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UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE

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COVER: Alix Aymé, *Lever du soleil sur un paysage de campagne*, peinture à l'huile sur toile, 1929–1930, Musée national de Luang Prabang © Lacombe & Ferrer

*For a discussion of Alix Aymé's murals, see Michèle-Baj Strobel's contribution in this edition

EDITORIAL

The *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS) has long played a crucial role in preserving, studying, and promoting the rich heritages of Thailand and other mainland Southeast Asian countries, along with their interconnected histories. This June 2025 issue continues that tradition with a wide-ranging collection of research articles and reviews spanning ancient inscriptions to contemporary cultural studies, offering insights into history, religion, art, archeology, architecture, languages, and literature, as well as reflections on modern developments in the region.

We begin with a moving tribute to a cherished figure at The Siam Society, Elizabeth Howard Moore (1949–2024). Moore’s scholarly work and dedication to the material culture of the region, especially Thailand and Myanmar, will continue to influence generations of archeologists and students, leaving a lasting imprint on the discipline.

We continue our “Research Highlights” with Pittayawat Pittayaporn’s examination of Lao, Thai, and other Southwestern Tai languages, offering a linguistic perspective on the historical connections that bind these groups. Herbert Swanson then revisits the history of Siam’s first Protestant church, proposing insights into how global religion, regional history, and local communities intersect. This issue also highlights Bangkok’s visual and architectural heritage: Paul McBain’s investigation of the Khrua In Khong style of temple murals provides a look at the fusion of Siamese and Western artistic traditions during the Fourth Reign of King Mongkut; Pinai Sirikiatikul’s study of the Hennebique system of reinforced concrete in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall offers an exploration of how Western construction methods were adapted in Siam, following the direction of King Chulalongkorn, during the early 20th century. Further exploring dynamic and evolving cultural and regional landscape, Chris Joll and colleagues examine the careers of Islamic transcultural trend-setters in central and southern Thailand, while Stefanie Siebenhütter analyzes the role of social media in shaping the online presence of the Kui linguistic minority in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Both studies underline how modern technologies, and cross-cultural exchanges influence cultural identities and regional societal change.

Also in this issue, we introduce two new sections. First, in “Epigraphic Study”, Chhom Kunthea and colleagues offer a detailed analysis of a newly discovered inscription from Óc Eo in the Mekong Delta, shedding light on Buddhist processions and the ancient toponym Tamandarapura, thereby enhancing our understanding of early Southeast Asia. Second, in “Archeology in Progress”, Saw Tun Lin and his team present preliminary findings from the Shwe Creek excavation in Bagan. Their work contributes to a deeper grasp of earthenware production in medieval Myanmar. In “Museum Spotlight”, Forrest McGill focuses on a recent acquisition of a Sawankhalok ceramic at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, discussing its possible function and international connections with the Islamic world. Finally, “Literature Escape” by John Clark analyses *Defan Doesn’t Recall*, an award-winning novel by

Siriworn Kaewkan, offering a reflective exploration of memory and storytelling in southern Thai literature.

In the last section, “Events & Exhibitions”, Michèle-Baj Strobel reviews a new permanent installation at the National Museum of Luang Prabang featuring splendid and freshly restored murals by French artist Alix Aymé. The paintings offer readers a glimpse into the vibrant world of exotic and colonial art in Laos. Meanwhile, Max Crosbie-Jones highlights the recent UNESCO Seminar on Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property, held in Bangkok in November 2024. This seminar is a timely reminder of the ongoing efforts to protect cultural heritage from the destructive forces of archeological looting and illegal trade, an issue of paramount importance for the preservation of Southeast Asia’s rich historical legacy.

Among the numerous book reviews featured, we are delighted to highlight a glowing evaluation of *Wider Bagan*, Elizabeth H. Moore’s final published work, a fitting tribute to her enduring contributions to the field. We trust that this issue of JSS will inspire further exploration and engagement with the captivating, ever-evolving narratives of Southeast Asia.

Nicolas Revire
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**IN MEMORIAM:
ELIZABETH HOWARD MOORE (1949–2024)**



CAPTIONS

- | | |
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| <p>1. Elizabeth in December 1955, family album, digitized by Su Latt Win</p> <p>2. Elizabeth in 1963, family album, digitized by Su Latt Win</p> <p>3. Meikhtila, Myanmar, 22 July 2017 © Theint Theint Aung</p> <p>4. The Elizabeth Moore library, Yangon, 7 December 2017 © Theint Theint Aung</p> <p>5. Field trip in Bagan, 24 December 2017 © Theint Theint Aung</p> | <p>6. Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 27 April 2019 © Theint Theint Aung</p> <p>7. EuroSEAS Conference, Paris, 30 June 2022 © Nicolas Revire</p> <p>8. EuroSEAS Conference, Paris, 30 June 2022 © Nicolas Revire</p> <p>9. Wat Rong Meng, Chiang Mai, 10 November 2022 © Suppawan Nongnut</p> <p>10. IPPA Conference, Chiang Mai, 12 November 2022 © Suppawan Nongnut</p> |
|--|---|

The name Elizabeth, née Howard, Moore is one that is likely very familiar to many readers of the *Journal of the Siam Society*. She not only published in JSS on several occasions (see the reference list at the end), she was also an active scholar in Thailand throughout the course of her career, making significant contributions to the study of this country's art and archeology. At the time of her passing on 13 January 2024, Elizabeth was Emeritus Professor in the Department of the History of Art and Archaeology, School of Arts, SOAS, University of London. This brought to a close her 34-year association with this academic institution, having been the first member of staff appointed to the newly formed department in 1990.

One of three children, Elizabeth was born on 28 August 1949 in Washington, D.C. to Paul Cushing Howard (1913–1968) and Margaret Huntington Whittm Howard (1913–2006). She had mentioned to both of us on separate occasions that she had a long family connection with Myanmar (Burma), one such incident being when she reviewed a colonial photo album, but neither of us knew the exact details. Her paternal grandparents, Randolph Lee Howard (1884–1958) and Mae Myrtle Cushing (1884–1956) were American Baptist missionaries in British Burma from 1910 to 1924 and Elizabeth's father, Paul, was born there in 1913. Randolph Lee Howard taught philosophy at Judson College in Yangon (Rangoon), becoming its president in 1921.¹

¹ These details can be found in Farouk Yahya. 2024. Elizabeth Moore (1949–2024), *Indonesia and the Malay World* 52: 150–154.

In 1971, Elizabeth graduated from Pomona College, in Claremont, California, with a BA in Art History. She spent the next decade working as a teacher overseas. During this time, she taught in Nairobi, Kenya (1974–1975), in Jakarta, Indonesia (1975–1976), and Singapore (1977–1979). During her time at the latter two locations she began to develop a growing interest in the art and archeology of Southeast Asia. In 1978, one of her close friends, Anne Tofield, founded the Friends of the National Museum of Singapore and Elizabeth became an active member of their study groups, giving her first public talk, titled “Indonesia and Kampuchea”, as part of their Southeast Asian art lecture series in March 1980. While also in Singapore she first visited Myanmar (then still Burma) and Thailand. While the second half of her academic career focused primarily on Myanmar, her original interests lay in northeast Thailand's archeology and moated settlements in particular.²

To pursue this interest further, in 1981, Elizabeth enrolled in doctoral studies at the Institute of Archaeology (UCL) in London under the supervision of the late Ian C. Glover (1924–2018). She focused on the circular moated sites in northeast Thailand and completed her dissertation *The Moated Mu'ang of the Mun River Basin* in 1986. This was published in 1988 by the British Archaeological Reports series in Oxford as *Moated Sites in Early North East Thailand*. As one of her most influential works, this publication is still the “go-to” reference for the region's archeological settlement patterns today.

² Ibid.

In connection with her doctoral research, Elizabeth became interested in the use of aerial photographs shot by the British Royal Air Force over the area. Her interest led to a collaboration between the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and Elizabeth organizing, cataloging, and digitizing an invaluable collection of 5,800 photographs, taken by officer Peter Williams-Hunt (1919–1953) both during reconnaissance flights over Thailand during the Second World War and in the early 1950s while he was based in British Malaya (Malaysia) until his premature death there in 1953. The photographs also included aerial images of Angkor, Singapore, and Burma, the latter numbering just over 800.

This began Elizabeth's career-long interest in using the then new technology of remote sensing, including satellite imagery, to understand the archeological footprints left on the landscape only visible from above—air or literally, space. For instance, with the aid of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, Elizabeth persuaded the NASA Jet Propulsion Lab to have the Space Shuttle Endeavour take radar images of Angkor Wat.

Today, thanks to Elizabeth's foresight and collaborative spirit, copies of the Williams-Hunt collection are available at a number of locations worldwide. The SOAS library now houses the original photographs and a set of new images, while relevant photographs are also available in Southeast Asian institutions such as the National Archives of Malaysia, the Singapore National Library, and the National Library of Thailand. Furthermore, a full set of the re-digitized images was acquired by the Centre for

Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), University of Kyoto.

As mentioned above, Elizabeth's work during the initial years of her academic career at SOAS in the early to mid-1990s focused primarily on Thailand. Building on her doctoral work, she co-published with Smitthi Siribhadra *Palaces of the Gods: Khmer Arts & Architecture in Thailand* (1992). As with her work on moated sites in northeast Thailand, this new volume, generously illustrated with photography by Michael Freeman, is still one of the only comprehensive publications on Khmer temples of Thailand carried out at a time when the northeast region was still not easily accessible. It also marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship and collaboration with MR Narisa Chakrabongse and her Bangkok based publishing house, River Books. Four years later, Elizabeth co-published, with Phillip Stott, *Ancient Capitals of Thailand* (1996). This volume also contained photography from Michael Freeman and was produced by River Books under the Thames & Hudson imprint.

The 1990s saw Elizabeth's focus gradually shift to Myanmar. However, she remained actively involved in Thai archeology circles for the remainder of her career. She published *Shwedagon: Golden Pagoda of Myanmar* (1999) while eight years later her work *Early Landscapes of Myanmar* (2007), again with River Books, represents a significant watershed moment. This seminal work was the first comprehensive synthesis of the archeology of the country to be published and is arguably one of the most important works to date on the subject. Her fourth book, *The Pyu*

Landscape: Collected Articles (2012) was published five years later. Finally, just prior to her death, Elizabeth was able to complete and publish her last book, *Wider Bagan: Ancient and Living Buddhist Traditions* (2023), with contributing authors Win Maung (Tampawaddy), Win Kyaing, Kyaw Nyi Nyi Htet, and Kyaw Soe Htun.³ This work highlights her sensitivity to local beliefs and epistemologies in the interpretation of Myanmar's past, an area often dismissed by Western archeologists, as well as her insistence on the inclusion of Myanmar experts in her works.

Elizabeth held many appointments and positions throughout her career. From 2003 until recently, she was a visiting professor at the University of Yangon, Department of Archaeology. In 2013, Elizabeth became a visiting professor at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, and at one time was a visiting professor with the Open Society Initiative at Yangon University. She served on the editorial boards of several SOAS journals including *Indonesia and the Malay World*. In 2014, Elizabeth served as the Chair of the SOAS Southeast Asia Centre. Furthermore, she twice served as Head of Department of History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS (1996–1997 to 1999–2000 and 2007–2008 to 2008–2009). She was promoted to Reader in 2009–2010 and to Professor in 2013–2014.

In retirement in 2014, Elizabeth was granted Emeritus status and remained extremely busy. She served as the In-Region Liaison for the newly established SOAS Alphawood Programme (SAAAP).

³ Bob Hudson reviews this book in this issue of the journal.

She remained a member of the SOAS Food Studies Centre and a retired member of the SOAS Southeast Asian Studies Centre. She also took an active role in building the educational infrastructure of Myanmar in the form of active mentorship and the donations of books to libraries in different parts of the country from her personal library that she brought to Yangon to help Alphawood alumni. For example, in addition to the Elizabeth Moore Library in Yangon, she donated to the Southeast Asian Arts Library to Dawei University.⁴

Elizabeth still frequently took part in academic events. She organised panels on Myanmar archeology on numerous occasions at the major in-region conferences such as SPAFACON 2021 and 2024 in Bangkok and IPPA 2018 in Hue, Vietnam and IPPA 2022 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, bringing together both Myanmar and international scholars.

She was also active at universities in Myanmar, including several invitations from Shan State Buddhist University. She continued to work closely with Myanmar archeological students. At the time of her passing she was working on a catalogue for the new museum in Bagan with some Alphawood alumni. She was also working on a paper looking at the development of new forms of Buddhist architecture and ritual in the post-Bagan period for the third volume of the SAAAP anthology *The Creative South* edited by Andrea Aciri and Peter Sharrock (forthcoming).

⁴ These details can be found in Peter Sharrock (2025), Obituary: SOAS Professor Emerita Elizabeth Howard Moore (1949–2024), *Asian Perspectives* 64(1), forthcoming.

With the 2021 military coup Elizabeth left Yangon and returned to London, but continued to extend help to Myanmar students and academics who were having difficulty leaving the country. She had planned to relocate to northern Thailand in mid-2024 as she had been offered the position of visiting scholar in Chiang Mai University hosted by Dr Thanyarat Aphiwong. Unfortunately, illness prevented her from leaving and to take up the offer.⁵

We are both personally aware that up until the end during her struggle with cancer, Elizabeth remained surprisingly active. We both saw her on-campus at the start of term in September 2023; she also made an appearance at

the opening to Alexandra Green's *Burma to Myanmar* exhibition at the British Museum and appeared online at the SOAS Shan New Years event hosted by the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies. She remained active on the Facebook page for the Elizabeth Moore Library until the end of November 2023, with her final posts praising the achievements of her Myanmar students. SOAS has lost a great member, colleagues have lost a great friend, and Southeast Asia has lost a great scholar.

Stephen A. Murphy⁶
& Michael W. Charney
SOAS, University of London

PUBLICATIONS IN JSS⁷

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Corresponding author. Email: sm120@soas.ac.uk.

⁷ For a comprehensive list of Elizabeth H. Moore's publications up to 2016, see: <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/view/people/Moore=3AElizabeth=3A=3A.html>.

LAO, THAI, AND THEIR NEXT OF KIN: THE PENINSULAR BRANCH OF SOUTHWESTERN TAI

Pittayawat Pittayaporn¹

ABSTRACT—This article reevaluates the subgrouping of Southwestern Tai languages using early phonological innovations reflected in Old Thai and Old Lao inscriptions. By analyzing four shared consonantal changes, simplification of *k^hr-, coalescence of *ɕl-, aspiration of *h-r- and occlusivization of *x-, the research results propose a “Peninsular Southwestern Tai” subgroup encompassing Thai, Lao, Southern Thai, and most of the so-called “PH” varieties. This proposal offers a more empirical analysis of the genealogical relationships among these languages and suggests a southward spread of Peninsular Southwestern Tai from northern Laos to southern Thailand.

KEYWORDS: Old Thai and Old Lao Inscriptions; Peninsular Southwestern Tai Subgroup; Phonological Innovations; Southwestern Tai Languages

Introduction

In the absence of sufficient textual evidence to trace the spread of ethnolinguistic groups, language genealogy offers valuable insights. Historical linguistics, when classifying languages belonging to the same family, uses the concept of a “subgroup” to describe a set of languages that share a common parent language. These languages are thought to have branched off from a common intermediate language (Campbell 1998: 166–167; Harrison 2003).

Southwestern Tai (SWT) languages, a subset of the broader Tai languages of the Kra–Dai language family, form one such subgroup. This subgroup includes Thai (also known as Siamese) and Lao, the national and modern languages of the Kingdom of Thailand and Lao PDR,

and several related languages spoken in the region (Li 1960; Strecker & Pittayawat 2018). Although historical records of SWT languages appear only after the 14th century, linguistic evidence suggests an earlier presence in the Indochinese Peninsula. In a previous study, I proposed that these languages began spreading from southern China into mainland Southeast Asia no later than the 10th century (Pittayawat 2014). However, the exact relationship among these languages and the routes of their expansion remain unclear.

Several scholars, including Marvin Brown (1965), James Chamberlain (1975), John Hartmann (1980), and Nanna Jonsson (1991: 148–151) have suggested grouping Thai, Lao, Southern Thai, and lesser-known languages of Thailand and Laos such as Phu Thai and Phuan together within the SWT subgroup. They base this classification primarily

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on a shared sound change: Proto-Southwestern Tai (PSWT) voiced stops became voiceless aspirated stops, i.e., *b- *d-, *j- and *g- changing to /p^h-/, /t^h-/, /c^h-/, and /k^h-/, respectively. However, recent research by Shinnakrit (2020) shows that this sound change was completed only in the 15th century, supporting the earlier view espoused by Burnay & Cœdès (1927–28), and Gedney (1991: 208), among others. William Gedney, in particular, argues that such a recent change is not reliable for determining deeper historical relationships between languages. Consequently, the validity of Chamberlain’s (1975) “PH” group, i.e., SWT languages in which the voiced stops became voiceless aspirated, is now in question.

Another set of criteria for classifying SWT languages involves analyzing their tonal systems. Many scholars have followed Chamberlain’s (1975) approach, using tonal criteria to group Lao, Thai, Southern Thai, and other related varieties such as Tak Bai, Khorat, Nyo, Phuan, and Phu Thai into a major subgroup within SWT. However, I have warned against relying heavily on tonal developments for language classification (Pittayawat 2556). This caution is well founded, as disagreements persist about the relationships between Lao and Thai. Brown (1965; 1966) argues that Lao and Thai are closely related to each other, while Chamberlain (1975; 1991) claims that they are more distantly related as Lao is closer to Southern Thai.

This debate highlights the complexity of tracing language relationships and the importance of empirical evidence in historical linguistics. These issues shed light on the history of Tai-speaking

populations and the spread of these languages in Southeast Asia. Chamberlain’s (1975) classification of Lao and Southern Thai as one subgroup and Thai and SWT varieties of northeast Laos and northwest Vietnam as another raises geographical concerns. The separation of Lao and Southern Thai by Thai in the middle and the separation of Thai and its supposed relatives in northeast Laos by Lao requires significant historical speculation to make sense. Although not impossible, the proposed scenario is problematic and lacks clear evidence (see below).

Therefore, this article aims to reassess the genealogical relationship among the so-called PH varieties, focusing on Lao and Thai, to determine whether they genuinely form a valid subgroup. My findings suggest that Lao, Thai, and many other PH languages indeed belong to the same subgroup, which can be labeled “Peninsular SWT”. This classification is based on shared early phonological innovations reflected in Lao and Thai inscriptions from the 14th to early 15th centuries. The proposed subgroup structure suggests that the precursor of Lao, Thai, and its closest relatives spread southward from northern Laos to southern Thailand.

Assessment of Previous SWT Subgrouping Proposals

The generally accepted method for subgrouping languages in historical linguistics involves analyzing shared innovations. These are sound changes shared by a group of daughter languages, distinguishing them from other related languages (Campbell 1998: 70; Harrison 2003).

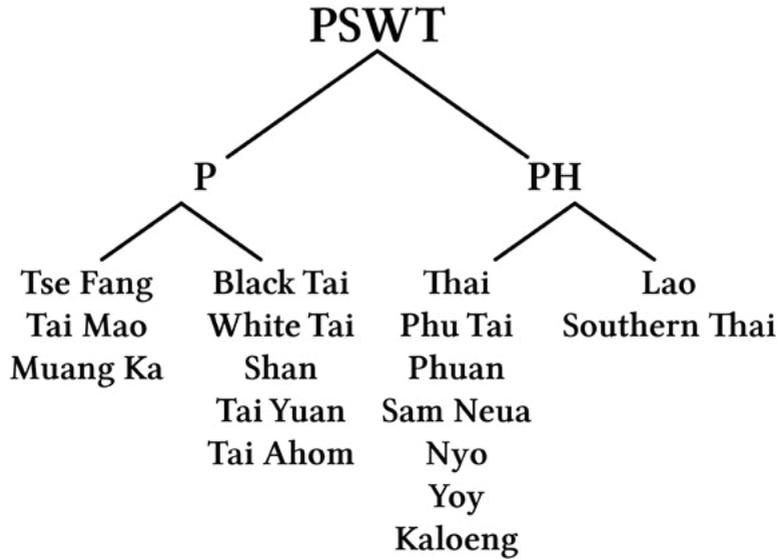


FIGURE 1: Chamberlain's subgrouping of SWT languages
© Chamberlain 1975: 50 (Adapted)

For instance, Proto-Tai (PT), the hypothetical ancestor of all Tai languages, had a **-ɣn* sound that later became **-on* in PSWT. The PT word **sɣn^c* 'heel' evolved into **son^c* (ສິນ, son) in PSWT, a change still evident in all SWT languages. In Shan and Black Tai, words with PT **-ɣn* became */-on/*, whereas in White Tai and Lue, they further developed into */-un/* (Pittayawat 2556). While **-ɣn > *-on* is a shared innovation among SWT languages, subsequent changes of */-on/* to */-un/* represent either parallel innovations or cases of diffusion, making them unreliable for subgrouping purposes.

For SWT languages, most studies primarily use patterns of splits and mergers of PSWT **A*, **B*, **C* and **D* tones as the classification criteria. This approach is exemplified by the widely cited subgroup structure proposed by Chamberlain (1975), as shown in

FIGURE 1. Other notable studies following this method include those by Hartmann (1980), and Pranee & Theraphan (2000), among many others.

A family tree is an effective graphical representation of the genealogical relationships among languages. Each branch of the tree represents a subgroup, generally understood as a cluster of languages descended from an immediate common parent language, which, in turn, is derived from an earlier proto-language. Chamberlain's (1975: 62-63) proposed family tree for SWT presents a chronological ordering of innovations that is inconsistent with known phonological history. A critical issue in his model is the assumption that the devoicing of PSWT voiced stops represents the oldest innovation within the family. This assumption leads to a problematic classification system based on the reflexes of these stops.

In Chamberlain’s model, SWT varieties are divided into two main subgroups, based on the outcome of the devoicing process. The “PH” group includes varieties that show voiceless aspirated reflexes of PSWT voiced stops, for example, where PSWT *b- evolved into /p^h-/. The “P” group comprises varieties where PSWT voiced stops developed into unaspirated counterparts, such as PSWT *b- becoming /p-/. This subgroup structure incorrectly assumes that the P/PH distinction represents the primary and earliest split in the SWT family when, in fact, other phonological innovations likely preceded this change.

Multiple lines of evidence indicate that devoicing occurred relatively late. The Thai and Lao writing systems likely developed when the voicing distinction was still intact (Li 1977: 22–23; Ferlus 1999). Indic loanwords with voiced initials were borrowed before devoicing, resulting in /p^h/, /t^h/, /c^h/, and /k^h/ in Thai for Indic *b*, *d*, *j*, and *g* (Gedney 1965). Thai name transcriptions in the *Veritable Record of the Ming Dynasty* (明實錄, *Ming Shilu*; 1368–1644) suggest the devoicing was completed in the mid-14th century (Shinnakrit 2020). Additionally, some Tay and Zhuang dialects, close relatives of SWT languages, maintain phonemic voiced stops (Theraphan 1997; Pittayawat & Kirby 2017).

Furthermore, Chamberlain (1975) employs patterns of tonal development as criteria for subgrouping. However, it is crucial to recognize that these patterns result from a series of mergers and splits, rather than single events. For example, the B≠D pattern used by Chamberlain to group Lao and Southern Thai results from separate sets of three distinct tonal

changes in each language. While Lao arrived at the pattern through the merger of C23 and C4, merger of C1 and DL123 and merger of C234 and DL4, Southern Thai varieties underwent merger of C1 and DL1, optional merger of C23 and DL23, and optional merger of DL23 and DL4. Similarly, the B=D pattern is not a merger but a retention from the proto-language (Gedney 1989; Pittayawat 2009a: 239–254). Therefore, previous SWT subgrouping proposals are problematic, as they equate apparent patterns of mergers and splits with shared innovations.

Furthermore, although tonal developments can inform genealogical classifications (Dockum 2019: 74–111), they are more suitable for determining shallower-level subgroups. To illustrate the inadequacy of subgrouping based on patterns of tonal splits and mergers, consider Chamberlain’s model in **FIGURE 1**, which groups Tai Mao with the Shan dialects of Tse Fang and Muang Ka within one subgroup, while placing Southern Shan in another. This arrangement presents a significant challenge, as research conducted by Edmondson & Solnit (1997) establishes these dialects as closely related and coherent subgroups. Moreover, Chamberlain’s model leads to incongruities, as seen in the case of the Lue dialects of Chiang Rung and Mueang Yong. These dialects would be placed in different branches due to the distinct splits of PSWT *A tones, despite their close relationship (Pittayawat 2556).

Specific to the relationships among Lao, Thai, and other PH languages are two key tonal patterns: the connection between *B and *D patterns and the split

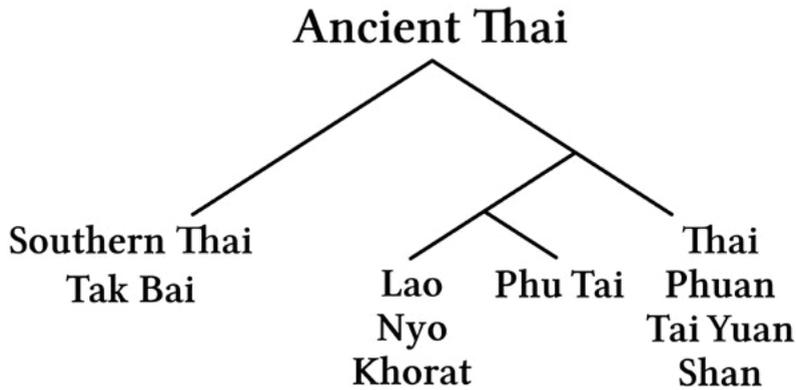


FIGURE 2: Brown's subgrouping of SWT languages © Brown 1965: 66–69 (Adapted)

of *B, *C, and *D tones. In this model, Lao and Southern Thai are subgrouped to the exclusion of Thai, Phu Thai, and Phuan. This classification is based on Lao and Southern Thai exhibiting *B≠*D and *BCD1-23-4 patterns, while the others share *B=*D and *BCD123-4 patterns. However, this model implies problematic geographical and historical scenarios. This implies that Thai separates Lao and Southern Thai, while Lao sits between Thai and its presumed close relatives, Phuan and Phu Thai. This arrangement presents a significant challenge for our understanding of the historical spread and development of these languages.

To address these geographical incongruities, Chamberlain (1972: 239; 1991: 471–474) proposes a speculative historical scenario. He suggests that Southern Thai, which he claims to be a descendant of the Sukhothai language, should be considered a remnant of the westerly expansion from northern Laos. Thai, claimed to have descended from the language of Ayutthaya, is proposed to have arrived in present-day central Thailand from northeast Laos around Xiang Khoang (ຂາງຂວາງ). Finally,

Chamberlain posits that the Lao arrived in northeast Thailand from northern Laos a few centuries later, effectively breaking the Thai–Phuan–Phu Thai continuum. However, given the problems associated with using such tonal criteria for subgrouping, the bifurcation of the PH subgroup must be abandoned.

Brown's (1965) influential subgrouping hypothesis, which predates and likely influenced Chamberlain's work, offers an alternative subgroup structure for SWT. As illustrated in **FIGURE 2**, Brown's model proposes that Southern Thai and Tak Bai, viewed as descendants of Sukhothai, branched off earliest from other languages. The remaining PH languages, along with P languages such as Shan and Tai Yuan, form a separate branch. Within this branch, Brown suggests a different arrangement from that of Chamberlain. Lao and Phu Thai constitute one subgroup, while Thai, Phuan, Shan, and Tai Yuan form another.

Although Brown considers consonantal and vocalic changes in his classification, he appears to implicitly prioritize tonal development. However, this approach has significant weaknesses.

The most problematic aspect is his lack of justification for the selection and chronological ordering of innovations. For example, he (1965: 114) suggests that the change *ɣ- > g- was an early innovation that separated Southern Thai from other languages. Yet, inscriptional evidence shows that *ɣ persisted in Thai after the 13th-century development of the Thai script (Li 1977: 214–219; Ferlus 1988).

Brown's model also faces chronological challenges. For the stage he calls "950 Yunnan", ancestral to all varieties in his study except Southern Thai and Tak Bai, he hypothesizes two consonantal and six tonal shared innovations. The tonal changes are particularly noteworthy, including both phonetic alterations and phonemic splits and mergers. For instance, he proposes that this hypothetical language underwent the *ABCD > *ABCD1-23-4 split and changed the B4 tone to a falling tone. This model's reliance on tonal changes for deep-level subgrouping and its chronological assumptions cast doubts on its validity.

It is important to note that Brown (1966), followed by Chamberlain (1972; 1991), posits that the language of Sukhothai and the language of Ayutthaya were distinct, rather than representing a single linguistic continuum. Brown's (1966; 1985) interpretation of tone marks in Sukhothai inscriptions is particularly noteworthy. He views these symbols as reflecting the sound system of an earlier stage of Southern Thai, which he believes had three lexical tones. Furthermore, Brown speculates that the modern Thai orthographic practice of classifying consonant symbols into "high", "mid", and "low"

categories was devised to correspond with a presumed three-way consonant distinction in the Sukhothai period. He uses this presumed correspondence as evidence for a particularly close relationship between the Sukhothai-period Thai and Southern Thai. However, this hypothesis is problematic despite having gained some popularity among researchers of Tai languages (e.g., Chanida 1991; Dueanpen 2541). As noted by Sireemas & Pittayawat (2019: 32–33), no substantial evidence has been put forward to support the proposed close relationship between Sukhothai Thai and Southern Thai. This lack of concrete evidence casts doubt on the scenario that the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya inscriptions represent two relatively different languages. This critical reassessment of Brown and Chamberlain's proposals invites a more nuanced understanding of the historical development of Thai and its related languages, emphasizing the need for rigorous evidence-based approaches to linguistic historiography.

In summary, tonal splits and mergers, while valuable for studying Tai dialects, are unreliable for subgrouping SWT varieties because of their recent nature and the tendency to cross subgroup boundaries. To accurately determine the genealogical relationships among SWT languages, it is essential to identify early segmental changes that can be verified empirically. This approach will provide a more robust foundation for understanding the historical development and the relationships of SWT languages, avoiding the pitfall of over-reliance on tonal patterns.

**TABLE 1: List of inscriptions analyzed
(1.1-1.11: Old Thai inscriptions; 2.1-2.4: Old Lao inscriptions)**

Inscription	FAD no.	Date	Language
1.1 Wat Si Chum	สท. 2	14th–15th c.	Thai
1.2 Nakhon Chum	กพ. 1	1357	Thai
1.3 Wat Hin Tang	สท. 37	15th c.	Thai
1.4 Lan Ngoen Phasa Thai Wat Mahathat	อย. 9	15th c.	Thai
1.5 Praditsathan Phra That	กพ. 59	15th c.	Thai
1.6 Phaen Dibuk Wat Mahathat	อย. 2	1374	Thai
1.7 Wat Chang Lom	สท. 18	1384	Thai
1.8 Wat Song Khop I	ชน. 13	1408	Thai
1.9 Chao Then Si Thep Khirimanon I	ชน. 5	1413	Thai
1.10 Wat Sorasak	สท. 25	1417	Thai
1.11 Wat Taphan	สฎ. 5	15th c.	(Southern) Thai
2.1 Phra That Rang Ban Rae	สน. 4	1350	Lao
2.2 Wat Luang (Nong Khai)	นค. 9	1414	Lao
2.3 Wat Daen Mueang (Wat Patchantaburi) I	นค. 1	1530	Lao
2.4 Wat Daen Mueang (Wat Patchantaburi) II	นค. 2	1535	Lao

Methodology

The primary data source for this epigraphic study is the *Inscriptions in Thailand Database* (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre). In order to consider the Thai language of the early period, the analysis included both Sukhothai and Ayutthaya inscriptions, in both Khom and Thai scripts, dated before 1450. This cutoff date is significant because the devoicing of PSWT obstruents in Thai was completed in the 15th century (Shinnakrit 2020). The results demonstrate that the two corpora of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya inscriptions reflect the same set of sound changes, suggesting a relatively unified dialect continuum. To facilitate referencing, all inscriptions used in this

article were assigned specific codes, as listed in **TABLE 1**.

It is important to note that while the Wat Taphan Inscription (1.11) may provide possible evidence for 15th-century Southern Thai, its linguistic affiliation is not definitive. The language of this inscription may be more closely related to the prestigious language of the Central Plain than the southern vernacular. This ambiguity highlights the challenges in definitively classifying historical language varieties and emphasizes the need for a cautious interpretation of inscriptional evidence.

In order to consider the Thai language of the early period, this article examines early inscriptions written in the Lao script (also known as Thai Noi) found in northeast Thailand. In addition to two pre-1450 inscriptions, the

corpus includes two items dating from the 1530s. This later cutoff date is necessary because the oldest discovered inscription written in the Lao script dates only from the end of the 15th century (Lorrillard 2018). The limitation to northeast Thai inscriptions is due to limited access to data from Laos itself.

This article adopts the reconstruction of the PSWT sound system presented by myself (Pittayawat 2009b). While this proposal largely aligns with previous reconstructions by scholars such as Sarawit (1973), Li (1977), and Jonsson (1991), it introduces several important differences in both consonant and vowel systems. The focus is specifically on consonantal changes, as the interpretation of vowel graphs presents significant challenges, a point emphasized in the work of Sireemas & Pittayawat (2019). Most notably for our purposes, I proposed a separate series of uvular consonants, including the voiceless stop *q- and the voiceless fricative *χ-. In Li's reconstruction, etyma that I reconstructed with *q- and *χ- are listed under *k^h- and *x-, respectively.

The approach of this article, which identifies early innovations in the Thai and Lao languages by examining how ancient inscriptions represent PSWT consonants (Li 1977; Pittayawat 2009b), is similar to the influential works of Diller (1988) and Duangduen & Pranee (1976). A phonemic merger was inferred when a PSWT sound was represented by a graph originally assigned to a different sound, suggesting that the two sounds were no longer distinct. The presence of shared innovations provides compelling evidence for considering these varieties to be particularly close. If Lao and Thai share a number of

innovations, they can be considered as belonging to the same immediate subgroup. An illustrative example of this approach can be seen in the treatment of words with PSWT initial *χ- in modern Thai. Currently, PSWT etyma such as *χaw^c 'to enter' (เข้า, *khao*) and *χu:n^c 'to ascend' (ขึ้น, *khuen*) are consistently spelt with the graph transliterated as *kh*, which originally represented only *k^h-. This pattern suggests that PSWT *χ- has become /k^h-/, merging with PSWT *k^h-.

The phonemic values of the graphs used in this analysis are based on Michel Ferlus's (1988) study, which is summarized in the **APPENDIX**. While Ferlus (1988) does not give exact phonemic values for Old Thai and Old Lao graphs, he provides their counterparts in what he calls *thai commun* or "common Thai", which can be considered his understanding of the PSWT sound system (Ferlus 1988). This article assumes that the original phonemic values of the graphs were identical to their PSWT correspondents. The transliteration of consonant and vowel graphs follows the systems of Ferlus (1988; 1999) and Uraisi (1984; 2553)² because they accurately represent both the graphemic contrasts and the correspondences to the Indic and Khmer scripts. Note that while some vowel transliterations may appear complex, they can be disregarded as they are not pertinent to the present analysis.

² The systems are largely identical, differing primarily in their notation of modified letters that were invented to represent Thai sounds absent in Old Khmer. Ferlus employs an apostrophe ('), while Uraisi uses an underline; for example, Ferlus's 'kh-' corresponds to Uraisi's kh-. Both systems are essentially derived from Cœdès's original transliteration scheme.

TABLE 2: Data sources for modern PH and P varieties

PH/P	Variety	Source
PH	Thai (Bangkok)	Hudak (2008)
	Lao (Nong Khai)	Hudak (2008)
	Southern Thai (Songkhla)	Apichaya & Pittayawat (fieldnotes)
	Tak Bai (Su-ngai Padi)	Puttachart & Thananan (2541)
	Khorat Thai (Noen Sung)	Kanitha & Pittayawat (fieldnotes)
	Nyo (Sakon Nakhon)	Thepbangon (1984)
	Yoy (Akat Amnuai)	Thepbangon (1984)
	Kaloeng (Dong Mafai)	Areeluck (1985)
	Phuan (Hat Siao)	Chalong (1986)
	Phu Thai (Waritchaphum)	Pittayawat (fieldnotes)
	Phu Thai (That Phanom)	Wilaiwan (2520)
P	Tai Yuan (Chiang Mai)	Hudak (2008)
	Shan (Möng Nai)	Hudak (2008)
	White Thai (Mường Tè)	Hudak (2008)
	Black Thai (Sơn La)	Hudak (2008)

Furthermore, these early shared innovations serve as valuable markers for identifying modern SWT varieties that belong to the same subgroup. By examining the modern reflexes of PSWT sounds, inferences can be made regarding whether specific sound changes have occurred. For instance, Southern Thai exhibits /r-/ for PSWT *r-, as in /ruə⁵/ < PSWT *ruə^h ‘boat’ (เรือ, *ruea*), maintaining a distinction from /h-/, which is the regular reflex of PSWT *h-. This indicates that Southern Thai did not undergo the change *r- > h- that occurred in Lao.

By comparing the sound patterns of these modern varieties with the established early innovations, it becomes possible to reconstruct their historical relationships in the absence of direct ancient evidence. The main sources of data on the modern PH and P varieties used in this article are listed in **TABLE 2**. These sources form the basis for my comparative analysis of contemporary

language forms, complementing historical data gleaned from ancient inscriptions.³

The language varieties were selected based on two primary criteria: the availability of extensive vocabulary data containing specific Tai words needed for analysis and the presence of precise phonemic transcriptions. Despite substantial research on some varieties, such as Tai Yo (e.g., Ferlus 2008) and Khorat (e.g., Wanna 1979), many were excluded due to a lack of comprehensive wordlists. For Southern Thai, while numerous studies exist on varieties spoken in Thailand and Malaysia (e.g., Diller 1979; Theeraphan 2521; Umar 2003), the

³ The semantic glosses provided in single quotation marks (‘ ’) represent approximate meanings of the reconstructed PSWT forms rather than the precise meanings of their reflexes in individual languages or their contextual usage in inscriptions. These standardized glosses facilitate cross-linguistic comparison of modern forms. For precise semantic interpretations in specific languages or inscriptional contexts, please consult the original sources.

absence of crucial lexical items necessitated original data collection. Notable gaps in documentation also persist for several PH languages in central and northeast Laos and northwest Vietnam, including Thai Muong Vat, Sam Neua, and Tai Et among others, despite pioneering fieldwork reports (e.g., Chamberlain 1975; 1983; Sasithorn 2553; Theraphan 2003; Warunsiri 2023).

Each language in this article encompasses multiple varieties spoken in different geographical locations. Although these varieties exhibit lexical and phonological differences, they share identical developments with respect to the early innovations attested in inscriptions (see below). Only varieties that demonstrate distinct reflexes of relevant PSWT sounds are included. For instance, while Southern Thai varieties differ in tonal patterns and reflexes of PSWT vowel and consonants such as *ml- and *ŋ- (e.g., Theraphan 2521; Umar 2003), they remain uniform regarding early innovations. The Nyo-Yoy-Kaloeng cluster (e.g., Kanjana 2524; Mudjalin 2559; Phinnarat 2000) presents notable variations in tonal mergers and splits, alongside minor divergences with regards to consonants such as the development of PSWT *f-. Similarly, Phuan varieties (e.g., Phinnarat 2010) show diversity in tonal patterns and the development of *χ-, while maintaining consistent reflexes for *x-, which merged with *k^h- in early inscriptional evidence. Particularly noteworthy are Phu Thai varieties (e.g., Phinnarat 2000), which are largely uniform except for Phu Thai Kapong spoken in Waritchaphum district, Sakon Nakhon province. This variety uniquely shows

/h-/ for PSWT *x- rather than the typical /k^h-/ in other Phu Thai varieties (Pittayaporn 2009b). Two varieties with /h-/ and /k^h-/ reflexes are included to represent this diversity.

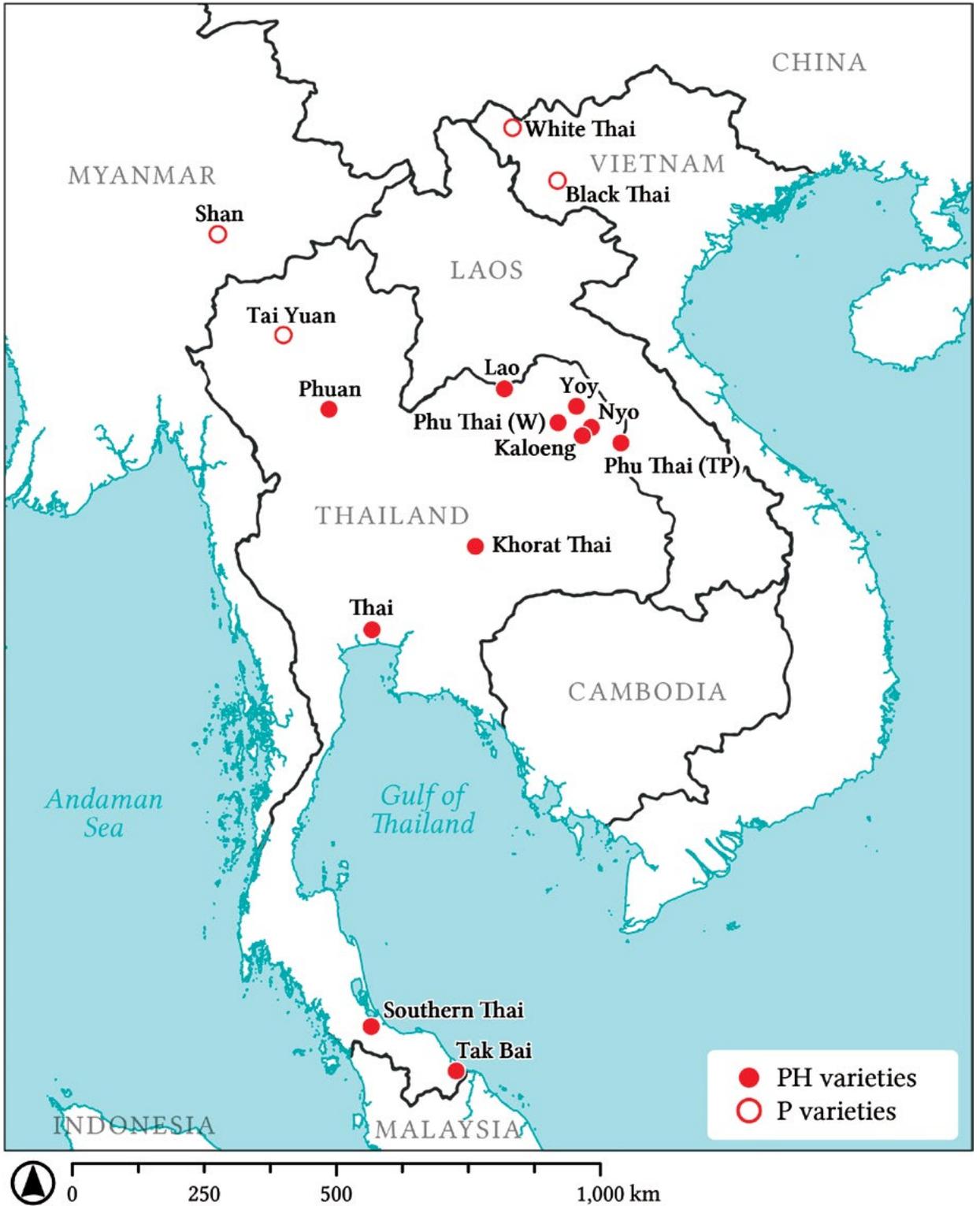
MAP 1 shows the geographical distribution of PH dialects examined in this article. The Phuan, Phu Thai, Nyo, Yoy, and Kaloeng dialects are notably scattered across northeast and central Thailand, having arrived there through forced migrations in the 19th century. This study relies on data from varieties spoken in Thailand, as comprehensive wordlists containing the relevant lexical items are not available for their counterparts in Laos.

Early Innovations Shared by Lao and Thai

Four shared consonantal changes in early Lao and Thai emerge from analysis of the inscriptional data. These shared innovations offer strong evidence for grouping these two major PH varieties as a subgroup within SWT. It is noteworthy that evidence for all the identified innovations is present in the Old Thai inscriptions from both the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, consistent with the assumption of a unified linguistic continuum.

