Art Nouveau in architecture, and greatly enhanced Rigotti's reputation. Subsequently, at the invitation of Mario Tamagno, in 1907 Rigotti signed a two-year contract with the Siamese government, specifically to work on the design of Anantasamakhom Hall (Figures 4.20 – 4.21). Rigotti's years at the PWD were thus relatively very short, as he was employed only for his knowledge and expertise in latest architectural practice that Tamagno and Gollo lacked. In August 1909 Rigotti returned to Italy, armed with the experience of modern ferro-concrete technology and historicist design of Anantasamakhom Hall.⁴¹ He remained a consultant to the project, and was involved in the execution of Siamese Pavilion in the 1911 International Exposition in Turin.⁴² In 1923 Rigotti would return to

³⁷ *Pun Cimen Thai, 2456 – 2526 [Siam Cement Company, 1913 – 1983]* (Bangkok: Media TransAsia Co., 1983).

³⁸ The Bank of Thailand, "Emilio Giovanni Eugenio Gollo," in *Wang Thewawet [Devavesm Palace]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Krungthep, 2004), 175.

³⁹ Piazzardi, *Italians at the Court of Siam*, 93.

⁴⁰ Choochuey, "Bangkok Seven Tales of Modernity."

⁴¹ "Farewell Dinner to Prof. Arch. Rigotti," *The Bangkok Times*, July 12, 1909.

⁴² Richard A. Etlin, "Turin 1902: The Search for a Modern Italian Architecture," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 13 (Summer 1989): 94 – 109.

Siam and worked for King Rama VI for three years on various projects, especially the Norasingh Villa. After his return to Italy, Rigotti kept on practicing till his death in 1968.

In retrospect, the Italian dominance over the PWD Technical Office could be partly attributed to the first generation of Italian builder-contractors like Joachim Grassi and Stefano Cardu. After dominating the construction business in 1870s Siam, they brought over the second generation of European architects and engineers like Carlo Allegri and Carl Sandreczki, who in turn became the original members of the PWD by the late 1880s. Tamagno and Gollo were the two most prominent members of the third generation of Italian architects and engineers in Bangkok. Rama V's appreciation of Italian arts and craftsmanship, of course, was perhaps partly another reason for the Italian dominance over the PWD. But of course one should bear in mind that during the nineteenth century, Italian architects were employed by the modernizing elites of many colonial and semi-colonial countries. As neo-classical architecture and other historicist styles became the lingua franca of the colonial world, Italian architects and artists were equally prominent in the remaking of cities like Istanbul, Cairo, Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Montevideo, and of course, Bangkok.⁴³ Indeed, these long-forgotten characters like Tamagno, Gollo, and Rigotti were all part of the global history of architecture; their European academic training was closely intertwined with the formation of modern Siamese architectural identity. In return, their Siamese years surreptitiously became part of the history of modern architecture in Italy, through their practice after the service in Siam.

4.2.2 The Siamese Collaborations : The PWD Ministers and the King

Another fact that should be taken into consideration was the Siamese participation in the PWD. At the ministerial level, since its establishment in 1889 to its dissolution in 1912, the Ministry of Public Works had always been under Siamese princes or nobles. After Prince Naris (in office 1889 – 1893), the PWD Ministry was led by Prince Chumbala (in office 1893), Prince Sonabundit (in office 1893 – 1898), and Chaophraya

⁴³ For the Italian architects' role in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Turkey, see Bozdogan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, 7.

Thewetwongwiwat (ML Lan Kunchon; in office 1898 – 1899). After Lan Kunchon, Prince Naris returned to head the PWD Ministry until 1905. After that, the Ministry was led by Phraya Suriyanuwat (Koed Bunnag; in office 1905 – 1906), Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum; in office 1906 – 1907), and Prince Nares (in office 1907 – 1912) (Figures 4.22 – 4.25).⁴⁴ Considering that the Ministry of Interior was administered by Prince Damrong for twenty years (1891 – 1911), while Prince Devawongse was the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1886 to 1922, the PWD was notable for its constant change of ministers. It was the Under-Secretary (*palat krasuang*), who kept the PWD running, together with the Director-General (*chao krom*) who acted as a go-between between the King and the Italian architects and engineers. For its entire history, the PWD largely had Phraya Sathianthapanakit (Chom Chomthawat) as its Under-Secretary, with Phra Sathitnimankan (MR Chit Itsarasak) as the Director-General. Communiqués between the Siamese administrators and the Italian staff were in English, although most of the Italians could speak Thai.

With such a cast of characters, Rama V's remaking of Bangkok during the turn of the twentieth century was highly collaborative in nature. In addition, it was by no means smooth, as indicated by reports of dissatisfaction and complaints from both Siamese and Italian sides. A very poignant example was a report Phraya Suriyanuwat (Koed Bunnag) presented to Rama V in November 1905. Although he took the position of Public Works Minister for only a year, Koed was already assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the various departments in the ministry. His assessment of the PWD was negative, and he minced no words in the report:

There was no order whatsoever. All European staff thought that they simply had to design and draw plans; the rest of the process was left at the mercy of the Siamese construction staff. Errors in construction, masonry, or carpentry were simply left uncorrected, even after the engineers voice their concerns. For the Siamese staff, they are notoriously so corrupt that PWD projects are always way overpriced. There are so many staff on the payroll, but the work produced was so small and slow.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Waruni Osatharom, *109 pi Krom Yothathikan [109th Anniversary of the Public Works Department]* (Bangkok: Arun Kanphim, 1997), 111.

⁴⁵ National Archives of Thailand, R5 YTh 1/32.

According to Koed, the construction of Ambara Villa (1901 – 1906), the king's main residence at Dusit Park, was a glaring evidence of the PWD Italians' incompetence:

It is very obvious that the architects are simply recent graduates who immediately came to Bangkok to work right after their final exams. They have textbook knowledge, but no practical and detailing experience. Any experience they have is received from the Chinese carpenters and masons here in Bangkok. There are so many faults in the Villa; even the main staircase is not properly done, and it is too late to fix. Mr. Allegri, who is in charge of the Europeans, has only civil engineering knowledge but no architectural expertise. It is very obvious that all of them do not understand the European standards of fine carpentry and masonry.⁴⁶

Apart from the PWD ministers, under-secretary, and director-general, the other Siamese that the PWD Italians had to collaborate with, of course, was Rama V. As a client, the king worked closely with the Italians architects and engineers, in order to get what he wanted. Most likely, English was the language used in the communications between the king and the Italians. However, communication could also be problematic when other Siamese courtiers who could not speak English were involved. While the king himself inspected construction sites, sometimes with the Italian architects and engineers, his commands and requests were made in Thai through the Office of His Majesty's Secretary. Accordingly, everything had to be translated back and forth, between English and Thai, sometimes causing a lot of unnecessary delays.

As for the PWD Italians' performance, archival documents suggested that the king was quite satisfied. Rama V obviously liked their designs, but was dissatisfied with their notoriously slow and temperamental working process, their misunderstanding of local context, and their unwillingness to compromise their designs to the king's wishes. In a letter to Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), the PWD minister, the king complained:

Your designers always wait until they finish the finely-rendered drawings before presenting them to me. With those fine renderings, they always obstinately refuse to make changes. The only problem is that those take ages to make. If they can make quick pencil drawings, drawn to scale, for our initial approval, then go on

⁴⁶ National Archives of Thailand, R5 YTh 1/32. Koed Bunnag spent eighteen years in Europe as the Siamese ambassador to the Court of St. James, France, and Germany, prior to his return to Siam in 1904. After the brief stint at the PWD, he became the minister of the Treasury for many years.

and execute the finely-rendered architectural drawings, it will be much more efficient.⁴⁷

In the case of Cesare Ferro, an Italian painter employed by the PWD to decorate major buildings with frescoes, the king warned the PWD minister: “You have to be very careful with Ferro. He is awfully lethargic by habit already, and even more so after years of training at the Public Works Department, this lethargy will be very severe upon reaching the deadline.”⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the king appreciated the Italians’ dedication to their work. Many of them were duly bestowed with royal decorations in appreciation of their service. In June 1909, the king wrote Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), the PWD minister, after a visit to a construction site: “The European architects and engineers should really be applauded for their work at the Anantasamakhom Hall construction. Unlike Siamese construction supervisors who simply point their fingers frivolously, they work diligently *in situ* until nightfall, just like the way they did in Italy. I was very pleased, and told Mr. Allegri so.”⁴⁹

Still, the king did not fully trust the PWD Italians, hence the need for the PWD ministers, under-secretary, and director-general, who might understand local conditions better than the Italians. For example, in August 1906, the king ordered the PWD minister to closely supervised the planning of his lavatory: “I like the plans for this water closet, but these engineers are all playing the guessing game because the situation in Europe is very different from Siam. They are all so full of self-confidence, only accept their faults when it is clearly theirs. They have nothing to lose; I am the one who’s losing money on this.”⁵⁰

With this cast of characters, the PWD was essentially a hybrid enterprise. The PWD Italians’ knowledge of latest architectural styles and construction techniques was

⁴⁷ King Chulalongkorn, *Samnao Phraratchahatthalekha suan phraong Phrabat Somdet Phrachunlachomklao Chaoyuhua thung Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum) [Private Correspondence from King Rama V to Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum)]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Bamrungham, 1939), 94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 – 31.

matched by the Siamese aristocrats' willingness to purchase modern technology and building materials. Communication was a problem, but they managed to get along and undertook a major transformation of the city of Bangkok by the turn of the twentieth century.