The first notable innovation in both Old Lao and Old Thai is the simplification of PSWT *k^{hr}- to *k^h-. **TABLE 3** shows that all words with *k^{hr}- onsets in PSWT consistently appear with kh- (corresponding to *k^h-) in both Thai and Lao inscriptions.⁴ This change had

⁴ Tone marks are omitted in our transliterations because they are not relevant to the analysis and



MAP 1: Location of SWT varieties discussed in this article
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TABLE 3: Examples of words attesting to the change PSWT *k^{hr}- > *k^h-

Language	Inscription	‘to beg’ ขอ, <i>kho</i>	‘slave’ ข้า, <i>kha</i>	‘other people’ เขา, <i>khao</i>	‘to drive’ ขับ, <i>khap</i>	
Thai	1.1	<i>kha</i>	—	<i>khau</i>	<i>khapp</i>	
	1.2	<i>kha</i>	<i>khā</i>	<i>khau</i>	—	
	1.3	<i>kha</i>	—	<i>khau</i>	—	
	1.4	<i>kha</i>	<i>khā</i>	—	—	
	1.6	<i>kha, khḥ</i>	<i>khā, khā</i>	—	—	
	1.7	—	<i>khā, khā</i>	—	—	
	1.8	<i>kha, khḥ</i>	<i>khā</i>	—	—	
	1.10	<i>khḥ, khḥ</i>	<i>khā</i>	—	—	
	1.11	<i>kha</i>	—	—	—	
	Lao	2.3	—	<i>khā</i>	—	—

occurred by the time these texts were inscribed, probably in the 14th to early 15th century. Importantly, this simplification occurred earlier than the changes to other clusters. For example, *kl- and *gr- were still regularly preserved in the Old Thai inscriptions, as seen in *klai* ‘far’ (< PSWT *klaj^A; ไกล) and *grva* ‘household’ (< PSWT *gruə^A; ครัว, *khrua*) in Wat Si Chum Inscription (1.1) and Wat Song Khop Inscription I (1.8), respectively. Similarly, *pl- were variably maintained graphically in Old Lao, as seen in *pluk* ‘to root’ (< PSWT *plu:k^D; ปลุค) in Wat Daen Mueang Inscription I (2.3). This early simplification of *k^{hr}-, contrasted with the retention of other clusters, marks a significant shared innovation in Lao and Thai phonological development.

The second innovation observed is the coalescence of PSWT *ʃl- into *ʃ-. As evidenced in TABLE 4, words that originated from *ʃl- are consistently spelled with the single graph given by Ferlus

as t-, which represents /ʃ-/ in both Old Thai and Old Lao inscriptions. This indicates that the change had occurred by the 14th century, when the oldest texts were inscribed. Despite the limited occurrence of words with *ʃl-, this innovation is unmistakable as such words never appear with the graphs transliterated as p- (representing /ʃ-/) or l- (representing /l-/) in any Old Thai or Old Lao inscriptions.

Another shared innovation is the aspiration of PSWT *h^r-. TABLE 5 shows that all instances of the voiceless rhotic *h^r- are represented as h- in both Old Thai and Old Lao inscriptions. This contrasts with other voiceless sonorants, such as *h^l- and *hⁿ-, which are attested with h- combined with graphs representing their corresponding voiced sonorants. For instance, in the Thai Wat Si Chum Inscription (1.1), we find *hnieḥ* ‘upstream’ (< PSWT *hⁿnuə^A; เหนือ, *nuea*) and *hlieḥn* ‘yellow’ (< PSWT *h^lluəḥ^A; เหลือง, *lueang*). Similarly, in the Lao Wat Daen Mueang Inscription I (2.3), we see *hmai* ‘new’ (< PSWT *h^{mau}^B; ใหม่,

Ferlus (1988) does not provide guidance on how to transliterate them.

TABLE 4: Examples of words attesting to the change PSWT *ʃl- > *d-

Language	Inscription	‘moon’ เดือน, <i>duean</i>	‘flower’ ดอก, <i>dok</i>
Thai	1.1	<i>tean, tiean</i>	<i>tək</i>
	1.2	<i>t̄iean, tiean</i>	—
	1.3	<i>tiean</i>	<i>tək</i>
	1.7	<i>t̄iean, tiean</i>	—
	1.9	<i>tiean</i>	—
	1.10	<i>tiean</i>	<i>tək</i>
	1.11	<i>tein, t̄iean</i>	<i>tək</i>
	Lao	2.1	<i>tein</i>
2.2		<i>tiean</i>	—
2.3		<i>tein</i>	—

TABLE 5: Examples of words attesting to the change PSWT *^hr - > *^h-

Language	Inscription	‘six’ หก, <i>hok</i>	‘head’ หัว, <i>hua</i>	‘stone’ หิน, <i>hin</i>	‘five’ ห้า, <i>ha</i>	‘stream’ ห้วย, <i>huai</i>
Thai	1.2	<i>hak</i>	—	—	—	—
	1.3	—	—	<i>hin</i>	—	—
	1.4	<i>hak</i>	—	—	—	—
	1.5	—	<i>hvă</i>	—	—	—
	1.7	<i>hak</i>	—	<i>hin</i>	—	—
	1.9	<i>hak</i>	—	—	—	—
	1.10	<i>hak</i>	<i>hvvă, hvav</i>	—	—	—
	1.11	<i>hak</i>	—	—	—	—
Lao	2.2	—	—	—	<i>hā</i>	<i>hvay</i>
	2.3	—	—	—	<i>hā</i>	<i>hvay</i>

TABLE 6: Examples of words attesting to the change PSWT *^x- into *^k^h-

Language	Inscription	‘white’ ขาว, <i>khao</i>	‘green’ เขียว, <i>khiao</i>
Thai	1.1	<i>khāv</i>	<i>khyav</i>
	1.5	<i>khāv</i>	—
	1.7	—	<i>khyav</i>
	1.8	<i>khāv</i>	—
	1.11	<i>khāv</i>	—

mai), and *hlvaŋ* ‘big’ (< PSWT *^hluəŋ^A, หลวง, *luang*).

These examples demonstrate the retention of conservative representations for *^hl-, *^hn-, and *^hm-, contrasting with the simplification of *^{hr}- to /h-/ in both languages. This pattern of differential treatment between *^{hr}- and other voiceless sonorants provides strong evidence for a shared innovation in the early stages of Thai and Lao. This innovation is of particular significance since it is not found in the early stages of Tai Yuan (Bauer 2015; Shinnakrit 2021; 2023) and Shan/Tai Nüa (Shinnakrit & Buragohain 2024).

The final innovation found in Thai inscriptions is the occlusivization of PSWT *x- into *k^h-. In Thai, words that originally had *x- in the proto-language were primarily written with *kh-* as onsets, as shown in **TABLE 6**. While it has been established that the graph ‘*kh-*’ was created by modifying *kh-* to represent a voiceless velar fricative /x-/ (Li 1977: 207–214; Diller 1988), words spelled with this graph in Thai inscriptions all go back to either the voiceless uvular stop *q- or the voiceless uvular fricative *χ- in PSWT (Pittayawat 2009b: 123–124). This strongly suggests that the merger of *x- with *k^h- had already occurred before the merger between *q- and *χ- into /x-/ filled the gaps left behind. The change *x- > *k^h- must have taken place very early in the Thai language, as evidenced by the Old Thai inscriptions that reflect them. The words ‘white’ (๒๓๓, *khao*) and ‘green’ (๒๓๒, *khiao*) share the reconstructed initial consonant *x- in PSWT.

This innovation is also particularly significant since it is not found in the

earlier stages of Tai Yuan (Shinnakrit 2021; 2023) and Shan/Tai Nüa (Shinnakrit & Buragohain 2024). Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain whether these changes also occurred in Lao, as the graph ‘*kh-*’ does not exist in the available Old Lao inscriptions, perhaps because of the inscriptions’ significantly younger age. It is also important to distinguish it from the second round of occlusivization that occurred in the 14th–15th century. This subsequent change eventually led to the disuse of the ‘*kh-*’ graph, as discussed by scholars such as Diller (1988).

Peninsular SWT

This section demonstrates how early shared innovations reflected in Old Thai and Old Lao inscriptions provide compelling evidence for grouping not only Thai, Lao, and Southern Thai together, but also most PH varieties. These innovations are also found in lesser-known varieties that have no pre-modern written records such as Southern Thai, Tak Bai, Khorat, Nyo, Yoy, Kaloeng, and Phuan. However, Phu Thai appears to be more distantly related, as it possibly lacks one of the shared innovations. The proposed name for the subgroup is “Peninsular SWT” or PSWT, reflecting its geographical distribution across much of the Indochinese peninsula.

The most readily discernible shared innovation among PH varieties is the coalescence of PSWT *ɓl-. This phonological change is evident across all PH varieties examined in this article, including Southern Thai, Tak Bai, Khorat, Phuan, Phu Thai, Nyo, Yoy,

Table 7: Reflexes of PSWT *ʂl- in PH varieties

Language	‘moon’ เดือน, <i>duean</i>	‘flower’ ดอก, <i>dok</i>
Thai	duən ¹	dɔ:k ²
Lao	duən ²	dɔ:k ²
Southern Thai	duən ³	dɔ:k ⁴
Tak Bai	duən ¹	dɔ:k ³
Khorat Thai	diən ⁵	dɔ:k ²
Nyo	duən ¹	dɔ:k ³
Yoy	duən ¹	dɔ:k ³
Kaloeng	duən ⁵	dɔ:k ²
Phuan	duən ¹	dɔ:ʔ ²
Phu Thai (Waritchaphum)	dɤ:n ³	dɔʔ ⁵
Phu Thai (That Phanom)	dɤ:n ³	dɔʔ ⁵

and Kaloeng. As illustrated in TABLE 7, words that originally had initial *ʂl- in PSWT now consistently exhibit /d-/ as onsets in these varieties. This reflex suggests that *ʂl- merged with *d-, mirroring the change observed in Lao and Thai inscriptions.

Notably, this innovation extends beyond PH varieties. Some P varieties, such as Yuan, Khuen, and Lue also display reflexes identical to *d-. For instance, Yuan /dwan¹/ exemplifies this shared development. This broader distribution suggests that while the coalescence of PSWT *ʂl- provides strong evidence for grouping PH varieties together, the resulting subgroup may be more extensive than initially thought. It potentially encompasses not only Peninsular SWT but also some P varieties. This finding underscores the complex interrelationships within SWT and highlights the need for a nuanced approach to subgrouping on the basis of early shared innovations.

The simplification of PSWT *k^hr- is less straightforward. While all PH varieties display a simple /k^h-/ as a reflex of the velar cluster as illustrated in TABLE 8, Lao and Phu Thai, Phuan, Nyo, Yoy and Kaloeng have simplified all initial clusters. It is unclear whether *k^hr- was simplified earlier, with the other clusters simplified later, or whether they were all simplified simultaneously. If the former is true, the simplification of *k^hr- would support grouping Phu Thai, Phuan, Nyo, Yoy and Kaloeng with Lao, Thai, Khorat, and Tak Bai.

Similarly unclear is the interpretation of data regarding the aspiration of PSWT *h^r-. As illustrated in TABLE 9, Thai, Southern Thai, Khorat, and Tak Bai display /h-/ as the reflex of the voiceless rhotic while retaining *r-, whereas Lao and other nearby languages exhibit /h-/ for both PSWT *h^r- and *r-. Although the Phuan variety spoken in Suphanburi lacks direct reflexes for the particular words in the following table,

TABLE 8: Reflexes of PSWT *k^{hr}- in PH varieties

Language	‘to beg’ ขอ, <i>kho</i>	‘slave’ ข่า, <i>kha</i>	‘other people’ เข่า, <i>khao</i>	‘to drive’ ขับ, <i>khap</i>	‘egg’ ไข่, <i>khai</i>
Thai	k ^{hɔː} 5	k ^{haː} 3	k ^{haw} 5	k ^{hap} 2	k ^{haj} 2
Lao	k ^{hɔː} 1	k ^{haː} 4	—	k ^{hap} 1	k ^{haj} 3
Southern Thai	k ^{hɔː} 1	k ^{haː} 2	k ^{haw} 7	—	k ^{haj} 1
Tak Bai	k ^{hɔː} 1	—	k ^{haw} 3	—	k ^{haj} 3
Khorat Thai	k ^{hɔː} 5	—	—	—	k ^{haj} 2
Nyo	k ^{hɔː} 1	—	k ^{haw} 1	k ^{hap} 4	k ^{haj} 3
Yoy	k ^{hɔː} 1	—	k ^{haw} 1	k ^{hap} 4	k ^{haj} 3
Kaloeng	k ^{hɔː} 5	—	—	—	k ^{haj} 2
Phuan	k ^{hɔː} 5	k ^{haː} 6	—	k ^{hap} 5	k ^{haj} 2
Phu Thai (Waritchaphum)	k ^{hɔː} 1	—	—	k ^{hap} 4	k ^{haj} 3
Phu Thai (That Phanom)	k ^{hɔː} 1	k ^{haː} 5	—	—	k ^{haj} 3

TABLE 9: Reflexes of PSWT *h^r- in PH varieties

Language	‘six’ หอก, <i>hok</i>	‘head’ หัว, <i>hua</i>	‘ear’ หู, <i>hu</i>	‘stone’ หิน, <i>hin</i>
Thai	hok ²	huə ⁵	huː ⁵	hin ⁵
Lao	hok ¹	huə ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹
Southern Thai	hək ¹	huə ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹
Tak Bai	hok ¹	huə ¹	huː ¹	hi:n ¹
Khorat Thai	hok ⁴	—	—	hin ⁵
Nyo	hok ⁴	huə ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹
Yoy	hok ⁴	huə ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹
Kaloeng	hok ⁵	huə ⁵	huː ⁵	hi:n ⁵
Phuan	hok ⁵	huə ⁵	huː ⁵	hin ⁵
Phu Thai (Waritchaphum)	hok ⁵	hoː ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹
Phu Thai (That Phanom)	hok ⁵	hoː ¹	huː ¹	hin ¹

other words that had *h^r- in PSWT consistently show /h-/ as expected. Examples include /hiw⁶/ ‘to carry’ (หิ้ว, *hiu*), /huːʔ²/ ‘loom’ (หูก, *huk*), and /hɔːʔ²/ (หอก, *hok*) ‘spear’. Hence, it remains unclear whether *h^r- in the latter set of dialects underwent a direct

change to /h-/ early on or if it first changed to /r-/ before becoming /h-/ at a later stage.

While inscriptional data suggests the latter for Lao, epigraphical evidence is not available for the other languages. Therefore, similar to the uncertainty

TABLE 10: Reflexes of PSWT *x- in PH varieties

Language	‘white’ ขาว, <i>khao</i>	‘green’ เขียว, <i>khiao</i>	‘galangal’ ข่า, <i>kha</i>	‘hook’ ขอ, <i>kho</i>
Thai	k ^h a:w ⁵	k ^h iəw ⁵	k ^h a:2	k ^h ɔ:5
Lao	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h iəw ¹	k ^h a:3	k ^h ɔ:1
Southern Thai	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h iəw ¹	—	k ^h ɔ:1
Tak Bai	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h iəw ¹	k ^h a:3	—
Khorat Thai	k ^h a:w ⁵	k ^h iəw ⁵	—	—
Nyo	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h iəw ¹	k ^h a:3	—
Yoy	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h iəw ¹	k ^h a:3	—
Kaloeng	k ^h a:w ⁵	k ^h iəw ⁵	k ^h a:2	—
Phuan	k ^h a:w ⁵	k ^h iəw ⁵	k ^h a:2	k ^h ɔ:5
Phu Thai (Waritchaphum)	k ^h a:w ¹	k ^h e:w ¹	k ^h a:3	k ^h ɔ:1
Phu Thai (That Phanom)	—	h ^e :w ¹	h ^a :3	—

surrounding the simplification of *k^hr- clusters, the aspiration of *h^r- is ambiguous, making it unclear whether Phu Thai, Phuan, Nyo, Yoy, and Kaloeng should also be classified in this same subgroup.

The three phonological innovations discussed so far provide strong evidence for grouping Lao, Thai, Southern Thai, Khorat, and Tak Bai together in Peninsular SWT. However, determining the status of Phu Thai, Phuan, Nyo, Yoy, and Kaloeng requires examining the fourth innovation, the early occlusivization of *x-. As shown in TABLE 10, the reflex of PSWT *x- in Nyo, Yoy, Kaloeng, and Phuan is /k^h-/.

This change presents ambiguity in the history of these varieties. Since PSWT *q- as reconstructed by me (Pittayawat 2009b: 123–124) presumably also became /x-/ and eventually /k^h-/, it is not clear whether PSWT *x- became /k^h-/ early on, before *q- changed to /x-/, or if the two dorsal sounds first merged to /x-/, which became /k^h-/ only later. This ambiguity obscures their

precise historical relationships with Lao and Thai. Therefore, Nyo, Yoy, Kaloeng, and Phuan may only be provisionally placed within Peninsular SWT, as there is no conclusive evidence against their sharing of these innovations.

The status of Phu Thai dialects within the Peninsular SWT subgroup presents an interesting challenge. While the Phu Thai Kapong dialect of Waritchaphum does not exhibit the early occlusivization change from *x- to /k^h-/, the dialect spoken in That Phanom shows this change. This variation might suggest a potential split within Phu Thai varieties. However, grouping some Phu Thai dialects with Lao and Thai while excluding others is unlikely, given the overall homogeneity of Phu Thai dialects considered in this article. The most plausible hypothesis is that Phu Thai, as a whole, did not undergo the early occlusivization. Instead, it appears that PSWT *x- only recently became /k^h-/ in some dialects and /h-/ in others. Given this hypothesis, the Phu Thai dialects are tentatively

placed outside the Peninsular SWT subgroup. The occurrence of /k^h-/ as a reflex of PSWT *x- requires careful evaluation, as some instances may represent lexical borrowings from Lao or other languages Phu Thai is in contact with rather than inherited forms.⁵

Discussion

In contrast to earlier studies on the subgroup structure of SWT, which were often restricted in their analysis by considering only tone-related developments, the current research concentrates on innovations related to consonants and vowels. The article proposes that Thai, Lao, Southern Thai, Tak Bai, Khorat, Nyo, Yoy, Kaloeng, and Phuan form a subgroup within SWT called “Peninsular SWT”. Notably, I argue that Phu Thai is outside this subgroup.

From a broader SWT perspective, an important question arises regarding the relationship between the Peninsular SWT and other SWT languages. This discussion begins with Phu Thai, which, as discussed earlier, may not have undergone the early occlusivization of PSWT *x- to *k^h, potentially excluding it from the Peninsular SWT subgroup. However, Phu Thai varieties share the coalescence of PSWT *ɣl- into *ɗ-, indicating a close relationship with Peninsular SWT. As so-called PH varieties, they are provisionally considered the closest relatives of Peninsular SWT, despite not fully participating in all its defining innovations.

The discussion then extends to P languages, particularly to Tai Yuan and

Shan. These languages did not undergo either the aspiration of PSWT *^hr- or the early occlusivization of PSWT *x- to *k^h-. Like Nyo, Yoy, Kaloeng, and Phuan, it is not possible to determine from modern reflexes whether Shan and Tai Yuan share these innovations. However, the reflexes of PSWT *^hr- and *x- in these two languages in the 16th-century were /r-/ and /x-/ respectively, remaining distinct from the reflexes of PSWT *^h- and *k^h- (Bauer 2015; Shinnakrit 2021; 2023; Shinnakrit & Buragohain 2024). This evidence indicates that Tai Yuan and Shan did not share two of the four innovations that define Peninsular SWT.

Interestingly, Tai Yuan and Shan differ in their treatment of PSWT *ɣl-. Tai Yuan underwent the coalescence of PSWT *ɣl- into *ɗ-, aligning it more closely with Peninsular SWT. In contrast, most modern Shan/Tai Nüa varieties exhibit /m-/, the regular reflex of PSWT *ɣ-, in most words with PSWT *ɣl-, as evidenced by examples such as /mək²/ ‘flower’ < *ɣlɔ:k^D (ดอ๑, *dok*) and /məŋ¹/ < *ɣlɔ:ŋ^A (ดอ๑, *dong*). This distinction suggests that Tai Yuan has a closer genetic relationship to Peninsular SWT than does Shan. Intriguingly, Harris (1975) documents a “Tai Nüa” dialect spoken in Van Pong Tong in Xishuang Banna that exhibits a distinctive pattern: unlike other Shan/Tai Nüa dialects, it shows /l-/ as the regular reflex of both PSWT *ɗ- and *ɣl-. The status of this variety remains uncertain as it may represent either a divergent Shan dialect or a non-Shan variety that has undergone contact-induced changes from surrounding Shan communities.

As for the SWT dialects spoken in Vietnam, Black Tai and White Tai

⁵ See Phinnarat (2000) for discussion of contact among Lao, Phu Thai, and Nyo varieties.

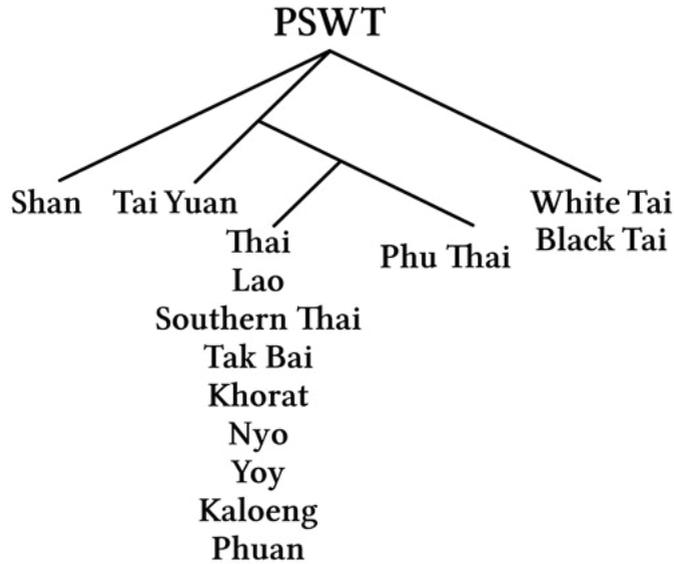


FIGURE 3: Tentative SWT family tree © Pittayawat Pittayaporn

do not belong to the Peninsular SWT subgroup, as they lack the key innovations characteristic of the group. These include the early simplification of $*k^hr-$, and the early occlusivization of $*x-$. Instead, Black Tai, White Tai, and their close relatives in Vietnam exhibit distinct phonological developments that set them apart from Peninsular SWT.

One notable feature is Black Tai and White Tai treatment of PSWT $*k^hr-$. In these varieties, $*k^hr-$ coalesced into $/c^h-/$, which, in some cases, further evolved into $/s-/$. This development is evidenced by etyma such as PSWT $*k^hrap^D$ ‘to drive’ (ขับ, *khap*), realized as $/c^hap^2/$ in White Tai and $/sap^2/$ in Black Tai, and PSWT $*k^hrɔː^A$ ‘to beg’ (ขอ, *kho*), reflected as $/c^hɔː^1/$ and $/sɔː^1/$, respectively. This pattern contrasts sharply with the simplification observed in Peninsular SWT languages. Moreover, White Tai and Black Tai both show $/b-/$ as the reflex of PSWT $*ɓl-$, a development distinct from the Peninsular SWT varieties. Examples include White Tai

$/bɣn^1/$ and Black Tai $/buən^1/$ from PSWT $*ɓluan^A$ ‘moon’ (เดือน, *duean*), and both varieties showing $/bɔʔ^2/$ ‘flower’ from PSWT $*ɓlɔk^D$ (ดอก, *dok*). An additional distinguishing feature is observed in White Tai, which clearly maintains distinct reflexes for PSWT $*x-$ and $*k^h-$. This is demonstrated by words such as $/xa:w^1/$ ‘white’ from PSWT $*xa:w^A$ (ขาว, *khao*) and $/k^haw^3/$ ‘rice’ from PSWT $*k^haw^C$. (ข้าว, *khao*). This retention of distinction contrasts with the early occlusivization observed in Peninsular SWT languages.

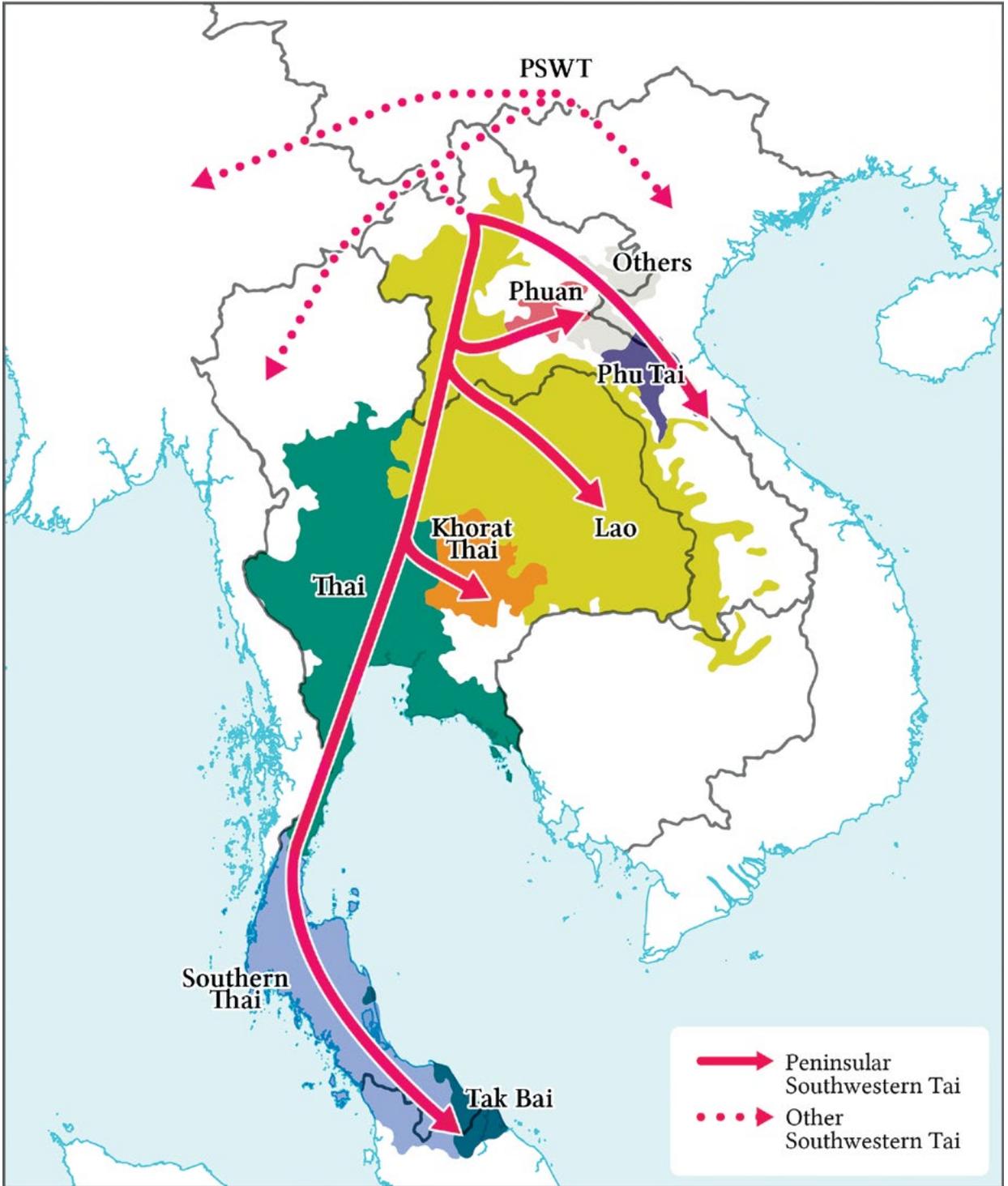
The proposed tree in **FIGURE 3** diverges notably from that of Chamberlain (1975). While Chamberlain’s PH languages are indeed subgrouped together, forming the Peninsular SWT subgroup in our model, his P languages do not constitute a unified branch. The proposed subgroup structure also diverges from Brown’s model in its treatment of Southern Thai and Tak Bai. Contrary to Brown’s classification, which positions these varieties as the

most divergent in a separate branch, the current model incorporates them within a broader group of PH languages. The proposed subgroup model is predicated on the assumption that Old Thai varieties of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya are closely related. This assumption is corroborated by the analysis of early phonological innovations reflected in the inscriptions from both kingdoms, lending credence to its validity. The inscriptional evidence suggests a linguistic continuum rather than two distinct languages.

This perspective challenges earlier models that posited a more significant linguistic divide between Sukhothai and Ayutthaya (Brown 1965; 1966; Chamberlain 1972; 1991). This suggests a more gradual and unified development of Thai and related languages across these historical kingdoms. Nevertheless, additional research is necessary to fully elucidate the diachronic relationships among these varieties and refine our understanding of the historical development of SWT. It is important to note that the precise nature of the relationship between these historical varieties and their connection to modern PH languages requires further investigation. The current hypothesis posits that the Thai inhabitants of the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms spoke variants of the same language, which is ancestral not only to modern Thai but also to the Southern Thai, Tak Bai, and Khorat varieties. This position stands in contrast to Dueanpen's (2541) and Chanida's (1991) acceptance of Brown's and Chamberlain's hypotheses (see above).

Furthermore, the Peninsular SWT hypothesis presents a historical scenario that, in contrast to previous subgrouping proposals, aligns closely with the existing historical findings given below. This hypothesis, which places Thai and Lao within the same SWT subgroup, suggests a pattern of Tai-speaking population movement from Laos to central Thailand, which then served as an intermediary dispersing center for further expansion into southern Thailand.

Assuming that the language of Sukhothai is ancestral to modern Thai, this model proposes that the pre-13th century precursor of both Lao and Thai likely originated in the Luang Prabang area, spreading southward to Sukhothai via the present-day areas of Xayabuli (ໄຊຍະບູລີ) in Laos and Nan in Thailand, along the Mekong, and then the Nan rivers. This scenario, illustrated in **MAP 2**, finds support in historical and geographical factors. The chronicles of Nan and inscriptions from Sukhothai portray the rulers of Sukhothai, Nan, and Luang Prabang as belonging to the same lineage (Prasert 2541: 401–404; Masuhara 2546: 25–27; Sarasawadi 2561: 74–75). Additionally, ancient routes connected Sukhothai to the Mekong River via the Nan River, linking to either Hongsa (ຫົງສາ) or Pak Lai (ປາກໄລ) in Laos before continuing upriver to Luang Prabang (Teerawatt 2558). These routes may have served as migration pathways for Peninsular SWT speakers as they dispersed from the middle Mekong region. The convergence of linguistic evidence with historical and geographical data presents a compelling case for the proposed SWT subgrouping model.



MAP 2: Proposed dispersal scenario for Peninsular SWT
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In the absence of sufficient textual evidence to trace ethnolinguistic group dispersal, linguistic genealogy offers valuable insights. For SWT languages, genealogical relationships can inform hypotheses about their spread across the Indochinese Peninsula. The proposed subgrouping model challenges previously held views on the historical development of these languages. These views have posed significant obstacles

to advancing our understanding of how Tai-speaking populations arrived and fundamentally transformed the ethnolinguistic landscape of Southeast Asia. The divergent conclusions of this article stem primarily from its methodological emphasis on empirical evidence and systematic historical linguistic analysis. This study thus provides a new framework for understanding language spread and population movement in the region.

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APPENDIX: PHONEMIC VALUES OF OLD THAI AND OLD LAO GRAPHS

Phonemic values of Old Thai and Old Lao graphs are based on correspondences between the graphs and the PSWT phonemes established by Ferlus (1988: 22-25). The sibilants *ś* and *ṣ* lack PSWT correspondences and are thus treated in this article as phonologically equivalent to *s*. Similarly,

the graphemes *gh*, *ḍh*, *dh*, *bh*, and *l* are considered phonologically identical to *g*, *ḍ*, *d*, *b*, and *l*, respectively. These phonological equivalences do not affect the present analysis. Vowel graph transliterations are omitted as they are not pertinent to the present analysis.

Transliteration	Old Thai Thai Script	Old Thai Khom Script	Old Lao Thai Noi Script	Old Lao Dhamma Script	Phonemic Value
<i>k</i>	ค	𑄑	𑄑	𑄑	/k-/
<i>kh</i>	ข	𑄒	𑄒	𑄒	/kh-/
<i>'kh</i>	ค		𑄒	𑄒	/x-/
<i>g</i>	ก	𑄓	𑄓	𑄓	/g-/
<i>'g</i>	ก		𑄓	𑄓	/ɣ-/
<i>gh</i>	ง	𑄔		𑄔	/g-/
<i>ñ</i>	ฦ	𑄕	𑄕	𑄕	/ŋ-/
<i>c</i>	ช	𑄖	𑄖	𑄖	/c-/
<i>ch</i>	ฌ	𑄗		𑄗	/ch-/
<i>j</i>	จ	𑄘	𑄘	𑄘	/j-/
<i>'j</i>	ฉ	𑄙	𑄙	𑄙	/z-/
<i>ñ</i>	ฦ	𑄚	𑄚	𑄚	/ɲ-/
<i>t</i>	ต	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/d-/
<i>th</i>	ถ	𑄜	𑄜	𑄜	/th-/
<i>ḍ</i>		𑄝		𑄝	/ḍ-/
<i>ḍh</i>		𑄞		𑄞	/d-/
<i>n</i>	ณ	𑄟	𑄟	𑄟	/n-/
<i>t</i>	ด	𑄠	𑄠	𑄠	/d-/
<i>'t</i>	ต		𑄠	𑄠	/t-/
<i>th</i>	ด	𑄡	𑄡	𑄡	/th-/
<i>d</i>	ด	𑄢	𑄢	𑄢	/d-/
<i>dh</i>	ด	𑄣	𑄣	𑄣	/d-/
<i>n</i>	น	𑄤	𑄤	𑄤	/n-/
<i>jh</i>		𑄥		𑄥	/j-/
<i>p</i>	ป	𑄦	𑄦	𑄦	/b-/
<i>'p</i>	พ		𑄦	𑄦	/p-/
<i>ph</i>	ผ	𑄧	𑄧	𑄧	/ph-/
<i>'ph</i>	ฝ		𑄧	𑄧	/f-/

Transliteration	Old Thai Thai Script	Old Thai Khom Script	Old Lao Thai Noi Script	Old Lao Dhamma Script	Phonemic Value
b	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/b-/
'b	𑄛		𑄛	𑄛	/v-/
bh	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/b-/
m	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/m-/
Y	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/j-/
r	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/r-/
l	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/l-/
v	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/w-/
ś	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/s-/
ṣ	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/s-/
s	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/s-/
h	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/h-/
l̥		𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/l-/
ʔ	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	𑄛	/ʔ-/

REVISITING THE DATING OF THE FIRST AND OLDEST PROTESTANT CHURCH IN SIAM

Herbert R. Swanson¹

ABSTRACT—This article reconsiders one of the key dates in Asian Christian history, the supposed 1837 founding of today’s Maitrichit Church, Bangkok, usually considered the first and oldest Protestant church in Siam. It examines three potential dates: (1) the founding of the first Baptist Chinese immigrant de facto church in 1833; (2) the formal establishment of that church led by a visiting representative of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society in 1837; and (3) the apparent withdrawal of the Chinese members from the 1830s church to form a new, separate church in 1861. The article concludes that Maitrichit Church began in 1833 and is, indeed, the first and oldest Protestant church in Siam.

KEYWORDS: Baptist Missions; Chinese Immigrants in Siam; Chinese Protestantism; Maitrichit Church; Thai Christianity

Contested Origins

Protestantism in Siam began in 1828 with the arrival in Bangkok of the first two Protestant missionaries, making that date the single-most important benchmark in the study of the nation’s 19th-century Protestant movement. From then on Protestant missionaries began importing into Siam not only their religion, but also a range of Western technologies and practices including, most notably, medicine, education, and printing. By the same token, the second key benchmark in the history of 19th-century Protestantism is the founding of Siam’s first Protestant church, a Teochew-speaking Chinese migrant

church in Bangkok, universally understood as today’s Maitrichit Church (คริสตจักรไมตรีจิต), a member congregation of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT).² As the story is generally told, Maitrichit Church was founded in Bangkok on 2 July 1837, making it the first as well as the oldest Protestant church in Siam. The date of 1837 is universally assumed as a solid, incontrovertible historical fact.³

² Officially named the Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church: 591 Maitri Chit Road, Pom Prap, Pom Prap Sattru Phai, Bangkok 10100, Thailand. See: <https://www.maitrichitchurch.org>.

³ Standard histories for Thai Protestantism include McFarland 1928, and Wells 1958; see also Trakulhun 2024. For the missionary role in Thai modernization, see Auraiwan 1981; see also Lord 1969, Popp 1985, and Trakulhun 2013.

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Primary records of the 19th-century Baptist missionaries, however, tell a more complicated and nuanced story. Those records suggest three possible dates that can be claimed as Maitrichit Church's founding date. They are: (1) 1833, when the first Baptist group of three Chinese migrant converts formed as a *de facto* church; (2) 1837, when a series of events "regularized" the status of that Chinese congregation as a church; and (3) 1861, when the 1830s church was reconstituted by the Baptist Mission as a Siamese church and the Chinese members of the original church became established as a new church or congregation. If correct, this third date would invalidate the claim that Maitrichit Church is the oldest Protestant church in Siam. Twelve years prior to that year, in 1849, the Presbyterian Mission in Bangkok established its first church, the Samray Church (คริสตจักรสำเรย์),⁴ also a CCT member church today, thus making it Siam's oldest Protestant church.

The purpose of this article is to address this confusion of dates. A basic historiographical principle holds that an accurate, reliable chronology based on original sources is the bedrock of historical narrative. Conversely, an inaccurate, confused, or contested timeline based on hearsay almost inevitably leads to misrepresentations and misinterpretations of events and their causes and consequences. This principle is important for at least three reasons: first, the status of Maitrichit Church in the Protestant timeline in and of itself matters; second, wrestling with this perplexity regarding dates

highlights key moments in the church's history; and third, discerning the founding date of Maitrichit Church subjects the Baptists to a scrutiny that has long been lacking in the study of 19th-century Siamese Protestant history. Indeed, the history of the Baptist Mission and its churches more generally has received almost no critical study and its primary materials have long gone unused by the scholarly community.⁵ This is true even though the Baptist's Chinese converts emerged in the 1840s and 1850s as Siam's first viable Protestant community. Thus this article sheds light on the putative status of the Maitrichit Church as the oldest Protestant church in Siam while also encouraging scholars to use the Baptist Mission's long ignored historical records as an important resource for the study of 19th-century Siam.

Commencing the Church (1833)

The Baptists' first congregation in Siam began to emerge after the first two Protestant missionaries arrived in Bangkok in 1828; Rev. Jacob Tomlin (1793–1880) and Rev. Dr Karl Gutzlaff (1803–1851) were missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS). They did not stay long, but during the time they were in Bangkok, Gutzlaff baptized a single Chinese immigrant convert, Bunti (บุญดี) who, by December 1831, had become the leading member of a small group of four to six prospective Chinese male converts. The group was formed by another missionary, the Rev. David Abeel (1804–1846). Abeel was a

⁴ The church is located at 37 Soi Charoen Nakhon, 59 Alley, Thonburi, Bangkok 10600, Thailand.

⁵ The one exception to this oversight is Trakulhun 2013 and 2024.



FIGURE 1: Portrait of Rev. John Taylor Jones, *The Missionary Magazine*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, January 1853 © American Baptist Missionary Union

representative of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) who temporarily worked in Bangkok in 1831–1832 (Abeel 1834: 248). After Abeel left, the Rev. John Taylor Jones (1802–1851) and his wife Eliza Grew Jones (1803–1838), American Baptists working in British Burma, moved to Bangkok in late March 1833 to initiate Baptist work in Siam [FIGURE 1].

The Joneses represented the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (ABFMS), which in 1846 was renamed the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU). The remnant of Abeel's small group contacted the Jones' shortly after they arrived and immediately affiliated themselves with the Baptist

Mission.⁶ As the only baptized member of the group, Bunti acted as its first leader and throughout 1833 the group continued to meet and pray together with the Joneses. By November, two other regular members of the group asked to be baptized; John Taylor Jones consented to their request and baptized both men, Chek Peng and Seng-Seah, on Sunday, 8 December 1833. He also rebaptized Bunti by immersion, considered by most Baptists to be the only correct form of baptism. After the baptisms, the Joneses joined with the

⁶ J.T. Jones to L. Bolles, 7 April 1833. Baptist Mission Records (hereafter abbreviated as BMR) FM 110–5. Here and after, the originals of these records are housed at the American Baptist Historical Society, located at Mercer University, Atlanta, in the USA.

three Chinese converts in celebrating communion.⁷ In his subsequent report of these events, Jones wrote to the Baptist home office in Boston that this small group of converts plus the Jones' themselves together comprised "*a little Bap Church*".⁸

At no point does Jones explain what he meant by "church", but it is clear from his journal entry that he believed that the small group of three converts including himself and Eliza comprised a *de facto* church irrespective of the lack of a formal declaration or ceremony to that effect. Jones's sense that he was leading a church despite the lack of formalities reflected the American Baptist understanding of what constitutes a "church". Historically, Baptists have espoused a form of church polity called "congregationalism" which affirms the institutional autonomy of local churches. David Allen states, "The concept of autonomy is vital to Baptist theology and is in fact part of the warp and woof of what it means to be Baptist" (Allen 2010: 59). Congregational autonomy means that in Baptist ecclesiastical structures there is no higher governing body that establishes churches. If a group of Baptists consider themselves a church, they are a church, and no higher agency can tell them otherwise. In the case of dating the beginning of Maitrichit Church, we must therefore pay attention to what those on the field and in the Baptist home offices thought about the ecclesiastical status of their congregation—since no objective, external

measure is available to determine whether that small Baptist group of converts plus the Joneses was or was not a church. In fact, Jones's early correspondence with and reports to the ABFMS from time to time referred to the small band of Baptists in Bangkok as "our little church" in a variety of formulations; later colleagues as well as the ABFMS functionaries in Boston echoed his assertion that there was in fact a Chinese Baptist church in Bangkok.⁹

Thus, it seems logical to conclude that 8 December 1833 is the date of the beginning of Maitrichit Church. However, as we shall see below, later chroniclers did not embrace this date. At the time, Jones and others thought the church began that year, but they did not overtly state that 1833 was its founding date. Later references supporting the 1833 date are of two kinds: first, two later sources refer to 1833 as the year of the church's "commencement"; second, a few others offer it as the first date in the history of the church and pass over any other dates in silence, implying that it was founded in 1833 without claiming that such was the case.

The first of the two sources that record 1833 as the "commencement" of the church appears in the Baptist Mission's annual report for 1848 and states simply that the church "was commenced in 1833 with the baptism of three persons". There is no mention of the competing date of 1837.¹⁰ The

⁹ See Jones to Bolles, 31 December 1834, BMR (FM 110-5); Jones to Bolles, 18 January 1835, BMR (FM 110-5); Jones to Bolles, 15 February 1834, BMR (FM 110-5); and Bolles to Jones & William Dean, n.d., BMR (FM 110-6).

¹⁰ Mission to Siam. *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (hereafter cited as *BMM*) 29, 7 (July 1849): 254-256.

⁷ Journal of Rev. J.T. Jones, Nov.-Dec. 1833, BMR (FM 110-5). See also Eliza G. Jones 1842: 76, 92-93.

⁸ *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

second source was published in 1909 by the Rev. Samuel J. Smith (1820–1909), a former Baptist missionary in Siam who went to Bangkok as a boy of twelve with the Jones family. He writes, “In the latter part of 1833 Dr. Jones baptized three Chinamen. This was the first baptism by immersion ever performed in the river Menam. This was the commencement of the now flourishing Chinese Baptist Church of Bangkok [i.e., Maitrichit Church]” (S.J. Smith 1909: 4).

The use of the word “commence” in these two sources is ambiguous and feels somewhat tentative; there are several other words that might have been used that would more clearly designate 1833 as the beginning date of a new church—words such as “established”, “founded”, or “organized”. The use of the term “commence” seems to imply a vague process of beginning rather than a precise, dateable event. Smith’s usage of it is particularly notable in that he was a youthful witness to the events of 1833, a participant in the events of 1861, and surely knew about those of 1837, although he was not in Bangkok at the time. If he believed that the church was established in 1833, why not say so directly? The fact that he did not refer to 1837 at all does throw doubt on that year as the foundational date, but his use of the word “commence” for 1833 leaves us with the suspicion that he hesitated to claim that today’s Maitrichit Church was unequivocally founded in that year. His ambivalence on this point matters because Smith is the one later source most knowledgeable concerning the events of 1833; we will return to his ambiguity on this matter in our evaluation of the third date, 1861, as he

was a key protagonist in the events of that year.

Five other relevant sources only reinforce the somewhat ambiguous sense that Maitrichit Church can mark 1833 as its birth date. First, Eliza Jones in her memoirs (1842: 76–79, 92–98), describes the baptism of the three Chinese converts in 1833 and goes on to discuss the early years of the church without reference to the 1837 date. The impression is that the church began in 1833. Second, in his standard history of Baptist world missions, published in 1890, Edmund F. Merriam writes that three Chinese men were baptized in December 1833 and then goes on to briefly describe the history of the Bangkok Mission including “the Chinese Baptist Church in Siam” without reference to either 1837 or 1861. As with Eliza Jones, he leaves the impression that the church was founded in 1833 without stating so directly (Merriam 1900: 154–155). Third, the aforementioned Smith wrote, upon his return to Bangkok in 1849 after an absence of fourteen years, that there had been great changes in that period. He especially recalled that the Chinese church Jones had organized in the 1830s had by 1849 about 27 members and a chapel.¹¹ There is no mention of a date, but the fact that Smith remembers that Jones founded the church can only refer to the events of 1833 because after 1835 Jones was seldom involved with the church; much of his attention was focused on the translation of the Bible into Siamese. Thus, yet again the 1837 date is passed over in silence.

¹¹ Siam. Letter of Mr Smith. *Missionary Magazine* 30, 2 (February 1850): 41–43.

Fourth, in late 1836, Bunti became disgruntled and pulled away from the missionaries. During the resulting crisis, the Rev. William Dean (1807–1895), a recently appointed member of the Baptist Mission, wrote that, “[...] the present appearances look much like a speedy extinction of the visible church here”.¹² To be sure, Dean does not here mean to assert that the small Chinese migrant group in Bangkok was a church as such. By “the visible church”, he means, rather, that the converts belonged to the overt global body of Christians as opposed to the “invisible church” of those who are truly converted believers (Komonchak 1976: 112ff). Still, Dean comfortably uses the term “church” in passing to refer to the group of converts in Bangkok. Finally, fifth, in an undated letter from 1835, the Rev. Lucius Bolles (1779–1844), the ABFMS Corresponding Secretary, headquartered in Boston, wrote to the Bangkok missionaries that, “The little Chinese Church you will not cease to cherish, and if Bun Ty can be made useful, it will doubtless be best to keep him fully employed”.¹³ Prior to the events of 1837 described below, in sum, the missionaries in Bangkok and Baptist officials in the United States explicitly and repeatedly referred to a small Chinese Baptist church in Bangkok. They clearly assumed that it could be a church despite the lack of any formalities, which assumption makes perfect sense given their Baptist notion of congregational autonomy.

¹² Journal of Mr Dean at Bankok. *Baptist Missionary Magazine* 18, 2 (February 1838): 38–41.

¹³ L. Bolles to J.T. Jones and William Dean, n.d. [1835], BMR (FM 110–6).

Over twenty years later, in 1859, Dean offers an alternative version of the founding of the church that does not reflect with actual events but does confirm the sense that Maitrichit was already a church prior to 1837. According to Dean, by 1835 the first group of three converts had broken up with the defection of Bunti and the death of the other two. Dean claims that after he arrived in 1835, the Baptist Mission gained three new Chinese converts that same year, which were then organized into a church with himself as the organizing pastor. He writes, “So far as we know, this was the first Protestant church composed of Chinese converts. Others were afterward added to them of such as afforded evidence of being born again” (Dean 1859: 115). Dean does not mention 1837 and clearly believed that the church began in 1835. His memory, however, was faulty as Bunti defected in late 1836 and the other two original converts were still alive when the events of 1837 took place. In fact, Dean himself, as we will see, reported on those events at the time and somewhat tentatively acknowledged that the church was first organized as a “regular” church in 1837. Dean’s later recollection, faulty as it was, is still important because it lends weight to the sense that the Baptist church in Bangkok was founded prior to 1837 and that the events of that supposedly pivotal year were not as momentous as later generations believed.

Regularizing the Church (1837)

The Baptist presence continues in June 1837 when the Rev. Howard Malcolm (1799–1879), a representative of the ABFMS, visited its fledgling mission

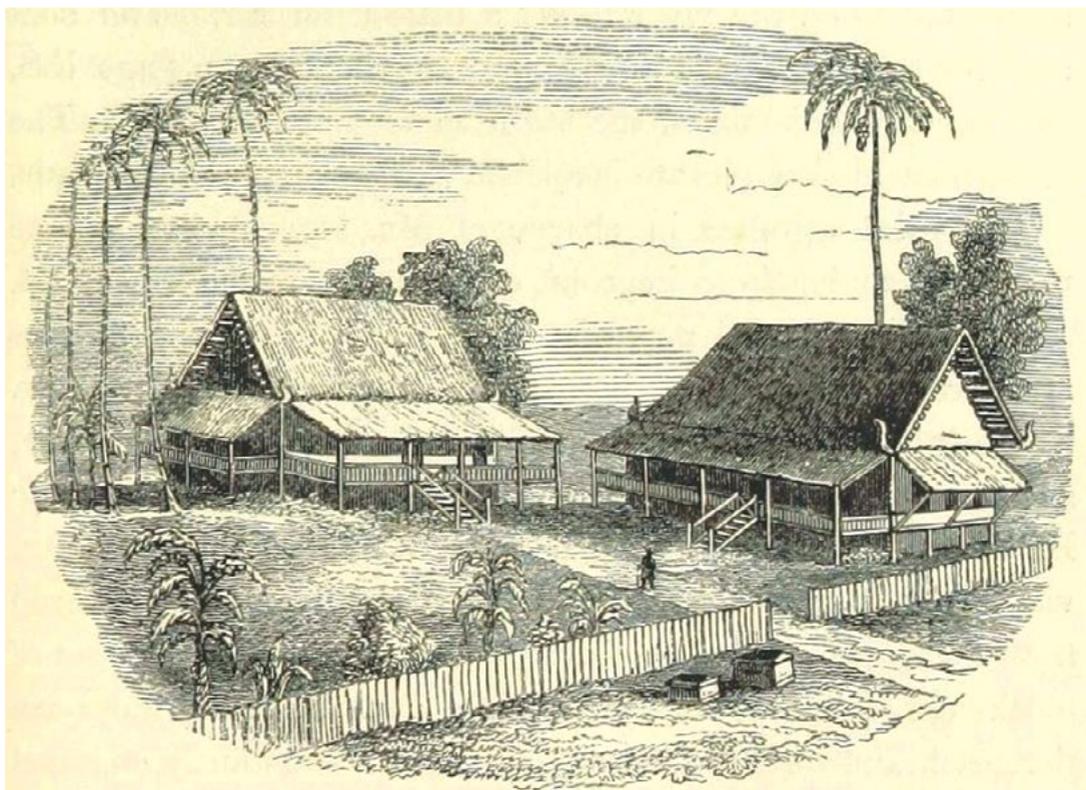


FIGURE 2: Baptist Mission Premises, Bangkok, 1837 © Malcolm 1839: II, 157

in Bangkok. He was on a tour of the Baptist missions in East and South Asia and spent seven weeks with the Siam Mission during which time he took note of the fact that the *de facto* church in Bangkok had never been formally constituted. At his behest, the small Baptist congregation, composed of converts and missionaries, declared itself an official congregation on Sunday, 2 July 1837 after having met previously to prepare for the event [FIGURE 2]. Malcolm later wrote,

Deeming it important to form the brothers and sisters of this station into a regular church of our Lord Jesus Christ, I convened them in council, and, after full

consideration, it was unanimously resolved upon. After devoting a day to fasting and prayer, and drawing out, in full, the platform of doctrine and discipline, I proceeded on the following Sabbath, to preach and perform the appropriate solemnities. Nine persons of whom two were the China men already mentioned, formed the material of the church (Malcolm 1839: 138).

Malcolm was aware of the potential historical significance of the official founding of this small, foreign-dominated congregation, observing that, “The first Lord’s Day in July, 1837,

was, by this solemn event, rendered memorable in the history of Siam, as the birth-day of the first Protestant church of Christ in the kingdom". He went on, "It was indeed a small room, and a small company; but an occasion full of present benediction and future promise". He avowed, "Hereafter centennial jubilees will celebrate the event, sacred orators dwell on it with glowing tongue, and unborn generations bless the auspicious hour". And he concluded, "The 'little one will become a thousand' and the day of small things give place to periods of power, extension, and triumph" (Malcolm 1839: 139). It is compelling rhetoric designed to fix the date of 1837 as a crucial moment in time and to attach Malcolm's own name to it.

The missionary event held on that Sunday was attended by only one of the Chinese members of the fledgling church. Malcolm, furthermore, had no official mandate, and the event was not entered into the official minutes or reports of an authoritative ecclesiastical body other than the local mission itself, of which he was not a member. As best as we can tell, the whole matter was Malcolm's idea and did not reflect any felt need by the mission or its converts. Still, more to the point, the actual historical situation of the church did not change in the least as a result. The ambivalence surrounding the event was reflected in Dean's report of it published in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (BMM) where he refers to the church prior to July 1837 as in an "unorganized state" and observes that, "We before celebrated the communion, and considered ourselves virtually bound by a Christian compact,

not till now regularly organized into a church".¹⁴ While Malcolm clearly believed he was establishing a new church, Dean's perspective was more nuanced and ambiguous. He seems to have felt that the events of 1837 "regularized" the church's status as a church and confirmed and solidified that status even though it had previously already shared a common congregational bond generally considered to be that of a church by those on the field and in the home office alike.

In the years after 1837, however, Baptist chroniclers took up Malcolm's ceremonial "regularization" of the church; this date has become the generally accepted date for the church's founding. It may well be that his soaring rhetoric as much as anything else transformed 1837 into a foundational event. Thus, William Gammell's standard history of American Baptist missions, published just twelve years later in 1849, recorded that, "In the summer of 1837 the mission at Bangkok was visited by Rev. Mr Malcolm, in his official tour in the East, and while he was there its several members, together with the three Chinese converts who still remained faithful, were formed into a Christian church" (Gammell 1849: 192). Gammell's word implies and assumes that there had not been a church in Bangkok prior to 1837. In succeeding years, this implicit assumption became fact.

In 1884, G. Winfred Hervey thus dated the organization of the Baptist Chinese church in Bangkok as 1837 and noted that it was "the first Protestant

¹⁴ Journal of Mr Dean, n.d., *BMM* 18, 7 (July 1838): 179.

church in Siam”, solidifying the significance of the date as a key event in the history of Siamese Protestantism as well as a notable event in the history of Baptist foreign missions (Hervey 1884: 469). In subsequent years other Baptist sources locked 1837 into its chronological niche. Helen Barrett Montgomery (1913: 149), not only dated the founding of today’s Maitrichit Church as 1837 but also incorrectly named William Dean its founder.¹⁵ That is a mistake other sources also sometimes make including, for example, Margaret Landon, the well-known author of *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944), who claimed in a 1948 foreword that Dean organized the church in 1837 (Goddard 1948: 7). Meanwhile, the 1837 date also became a staple in general histories of Protestantism in Siam or Thailand including the two standard sources, George B. McFarland’s *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam 1828–1928* (1928) and Kenneth E. Wells’ *History of Protestant Work in Thailand 1828–1958* (1958: 18). McFarland (1928: 29) also mistakenly credited Dean with founding the church. Finally, Maitrichit Church celebrates 1837 as the birth date of the church and Protestant churches in Siam more generally recognize it as the founding date of the nation’s first Protestant church.¹⁶

In this way, common knowledge holds that Siam’s first Protestant church was a Chinese immigrant congregation

founded by Baptist missionaries in 1837 and that this is today’s Maitrichit Church. The events of that year had all the trappings of a foundational event including planning meetings, worship services, a statement of faith, and a duly appointed pastor, William Dean [FIGURE 3]; the involvement of Howard Malcolm as an official of the ABFMS lent it further credibility. However, all of this does not alter the fact that the Baptists in Bangkok and Boston considered their “little Chinese church” as a church virtually from the beginning. It does not change the reality that the supposedly foundational events of 1837 did not respond to a felt need in Bangkok nor did it change the fact that the congregation was before and after a tiny group composed largely of a handful of Chinese male converts led by a missionary pastor.

In the years after 1837, the small Baptist church in Bangkok slowly grew in numbers as its missionary patrons faced a number of daunting challenges to their work in Siam including the climate, health issues, slow communications and travel, limited financial resources, an unstable Chinese migrant community, Roman Catholic competition, cultural and social incompatibilities, and a Baptist evangelical ideology that was of little or no interest to the vast majority of either the Chinese or Siamese in the Bangkok region. By 1860, the church still numbered only 20 “native” members including three then in China. Most of the members were Chinese males, older than fifty, with some single and others married to local women.

¹⁵ See also, Merriam 1900: 154; Blanford 1977: 33; and A.G. Smith 1980: 32.

¹⁶ See Anonymous 2530: 13; also “คริสตจักรไมตรีจิตฉลองครบรอบ 150 ปี” [Maitrichit Church Celebrates Its 150th Year]. ข่าวคริสตจักร [Church News], Aug. 1987: 45.

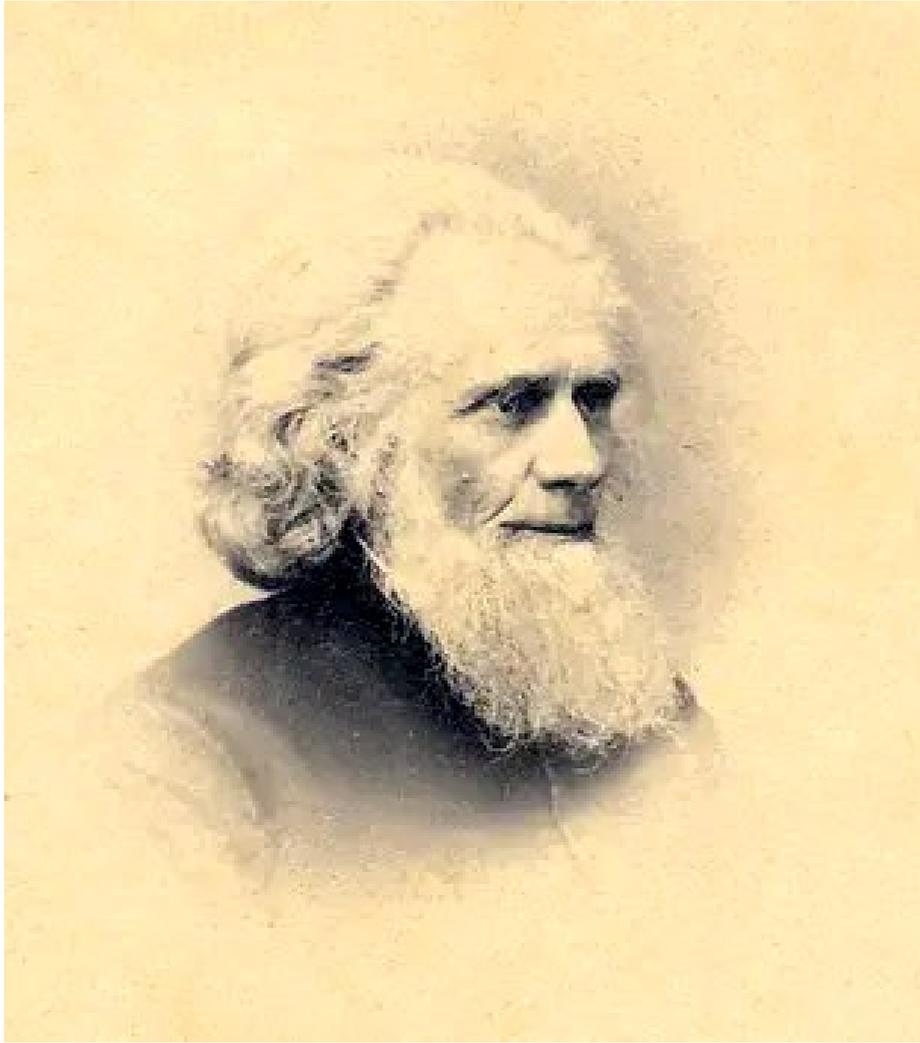


FIGURE 3: William Dean Portrait © Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity

Reinventing the Church (1861)

The final chapter in the saga of Maitrichit Church's origins opened in 1854 when the Rev. Robert Telford (1826–1898) arrived in Bangkok from Boston to begin work with the Chinese Department of the Baptist Mission. At the time he joined a colleague in that work, the Rev. William Ashmore (1824–1909), but Ashmore was reassigned to the Baptists' Hong Kong Mission in 1858 leaving Telford in charge of Chinese work in Siam including the Bangkok

church. Unlike Ashmore and his other predecessors in that work, including William Dean, Telford proved to be a largely ineffectual leader of the church who by early 1860 had fallen into an intense personal conflict with the Rev. Samuel J. Smith, introduced above. Smith was in charge of the mission's Siamese Department and the only other Baptist missionary left on the field.¹⁷ Smith originally came to Bangkok

¹⁷ See Telford to J.G. Warren, 11 February 1860, BMR, FM 111-8; Telford, Copy of Rejoinder to Rev. S.J.

in 1833 at the age of twelve with the Joneses, having been adopted by them in India. Smith subsequently studied in the United States for fourteen years before returning to Bangkok in 1849 as a Baptist missionary. He was tasked with expanding the mission's outreach to the Siamese and soon allied himself with Mr John H. Chandler, a somewhat testy Baptist lay missionary responsible for the mission's printing establishment until he withdrew from the mission in 1856. After he resigned from the mission, Chandler remained in Bangkok and maintained a close if unofficial connection to the mission through Smith.

By 1860, Telford and Smith were engaged in an acrimonious dispute between the mission's Chinese and Siamese Departments, especially over control of certain properties in Bangkok. It was a feud also marked by personality clashes between the two with Chandler lending his support to Smith. The feud caused a flurry of counter-punching missives sent by each missionary to the ABMU that led the Executive Committee in 1861 to suggest to Telford and Smith that the two departments be reconstituted as two separate, autonomous missions, one working with the Chinese and one with the Siamese. Publicly, the committee justified this action as the implementation of a policy to strengthen Baptist evangelistic outreach to the Siamese while still maintaining its ongoing work with Chinese immigrants.¹⁸

Smith, 17 April 1860, BMR, FM 111-8; and S.J. Smith to Telford, 24 April 1860, BMR, FM 111-8.

¹⁸ R. Telford, Annual Report of the Siamese Baptist Miss. for 1860/61, n.d., BMR (FM 111-9); and W. Dean, Report of the Committee on the Siam and China Missions, n.d. *Missionary Magazine* [originally *BMM*] 42, 7

However, clearly the Executive Committee took this step primarily hoping that removing Telford and Smith each to their own independent mission would tamp down the embarrassing fiasco their feud had created.

The chief obstacle to separating Baptist work in Bangkok into two missions was the congregation. In a later report, the ABMU Executive Committee affirmed in principle that outreach to the Siamese and not Chinese migrants should be its chief goal in Siam, but the actual transition to such a policy was "delicate & led to unexpected difficulties" because the existing church had always been a Chinese congregation and, since 1835, had always been supervised by the mission's Chinese Department. By 1860, it had only a few Siamese and mixed-race members. Acknowledging Chinese priority in the church, the Executive Committee report states that the church, "[...] enshrined memories of the most sacred character, and treasured up interests, personal to the missionaries and to the church members, which could not lightly be set aside". It acknowledged that logically "the Siamese portion would have been allowed to take the initiative in forming a new church", but it was felt that the larger and stronger Chinese membership could better weather the challenges of functioning as an independent congregation than could the Siamese minority. The report concludes, "[...] it was decided that the Chinese members, under the supervision of Mr Telford, should go forth and associate as a Chinese church—the other [original] organization to be known

(July 1862): 208–209.

hereafter as the Siamese [church]”.¹⁹ The impetus for these changes was thus taken by the ABMU Executive Committee and was aimed primarily at patching over the Telford-Smith feud. The founding of a new congregation, in sum, did not arise out of a felt need in Bangkok but, rather, out of Boston’s need to deal with difficult missionary staffing issues.

Telford apparently felt that this move was the only way he could protect the integrity of the Chinese congregation and retain his role as its pastor. In any event, he went along with the ABMU’s plans and subsequently informed the Executive Committee that he met with the Chinese members on Saturday, 6 April 1861, and they willingly agreed to form a new church. The official ceremonial founding of the congregation then took place in a worship service held at the Baptist missionary compound in Bangkok on the following Monday, 8 April 1861. Telford took pains to explain that the Chinese members themselves made the final decision to form their own church and held a “simple ceremony” to that end. They also elected their own officers, including appointing Telford as their pastor.²⁰ These events, however, only served to intensify the feud between Telford and Smith as each claimed that their church controlled the disputed properties with Smith arguing that the ownership of them remained in the hands of the original, now Siamese church. Telford left Bangkok two years

later in 1863, ostensibly because of his wife’s health but also because the situation there was no longer tenable for him and his family.

If Telford’s report to Boston is correct, the Chinese members of the original 1830s church held a simple ceremony on 8 April 1861 organizing a new Chinese church with its own set of officers. The actions of that day should put the whole matter of the founding date of Maitrichit Church to rest. It was clearly understood by all parties involved that the events surrounding the removal of the Chinese majority from the mission’s original congregation and the reorganization of that majority as a new church was as much an official action as were the events of 1837. In fact, it was still more “official” because it grew directly out of policy decisions made in Boston. In this scenario, then, Maitrichit Church was originally organized as a Chinese church in 1837 and then the Chinese members of the 1837 church became reconstituted as a new congregation in 1861. In this reckoning, the church of 1837 was shorn of its original identity so that it could become a Siamese congregation. The official story, thus, seems to be that Maitrichit Church was founded on 8 April 1861. If one embraces 1837 as the date of the official founding of the original church, it then seems only correct to affirm 1861 as the date on which today’s Maitrichit Church was founded. The original 1837 church, meanwhile, died a slow death in the aftermath of 1861 and eventually ceased to exist.

When Telford left Siam, the Chinese Mission in Bangkok and its Chinese

¹⁹ Siam Mission, n.d., *Missionary Magazine* 42, 7 (July 1862): 276–280.

²⁰ Telford to Warren, 9 April 1861, BMR, FM 111–8; and Telford to Warren, 11 April 1861, BMR, FM 111–8.

church needed a new missionary and the ABMU asked William Dean to return to Siam and take charge of both. He enthusiastically agreed and arrived back in Bangkok with his family on Christmas Day 1864; the situation was immediately transformed. In the intervening years, Dean had become a widely known, highly respected, and influential figure in American Baptist foreign mission circles. In Siam, Dean was well-remembered and highly regarded in government circles. He was thus influential both in Bangkok and in Boston. Smith and Chandler were simply not in his league, thus a continuation of the disputes between the two Baptist missions in Bangkok was not going to go well for them. Dean, indeed, soon reported back to Boston that Smith's so-called Siamese church had no ethnic Thai members left, it was dwindling in size, and Smith himself was doing almost no outreach work among the Siamese.²¹

Dean's assessment of the Baptist ecclesiastical situation in Bangkok, furthermore, was that the Chinese members felt bitter about how they had been tricked by Smith and Chandler into appearing to give up their rights to property they believed was theirs. Dean wrote, "The Chinese brethren with us conscientiously regard themselves still members of the old-first Baptist Chinese Church of Bangkok, never having asked or received letters of dismissal from it & never having organized themselves into a new '2nd church' as the 'pastor' of the Siamese church [Smith] chooses to style us". Dean was not correct in

his assertion that the Chinese members had not organized themselves into a new church four years previously, as we have seen above, but he was almost certainly right in his claim that they felt they were the same church as they had been before 1861 and that they felt bitter about their treatment at Smith's hands. Dean thus considered the division of the original Chinese church in 1861 to be a regrettable act taken for self-seeking and unspiritual reasons and sought to reclaim ownership of the original church for the Chinese congregation he inherited in late 1864. In his eyes, it was the original church because the members who were supposedly removed to the so-called second church had never been properly dismissed and therefore remained members of the original church. Dean summarized his feelings by writing, "This church has passed through many changes, but the Master holds it still as a light in his hand amid the darkness of this heathen people".²² By "this church" he meant today's Maitrichit Church. Considering Dean's reports and Smith's failures, meanwhile, the ABMU decided to suspend the work of the Siam Mission in Bangkok as of 1869. Smith by that time had gone into private business and was no longer employed by the ABMU; the ground in Bangkok was left entirely to Dean's Chinese Mission and its Chinese church.²³

²¹ Dean to Warren, 25 April 1865, BMR FM 108-26.

²² Dean to Warren, 22 February 1865, BMR FM 108-26; Dean to Warren, 7 June 1865, BMR FM 108-26; and Dean to Warren, 25 August 1865, BMR, FM 108-26.

²³ Siam. Chinese Mission of Bangkok. Letter from Dr Dean, 22 January 1868. *Missionary Magazine* 48, 8 (August 1868): 326-330.

As best as we can tell, Dean was convinced that the church he began to serve in December 1864 was in fact the same church that he had pastored two decades earlier. There had never been an actual Siamese church, and the original Chinese church had successfully navigated the shoals of missionary controversy regardless of any apparently official measures. This version of events, shared by the Chinese members, quietly became the accepted, semi-official narrative of events. It privileged 1837 at the expense of 1833 while nullifying the unpalatable events of the 1860s, ultimately banishing them from the living memory of the church. In 1879, thus, an ABMU report on the Bangkok Mission to the Chinese cited a list provided by Dean of the six organized Chinese churches in Siam at that time along with the founding date for each church. At the head of the list is Bangkok's Wat Ko Church (คริสตจักรวัดเกาะ), as today's Maitrichit came to be known in the later 19th century, which according to Dean's list was "organized in 1837".²⁴ It was as if the events of the early 1860s had never happened.

Even Smith eventually seems to have accepted the nullification of 1861. As we saw earlier, in 1909 at the end of his life he published a book, *Brief Sketches of Siam*, that included a passing reference stating that the Baptist Chinese church in Bangkok "was commenced" in 1833. We noted above that the choice of the word "commence" was curious when other more direct terms could have been used. Considering events in the early 1860s, the choice takes on added

significance. Smith could not have forgotten the interpersonal turmoil of the eventful years that led to his withdrawal from missionary work and he surely remembered that the Chinese members of the original 1830s church had been intentionally removed from that church and formed into a new church in 1861. Yet, as the years passed and the immediacy of those events faded into distant memories, Smith too came to accept that the Wat Ko Church of 1909 was the church that "commenced" in 1833. He accepted, somewhat ambiguously to be sure, that from the beginning there had always been the one Baptist Chinese immigrant church in Bangkok, that is the Wat Ko Church, which in 1935 was renamed as Maitrichit Church [FIGURE 4].

Our two key witnesses for the events after 1861, Dean and Smith, thus each in their own way believed that the founding of a second Baptist Chinese church in 1861 did not affect the *de facto* identity of the original Chinese congregation, which remained intact despite having been officially excised from the original church because of a missionary feud. Although Smith maintained a shadowy Siamese church and mission for several years after he left the Baptist Mission in 1869²⁵, his mission and its church survived for just a few years and only the original Chinese congregation under the Chinese Mission in Bangkok carried on. In the decades after 1865, then, Dean and Smith in a sense colluded in the process of making 1837 a seemingly rock-solid, unchallenged moment in Thai Protestant church history.

²⁴ Missions to the Chinese. Bangkok—(Siam). Rev. W. Dean, D.D., and wife. *BMM* 59, 7 (July 1879): 246.

²⁵ See Smith to Rev. J.N. Murdock, 7 August 1875, BMR FM 111-4.

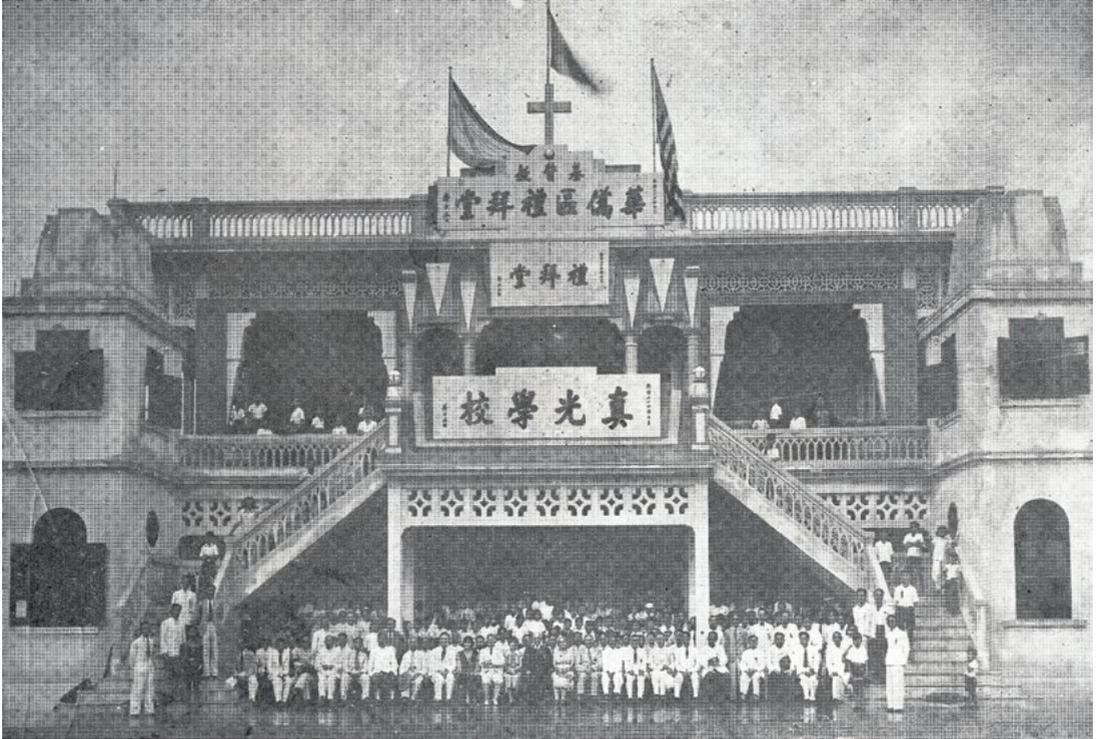


FIGURE 4: Wat Ko (Maitrichit) Church, 1935 © Church of Christ in Thailand Archives

I have used the phrase “in fact” repeatedly at key junctures in recounting the story of the founding of Maitrichit Church, most notably regarding the events in the early 1830s and again of the 1860s. In 1833, when the first small Baptist group began, it was “in fact” a church despite not having been officially declared such. In 1864, when Dean returned to Bangkok, the church he led was “in fact” the same church as the church of the 1830s despite the events of 1861. This usage brings us full circle to the Baptist notion of “church” which, during the first years of the mission, left it to the missionaries on the field to discern whether their band of Chinese converts constituted a church or not. There was no other

agency, local or international, that had the authority to decide the matter and the Chinese converts themselves necessarily deferred to the missionaries in such matters. To establish a single, definitive date for the founding of Siam’s oldest Protestant church, in short, we must decide if we will embrace the Baptist missionary habit shared by their headquarters in Boston of referring to their small Chinese group of converts prior to July 1837 as a church. If we do, then the matter is settled: Maitrichit Church began on Sunday, 8 December 1833, when its first three converts were baptized and first took communion together under the pastoral leadership of Jones.

However, if we decide that a church does not become a church in the full sense of the word until it has some form of official declaration, usually including a worship service and other celebratory events, then the small Baptist group of converts in Bangkok and their missionaries were established as a church on Sunday, 2 July 1837. Later chroniclers, as we have seen, have accepted this viewpoint and designated 1837 as the date of the founding of Maitrichit Church. If this latter position is accepted, however, the troubling question raised in the Introduction concerning the events of 1861 must be addressed. According to Telford, the Chinese members of the 1830s congregation willingly and intentionally withdrew from the 1837 church and started a new church on Monday, 8 April 1861, which event they celebrated with the requisite worship service and other formalities. If such formalities are necessary for starting a church, on what legitimate historical grounds does one affirm the celebrations of 1837, but nullify those of 1861? Dean justified doing so by denying that there had been any official actions taken in 1861, which contradicts the contemporaneous record of events. The two Baptist missionaries present in 1861, Telford and Smith, as well as the Chinese members in Bangkok and the Baptist authorities in Boston all understood that a new Chinese church had been properly established in that year. If we privilege officially declared acts and officially held ceremonies, in short, the virtually inescapable conclusion is that Maitrichit Church is not the oldest Protestant church in Thailand today nor was it even the first church. In this scenario,

the Presbyterian Samray Church, as noted in the Introduction, is the oldest Protestant church in Thailand today, but it was not the first Protestant church. The earliest church was supposedly established by the Baptists in 1837 and died a largely silent, pathetic death sometime in the 1860s. Maitrichit Church took its place beginning with its founding under Telford in 1861.

But this second scenario ignores the fundamental reality that, beginning in December 1833, only one Chinese immigrant Baptist congregation existed in Bangkok. There was no break in its story despite the events of 1837 and 1861; from the beginning all concerned called the original congregation a church. Dean may have been incorrect in his claim that the events of 1861 were null and void because the requisite formalities were not held, but in the later 1860s he and the Chinese members of the church were not wrong when they insisted that they “in fact” still belonged to the original church and that he was pastor of the same church then as he had been two decades earlier. Perhaps, most important of all, the *de facto* church of 1833 was the only one initiated by the Chinese members themselves; it was they who approached the Joneses with a request to affiliate as a group with the Baptist mission. In stark contrast, an agent of the ABFMS initiated and implemented the so-called “regularization” of the church in 1837 and the Executive Committee of the renamed ABMU initiated the events of 1861.

In sum, the weight of the evidence argues for the conclusion that Maitrichit Church, later known as the Wat Ko Church,

was founded in 1833: first, the missionaries who established the first small group of converts as a church were Baptist missionaries who assumed that the group was indeed a church, thus reflecting the Baptist principle of congregational autonomy which affirms the sovereign right of a church to determine its own ecclesiastical status. In 1833, the converts were unable to decide for themselves if they were a “church” while their missionary patrons were equipped to decide; those patrons and their superiors in Boston repeatedly affirmed the congregation was a church

that worshipped together, fellowshipped together, celebrated baptism and communion, and had their own pastor. Second, this congregation maintained an unbroken identity from its founding in 1833 through all the events of 1837, 1861, to the present. Given this history, we conclude that Maitrichit Church began on Sunday, 8 December 1833, when three Chinese converts received baptism in the Chao Praya River and then celebrated communion with John Taylor and Eliza Jones. It is indeed the first and oldest Protestant church in Siam.

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MIRACULOUS AMALGAMS: THE IN KHONG STYLE MURALS OF THE FOURTH REIGN (1851–1868)

Paul McBain¹

ABSTRACT—In mid-19th century Bangkok, Siamese temple mural art saw the rise of the innovative “In Khong style”, characterized by three-dimensional landscapes and European-style buildings, departing from relatively two-dimensional Buddhist narratives. Proliferating during the Fourth Reign (Rama IV, 1851–1868), this style extended beyond Khrua In Khong’s documented works. This article argues that the In Khong style was a modern art form unique to Siam, shaped by the development of a class of hired craftsmen inspired by imported wallpaper and prints. Reflecting Siam’s age of wonder and fascination with the West, these murals expressed a reimagined world through fantastical landscapes and structures, rather than merely imitating European forms and techniques.

KEYWORDS: Asian Modernity; European Influences; Khrua In Khong; King Mongkut (Rama IV); Siamese Art; Temple Murals

Introducing the In Khong Style

Sometime around the middle of the 19th century, Siamese temple mural art in the greater Bangkok region underwent a profound shift. Replacing Mount Meru, gilded temples, and pavilions, the “In Khong style” of steam ships, railways, aerial and linear perspective or shading and converging lines which lend to images an illusion of depth, emerged. These murals of the Fourth Reign (Rama IV, 1851–1868) suggest less the fabled, arcadian landscapes of the *Thotsachat Chadok* (ทศชาติชาดก; stories of ten former lives of the historical Buddha) and other narratives which celebrate the Buddha’s lives and accomplishments. Rather,

they evoked fabled future landscapes of worlds and buildings populated with *apsaras* and European architectural forms which these craftsmen had never seen except in prints. They also evoke, strangely, the “cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces” and “solemn temples” of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610). That is to say, they are images of fancy so whimsical as to call attention to their own insubstantiality, images which seem abundant in the art and literature of ages characterized by epistemological change.

Wat Bowon Niwet (วัดบวรนิเวศ) showcased this new style, painted in about 1840 by the elusive monk-painter Khrua In Khong (ขรัวอินโขง; ca. 1800–1860), which then spread across the capital during the Fourth Reign. In this article,

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expanding on a prior article published in this journal (McBain 2022) which analyzed the murals of In Khong's two flagship temples, I explore the development and historical context of the In Khong style more broadly. I endeavor to understand from what internal and external conditions this modern—i.e., breaking consciously from traditional styles and subjects—artistic style arose. I argue that the mural craftsmen, following the tastes and ideals of their chief patron, employed Western painting techniques and architectural forms, but elaborated on these forms to express a sense of wonder at the possibilities of a new world.

During the Fourth Reign Siam shifted from wishing to see itself as part of an Indic and Sinic civilizational sphere to advertising itself as part of Western civilization (Peleggi 2002: 12). In his nearly two decades as a monk, King Mongkut, Rama IV, learned English, Latin, and astronomy with visiting missionaries. His new order of *thammayut* monks was conservative, basing itself at least in principle on the practice of an ancient Mon Buddhist lineage, but was also modern in that it encouraged a “skeptical attitude on the natural world” and came to dismiss many popular Buddhist narratives as mere fables (Reynolds 1973: 125). In a previous article (McBain 2022), I analyzed the allegories in the murals of Wat Bowon Niwet and its sibling temple, Wat Borom Niwat (วัดบรมนิวาส), and argued that these images not only presented European culture as something marvelous but were also a kind of visual rhetoric working to assimilate European ideals of scientific and even political enlightenment to the

new *thammayut* Buddhist ideals of the future king. Looking beyond those two flagship temples, this article looks at the development of the In Khong style as a modern art form unique to Siam.

“Modern” in European art is associated with Impressionist figures, such as Oscar-Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), and representative movements such as Cubism or Expressionism. Generally speaking, it denotes a clear and usually self-conscious break from preceding stylistic art traditions. The In Khong style, drawing self-consciously on foreign sources, represents a palpable break from the comparatively two-dimensional, stylized mural art that preceded it in Siam. However, to say that it is an example of “modern” art, participating in a world historical movement, implies coherence with other outside movements and discontinuity with internal, domestic visual discourses (Clark 2021). Endeavoring not to understand the “modern” as a European import, John Clark understands the Asian Modern more comprehensively as styles which demonstrate a “new relativization of the pasts of any group or group of cultures” or a “temporal discontinuity with innerness”—styles which “posit an outside” (Clark 2021: 22).

In Khong and his contemporaries are famous in Thailand as the first artists to effectively employ “Western” techniques such as *chiaroscuro* and linear perspective. Wiyada, for example, writes that In Khong “was the first Thai to adopt the true three-dimensional perspective technique to Thai painting” (1979: 125). But rather than seeing their work as a simple West-East import or as a



FIGURE 1: South wall mural, Wat Mahaphrueytharam, ubosot, Bangkok, ca. 1860s. In Khong style, blending European landscapes and mixed architecture © Paul McBain

progression from stylized to realistic visual representation, we may start to write the history of Siamese art's "modern" by paying close attention to internal structures and discourses, the reasons and aims behind its own particular radical break from prior styles. The modern In Khong style arose not from mere importation, but from its own socio-economic structures, including the rise of a class of hired craftsman, the aspirations of the king, and their felt need to assimilate Buddhism to certain Western ideals. This article thus begins by exploring the internal conditions under which the In Khong modern style developed.

Patronage and the Royal Taste

Although Khrua In Khong is now by far the most famous mural craftsman of the Fourth Reign, we know very little about

him except that he was a monk and probably came from Phetchaburi, south of Bangkok.² Having painted the murals of Wat Bowon Niwet and Wat Borom Niwat (ca. 1840s), we know that he went on to paint murals at the Ratchaphongsanuson Pavilion (หอพระราชพงศานุสร) in the Royal Palace. However, in addition to the handful of murals attributed to him, many temple walls painted during the late Fourth Reign such as at Wat Mahaphrueytharam (วัดมหาพฤฒาราม) have a similar style, with gradient blue skies, wide landscapes, and European-style buildings and steamships [FIGURE 1].

² In this article, I refer to Khrua In Khong and other mural painters as "mural craftsmen" because *chang phap* (ช่างภาพ) or "picture craftsman" was how they were referred to in writings of the mid-19th century. The modern Thai term for artists *silapin* (ศิลปิน), implying the higher status accorded to an original creative designer, was not generally applied to mural painters.

I began this article searching for an elusive “school” of murals painted by craftsmen who are sometimes said to have been Khrua In Khong’s students. Wiyada Thongmitr writes of Khrua In Khong’s “disciples”, including Phra Khru Kasinsangwon (พระครูกสิณสังวร; dates unknown), the abbot of Wat Thong Nopphakhun (วัดทองนพคุณ) in Thonburi (Wiyada 1979: 135). Steve Van Beek mentions that In Khong’s “students” painted Wat Ratchapradit (วัดราชประดิษฐ), one of King Rama V’s (r. 1868–1910) landmark temples (Van Beek & Tettoni 1991: 190). However, I have found no primary textual evidence for “Achan In” (อาจารย์อิน), as he fleetingly appears in the chronicles, as have named disciples.³ Though we have no primary evidence about a “school” of Khrua In Khong in the sense of a group of students that he personally trained, there is little doubt that he had the status of “most favored” artist in the Fourth Reign and that his style flourished. It is possible that he was something akin to the chief artistic “director” of the reign, rowed from temple to temple to inspect and advise on mural art projects.

Stylistic characteristics of the In Khong style are: a deployment of linear and aerial perspective, *chiaroscuro*, and wallpaper-like landscape vistas with follies, often of Grecian or classical-like architecture mixed with Siamese forms.

³ The idea of Khrua In Khong having had named “disciples” seems to have originated with No Na Pak Nam. He writes in his *Dictionary of Art* that Khrua In Khong had “many disciples, amongst whom were some well-known names like Phra Khru Kasinsangwon of Wat Thong Nopphakhun” (2522: 43; my translation). However, it is not clear where this assertion comes from. Perhaps No Na Pak Nam may have had interviews with surviving artists, monks, or nobles who may have known this, at least second-hand.

Clark (2013) also notes much darker coloring than earlier murals, perhaps to indicate the colder climate of Europe as well as new “realistic” elements from Euro–America such as trees with straight trunks, water flowing in ripples, and splashing white foam. The style appears largely limited to the capital and its environs with the exception of a few temples in Ayutthaya and Phetchaburi. Moreover, it was largely outside of contemporaneous vernacular practices of mural painting such as, for instance, at Wat Phra Singh (วัดพระสิงห์) in Chiang Mai or Wat Khongkharam (วัดคงคาราม) in Ratchaburi.⁴ I refer to this style of mural painting simply as the In Khong style because, although we know little about the artist and have no way of knowing if he trained students, we can

⁴ Examples of the In Khong style are located as follows. In Bangkok: Wat Bowon Niwet (วัดบวรนิเวศ), Wat Borom Niwat (วัดบรมนิวาส), Wat Mahaphrueytharam (วัดมหาพฤฒาราม), Wat Sommanat (วัดโสมนัส), Wat Pathumawanaram, (วัดปทุมวนาราม), Wat Ratchapradit (วัดราชประดิษฐ), Wat Makut (วัดมกุฏ), the Ratchakoramuson Pavillion (หอพระราชกรมานุสรณ์) and the Ratchaphongsanuson Pavillion (หอพระราชพงศานุสร) in the Royal Palace. In Thonburi, Wat Thong Nopphakhun (วัดทองนพคุณ), Wat Buppharam (วัดบุพพาราม). On Ko Kret in Nonthaburi, Wat Paramaiyikawat (วัดปรมัยยิกาวาส). In Samut Prakan, Wat Protket-taram (วัดโปรดเกศเชษฐาราม) holds framed paintings in the style. In Phetchaburi, Wat Mahasamanaram (วัดมหาสมณาราม). In Ayutthaya, Wat Phra Ngam (วัดพระงาม). Clark (2013) also notes Wat Kanmatuyaram (วัดกันมาตุยาราม) in Bangkok; Wat Pradu Song Tham (วัดประดู่ทรงธรรม) in Ayutthaya; Phra Nakhon Kiri (พระนครคีรี) in Phetchaburi; Wat Wang (วัดวัง), Wat Wihan Beuk (วัดวิหารเบิก) in Phthalung; Wat Matchimawat (วัดมัจฉิมาวาส) in Songkhla; Wat Aponsawan (วัดอัปสรสวรรค์), Wat Chinorot (วัดชีโนรส), Wat Pao Rohit (วัดเปาโรหิตย์) in Thonburi. This is not an exhaustive list. Sketches and other materials by Khrua In Khong and artists exist in private collections and in the National Library of Thailand. These include hanging pictures such as the anonymous work *Inao in the City of Kalang* (1887) displayed at Bang Pa-In Palace in Ayutthaya.

be fairly certain that this elusive monk from Phetchaburi was the style's originator.

Prior mural painting in Thailand, from which the In Khong style was a radical departure, has few surviving works from before the 18th century. What we now see is largely the reconstruction and development of artists in Bangkok after the late 1780s (Clark 2021: 42). Prior murals in Bangkok had tended to depict Jātaka tales and stories of Gotama Buddha's past lives. By the Third Reign (1824–1851), there was a marked increase in the variety of subjects (including Chinese subjects) depicted as well as in the detail of scenes, though the In Khong murals nevertheless mark a radical departure in both their commitment to the illusion of spatial realism as well as their inclusion of European architectural forms. Changes in mural art styles in the early 19th century were likely accelerated by a change in the role and reimbursement of craftsmen. In the first two reigns of the Rattanakosin Era (1782–1824), craftsmen were either *phrai* (ไพร่) *corvée* laborers or royal craftsmen. Royal craftsmen were co-opted into *krom* (กรม) or troops for their given specialty, such as woodworking or lacquer work. To make a single “lion-footed table” (โต๊ะเท้าสิงห์, *to tao sing*), for example, required that the table be passed between no less than ten different specialized troops (for instance, carpenters, whittlers, lacquer painters, gold painters, to name only a few) before completion (Saran 2534: 44). Craftsmen could not be outsourced, unlike the majority of *corvée* laborers, attesting to their short supply.