4.3 Remaking Bangkok : The Scenes

With the PWD Italians, the Sanitary Department French engineers, and Siamese Ministers, King Rama V began the remaking of Bangkok right after his return from the 1897 journey. Initially, changes were piecemeal—a new set of regulations on pavements, a new bridge to commemorate the king's birthday, or a proclamation prohibiting the use of inflammable roofing materials.⁵¹ The King, however, was already planning a major transformation of the city, the result of which would so dramatically change the urban environment of Bangkok with the urban vistas, historicist architecture, and civic pageantry.

By then Bangkok was a capital city of 600,000, most of which lived within the 3rd ring of city moat, Khlong Phadung Krungkasem, especially areas within the city walls and Sampeng, the Chinatown. South of Khlong Phadung, a suburban district of Bangrak had already grown since the early 1890s by the settlement of wealthy Siamese, Chinese, and European residents. Its adjacency to the port area led to the cosmopolitan character of this suburban district, with consulates, banks, trading houses, clubs, and fine residences spread over old orchard areas that became prime real estates. By the time Rama V began his comprehensive remaking of Bangkok, he had no choice but to venture north of Khlong Phadung (Figure 4.26).

By the late 1890s, the area north of Bangkok was still sparsely populated, except for the well-watered banks of the Chao Phraya river. There was a small road that ran along the bends of the river till it reached Khlong Samsen, an ancient canal that cut through the wide expanses of rice fields called Thung Samsen (Samsen Field) and Thung Sompoj (Sompoj Field). On March 6, 1899, *The Bangkok Times* reported that the king

⁵¹ RKNBS 15: 34, 345; RKNBS 15: 34, 349; RKNBS 15: 42, 435.

visited the fields almost daily; eight days later a formal announcement was made, of the king's plan to build a summer residence.⁵² According to the announcement, the main reason for the new summer palace was the King's health:

As every resident of Bangkok is well aware, the Grand Palace is entirely surrounded by buildings and thus receives scarcely any fresh breezes. Intense heat accordingly prevails during the summer, and this affects His Majesty's health. ... His Majesty the King therefore deems it desirable to have at Bangkok a summer resort provided with the necessary walks, where His Majesty may enjoy daily exercise according to His convenience. For this purpose His Majesty has been graciously pleased to command that the plantations and paddy-fields, situated between Klong Padung Krung Krasem and Klong Samsen and extending to the east up to the Railway-line, be bought.⁵³

The King named the project Suan Dusit (Dusit Park; a celestial garden), intentionally not using the term *phraratchawang* (royal palace), as the funding was from the King's privy purse, not state budget.⁵⁴

The plantations and paddy-fields bought, however, totaled into a vast trapezoidal plot of land, about three square kilometers in size, so Dusit Park was not a small villa in a private park, but a whole new suburb about a quarter of the city's size. The irregular lines of old paddy-fields were obliterated by the grids of new roads and canals, the new urban vistas that were markedly different from the labyrinthine roads within the City. Carlo Allegri, the PWD engineer, together with Octave Fariola de Rozzoli, the City Engineer, laid down the streets that divided the vast area into zones, with the king's residence at the center. The blocks to its south were zoned for palaces of the king's sons and governmental offices; the blocks to the north were reserved for army barracks, service functions, and residences of some courtiers (Figures 4.27 – 4.28).⁵⁵ By the end of 1899 a large wooden bungalow was built at Dusit Park, so the king and the royal family

⁵² "Locals," *The Bangkok Times*, March 6, 1899.

⁵³ "The New Palace," *The Bangkok Times*, March 14, 1899.

⁵⁴ RKNBS 15: 50, 543.

⁵⁵ For further details on the creation of Dusit Park, see Bureau of the Royal Household, *Chotmai het kankosang lae somsaem Phrathinang Wimanmek Phutthasakkarat 2443 – 2518 [Chronicles of the Construction and Renovation of Wimanmek Mansion, 1900 – 1975]* (Bangkok: Bureau of the Royal Household, 1990). Secondary sources and studies are: MR Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (Bangkok: River Books, 1996); Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

could stay overnight.⁵⁶ As the king truly enjoyed evenings at Dusit Park, by June 1900 the king decided to build a permanent residence there. Munthat Rattanakot, a three-story teakwood royal residence on Sichang Island, in the Gulf of Siam, was relocated to Dusit Park and enlarged into a huge teakwood mansion. Kon Hongsakul, the royal master builder, was in charge of the construction of the building, later named Wimanmek Mansion (Figure 4.29).⁵⁷ Teakwood villas of various gingerbread styles were also constructed around Wimanmek Mansion for the king's three queens, several favorite concubines, and the young princes and princesses (Figure 4.30). After the inauguration ceremony on March 27, 1902, Wimanmek Mansion became the king's residence. However, a separate hall of audience was needed, and the king commissioned Mario Tamagno and the PWD team to design Abhisekdusit Hall, a one-storey building of hybridized Moorish style, with Italian Art Nouveau decorative elements, inaugurated in April 1904 (Figure 4.31).⁵⁸

Soon after the king's residence at the center of Dusit Park was located, a grand urban thoroughfare that would connect it with the old Grand Palace was planned by Carl Sandreczki.⁵⁹ At the length of 3,200 meters, the avenue was designed and constructed in three parts (Figure 4.32). To be named Ratchadamnoen Avenue—the King's Progress—construction of the outer section, from Dusit Park to the city walls, began in August 1899. The name of the new avenue was derived from Queen's Walk, a fine avenue in Green Park, London.⁶⁰ In a letter dated September 1902, the king compared Ratchadamnoen Avenue with London's the Mall, the grand avenue leading to the front gate of Buckingham Palace, with Marlborough House, the Crown Prince's official residence, on its side.⁶¹ The avenue took two years to build, and was seventy-two meters wide, with three lines of carriage ways separated by rows of trees and footpaths. In addition, twenty

⁵⁶ RKNBS 16: 50, 689 – 696.

⁵⁷ RKNBS 17:24, 302 – 305.

⁵⁸ RKNBS 21:4, 46 – 50.

⁵⁹ Pirasti Povatong, "Thanon Ratchadamnoen: Prawat kankosang [Ratchadamnoen Avenue: An Architectural History]," *Muang Boran* 33:4 (October – December 2007): 32 – 54.

⁶⁰ National Archives of Thailand, R5 N 18.1 Z/1.

⁶¹ King Chulalongkorn, *Prachum phraratchahatthalekha Phrabatsomdet Phrachunlachomklao Chaoyuhua thi song borihan ratchakan phaendin phak thi 3 ton thi 2 [Compilation of Rama V's Letters on His Administration of State Matters, Volume 3 Part 2]*, (Bangkok: Rongphim Samnak Thamniap Nayokratthamontri, 1971), 49.

meters-wide strips of land on both sides of the avenue was bought up by the Privy Purse, with the intention of building continuous blocks of department stores and multi-storey apartments for the wealthy residents of Bangkok (Figures 4.34 – 4.35). A service road, Thanon Sukha, lined the back of the Privy Purse land to separate it from “the uncontrollable mess of attap-roofed huts and hovels.”⁶²

After the construction of the outer sections of the avenue was completed, in 1902 the PWD and the Sanitary Department continued with the final stretch of the thoroughfare, from the already finished parts to the Grand Palace. As the avenue cut along the eastern end of Sanam Luang, the multi-purpose ground immediately north of the Grand Palace, the king ordered a complete makeover (Figure 4.36). A quarter of the old Front Palace was demolished, so that the century-old trapezoidal-shaped Sanam Luang could be enlarged and transformed into a large hippodrome-shaped space, with the Ratchadamnoen Avenue on its eastern side (Figure 4.37). A few years later, the Dusit Park terminus of the avenue would be enlarged into a vast rectangular plaza; Ratchadamnoen Avenue became the grand thoroughfare that ran from the front gate of the old palace—still used for ceremonial functions—to the front lawn of Dusit Park, the monarch’s suburban residence (Figure 4.38).

As Ratchadamnoen Avenue crossed over three rings of city moats, cast-iron bridges were designed by Carlo Allegri, Mario Tamagno, and the PWD team. Makhawan Rangsang, Phanphiphop Lila, and Phanfa Lilat Bridges were inaugurated in 1903, 1904, and 1907, respectively.⁶³ Of neo-classical style, the bridges were elaborately decorated with marble pylons, wrought-iron railings and lampposts, turning the crossing from the inner-city area to the suburb into fine urban vistas (Figure 4.39 – 4.40).

While the construction of the king’s residence, the avenue, and the bridges was going on, other elements of Dusit Park had also taken shape. By 1899 the king’s sons began to return from their study in Europe, and Dusit Park was created just in time to provide large plots of land to build their princely villas. In 1900 Princes Rabhi, Prawit,

⁶² National Archives of Thailand, R5 N 18.1 Z/1.