Beginning with the Third Reign, however, craftsmen were frequently hired from outside the palace. Wat Phra

Chetuphon (วัดพระเชตุพน) or Wat Pho (วัดโพธิ์), the king's flagship temple restoration was, we know from inscriptions, largely completed by hired laborers, often at great cost. Some sections were done by royal craftsmen overseen by royal pages, but the majority consisted of a mix of monks and hired craftsmen, sometimes working together on the same project. Some of these craftsmen were immigrant Chinese, as the poet Muen Phrom Samaphatson, colloquially known as Nai Mi (หมื่นพรหมสมบัติสร or นายมี; ca. 1795–1850) describes in his *Nirat Suphanburi* (นิราศสุพรรณ; ca. 1840):

พวกช่างจีนสินจ้างรางวัลเพิ่ม
ช่างไทยเต็มเปี้ยหวัลด่วนจัดสรร
บ้างเลื่อนที่มีนามขึ้นตามกัน
ทั้งช่างปั้นเขียนฉากสลักกลึง

Those Chinese craftsmen were hired for labor with yet more rewards.

Thai craftsmen got more allowances at the temple allocated to them.

Some moved around, gaining names for themselves,

All craftsmen, builders and painters, sculpting and lathing (Saran 2534: 88; my translation).

The hired laborers included monks, as Nai Mi notes in a sarcastic tone:

ไตรพระช่างตั้งเพียรปั้นเขียนงาม
สร้างอารามมาช่วยรวยทุกองค์

And monk craftsmen, industrious in sculpting and painting well, Built temples, came helping and getting rich, every monk (Saran 2534: 96; my translation).



FIGURE 2: Panel, northern wall, Wat Mahaphruettharam, ubosot, Bangkok, ca. 1850s. European bay motif with Chinese-influenced brushwork © Paul McBain

Craftsmen who achieved fame almost always began learning their trade as novice monks, studying at a temple which was well-known for a particular craft. A great number of the craftsmen who worked on Wat Pho were from Wat Rakhang (วัดระฆัง), indicating that the latter was something of a training school for artisans. Nai Mi writes of Khrua Nak (ขรัวนาค) at Wat Phleng (วัดเพลง) in Bangkok Noi Canal:

แต่ก่อนพระวัดนี้ท่านดีมาก
ชื่อขรัวนาคช่างฉลาดช่างวาดเขียน
มีคนจำแบบอย่างมาวางเรียน
จนช่างเขียนประเดี๋ยวนี้ก็ดีจริง

In times before, a monk of this temple was excellent,
His name Khrua Nak—a craftsman skilled in painting and drawing,
Many people came in crowds to study with him,
And so painter-craftsmen these days excel truly (Saran 2534: 70; my translation).

Despite the fame they could achieve in their own time, their biographies were scarcely recorded because for chroniclers they were simply “craftsmen” (ช่าง, *chang*) specialists, a status similar to those who specialized in making fireworks and Mount Meru funeral pyres.

By the 1840s, the period in which Khrua In Khong was likely painting Wat Borom Niwat, a class of hired craftsmen had emerged. They likely journeyed between temples to learn with well-regarded masters, making sketches of famous murals. Scholars have noted a marked improvement in technique, in the quality of detail and realism,

of murals painted in the Third Reign (Phanuphong & Chaiyot 2549: 50–52). This change has been attributed to increased trade caused by improvements in shipping technology, the importation of prints (particularly from India and Burma), new dyes from China, and skilled immigrant painters. Immigrant painters brought both a competitive edge as well as new painting techniques. Effective renderings of aerial perspective and an atmospheric painting of buildings and trees appeared using characteristically Chinese painting methods such as the “dabbing technique” and bark brushes at Wat Suwannaram (วัดสุวรรณาราม) and Wat Daowaduengsaram (วัดดาวดึงษาราม) in Thonburi (Apinan 1992: 4). The In Khong craftsmen, even as they depicted European buildings and landscapes, continued to display the influence of techniques learned from immigrant Chinese, as we can see in a panel from Wat Mahaphrueytharam which seems to blend Siamese architecture, European aerial perspective, and Chinese landscape painting [FIGURE 2]. But the single most transformative factor causing changes in mural representation during this period surely derives from a shift in the ways in which craftsmen were hired and reimbursed. To be a mural craftsman was, quite suddenly, a profitable occupation available to anyone who had skill, encouraging competition amongst painters for patronage.

While financial rewards, local fame, and freedom to experiment had improved, mural craftsmen still relied on patronage, particularly royal patronage. Siamese kings had immense power to dictate aesthetic tastes during their

reign, as epitomized by the old Siamese expression “The lord says it is beautiful, so we say so too” (เจ้าว่างาม ก็ว่าตามเจ้า; Koompong 2003: 149). We know well that King Mongkut had a taste for things from Europe and America. Sir John Bowring (1792–1872), when taken on a tour of the king’s private apartments, noticed pendulums, watches, barometers, thermometers, and a microscope, all items which might be found “in the study or library of an opulent philosopher of Europe” (Peleggi 2002: 23). While it is true that Mongkut’s Europhilia was to some extent a strategy to appear “civilized” according to Euro–American preconceptions, he also wrote copiously in Thai on the wonders of Europe. He would often refer to European science as *mahatsachan* (มหัศจรรย์) or miraculous (Wilairat & Thawatchai 2559: 141). The king also seems to have been much more concerned than prior Siamese monarchs for artwork to achieve European-style realism. He hired the French sculptor Émile-François Chatrouse (1829–1896) to make his likeness but, apparently finding it insufficiently realistic, ordered a new sculpture by a local artist. Apinan suggests that Rama IV’s receipt of photographs and portraits of monarchs such as Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) convinced him that the exchange of realistic portraits as acts of diplomacy were important to Western kings and queens. However, “disregard for shading, foreshortening, and perspective in traditional Siamese art” meant that the “indigenous” style of Siamese painting had to be augmented to achieve such realism (Apinan 1992: 11).

Mongkut’s reaction to one mural allows us to glimpse how carefully he

thought about art. The incident occurred at Wat Thong Noppakhun in Thonburi, said to have been directed by the abbot Phra Khru Kasinsangwon. The king, having seen some interesting copies made by student painters of these murals, visited the temple in 1860, apparently with the intention of asking if Phra Kasin could oversee the restoration of certain temples. Mongkut praised the monk-painter’s “strange and wondrous style which does not imitate anyone else” (เขียนแปลกประหลาดมากไม่เลียนอย่างของใคร), a style which had “the wisdom to avoid and elude old forms” (ทำไปด้วยปัญญาที่เลี่ยงหลักหนืออย่างเก่า). It was “a style of craft which is most strange and excellent, charming and delightful to the royal heart” (มีฝีมือช่างแปลกประหลาดดูเป็นที่เพลิดเพลินเจริญพระราชหฤทัยได้นั้น). However, as the king was leaving, he discovered images which were “disgraceful to the eyes” (อุจาดตา, *uchatta*), images of *apsaras* bathing in the gardens of heaven. One lady was urinating, and others had their skirts up so that their “nether regions” (อุทรประเทศ, *uthara prathet*) were visible. These images led Mongkut to reflect on what may be considered “improper” in mural art. The king wondered: “What are the purposes of these images—are they a metaphor for the contemplation of worldly desire or about belief?” (จะเป็นประโยชน์โภชนผล เป็นปริศนาธรรมทางสังเวชหรือทางเลื่อมใสอย่างไร). And, if not, in what way are they “edifying” (เจริญจิต, *charoenchit*)? Finally, he felt that such images, unlike “the dances of actresses who perform in an open field” (โขนละครพ้อนรำตลกแต่งไปออกโรงในท้องสนาม) were simply not the kind that should be enjoyed “publicly” (ที่แจ้ง, *thi chaeng*).

They were comparable to the kind of art made by “a Chinaman who painted similar pictures” (อย่างจีนเขาเขียนรูปเช่นนี้บ้าง) and placed them behind a mirror coated with wax that could only be seen with a candle. The offending images were corrected (Royal Writings 2518: 88).⁵ This account shows us just how much power kings had to dictate the tastes of mural art. It also demonstrates that Rama IV thought mural art should be “edifying” and that he favored that which was “strange” and original, deviating from old forms. We also know he was concerned that everything in the capital be as proper as possible.

The “strange” style so favored by the king seemed to have included a love of fantasy and the marvelous. We know, for instance, that King Mongkut had a special liking for angels. He ordered that craftsmen at Wat Pathumwanaram (วัดปทุมวนาราม) make a painting of “angel children and angels on an excursion in Dawadueng [Tāvātimsa Heaven]” (เรื่องเทพบุตรเทพธิดามาประพาสในสวนที่ดาวดึงษ์). He later wrote in a letter that “though I may be old, though I may be frail already, angels are still with me [...] angels, if there are any, surely go alongside the king” (ถึงแก่ชราแล้วเทวดายังเข้าด้วย [...] ถ้าเทวดามี เทวดาคงเข้าด้วยในหลวง) (Patsaweesiri 2558: 334). Patsaweesiri (2558) believes that such a preference must have become well-known and inspired the proliferation of firmaments of angels in the murals of this period.

⁵ These are my own translations. This section is from the Royal Writings in 1860, which are not written directly by the king himself but reports of his activities and declarations written by his secretaries.

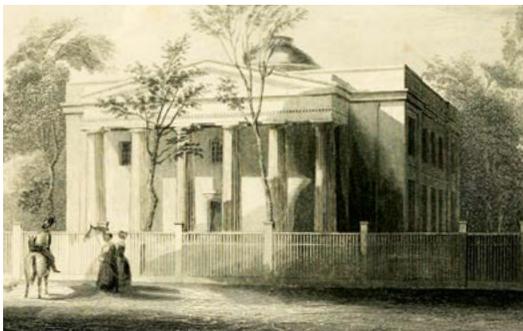
Despite his reputation as the Siamese king who was most keen on scientific innovation, these comments indicate a love not so much of scientific empiricism and exactitude, but of wonder. King Mongkut’s well-chronicled love of scientific subjects such as astronomy did not share the decorous ethics of “integrity and disinterestedness” which was becoming widespread among European scientific intellectuals. Rather, his aesthetic tastes indicate the “atmosphere of wonderstruck novelty” with a particular love for “things rare and unusual”, more commonly found in the writings of natural philosophers of the 17th century (Daston & Park 1998: 329). For instance, at Phra Pathom Chedi, the sight of a ball of light glowing above the stupa “delighted” Rama IV, even while he opined that the effect was likely caused by rainwater encountering elements in the bricks (Johnson 1997: 239). Newly encouraged by the possibility that technical skill could reap rewards and especially mastery of Euro-American forms, artists of the Fourth Reign developed a radical, modern style under the supervision of their chief patron: a king who favored the strange and unconventional and prized originality.

Student Paintings at Wat Protket

An excellent source for understanding the development of the In Khong style is a collection of what was likely student practice art now housed at Wat Protketchettaram (วัดโปรดเกศเชษฐาราม) or Wat Protket, Samut Prakan. These works of art in the In Khong style are, unusually for Siam, framed rather than



FIGURE 3: Tempera on panel framed painting, housed in the ubosot at Wat Protketchettaram, Samut Prakan, In Khong style, ca. 1850s © Paul McBain



**FIGURE 4: Thomas Addison Richards, “Medical College, GA” from *American Scenery, Illustrated*, 1854, p. 71
© Library of Congress**

mural images. The paintings were clearly made by different painters with different levels of technical ability. Though we cannot be certain about the training process for Siamese painters outside of the In Khong style, accounts

by later craftsmen strongly suggest that this involved copying existing elements with feedback from the teacher (Saran 2534: 67). However, here we will see that the In Khong style painters did not merely copy European sources but added their own creative elaborations.

One example at Wat Protketchettaram is of a large colonnaded house [FIGURE 3] possibly drawn from a scene from *American Scenery* (1854), a copy of which was gifted to King Mongkut by Ambassador Townsend in 1856 [FIGURE 4]. To the left of the house, the landscape with trees and the ocean shows a good understanding of aerial perspective. Yet, as No Na Pak Nam notes (2537: 107), the two central trees and the flag blow leftward in the wind, while the copse of trees on the far left bend to the right.

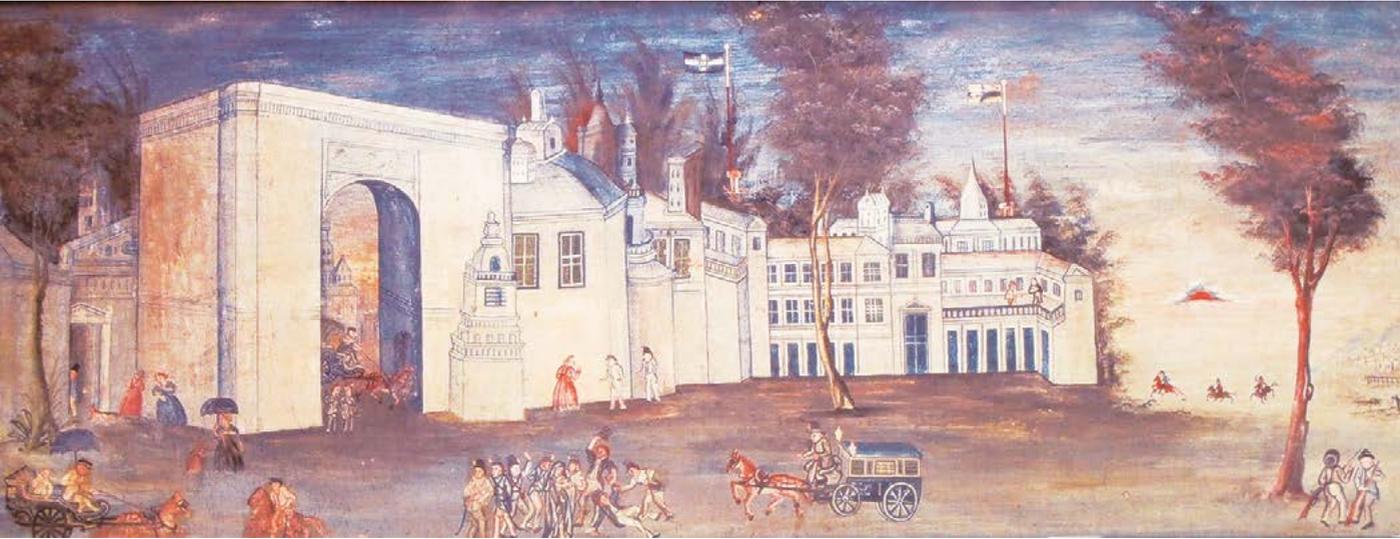


FIGURE 5: Tempera on panel, framed in the ubosot of Wat Protketchettaram, Samut Prakan, In Khong style, ca. 1850s. European buildings clustered near a triumphal arch © Paul McBain

Also, several chimney flutes emerging from the building's roofs have slats in them, similar to windows. No Na Pak Nam believes that this may be because Siamese painters did not know the purpose of chimney flutes and so may have added these embellishments. The painter also enhanced the image by adding structures on the main roof with pillars and balustrades. This example of Siamese artists adding their own creative touches demonstrates that they would elaborate on forms of European architecture without necessarily knowing their functions. A similar tower with slats, painted many decades later at Wat Paramaiyikawat (วัดปรมัยยิกาวาส), indicates that Siamese craftsmen did not merely copy prints, but developed their own style with its defining elements copied across different works.

Another example from Wat Protketchettaram shows a line of European buildings leading to a triumphal arch [FIGURE 5]. This is likely based on a slide from a viewing device



Porte Saint-Denis.

FIGURE 6: Postcard from ca. 1840s, unknown artist © Public Domain

called the Panoptic Polyorama, almost certainly “a viewing box with various slides for use with it” presented to King Mongkut by the French Embassy in 1856 (Clark 2013: 19). The slide is of an image based on a lithograph print of the Porte Saint-Denis in Paris [FIGURE 6]. In the Wat Protketchettaram painting, the buildings on the right are not arranged geometrically, but are two-dimensional renderings of copied architectural forms

crammed together irrationally. This results not so much in a realistic-seeming rendition of physical space from a single perspective, but a projection of a sense of whimsical proliferation.

Clark (2014) writes that the “major visual discourse” of the school consisted of prints from various ambassadors. But, as we have seen, the painters did not so much copy European architectural models or endeavor to mimic the illusion of spatial realism in these prints faithfully. Rather, having learned various design elements from prints, they proceeded to create their own designs, free from the dictates of form and functionality. Before speculating about what effects they were trying to achieve with these elaborations, we should consider some other possible inspirations for the artists and the ideas that they may have inferred from these sources.

Inspirations: Wallpaper, Follies, and Perspective

As well as prints from books, printed wallpaper art may have been another important inspiration. Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong (นริศรานุวัดติวงศ์; 1863–1947) wrote briefly in his correspondence that Khrua In Khong had never visited Europe, but had largely learned his craft copying European and American wallpaper prints (Narisara & Damrong 2512: 258). In my earlier article, I suggested that landscape wallpaper was likely the compositional form which Khrua In Khong found could best “bridge the difference between European perspectival art and the wide vistas of Siamese murals” (McBain 2022: 31). By the

mid-19th century, when we know from foreign accounts that European wallpaper became popular amongst Siam’s elites (McBain 2022: 30), techniques employed to design and print landscapes on paper were highly developed. French companies such as Zuber & Cie in Rixheim and Dufour et Cie in Mâcon competed with one another and, as well as against their classification as craftsmen of a minor art, these companies employed some of the most highly skilled artists for their designs. Drawing on the insight of master landscape painters that, since the sky needed to be executed perfectly because it occupied much of their work, wallpaper designers developed techniques to brush on a graded blue color consistently before applying the prints of the landscapes themselves (Nouvel-Kammerer 2005: 96). We find such attention duplicated in the subtle atmospheric gradients in the murals of Wat Borom Niwat and other works from this period in Bangkok. The use of clumps of trees distributed regularly in landscape wallpaper “served to separate the scenes and to provide a rhythm for the composition as a whole”. Clumps of trees could also be used as convenient separators between the blocks used to print wallpaper (Nouvel-Kammerer 2005: 103). These characteristic tree spacings can be found in many In Khong style murals. We also find characteristic floral patterns of European wallpaper in temple murals of the period.

As well as depicting exotic landscapes, scenic wallpaper landscapes were often peppered with “follies”, functionless buildings, often mock ruins or buildings in a classical style which augmented

the view of wide spaces. The seeming frivolousness of follies were, in both the In Khong style and in Euro–American gardens and landscape paintings, more often an expression of ideology. Follies, such as pyramids, colonnades, and rotundas in the landscape acted as “portals” to imaginative and historical realms and even inscribed the landscape itself with classical values (Carso 2021: 3). Indeed, print books from the United States that the In Khong artists used prioritized examples of classical architecture in the American landscape, because such architecture possessed valences for Western consumers connoting civility, classical values, and historical depth. The American landscape painter Thomas Cole (1801–1848) described his homeland in his “Essay on American Scenery” (1836) as a historic “shoreless ocean” and wished for elements such as follies of ancient-seeming ruins to populate the wilderness with the “memories” of ancient culture. The European-style designs in In Khong style murals became a way of “inscribing” the landscape of temple murals with either European ideals or imagining a future amalgam of European and Thai Buddhist elements.

An example of such an amalgam can be found at Wat Sommanat (วัดโสมนัส) in Bangkok. On the east wall near the main entrance is the image of a temple with various figures drawn in traditional Siamese court dress worshipping a buddha-image [FIGURE 7]. The building is an open-air pillared hall capped by a triangular pediment with painted floral motifs, topped by a large dome. We find such dome-topped temples—with domes so large that the building’s

base would not have supported them in reality—throughout the murals of this reign. One can see another example in the mural of Wat Buppharam (วัดบุปผาราม) in Thonburi [FIGURE 8]. The domes may have been based on prints of domed buildings such as the Roman Pantheon found in illustrated encyclopedias including *Iconographic Encyclopedia of Science, Literature, and Art* (Heck 1852), gifted to Mongkut by the United States in 1856. Siamese mural artists relatively freely combined elements drawn from different sources. This is one small example of artisans experimenting with the design without knowledge of the function and construction requirements of European architectural forms, creating quite fantastical-seeming buildings.⁶

We can perhaps think of the inclusion of these European-style buildings as examples of a fascination with an “exotic” foreign culture. King Rama IV found mastering these Euro–American styles was desirable, perhaps as a sign of the kingdom’s “civilized” abilities. As Roger Nelson writes, the love of and attraction to all things unknown and foreign (“xenophilia”) played a significant role in the development of modern art in Southeast Asia. A tendency for Asian artists to “seek approval [...] especially in the West”, which began in the 19th century continues to this day (Nelson 2019: 254) and the In Khong style may be seen as one example. Just

⁶ Such buildings were not usually seen in the landscape of Bangkok, only appearing in piecemeal. Examples of European-style buildings constructed during the Fourth Reign include the clocktower in the palace which had window-like indentations in its tower as well as the observatory tower in Ayutthaya.

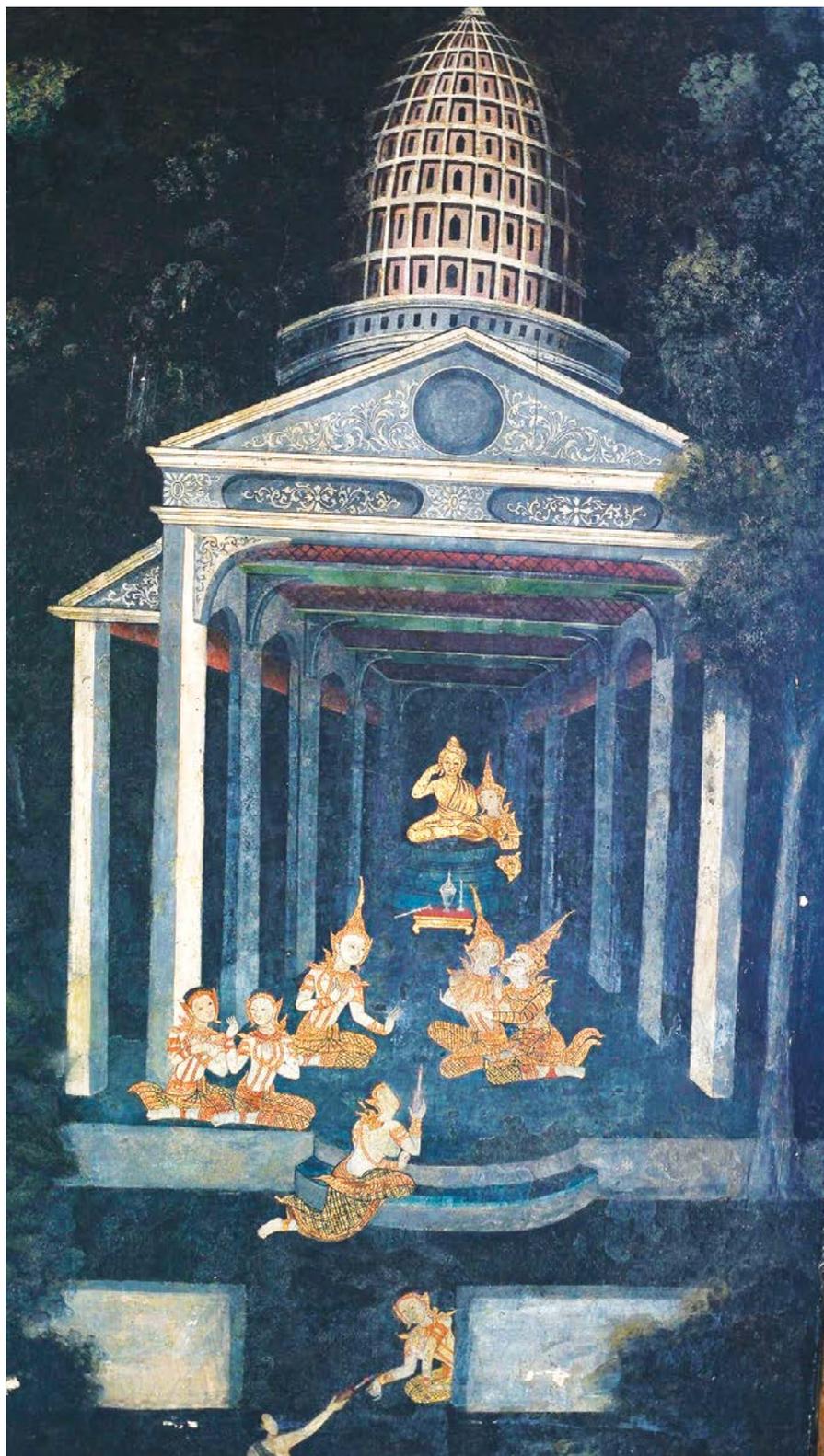


FIGURE 7: Detail, east wall, Wat Sommanat, *wihan*, Bangkok, ca. 1853. Court figures in a hall with a European-style pediment and a large dome © Paul McBain



FIGURE 8: Mural, western wall, ubosot of Wat Buppharam, Thonburi, ca. 1860s. Daily life with Siamese and European forms, including a domed temple at top left
© Paul McBain

as European artists such as Walter Spies (1895–1942) rendered the lush foliage of Bali or Granada Carbezudo (1865–ca. 1900) portrayed the finely-wrought costumes of local Filipina fashion, In Khong artists showed a fascination with European architectural forms and fashions. The difference is that while the exoticism of these European artists displayed these foreign lands as colorful cornucopias of difference from their home cultures, In Khong artists rendered the architecture and dress of Europe in a way that if anything celebrated an amalgamation of forms and designs, demonstrating perhaps an exoticism of aspiration rather than an exoticism of seductive difference.

Examples of this amalgamation can be seen in the murals of Wat Paramaiyikawat (Temple of the Grand-

mother), a Mon temple on the island of Ko Kret in Nonthaburi famous for its “leaning” pagoda. These were painted during the Reign of Rama V and depict the thirteen ascetic practices (No Na Pak Nam 2546: 14). In the part of the landscape depicting the ascetic practice of *abbhokāsikaṅga*, dwelling in the open air, monks walk in front of a fenced monastery with a brown, bare yard [FIGURE 9]. The large tower in the center seems to arise from a pale blue lake on the right. The tower serves no obvious purpose, but is used artistically to balance the composition of the landscape. The two spires on either side of the central structure are reminiscent of the chimneys embellished with windows that we saw above at Wat Protket. In the background, next to a gated temple, are a line of multi-storied



FIGURE 9: Detail, north wall, ubosot of Wat Paramaiyikawat, Ko Kret, Nonthaburi, by MC Pravij Jumsai, ca. 1876. Practicing monk with towers resembling earlier In Khong style elements © Paul McBain

buildings which, since they are a dense cluster in a rural area, seem not to make practical sense. But, just as folly structures in European or American gardens served in part to imbue a certain classical memory to the landscape, these proliferating nonsensical structures perhaps served to inscribe the landscape with a sense of wonder about a new age.

In another panel in the same temple, the historical Buddha sits with his disciples in the forest, then leads them in procession into the central plaza where an agricultural ceremony takes place, and then appears on the second floor of a European-style

building [FIGURE 10]. It was not a departure from tradition to depict Gotama Buddha outside of his proper historical context. However, the Buddha is depicted in an architectural landscape that would have seemed to the painters and audience exotic and modern. Perhaps the effect was to produce one of a sense of possibility for Buddhism in a new age.

A third inspiration for the murals of the Fourth Reign are, simply, images which made use of aerial and linear perspective, effects which, as we have seen above, artists were keen to replicate. The In Khong murals of the Fourth



FIGURE 10: Detail, north wall, ubosot of Wat Paramaiyikawat, Ko Kret, Nonthaburi, by MC Pravij Jumsai, ca. 1876. Agricultural ceremony with European-style buildings © Paul McBain

Reign were not the first Siamese experiments in perspective. Phanuphong Laosom and Chaiyot Isawonphan studied the change in representation effected by the introduction of new technologies, in particular clear mirrors (Phanuphong & Chaiyot 2549: 57–59). Such mirrors were given as gifts to King Rama II (r. 1809–1821) by ambassadors from Portugal. These mirrors, the authors argue, could have encouraged not only a new understanding of one’s own place in linear space, but also an understanding of visual composition with lines and corners to give a sense of space within a frame. However, the murals at Wat

Bowon Niwet by Khrua In Khong clearly mark a strong departure from all prior mural art in Siam in that they effectively deploy effects such as aerial perspective and linear perspective based on imported prints. Yet, while they copied designs based on linear perspective, the realism of the in Khong artists seems only to have gone so far. The practice paintings at Wat Protket imitate Euro–American prints, but do not seem to have employed the mathematical calculations required to optimally render an illusion of spatial realism. The aim was not a simulacrum of reality from an individual standpoint, nor a desire to reproduce as faithfully

as possible a single moment in time. Rather, elements copied from examples of linear perspective and *chiaroscuro* were employed for “lyrical” effects. Indeed No Na Pak Nam (2537: 108) suggested that we should perhaps not look to early European linear perspective art for comparisons with the In Khong style, but rather the 20th century proto-surrealist painter Giorgio De Chirico (1888–1978). The “spatial theatres” of his trademark arcades give the impression of having been modelled after classical paintings but are really more like parodies of linear perspective in which the logic and order imposed on objects in space is subverted (Rubin 1982: 59). While there is of course no direct influence, the comparison is an apt one in that both De Chirico and the In Khong painters employ perspective, where the aim is not necessarily realism but the deployment of techniques associated with realism for “lyrical” effects.

“Age of Wonder”

What then were these lyrical effects—or non-realistic effects used to convey a certain theme or mood to the viewer—expressing? My contention is that the In Khong murals are examples of an age of wonder in Siam in the middle of the 19th century: wonder about the marvels of the West, during a time in which possibility and creativity were the guiding feelings, at least among a certain set of the elite surrounding King Mongkut. No Na Pak Nam cites MR Kratai Itsarangkun (กระต่าย อิศรางกูร, ม.ร.ว.), also known as Mom Ratchothai (หม่อมราชวงศ์ทัย; 1820–1867), the author of *Nirat London* (นิราศลอนดอน) as one

source for understanding Siam’s sense of wonder (Kratai 2553). The long poem is an account of a Siamese ambassador’s visit to London in 1857 in the classical *nirat* or “journey-of-separation” poetic style. It contains stories about motorcars and other machines which might have driven Siamese artists into a “marvellous world of imagination” (No Na Pak Nam 2526: 10). In London, the ambassador sees an “ingenious” tunnel under a river; he visits the College of Science where skeletons remind him of “pitiable *preta*”, hungry-ghost spirits, and bottled specimens of unusual beings which cause his hair to stand on end (Kratai 2553: 81). He describes a dance at Buckingham Palace, with assorted sweets and champagne, comparable to a story about “heavenly ladies” dancing with a pack of angels (Kratai 2553: 92). His language strays into metaphors derived from classical poetic and Buddhist sources. His description of London Zoo is reminiscent of old poetic descriptions of the fabled Himaphan Forest. He frequently describes Buckingham Palace as “the heavenly palace” and even draws attention to the wallpaper adorning its many rooms (Kratai 2553: 83). He describes his visit to the wonderful sights of Crystal Palace, which would have been the permanent exhibitions in the relocated palace after the famous Exhibition of 1851, as follows:

ดูวิจิตรพิสดารตระการแก้ว
It appears—bewildering, exquisite,
dazzling, all those crystals/gems.

รับวามแวแสงสว่างกระจ่างใส
Glittering, glimmering, dazzling
lights limpid and lucid.

ทั้งหลังคาฝาผนังช่างกะไร
Both the ceiling and the
walls—impossible!

ตลอดไปหมดสิ้นด้วยจินดา
They go on and on, beyond the
imagination.

สูงตระหง่านยาวกว่าสิบห้าเส้น
So tall, so wide they must be
more than 15,000 (Kratat 2553:
66; my translation).

He goes on to describe “the many varieties of flora” (พฤกษาค่างต่าง) on display and the “sculptures of lions, men and women” (รูปสัตว์สิ่งท่คนหญิงชาย) as well as “steam engines, large and small” (เครื่องกลไฟทั้งใหญ่่น้อย). In the context of Siamese literature of the 19th century more broadly *Nirat London* can be seen as an example of the application of the lyricism of old poetry, previously used to evoke the semi-fantastical world of heavens and praise the resplendent public works of Siamese monarchs, to express the wonders of new lands. Earlier Siamese literature of the Ayutthaya period delighted in elaborate descriptions of buildings. The late 15th-century verse *Ocean Lamentations* (กำสรวลสมุทร) praised Ayutthaya, whose glory “from the skies above drops to the earth below” (ยั้งฟ้า ลงดิน แลฤา) and was crammed with gorgeous chedis, “with gold their interiors painted, with gold bedecked” (ในทาบทองแล้วเนื้อ นอกโสรรม). Ayutthayan literature delighted in an aesthetics of *alangkan* (อลังการ; Skt., *alamkāra*), elaborate ornamentation. There are long descriptions of the gilded, the glistening, and the gorgeous.

In the 19th century, a similar style was employed (as in *Nirat London*) to

describe the little-known wonders of a new world. For example, in *Lamentations* (รำพันพิลาป; ed. 2510), Sunthon Phu (สุนทรภู; 1786–1855) sails around the world in a dream journey, describing the color and variety of a market in India:

พื้นม่วงตองทองซำย่ามะหวาด
ฉีกวิลาศลายล่ายองเขียนทองจิม
ทำที่อยู่ดูพิลึกลัวนตึกทิม
เรียบเรียงริมฝั่งสมุทรแลสุดตา
จะตามใจให้เพลินเจริญเนตร
ชมประเภทพราหมณ์แขกแปลกภาษา

The ground is purple and gold with Indian ornamented fabrics, European intricate threads inscribed elegantly with gold. Striking and strange seem all the rows of houses, Arranged in lines along the ocean as far as the eye can see. Gaze gladly to your heart’s content, Admiring Brahmins and Indians speaking in tongues unknown (my translation).⁷

A language of excess could now be applied to new, exotic realms. These descriptions were not necessarily meant to be serious or documentary, but were playful and excessive, in which the proliferation of the new was expressed via its sheer abundance rather than a detailed understanding. In his epic *Phra Aphaimani* (พระอภัยมณี; ed. 2507), Sunthon Phu describes how Sri Lanka sends out for “people of knowledge” (ผู้รู้, *phu ru*) from all corners of the globe, such as the “Gulf of Germany”

⁷ For a discussion of both works and longer translated passages, see Chapter 5 of *A Drunken Bee* (McBain 2025).

(อ่าวเยีระมัน, *ao yiaraman*); possibly Egypt (ไอยคุปโต, *Aikupto*), and Medina (เมืองมัดชนะ, *Matchana*).⁸ Perhaps in the same way this sense of profusion, of *alangkan*, overelaboration beyond the necessities of form and function, can be applied to understand the In Khong murals. The accuracy of the names of foreign countries did not much matter, nor did the faithful reproduction of linear perspective. Rather these murals celebrated the possibilities of the wonderful, but not yet fully comprehended, via an abundant elaboration of new forms. Both the artistic and literary productions of the age seem unconstrained by categories of old and new, foreign and local. Fascinated by the wonder of a new, faintly known other world and encouraged by their chief patron to experiment with the forms of that world, a similar sense of freedom from convention and categorization seems expressed both in the language of contemporaneous literature and in the In Khong style murals.

The Marvelous In Khong Style Declines

We can stress that the freedom from convention and categorization was characteristic of mid-19th century art in Siam by briefly looking at how in subsequent decades mural art became markedly less experimental. The age of wonder in Siam seemed to decline not long after King Mongkut's reign. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ; 1862–1943) wrote sadly that “Achan In Kong's rendering of the story

of King Naresuan fighting with an elephant in the royal remembrance of Wat Phra Sirattanasasadaram” was in a chapel that was used as somebody's office. The prince was shocked to find that the resident worker had hammered nails into the mural so as to hang up a clothesline (Narisara & Damrong 2512: 182). Prince Narisara noted with great displeasure that a local disciple who had studied art in Europe called the murals of Wat Borom Niwat “ugly” and “embarrassing” and thought that they should be whitewashed. The lack of understanding by this privileged student made Prince Narisara “at (his) wit's end”; he worried for the future of these paintings. However, he finally conceded that it was simply natural that tastes change (Narisara & Damrong 2512: 258).

This change in taste seems to have come alongside a change in what constituted proper “art”. Wat Ratchapradit (วัดราชประดิษฐ) in Bangkok was one of the few temples in which King Rama V had a personal hand during his reign. The murals depict his own version of the “Royal Ceremonies of the Twelve Months (พระราชพิธีสิบสองเดือน) (Pichit 2560: 1069). These also depicted King Mongkut's efforts to transform Buddhism, as well as notably his scientific efforts such as viewing an eclipse through a telescope. These murals exhibited a strong tendency to depict the reality of locations without whimsy in the actual moment of particular historical events. This is not to say that, as soon as the regime changed, there was an immediate shift towards a new kind of realism in mural painting. Nevertheless, the proliferation and reverie that had permeated the murals of the Fourth Reign gradually

⁸ This long list of countries occurs in Chapter 53 of the epic.

lost favor and were replaced with other styles. During the Fifth Reign, there was a great increase in the hiring of foreign architects and designers. The idea for a special school for training craftsmen as well as making *tamra* (ตำรา) or manuals with examples of artistic elements to be copied which aimed to preserve “traditional” forms also developed during this period. Not long after the reign of King Rama V, local art for elites became even less of an experimental or creative force, but something to be protected. The Anglophone King Rama VI (r. 1910–1925) lamented that “Young Siam” only aped the ideas of Europeans and felt that “traditional art” needed support. He founded the Arts and Crafts School (โรงเรียนเพาะช่าง) in 1913, precisely to protect “traditional” art, apparently meaning Siamese art before it was corrupted by international influence. This then became art as “national essence” (Clark 2020: 47).

Just as Khrua In Khong and his contemporaries were inexorably tied to the favour and patronage of the monarchy, contemporary Thai artists have been compelled by particular expectations and market forces. As David Teh writes, contemporary Thai artists from at least the 1980s and perhaps earlier must cater to two “reliable” appetites: “the decorative patriotism of the *nouveau*

riche, and the exoticism of tourists and expatriates” (2017: 47). Self-exoticizing “traditional” motifs, particularly Buddhist ones, proliferate in contemporary Thai art. As Teh’s work makes elaborately clear, however, it was never really obvious what Thai art’s “traditional” was, especially as Thailand, amongst other Southeast Asian nations, is a place of “mottled modernities” rather than “traditional” societies which happen to participate in the modern world. The In Khong style is one wrinkle in the idea of an homogenized “tradition”—some of the Kingdom’s greatest religious art is not “traditional”, but born of a productive tension between old and new, local and foreign. However, a handful of modern artists have employed the mixed amalgams of artists like Khrua In Khong. The 2022 exhibition *Déjà vu: When the Sun Rises in the West* by Natee Utarit (นที อุตฤทธิ; b. 1970) imagined the historical Buddha’s hypothetical journey to the West to meet Greco-Roman culture. In one piece, Natee mixes images of Greco-Roman architecture with modern-day visitors to a park, combined with In Khong’s trademark giant lotus flower. Natee’s work is an example of a contemporary Thai artist delving into the complicated array of temporal registers and international exchanges from which the country’s mottled modernity arises.

The murals of the In Khong school are modern in the sense that they markedly broke from traditional forms, endeavoring to describe an as-yet unfamiliar world. It was not the rebel imaginations of individual artists that spearheaded this

change, it was an outward-looking intellectual king. At the disposal of King Mongkut was a new class of skilled and innovative mural craftsmen and many illustrated books from Europe and America to share with them. These

craftsmen, encouraged by a king with innovative ideas about Buddhism, were free to imagine elaborate landscapes. They also learned many new forms. These they scattered into their dreamy landscapes in an eclectic manner, perhaps because they felt few hard distinctions between old and new or “Western” and “local” forms.

At least it was not yet felt necessary to guard that which was felt to be “traditional” or to only imitate slavishly the foreign and new. Even in what are likely student paintings now housed at Wat Protketchettaram, these painters not only imitated European architectural designs, but lyrically expanded upon them. Perhaps the mural craftsmen, following the desires of their chief patron—who wished to import science but who worried about losing Buddhism—had been trying to visualize landscapes which were both modern and Buddhist, full of both realism and wonder. Or they may

simply have been letting themselves experiment, converting Western architectural forms, which were less gilded and lavish than Siamese temples, but which had cultural cachet, into the sumptuous, crammed excess of prior murals such as those at Wat Suwannaram in Thonburi and the lyric extravagance of Siamese literature which described new lands like *Nirat London* and *Phra Aphaimani*.

Whichever way we interpret the In Khong style, these artisans’ blend of technical skill, uninhibited mixing of both European and local elements, and creative abandon make these works both striking and unique. These murals are not modern merely because they use perspective and *chiaroscuro*. Their eclecticism represents an age in which all that was once solid could melt into air. They are modern in the sense that they evoke the sense of the possibility of a new age before it was given “a local habitation and a name”.

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STRUCTURAL INNOVATION AND LOCAL AGENCY IN SIAM: THE HENNEBIQUE SYSTEM IN BANGKOK'S ANANTA SAMAKHOM THRONE HALL

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ABSTRACT—The adoption of the French Hennebique system in constructing the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (1907–1915) introduced advanced reinforced concrete to Siam, but also imposed proprietary constraints, limiting local control over design and contractor selection. Siam's Public Works Department (PWD) engineers were relegated to supervisory roles under Hennebique's patent. Meanwhile, Bangkok's soft soil led to foundation settlement, exposing flaws in the Compressol pile system employed by Hennebique's concessionaire. To resolve this, E.G. Gollo, an Italian engineer employed by the Siamese government, devised a caisson foundation, stabilizing the structure and reducing reliance on Hennebique's specialists. This article examines how Gollo's intervention marked a crucial shift in Siam's modernization, strengthening local agency in architectural development and technological adaptation.

KEYWORDS: Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall; Construction History; Engineering Innovation; Hennebique System; Public Works Department (PWD); Reinforced Concrete

Reinforced Modernity in Siam

King Chulalongkorn's ambition to construct a Western-style throne hall in Bangkok marked a pivotal moment in Siamese architectural history, signaling a bold shift toward modernization. His vision took root in the 1870s when he commissioned British architect John Clunis to design the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall. However, Regent Somdet Chao Phraya Borom Maha Sri Suriyawongse (สมเด็จพระเจ้าพระยาบรมมหาศรีสุริยวงศ์ ช่วง บุนนาค; 1808–1883) insisted that the

king's symbolic throne hall must adhere to ancient royal traditions, particularly the tiered roofs emblematic of a "Prasat" (Damrong 2475: 2; Chulalongkorn 2514: 51; Duangchit 2535: 72), even though the delivery of imported ironwork intended for a Western-style roof had already arrived in Siam at the time.² This conflict of ideals resulted in a compromise,

² This unused ironwork was later repurposed at the request of Prince Chaturonrasmi (สมเด็จพระเจ้าฟ้าจาตุรนต์รัศมี; 1857–1900) for his residence at Phra Ratcha Wangoem Palace (พระราชวังเดิม). See letter of King Chulalongkorn to Chao Phraya Phanuwong Maha Kosathibodi (เจ้าพระยาภาณุวงศ์มหาโกษาธิบดี ท้วม บุนนาค), 3 June 1878, in National Archives of Thailand, มร. 5 รล-พค/2; National Archives of Thailand, มร. 5 นก/12 เรื่อง 317; Chulalongkorn 2477: 302.

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merging Western and Siamese architectural elements. King Chulalongkorn's determination to modernize architecture grew stronger. Three decades later, he commissioned the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (พระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคม), a project that fully embraced Western architectural principles and cutting-edge construction techniques, notably reinforced concrete. Although King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) did not live to see its completion in 1915, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall stands as a powerful testament to his visionary leadership, representing Siam's decisive embrace of modern global building technology.

Reinforced concrete, a revolutionary method that transformed global construction practices in the late 19th century, was among the most significant innovations of the era. While a few systems for reinforced concrete emerged during this period, French engineer François Hennebique's (1842–1921) approach stood out as the most flexible and widely used. The Hennebique system integrated structural elements such as columns, beams, and slabs into a unified framework, with steel bars embedded in concrete for reinforcement. By significantly enhancing the strength, durability, and fire resistance of buildings while enabling long-span structures, the system offered a combination of capabilities that were unattainable with traditional materials. These attributes made it popular for constructing long-span buildings such as bridges and ribbed domes worldwide (Curley 2010).

To date, much of the scholarship on King Chulalongkorn's architectural

legacy has concentrated on the adoption of Western styles, treating them as symbolic gestures of civilization and modernization. While these interpretations offer valuable cultural and political insights, they often prioritize form, style, and aesthetics over the material realities of construction. By revisiting these propositions and re-centering attention on the process of construction, this article argues that the integration of reinforced concrete was far more central to shaping Siam's architectural modernity than previously acknowledged. This approach highlights the interplay between technological adaptation, power dynamics, and local agency, offering a deeper understanding of Siam's modernization efforts.

The first proposition examines how Siam's architectural modernism responded to Western colonialism. Traditional narratives, shaped by royal nationalism, connect King Chulalongkorn's adoption of Western architecture with efforts to counter Western dominance and preserve Siam's sovereignty. Sumet Jumsai, for instance, argued that emulating Western lifestyles was seen as necessary to avoid colonization, as "Foreigners [ฝรั่ง] measure progress solely by their technology and culture; if any country is not considered advanced in their eyes, it might end up as a colony" (2525: 294; my translation). Similarly, Chot Kalayanamitr (2526: 57–76) noted that the influx of Western architects transformed Bangkok, enhancing its appeal to foreigners and countering perceptions of barbarism. Though this perspective may seem outdated, it reflects the view that modernization was crucial to Siam's independence, a

belief echoed by some hyper-royalists today.

The second proposition examines the consumption practices of Siamese elites, shaped by their Westernized preferences. Maurizio Peleggi (2002) contends that the adoption of Western luxury goods, architecture, and public spectacles was a deliberate strategy to enhance the symbolic capital of the Siamese monarchy, intentionally distancing it from Indian and Chinese cultural spheres. In his analysis of Suan Dusit's development—a royal residential complex purposefully distinct from the traditional Grand Palace—Peleggi calls attention to the pivotal role of European professionals within the Public Works Department (กรมโยธาธิการ) in reshaping Bangkok's royal and urban landscape. The construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, other residences within Dusit Palace, and the creation of the Ratchadamnoen Boulevard, which connected the new complex to the Grand Palace, marked a departure from traditional architectural designs. This transformation introduced not only more refined private and public spaces but also a deliberate alignment with a localized conception of “civilization”, *siwilai* (Peleggi 2002: 75–88, 95–102). As Thongchai Winichakul (2000: 529–534) argued, *siwilai* (ศิวิไลซ์) encompassed aspirations for progress and modernity that arose from Siamese elites' concern about Siam's standing among modern nations. This concept extended beyond mere Westernization, reflecting a selective adaptation of global influences to assert Siam's sovereign identity on the world stage. By incorporating Western forms and practices, the Siamese

monarchy signaled a shift toward these ideals while maintaining an autonomous and uniquely Siamese appropriation of “civilization”.

The third proposition emphasizes the concept of hybridity—defined as the fusion or blending of disparate cultural or architectural elements—suggesting that architectural modernization during King Chulalongkorn's reign was not merely a response to colonial pressures but also a selective integration of foreign influences with local traditions. Somchart Chungsiriarak (2553) points up this fusion, particularly in the design of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which blends Western architectural paradigms with Siamese traditions. As Somchart noted, “This throne hall was designed like a Thai temple, falling into the category of turning a Western building into Thai” (2553: 130; my translation). This focus on hybridity during King Chulalongkorn's reign laid the foundation for subsequent architectural developments, where the interplay between foreign and local elements continued to evolve. Expanding this framework, Chatri Prakitnonthakan (2563) applies the notion of hybridity to his analysis of post-1932 architecture, challenging Eurocentric readings of modernity. He argues that modernity is not a singular, uniform process but one of adaptation, where foreign and local elements coexist and intertwine. In Thailand's case, Chatri asserts that this hybridity—between “modernity” and “Thainess”, shaped by the country's socio-political context—forms the key to understanding the trajectory of modern architecture (2563: 6–9). Thus, modernization in Thailand is not a

passive importation of Western ideas but a dynamic and localized reinterpretation.

While these propositions interpret Western architecture in their own terms, they often overlook the critical innovations in construction technologies that made such designs possible. Discussions on the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall often acknowledge its use of reinforced concrete but rarely explore its broader significance (Somchart 2553: 126–133; Koompong 2013: 71–88). This reflects a common trend in architectural historiography, where construction is treated as secondary to style, symbolism, and political implication. Such an approach diminishes the transformative power of construction technologies, which play crucial roles in reshaping the relationship between design and construction.

Among the scholars of Western architecture in Siam, Francesca B. Filippi stands out for her focus on these often-overlooked construction processes. Her research on the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall highlights the pivotal role of reinforced concrete in Siam's modernization. Drawing on archival materials from Turin architects and Italian engineers working for Siamese administrations during the Fifth (1868–1910) and Sixth (1910–1925) Reigns, Filippi examines how technological innovations symbolized Siam's attempt to balance the adoption of European technologies with resistance to European political and economic dominance. As Filippi notes, "Relations were ambiguous, vacillating between Siam's need to recruit European technicians and its equally important need to resist the political and economic pressure exerted

by European firms" (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 1). Her work urges a more nuanced view of how technology, power, and autonomy shaped Siam's modern identity. Yet, while she acknowledges this ambiguity, her analysis stops short of examining exactly how Siam actively managed and negotiated these conflicting pressures.

This article builds on Filippi's foundational research, expanding the focus to address these limitations. While her work offers crucial insights regarding the introduction of reinforced concrete in the country's modernization, it remains predominantly in European perspectives—a reflection of the sources she uses—leaving key aspects of Siamese agency underexplored. By incorporating previously unexamined local sources, this article offers a fresh analysis of how reinforced concrete was not merely imported but strategically adapted to local conditions. It highlights the nuanced strategies Siam employed to reconcile its modernizing ambitions with the imperative of maintaining autonomy.

Two observations from existing scholarship on King Chulalongkorn's modernization further support the argument presented here. While these works do not specifically address reinforced concrete, they align with a broader scholarly consensus that this article builds upon. David Wyatt's characterization of "Young Siam" (1969), led by King Chulalongkorn, provides a compelling framework to understand this agency. Comprised of younger royal family members and reform-minded officials, "Young Siam" embraced Western ideas not merely as tools but as values

aligned with Thai principles, using them as foundations for political and institutional reforms (Wyatt 1969: 44–45). In addition, Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead emphasizes King Chulalongkorn's ability to strategically blend old and new, observing that “the Thai monarch chose to keep old practices when it suited him while also introducing modern practices” (2004: 125). Together, Wyatt's and Kullada's perspectives provide a robust lens for understanding the selective modernization strategies employed by the Siamese elite.

Building on this foundation, this article reexamines the adoption of foreign technologies such as reinforced concrete, shifting the focus from European influences to local agency. It reframes the construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a process of negotiation, in which European advancements were selectively employed to align with Siam's modernization goals and reinforce royal sovereignty. This approach demonstrates that modernization in Siam, through the early use of reinforced concrete, was neither straightforward nor entirely European-driven, but the result of a dynamic interplay between technological advancements, power structure, and local autonomy in the early 20th century.

The Transition to Modern Building Materials

Historically, the Siamese court relied on the *corvée* system, a state-controlled mechanism that ensured a steady supply of materials and labor for construction. However, the 19th century marked a significant shift as capitalism

emerged, leading to the decline of the *corvée* system and the increasing reliance on Chinese migrant labor. This transition was pivotal, transforming Siam from a system of state-controlled resource management to a market-driven economy where building materials and labor became commodities. Under King Chulalongkorn's reign from the 1870s onward, this economic shift fueled ambitious modernization projects, spurred growth in the building industry and attracted European contractors to Bangkok.

These contractors, responding to the emerging market-driven economy in Siam, revolutionized the construction industry by introducing general contracting practices that prioritized formal agreements, precise cost estimates, and comprehensive project management. This system allowed clients to anticipate building costs in advance, reflecting the contractors' emphasis on efficiency and profitability. It also provided opportunities for generating profits at various stages of the building process, such as through material procurement or labor management. The Public Works Department (PWD) was inaugurated in 1889 and later became part of the Ministry of Public Works when it was established in 1892, alongside four other departments: Railways, Post and Telegraph, Goldsmith, and the Ten Crafts. Upon its inauguration, Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong (นริศรานุวัดติวงศ์; 1863–1947) served as the first Minister of the PWD, with the English engineer E.F.W. Wilkinson as Engineer-in-Chief. By this time, the contracting system introduced by European firms had

become standard practice—whether through external contractors or by incorporating these procedures directly within the PWD itself (Pinai 2565: 72–90).

As market-driven forces transformed labor and resource management in Siam, they also introduced modern building materials such as iron and cement. While traditional materials such as wood, brick, and stone had long been the backbone of government construction projects, the second half of the 19th century saw the increasing use of imported iron and cement in Siamese construction.³ European contractors, working with Chinese laborers, played distinct roles in this transformation. Iron, often fabricated by European manufacturers, became the preferred material for larger and more complex structures, particularly in public buildings and infrastructure projects such as bridges, train stations, and government offices, where durability and strength were paramount.⁴

Cement, though imported, was locally mixed with aggregate, sand, and water, and Chinese laborers were key in providing the manual workforce required for tasks such as transporting materials, preparing mixtures, and laying cement under the direction of European supervisors. Initially valued for its resilience,

cement was first applied in mass, unreinforced structures such as roads and river embankments, where its durability was indispensable.⁵ Its application soon expanded to include roof and floor tiles, as well as serving as a modern alternative to traditional mortar and plaster in decorative work. This steady yet decisive shift towards modern materials and techniques marked a new era in Siamese construction, where foreign innovations were progressively integrated with traditional practices.

Recognizing Siam's growing dependence on cement, John Clunis (1830–1894), a British architect formerly based in Singapore and later Siam's first royal architect,⁶ proposed establishing a cement factory in Siam as early as 1885, with the capital and locations to be provided by King Chulalongkorn. This initiative predated the more commonly noted 1908 proposal. Although the King recognized the project's potential to significantly advance Siam's construction industry, his concerns about Clunis's ability to execute it successfully ultimately led to its rejection.⁷ Nevertheless, the importance of cement continued to grow, with Siam relying

³ Evidence indicates that imported cement was in use as early as 1882, for the restoration of Wat Phra Kaew (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม), where it was applied to the repairs of the Ordination Hall (พระอุโบสถ) and the surrounding low walls (กำแพงแก้ว). However, its introduction may have occurred even earlier. See National Archives of Thailand, มร. 5 ศ/27 ศ6/46 (พ).

⁴ For an early account of metal construction in Siam, see Filippi & Fasoli (2014: 21–28), particularly Vilma Fasoli's discussion in the section "The Società Nazionale Officine Savigliano and the Italian contribution to the introduction of metal construction in Siam".

⁵ Concrete was regarded as the ideal material for the embankment, with Prince Narisara recommending its use along the riverfront at Wat Ratchaburana (วัดราชบูรณะ กรุงเทพฯ) in 1889. He acknowledged its superior durability, with an expected 150-year lifespan, despite being the most expensive option compared to cast iron and wood. See National Archives of Thailand, 16 ม.ค.–18 พ.ย. 108, กร. 5 ย/20 ยธ 8.3/1.

⁶ During his tenure as royal architect for the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall, Clunis also served as contractor for the pavilions in front of the hall. See National Archives of Thailand, มร. 5 นก/21 เรื่อง ที่ 4.

⁷ National Archives of Thailand, 1885 (จุลศักราช 1247), มร. 5 รล พศ/16.

entirely on imports until 1916, when the first locally established cement factory, founded in 1913, began production.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cement had become indispensable to Siamese construction, driving public infrastructure projects such as the expanding railway network (Brown 1988: 151; Porphant 2015: 463) and in supporting developments in the newly cut streets of Bangkok, particularly in Sampheng (Chua 2013: 160).⁸ Cement imports rose significantly, from 11,275 casks in 1898 to 25,972 casks in 1901, reflecting the nation's growing reliance on this material during its modernization. Although imports temporarily declined between 1904 and 1905, they rebounded by 1907, coinciding with the commencement of major projects such as the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which marked a renewed surge in building activity. By 1913, Denmark, Cochinchina, and Hong Kong had emerged as Siam's top three cement suppliers, catering to the increasing demand for this essential building material.⁹

Despite cement's growing prominence in construction, its integration posed significant challenges. European contractors, entrusted with key projects, encountered structural weaknesses that exposed the limitations of contemporary construction. A notable example is the clock tower at the Supreme Court of

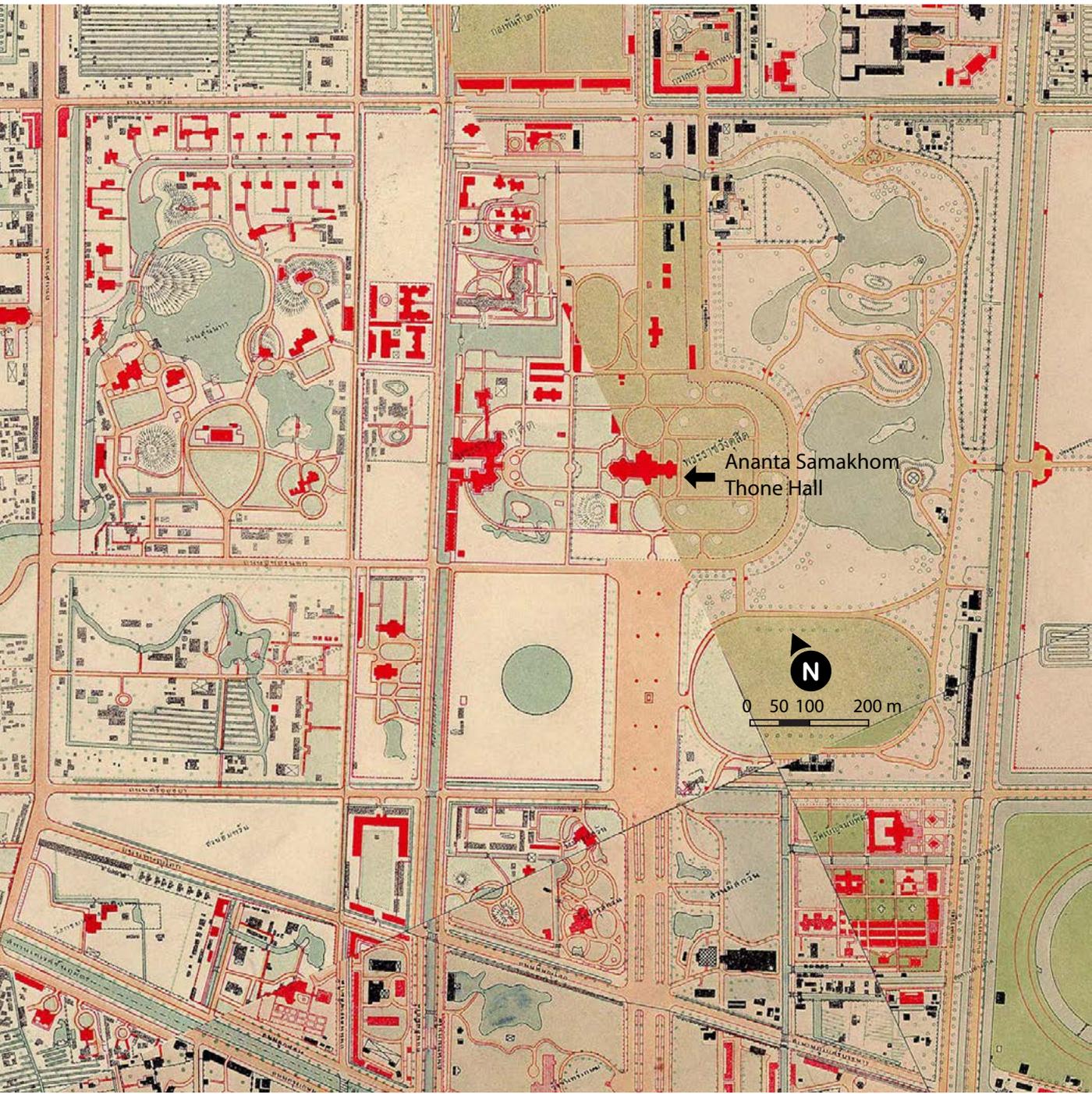
Bangkok, constructed by Joachim Grassi, (1837–1904), an Austrian-born architect who became a French national in 1883. Within just three years of completion, the tower exhibited alarming cracks and instability, ultimately leading to its demolition in 1892.¹⁰ Such failures highlighted the inadequacies of existing techniques and underscored the urgent need for more reliable and robust construction methods to meet the demand of Siam's modernization.

As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, King Chulalongkorn's architectural ambitions—most notably the creation of the new royal residence at Dusit Park (สวนดุสิต)—sought to redefine the Siamese monarchy's modern identity, distinguishing it from the traditional grandeur of the Grand Palace. Central to this vision was the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, conceived not only as a monumental structure but as a symbol of Siam's progress. Positioned at the end of Ratchadamnoen Boulevard—a newly cut thoroughfare linking the Grand Palace with the emerging Dusit Palace—it was intended to embody Chulalongkorn's modernization and realize his long-standing aspiration to erect a Western-style throne hall, a vision he had first pursued unsuccessfully with the Chakri Maha Prasat (พระที่นั่งจักรีมหาปราสาท). However, the failure of its brick and cement foundation (Gallotti 1910: 67) exposed the limitations of traditional construction methods, undermining the broader ideological aspirations tied to the project [MAP 1].

⁸ By 1931, Sampheng had become the area most densely populated with concrete buildings.

⁹ The statistics on cement imports in this paragraph are sourced from the *Diplomatic and Consular Reports* and *The Foreign Trade and Navigation of the Port of Bangkok* for the years 1898 to 1913. These records indicate no documented cement import statistics prior to 1898.

¹⁰ For the building inspection of the Supreme Court conducted by Wilkinson, refer to the National Archives of Thailand, 14 September 1890 (ร.ศ. 109), นร. 5 ยศ/20 ยศ 8.3/2.



MAP 1: Dusit Palace, based on 1925 survey, with the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall at its center, Bangkok © Royal Thai Survey Department (Adapted)

This structural collapse accelerated Siam's interest in reinforced concrete, a European innovation promising greater durability and new structural possibilities. Yet, the adoption of reinforced concrete in any context is not merely a substitution of materials; it carries far-reaching implications, transforming construction practices by reshaping production methods and labor dynamics. In Siam, its introduction must be understood within the global development of reinforced concrete in the late 19th century together with its profound impact on local authority.

The Rise of Reinforced Concrete: The Hennebique System

By the late 19th century, the transformation of concrete into modern reinforced concrete was driven by the integration of steel reinforcement—a groundbreaking development independently pioneered in France, England, and the United States. This innovation allowed a few select firms to establish patented systems, which they zealously guarded and commercially exploited, protecting technical details through litigation to maintain their competitive edge (Cusack 1987: 61). For clients and architects, engaging with these specialized firms became a necessity, as only these firms possessed the expertise to design buildings using their proprietary systems. Relying on these firms became synonymous with ensuring construction reliability and success (Forty 2012: 15, 18).

Among these patented systems, Hennebique's, introduced in 1892, emerged as the most prominent. By 1905, the Hennebique system controlled roughly

one-fifth of the global market, achieving this dominance without the firm requiring significant capital investment or maintaining its own dedicated construction workforce, relying instead on a network of agents and concessionary contractors. The cornerstone of this success was Hennebique's Paris-based engineering office, which translated architects' designs into structurally sound reinforced concrete framework. Upon receiving these designs, Hennebique's specialists meticulously adapted them to align with the firm's proprietary system, ensuring all necessary structural details complied with its specifications. This carefully orchestrated operation, supported by agents and contractors selected by Hennebique rather than the architects, cemented the system's widespread adoption (Cusack 1986: 184–185; Forty 2012: 18).

While the Hennebique system ensured precision and reliability, it significantly diminished architects' influence, rendering them increasingly dependent on the specialized expertise and authority of the firm (Cusack 1986: 184–185). This shift in power dynamics reflected a broader transformation within construction practices, as engineering and material expertise began to overshadow traditional architectural authority. This transformation was particularly evident in the construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, where the Hennebique system played a crucial role in ensuring its structural integrity. The Throne Hall illustrates how the adoption of Hennebique system not only provided the Siamese government with the advanced building

technology but also curtailed its architectural autonomy, profoundly reshaping palace construction practices.

The Creation of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall

The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall stands as a testament to King Chulalongkorn's ambitious architectural vision, despite facing silent criticism over its perceived extravagance and necessity.¹¹ On 23 March 1907, just before his second trip to Europe, the King appointed Chao Phraya Yommarat, also known as Pan Sukhum (ปั้น สุขุม; 1862–1938), to oversee the project, instructing him to commence construction without delay.¹² To mitigate potential criticisms, the King brought to the fore the importance of advance cost estimation and proposed using Privy Purse funds, with plans for reimbursement at a later stage.¹³ Unlike the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall, where compromises were made, King Chulalongkorn remained resolute in ensuring that the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall would be completed without compromise.

The monumental scale and height of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall—measuring 49.5 meters in width, 112.5 meters in length, and crowned by a central dome rising 49.5 meters above the ground—posed significant challenges for ensuring structural stability. According to *Bangkok Times*, the dome was designed to dominate the skyline,

standing “higher than the pagoda of Wat Saket, or the masthead on Phra Maha Chakri” (1908: 5). While this observation is partially misleading, as the pagoda of Wat Saket rises to a height of 59.75 meters, it reflects the prominence the dome was expected to achieve in the reporter's view.

Initial efforts by PWD engineers to use solid brick for the foundation quickly proved inadequate. As Paul Gallotti, a columnist for *Le Béton armé*—Hennebique's monthly journal—noted: “The engineers tried to establish a few meters deep of soil plate made out of strong brick that usually is used within the country. The instability of the base location disallowed the continuation of the construction that has already used up a significant amount of funds” (1910: 67–68). The brick foundation system Gallotti described was likely considered the best available in Siam at the time, as detailed in a *Construction Manual* (Ploy & Ju 1909: 16–17). This method involved a brick layer resting on a mixture of cement and broken brick, used as an aggregate, with driven wooden piles beneath to provide additional support on the region's notoriously unstable soil [FIGURE 1]. However, this early setback created a critical pause in the project, ultimately leading to an inevitable shift toward the more reliable and innovative reinforced concrete system.

Carlo Allegri's Initiative: Partnering with Reinforced Concrete Experts

The transformative shift in Siamese construction practices was heavily influenced by the Italian engineer Carlo Allegri (1862–1938), Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department. Allegri

¹¹ Letter of Chulalongkorn to Yommarat, dated 25 March 1907, as quoted in Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 837–838.

¹² *Ibid.*, as quoted in Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 836.

¹³ *Ibid.*, as quoted in Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 837–838.



FIGURE 1: A diagram of a foundation considered the most effective and recommended for constructing a stable foundation in 1909 © Ploy & Ju 1909: I, 17

began his career in Siam in 1889 with the contractor firm Grassi Brothers and was appointed as an assistant to PWD Chief Engineer Wilkinson within a year. By 1892, Allegri succeeded Wilkinson as Chief Engineer (Peleggi 2002: 83), marking the start of a career that would redefine Siam's construction practices. While Allegri is celebrated for recruiting European architects and engineers for the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, his equally vital but often overlooked contribution was his selection of reinforced concrete firms.

As Filippi noted, Allegri came from a family of general contractors specializing in large-scale construction, particularly bridges. Eusebio Allegri, a key figure in the industry, established important connections, notably with the Italian firm Dominio Borini, renowned for the Dulac system for pressurized caissons (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 9). These connections proved invaluable as the Siamese government sought cutting-edge expertise for the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall.

Recognizing Allegri's expertise, Chao Phraya Yommarat entrusted him

with the task of studying advanced foundation systems in Europe. Accordingly, Allegri approached two prominent firms: Domenico Borini in Turin and Hennebique in Paris. Although Allegri initially favored Borini due to familial connections, Borini declined the project, citing its complexity, prompting Allegri to turn to Hennebique (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 9). Allegri's decision to collaborate with Hennebique was likely influenced by the strong ties between PWD staff and Turin, particularly Emilio Giovanni Gollo (1873–1934), an alumnus of Turin's School of Application for Engineers. As a student under Professor Camillo Guidi, Gollo gained hands-on experience with reinforced concrete through projects managed by Porcheddu, an agent and the General Concessionaire of the Hennebique system in Northern Italy (Filippi 2008: 125).

Returning to Bangkok, Allegri outlined his strategy in a *Memorandum* submitted on 30 March 1907. The report estimated a cost of 2 million baht and a five-year timeline, advocating reinforced concrete for both the roofing

and foundations.¹⁴ For the foundations, Allegri proposed using the Compressol apparatus, a cutting-edge system introduced to Siam for the first time. This apparatus created subterranean pylons by perforating the ground and compressing concrete with a sequence of weighted tools. Allegri described the process as follows:

Foundations to be made of compressed columns of cement concrete, which are to rest on the stratum of clay to be found at 12 meters below the surface of the ground. Such depth will be reached by means of a new apparatus called compressol. This consist of a portable scaffolding (almost like a pile driver) worked by a steam engine and provided with 3 different weights to be applied at the falling extremity of the chain. The first of these weights has the shape of a cone with the pointed end towards the ground, which on being dropped from the scaffolding, perforates the ground and reaches after repeated strokes [sic] the depth required. The second weight [...] has the shape of a rifle buffet, while the third one is perfectly flat at the bottom. These two weights are used to compress gradually the

stones and the cement concrete, which is thrown into the hole, perforated by the first weight, and thus obtaining subterranean columns of great compression and stability. These columns at ground level will then be connected together by ferro concrete beams on which the building will be erected. This system has been successfully adopted lately in Europe and has given great satisfaction in grounds of the same nature as that of Bangkok (Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 845–846; my translation).

Allegri championed reinforced concrete for its ability to address Bangkok's unstable soil, as well as for its durability, cost efficiency, and time saving potential. He highlighted its benefits: creating a solid foundation with less earth removal, reducing masonry needs, and minimizing labor costs, while ensuring long-term stability (Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 845).

Hennebique's Reinforced Concrete Solutions

By spring 1907, Italian architect Mario Tamagno (1877–1941) of the PWD had finalized the initial design of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, establishing its layout and elevation. However, lacking structural detail, the architectural drawings were sent to Hennebique's Paris office for adaptation to reinforced-concrete methods [FIGURE 2]. Subsequent revisions reduced the hall's scale by eliminating side corridors intended

¹⁴ Carlo Allegri, *Memorandum for the Construction of the New Throne Hall at Suan Dusit, 30 March 1907*, รล. ร 5 ก. 12 คล่อง ที่ 1 แฟ้ม ที่ 4, The Royal Secretariat (สำนักพระราช-เลขานุการ), as quoted in Bandit & Pirasri 2550: 845–846.

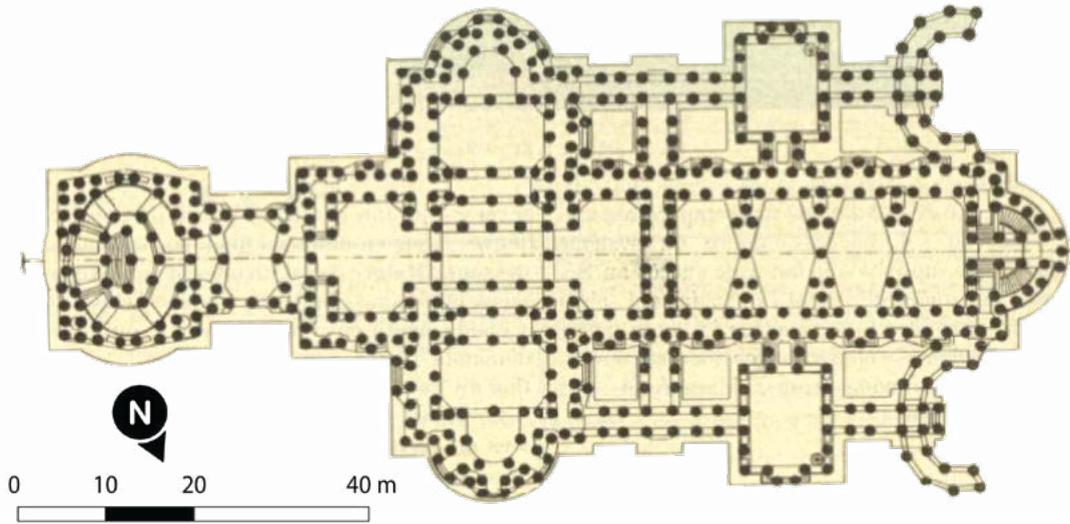


FIGURE 2: Foundation plan of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, as published in *Le Béton armé* © Gallotti 1910: 67 (Adapted)

for service areas, streamlining the design and enhancing its monumental character (Filippi 2008: 126). Recognizing the project's complexity, Carlo Allegri enlisted Italian architect Annibale Rigotti (1870–1968) in November 1907 to assist with the second phase, incorporating feedback from Paris.¹⁵

Drawing on the archives of Hennebique in Paris and Allegri in Turin, Filippi recounts key developments during the adaptation process. Hennebique's specialists identified a critical issue early on: the unstable clay bed at Dusit Park. In an August 1907 letter to Allegri, a preliminary solution was proposed, but by February 1908, it was evident that stability could not be

ensured without reinforced concrete in critical elements, including the roof, dome and floor slabs. To address these challenges, Hennebique's team designed a double-shelled dome to distribute the load across concrete pillars and marble columns, reducing weight and improving stability (Filippi 2008: 132–135; 2010: 12). By 1910, *Le Béton armé* reported that reinforced concrete had been incorporated into the ceilings, domes, floors, and stairs—an approach that reduced weight while ensuring durability and efficient load distribution for the superstructure (Gallotti 1910: 67–68) [FIGURES 3–4].

The demand to reduce the building weight of the superstructure considerably was a direct response to the unstable soil conditions identified earlier by Hennebique's team. This likely explained why Allegri and the PWD architectural team scaled down the Throne Hall's design. Initial calculations for a continuous foundation revealed impracticalities, requiring beams over

¹⁵ Rigotti's official tenure as PWD architect ended on 30 September 1909, after he completed essential drawings, leaving the remaining tasks to draftsmen. Despite this, he continued supporting the Siamese government from Turin as a consulting architect, ensuring that elements fabricated in Italy adhered to the original designs. See National Archives of Thailand, มร. 5 ๗/32, ร. 5 ๗. 9/64.

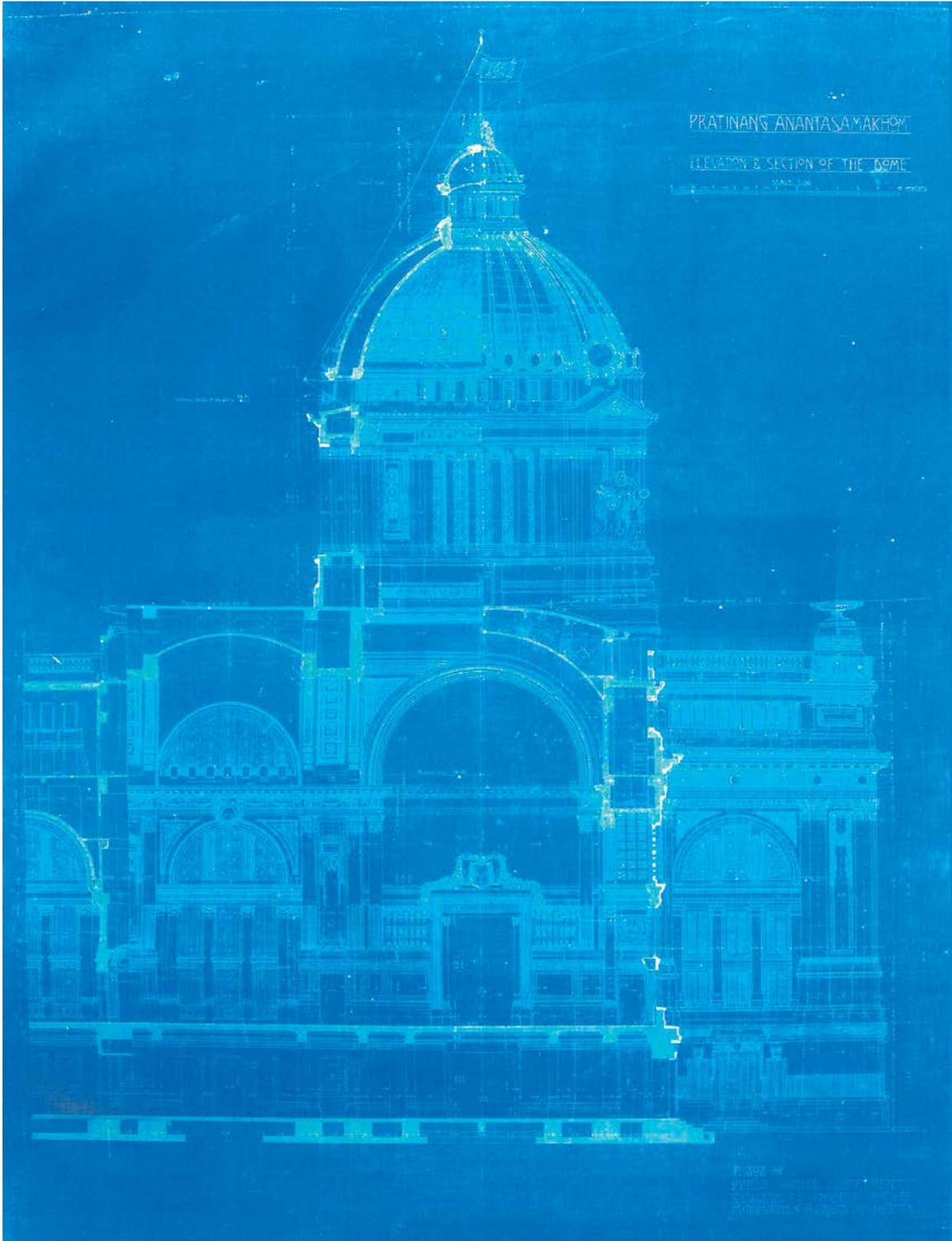


FIGURE 3: Section of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, revised after Hennebique’s feedback, showing a double-shell dome by Tamagno and Rigotti © Nithi 2551: 51

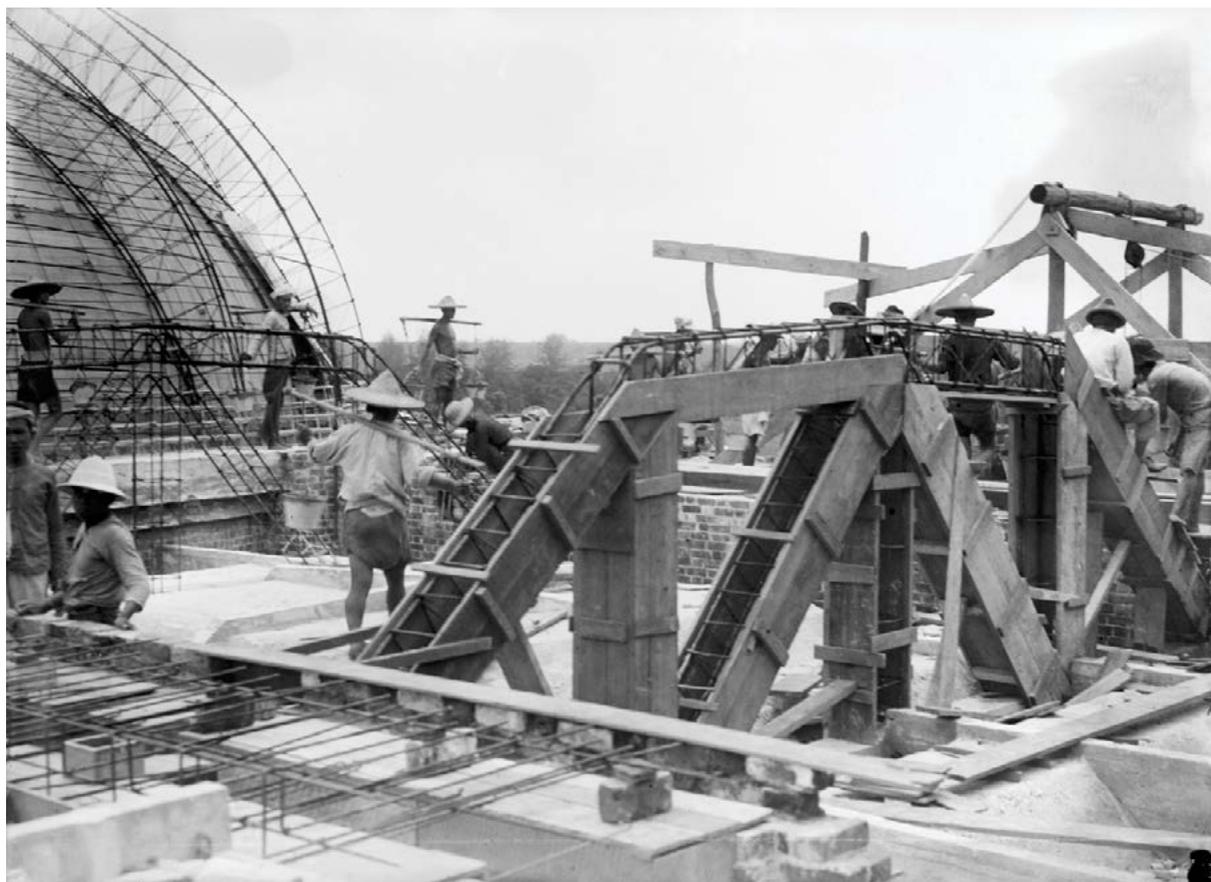


FIGURE 4: Reinforced concrete work at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, 1910.
Photo by Kurt Beyer showing Chinese workers preparing formwork
and steel for the roof © Deutsche Fotothek

three meters thick, which still could not guarantee stability. As an alternative, Hennebique’s specialists considered a reinforced concrete slab for the foundation. However, concerns over costs, terrain unpredictability and material availability led to its abandonment (Filippi 2008: 132–133). To address foundational challenges, Hennebique proposed the patented “Compressol” deep pile-driving system, which Allegri detailed in his 1907 *Memorandum* as a solution specifically designed to stabilize unstable soil. Patented in 1902 and executed by the “Société Anonyme de fondations par compression mécanique

du sol”, this technology had proven effective in other challenging projects, such as the bridges of Saint-Louis in Senegal (Gallotti 1910: 68). Beginning in March 1908, 501 subterranean pylons were driven beneath the throne hall’s perimeter to stabilize the foundation [FIGURE 5]. The significance of the Compressol system was further acknowledged in King Chulalongkorn’s royal command, likely influenced by Allegri’s 1907 report, and engraved in the foundation stone laid on 11 November 1908, underscoring its importance in the throne hall’s construction (NAT 2527: 100) [FIGURE 6].

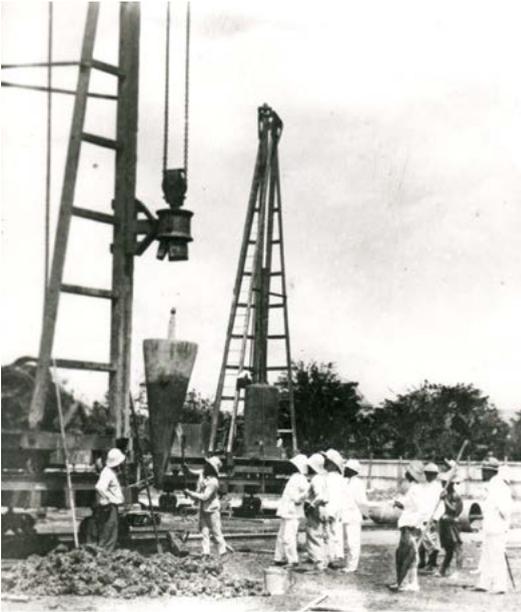


FIGURE 5: Compressol piling system from France, begun in March 1908, using a 2-ton steel pendulum to drive piles to the required depth © NAT



FIGURE 6: Key foreign personnel at the Ananta Samakhom foundation ceremony, 11 Nov. 1908, included Allegri, Gollo, Tamagno, Rigotti, Shaw (PWD), and Bénabang (Compressol) © NAT

Hennebique's Foreign Network of Concessionaire Contractors

Hennebique's network mobilized personnel from French Indochina to manage the implementation of both systems. Among them were J. Bénabang, a French Engineer of Arts and Manufactures, who served as Director of the *Société Anonyme de fondations par compression mécanique du sol*, played a pivotal role in overseeing the foundation work. As reported by *Bangkok Times*, Bénabang represented the firm "engaged for many months sinking the foundations" (1908: 5). He was assisted by compatriot François de Fornel, an experienced site manager, who, after completing his work on the concrete construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, applied for a position with

the Siamese Government's Sanitary Department (กรมสุขาภิบาล) in November 1909, ultimately serving as a concrete specialist.¹⁶ In May 1908, contractors affiliated with Hennebique's concessionaire network arrived to supervise the brickwork, using locally sourced "pressed bricks" alongside reinforced concrete (Gallotti 1910: 69; Filippi 2008: 128–129) [FIGURES 7–8].

While many workers remain unnamed, their contributions were indispensable to the project's progress. Despite material supply challenges and the complexity of coordinating skilled labor, early construction phases advanced rapidly,

¹⁶ Recommendation letters written in French for De Fornel by J. Bénabang, A. Fraysse, and A. Stemmer, dated 8 November 1910, detailing his responsibilities as a site manager, can be found in the National Archives of Thailand, กต 35. 8/9.

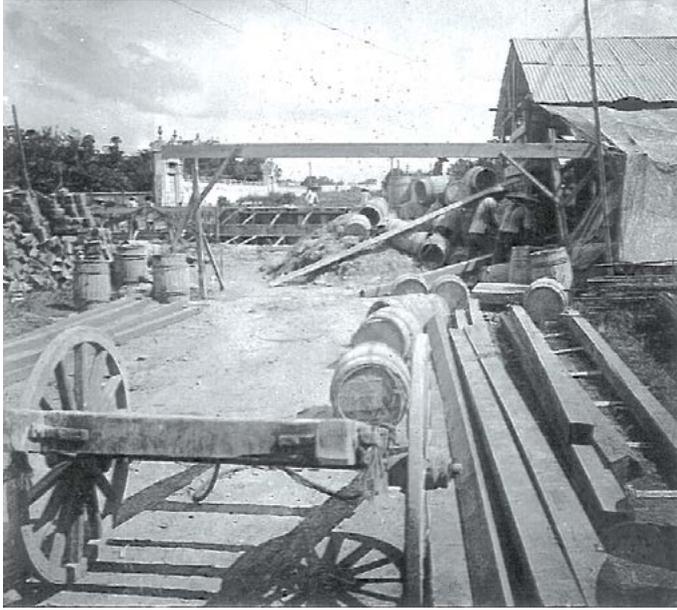


FIGURE 7: Construction site of Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, January 1909, showing foundation work with imported cement stored in wooden barrels © NAT



FIGURE 8: Brickwork at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall under construction, 1909, with scaffolding and stocked pressed bricks © NAT

with each stage completed in less than three months (Gallotti 1910: 68). King Chulalongkorn, observing this progress, praised the dedication of foreign workers on 24 April 1909:

The foreigners truly deserve praise for their work on the construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Unlike some of our supervisors who stand around pointing fingers, they worked diligently, often late into the evening until it was completely dark—just as they would in Italy. Upon seeing their efforts, it was highly satisfying (Chulalongkorn 2482 134; my translation).

However, even with their innovative methods and tireless efforts, building on unstable soil remained a precarious endeavor, and the project faced ongoing risks.

The Role of Local PWD Engineers in the Hennebique System

During the construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, local PWD engineers—who were often foreign professionals, primarily Italian—found their roles largely confined to supervisory tasks. Hennebique's French proprietary control over its reinforced concrete patent placed all structural calculations and detailed drawings under the purview of its specialists, leaving the PWD engineers without the expertise or authority to address critical construction issues. This lack of control is evident

in a letter from Italian PWD engineer G. Kluzer to his compatriot Edmondo Roberti di Castelvero, dated 28 March 1908, in which Kluzer expressed concerns about the reinforced concrete system:

The French team is working on the foundations of the Hall, but we still do not know whether the famous posts will remain stable or whether they will sink into the deep, [...] the engineer Moreschi is supervising the works in reinforced concrete being built by the French (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 10).

Kluzer's remarks underscore the uncertainty surrounding the project and emphasize the limited influence of local PWD engineers, such as the Italian Bernardo Moreschi, who were tasked with overseeing construction without the authority or technical knowledge to intervene in Hennebique's foreign procedures.

The integration of Hennebique's reinforced concrete system was meticulously managed, with the process divided into distinct stages that extended its influence far beyond the initial architectural design. While local PWD architects initiated the project, Hennebique's specialists in Paris translated the design into reinforced concrete, ensuring every structural detail conformed to the firm's patented system. The execution of the concrete work was entrusted to the Société Anonyme de fondations par compression mécanique du sol, a concessionaire chosen by Hennebique. Skilled French personnel, drawn from the firm's French Indochina network,

were deployed to supervise construction in Bangkok. PWD engineers, though formally responsible for overseeing the project, were required to strictly adhere to Hennebique's exact specifications. This separation of design and execution allowed Hennebique to retain effective control over international projects like the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, ensuining its monopoly on its proprietary system, while delegating implementation to local and regional teams. This approach exemplified Hennebique's broader strategy of international expansion, maintaining control over complex projects without direct involvement in on-site concrete work.

King Chulalongkorn's Struggles with the French Hennebique System

The infringement of Hennebique's patents was a significant concern that shaped the French firm's strict control measures. While this approach enabled Hennebique to maintain commercial advantage, it also introduced challenges for the Siamese government in exercising oversight. Initially, King Chulalongkorn supported the use of the Hennebique system for the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and, on 4 September 1907, praised Chao Phraya Yommarat's decision to adopt reinforced concrete, remarking, "I would like to compliment you on your very good conscience" (Chulalongkorn 2482: 166–167; my translation). However, problems soon emerged. The autonomy granted to concessionaire contractors, who were carefully selected by Hennebique rather than by PWD's architects or engineers, created a shift in control that bypassed

traditional processes. This dynamic, emblematic of a broader transformation in the construction industry globally, undermined the discipline and standards King Chulalongkorn sought to uphold within palace construction, replacing centralized authority with an increasing reliance on external expertise and management.

In a personal letter to Chao Phraya Yommarat dated 26 November 1907—during the period of active construction by Hennebique’s concessionaire contractors—the King expressed his concerns and called for immediate corrective measures:

There is a protocol for the palace’s public works: all tasks fall under their responsibility, except for those specific commanded by His Majesty. Anyone undertaking such work must collaborate closely with the palace’s Public Works Department as though they were part of it.