⁶³ Povatong, “Thanon Ratchadamnoen : Prawat kankosang [Ratchadamnoen Avenue: An Architectural History],” 32 – 54. See also, Sirichai Narumit, *Old Bridges of Bangkok* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1977); Piazzardi, *Italians at the Court of Siam*.

and Chira moved into their new Dusit Park palaces, all of which were designed by the PWD architects.⁶⁴ As these princes were born of concubines, their residences were simply large edifices of straightforward neo-classical style and load-bearing wall structures (Figures 4.41 – 4.42). By 1905, however, another frenzied phase of princely palace construction began with the return of Crown Prince Maha Vajiravudh, Prince Chakrabongse, Prince Paribatra, and Prince Yugala. As these princes were of the highest rank—born of queens and consorts—their palaces were quite considerably more elaborate. The PWD architects had ample opportunity to play with various European styles : neo-Baroque, neo-Rococo, Italian Art Nouveau, and neo-classic, with larger budget and newer construction techniques (Figures 4.43 – 4.46). As each of these palaces were actually a group of buildings housing hundreds of people, from the prince and his family, to their retainers, secretaries, nurses, chauffeurs, cooks, gardeners, servants, and so on, Dusit Park became an elite enclave that was quite bustling with people.⁶⁵ In addition, as Rama V took up permanent residence at Dusit Park, many of the court nobles relocated and built their residences on its perimeters. Some of these mansions were bestowed from the king to show his favor, and the PWD had, again, ample opportunity to show off their command of latest architectural styles. Examples include the residence of Nop Krairoek, the King’s butler (1905), and the house of Koed Bunnag, the Minister of PWD (1908). Unbound by the rules and regulations of ancient Siamese sumptuary laws, these fine European-style residences of the court nobles must have perplexed the common Siamese; to use the same language of architecture that the princes used was simply unthinkable prior to the reign of Rama V (Figures 4.47 – 4.48). In offering their service to the Siamese patrons, the PWD architects thus became a part of architectural transformation that was happening around turn-of-the-century Siam.

Another important element of Dusit Park was the Buddhist monasteries. In reclaiming the lands for the project, five former or derelict monasteries of no architectural importance were obliterated. In return, Rama V not only built a new monastery, Wat

⁶⁴ RKNBS 17: 7, 48 – 50.

⁶⁵ See, for example, an account of life in Prince Chakrabongse’s household, in Prince Chula Chakrabongs, *Lords of Life: The Paternal Monarchy of Bangkok, 1782-1932, with the Earlier and More Recent History of Thailand* (London: Alwin Redman Limited, 1960) and; Eileen Hunter, *Katya & the Prince of Siam* (Bangkok: River Books, 2004).

Benchamabophit, but also undertook a complete renovation of two ancient temples : Wat Somkhiang (renamed Wat Ratchaphatikaram), and Wat Rachathiwat (Figures 4.49 – 4.50).⁶⁶ Construction of these monasteries began in 1899; around the same time Prince Naris returned to the position of PWD minister, and it was through these monastery projects that he developed a new language of Siamese architecture, with collaboration from the PWD Italians.⁶⁷

With all of these elements in place : royal residence, princely palaces, monasteries, streets and avenues, Rama V moved on and embarked on the key component of Dusit Park, Ambara Villa (Figures 4.51 – 4.53). In 1900, Carl Sandreczki took the king’s brief to Germany and developed a design for the forty-room mansion at the Munich firm of Otto Lasne.⁶⁸ In December 1902, the foundation stone for the Ambara Villa was laid on the site, east of Wimanmek Mansion.⁶⁹ After construction began, Mario Tamagno and the PWD team took over the project from Sandreczki; the building’s exterior was German Art Nouveau, while its interior was flamboyantly Italian fin-de-siècle. Italian architects, sculptors, painters, and moulders were kept busy decorating this edifice.⁷⁰ Maple & Co., a London-based department store, supplied furniture for all of the main rooms in Ambara Villa, except for the Egyptian Room, which was fitted with elaborate furniture the king bought on his return from the 1897 trip (Figures 4.54 – 4.57). Construction took almost five years; upon its completion the king moved in by the end of 1906. After some alterations, Ambara Villa was officially inaugurated in February 1907.⁷¹ It became the king’s main residence until the king

⁶⁶ Wat Benchamabophit, *Prawat Wat Benchamabophit Dusitwanaram [History of Wat Benchamabophit]* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 2000), 5.

⁶⁷ For sources on the life and work of Prince Naris, see Sucharit Thaworasuk, *Phraprawat lae phonngan sinlapa khong Somdetphrachaoborommawongthoe Kromphraya Naritsaranuwattiwong [Life and Artistic Work of Prince Naris]* (Bangkok: Thai Watthana Panich, 1968); Manop Itsaradet, *Sathapattayakam fi phrahat Somdetchaofa Kromphraya Naritsaranuwattiwong [Architectural Works of Prince Naris]* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1995).

⁶⁸ Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty*, 209.

⁶⁹ RKNBS 19: 38, 743 – 744.

⁷⁰ Mario Tamagno, “List of Work by Professor Mario Tamagno, Architect,” 39 – 45.

⁷¹ RKNBS 23: 49, 1241 – 1251.

passed away on October 23, 1910, in the state bedroom on the third floor of Ambara Villa.⁷²

Just a month after the inauguration of Ambara Villa, on March 27, 1907, King Rama V left Siam for his second, and last, journey to Europe, ten years after the 1897 trip. By then Siam's future was quite secured, and the purpose of the trip was for the king's health, and to reaffirm his personal ties with European royalty.⁷³ On November 17 of the same year, the king returned to Bangkok amidst great fanfare (Figure 4.58).⁷⁴ After the royal yacht Maha Chakri anchored at the Royal Landing in front of the Grand Palace, the king disembarked at the designated auspicious time of 10:48 a.m. He was warmly received by the Crown Prince, the royal family, court officials, and foreign dignitaries, then he entered the Grand Palace to pay respect to the Emerald Buddha and the relics of the royal ancestors. After that the king left the Grand Palace to receive the welcoming address from the people of Bangkok at Sanam Luang, the royal ground north of the Palace. From there he took a state carriage ride, from the old Grand Palace to Ambara Villa, his new residence at Dusit Park.⁷⁵ The procession moved along Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the grand urban armature linking the old center of power with the new one, lined with ephemeral triumphal arches that represented simultaneously the king, the welcome from the people, and the ministry that footed the bill for the construction of the arch (Figure 4.59).⁷⁶ With the arches' variety of architectural styles, the November 1907 event was truly momentous since it was the first time that the urban vista, the historicized forms of architecture, and the civic pageantry, were put together as a single scene, with the highly revered king at center-stage. For the fifty-five years old king, this must have been quite satisfying an achievement.

⁷² "Death of the King," *The Bangkok Times*, October 24, 1910.

⁷³ The journal of the 1907 journey to Europe was kept in the form of the king's correspondence to his daughter Princess Nibhanopphadon: see King Chulalongkorn, *Klai ban [Far from Home]* (Bangkok: s.n., 1907).

⁷⁴ "His Majesty's Return," *The Bangkok Times*, November 8, 1907.

⁷⁵ "The Reception of His Majesty," *The Bangkok Times*, November 11, 1907.

⁷⁶ For a full study of the 1907 event, see Kundoldibya Panitchpakdi et al., *Samut phaphthai kanrapsadetphraratchadamnoen Phrabatsomdet Phrachunlachomklaochaoyuhoa chak kansadetphraratchadamnoen praphat thawip Yurop khrang thi 2 Ro So 126 [Photographic Album of the Welcoming Celebrations on Rama V's Return from the 1907 Journey to Europe]* (Bangkok: Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, 2004). See also, Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

In the following year, the king's fortieth anniversary on the throne was similarly celebrated with great pomp and spectacular pageantry.⁷⁷ In Bangkok, the spectacles occurred on the grounds of Dusit Park, beginning on November 11, 1908, with the laying of the foundation stone of the Ananta Samakhom Hall.⁷⁸ The king himself presided over the ceremony inaugurating the construction of the grand edifice designed by Mario Tamagno and the PWD team (Figure 4.60). Later in the same day the king opened his own equestrian statue, a gift from the people of Siam to their beloved monarch, set in the middle of the Royal Plaza at the northern end of Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Figure 4.61). The king, the city, and the people thus became unified in the grand and spectacular manner, further enhanced by the PWD-designed pylons, baldachins, and bunting. The event concluded with the king's inspection of floats representing the various facets of progress and civilization Siam had achieved during the august king's reign.⁷⁹

Two years later, on October 23, 1910, King Rama V died of chronic nephritis, in the state bedroom on the third floor of the Ambara Villa, Dusit Park. After the initial preparations according to the ancient Siamese court custom, the body of the king was dressed in full regal robe, his face covered with a gold mask. The body was then placed in a funerary urn, which was enclosed by the great golden casket.⁸⁰ By dusk the casket was brought down from the third floor to the front porch, and was placed at the center of the funeral procession. At seven o'clock the grand procession, with the body of the highly-revered king, left Dusit Park. Rama V progressed, for the last time, along Ratchadamnoen Avenue, followed by Rama VI and members of the royal family, members of the government officials, in full dress uniform. The Bangkok Times noted the sombre scene: "The passing of this cortege along the broad avenue lined with spectators, the silence only broken up by the steady tramp of feet and the wailing music of the bands, produced a depressing effect which will not easily be forgotten by the spectators."⁸¹ After reaching the Grand Palace, the king's body laid in state for months in

⁷⁷ For a compilation of primary documents on the event, see National Archives of Thailand, *Chotmai het phraratchaphithi Ratchamangklaphisek Ro So 126, 127 [Archival Records of the 1908 – 1909 Jubilee Celebrations]* (Bangkok : National Archives of Thailand, 1984).

⁷⁸ "The Record Reign Celebrations," *The Bangkok Times*, November 12, 1908.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ "Death of the King," *The Bangkok Times*, October 24, 1910.

⁸¹ "The Funeral Procession," *The Bangkok Times*, October 24, 1910.

Dusit Mahaprasat, the ancient throne hall built by King Rama I (Figure 4.62). On March 16, 1911, the king's remains were cremated in the *phra meru*, the royal funeral structure that had been temporarily erected in the middle of Sanam Luang (Figure 4.63). Kon Hongsakul, the royal master builder, returned from semi-retirement to design and construct the grand ephemeral structure, under the supervision of Prince Naris.⁸² The PWD Italians, led by Mario Tamagno, helped with the production of Siamese-style decorative elements but using modern techniques.⁸³ In the end, architecture and urban design still played a leading role in the Siamese aristocrats' construction of self-identity. Indeed, the forty-two years span of Rama V's reign was long enough to see significant changes in both architecture and the building practice in Siam. Buildings like the Anantasamakhom Hall, or Ambara Villa, were on par with anything built by European royalty, at least in external appearance. Like other achievements and progress made during the reign, this was truly impressive, as the Bangkok Times had observed on the eve of the king's death: "The growth that in Europe took generations, the King, working on the old civilisation of Siam, was able to effect in his own life-time."⁸⁴

Indeed, with such an acceleration of self-civilizing mission, perhaps the construction and manifestation of *siwilai* in Siamese architecture was far from complete. In the final part of this chapter, I will examine three sites in Dusit Park—royal residences, Buddhist monasteries, and state pageantry—in order to explicate how the Siamese aristocrats' carefully orchestrated *siwilai* and modern architectural images were actually rested on the supposedly uncivilized or traditional norms. In some of these sites, old spatial practices persisted, and were even more glaringly obvious due to the disparity with the new external appearance. In others, it was traditionalism that grew as a response to the accelerated modernization.

4.4 Beyond *Siwilai* : Indigenous Modernity in Dusit Park

As this chapter has tried to explicate, the latter half of King Rama V's reign was a transformative period through which the Siamese aristocrats' civilizational ideals, their

⁸² "The Royal Cremation," *The Bangkok Times*, March 13, 1911.

⁸³ Mario Tamagno, "List of Work by Professor Mario Tamagno, Architect," 41.

⁸⁴ "Editorial," *The Bangkok Times*, October 24, 1910.

architects, and their architecture, were simultaneously transformed. Bangkok was always a hybrid city, but it was made even more so during this tumultuous period. Historical writings on this period often portray this very hybridity as a unique phenomenon, a modernization process without colonization, made possible only by the benevolent and far-sighted king. As for the writings on the architecture of this period, modernization is often highlighted as a key theme, too often understood simply as a replacement of tradition with modernity, the old versus the new, the East and the West. Buildings like the Chakri Throne Hall (1882), for example, demonstrate how the East and the West were juxtaposed in the *siwilai* architecture of the period.

In this final part of the chapter, I seek to inquire further into the very nature of this hybridity, the juxtaposition of foreign and indigenous elements in a seemingly simple and natural design, which actually concealed the paradoxical and unstable conditions. While the Europeanized nature of new royal residences was obvious, traditional and allegedly uncivilized spatial practices might persist. While the architecture of the new monasteries relied heavily on historical forms of ancient Siamese architecture, deep beyond the façade were modern construction techniques and materials. It was not simply juxtaposition, but subtle and complicate collaborations between the Siamese aristocrats and their architects, accelerated by the free flow of architectural styles, building materials, and people of the turn of the twentieth century. King Rama V and other Siamese aristocrats were able to maintain their status quo only through their ability to move between these realms of hybridity and collaboration.

4.4.1 Polygyny in the Princely Villas

In the new palaces and fine residences of Dusit Park, Italian architects of the PWD dreamed up grand villas of eclectic, fin-de-siècle styles, proudly stating the aristocratic owners' ability to keep up with the trends of the time. With imported materials inside and out, at a cursory glance these Siamese residences were similar to the European suburban villas, except perhaps for the details for tropical climate. Typically, these grand residences were two-storey, with a porte-cochère out front. An entrance hall led to the grand staircase inside. On the lower floors were reception room, dining room,

and perhaps a pantry. On the upper floors were the main reception hall, living room, breakfast room, children's room, a library, and the bedroom suites for the master and the mistress of the house (Figures 4.41 – 4.46).⁸⁵

While these villas looked just as civilized as those of suburban Berlin or Brussels, projecting the image of a genteel family living their wealthy lives, the reality of the Siamese elite's family life was much different. One glaringly “uncivilized” practice that had to be cleverly concealed behind the Europeanized façades was polygyny. Historically, the practice of polygyny was legitimate, even almost mandatory for Southeast Asian kings and princes. Polygynous marriages helped strengthen and maintain political ties between rulers and their supporters, cementing bonds among powerful men of the ruling class.⁸⁶ The Inner Court (Fai Nai) was a Siamese institution consisting of the king's different ranks of the royal wives, unmarried princesses, female retainers, servants, and slaves. Princes and nobles had their share in polygamous practice as well; The ex-Regent Chuang Bunnag, for example, had about twenty wives, two of which were officially instituted as *Thanphying*, or Dames. Prince Chuthamani (1808 – 1865), King Rama IV's younger brother, had one hundred and twenty wives.⁸⁷ Prince Chaturonratsami (1856 – 1900), Rama V's younger brother, had nine wives with fourteen children.⁸⁸ Even after the turn of the twentieth century, the practice continued quite unabated; Chaophraya Ramrakhop (ML Fua Pheungbun, 1890 – 1967), a high court official during the reign of King Rama VI, had thirty-four children from ten wives.⁸⁹

According to a study of Rama V's Inner Court, the king had one hundred and fifty-three wives who came from different backgrounds : branches of the royal family, governors of provincial areas and tributary states, wealthy Chinese, and influential families of court officials, all of whom benefited much from the king's polygynous

⁸⁵ Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty*.

⁸⁶ Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 111.

⁸⁷ Malcolm Smith, *A Physician at the Court of Siam* (London: Country Life, 1947), 37 – 40.

⁸⁸ Prince Bhanurangsi, *Rachinikul ratchakan thi 5 [Genealogy and Descendants of the Fifth Reign]* (Bangkok: n.a.), 144.

⁸⁹ *Thiraluk nai ngan phraratchathan phloeng sop Phon Ek Chaophraya Ramrakhop (ML Fua Pheungbun) [Cremation Volume for Chaophraya Ramrakhop]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Thanakhan Krungthep, 1967), 15 – 16.

practice (Figure 4.64).⁹⁰ The royal wives were ranked according to their birth; there were four Queens (*phra ratchathewi*), and four Consorts (*phra akkharachaya*), all of whom were princesses by birth. For the royal wives who were commoners by birth, there were about eight Grand Concubines (*phra sanom ek*), while the rest were mere concubines (*chao chom*). In the traditional setting of the Grand Palace, this intricate network of polygyny was accommodated by the blocks of residences within the Inner Court. The queens occupied the larger blocks, located close to the king's residence, while the rest resided in courtyard mansions of smaller size, further away from the king's bedchamber (Figures 4.65 – 4.66).

After the early contacts with foreigners from the West, Siamese aristocrats' practice of polygyny was increasingly criticized. To the European eyes, polygyny was merely a sexual perversion, an injustice to women, and a sure sign of a dark, uncivilized nation.⁹¹ Monogamy, of course, was equated with civilization and the Enlightenment notions of progress. During the reign of Rama V, the Siamese elite tried to slightly modernize the system, partly to minimize the European critiques, and partly as a process of modernization (Figure 4.67). After Queen Sawangwatthana (1862 – 1955) gave birth to the first male celestial prince (*chao fa*—the prince of the highest rank, born of a princess), Prince Maha Wachirunahit, in 1880 King Rama V elevated the Queen's rank to the Somdet Phranangchao level. Three years later, the king established Prince Maha Wachirunahit as the first Crown Prince, in order to clarify the line of succession according to the modern norms. However, in January 1894 the Crown Prince died, and the king switched the line of succession to those born of another Queen, Saowabha. Prince Maha Wachirawut (King Rama VI), became the heir to the throne. While all of this was going on, as the Chakri Reformation was taking effects, the king's polygynous practice continued unabated. This was extremely paradoxical, since modernization was supposed to eventually eradicate the need for polygyny, but the Inner Court kept on increasing in size, and complexity. Anyhow, while the Siamese elite were very comfortable with this paradoxical situation, when they had direct contact with Europeans,

⁹⁰ Pornsiri Buranakhet, "Nangnai: Chiwit thang sangkhom lae botbat nai sangkhom thai samai Ratchakan thi 5 [Inner Palace Women : Social Lives and Roles in Thai Society during the Reign of Rama V]" (M.A. thesis, Thammasat University, 1997). See also Loos, *Subject Siam*, 113.

⁹¹ Loos, *Subject Siam*, 119.

how would they present their polygenous selves? One way, simply put, was to deceive. In 1896 the king made a state visit to Dutch Java. Apart from the usual male retinue of princes and nobles, the king also brought Queen Saowabha, Grand Concubine Chum Krairoek, and a few of his sons and daughters. When formally received by Dutch colonial rulers, Rama V had to present Chum, the Grand Concubine, as Queen Saowabha's lady-in-waiting (Figure 4.68).⁹² In another instance, during the 1897 trip Rama V commissioned Eduardo Gelli, a Florentine artist, to paint a large oil portrait of the royal family, to be hung on the wall of the royal drawing room at Chakri Throne Hall. As it was not possible to put all of his one hundred and fifty-three wives, and dozens of their sons and daughters, into one painting, the king simply chose to put himself, Queen Saowabha, and five of their nine progenies (Figure 4.69). Accordingly, the illusion of "normal" family by European standard was maintained, with oil on canvas.