In the construction of this throne hall, there are obstructions because it is outside the control of the palace’s public works. How can we address this situation? We need a solution that is both suitable and orderly. Please take some time to consider this matter (Chulalongkorn 2482: 67; my translation).

This letter underscored the tension between the palace’s PWD and the growing influence of external contractors operating under the proprietary

Hennebique system. The King’s frustration arose from the diminished control over the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall project, which disrupted established protocols and revealed gaps in governance. These tensions reflect the broader organizational reforms initiated by the Minister of Public Works, Phraya Suriyanuwat (พระยาสุริยานุวัตร; 1862–1936), a few years earlier. These reforms sought to consolidate authority under the Engineer-in-Chief, who was tasked with assessing structural possibilities, inspecting construction, supervising contractors, and managing financial approvals:

The Engineer Division and the Architect Division, overseen by an Engineer-in-Chief. The Engineer-in-Chief is responsible for assessing structural possibilities, inspecting building work, and supervising all contracting based on the designs created by the architects and engineers. This role includes comprehensive control over the project, down to approving daily employee wages and contractor fees.¹⁷

King Chulalongkorn’s call for corrective action can be seen as a response to the incomplete implementation of these reforms. External contractors, particularly those affiliated with Hennebique’s concessionaire network, operated with a level of independence that clashed with the

¹⁷ Letter of Phraya Suriyanuwat to King Chulalongkorn, National Archives of Thailand, 8 February 1906 (ร.ศ. 124), กร. 5 ยศ/1 ยศ. 1/32 (my translation).

King's vision for centralized oversight and governance of palace construction. The proprietary nature of the Hennebique system further complicated matters, as it circumvented the traditional oversight mechanisms of the palace's PWD. This tension between innovation and governance reflects the broader challenges faced by the Siamese government in integrating modern techniques into traditional frameworks of control.

These struggles became particularly acute during the crisis of the sinking foundations of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. A central figure in addressing this crisis was E.G. Gollo, whose expertise, developed in Turin, played a crucial role in stabilizing the structure. As Francesca B. Filippi notes, Gollo's relentless efforts were vital to addressing the crisis and ensuring the project's continuation (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 10). While Filippi's research has illuminated the contributions of Italian engineers like Gollo, this article argues that his success in resolving the foundation crisis extended far beyond technical problem-solving. It demonstrated the complex interplay of foreign innovation and the Siamese government's aspiration for autonomy in the broader context of Siam's modernization.

Gollo's intervention and subsequent involvement in Siam's building activities, therefore, merit re-evaluation within this broader historical framework, showcasing King Chulalongkorn's efforts to reassert control over processes that had, at times, been dominated by foreign entities such as the French owned Hennebique company.

Gollo's Heroic Rescue of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall

Despite the use of advanced foundation technology and meticulous preparation for Bangkok's notoriously soft soil, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall project encountered significant setbacks. Two years into construction, as the subterranean foundation was completed and brickwork commenced, the building began to sink—most critically beneath the massive dome, which weighed approximately 1,500 tons. This alarming subsidence accentuated the complexity and unpredictability of the project, prompting Gollo to intervene.

Drawing on Allegri's notebook, Filippi reveals that by late 1910, local PWD engineers determined the cause of the subsidence as the failure of Compressol posts to reach bedrock. Confronted with this urgent crisis, Gollo devised an innovative foundation system to address structural instability. Despite significant challenges such as water infiltration and the need to demolish newly installed posts, Gollo implemented a network of tall, waterproof caissons made of reinforced concrete beneath the entire structure. These interconnected caissons effectively stabilized the Hall, enabling it to “float” on the unstable soil (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 10).

Gollo's expertise in caisson foundations, cultivated through his education in Turin and his practical experience with the Porcheddu company, proved critical in resolving the foundation crisis (Filippi & Fasoli 2014: 9–10). His ingenious solution not only stabilized the structure but also garnered wide-

spread acclaim. Chao Phraya Yommarat praised Gollo's unwavering dedication: "From May 1911 to September 1911, E.G. Gollo oversaw the work tirelessly, day and night, until the second part of the foundation was completed, effectively halting further sinking" (Neungreudee 2543: 60; my translation). Independent accounts, such as Erik Seidenfaden's *Guide to Bangkok with Note on Siam*, further attest to Gollo's ingenuity. Seidenfaden (1928: 252–253) observed that while Bangkok's subsoil could not support the immense weight of the building, Gollo's air-filled concrete pontoons allowed the structure to "float" on the soft river mud. Apart from being celebrated in his time, Gollo's achievements were substantiated in official records from the 1970s and 1980s, which further validate his pivotal role in stabilizing the project through the use of caisson foundations.

Post-Construction Challenges

In 1975, severe flooding in Bangkok caused significant damage to the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, particularly its foundation. In response, the Committee of Construction and Repair (คณะกรรมการสร้างและซ่อมแซมปรับปรุงพระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคม) was established. This committee oversaw two sub-committees: First, the Sub-committee on Structural and Architectural Restoration, which included the Engineering Division (ฝ่ายวิศวกรรม), and the Architecture and Mural Painting Division (ฝ่ายสถาปัตยกรรมและจิตรกรรมฝาผนัง); Second the Sub-committee on Public Relations and Event Documentation (ฝ่ายประชาสัมพันธ์และบันทึกเหตุการณ์).

These sub-committees convened intermittently between 1979 and 1984 to address the issues. The most pressing concerns were subsidence and leakage, particularly around the western staircase, which necessitated a comprehensive investigation.

In December 1979, the Sub-committee on Public Relations and Event Documentation uncovered 48 photographs documenting the original foundation construction and Gollo's critical interventions [FIGURE 9].¹⁸ Engineer Dr Rachot Kanjanavanich (รชฏ กาญจนวานิชย์; 1924–1996) drew attention to the significance of these images, noting that they provided a rare and detailed insight into the construction process:

Photographs retrieved from the National Archives vividly depict the foundation's construction process, which involved the utilization of a steel pendulum to drill into the ground and pour concrete, reaching a maximum depth of 7–8 meters. The addition of the basement likely ensued by excavating the soil between the piles to alleviate weight, a common practice following the initial construction phase. Despite the antiquity of the technique, exceeding 80 years,

¹⁸ These photographs are likely the same ones featured in Allegri's 1911 report at the International Exhibition in Turin, where Allegri commended Gollo for his ingenious application of reinforced concrete. See Filippi 2008: 132.



FIGURE 9: Photograph of the original foundation of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall during its conversion into caissons designed by Gollo, circa 1911 © NAT

its efficacy remains commendable. The structural integrity of the Throne Hall, evidenced by its reinforced concrete composition, is notably robust and stable.¹⁹

After 810 days of monitoring, the investigation revealed that the building was sinking at a rate of 1.5 centimeters per year, with uneven subsidence on the eastern side. Proposed solutions included full underpinning at an estimated cost of 50 million baht or a targeted underpinning of the western staircase for 5 million baht. By January 1984, the Engineering Division of the

Sub-committee concluded that subsidence was primarily due to natural factors and groundwater pumping, posing no immediate threat to the building's overall integrity. Consequently, the decision was made to underpin only the western staircase.²⁰

Furthermore, Thai engineer Arun Chaiseri's (อรุณ ชัยเสรี; b. 1934) 1980 investigation into leaks prompted a thorough assessment of the underground chamber, which revealed leaks at the ceiling and wall joints.²¹ His survey also detailed the sophisticated network of cellar walls, which divided the basement into functional spaces

¹⁹ Rachot Kanjanavanich, National Archives of Thailand, 9 January 1980, (4) ศส 2.3.15/12 (my translation).

²⁰ National Archives of Thailand, 10 January 1984, (4) ศส 2.3.15/12.

²¹ National Archives of Thailand, September 1980, (4) ศส 2.3.15/12.

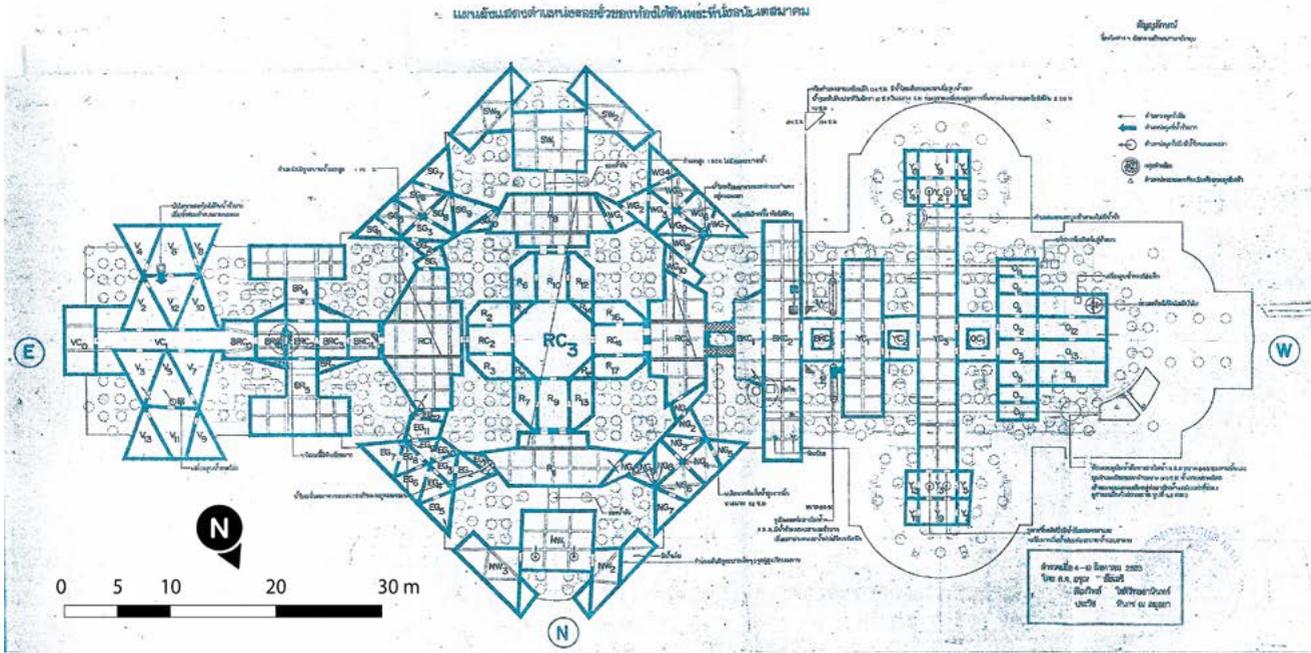


FIGURE 10: Map from the 1980 leak detection surveys, showing Compressol piles superimposed with Gollo’s cellar walls of caisson foundations © NAT

designed for ease of maintenance. These walls, positioned perpendicular and diagonal to the building’s axis, played a crucial role in integrating Gollo’s caisson foundations with the Compressol piles, effectively halting further sinking.²² The foundation of the

Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall thus represents a successful synthesis of the Compressol pile system and Gollo’s caisson foundations, showcasing a remarkable engineering achievement that continues to stabilize the structure [FIGURES 10–11].

E.G. Gollo’s intervention in constructing the second foundation of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall to rescue the failed Compressol piles surpassed the original plan set by the Hennebique company, addressing the anticipated challenges of Bangkok’s soft soil with

unparalleled ingenuity. His approach redefined reinforced concrete technology, demonstrating the necessity for flexibility and innovation beyond the rigid constraints of patented systems such as French Hennebique’s. From the perspective of the Siamese government, Gollo’s expertise offered a superior alternative, enabling the local PWD to regain control over the reinforced concrete process—

²² National Archives of Thailand. September 1980, น (4) ศธ 2/12.

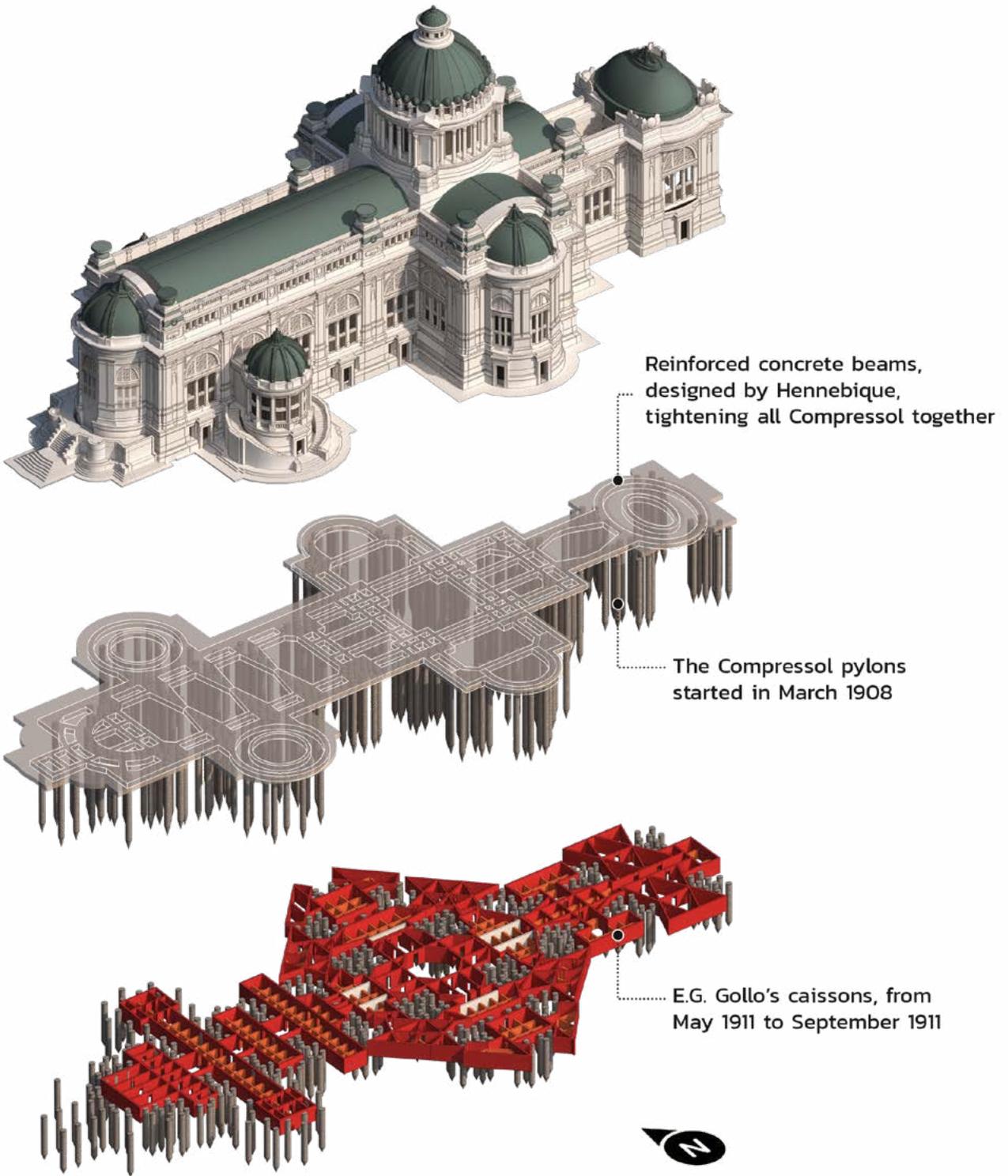


FIGURE 11: Isometric drawing demonstrates the Gollo's caissons insertion into the Compressol piles, just underneath the reinforced beams designed by Hennebique
© Pinai Sirikiatikul & Patcharapong Kulkanchanachewin

something previously impossible under the Hennebique system. Consequently, Hennebique's influence in Siam waned after the completion of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, while Gollo's prominence steadily rose, owing to his proven success with caisson foundations tailored to Bangkok's unique conditions. This distinguished Siam's case from other Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, where the Hennebique system maintained a strong presence under French colonial rule.

Gollo's contribution to the Throne Hall set a precedent for future projects, demonstrating to the Siamese government that technological innovation could support, rather than undermine, its authority. His involvement in subsequent high-profile projects across the public and private sectors—such as Phaya Thai Palace (พระราชวังพญาไท), Villa Norasingh (บ้านนรสิงห์), and Chulalongkorn University (จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย)—cemented his reputation as an indispensable figure. Remarkably, Gollo often served as both engineer and reinforced concrete contractor, an unusual role for a government official at the time. The exception, which allowed him to work in the private sector, underlined his unique importance to the Siamese government. His expertise in reinforced concrete became an asset independent of the patented system, liberating Siam from the constraints that had previously limited its agency.

Most notably, Gollo played a crucial role in the establishment of the Siam Cement Company (บริษัทปูนซิเมนต์ไทย) in 1913. By 1915, the company was producing cement domestically,

significantly reducing the nation's reliance on imports (Brown 1988: 151–155). In recognition of his unparalleled contributions, his contract with the Siamese government was extended and, in 1923, he was honored with the prestigious title Phraya Sinlapasat Sopit (พระยาศิลปศาสตร์โสภิต)—an accolade not even his fellow Italians, Allegrì and Tamagno, received. This distinction underscores Gollo's exceptional value as a reinforced-concrete expert to the Siamese government and highlights his enduring impact on Siamese construction.

In summary, the early adoption of reinforced concrete initially limited Siamese control over construction practices, as foreign expertise and patented systems dominated the process. However, Gollo's unplanned intervention to stabilize the sinking foundation marked a turning point, demonstrating how local agency could regain influence over imported technologies. His expertise bridged the gap between tradition and modernity, aligning with the broader political strategy of King Chulalongkorn's reign. As Wyatt and Kullada observe, King Chulalongkorn's modernization reforms carefully balanced Western ideas with Thai values, selectively integrating modern innovations while maintaining royal authority. Within this context, the adoption of reinforced concrete under Gollo's guidance was not just a technical advancement but also part of a larger effort to navigate the influence of competing foreign powers—particularly the French firm and Italian engineering expertise—ensuring that no single foreign power dominated Siam's modernization efforts. Far from

being a straightforward importation of Western technologies, the process exemplifies how Siam strategically managed modernization on its own terms, using technological advancements to reinforce, rather than undermine, its

sovereignty. Gollo's contributions to reinforced concrete stand as a critical moment in Siam's history, where the interplay of local agency and foreign expertise redefined both its architectural and political trajectory.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FAD	Fine Arts Department (กรมศิลปากร)
NAT	National Archive of Thailand (สำนักหอจดหมายเหตุแห่งชาติ)
PWD	Public Works Department (กรมโยธาธิการ)

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Chulalongkorn to Chao Phraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum) with the Biography of Chao Phraya Yommarat]. Published on the occasion of the royal cremation of Chao Phraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), 10 April 1939. Bangkok: Bamrungtham Printing House.

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THE CAREERS OF ISLAM'S TRANSCULTURAL TRENDSETTERS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN THAILAND

Christopher M. Joll,¹ Hafiz Salae² & Srawut Aree³

ABSTRACT—Muslims in Thailand, as with those across the Muslim World, have been influenced by modernist, reformist, and revivalist trends from the Middle East and South Asia, challenging traditional religious leadership. This article applies Nile Green's religious economies model to Thai Islam, focusing on five key figures: (1) 'Ahmad Wahab, (2) Direk Kulsiriswad, (3) and Sheikh Rida 'Ahmad Samadi in Bangkok, and (4) Ustadh 'Abdullah Chinarong and (5) Ismail Lutfi Japakiya in the far South. We document the impact of transnational Islamic movement, the connections between them, and how all these were multilingual, cosmopolitan middlemen that reshaped the local practice of Islam in Thailand's diverse religious landscape.

KEYWORDS: Bangkok; Islam in Thailand; Islamic Movements; Muslims in Thailand; Southern Thailand

Introduction

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, Muslims in Thailand—the vast majority of whom are scattered in central and southern Thailand—have been impacted by a range of 20th century Islamic trends produced by Muslim activists in Indonesia, South Asia, and the Middle East. This article reconstructs the careers of five of the most influential Thai trendsetters who have shaped Islamic thought and practice since the late 1920s. Our interests are neither in doctrinal details, nor confessional politics. Instead, we document the multipolar origins

of these transnational trendsetters, overlooked connections between them, and their transcultural credentials. We also point out some overdue analyses about connections between central and southern Thailand that have become more important since the 1980s when Thai became more widely read and spoken by Thailand's southern Malays (Joll 2011: 75-78; 2014).

We begin with a short theoretical prolegomenon introducing readers to Nile Green's application of the "religious economies" framework to the Muslim world. In the sections that follow, we explore ways that Green's work provides fresh insights into these five influential local shapers of Islam. We have interacted with some empirically rich recent studies by Muslim religious historians based in Thailand sharing our interest

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FIGURE 1: Cabinets at the Haji Sulong Foundation containing Haji Sulong’s personal collection, Pattani © Christopher M. Joll

in importers of ideas that challenged the confessional hegemony of local “traditionalist” establishments.⁴ By beginning with developments in central Thailand, we seek to both correct the widespread neglect of Metropolitan Bangkok in Muslim Studies and connections between central and southern Thailand.⁵

The initial inspiration for this article was by a serendipitous discovery when a team of local researchers undertook to catalogue the contents of the personal collection of Haji Muhammad Sulong bin Haji ‘Abd al-Qadir bin Muhammad (ฮัจญี มุหัมหมัด สุหลง บุตรของ ฮัจญี อับดุล กอดิร บุตรของ มุหัมหมัด; محمد بن الحاج عبد القادر بن الحاج محمد سلوم; 1895–1954), also known

as Haji Sulong, at the Haji Sulong Foundation (มูลนิธิอาจารย์ฮัจญีสุหลง) in Pattani’s provincial capital in February 2020 [FIGURE 1]. Haji Sulong has been dealt with by others elsewhere.⁶ These include commenting on his connections to what Francis Bradley (2010) has referred to as Mecca’s “Patani School”, connected to Sheikh ‘Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatānī (الفتاني الشيخ أحمد بن محمد زين; 1856–1908). However, among the hundreds of Arabic and Jawi manuscripts in his personal library was only one Thai language publication. This was an issue (no. 75–76) of *Al-Islah Association* (อัล-อิสลาห สมาคม) published in 1948 [1368 AH/2491 BE]. This journal had been published by the Al-Islah Foundation (มูลนิธิอัลอิสลาห) in Bangkok Noi since 1928 [FIGURE 2].

⁴ In this article, it has not been possible to include the impact of the Tablighi Jama‘at throughout Thailand which have been dealt with elsewhere (Braam 2006; Horstmann 2007; Noor 2007, 2012).

⁵ Documenting connections between reformist movements in central and southern Thailand was one of the (many) seminal contributions of recent doctoral dissertations to Thai Muslim scholars (e.g., Amporn Marddent 2016; Hafiz Salae 2017).

⁶ On Haji Sulong, see *inter alia* the following: Liow 2010; Ockey 2011; Husam Lamato et al. 2017; Daungyewa Utarasint 2018: 41–55; Bruckmayr 2019: 186–187.

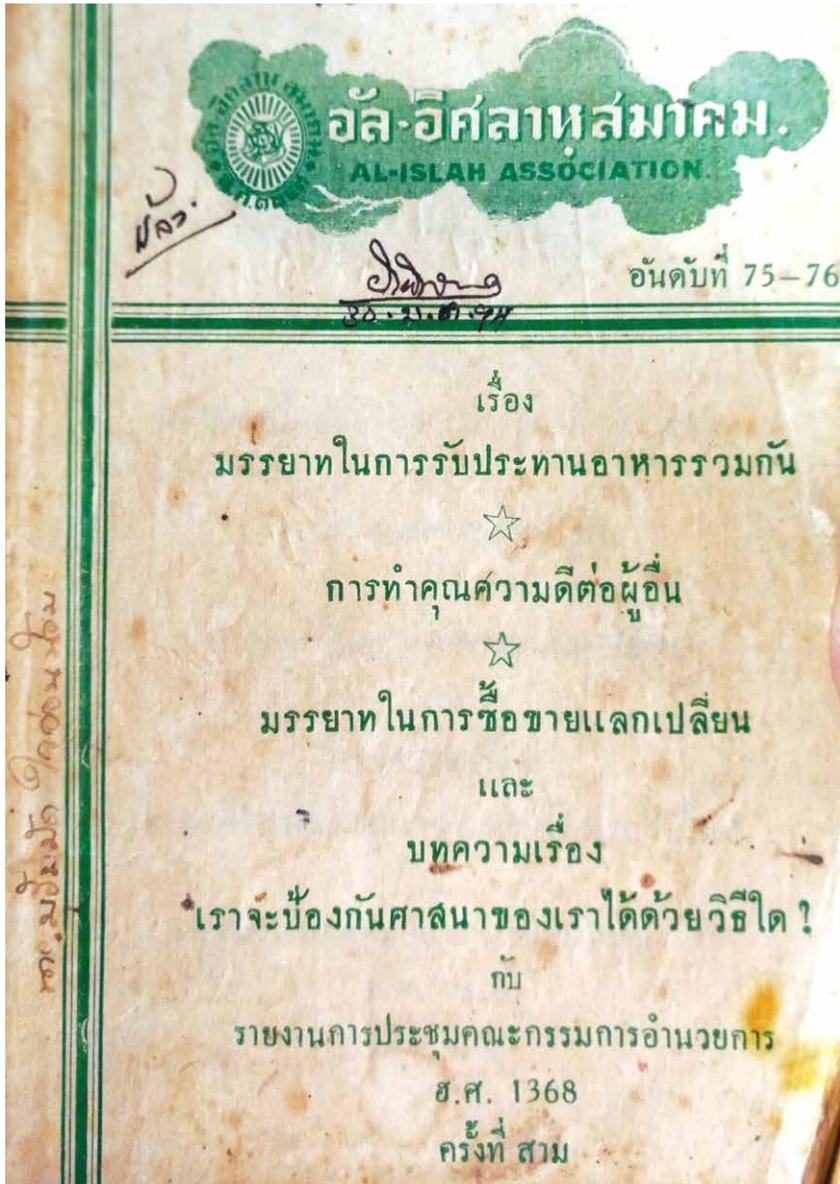


FIGURE 2: 1948 issue of *Al-Islah Association* included in Haji Sulong's personal collection, Pattani © Christopher M. Joll

We have no intention of attempting any misguided attempt to construct some sort of concrete skyscraper upon such bamboo-like piles. Rather, we argue that this document represents long-overdue, reliable documentary evidence of Haji Sulong having been aware of the reformist activism of the organization established in Bangkok by

‘Ahmad Wahab (อะหมัด วาฮับ; 1883–1956). We have yet to have come across any correspondence among them between the 1930s and 1950s. Nevertheless, we describe below that both these religious entrepreneurs arrived in Siam in the late 1920s. We assume their arrival was connected to the final Wahabi capture of the Hijaz—which included the holy

cities of Mecca and Medina. From the early 20th century connections developed between later generations of reformist activists. Before this, central and southern Thai Muslims depended on Islamic influences they had been exposed to in Indonesia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. In southern Thailand ‘Abdullah Chinaron (อับดุลลอฮ์ จินารอง; b. 1931) had studied with Haji Sulong before he was abducted in 1954. In Bangkok, Direk Kulsiriswad (ดิเรก กุลสิริสวัสดิ์; 1922–2005) developed the reformist activism initiated by ‘Ahmad Wahab before ‘Abdullah Chinaron returned to Yala in the late 1960s. Other religious entrepreneurs in both central and southern Thailand developed their challenge to Thailand’s traditionalist Muslim establishment in the decades that followed.

Theoretical Prolegomenon

Over the past decade, Nile Green has applied Roger Finke and Rodney Stark’s (2005) the concept of religious economy to the Muslim World. Green’s *Bombay Islam* referred to Stark *et al.* shedding new light on relations between “large numbers and varied types of religiosity” (2011: 8). Religious groups—which Green refers to as “firms”—resemble commercial companies in the following ways: both are established by “entrepreneurs” and are highly competitive (Ibid.: 8). Religious economies develop wherever religious “producers” and “consumers” interact, but these may be “monopolistic or liberal, active or stagnant, closed or connected” (Ibid.: 122, 142).

While Weberian analysis of Western religious history argues that modernization led to disenchantment—and secularization—Green demonstrates that the impact of modernity upon Indian Muslims led to “re-enchantment and [the] personalization of [...] religiosity” (Green 2015: 12). We follow Green’s emphasis upon “space and geography” when considering concrete case studies (Ibid.: 8). This demands as acceptance of the “uneven character of global historical developments”, which lead to a “multiplicity of outcomes” in locales he refers to as “terrains of exchange” (Ibid.: 12). In these, religious entrepreneurs respond to the “changing demands of their followers” by producing (religious) products and delivering (religious) services. Finally, Green’s case studies reveal religious firms either “competitively co-exist” or sequentially “displace one another” (Ibid.: 9–10). As with any competitive marketplace, religious products and services are impacted by the interplay between the resources possessed by producers and the demands of the consumers in the (religious) economy (Green 2011: 197).

Four years after *Bombay Islam* (2011), Green looked at “the same things in several places”, by developing his religious economies model in *Terrains of Exchange* (Green 2015). This documented ways Islam was “remade, circulated, reorganized”. *Bombay Islam* explored “productive and distributive” processes. *Terrains of Exchange* interrogated “interactive, adaptive, cooperative and competitive” dynamics. In different religious economies, religious developments took different trajectories. This was due to different religious’

“impresarios” and “entrepreneurs” establishing religious firms that produced, marketed, and distributed differing religious products such as print media. Nevertheless, religious economies also supply services such as blessing, healing, salvation, protection, and belonging. All these are inexplicably connected to a range of—often competing—mosques, Sufi brotherhoods, and Islamic organizations (Green 2015: 9). Another important argument developed by Green in *Terrains of Exchange* relevant to our analysis of central and southern Thailand is that new religious firms were disproportionately established by “transcultural middlemen”.⁷ Although in different ways specific to the contexts in which they worked, all these reshaped their social identities through combinations of “religion, language, dress and behavior” which facilitated their assimilation into Western Christian contexts (London, Malta, Milan) or important imperial outposts (Bombay, Calcutta, Malacca, Singapore).

This theoretical prolegomenon has summarized most of the elements of Nile Green’s innovative conceptual framework and his theoretical vocabulary possessing the potential to shed new light on the five trendsetters introduced below. Green refers to his “new analytical vocabulary for interpreting the social operations of Islam” (2015: 10), by providing a “rhetorical antidote” defamiliarizing his readers and creating “analytical distance” between them and the social entities and actors that they assume they already know (Ibid.: 12). He states his objective as assisting his readers to perceive familiar

things in new ways, including recovering the “empirical texture and ethnographic terrain” that shapes religious exchanges (Ibid.: 13).

Thailand’s “Transcultural” Trendsetters of Islam

This section presents the careers of the most influential trendsetters of Islam in central and southern Thailand during the 20th century. We explore the utility of Green’s work to Muslim Studies in Thailand. These include competition between (traditionalist and reformist/modernist) “firms”, in these terrains of exchange. All these imported ideas and practices trending in the religious economies of Indonesia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East, but their cross-cultural/multilingual backgrounds and transnational connections contacts fit the description of Green’s transcultural middlemen/religious entrepreneurs/impresarios. We begin by documenting the contributions in central Thailand (specifically Metropolitan Bangkok).

Ahmad Wahab (1883–1956)

In the 1970–1980s, American anthropologist Raymond Scupin (1978, 1980b, 1980c, 1987) pioneered the study of what Green refers to as Bangkok’s reformist “firms”. Scupin (1980a: 2) relates that a Minangkabau exile (originally from eastern Sumatra) by the name of ‘Ahmad Wahab (age 43) arrived in Bangkok in 1926. Soon after his arrival, he taught in Ratchakarun School (โรงเรียนราชการุณ), Bangkok’s first private Islamic School, established by local descendants of Arab immigrants

⁷ This has been developed by Green (2009) elsewhere.

and Indian merchants (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 4). ‘Ahmad Wahab had been an active member of the Muhammadiyah movement, the first and largest mass modernist movement in the Dutch East Indies. He had spent a considerable amount of time in Mecca as a student, but due to his anti-colonial activities, he was barred from returning to eastern Sumatra and was invited by Thai Muslim students he had met in Mecca to relocate to Bangkok. According to Hafiz Salleh (Hafiz Salae 2017: 108), while in Egypt Wahab met the influential Muhammad Rashid Rida (رشيد رضا محمد; 1865–1935) who edited *Al-Manar* (المنار), published between 1898 and 1935. Indeed, ‘Ahmad Wahab contributed articles to *Al-Manar* under the pseudonym ‘Bangkok’. Amphorn Mardent (2016: 96) adds that he was also connected to another nationalist movement in present-day Indonesia, Sareket Islam.⁸

Details about the confessional, cultural, and ethnolinguistic geography of Bangkok’s Muslim minority explain how a professional stranger and religious sojourner such as ‘Ahmad Wahab could become a pioneering trendsetter. As multilingualism represents one of the most important characteristics of

transcultural religious middlemen, entrepreneurs, and impresarios, Hafiz Salleh persuasively argues that ‘Ahmad Wahab’s familiarity with both Arabic and Jawi sources was central to his local impact. Studies of Muslim minorities in Siam before the tumultuous 1930s tend to overlook the important detail that Malay was once widely spoken there; this had occurred because most were descendants of Malay prisoners who had been relocated to Bangkok during the reigns of Rama I (1782–1809) and Rama III (1824–1851).⁹ From his new home in Bangkok Noi [FIGURE 3], this mobile Minang—capable of conversing in Malay and Arabic—began modernist and reformist criticisms of Southeast Asian traditionalist “firms”. At the time, most Muslim communities in Bangkok were located along either the Chao Phraya River or Bangkok’s extensive canal network—the most important of which was the Saen Saep Canal. All of these ‘Ahmad Wahab could comfortably visit by boat. ‘Ahmad Wahab established connections with a number of mosques. In Bangkok Noi, the first was Masjid Mai Thanon Tok (มัสยิดใหม่ถนนตึก) in Charoen Krung road. This was registered as As-Salafiyyah Mosque (มัสยิดอัลสละฟียะฮ์), the same name of the school that ‘Ahmad Wahab was involved in establishing. The mosque was later renamed the Ansorit Sunnah Royal Mosque (มัสยิดอันซอริซซุนนะห์), roughly translated as “the helper of the Sunnah”.¹⁰

⁸ Merle Ricklefs (2001: 105) related that between 1919 and 1926, the Dutch sought to balance colonial budgets by cutting services and increasing taxes; they responded to political activism with a policy of arresting, imprisoning, and exiling political provocateurs. Howard Federspiel adds that members of Sareket Islam represented the full range of the political spectrum. While most of its leadership subscribed to “modernist Muslim principles”, between 1914 and 1926 a mixture of “communists, nationalists and Muslim activists” also joined. Although Sareket Islam sought concessions through industrial action, these led to the arrest and exile of many of its leaders (Federspiel 2001: 30–31).

⁹ On the topic of Malay prisoners of war between the 1780s and 1830s, see Joll 2022. For more on Malay language use in Siam before the 1940s, refer to the following: Tadmor 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 2004.

¹⁰ This detail is mentioned by the following: Songsiri Putthongchai 2013: 83; Amporn Marddent 2016: 47; Hafiz Salae 2017: 110.

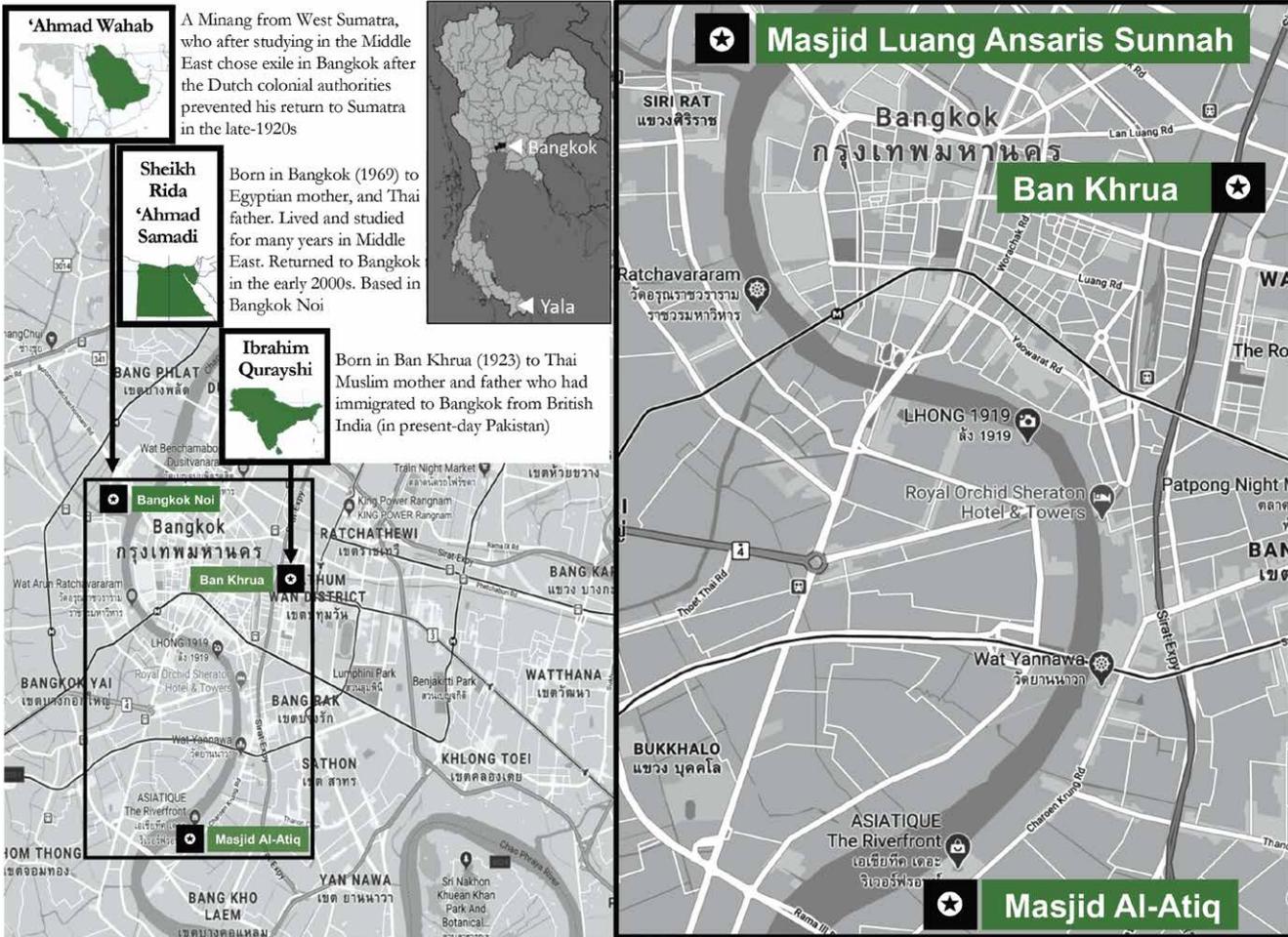


FIGURE 3: Bangkok Noi, Ban Khrua, and Masjid Al-Atiq in Metropolitan Bangkok connected with the careers of central Thailand’s trendsetters and their connections with Indonesia, South Asia, and the Middle East © Christopher M. Joll

Wahab’s operational base eventually shifted to the Al-Atiq Mosque, downstream from Bangkok Noi near the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River [FIG. 3]. Winyu Ardruga notes that ‘Ahmad Wahab was also involved in this mosque, changing its name from Surao Kao Suan Luang (สุเหร่าเก้าสวนหลวง) in 1952. Although his funeral was organized at Al-Atiq Mosque (มัสยิดอัลอะดีก), he was buried in Bangkok Noi (Winyu Ardruga 2012: 95).

In addition to leading regular study groups that attracted new “consumers”, this mobile, multilingual trendsetter established local Islamic associations and Islamic publications. These included the *Al-Islah Association* in Bangkok Noi in 1928 and the *Ansorit Sunnah Association* (สมาคมอันซอริซซุนนะห์) in the 1930s (Winyu Ardruga 2012: 95). The Al-Islah Foundation printed the aforementioned monthly periodical

Al-Islah Association. This was financially supported by members of the Muslim community and initially edited by ‘Ahmad Wahab (Scupin 1998: 251). As revealed below, Sheikh Rida ‘Ahmad Samadi’s family had connections with these institutions in Metropolitan Bangkok that he continued following his return to Thailand, in the early 20th century.

Direk Kulsiriswad (1922–2005)

In addition to Bangkok Noi and Masjid Al-Atiq Mosque—both connected with ‘Ahmad Wahab—the third important “terrain of exchange” in Bangkok was Ban Khrua [FIG. 3]. This was the birthplace of Direk Kulsiriswad also known as Ibrahim Qureshi (อิบรอฮีม กุเรชี) and Achan Direk (อาจารย์ดิเรก). Ban Khrua (บ้านครัว) is a cosmopolitan Muslim community located on the Saen Saep Canal (คลองแสนแสบ) near the intersection of the Chao Phraya River and the Bangkok Noi Canal. ‘Ahmad Wahab might have imported reformist/modernist franchises, by Achan Direk was his most important disciple. ‘Ahmad Wahab’s credentials as a transcultural trendsetter might have been related to his multilingualism and mobility, but Achan Direk was a polyglot local with a multicultural background. In contrast to ‘Ahmad Wahab who locally leveraged his ability to interact with a range of Jawi and Arabic sources, Achan Direk’s impact was as a native speaker of Thai.

Scupin (1998: 244–245) relates that Achan Direk first came into contact with ‘Ahmad Wahab through his father, a British subject from the Indian subcontinent who migrated to Bangkok

after 1855.¹¹ His father worked in the Thai postal service—as one of their English-speaking employees—and married a member of the local (Cham) community in Ban Khrua established in Siam since the early Bangkok period and connected to Bangkok Noi via Bangkok’s waterways. Achan Direk was a native speaker of Thai and proficient in Arabic, English, and Urdu—a relatively rare form of multilingualism in Bangkok at the time. The Urdu taught to him by his father assisted learning Arabic later. He also acquired English while an interpreter in the British Field Security Service in Bangkok at the end of the Second World War. After 1945, he worked for a bank and several other firms as a salesman. In 1956, he set up his own successful silk screen printing and textile printing ink business (Scupin 1998: 252). In other words, unlike ‘Ahmad Wahab, Achan Direk was more than a religious scholar. In this respect, he resembled Abdullah Chinarong (see below).

Achan Direk’s ability to read English, Arabic, and Urdu enabled him to access a range of Islamic literature. In addition to ideas encountered through direct contact with ‘Ahmad Wahab, his omnivorous diet of reading convinced him that Islamic reform was also required in Thailand. Amongst Achan Direk’s most enduring contributions to the local religious economy were

¹¹ Edward van Roy (2016: 183) describes steamers from Singapore bringing a “steady trickle of Indian immigrants” seeking to benefit from the new economic opportunities in Siam. They could benefit from the extraterritoriality provisions in the Bowring Treaty (1855) as British subjects. Their presence was recorded as early as 1883 and continued into the 1920s.

his many publications (in Thai) that he personally funded through his silk printing business—the first of which was published in 1949 (Scupin 1980a: 3). Although some addressed “folk Islam”, a history of Muslims in Thailand, and a study of Muslim influences on classical Siamese literature, after ten years he published a four-volume Thai translation of the Qur’an which solidified his reputation as the “foremost intellectual leader of the reformist movement” between the 1950s and 1970s (Scupin 2001: 38).

While the mosques and associations located in Bangkok Noi and Al-Atiq Mosque associated with ‘Ahmad Wahab furthered his impact, Achan Direk was also connected with a number of other Islamic associations. The first, Jamiyatul Islam (สมาคมญามิอะตุลอิสลาม) was, in the 1950s, associated with the local South Asian migrant community in central Bangkok. This was modelled along the lines of the Jama‘at-i Islami (جماعت اسلامی), which played an important role in Indo-Pakistani politics (Liow 2009a: 163). While initially an ethnically Indian association, Jamiyatul Islam opened its ranks to Muslims in Thailand regardless of their ethnic origins (Scupin 1980a: 4; Liow 2009a: 80). Jamiyatul Islam actively promoted reformist messages from global reformist thinkers and movements through its *Al-Jihad* (อัลญิฮาด) and *Al-Hidayah* (อัลฮิदाเยฮ) magazines (Hafiz Salae 2017: 110). Jamiyatul Islam later played an instrumental role in the formation of the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT). Established in 1964, by 1967 its membership comprised mostly reform-minded Thai youths and intellectuals (Liow 2009b: 192).

Sheikh Rida ‘Ahmad Samadi (b. 1969)

The third trendsetter credited with diversifying Bangkok’s religious economy is Sheikh Rida ‘Ahmad Samadi (เชคริฎอ อะหมัด สมะดี); his contributions as a transcultural middleman have been analyzed by Winyu Ardrugsa (2012), Hafiz Salleh (2017), and Amporn Marddent (2016). Like ‘Ahmad Wahab, Sheikh Rida was a mobile religious entrepreneur before relocating to Metropolitan Bangkok in the late 20th century. Resembling Achan Direk, Sheikh Rida came from a multicultural family. His father was a Thai Muslim employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while his mother was an Egyptian. Although he was born in Bangkok in 1969, his maternal grandfather was a shariah court judge in Egypt; in addition, the origins of his father’s lineage comes from Songkhla’s Sultan Sulaiman.¹² Sheikh Rida’s paternal grandfather served as the Imam of Bangkok Noi’s Ansorit Sunnah Mosque and was the editor of publications produced by the Al-Islah Foundation.