During the early years of Rama V's reign, architectural styles changed, but spatial arrangement of palace layouts remained very traditional. The intricate network of polygyny was still going strong, in spite of the Europeanizing taste. An example was Bang Pa-In Palace, Rama V's summer residence eighty miles north of Bangkok, that the king built around 1872. Free from the strict confines of the Grand Palace walls, Rama V's Inner Court were accommodated in small villas and bungalows, picturesquely located in the park-like area north of the king's residence, Warophat Phiman Hall. Still, the spatial arrangement of the Inner Court was quite strictly maintained, with the queens' villas located close to the king's residence (Figure 4.70). Water features like canals, lake, and ponds were cleverly designed to segregate the female quarters from the public side of the palace. For the princes, the same spatial arrangement was deployed in a smaller scale. An example was the layout of Buraphaphirom Palace, the residence of Prince Bhanurangsi (1859 – 1927), the younger brother of King Rama V. The vast palace compound was divided into the public part, with a circular road leading from the front gate to the prince's main residence, an imposing neo-classical edifice built in 1876 by Joachim Grassi, the Italian builder-contractor. The prince, however, had about a dozen

⁹² King Chulalongkorn, *Raya thang thieo Chawa kwa song duen [Journal of a Two-Month Journey in Java]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1923), 313.

wives, five of whom gave birth to sixteen children.⁹³ The wives and the children did not live in the main residence, but in the wooden villas and bungalows built in the garden directly behind the main building, surrounded by the inner line of walls (Figures 4.71 – 4.72). The same kind of spatial segregation was continued by even the princes of the next generation, Rama V's sons. A perhaps extreme example was Prince Abhakara (1880 – 1923), a British-trained admiral of the Royal Siamese Navy. In spite of his British training, the prince was widely known to have so many wives, including a Russian, a Japanese, and a pair of twins. In 1907 the prince built a fine two-storey neo-classical villa in Dusit Park as his residence, where he lived with Princess Dibhyasamphan, his official consort. But of course, towards the main residence's back was the prince's Inner Court, consisting of fifteen houses, each of which was occupied by the prince's many concubines and their children (Figure 4.73). In order to keep up the monogamous, civilized appearance, the Siamese aristocrats opted to deploy architecture and landscape design as a means to separate their private life from the public one.

By the time Rama V built Dusit Park, however, things began to change. In 1902, when the king built Wimanmek Mansion as his first residence at Dusit Park, he also commissioned the royal master builders to build teakwood villas of various Europeanized styles for his three queens, two consorts, and the favorite concubines (Figure 4.74).⁹⁴ The queens' villas were zoned west of the king's mansion, separated by a north-south canal, while the concubines' villas, smaller in size, were grouped together towards the north side of the palace compound (Figure 4.75). However, as customs began to loosen up, and Wimanmek Mansion was an edifice of a very large size, the king broke up the tradition by allowing his women to live under the same roof. The king occupied the whole top floor of the octagonal-shaped tower on the western end of the mansion (Figure 4.76). Directly underneath, on the second floor, were the living quarters of Queen Sukhumal and her retinue, a sure sign of Sukhumal's increasing power towards the end of Rama V's reign. To the octagon's east was a row of rooms, which were partitioned and occupied by

⁹³ Prince Bhanurangsi, *Rachinikul Ratchakan thi 5 [Genealogy and Descendants of the Fifth Reign]* (Bangkok: n.a.), 152.

⁹⁴ Nanthiya Sawangwutthitham, "Botnam [Introduction]," in National Archives of Thailand, *Chotmai het phraratchaphithi Ratchamangkhlaphisek Ro So 126, 127 [Archival Records of the 1908 – 1909 Jubilee Celebrations]* (Bangkok: National Archives of Thailand, 1984), 5.

the Bunnag concubines, the king's favorites. Further to the east, at the corner of the L-shaped mansion, was the large quarters of Queen Saowabha, still of utmost importance as the mother of the Crown Prince, but no longer the king's favorite. After Saowabha's quarters came the smaller arm of the L-shaped plan, with the cabinet meeting room at its center. Further north, at the northern end of the wing, was the quarters of Princess Saisawaliphrom, another favorite of the king.⁹⁵ With this complicate arrangement, the queens, consorts, and concubines had both their own detached villas, and the living quarters at Wimanmek Mansion. Had the king had to receive foreign guests at the Mansion, members of the Inner Court could temporarily moved to their villas, to present the façade of civilized, monogamous Siam to the foreigners' eyes. Anyway, the most important point is that as a building, Wimanmek Mansion was simply a large edifice with lots of interchangeable rooms; the functional non-specificity—typical of traditional Siamese houses—thus allowed for an accommodation of polygenous spatial practices.⁹⁶

For the PWD-designed Ambara Villa, however, the situation was quite different. In the beginning, Carl Sandreczki worked on the preliminary design with a Munich-based firm of Otto Lasne and came up with an H-shaped building, with two east-west wings connected at the center with a single north-south wing, with a porte-cochere leading up to the grand foyer at the center (Figures 4.77 – 4.79). The south wing was a three-storey structure; on the ground floor there were reception rooms and pages rooms; on the first floor, Council Chamber, dining room, and smoking room; and finally on the second floor, the King's bedchamber, a private sitting room, a library, and a chapel (Figures 4.80 – 4.83). There were two staircases; one for the king, the other for his guests, and the pages. The north wing was two-storey high, on the ground floor there were luncheon room, smoking room, and a reception room called the Egyptian Room. On the first floor, there was a suite of dressing room/sitting room/bedroom, mysteriously labeled simply as such. It was definitely not the king's official bedroom suite, as that was located on the second floor of the south wing (Figure 4.84). However, archival documents suggested that the suite was originally meant to be used for the king's conjugal purposes; right next to it

⁹⁵ Sulak Siwarak, *Samphat MC Chongchitthanom Diskul [Interviews with MC Chongchitthanom Diskul]* (Bangkok: Munlanithi Sathiankoset-Nakhapraphip, 1986), 313.

⁹⁶ Ruethai Chaichongrak, *Thai House: History and Evolution* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 2002), 212.

were two small bedrooms, with a separate staircase that could be accessed from the west part of the compound. Nonetheless, the Ambara Villa rooms were fully furnished with English furniture; the villa's floor plans were sent to Maple & Co. in London, which sent back shiploads of furniture, together with instruction manual on their installation.⁹⁷

After Ambara Villa's inauguration ceremony in February 1907, however, Rama V immediately transformed the building to accommodate his polygynous familial arrangement. The conjugal suite on the first floor of the north wing was occupied by Queen Saowabha, who also installed a mosaic portrait of herself on the wall of the wing's main staircase (Figure 4.85).⁹⁸ In addition, a whole set of rooms were added to the west of Saowabha's suite, and was taken up by Princess Saisawaliphirom, the favorite consort, and her numerous retinue.⁹⁹ Moreover, the PWD designed and constructed another building, thirty meters north of Ambara Villa, for Queen Sukhumal and her entourage. The two-storey building, named Udornphak Hall, was connected to Ambara via a beautiful cast-iron bridge that was designed by Mario Tamagno.¹⁰⁰

The construction of these Europeanized royal residences, therefore, was not a simple case of civilization through westernization. Deception, segregation, and adaptation were just some of the means through which the Siamese aristocrats dealt with the paradoxical situation. Through architectural and landscape design, polygyny and modernity co-existed, and actually persisted well into the twentieth century.

4.4.2 Neo-Traditionalism in Modern Siamese Monastery

Another traditional institution that underwent significant transformation during the reign of Rama V was Buddhism. Like their forebears, the early-20th century Siamese elite also had to broadcast their public image as defenders of the faith through

⁹⁷ Maple & Co., London, *New Palace Dusit Park Bangkok, For His Majesty the King of Siam. Plans & Designs of Furniture* Manuscript preserved at Rare Book Room, the National Library of Thailand.

⁹⁸ Apinan Poshyanonda, *Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in Thai Royal Court*, (Bangkok: Bureau of the Royal Household, 1993), 225.

⁹⁹ Sulak Siwarak, *Samphat MC Chongchitthanom Diskul [Interviews with MC Chongchitthanom Diskul]*, 303.

¹⁰⁰ Mario Tamagno, "List of Work by Professor Mario Tamagno, Architect," 39.

construction and upkeep of Buddhist monasteries.¹⁰¹ Throughout his long reign Rama V built four Buddhist monasteries in Bangkok, two of which were executed by the royal master builders since the beginning of his reign, as required by the royal customs. The first royal monastery to be constructed, perhaps after the order of Chuang Bunnag the Regent, was Wat Ratchabophit (Figure 4.86). Construction began as early as 1870; the design of the monastery still followed King Rama IV's preference for small, delicately built monastery of ancient Siamese design.¹⁰² As the construction of Wat Ratchabophit took so many years, in 1876 the young king began another monastery project. Named after the king's mother, Wat Thepsirin was a very large temple complex that Rama V built to match with Wat Makutkasat, a monastery that Rama IV constructed during his reign.¹⁰³ Like Wat Ratchabophit, construction of Wat Thepsirin also took so many years (Figure 4.87).

The fact that Rama V built only two monasteries in Bangkok during the first 32 years of his reign was quite startling, considering that during the 27-year reign, the pious Rama III constructed as many as fourteen monasteries, while Rama IV built five monasteries during the 17-year reign.¹⁰⁴ It was not that the king was not interested in Buddhism; indeed, the king truly enjoyed his role as the defender of the faith, and was the driving force behind Prince Wachirayan's reforms of Buddhism and education.¹⁰⁵ It was perhaps more because of the fact that the building activities of the Chakri Reformation were of the secular nature: palaces, governmental offices, and other modern buildings. In addition, after a century of pious kings and princes, the city of Bangkok was full of old monasteries, most of which were in dire need for repair. Accordingly, while there was no new commission to practice their architectural creativity, the old royal master builders,

¹⁰¹ For Rama V's transformation of the Sangha and Buddhism in Siam, see Stannley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 220 – 225.

¹⁰² Department of Fine Arts, *Prawat Wat Ratchabophit Sathitmahasimaram [History of Wat Ratchabophit]* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 1988), 12.

¹⁰³ Wat Thepsirintharawat, *Prawat Wat Thepsirintharawat [History of Wat Thepsirintharawat]*, (Bangkok: Rongphim Mahamakut Ratchawithayalai, 1999), 3.

¹⁰⁴ Khaisang Sukhavadhana, *The Chinese-Influenced Thai Buddhist Monasteries of the Early Rattanakosin Period* (Bangkok: James H. Thompson Foundation, 1982), 16; Somkid Chirathatsanakul, *Rupbaep Phra Ubosot lae phra Wihan nai Samai Phrabatsomdet Phrachomklao Chaoyuhua* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 2004) 39.

¹⁰⁵ David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 216-7.

the Hongsakuls, Kethuthats, and Yamabhais, spent their days on renovations of old monasteries. Indeed, apart from the major renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (1879 – 1882), other major monastery renovation projects include Wat Pho (1879), Wat Bowonniwet (1885), Wat Mahathat (1893), Wat Suthat (1895), Wat Arun (1896), and Wat Saket (1899). All of these monasteries were built during the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century, and by the turn of the twentieth century were all in various states of disrepair.

Viewed against this context, Rama V's plan to build a major new monastery for Dusit Park, beginning in 1899, was a significant turn. Located just about five hundred meters southeast of the king's residence, Wat Benchamabophit was meant to be a model monastery worthy of the new summer palace. Following Prince Wachirayan's reforms of Buddhism and education, the new monastery would serve a dual role: as a well-ordered living quarters for the monks, and as a center of Buddhist learning for the ancient Mahanikaya Sect.¹⁰⁶ By then the Public Works Department was under the administration of Prince Naris, the king's half-brother with artistic inclinations (Figure 4.88). As the PWD Italians were already undertaking most of the Dusit Park projects, naturally the king asked Prince Naris to undertake the new monastery project.

The son of King Rama IV and a princess who was a sister of Rama V's mother, Naris (1864 – 1947) was highly regarded as a prince of the highest rank. Since an early age the prince showed artistic inclinations towards music and painting, but eventually had to follow the princely custom of joining the military. After a brief stint at the First Infantry Regiment, the king's Royal Bodyguards, a group of young Siamese aristocrats that the king personally formed in 1870, Prince Naris took the position the Comptroller-General of the Siamese army. During the 1879 – 1882 renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, however, the prince discovered his avid interest in fine arts, design and

¹⁰⁶ Wat Benchamabophit, *Pramuan ekkasan samkhan nuang nai kansathapana Wat Benchamabophit Dusitwanaram [Compilation of Historic Documents on the Establishment of Wat Benchamabophit]* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 1995), 11 – 12. At that time, the Siamese Sangha was divided into Mahanikaya and Thammayutika Sects, the former much older, while the latter was of a reformist nature, and was generally seen as patronized by the royal family. Incidentally, on the western edge of Dusit Park there was already a Thammayutika monastery of Wat Rachathiwat. So perhaps the king's decision to make Wat Benchamabophit a Mahanikaya one was his attempt to give equal opportunities to both sects.

architecture. By 1888 Prince Naris was already on the Local Committee, Rama V's early attempt to regulate and modernize Bangkok.¹⁰⁷ With his interest in public works, in the same year Prince Naris went on an inspection tour of the British colonies of Singapore, Penang, and Rangoon; upon his return the king established the Public Works Department (PWD), with Prince Naris as its first director.¹⁰⁸

The point that needs to be emphasized here is that, while Naris was a gifted painter, composer, and administrator, he had no formal training in traditional Siamese architecture whatsoever, and practically no connection at all with the old royal master builders like the Hongsakuls, Kethuthats, and Yamabhais. During his first term at the PWD (1889 – 1893), Prince Naris' major work consisted mostly of civil engineering projects like roads, railroads, postal service, and telegraph.¹⁰⁹ With his high rank and administrative ability, however, in March 1893 he left the Ministry of Public Works for the Treasury. After a year there, in December 1894 he became the Minister of War, the position of which he held on till his return to the Ministry of Public Works in 1899.

And it was during this second term at the PWD that Prince Naris undertook the Wat Benchamabophit project, so it was most likely that the prince was already familiar with the PWD Italians and their work. Construction of the new monastery began in March 1900. Interestingly, at first Rama V undertook the project in a very traditional way. The king himself was the project manager, the *mae kong*, while Prince Naris was the master builder, the *nai chang*. However, perhaps the king was not sure if the prince would be competent enough for such a major project of traditional Siamese-style, he recruited the service of the old master builder, Kon Hongsakul, to help supervise the construction of Wat Benchamabophit as well (Figure 4.89). In addition, Rama V asked another self-taught royal artist, Prince Chaloemlaksanawong (1853 – 1913; Figure 4.90), to help Prince Naris with the Siamese-style decorative designs.¹¹⁰ Later on, the prince also received help from Carlo Allegri, Mario Tamagno, and their PWD colleagues,

¹⁰⁷ RKNBS 4: , 138.

¹⁰⁸ RKNBS 6: , 339.

¹⁰⁹ Waruni Osatharom, *109 pi Krom Yothathikan [109th Anniversary of the Public Works Department]* (Bangkok: Arun Kanphim, 1997), 5 – 9.

¹¹⁰ Wat Benchamabophit, *Pramuan ekkasan samkhan nuang nai kansathapana Wat Benchamabophit Dusitwanaram*, 131 – 133.

especially in the design and execution of the marble cladding for the ordination hall's exterior, which was entirely made in Italy.¹¹¹

With Prince Naris' background, together with the mixed-bag cast of characters, the much-acclaimed architecture of Wat Benchamabophit was, in fact, a hybrid. Like any Siamese monastery, Wat Benchamabophit was divided into the sacred precinct (*phutthawat*), and the monks' quarters (*sanghawatt*) (Figures 4.91 – 4.92). The monastic ground was overlaid with gridiron lines of walkways that reminded one of the regularized urban vistas of Dusit Park streets; a straight canal neatly divided the monastery grounds into the two precincts. In addition, architecture also helped enhance the division: most of the buildings in the monks' quarters were neo-classical in style, while the entire sacred precinct was totally traditional Siamese, at least in the intention (Figures 4.93 – 4.94).

In the design of the ordination hall, the centerpiece of the entire monastery, Prince Naris revived some of the very ancient Siamese architectural elements, and recomposed them into a new Siamese design for the twentieth century. Rama V initially planned to bring Phra Phutthachinnarat, a thirteenth-century Buddha image that was renowned for its beauty, from the northern city of Phitsanulok, to be the main icon for the ordination hall of Wat Benchamabophit. Accordingly, Prince Naris' design of the hall was an interpretation of the ancient hall of Phra Phutthachinnarat : the main building intersected with a square cloister. At Wat Benchamabophit, however, instead of the usual rectangular plan, Prince Naris used a cruciform-shaped plan with the two arms connecting directly to the cloister (Figures 4.95 – 4.98). This concept of extreme traditionalism with a twist ran throughout the whole building, down to the minutest details. For instance, Prince Naris decided to use *kabu* tiles—the glazed terracotta tiles with curved ridges—for the multi-tiered roof of the ordination hall, because the tiles were commonly used in ancient Sukhothai and Ayutthayan temples, but rarely during the Bangkok period. For another example, as there was no wooden ceiling inside the ordination hall, most of the timber roof structure could be seen from below; each beam thus had to be quite elaborately carved and decorated with gilt and colored glass mosaics,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 203 – 259.

in the manner of an eighteenth-century temple of Wat Kasattra, in the ancient capital of Ayutthaya (Figure 4.99).¹¹²

The fact that this neo-traditional monastery was built for the very Europeanized Dusit Park produced yet another paradox. Perhaps this signaled a concerted reaction against cultural Westernization; when everything was seemingly, overwhelmingly Westernized, Buddhism remained one of the last bastions of traditional institutions that could have preserved Siamese national identity. In fact, Rama V himself was not even sure if traditional Siamese art and architecture would last much longer under the pace of civilization/Westernization. In a private correspondence from the king to Prince Naris, the king stated his hope:

My wish to decorate this monastery was not just to adorn without aesthetic sensibility. I am certain that Thai arts and crafts will eventually become extinct. In the future, only the *farang* [Europeans] mimicry of Thai forms and patterns, will remain, in spite of its indelible, unmistakable *farang* trace. I only wish to leave for posterity the finest specimen of Thai arts that they can copy, instead of the mediocre ones.¹¹³

However, in order to create “the finest specimen of Thai arts,” Prince Naris had turned to the PWD Italians for some fresh design input. One of the most important design decisions was the prince’s choice of white marble cladding and columns for the ordination hall’s exterior, instead of the customary stucco work in traditional Siamese temples. The PWD Italians offered their familiarity with marble as cladding material, translating Prince Naris’ elevations into a set of drawings, which was subsequently sent to the Genoa-based firm of Giuseppe Novi, the supplier of marble.¹¹⁴ The result was a new sense of glossy solidity and coldness, which was not normally found in traditional Siamese temples’ stucco walls.

In 1908, Rama V and Prince Naris began working on yet another monastery project of Wat Rachathiwat. An ancient monastery on Chaophraya river, Wat Rachathiwat was quite prominent historically for Rama V. During the early nineteenth

¹¹² National Archives of Thailand, R5 S6. Letter from Kon Hongsakul to King Rama V, dated July 8, 1909.