Sheikh Rida’s mobility and multilingualism came from travels with his father who was posted to Thai embassies abroad. In addition to living in Malaysia (for two years), he lived in Saudi Arabia (for eleven years), and his mother’s homeland, where he lived for fifteen years. He first graduated from Egypt’s Al-Azhar University (جامعة الأزهر الشريف), was deported from Egypt to Thailand in mid-1999 for his involvement in Egyptian Salafi groups, and post-graduated from Al-Qurawiyun University

¹² On the Sultan Sulaiman lineage, see Thanin Salam 2004, and Dalrymple & Joll 2021, 2022.

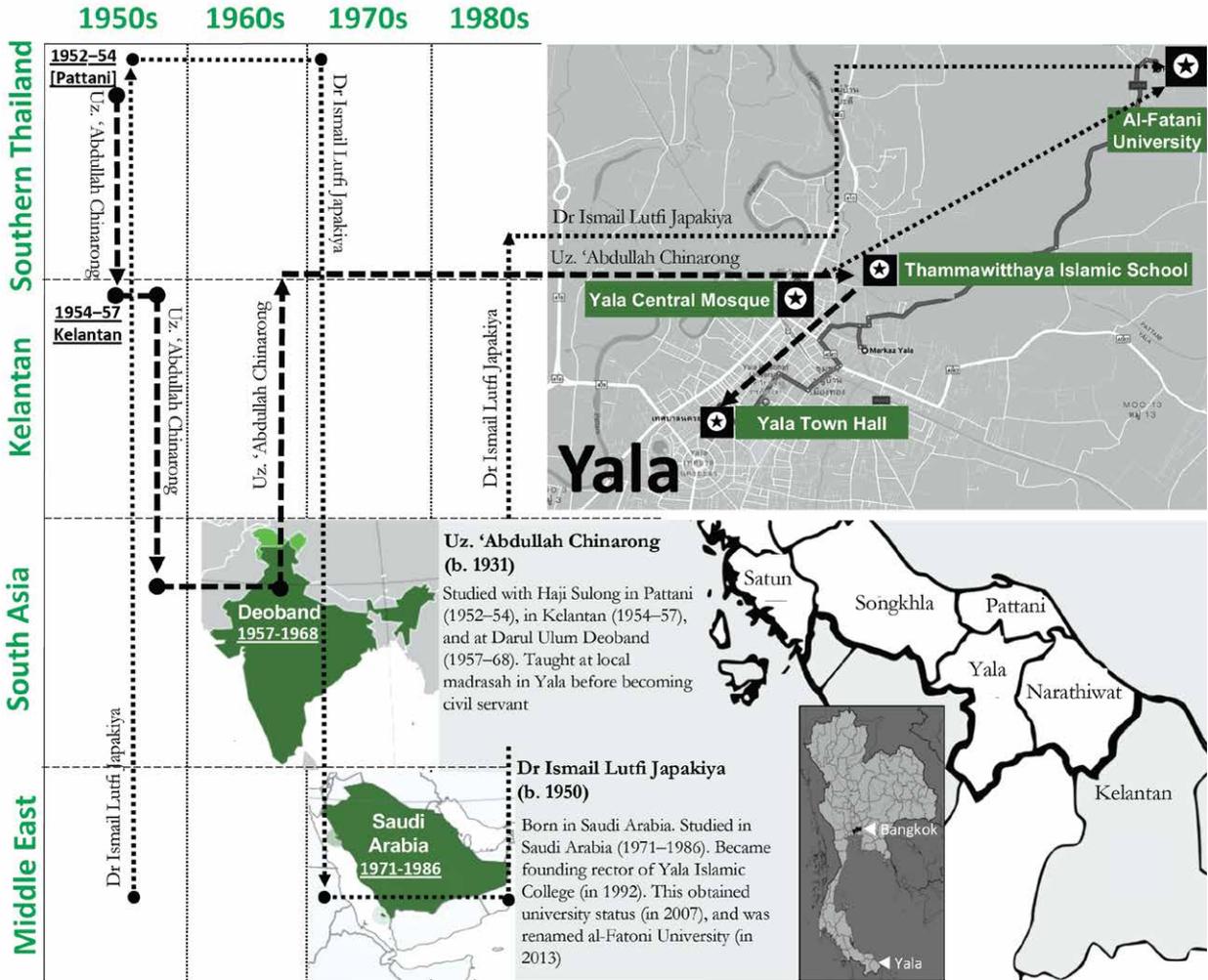


FIGURE 4: Transnational connections between southern Thailand (specifically Yala), the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent © Christopher M. Joll

(جامعة القرويين) in Morocco in 2001. As an exile with links to the Arab World and Bangkok Noi, Sheikh Rida most closely resembles 'Ahmad Wahab. After completing his master's degree in Morocco in 2001, Sheikh Rida taught at the Muslim Wittayakhan Islamic School (โรงเรียนมุสลิมวิทยาการ) in the province of Chachoengsao, east of metropolitan Bangkok, lectured at the Al-Islah Foundation, and took over from his father as publishing editor of *Al-Islah Association*. In 2001, Sheikh Rida also established the Muslim Group for Peace

(มูลนิธิมุสลิมเพื่อสันติ; Hafiz Salae 2017: 99-164). He eventually married a local Thai Muslim woman in 2002. After becoming proficient in Thai, he began accepting public speaking invitations in Bangkok. In contrast to the more conventional face-to-face study circles or print media, the most influential Islamic association that Sheikh Rida contributes to is the enormously influential White TV Channel (established in 2014). He also contributes to Muslim radio broadcasts over community radio station and directly over the internet.

Ustadh ‘Abdullah Chinarong (b. 1931)

Having introduced readers to the range of transcultural Islamic trendsetters who established religious “firms” in Metropolitan Bangkok from the 1920s, our focus here is on the contributions of Ustadh ‘Abdullah Chinarong (อุสตาทซ์ อับดุลลอฮ์ จินารอง), and Dr Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (see further below). These trendsetters appeared following the disappearance of Haji Sulong in 1954. We wish to reiterate the important point that some of the developments documented above preceded those dealt with below. **FIGURE 3** drew attention to the importance of geography in Bangkok, where the most important terrains of exchange were cosmopolitanism, multilingual communities that produced—or were open to—importers of Islamic trends originating from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, South Asia, or the Middle East. We have previously argued elsewhere that the success of local Islamic trendsetters could conceivably be attributed to their cumulative impact and—perhaps accidental—division of labor (Srawut Aree & Joll 2020: 293). Our reconstruction of southern Thailand’s Islamic trendsetters (summarized in **FIG. 4**) pays attention to their transnational movements, the Islamic trends they imported and the operational bases eventually established by them. Notwithstanding the linguistic and cultural geography of present-day Bangkok as more complex than that of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, **FIGURE 4** also highlights the centrality of Yala’s (compact) provincial capital—not Pattani—that we argue can be explained by the strength of the

traditionalist leaders of local *pondok* and the Islamic Council in Pattani.

Throughout southern Thailand, Ustadh ‘Abdullah Chinarong is commonly referred to as “Loh India”, connected to his 9-year educational sojourn (between 1956 and 1968) at northern India’s famous Darul Ulum Deoband Madrasah, located approximately 150 km north of New Delhi. Before travelling to India in 1957, he was a member of Haji Sulong’s final cohort of students in Pattani before Sulong’s abduction and disappearance by the Royal Thai Police in 1954. Haji Sulong had close connections with Muhammad bin Yūsuf bin ‘Ahmad (محمد بن يوسف بن أحمد), also known as Tok Kenali (1868–1933), who was one of Shaykh ‘Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatāni’s (1856–1908) most influential students in the Malay World. This, in part, explains Chinarong’s decision to study in Madrasah Ahmadiyah located just outside Kelantan’s capital of Kota Bharu in Malaysia. Three years later, he enrolled at the Darul Ulum Deoband Madrasah (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 109). It is worth noting that Hafiz Salae’s empirically rich analysis of Islamic trendsetters between central and southern Thailand mentions that while in northern India, he came into contact with Thai Muslim disciples of ‘Ahmad Wahab (Hafiz Salae 2017: 118).

In 1968, Chinarong returned to southern Thailand. He initially taught at some of Yala’s largest private Islamic schools, including Thammawitthaya Islamic School (โรงเรียนธรรมวิทยามูลนิธิ), where he became a vocal critic of aspects of Islam advocated by local Malay traditionalist firms (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 110). After five years, Loh India became a Thai civil

servant, working at Yala's Education Development Center. In this, he resembled Direk Kulsiriswad who was both a businessman, Muslim educator, and Islamic activist. Resigning as a full-time religious teacher increased his freedom to articulate concerns about inconsistencies between local customary Islam, the interpretations of the Qur'an, and the corpus of prophetic traditions referred to as the *hadith* had been exposed to in northern India. He also began to regularly preach on Sunday mornings—although he chose Yala's city hall over Yala's Central Mosque. Thai scholar Muhammad Ilyas Yahprang comments that those attending Chinarong's lectures included “civil servants, college and university lecturers, private company workers, businessmen, university students” (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprang 2014: 111). His following among Malay university students and involvement in education led him to increasingly function as mentor to Muslim youth movements. These emulated both the Egyptian Ikhwan al Muslimūn (الإخوان المسلمون) established in 1928, and the South Asian Jama'at-i-Islami (جماعت اسلامی پاکستان) established in 1941 (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprang 2014: 113). Hafiz Salae (2017: 118) notes that, after two years, his public preaching portfolio ended and he established Islam Prasanwit (โรงเรียนอิสลามประสานวิทย์), an “Islamic-integrated school” on the outskirts of Yala. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that South Asian influences imported by Loh India to southern Thailand, the activism had already begun to be popularized by Direk Kulsiriswad in central Thailand.

Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (b. 1950)

The well-known Saudi-educated Dr Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (ดร อิสมาอีลลูตฟี จะปะกียา) is widely acknowledged as the most influential reformist activist in present-day southern Thailand.¹³ Lutfi's local influence can be attributed to Arabic language credentials connected to having been born in Saudi Arabia (in 1950) and his Saudi education (1971–1986). Lutfi has a doctorate in comparative Islamic jurisprudence from the Islamic University of Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud (جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية) in Riyadh, where he also completed his master's degree in comparative *fiqh* (الفقه; Islamic jurisprudence). Before this, he had graduated with a bachelor's degree in *usuluddin* (أصول الدين; religious principles) at Madinah University. He initially leveraged the cultural capital of his family who had established Bamrung Islam Witthaya School (โรงเรียนบำรุงอิสลามวิทยา) in the village of Brao, 15 km from Pattani on the road to Yala's provincial capital. Under the leadership of his father Babo Abdurrahman Japakiya (بابา عبدالرحمن جافاكيا), this school was one of a number traditionalist Islamic boarding schools referred to in Thailand and Malaysia as *pondok* (ฟوند็อก): registered as private Islamic schools (PSTI) that taught the Thai national curriculum alongside elements of a traditional Islamic education.¹⁴ Under Lutfi's

¹³ For more on Lutfi, see Liow 2009a, 2010; Braam 2013; Muhammad Ilyas Yahprang 2014.

¹⁴ The following have provided the most comprehensive summary of changes in Islamic education in southern Thailand, Liow 2009a, 2010; Hasan Madmarn 2011; Hafiz Salae 2017.

leadership, Bamrung Islam School has functioned since the 1980s as the principal conduit of his Saudi-style reformist firm in Malay-majority southern Thailand. In the local Pattani Malay dialect, *Orae Brao* is employed by local traditionalists when referring to these local “Wahhabis” from the village of Brao located approximately 10 km from Pattani’s Provincial capital. Last, but not least, Lutfi’s local status is heightened as the founding rector of Yala Islamic College (วิทยาลัยอิสลามยะลา), established in 1992. This became Thailand’s first private Islamic university. Although initially registered in 2007 as Yala Islamic College, its name was

changed in 2013 to al-Fatoni University (มหาวิทยาลัยฟาฏอนี). Yet another important detail mentioned by Hafiz Salae (2017: 131–133) is that Lutfi actively recruited Malays from Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat while they were studying in Pakistan. In other words, although Lutfi was educated in Saudi Arabia and the construction of al-Fatoni has been primarily funded by Middle Eastern donors, a range of South Asian reformist influences have also influenced this new religious “firm” in southern Thailand. In present-day Thailand, Lutfi and Rida are the highest profile proponents of the Saudi-style Salafi (السلفية) reformist franchise.

Details about the transnational connections and operational bases in Metropolitan Bangkok and Yala of Thailand’s five trendsetters of Islam are summarized in **FIGURES 3** and **4**. **FIGURE 5** summarizes the careers of these transcultural religious entrepreneurs highlighting the connections between them.

Analysis of developments in central and southern Thailand from the 1920s reveals the multipolar origins of the Islamic franchises imported by these five transcultural religious entrepreneurs. These included Indonesia (famous for its Islamic institutions such as the Muhammadiyah), the Middle East, and South Asia. Secondly, some of these men were contemporaries. Both ‘Ahmad Wahab and Haji Sulong came to (what was then) Siam in the late 1920s, a time which can be safely assumed to have been related to the tumultuous

reconfiguration of Islamic authority in the Arabian Peninsula. While ‘Ahmad Wahab imported elements of the Islamic franchises he had encountered between Sumatra and the Middle East, Haji Sulong imported the “juristic Sufism” (Buehler 1998: 224–223; Dickson 2022: 5–6) of the Meccan-based Patani School. After studying in Kelantan, Loh India studied with Haji Sulong as a member of his last cohort of students before studying in the Indian sub-continent. Direk Kulsiriswad (Achan Direk) built upon the reformist activism in Bangkok Noi before Loh India’s return to Yala in the late 1960s. To reiterate, there is no evidence about any connections between these two trendsetters in Thailand—despite both having been influenced by South Asian modernism. We have argued elsewhere that later generations of religious entrepreneurs

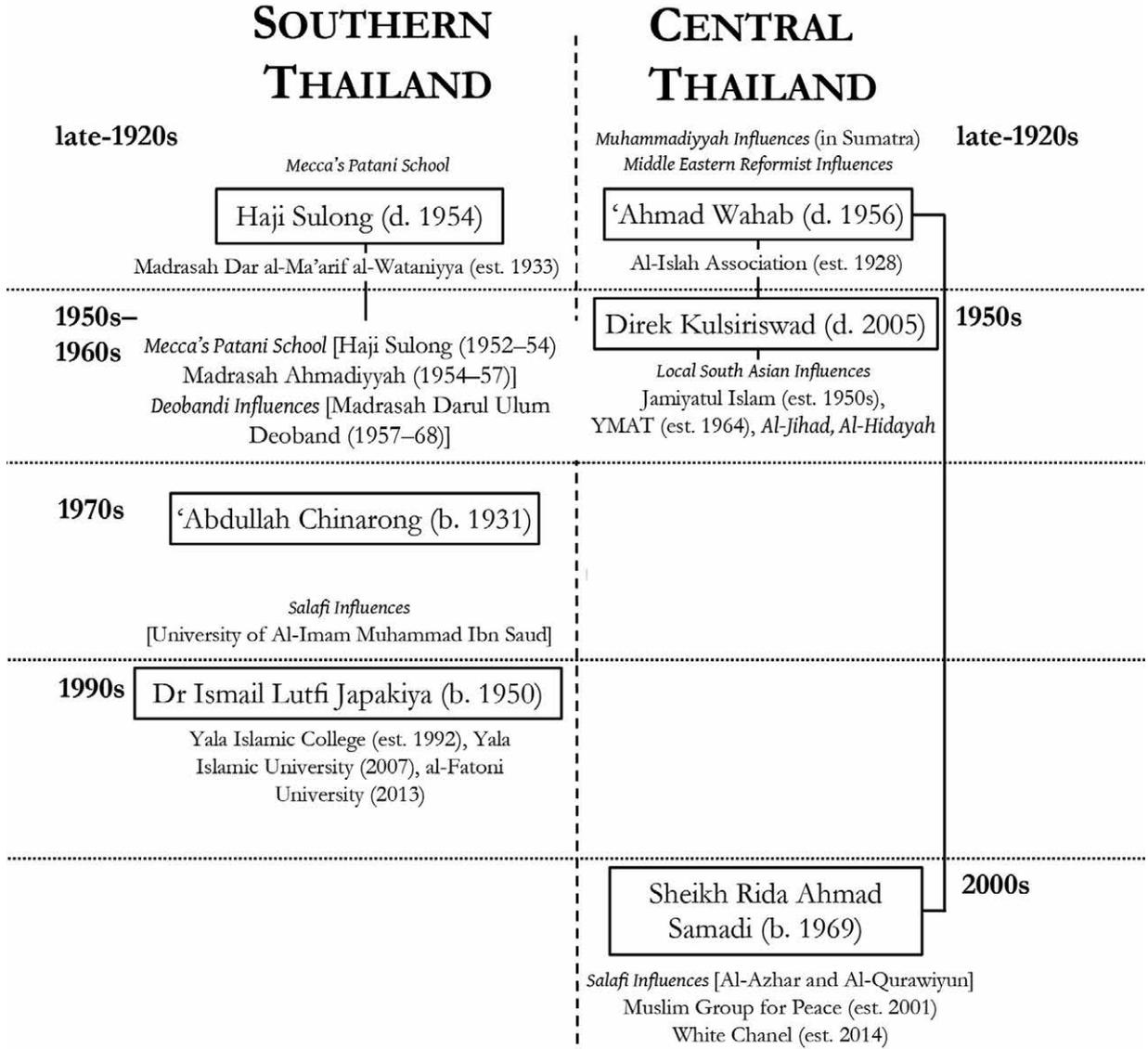


FIGURE 5: Islam’s transcultural trendsetters in central and southern Thailand: Summary of transnational movements, influences and connections © Christopher M. Joll

in Thailand benefitted from the achievements of other local activists. The reformist franchise established by Lutfi indirectly benefitted from the Islamic activism of ‘Abdullah Chinarong. We have documented connections between ‘Ahmad Wahab and Direk Kulsiriswad. Similarly, the family of Sheikh Rida—the highest profile transcultural middleman of Salafism based

in Metropolitan Bangkok—had long-standing connections with the Al-Islah Foundation. In many respects, his influence in central Thailand resembles that of Lutfi in southern Thailand.

Despite important differences between these five trendsetters, all these fit the description of Nile Green’s transcultural middlemen/religious entrepreneurs. After all, regardless of

their backgrounds and reservations, conservative traditionalists are best persuaded to accept strange ideas articulated in local languages and dialects by someone familiar. All of these religious entrepreneurs were polyglots. As a Thai civil servant, Chinaronng was a bilingual Malay who also learned Urdu while studying on the Indian subcontinent. With the notable exception of Achan Direk, all spent time overseas. Achan Direk's cosmopolitan credentials are related to having hailed from the Cham community of Ban Khrua and that his father was a South Asian

immigrant. 'Ahmad Wahab was the only religious entrepreneur who can safely be described as a professional stranger. Nevertheless, we have documented that his local impact was related to having established his operations based in one of Metropolitan Bangkok's Malay-speaking communities. Equally important, the Islamic trends he introduced were disseminated, in Thai, by his local disciples—the most important of whom was Direk Kulsiriswad. He might not have had the most mobile career, but this was compensated by the cosmopolitan cultural milieu that he was born in and having become an adept polyglot.

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KUI MINORITY LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Stefanie Siebenhütter¹

ABSTRACT—This article examines the online and offline media use of the Kui minority in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, focusing on their linguistic choices using social media. Without a writing system of their own, Kui speakers use majority languages for communication. The study explores the availability of media in Kui and the reasons for adopting national languages online. Findings highlight a desire for social inclusion while maintaining ethnic identity. Despite language shifts, Kui speakers persist in their cultural practices. This research challenges assumptions that language shift leads to cultural loss, showing how minorities navigate digital spaces without abandoning their heritages.

KEYWORDS: Endangered Languages; Kui Ethnic Minority; Language Maintenance; Social Media; Thailand/Laos/Cambodia

Introducing the Kui Minority

The Southeast Asian mainland is home to numerous ethnic and linguistic minorities (e.g., Schliesinger 2000, 2017; Siebenhütter 2020, 2022, 2023). The Kuis,² the focus of this article, reside in the border region of Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (e.g., Bos 2009; Keating 2013; Baird 2022).

Erik Seidenfaden’s 1952 study, “The Kui People of Cambodia and Siam”, was among their first Western ethnographic accounts, marking an early contribution to minority studies in the region. Since then, research on ethnic minorities has expanded significantly.

This article examines the development of minority research in Southeast Asia, focusing on the Kuis and their online and offline communication. It traces the evolution of scholarship on ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, highlights efforts in language documentation and revitalization, and reviews past and emerging research on the Kuis and

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² The author is aware that the minority people under discussion use different names, e.g., Kuy or Kuay in Cambodia, or Suai, and so on, throughout Laos, and are often not aware of being participants in one ethno-linguistic group.

other minority groups in the region. **MAP 1** shows the regions with significant Kui, Kuay, Suai, etc. (กฺวย, กวย, สว้ย) populations in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. As of 2025, the Austro-Asiatic language is considered endangered, with an estimated total of between 10,000 and one million speakers.³ The Kui minority in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia is estimated to number around 400,000 people, of which around 220,000 live in Thailand (Siebenhütter 2022: 10). They have little media and public presence; they have no written language—the Kuis, as with the respective national majority speakers, use Thai, Khmer, or Lao when they want to communicate in written language—thus there is no literature or social media page in Kui. It is difficult to provide exact numbers of people identified as belonging to this minority group as all the latest published figures are extrapolations (Siebenhütter 2020, 2023).

As with much of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand has experienced migrations, resettlements, and shifting national borders, contributing to a highly diverse cultural and linguistic landscape. Research on minorities in Cambodia (Grabowsky 2004; Schliesinger 2011; Swift 2013), Vietnam (Engelbert 2016), Laos (Baird 2015), and Thailand demonstrates how factors such as climate change, political transitions, and colonial legacies have shaped this complexity. European colonization—particularly in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—along with interactions with traders, diplomats, and missionaries, led to some of the earliest studies of minority groups in the region (e.g., Grabowsky 2010; Ivarsson

& Sing 2022). U.S. military research also contributed, notably Schrock's *Minority Groups in Thailand* (1970), which documented Kui self-identification as “Kui” (meaning “men”) and alternative names or spellings such as Kuoy, Kuy, Koui, and Soai or Souai, etc., particularly among non-Kui speakers. My fieldwork in northeast Thailand confirmed the preference for “Kui” among speakers themselves, leading me to adopt this term here.

The study explores Kui digital and offline language use, analyzing their social media presence and linguistic choices. It considers the factors influencing their use of majority languages such as Thai, Khmer, Lao, and English in daily communication while also highlighting their aspirations for social inclusion and the resilience of Kui identity and cultural practices. Finally, it discusses the growing role of digital media in shaping minority language survival, underscoring implications for the future of minority communities in Thailand and beyond.

Data Collection and Research Process

During multiple field research trips between 2014 and 2021 to Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, I explored the cultures and languages of the region, with a particular focus on the ethnic and linguistic minorities, especially the Kuis. The primary data collection for this research took place between 2019 and 2021, during which I gathered ethnographic and sociolinguistic data from Kui speakers. Fieldwork was conducted primarily in three Kui villages in northeast Thailand: Ban Kanhloeng (บ้าน กั้นลวง) in Sikhoraphum district of

³ See: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/kdt/> (accessed 19 February 2025).



MAP 1: Regions with significant Kui, Kuay, and Suai populations in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia © Thomson Walt

Surin province; Ban Khinak (บ้านขี้หนาค) in Prang Ku district of Sisaket province; and Phu Sing (ภูสิงห์) in Phu Sing district, also in Sisaket province [MAP 2].

“Offline” data collection included ethnographic fieldwork and one-on-one interviews with Kui speakers in their

villages. I also participated in several Kui rituals and festive activities throughout Surin province. Additionally, group interviews were held in Sisaket and Surin provinces in Thai and English. In some cases, two Kui research assistants facilitated introductions and initial



MAP 2: Field sites in Surin and Sisaket provinces in northeast Thailand © Monika Feinen

contacts in the villages. Over 200 short questionnaires—administered both online and in paper form between 2019 and 2020—provided insights into participants’ daily communication habits, offline media use, digital engagement, and social media preferences. These responses also offered demographic data, which allowed for an evaluation of media usage patterns by residence and age cohort.

“Online” data collection examined the presence of Kui minorities on social media in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Three methods were used: (1) interviews with Kui individuals in Cambodia and Thailand via Facebook, (2) questionnaires

focusing on their language preferences in digital communication, and (3) online research on Kui social media presence and interactions. While the study initially aimed to also include the Kuis in Laos, I was unable to establish contact with native speakers via social media during the COVID pandemic. Therefore, the research primarily analyzed their online activity on platforms such as Facebook (including Messenger), WhatsApp, KakaoTalk, and smaller private blogs in Thai and Khmer. Additional interviews were conducted via email and social media in Thai and English, with some recorded and transcribed for analysis.

As a result of this study, an interview guide was developed for future in-depth studies on the digital use of minority languages, which is available upon request. In the following sections, I present a selection of illustrative responses from speakers and provide supplementary examples from social media and online content of the Kuis.

Rituals, Practices, and the Oral Tradition of Minorities

Like many minorities in Southeast Asia, northeast Thai Kuis possess a rich heritage of rituals, practices, legends, and myths that have been passed down through both written and oral traditions (Seidenfaden 1952; Siebenhütter 2022, 2023). To date, Kui speakers do not have a distinct writing system. Like other minority groups without indigenous scripts, Kui people rely on majority languages for written communication. In Thailand, they use Thai, while in Laos and Cambodia, they may use Lao or Khmer in daily conversations, such as in markets, homes, or neighboring villages. Most members of minority groups are multilingual, acquiring multiple languages either from their parents or when they enter the education system, which is dominated by the national language (Siebenhütter 2023).

This multilingualism extends beyond language to encompass religious and cultural practices, which have developed over centuries due to the region's long history of cultural exchange and language contact (e.g., Holt 2009; Siebenhütter 2019, 2021). Indian (South Asian) influence is evident in the religious life of Thailand. As Holt (2009) argues for Laos, the general knowledge of Theravada

Buddhism in Thailand is deeply influenced by indigenous religious cultures, particularly the worship of spirits believed to govern specific social and geographical areas. Kuis exemplify the enduring influence of traditional spiritual cults on culture and society, as well as the integration of Buddhist temple and ritual practices into daily life.

Kuis are well known for wild elephant catching and are also mentioned as the last generation of elephant “doctors” in Thailand (Alisa 2025). Furthermore, they have been known for their skills as ironworkers and ironsmiths for centuries (Dupaigne 2016), a tradition that may have been influenced by Hindu civilization, as Seidenfaden suggests from their use of “Brahmanical rites and incantations” (1952: 149). Dupaigne (2016) also notes that weaving, a craft practiced by various ethnic groups in the region, was historically important among the Kuis.⁴

Media Representation of the Kui Minority

None of the Kuis interviewed during the 2019 fieldwork were aware of any newspapers or books in Kui, which is not surprising given the lack of a proper writing system. No radio or television programs could be named either. However, at least until July 2020, one Kui speaker from Buriram province, near the border with Cambodia, used a YouTube channel to teach Kui using the Thai alphabet (see details below).

In mainstream print and online media in Thailand and Cambodia, occasional articles address the land and

⁴ The artistry of textiles and weaving is further explored in Siebenhütter 2022.

forest rights of the Kuis, who see themselves as displaced from their habitat due to construction projects. Similar disputes can be found outside Southeast Asia as well; for example, critical reports questioning the legitimacy of land rights can be found in Europe, such as in Norway (Laakso et al. 2016).

On social media, such as YouTube in Thailand, Kuis are regularly portrayed as an endangered minority, multilingual in the older generations, and at risk of extinction due to the lack of language transmission to younger generations. However, some younger Kuis, aged about 40 and under, organize into small groups on social media in both Thailand and Cambodia to announce events or share pictures. Communication on these platforms typically occurs in Thai or Khmer. Younger Kuis, between 15 and 24 years old, report familiarity with pop songs that are hardly distinguishable from modern Thai pop music. These songs express a modern minority culture rather than the cultivation of native folklore (Siebenhütter 2023). Pop music can significantly influence the linguistic repertoire, motivating speakers to linguistically (e.g., lexically) identify with geographically distant groups, such as listeners in southern Laos who enjoy Thai popular music.

The omission of mentions of Kuis as a minority in the media does not necessarily carry a negative connotation. Avoiding topics relevant to minorities can sometimes indicate such good integration that the minority does not require specific media attention, as described by Laakso et al. (2016) regarding the Hungarian minority in Austria. However, it may also suggest that

minority members refrain from raising critical issues to avoid being associated with groups that have lower social status or are seen as troublemakers, as sometimes portrayed in the majority media. If all media are state-controlled, as in Laos and Cambodia, reports are often aligned with government priorities.⁵

In general, the majority media's portrayal of minorities, including the Kuis in northeast Thailand, often avoids addressing serious conflicts, such as minority land rights in the "Emerald Triangle" where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia meet. As a result, many minorities, including the Kuis, may prefer to remain quiet and invisible, maintaining harmony at the cost of their rights. Although the Kui individuals I interviewed did not report significant difficulties, some admitted to hiding their heritage to avoid identification as poor provincial residents. Such actions may not only impact Kui individuals but also others from northeast Thailand.

Challenges faced by minority language speakers are common not only in Thailand but also in other parts of the world. While the situation in Europe cannot be directly compared, research outcomes regarding minorities in Sweden and Norway are instructive. As with the Kuis, these minorities are in competition with the major populations and their languages. Kuis face similar rivalry not only from the central Thai population but also from other minorities in northeast Thailand, such as Khmer, Lao (Isan-Lao), and smaller ethnic groups. Laakso et al. describe

⁵ See Laakso et al. 2016 on the situation of Veps and Karelian minorities in Russia.

political grievances related to the attention given to minorities, using the example of the Sámi, Meänkieli, and Kven minorities in Sweden and Norway:

The wrongdoings of the past and assimilationist policies have led to the current situation, where many minority language speakers have lost their heritage language and may even be ashamed of their ethnic roots. The majority media reflects on this and places responsibility on the majority (2016: 199).

In Thailand, several minorities are losing their heritage languages due to political decisions, such as education policies that make it difficult for children to learn their ethnic languages. Minority languages are often not taught in schools and the shame and fear of exclusion contribute to this loss, as is the case for the Kuis. These feelings are frequently cited as reasons why minority languages are not used on social media platforms (Belmar 2020).

My research supports Guillem Belmar's findings, showing that minority speakers in urban areas such as Bangkok fear being looked down upon by those from wealthier regions. For example, one Kui male who moved to Bangkok reported that he tries to avoid being identified as someone from the "poor northeast of Thailand" or as a member of the Kui minority unless it is absolutely necessary. This tendency may be even stronger when parents and grandparents model majority

behaviors in hopes of providing the best opportunities for their children.

Maintenance and Revitalization of Minority Languages

As is common in mainland Southeast Asia, a single national language is typically employed to promote national identity and unity. This is often supported by a language policy designed to promote and develop that language. However, indigenous ethnic and immigrant minority groups may be marginalized, leading to a decline in the use of their languages (Bradley 2019a). Political objectives repeatedly seek to emphasize the unity of the nation, supported by the ideology of one nation carrying a singular national identity.

Apart from private initiatives on social media, there are no official efforts in Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia to revitalize and maintain the Kui language. However, efforts such as producing books and other materials to educate in minority languages have been made for some other languages in southern Thailand, as noted by researchers at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia at Mahidol University in Bangkok (e.g., Suwilai 2006; Sumittra 2013). Furthermore, bilingual education work has been conducted with the Hmong in Chiang Rai province (Suwilai 2006). Compared to other minority languages in Thailand, Kui still retains a relatively high number of active speakers; however, as mentioned in the introduction, it is marked as endangered. Additionally, researchers continue to study the rituals and practices of minorities and

are engaged in further investigations into endangered languages, focusing on their documentation, revitalization, maintenance, preservation, and education (e.g., Suwilai 2018; Bradley 2019b).

Digital Participation and the Extinction of Minority Languages Online

Though a significant number of minorities are present in Thailand, the use of social media by linguistic minorities has received comparatively little attention in previous research. Generally, lesser-known and especially unwritten languages cannot be used directly in online communication. In many cases, this is due to availability issues, forcing users to adopt one of the major languages supported by social media platforms. When minority language speakers wish to participate using a language without a proper writing system, they must resort to other writing systems. Furthermore, minority languages with their own writing systems are rarely used in online communication. Researchers have traced the reasons for such developments in minority speakers in Europe, such as Frisian (Belmar 2020).

In terms of minority participation in online communication and social media, Belmar & Heyen (2021) show that participation can still take place without written or spoken language, for example, through videos, pictures, voice messages, and other alternatives; they argue that written language is just one medium. Therefore, the absence of a writing system or the unavailability of a minority language on specific platforms like Facebook or YouTube does not entirely exclude minorities. However, it would be naive to assume

that all online activities can be conducted without the use of language. If members of a minority wish to participate in any way, they must still use a language at least for account registration, website dashboard menus, etc., and these are almost never minor languages like Lao or Khmer, even though they are national languages, let alone minority languages like Kui, Pacoh, or So. Moreover, translation software that delivers satisfactory results is not available for minority languages.

While social media use has seen a notable rise across Southeast Asia in recent years,⁶ not all languages are represented equally. In the digital domain, some minority languages are not represented at all. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. Firstly, only available language options can be used; if certain languages are not offered, they cannot be selected. Secondly, the speakers themselves determine which languages they use in the digital domain; this decision is influenced by factors beyond their linguistic abilities. Many factors impact the choice of a *lingua franca*, such as English, the majority language of the target group (e.g., Thai), or an unwritten variation or dialect of a minority language.

While some research on the use of social media by European minority languages has been conducted by scholars such as Belmar (2018, 2020), Belmar & Glass (2019), and Belmar & Heyen (2021), there is relatively little research available on Southeast Asian minorities'

⁶ From January 2017 to January 2018, Thailand observed an 11% increase in social media users (Chaffey 2024). Since that time, the number of users has undoubtedly increased significantly (Kemp 2024).

online presence and social media use (Siebenhütter 2022). The primary reasons for not using a minority language on social media were identified by Belmar and colleagues in an online survey of 259 participants representing 54 different native languages, including 76.8% minority speakers. According to Belmar (2018: 18, 2020), the reasons for non-use included fear of being misunderstood by friends who do not speak the minority language (64.9%), lack of knowledge regarding the correct way to write in the minority language (13.5%), fear of embarrassment due to mistakes (20.3%), lack of fluency (27%), and preference for another language (12.2%).

In his 2013 study, András Kornai traces the digital decline and subsequent resurgence of a language. As a language dies in the digital age, its functionality is gradually lost, affecting all areas of communication, from daily interactions via SMS and email to online commerce. The loss of prestige is evident in the most literal sense: a language not available online is effectively nonexistent. This means that digital natives do not develop digital skills in their native language. In contrast, the digital rise of a language represents a process in which the language gains more digital functions and prestige, while its speakers develop increasing digital skills.

Although many languages appear to be well-preserved in the analog world, over 95% of all languages have not yet been digitized (Kornai 2013). The most crucial indicator of a language's vitality in the analog world is the size and generational composition of its community. In the digital domain, however, the key factor is the number of individuals exposed to digital technology from an

early age. Once a language community starts creating content through text messages, blogs, and wikis, it can be reasonably assumed that younger generations will follow suit. Subsequently, digital forums such as Facebook are likely to be used by parents and grandparents to maintain communication with their children. Passive consumption of digital material in a common language is irrelevant and potentially detrimental to the survival of an endangered language. Furthermore, passive web presence can be distinguished from active web presence. The former is indicative of preservation efforts, while the latter represents digital vitality.

To more precisely calculate the share of different languages in the total content of the Internet, Pimienta et al. (2009), among others, are working on methods to determine the relative power of a language using various indicators. These include software downloads, the number of users on certain social media platforms, and Wikipedia usage. "No Wikipedia, no ascent", sums up Kornai (2013: 3) regarding the importance of this knowledge platform. A language that is not used on major online platforms like Wikipedia is unlikely to play a significant role in the future. As of June 2024, Wikipedia lists 316 active language versions. Kui is not represented on Wikipedia, along with many other minority languages in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Kornai (2013: 9) estimates that no more than a third of the languages that existed when Wikipedia was founded in January 2001 will make the transition to the digital age.

According to the latter, digital advancement requires the use of a

language in a variety of digital contexts. The survival of a language in the digital age is essentially blocked for local language variants whose speakers had already ceded two critical areas to dominant languages by the time of the industrial revolution: prestige and core functional areas. Moreover, a large number of speakers does not necessarily equate to a large web presence. For example, Piedmontese has around two million speakers but very little web presence, while Faroese, with only 50,000 speakers, boasts a high-quality Wikipedia presence (Kornai 2013: 9).

Out of the 7,000 languages believed to still be alive, Kornai (2013: 10) predicts that perhaps 2,500 will survive another century in the traditional sense, with only 10% of these surviving digitally. The rest will either become digital heritage (like Nynorsk) or face digital extinction (like Mandinka). In the context of a 12-year study on linguistic diversity on the Internet (Pimienta, Prado & Blanco 2009), the frequency of languages in online searches and the ratio compared to the use of English were examined. Both software and operating systems are usually only available in English or other major languages.

A common method of assessing the appropriateness of online content for a certain population and the state of linguistic diversity worldwide is to compare the estimated number of Internet users who speak a language with the estimated percentage of websites available in that language. More than 50% of all web content is provided in English, yet only 25% of all Internet users speak English. Pimienta

et al. (2009) question the accuracy of this common method of recording languages on the Internet.

There is an overall research gap on minority languages in the digital world. The majority of research on language in the context of social media focuses on major languages (e.g., Tagg & Seargeant 2015). Studies on minority groups in Thailand and Laos and their use of social media have mainly concentrated on healthcare (e.g., Haenssger, Nutch & Zanello 2021) or language documentation (Siripen et al. 2021). Others examine the connection between identity and language and their representation on platforms like Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Bolander 2017) and, more broadly, linguistic diversity and multilingualism in online communication (e.g., Leppänen, Kytölä & Westinen 2017).

Kui Online Presence, Social Media Use, and Online Communication

Interviews and questionnaires indicate that Kui language is not widely used in social media and online communication. Kui has no Wikipedia page (as there is no Kui script, but also no page in Kui using Thai, Lao, or Khmer script), nor are there language options in platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, or other services. However, Kui speakers do use Facebook and other messenger services, commonly accessed by the Thai population, using Thai, English, and sometimes other languages such as Khmer. According to recent data and my own observations, Facebook remains highly popular in Thailand, with a penetration rate of around 91% in the third quarter of 2023. With 50



FIGURE 1: Screenshots of Kui World’s Day (วันกួយโลก) social media banner, 9-10 March 2019 © Kui Association/Facebook

million Facebook users in Thailand that year, the platform is the leading social media network in the country. Additionally, Thailand ranks among the top social media users in Southeast Asia, with other platforms like the Japanese service LINE also widely used (Kemp 2024).

Surveys on Kui social media use, conducted between Fall 2018 and Summer 2020, show a strong preference for online platforms. Even though Kui people rank as one of the lowest-income social groups in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, they use social media at levels comparable to other socioeconomic groups.

Kui speakers are aware of their minority status in the three countries and many organize online to stay connected with other Kui members across the region. These virtual interactions often lead to in-person meetings and festivals, such as “Kui World’s Day” (วันกួយโลก) in Ban Taklang (บ้าน ตากกลาง),

Tha Tum district, Surin province, in Thailand [FIGURE 1], and the “Kui Cultural Festival Cambodia–Thailand–Lao” in Pal Hal Village (ភូមិប៉ាល់ពាល), Krong Preah Vihear, in Cambodia [FIGURE 2].

However, communication within these groups typically happens in Thai, which serves as a *lingua franca* for Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Even though Kui speakers, especially those under 40, are active on social media, most posts are in Thai or Khmer. This is because, through exposure to Thai media, a significant portion of Khmer and Lao speakers, particularly in border areas, understand Thai well and often speak it fluently. Thai speakers, in contrast, do not have the same level of understanding or fluency in Lao or Khmer. For instance, a Kui from northern Cambodia may communicate with a Kui co-organizer in Thailand using Thai via Facebook to plan a joint Kui festival, as Thai is the most



FIGURE 2: Screenshot of “Kui Cultural Festival Cambodia–Thailand–Lao” announcement in Khmer and English, 21 January 2020 © Kui Tak/Facebook

accessible language for both parties. Kui dialects vary significantly across villages and, while proficiency in Kui is not uniform, Thai is the preferred regional medium for communication.

A similar pattern was observed in northeast Thailand, where a married Kui couple from Surin province, despite their strong ties to Kui heritage, often switched to Thai when speaking to each other. Their explanation was that it was simply faster and easier to communicate in Thai, which everyone spoke fluently due to its necessity in daily life. While Kui language proficiency varied between them, Thai provided a common foundation for communication. Additionally, the Facebook group “The Kui People Association of Thailand” (ชมรมชาวกูยแห่งประเทศไทย)⁷ has become a popular online forum for Kui speakers, and the

⁷ See: <https://www.facebook.com/THEKUIASSOCIATION/> (accessed 18 February 2025).

group “Kui Tak” (ក្លយតាក់),⁸ maintained by Kui speakers in Cambodia, had 2,517 followers in February 2025 [FIGURE 3].

Kui speakers generally take pride in their ethnic identity. As I have observed (Siebenhütter 2022: 182–183), they often proudly affirm their heritage, with some explicitly noting their ancestral roots in Kui–Kui wedding traditions. However, younger Kui speakers, such as a group of schoolgirls in Ubon Ratchathani province, may occasionally downplay their ethnic background to avoid ridicule. However, a young Kui speaker from Buriram province even ran a YouTube channel dedicated to teaching Kui [FIGURE 4].⁹

⁸ See: <https://www.facebook.com/kuitakpage/> (accessed 18 February 2025).

⁹ Swatsh Ayaze channel with 315 subscribers on 18 February 2025. See: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXBfL6gm8IRu12Zb1Cwtndw>.

facebook



FIGURE 3: Homepage of the Facebook group “Kui Tak”, 18 February 2025

© Kui Tak/Facebook

Some Kui speakers also write Kui using Thai and Khmer characters on Facebook. A recent analysis of 95 comments in English, Khmer, and Thai scripts from a social media discussion about the Kui language revealed the following insights:

1. 20 comments offered new insights or personal opinions, such as “It is the responsibility of parents and elders to maintain their customs and language”, and “I am a Kui from Preah Vihear province in Cambodia, and I really want to meet Kui people from Surin and Sisaket”.
2. 37 comments, including 16 positive remarks like “I love Khmer” and “I am Kui from Surin province, Thailand; I’m proud to be Kui”, often included

personal assessments or comparisons with other languages.

3. Three comments addressed issues related to land rights for Kui people in Cambodia and Thailand, a frequent topic in discussions about ethnic minority rights in the border regions (Keating 2013).

4. 14 comments, some of which were offensive, had little relevance to the video content, with some relating to Thai politics.

In summary, a significant proportion of Kui people are active in social media and online communication, using Thai, Lao, and Khmer, alongside English, to communicate online. In daily life, when Kui or another minority language is not an option, they typically use these larger regional or national

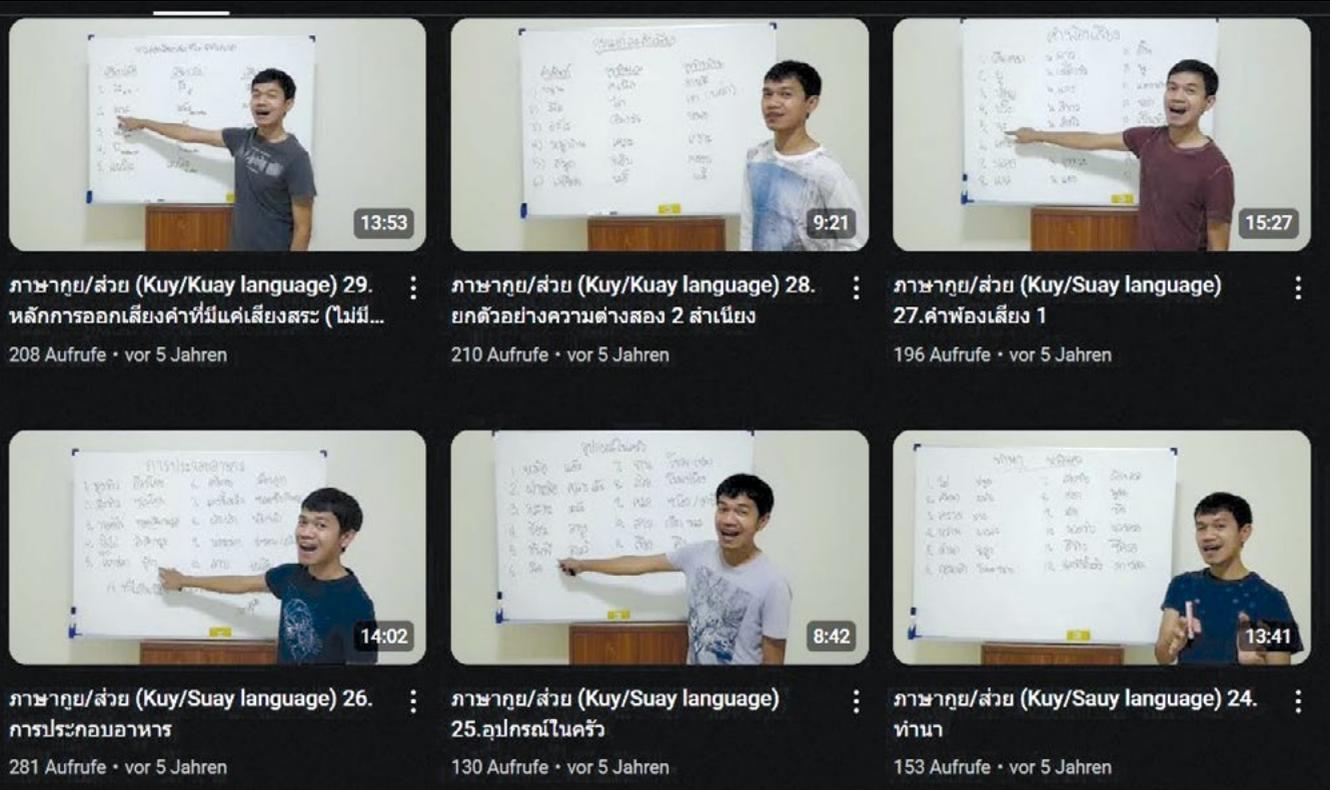


FIGURE 4: Screenshots of Kui teaching on YouTube channel Swatch Ayaze, 18 February 2025 © Swatch Ayaze/YouTube

languages. There is a clear interest in preserving Kui heritage, with many expressing a desire for a dedicated Kui alphabet to support their cultural legacy. However, following Kornai’s (2013) predictions for the survival of minority languages in the digital age, the future of Kui in digital communication appears uncertain—along with that of many other minor languages.