¹¹³ Wat Benchamabophit, *Pramuan ekkasan samkhan*, 279.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

century, his grandfather, Rama II, when still a prince, spent his monkhood there. Furthermore, it was at this monastery that his father, Rama IV, while still in monkhood, established Thammayutika Sect.¹¹⁵ However, by the time Dusit Park project was going on, the monastery was in a dilapidated state. In 1908, Rama V began a rebuilding project for the entire monastery. In a letter to Prince Wachirayan, dated June 12, 1908, the king stated his intent: “In this project I do not wish to decorate lavishly and turn this into a spectacular royal monastery. Instead, I wish it become a simple, comfortable monastery like those of the countryside. Foreigners would call this a monastery, not a royal chapel.”¹¹⁶ In another letter the king expressed his wish to make this look like an ancient, well-established monastery, and made all the more pleasant with large ancient trees and lotus ponds.¹¹⁷

Once again, the king asked Prince Naris to redesign the ordination hall of Wat Rachathiwat. As it turned out, the project was quite complicated, since the original structure dating from the 1820s was considered historic, and needed to be preserved, in spite of its outdated style and dilapidated condition. Prince Naris’ solution was to build a new shell over the old structure, leaving the latter quite intact (Figures 4.100 – 4.101). With the PWD Italians’ expertise in ferro-concrete construction and the king’s wish for something ancient, Prince Naris came up a startling design that combined typical ordination hall’s oblong shape with a decorative program inspired by twelfth-century Khmer monuments.¹¹⁸ In yet another creative collaboration, the prince and the PWD Italians managed to translate the Khmer-style bas-relief decoration into the new language of ferro-concrete pre-cast panels (Figure 4.102). Like the ordination hall at Wat Benchamabophit, the building was at once ancient and modern, paradoxically.

While the ordination halls of Wat Benchamabophit and Wat Rachathiwat were both very much celebrated as the first examples of modern Siamese architecture, Prince

¹¹⁵ Phra Ratchakawi, *Prawat Wat Rachathiwat [History of Wat Rachathiwat]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Surawat, 2000), 4 – 5.

¹¹⁶ King Chulalongkorn, *Phraratchahatthalekha song mi paima kap Somdetphramahasamanachao Kromphrayawachirayanwarorot [Royal Correspondences with Somdetphramahasamanachao Kromphrayawachirayanwarorot]* (Bangkok: Rongphim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1929), 150.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 160 – 161.

¹¹⁸ Mario Tamagno, “List of Work by Professor Mario Tamagno, Architect,” 41.

Naris became highly regarded as *Somdet Khru*, the Prince-Master. While the prince's ingenuity and fine aesthetic sensibility was obvious, his contribution to the Siamese art and architecture, undeniably, was partly rested on the creative input from the long-forgotten PWD Italians and their expertise. Interestingly enough, the neo-traditional "Siamese" styles of Prince Naris were actually a reaction against the accelerating cultural Westernization at the end of King Rama V's reign. By the reign of Rama VI (1910 – 1925), these styles would become the Siamese national style, in the awakening of nationalist sentiments.¹¹⁹

4.4.3 Traditionalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Architecture of Pageantry

By the time Rama V left for his second journey to Europe, Dusit Park was a huge construction site. The king left in March, barely a month after the inauguration of Ambara Villa. The construction of Wat Benchamabophit had barely begun, but at least Ratchadamnoen Avenue was completed, in all its three parts. With tree-lined roads and princely palaces, finally the king's vision, inspired by his first visit to Europe, began to turn into reality.

On November 17, 1907, Rama V triumphantly returned to Bangkok from his eight-month journey to Europe. After the royal yacht *Maha Chakri* anchored at the Royal Landing in front of the Grand Palace, the king disembarked at the designated auspicious time of 10:48 a.m. He was warmly received by the Crown Prince, the royal family, court officials, and foreign dignitaries. From there the king entered the Grand Palace to pay respect to the Emerald Buddha and the relics of the royal ancestors. After that the king left the Grand Palace to receive the welcoming address from the people of Bangkok at Sanam Luang, the royal ground north of the Palace. From there he took a state carriage ride, from the old Grand Palace to Ambara Villa, his new residence at Dusit Park. The procession moved along Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the grand urban armature linking the old center of power with the new one. The whole urban area, from the Royal Landing to Dusit Park, was cleaned up and decorated profusely for the event:

¹¹⁹ For a brief discussion of nationalism in Siamese art and architecture during the reign of Rama VI, see Walter Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978), 230 – 234.

In an incredibly short time workmen have transformed the Park and its approaches. Waggons loaded with huge bales of red cloth, timber etc. pass the pedestrian, making for the Park. Fussy little steam rollers are smoothing roads, everywhere does the sound of the hammer predominate. From the Royal Landing past the Grand Palace, the Ministry of Justice, over the bridge by the Mint, thence to the Falila bridge—now almost finished—on to the bridge of Italian marble and up to the gates of the Palace itself is a forest of masts stands, and triumphal arches.¹²⁰

Along the avenue, nine temporary arches of unprecedented scale were put up by the major ministries of the Siamese government (Figure 4.103). In fact, triumphal arches were nothing new to the Siamese. In the traditional urban landscape, city walls and gates were of crucial importance, especially when warfare was still the norm. Like palace gates, major city gates were considered sacred, always protected by guardian spirits. The very act of entering the city through its gate, of course, was momentous. With the Siamese art of ephemeral structure, temporary arches had been built to commemorate significant events, like the welcoming ceremony for the king's newly discovered white elephant, or the arrival of a monarch.

By the time Rama V began to travel outside Siam, the Siamese aristocrats began to learn that civic pageantry and temporary triumphal arches were appreciated and used by Europeans as well. During the king's first trip to Dutch Java in March 1871, the colonial government of Batavia put up eight triumphal arches on strategic spots along the Siamese monarch's route from the city's main pier to the Governor-General's palace. Although made simply of bamboo and leaves, which were already withered by the time the king arrived, it was perhaps the first lesson the king received on how urban space and temporary structure could work in unison to present a message.¹²¹ Around the same time, the Siamese elite began a new tradition of decorating the city with illuminations on the king's birthday. Most spectacular, of course, was the Grand Palace, which was often decked out with illuminated triumphal arches. Government buildings, trading houses, and residences of princes and nobles, especially those on the river, would be likewise

¹²⁰ "Transformation of Suan Dusit. To Welcome the King." *The Bangkok Times*, November 6, 1907.

¹²¹ Kannikar Sartrprung, *A True Hero: King Chulalongkorn of Siam's Visit to Singapore and Java in 1871* (Bangkok: Tana Press, 2004), 55.

decorated. The king and his court would travel up and down the river, to appreciate the glittering lights of the oil lamps.

During the king's first visit to Europe in 1897, he was also welcomed by some cities with grand civic pageantry. The most spectacular, perhaps, was on the king's entry to the city of Stockholm, on July 13, 1897. After disembarking from the Swedish royal barge, Rama V and King Oscar II of Sweden stepped onto the royal landing in Stockholm. On the landing was a huge triumphal arch in the shape of four Siamese-style pylons, the top of which hold together the royal insignia and the crown of Sweden.¹²²

Upon Rama V's return to Bangkok in December of the same year, the city also tried to put up welcoming festivities to receive the king. Perhaps new to the undertaking, the 1897 event was awfully lengthy, with so many events spread over ten weeks, after the king's arrival in mid-December.¹²³ Ephemeral arches were put up by some ministries and the various social groups; the most impressive was the Ministry of War, which erected a temporary structure in the shape of an ancient city gate, right next to its headquarter.

Ten years later, the king's return from the second trip to Europe was celebrated in a much more coordinated manner. Right after the king left Bangkok, a committee was set up to plan the welcoming festivities, with the Crown Prince Maha Wachirawut as the president. With careful planning, the event on November 17, 1907 aforementioned was relatively compact, precise, and powerful.

Central to that event, of course, was Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the nine triumphal arches, each of which was erected at the expense of a major ministry. The scale and expense paid was unprecedented, as *The Bangkok Times* reported: "No effects are being spared to produce a wonderful effect. The work put into some of the arches, for instance, would astound those who will only see the finished result ... It is safe to say

¹²² Phraya Sisahathep, *Chotmai het sadet praphat Yurop Ro So 116*, 278.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 535 – 650.

that the prospective decorations and illuminations will surpass any seen in Bangkok before, which is saying a good deal.”¹²⁴

The first arch, at the beginning of the avenue, was the Army Department’s arch. A pair of war elephants, fully decked out with traditional Siamese garb for combat, stood atop of golden pedestals. Their tusks held aloft the *phra kiew*, the princely crown, which was Rama V’s personal emblem. Its height of twenty meters and three-dimensionality marked an impressive prelude to the whole ensemble along Ratchadamnoen Avenue. After the avenue crossed over the inner city moat stood the arch of the Ministry of War, in the shape of two mythical animals, a Ratchasi and a Khotchasi, each of which was holding up a seven-tiered parasol in red and gold, which in turn held aloft a banner, the dynastic symbol, and the Great Crown of State, all in three-dimensional form.¹²⁵

After these two arches with traditional Siamese designs, the Ratchadamnoen arches turned quite cosmopolitan in design. The third arch, the Ministry of Interior’s, consisted of four tapering towers, each of which was topped with an open pavilion. The towers were connected at the top with a sort of trussed gangways, with the king’s insignia at the center. The effect was quite spectacular, a hybrid of London’s Tower Bridge and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Lights, electric and otherwise, were the main feature, as The Bangkok Times reported: “Along one of the gangways crossing the avenue runs a large electric device of welcome to the King, which at night flashed forth every few seconds. The lattice work is filled in with Japanese lanterns and the edges of the structure picked out in coloured electric lights. When lit up at night this arch was specially brilliant.”¹²⁶

The fourth arch was that of the Ministry of Justice, a Siamese-style design featuring the image of Bodhisattawa, an official emblem of Dusit Park Palace. Atop Bodhisattawa was the king’s personal emblem, the *phra kiew*, with its tip ablaze with rays of royal power. This was followed by the arch of the Ministry of Local Government, a grand Chinese-style gateway, twenty meters high and profusely decorated in hybrid Chinese-Japanese fantasy:

¹²⁴ “Transformation of Suan Dusit. To Welcome the King.” *The Bangkok Times*, November 6, 1907.

¹²⁵ “The King’s Return. A Nation’s Welcome,” *The Bangkok Times*, November 18, 1907.

¹²⁶ “A Fine Arch,” *The Bangkok Times*, November 18, 1907.

A gateway of Chinese design, with dragons twining round the columns, the whole being outlined in electric lights. From this bridge to the next, the Venetian masts are different in design from those elsewhere, and the whole scheme was very pretty and distinctive. The masts are connected lengthwise by Japanese lanterns, and crosswise by multi-coloured silks. From each mast hung flags of Chinese yellow, with Chinese characters emblazoned on the same.¹²⁷

The sixth arch, the arch of the Ministry of Public Instruction, was also of Siamese style, featuring on its top the old ministerial emblem, an image of Agni, the god of fire, riding a rhinoceros. This was followed by the arch of the Ministry of Agriculture, a vaguely Indo-Saracenic design flanked by two obelisks on high pedestals. The eighth arch, that of the Ministry of Finance, was a graceful Art Nouveau design, featuring a single horseshoe-shaped gateway flanked by two towers. Two oversized models of the new coins hung prominently within the frame of the arch.

The final arch, the Ministry of Public Works, stood at the terminus of Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the entrance to the royal palace of Dusit Park. At the center of the oval plaza was a statue of Phra Pharuhatsabodi (the god of Thursday) riding a deer, an obscure reference to the king's Coronation Day. At the north edge of the plaza stood the arch, a single tall gateway of Moorish-Siamese design forty meters high, flanked by low colonnades of matching style, extending for twenty-five meters each. Of all nine arches, this one was executed in the finest manner, not only because it represented the PWD itself, but also because this actually was a full-scale model of Rama V's equestrian statue, and a matching permanent gateway to Dusit Park.

These carefully orchestrated spectacles featured PWD-designed ephemeral structures, strategically placed in the newly civilized urban spaces of Bangkok. A spectacular pastiche of traditional and cosmopolitan forms, the ephemeral structures best captured the uneasy combination of tradition and modernity in the Siamese conception of self-identity in the swiftly changing world. Apart from welcoming the king from his long sojourn, the 1907 arches' main message was the progress and achievements made after the king's bureaucratic reforms. As the architectural tradition of triumphal arch was rooted in both Siamese and European culture, the message could be broadcast to the

¹²⁷ "The King's Return. A Nation's Welcome," *The Bangkok Times*, November 18, 1907.

audience, local and foreign alike. The PWD's knowledge of structural design was combined with Siamese expertise in ephemeral structure, in the creation of this grand civic pageantry which greatly shaped the public memory of Rama V's reign as the time of change and progress. This was reiterated in the king's address to the people of Bangkok, given before the royal progress along Ratchadamnoen Avenue started:

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.¹²⁸

A year later, the spectacles of civic pageantry was repeated in the celebration of Rama V's forty-one years of rule, the "Record Reign," since the number of years surpassed those of any reign in Siamese history. Like the 1907 event, a committee of Siamese princes and ministers was set up, headed by the Crown Prince, whose experience at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee festivities in 1897 certainly helped with the organization of the days-long event.¹²⁹ Also a mix of traditionalism and visual manifestation of modern civilization with the king at the center, the Record Reign celebrations began early in the morning of November 11, 1908 with the laying of the foundation stone for the king's new audience hall at Dusit Park, Anantasamakhom. Presented at the ceremony were the king, the Minister of Local Government Chaophraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), the PWD Italians : Carlo Allegri, Mario Tamagno, and Annibale Rigotti, and the representative of the French company specializing in the Compressole method of ferro-concrete foundation work.¹³⁰

At 4 in the afternoon, the king returned to the same site to unveil his own equestrian statue, a gift from the people of Siam to their beloved monarch, set in the middle of the plaza some two hundred meters north of where the PWD arch stood a year earlier. A huge bronze equestrian statue of the king was made after his wish; Rama V himself sat at the Paris studio of Georges Ernest Saulo, the sculptor, during his 1907 visit

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, 133.

¹³⁰ "The Record Reign Celebrations." *The Bangkok Times*, November 12, 1908.

to the city.¹³¹ After the king's wish was made public, a nationwide subscription rally was made to raise funds for the construction of both the statue and its pedestal, to be erected at Dusit Park as a tribute of the Kingdom of Siam to its much-beloved monarch. During the unveiling of the statue, the king, the city, and the people thus became unified in the grand and spectacular manner, further enhanced by the PWD-designed pylons, baldachins, and buntings.

The Crown Prince began the dedication ceremony by reading an address to the king. After congratulating his father on the unprecedented record of forty years of rule, an auspicious occasion of “the history of Siamese nation,” Maha Wachirawut went, feverishly, on the theme of civilization:

When he calls to mind the degree of progress and prosperity Siam has attained during the last forty years, we are moved by feelings of appreciation for Your wise Rule and of gratitude for the blessings which Your Majesty has bestowed on the State and the people in incomparable measures. I venture to say, sire, that You are the incarnate Sovereign of right divine having come among us at the most opportune epoch when Siam endeavoured to tread from old way to new the path of progress.¹³²

The Crown prince then concluded with the theme of love, loyalty, and devotion, which had been made manifest in the equestrian statue, “the testimony of national feelings for Your most gracious Majesty,” and “a national monument of our heartfelt devotion to Your Royal Person.”¹³³

In reply, Rama V read a much-longer address. After outlining the context of the Chakri Reformation and its accomplishments, the king congratulated himself:

The changes which have taken place during the last forty years are such as even five hundred years of our previous national existence could not have accomplished. It makes Us especially happy to think that it is We who have occupied the throne throughout these forty eventful years and have enabled our beloved country to be guided in the path of administrative improvement and national prosperity along the line of a single and continuous policy... Our

¹³¹ Poshyanonda, *Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in Thai Royal Court*, 208 – 209.

¹³² National Archives of Thailand, *Chotmai het phraratchaphithi Ratchamangkhlaphisek Ro So 126, 127 [Archival Records of the 1908 – 1909 Jubilee Celebrations]*, 109.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

country and nation have attained the state of advancement and prosperity which is so evident.¹³⁴

The king concluded with the theme of national solidarity and patriotism, which was exemplified, of course, in the construction of the equestrian statue. King Rama V then pulled the cord to unveil the yellow silk cover of the statue amidst great fanfare.

Two days later, on November 13, 1908, the king returned to the temporary pavilion in front of the equestrian statue, this time to witness a spectacular procession to illustrate the civilization and prosperity accomplished during the Record Reign. As put by the Crown Prince, the idea was “to collect and visually present the many accomplishments made, to be comprehended visually and mentally by the spectators.”¹³⁵ The expense of 200,000 baht was set for the organization of the event, quite a considerable sum. All branches of the government were requested to participate in the procession by organizing a float to represent their work; private companies and wealthy residents could also send their floats to join the Record Reign procession. In the end there were seventy-nine floats with twenty thousand attendants.¹³⁶ Of these great number of floats, thirty five were from the various ministries and departments, sixteen from the *monthons* (provincial administrative areas), and twenty one were presented by the private companies and wealthy residents of Bangkok. Accordingly, the kingdom and its accomplishments and resources were made into a moveable spectacle for the king and his subject. For his part, Rama V simply sat in the royal pavilion, watching the Record Reign materialized and moved along, with the newly-unveiled equestrian statue as the backdrop. Interestingly, this was a reversal of the 1907 procession on the occasion of the king’s return from his European journey. Back then it was the king who moved along the avenue through the arches illustrating his administrative accomplishments; now those very accomplishments themselves were presented and consumed by the royal gaze. The entire procession lasted from early afternoon to the evening. On the following day, the floats were put on display outside the Grand Palace walls so the king and the people of Bangkok could further inspect the extravaganza.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 128.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁶ “The Record Reign Celebration,” *The Bangkok Times*, November 14, 1908.

In conclusion, this chapter examines the transformation of the *siwilai* ideals during the latter half of Rama V's reign, with the king's 1897 journey to Europe as a major turn, a defining moment in the Siamese aristocrats' line of thought. Subsequently, the Siamese aristocrats embarked on yet another phase of self-civilizing mission through material culture, architecture and urban design. Although physical changes were made throughout the city, the Siamese elite's vision of *siwilai* was most vividly played out in the construction and development of Dusit Park, an elite suburban enclave north of the old walled area of the city. With Dusit Palace as its center, Dusit Park was complete with gridiron streets, fine avenues, cast-iron bridges, princely palaces and residences of noblemen, and new Buddhist monasteries, most of which were designed by the Public Works Department (PWD). The analysis of the establishment and components of the PWD reveals that this was essentially a hybrid organization that thrived on collaborations between many stakeholders: the king, the Siamese ministers and director-generals, and the Italian architects and engineers. For their part, there were two generations of Italians: those who began their career in Siam working for private builder-contractors but later recruited to join the PWD, and those who came directly to the PWD, with their Turin connection. Nonetheless, all of them were part of the Italian architects and artists of the turn of the twentieth century, who offered their service and expertise to the non-Western rulers with modernization schemes.

With the PWD Italians' service, the Siamese elite came up with their modern public image that was at once Siamese and civilized, at least in the external appearance. A close scrutiny of these sites : princely residences, modern monasteries, and civic pageantry, however, reveals the unstable conditions that laid underneath the façades of modern Siam.