The idea that the loss of a language inevitably means the demise of its culture, however, should be approached with caution. While the decline of a language is often seen as indicative of cultural decline (Schulze 2010), this view is too simplistic and does not always reflect the complex relationship between language, identity, and culture.

The discussion in this article covered the general patterns of offline and online communication as well as the spread of Kui minority media. It also explored speakers’ attitudes toward

both minority (Kui) and majority languages (mainly Thai) and the reasons behind their language choices in social media and other online communication. Among the factors influencing language

choice, social goals, and the desire for life improvement (e.g., finding work, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging) were found to be significant. More often, the lack of online availability of the minority language was cited as a reason for choosing Thai, Lao, Khmer, or English in online communication and social media activities. The presence of minority languages in online communication and social media has been under-researched, but preliminary findings suggest that increasing digitalization—the effects of which are already becoming apparent—could have a detrimental impact on linguistic diversity.

In the case of the Kui (Kuay or Suai) populations in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, the widespread use of national languages for online and offline participation does not lead to an immediate loss of their minority identity and culture. However, the use of minority languages in online communication is generally less frequent than the use of dominant languages; this is not uncommon for Kuis.

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Regarding attitudes toward the use of minority languages on social media, I found that these attitudes were predominantly pragmatic for the Kuis, with speakers adhering to economic principles. In other words, speakers use what is understood and prefer what is easiest to implement. Speakers rarely, if ever, evaluate their language choices, at least in conversation.

In conclusion, Seidenfaden's 1952 observations do not require a radically new direction over the past 70 years. While the Kui language has not completely died out, ethnic Kui people in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia are increasingly shifting toward the use of Thai, Lao, or Khmer in everyday life. Not all Kui speakers are fluent in their mother tongue and some do not even speak it at all. Thus, Seidenfaden's conclusion that "They [the Kuis in Thailand] are fast becoming Thai in language and culture" (1952: 180) remains a fitting description of Kui life, with the caveat that language loss or shift does not necessarily result in the loss of minority identity and culture.

recommendations. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to Nicolas Revire for inviting me to write this article and for his feedback and to all the Kui interviewees for their valuable contributions.

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**A BUDDHIST PROCESSION INAUGURATED
IN A 7TH-CENTURY INSCRIPTION FROM ÓC EO (K. 1426)
AND THE ANCIENT TOPONYM TAMANDARAPURA**

Chhom Kunthea,¹ Dominic Goodall² & Arlo Griffiths³

ABSTRACT—This article presents a reading and translation of inscription K. 1426, discovered recently at the Óc Eo archeological site in the Mekong Delta. The stela, inscribed in Southeast Asian Brāhmī script typical of the 7th century, references King Jayavarman I (654–694 CE). Face A features Sanskrit stanzas detailing a royal grant to the Buddhist Sandalwood Monastery (Candanavihāra) for an annual Vaiśākha full moon procession and donations to support the procession of a Buddha image. Face B, in Old Khmer, reiterates these details and outlines the management of this monastery. The new inscription sheds light on early Buddhist rituals in Óc Eo–Ba Thê and identifies Tamandarapura, possibly the site’s ancient name in southern Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Candanavihāra (Sandalwood Monastery); Jayavarman I; Mekong Delta; Óc Eo; Procession of Buddha Statue; Tamandarapura

A New Epigraphic Discovery

An expansive archeological excavation was conducted at Óc Eo–Ba Thê site (An Giang province) and Nền Chùa site (Kiên Giang province) from 2017 to 2020 by three Vietnamese institutes, the Institute of Imperial Citadel Studies, the Institute of Archaeology, and the Southern Institute of Social Sciences

(Bùi 2023: 55). The inscribed stela studied below was found in an excavation pit on Mount Ba Thê, about 100 meters northeast of the Linh Sơn pagoda, in October 2019.

Ba Thê Mountain has been inhabited since the prehistoric period, as evidenced from the early objects found at its foot (Aymonier 1900: 144). Louis Malleret’s 1944 archeological excavation revealed human occupancy on the whole mountain in the pre-Angkorian period (6th–8th centuries CE). The mountain was then the main religious site of Óc Eo, the most important trading center of the

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³ EFEO, Jakarta.

Funan polity as attested in Chinese records from the 3rd century CE to the 7th century CE (Harris 2023: 224). The city was linked, by its extensive canal system, to a port on the coast and to the city of Angkor Borei about 100 km to the north, considered by many scholars to have been the Funanese capital.

At least 18 statues, complete or fragmentary, and two stone inscriptions have been discovered at Ba Thê Mountain (Malleret 1959: 76–79, 92). The majority of the statues belonged to the pre-Angkorian period and are classifiable as “Hindu”; more specifically they relate to the worship of Viṣṇu as supreme god. One of the inscriptions, K. 3 (7th–8th centuries CE), records in Sanskrit a donation of Kumārambha to Śiva named Śrīvardhamāna.⁴ Another, K. 4 (10th century CE), written in Old Khmer, is fragmentary; only separate words are readable (“god” or “king”, “gardens”, “female singers”, “female dancers”, “rice mortar” and “fortnight”, see Aymonier 1900: 145). The 2017–2020 excavations thus enriched the religious history of the mountain with the finding of a new and early Buddhist inscription given the inventory number K. 1426 and a stone tablet depicting what has been interpreted as a meditating buddha (Bùi 2023: 57). The meditating figure with folded hands might, however, be a bodhisattva.

⁴ In general, we remove the honorific Śrī when citing proper names, such as Candanavihāra and Jayavarman, as is the convention in most secondary literature; but this is an instance where the element śrī- appears to form an integral part of the name Śrīvardhamāna, “growing in prosperity”, as is suggested by the extra honorific in the collocation *śrīmān śrīvarddhamānaḥ* in stanza 3 of K. 3. Comparable are such Vaiṣṇava theonyms as Śrīdhara, “bearer of Śrī”, and Śrīnivāsa, “abode of Śrī”.

Epigraphical sources suggest that Buddhism spread in the Mekong Delta region as early as the 6th century CE (Harris 2023: 214). At least 12 inscriptions with Buddhist content, which are datable to the 6th, 7th, or 8th centuries CE, have been found in the three southern Cambodian provinces of Ta Keo (K. 40, K. 755, K. 790, K. 1266, K. 1355, K. 1455), Kompong Speu (K. 820), and Prey Veng (K. 49, K. 1247), and in the three Vietnamese provinces of Trà Vinh (K. 884), Long An (K. 1330), and now An Giang where the site of Óc Eo is located (K. 1426). This figure represents half of the inscriptions with Buddhist content found in the whole of the EFEO’s K. inventory for the pre-Angkorian period; the other half consists of 12 inscriptions from the central and northern regions, namely in the three Cambodian provinces of Kompong Thom (K. 163), Kratie (K. 132), and Siem Reap (K. 244), and in the four Thai provinces of Lopburi (K. 577), Nakhon Ratchasima (K. 388, K. 389, K. 400 A, K. 987, K. 1000, K. 1009), Sa Kaeo (K. 505), and Udon Thani (K. 981) [MAP 1].⁵

⁵ It may be noted that, depending on the context, we use the word “Cambodian” to designate either the contemporary nation state or, in a historical sense, as the English equivalent of the indigenous term Kambujā, in much the same way as speaking about medieval “France” implies a rather different polity with a rather different territory from that of contemporary France. The Cambodian corpus consists of inscriptions found in present-day Cambodia and some parts of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Some inscriptions that are not Cambodian by this or any definition have nonetheless been included in the EFEO inventory and thus have K. numbers. Among the inscriptions from the Thai provinces cited above, for example, K. 388, K. 389, K. 577, K. 981, K. 987, and K. 1009 contain expressions which reflect Mon epigraphic culture to some extent. Two more inscriptions probably of Mon influence,



MAP 1: Distribution of K. inscriptions with Buddhist content from the pre-Angkorian period © EFEO/Chea Socheat

The 12 listed Buddhist inscriptions of the Mekong Delta were written in Old Khmer, Sanskrit, Pali, or Prakrit. While some texts were locally composed, others were excerpts of verses of the Buddhist Canon, i.e., the *ye dhammā* verse and citations of the Buddha's words (*duḥkhasamuppāda*) which summarize the four noble truths. Local compositions cover such matters as a donation to a buddha or a monastery, the eulogy of a king's father for his devotion to the Triple Gem, and the transfer of wealth of two Buddhist monks to their grand nephew.

The Inscriptions of Jayavarman I's Reign

Among the aforementioned early Buddhist inscriptions from the Mekong Delta, two belong to the reign of King Jayavarman I, i.e., K. 49 and the newly discovered K. 1426 from Óc Eo. The king was a Śaiva devotee who also gave patronage to Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist beneficiaries. The inscription K. 1426, although undated, mentions the king's name and the formulaic phrase in Old Khmer language, *ājñā vraḥ kamratān añ ni* (អាជ្ញាប្រៀះកម្រតាណីអញ្ជីនី), "order of My Lord" (see below). To date, 21 inscriptions mentioning either this king's name or the formulaic phrase attested only during this reign are known. No other pre-Angkorian monarch seems to have left as abundant and varied an inscripational record as Jayavarman I.

i.e., K. 404 from Phu Khiao Kao and K. 965 from Hin Tang (both of 7th-8th centuries, Chaiyaphum province, Thailand) are not included in our study in spite of their Buddhist character because doubtful lettering does not allow a satisfactory reading and translation. But this is not the place to adjudicate the cultural and ethnic background of each inscription.

The inscriptions of his reign cover a vast area, from Wat Phu (Champasak province, Laos) in the north to Óc Eo in the south of Vietnam [MAP 2]. At least 13 of his inscriptions are from the Mekong Delta whereas six are from the northern region, and two discovered in Thailand are of unknown provenance (K. 1240, K. 1546). While some inscriptions are undated, others bear dates between 576 Śaka (654 CE) and 616 Śaka (694 CE).

The dates of the reign of King Jayavarman I are controversial. The reign is often believed to start in 657 CE as recorded in two of his inscriptions, namely K. 447 and K. 493 both dated 579 Śaka. However, Dominic Goodall and Nicolas Revire (2021: 271, n. 21) propose 654 CE instead, the date of K. 1201 (576 Śaka), an unpublished inscription of the king's reign from Prasat Houay Kadian in Champasak province.

Determining when the reign ended is more difficult. George Coédès (1968: 72) at one time believed that it ended after 690 CE, probably based on Sanskrit-Khmer inscription K. 1004, which mentions the name Jayavarman and the date 612 Śaka (= 691 CE).⁶ However, in his "Genealogy of the Kings of Cambodia" at the end of the same book of 1968, Coédès gives 657–681 CE as the dates of the king's reign. The year 681 CE is the conversion from 602 Śaka, the date of the Khmer inscription K. 451 from Siem Reap province. This text refers to King Jayavarman I by his posthumous name Śivapura; hence Coédès's later assumption in his genealogy that the king could not have been alive after 681 CE.

Claude Jacques (1982: 231) considered 691 CE the latest date of the king's

⁶ See: <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSCIK01004>.



MAP 2: Distribution of inscriptions belonging to the reign of Jayavarman I © EFEO/Chea Socheat

reign, a hypothesis which was followed by Goodall & Revire (2021). Michael Vickery (1998: 358–366) questioned the authenticity of inscription K. 1004 and favored the date 681. Although the inscription contains some doubtful words and might be “the result of a late Angkor-period attempt to recopy and/or rewrite a 7th-century charter” as Vickery stated, it is meaningful as a whole. Perhaps it would be more pertinent to question whether the posthumous name used in K. 451 (602 Śaka) really refers to King Jayavarman I. This problem was first raised by Coedès (1952: 56–57) on the grounds that another inscription of the king (K. 561, dated one year later than K. 451, i.e., 603 Śaka) suggests that he was still alive. Coedès proposed two solutions: (1) either that even the 7th-century inscriptions hitherto ascribed to Jayavarman I in fact belonged to two different kings (who could either have reigned successively or overlapped in time but reigned over different territories)⁷ or (2) that the dates 602 and 603 Śaka are in one case expressed in elapsed and in the other in current reckoning.⁸ In brief, his hypothesis was that the king died in 681 CE. However, the newly found inscription K. 1431 (Prasat Pram, Kratie) rules out this hypothesis, for the king was still ruling in his capital Purandarapura in 608 Śaka (= 686 CE).⁹ Moreover, it is necessary to take into consideration the

inscription K. 1240, fragmentary and kept in a private collection. It is a stela with a sculpture of Gaṇeśa in bas-relief on the top. It has been cut off under the second line of the text. Fortunately, the remaining letters of the third line allow an important restitution.

- (1) 𑀓 𑀓odaśottara-ṣaṣṣata
śaka-parigraha daśamī ket-
Āṣāḍha
(2) svāti-nakṣatra candra-
divasa-vāra Āy·kanloṅ·puran-
darapura 𑀓
(3) (Ā)j[ñ]ā (vraḥ) [kamratān]·
[Añ]·[n]i {5}·{2}·{2}

[Year] amounting to six hundred and sixteen of the Śaka [era], tenth day of the waxing [fortnight of the month of] Āṣāḍha, lunar mansion Svāti, Monday, at the palace of Purandarapura. Order of His Majesty [...]¹⁰

Dominique Soutif (2009: 424–425) proposes that the inscription belongs to the reign of King Jayavarman I's daughter, Queen Jayadevī, for he assumes that the queen stayed in Purandarapura, which may have been only one of the royal residences of King Jayavarman I, before moving to her palace of Kāmyārāma, as mentioned in inscription K. 904 (635 Śaka = 713 CE). However, it would be simpler to understand that the king was still ruling in his capital Purandarapura in 616 Śaka (= 694 CE). Moreover, the formulaic phrase *ājñā*

⁷ That there was another epigraphically attested 8th-century king Jayavarman (between Jayavarman I and Jayavarman II), a king now widely referred to as Jayavarman I *bis*, seems now established as a certainty. On this issue, see Goodall 2015: 74–76.

⁸ According to Roger Billard and J.C. Eade (2006: 402), the conversion of the date in K. 451 is 17 May 680 CE whereas that in K. 561 is either 681 or 682 CE.

⁹ See: <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSCIK01431>.

¹⁰ Dominique Soutif (2009: 416–425) edited only the first two lines of the text. Our reading and restitution of the third line is based on the photograph of the inscription found in Soutif's dissertation (2009: C).

vraḥ kamratān añ ni “order of My Lord” is a clear indicator of Jayavarman I’s reign, for it appears in at least ten of his inscriptions (K. 38, K. 44, K. 49, K. 426, K. 502, K. 818, K. 940, K. 1240, K. 1426 and K. 1431). The inscriptions belonging to preceding reigns use the phrase *ājñā vraḥ kamratān añ* without the final particle *ni*. The expression *ājñā vraḥ kamratān añ* or *ājñā vraḥ kamratān añ ni* is not attested in any inscriptions of the few remaining pre-Angkorian rulers such as Jayadevī or Jayavarman I *bis* and disappeared in the Angkorian period.

In short, if we adopt the new dates provided in K. 1201 and K. 1240, Jayavarman I appears to have had a long reign of at least forty years from 654 to 694 CE.

Physical Description of the Inscription

The stela newly discovered at Óc Eo is made of sandstone. Its upper silhouette has the shape of a downturned curly brace. Narrowing towards the bottom, the stela measures 64 × 32/26 × 8 cm. It has no tenon at its base, but the bottom 15 cm were left blank, as though this part was originally intended to be inserted into the ground or into a stone mortise. When discovered, it lay on the ground, somehow broken into two fragments on one face and in four fragments on another. The pre-modern breakage has not been repaired yet. The stela is now kept in the Óc Eo Museum.¹¹

The stela is inscribed on its two broad faces, Face A in Sanskrit verse and Face B in Old Khmer prose. Both faces are decorated with a blossoming lotus above one or two strings of pearls (two on A, only one on B) at the top of 14 lines of text and one string of pearls below the text on each face [FIGURES 1–2]. The Khmer text runs continuously in one column whereas the Sanskrit one is arranged in two columns, even-numbered verse quarters (*pādas*) in one and odd-numbered ones in the other. Both texts are written in a form of script typical of the second half of the 7th century, without long descenders on the characters *ka* and *ra*. Since no other king going by the name Jayavarman is known to have ruled in the 7th century, it is clear that the king Jayavarman mentioned in the Sanskrit text must have been Jayavarman I (ca. 654–ca. 694 CE). Besides its paleographic aspect, the inscription shares two main features of its content with other inscriptions of the same king: (1) as already stated, the opening expression *ājñā vraḥ kamratān añ ni*, i.e., “order of My Lord”, and (2) the details of the threat of punishment found at the end of the Khmer portion (see below).¹²

More specifically, the character *ra* consists of a double stroke and does not extend farther down than the body of other characters. While the subscript of the character *ṇa* in the word *pūrṇṇamī* in the Khmer text and *pūrṇṇodita-* in the Sanskrit one still preserves the “x” shape (characteristic of the 5th and

¹¹ At the time of completing this article, none of us has yet had the chance to observe the stone directly. We rely on information shared by Nguyễn Khánh Trung Kiên (2019) and Đỗ Trường Giang (2023).

¹² For more discussion of the characteristics of the inscriptions of King Jayavarman I, see Vickery 1998: 26, 165–168, and for his dates, see Goodall & Revire 2021: 271, n. 21.

6th centuries), the character *ṇa* above it has the two sides of the “x” split and connected by a stroke at the bottom. Again, the decoration of the stela and the paleographic characteristics of the script present similarities with several other inscriptions of Jayavarman I. The stela from Phum Chrei (K. 563, Kompong Speu), for example, also has a decorative lotus at the top and a string of pearls below the text.¹³ The character *kā* does not have a long descendant loop, except the ones in lines 9 and 12 of the Sanskrit text. The dominance of the *ka* without the descendant loop can also be found in the doorjamb from Tuol Kuk Preah (K. 493, Prey Veng, dated 657 CE); by contrast, the stela from Preah Kuhea Luong (K. 44, Kampot, dated 674 CE) presents more characters *ka* with the descendant loop than the other type, whereas the two types are equally represented in K. 563.¹⁴ In addition, the vowel-marker *i* is written as a small circle and the vowel-marker *ī* is slightly larger with a horizontal stroke in the middle in K. 1426. In some other inscriptions, such as K. 493, the latter appears like a spiral turning to the left.¹⁵

Synopsis

Face A contains seven Sanskrit stanzas in *anuṣṭubh* meter. The first is an invocation to the Buddha. Stanzas II and III

praise the fieriness and righteousness of the ruling King Jayavarman I. The *raison d'être* of the inscription is mentioned in stanzas IV and V: these constitute an edict of King Jayavarman I concerning a monastery named after *candana* “sandalwood” (*candanavihāra*, ចន្ទនវិហារ) and they decree the use of funds—not given by the king—for the annual procession of an image of the Buddha on the full moon day of the month of Vaiśākha (April–May). Stanzas VI and VII stipulate that the slaves, cows, buffaloes, gardens, fields, servants, etc., given to the Buddha are not to be stolen and are under the protection of the Governor of Tamandarapura (តម្រាបនៃបុរី).

Face B is a 14-line text in Old Khmer. It echoes the Sanskrit text in what is said about the annual procession of the Buddha’s statue of the Candanavihāra on the full moon day of Vaiśākha as an order of King Jayavarman I. It also provides details of the management of the wealth of the monastery including servants, slaves, cows, buffaloes, etc. The last two lines warn that those who flout the order of the king shall be punished.

A Famously Named Monastery and the Procession of a Buddha Statue

To date, the Cambodian epigraphic corpus contains at least 20 premodern inscriptions (7th–14th centuries CE) formulated in Old Khmer or in Sanskrit that mention the term *vihāra*.¹⁶ The name *candana*, “sandalwood”, given to the monastery with which K. 1426 is associated, reproduces the name of an ancient monastery constructed at the

¹³ For the edition and translation of the inscription K. 563, see Cœdès 1942: 198–199.

¹⁴ For the edition and translation of the inscriptions K. 44 and K. 493, see Cœdès 1942: 10–13, 149–152.

¹⁵ The paleographic data mentioned can be corroborated by consulting the relevant EFEO estampages kept in Paris. For the inscriptions K. 44, K. 493 and K. 563, the corresponding estampages bear numbers n. 392, n. 250, and n. 414 respectively.

¹⁶ For a list of the inscriptions, see Chhom 2021–22: 235–236.

place in western India called Sopara today (and referred to as Śūrpāraka or Śupāranagara in Sanskrit sources) that evidently remained famous in Buddhist circles for centuries.¹⁷ For a survey of relevant archeological, epigraphic, scriptural, and literary sources from the Indian Buddhist tradition, we refer to Chapter 1 (Introduction) of the monograph by Joel Tatelman (2000) dedicated to the narrative cycle about a man called Pūrṇa who becomes the founder of the Sandalwood Monastery at Sopara.¹⁸ Given the fame of the earlier Candanavihāra, it may be assumed that the echo of the name here is a conscious one.¹⁹ Whether or not it also indicates

some sort of affiliation with the older homonymous monastery is another question. Potentially relevant elements for the question of why the same name could have been given to a monastery in an ancient mercantile hub of the Mekong Delta are the emphasis on ocean-going trade in the narrative traditions about the Indian namesake and the fact that both at Sopara and at Óc Eo, the sea lies to the west.²⁰

Another point of interest for historians of religion is that the new inscription furnishes the earliest reference in the Cambodian epigraphic record to the procession of an image, here of the Buddha, to mark a chariot festival. We know of no other contemporary evidence from the region for such religious processions, but must extrapolate from Angkor-period allusions, for instance that of 902 Śaka in stanza XI of K. 356 (as re-translated by Goodall 2022: 250), which mentions the gift of a golden Viṣṇu (*harim... haimam*) mounted on a silver Garuḍa (*tāratārksyasthitam*) that was to process in festivals (*utsavayāyinam*).²¹ This image too must have been of portable size, either in stone, metal, or wood.²² Such practices

¹⁷ This persistence is revealed, among other evidence, by a Nepalese manuscript of 1015 CE transmitting three Buddhist texts in Sanskrit (Cambridge University Library, MS Skt Add 1643). The illustration on f. 216 verso, which can be viewed at: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01643/434> (accessed on 4 November 2023), is labelled *śupāranagare vulbhukavītarāgākṛte candranavihārah 12*. The online catalogue gives a detailed bibliography of published accounts of the manuscript. Previous scholars have observed that *candrana°* must be a copying error for *candana°*. We believe it may not yet have been observed that the perplexing phrase *vulbhukavītarāga-kṛte*, which would appear to mean that the monastery was considered to have been founded by a sage or *bodhisattva* (*vītarāga*) bearing the odd name Vulbhuka, starts to make sense once one sees, upon close inspection of the string *vulbhuka*, that it is in all likelihood a result of careless copying from another manuscript which read *pūrṇaka*. The two strings can indeed be graphically similar in old Newari script. This gives us the expected name (with insignificant suffix *-ka*) of the founder of the monastery at Sopara. We wish to thank Pia Brancaccio, who made us aware of the reference to the famous Candanavihāra in this manuscript.

¹⁸ See also Lamotte 1988: 21, 298, 300, 680.

¹⁹ It was customary in Indian Buddhism to name monasteries after the lay people who donated them; see Schopen 1996 and Albery 2020: 511–516. So, the designation *śrī-candana-vihāra* could alternatively be understood as “monastery of [a layman named]

Candana”. But this seems less likely to us.

²⁰ There is also a Jain Candanavihāra in the town of Jalor at the foot of the hill Songiri, in Rajasthan (India), mentioned as having been “renovated some time earlier than the thirteenth century” by Upadhye in the introduction to Part 2 of his edition of the *Kuvalayamālā* (1970: 103). Back in a Buddhist context, near Legaing in central Myanmar, there is another Sandalwood Monastery, but the oldest historical evidence for its existence does not seem to predate the 16th century. See Moore 2023: 168–169, 237–238 (map 3.8.3), 352.

²¹ See also “Utsava-mūrti” in Bhattacharya 1961: 89–90.

²² Given the name of the monastery and the fact that a number of wooden buddha images, datable to the

can be traced back in the wider world of Sanskrit influence; the two earliest sources known to date are the canonical *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (ca. 2nd–3rd centuries or later) and the travel account of a Chinese Buddhist monk, Faxian (4th–5th centuries). Rules on Buddhist image processions which are found in the section of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* called *Uttaragrantha* mention festivals as occasions for monastic fund drives, but do not imply the use of a chariot in the processions (Schopen 2022: 103, 107).²³ However, a chariot festival was recorded in Faxian’s account as Cristina Bignami (2017: 198) has noted:

In contrast to what might be expected, the earliest surviving evidence for a chariot festival comes neither from South Asia nor from a Brahmanical background, but from the kingdom of Khotan. There, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Faxian witnessed and recorded a Buddhist chariot festival around the year 400 CE. The very fact that Faxian described a second Buddhist festival that he witnessed in the ancient city of Pataliputra (the modern city of Patna in Bihar) suggests

that chariot processions were widespread ritual practices throughout South Asia (and beyond) at the time of Faxian.

Bignami goes on to quote from Faxian’s descriptions of the festivities (2017: 199–200). The description of the festival at Pāṭaliputra begins as follows (p. 199):

Every year on the eighth day of the second month there is a procession of the images. On this occasion they construct a four-wheeled car, and erect upon it a tower of five stages composed of bamboos lashed together, the whole being supported by a centre-post resembling a large spear with three points in height twenty-two feet and more. So it looks like a pagoda. They then cover it with fine white linen, which they afterward paint with gaudy colours. Having made figures of the *dēvas* and decorated them with gold, silver and glass, they place them under canopies of embroidered silk. Then at the four corners (of the car) they construct niches (shrines) in which they place figures of Buddha in a sitting posture with a Bodhisattva standing in attendance. There are perhaps twenty cars thus prepared and differently decorated. During the day of the procession both priests and laymen assemble in great numbers.

6th or 7th centuries, have been found in the Mekong Delta (Boisselier 1991), it is tempting to speculate that a wooden image was intended. Namhee Noh (2021) reports that these images are made of wood of the Takien (*Hopea odorata*), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), or Tamanu (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) trees, rendering it less likely that a statue made specifically of sandalwood was intended.

²³ Some scholars have suggested that the *Vinaya* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādins* may have been followed by the majority of Buddhist monks in Cambodia around the 10th century; see Chhom 2021–22: 261.

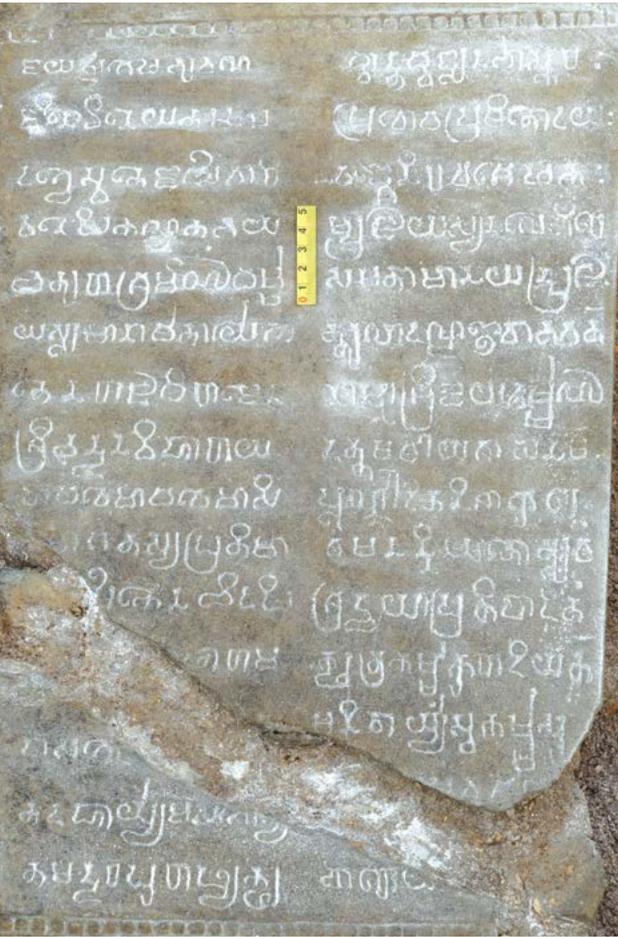
We note, incidentally, the mention of the “second month”, which we suppose corresponds to Vaiśākha, the second month of spring and of the year, in other words the same month in which our procession takes place. Moreover, the word *prāsāda* “temple, sanctuary, shrine, tower” in line 6 of the Khmer portion might refer to the pagoda-like chariot for a statue procession. Although the Khmer syntax allows two possible interpretations of the phrase *tve prāsāda panter vraḥ* (ព្រះ ព្រាសាទ បន្តិ តើ រៀះ), namely “build a *prāsāda* [and] organize a procession [of the statue of] the Lord” or “build a *prāsāda* [for] a procession [of the statue of] the Lord”, the latter seems preferable in the light of Faxian’s description. The Candanavihāra was probably already constructed, in durable materials (wood, brick, stone,

etc.), by the time of the royal order recording the donation to the monastery for the procession of the Buddha statue. For this statue a mobile “sanctuary-tower” (*prāsāda*) would have been built in disposable materials (wood, bamboo, etc.). Such a festival vehicle could clearly have been sufficiently elaborate to be referred to by the same word as that which normally designates temple towers, viz. *prāsāda*. We may compare the probably 7th-century prescription of an elaborate “chariot” (*vimāna*) made of wood, bamboo, and the like that was to have five niche-bearing aedicules and three storeys (*pañcāṇḍakam tribhaumam*) for the procession of a Śaiva manuscript in *Śivadharmottara* 2:45 (De Simini 2016: 378 and 396). Our inscription’s Kloñ Ñan was presumably a talented craftsman of this type of *prāsāda*.

Editorial Conventions

In the edition that follows, to represent the original text in romanized form we follow the conventions outlined in the DHARMA Transliteration Guide prepared by Dániel Balogh & Arlo Griffiths (2020), notably the use of · to represent the *virāma* sign and of capital letters to represent independent vowels combined with the use of *q* to represent cases where independent vowel characters are used as consonants in Khmer context. The indication by apostrophe ‘ of elision of *a-* in st. II is editorial. We further use the following editorial symbols.

- (...) surround graphic elements whose identification is uncertain but apparently in agreement with what is visible.
- [...] surround graphic elements that are entirely lost and are restored by conjecture.
- {n} surround a number of lost graphic elements corresponding to about *n akṣaras*.
- marks the gaps deliberately left blank to demarcate metrical units from one another.
- marks the spaces left blank between some characters in the Khmer text.



FIGURES 1a-b: Face A of stela (a) and its estampage (b)

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Edition

Face A [FIGS 1a-b]

- I.²⁴ (A1) jayaty aśeṣa-bhuvana²⁵
•dhvānta-dhvaṅsana-bhāskaraḥ
(A2) jino vineya-kamala-
•pravodha-prathitodayaḥ
- II.²⁶ (A3) dagdhe sva-tejasaivāri-
•vaṅśe nir-avaśeṣataḥ
(A4) vane '(p)i ka(ṅṭa)ka-bhaya
•m prajā yasya na lebhire

- III. (A5) catur-āsrama(r̥)ṁ dharmma-
•samatām ānayan prajā(h)
(A6) yas samānārthatāyogā
•t tulā-daṇḍa Ivābhavat
- IV. (A7) tena rājādhiraḥjena
•nāmnā śrī-jayavarmmaṅā
(A8) śrī-candana-vihārāya
•dattam arthāya śāsanam
- V.²⁷ (A9) mādhave mādhave māsi
•pūrṇṇodita-niśākare
(A10) [ta]thāgatasya pratimā-
•gamanan niyatotsavaṁ
- VI.²⁸ (A11) [Eta](s)[y](ai) kena cid api
•śraddhayā pratipāditam

²⁴ The roman numerals indicate Sanskrit stanzas, all of them in *anuṣṭubh* meter. Here, *pādas* a and c: *na-vipulā*.

²⁵ °*bhuvana*°: read °*bhuvana*°.

²⁶ c: *na-vipulā*.

²⁷ c: *bha-vipulā*.

²⁸ a: *na-vipulā*.

- (A12) dāsa-go-(mah)i(ṣ)ārāma-
 •kṣetra-karmmakarādi yat
 VII. (A13) tad ahāryyam asa[m]bho(g)
 ya•m anivāryyam sva-karmmasu
 (A14) tamandarapurādhyakṣa-
 •bhāro ya(m avagam)[yatām:]

Face B [FIGS 2a–b]

- (B1) Ājñā vraḥ kamratān· Añ· ni
 roḥ parihāra man·
 (B2) Oy· ta nā vraḥ kamratān·
 Añ· śrīcandana-
 (B3) vihāra _ gan· vnok· vraḥ
 kamratān· Añ· dai lah·
 (B4) gan ta saṃ paribhoga²⁹ lah·
 _ gan· pradāna qnak·
 (B5) lah· pre gui siddhi ta vraḥ
 kamratān· Añ·
 (B6) pre ge ta kloñ ñan·³⁰ Ai
 tamrān· tve prāsāda pan-
 (B7) ter· vraḥ ta gui pūrṇamī
 vaiśākha cracar· cnaṃ
 (B8) voṃ pre hau pak· tok· cmap·
 vnas· Amvi ta ge
 (B9) qnak· vrahha _ kñuṃ tmur·
 krapī daṃriṃ tpaḥ

²⁹ *saṃ paribhoga*: the reproductions at our disposal make it imaginable that the dot we interpret as *anusvāra* is actually accidental, which would allow reading *saparibhoga*. Previous scholars have sometimes hesitated between *saṃ paribhoga* and *saparibhoga* (see e.g. the note in Cœdès 1936 on the inscription K. 6). But it is probably undesirable to read *saparibhoga*, as the expression is attested multiple times with or without *p-* prefix as (*p*)*saṃ paribhoga*, often with clear presence of *anusvāra* (see further occurrences in the inscriptions K. 51, K. 163, K. 426, K. 561, K. 582, K. 600, K. 818, K. 904, K. 926 and K. 1275).

³⁰ *kloñ ñan·*: It might be read *kloñña n(aṃ)* “superintendent of temple (*naṃ* = *vnaṃ*)”, but this would yield a unique example of the word *vnaṃ* followed by the preposition *ai* “at”. Nevertheless, there are several examples in the pre-Angkorian inscriptions where *vnaṃ* stands in front of a name.

- (B10) sre karom dok _ voṃ tel·
 pre qnak· cralak·
 (B11) [voṃ] pre pāk· slā voṃ pre
 knar· c(k)op· ge voṃ
 (B12) [dap·]³¹ qnak· naṃ pitai col·
 [ka](m)l)uṇa Aṅgana
 (B13) ge [ta ce]r· gui ne(ḥ pa)r[i]
 hāra ta roḥ gui nehha
 (B14) ge (ce)[r· Ā](jñā) vraḥ
 kamratān· Añ· ge daṇḍa³²

Translation

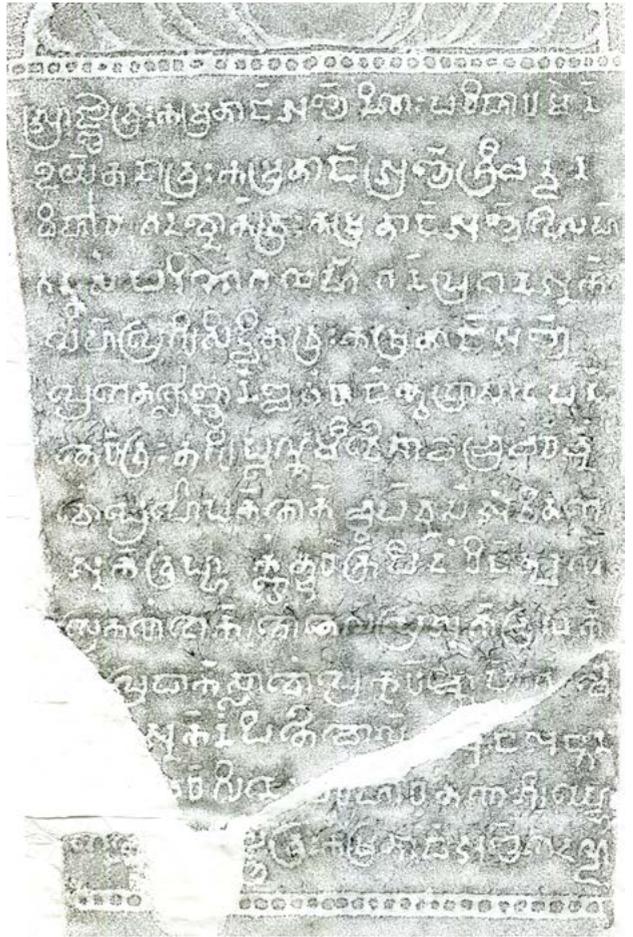
I. He is victorious (*jayati*), the Buddha (*jinaḥ*), a sun to destroy darkness (*dhvānta-dhvaṅsana-bhāskaraḥ*) throughout the world (*aśeṣa-bhuvana-*), whose rise is proclaimed by the awakening of his lotus-like disciples (*vineya-kamala-prabodha-prathitodayaḥ*).

II. After he burnt (*dagdhe*) completely (*nir-avaśeṣataḥ*) the race of his enemies (*ari-vañśe*) merely (*eva*) by his fieriness (*sva-tejasā*), his subjects (*prajāḥ*) experienced (*lebhire*) no (*na*) fear of thorns (*kaṅṭaka-bhayam*) even [when they were] in a forest (*vane 'pi*).

III. Leading (*ānayan*) his subjects (*prajāḥ*) to a state of being in balance in the Dharma (*dharma-samatām*) of those belonging to the four [orthodox] walks of life (*catur-āśramaṇām*), he became (*abhavat*), it seemed (*iva*), [impartial] like

³¹ The restitution of the world *dap* is based on both the meaning and the space on the stone. Given that the prohibitive word *dap* is followed by the word *pre* or *tel pre* in three previous phrases, the same wording is expected in the lost passage here. Nevertheless, the available space is too large for the word *pre* and too small for *tel pre*. The meaning of *dap* suits the context better than that of *pre* “to use, to order”.

³² Understand *daṇḍa*.



FIGURES 2a-b: Face B of stela (a) and its estampage (b)
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the rod of a pair of scales (*tulā-daṇḍaḥ*), because he possessed a sense of each [walk of life] being of equal value (*samānārthatāyogāt*).

IV. This (*tena*) overlord of kings (*rājādhirājena*), by name (*nāmnā*) the illustrious (*śrī-*) Jayavarman (*-jaya-varmmanā*), gave (*dattam*) the [following] charter (*śāsanam*) for the sake of wealth (*arthāya*) [given] for the benefit of the venerable (*śrī-*) Sandalwood Monastery (*-candana-vihārāya*):

V. “In spring (*mādhave*), in the month of Mādhava (*mādhave māsi*) [i.e., Vaiśākha],

when the risen moon is full (*pūrṇoditanisākare*), the procession of the image (*pratimā-gamanam*) of the Buddha (*tathāgatasya*) is to have a fixed festival (*niyatotsavam*)”.

VI. “[And] whatever (*yat*) is dedicated (*pratipāditam*) to this [image] (*etasyai*), out of devotion (*śraddhayā*)—slaves, cows, buffaloes, gardens, fields, workers, and so forth (*dāsa-go-mahiṣārāma-kṣetra-karmmakarādi*)—by anybody at all (*kena cid api*),

VII. “... that (*tad*) is not to be stolen (*ahāryam*), not to be enjoyed (*asambho-*

gyam), not to be withheld (*anivāryam*) for [the accomplishment of some individual's] own works (*sva-karmasu*). May [the responsibility of ensuring] this (*ayam*) be understood (*avaḡamyatām*) to be the burden [of duty] of the Governor of Tamandarapura (*tamandara-purādhyakṣa-bhārah*)”.

(B1–B12) Order of My Lord concerning the modalities (*roh*) of management (*parihāra*),

- assigning (*oy*) to My Lord (the Buddha) of the venerable Sandalwood Monastery some laborers of other Lords, some [laborers] who are a shared resource, [and] some who are gifts from people;

- enjoining that they become the exclusive property of My Lord (of the Sandalwood Monastery);

- enjoining that Kloñ Ñan at Tamrāñ build a shrine [for] a procession of the Lord[’s image] on the Full-moon Day of Vaiśākha, every year;

- forbidding that he summon to break (*pak*), to uproot (*tok*), to seize (*cmap*) the measured lands (*vnas*) from the Lord’s servants;

- [regarding] the slaves, cows, buffaloes, orchards, groves, low-lying rice fields, boats, absolutely forbidding that people cause damage (*cralak*);

- forbidding that they break areca [palms];

- forbidding that they obstruct taxation (*ckop*) of others;

- forbidding that they prevent the *nam pitai* people from entering inside the precincts (of the Lord).

(B13–B14) Those who transgress the above (*qui neḡ*)—the modalities of management as above—, [i.e.,] those who flout the order of My Lord, are punished.

Philological Commentary

Verse I. As Diwakar Acharya pointed out to us (pers. comm.), *vineya* could refer also to the king’s subjects (cf. *vinayādhāna* in *Raghuvamśa* 1.24). This means that a second punning interpretation is at least suggested, even if it is not perhaps meant to expand fully in the mind of the reader, in which the king is the subject of the stanza, his name, Jayavarman, being already adumbrated or suggested by the opening word:

He is victorious, that Victor (*jinaḡ*), a [veritable] sun for destroying the darknesses of all the world, whose rise spreads out to awaken the lotuses that are [his subjects who are] to be disciplined.

For a handful of comparable instances of pre-Angkorian Śaiva inscriptions that open with a verse that is manifestly in praise of Śiva but that allow themselves also to be interpreted as referring to the ruling king, see Goodall & Revire (2021: 270). This is a trope we find elsewhere, for instance in the 5th-century Guḡnāpur pillar inscription from Karnataka (India), commemorating the creation and endowment of a temple of Kāmadeva. Its first verse, as Cecil & Gomes suggest (2021: 16, n. 16), could describe both Kāma and the ruling king Ravivarman.

Verse II. The use of *kaṅṭaka* (literally “thorn”) to refer metaphorically to enemies or trouble-makers within the realm is an old cliché (cf. *Raghuvamśa* 14.73). One is thus meant to understand *kaṅṭakabhayam* simultaneously as “fear of

thorns” and “danger of trouble-makers”. Although the “burning of enemies” might in such a Buddhist context allude to the destruction of Māra, it seems more likely to us that this stanza speaks about the king. The correlative *yasya* shows that this stanza is to go with the next two stanzas which contain *yas* and then *tena*, each time denoting the king. The vocabulary (*tejas*, *prajāḥ*, *arivamśe*) also suggests that this stanza is only about the king.

Verse III. One could imagine a layer of meaning in which he “was [straight] as the rod of a pair of scales because of [the fact that he was engaged in cultivating] a meditative state of awareness that all things are of equal value”. Such a yogic awareness is spoken of as *sāmarasya* in Śaiva traditions, or as *śaktisamarasa* (e.g., in 5:36 of the *Uttarasūtra* of the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, and in 4:61 of the *Nayasūtra*, both edited in Goodall et al. 2015). Furthermore, given that this is a Buddhist inscription, and that *dharma-samatā* (or rather *sarva-dharma-samatā*) is similarly used in many Mahāyāna works (for instance several times in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*) to refer a state of mind in which one equanimously recognizes the “sameness of all things”,³³ it would certainly be fitting if the verse were intended to mean that he led his brahmanical subjects to a state of mind in which they felt a Buddhist equanimity with regard to all things. Such an interpretation might be straightforward

if we had an accusative *caturāśramiṇīr*, agreeing with *prajāḥ*, but we instead have the genitive plural *caturāśramiṇām*. Could one perhaps understand “Among those belonging to the four [orthodox] walks of life, he led subjects to [a Buddhist state of realization of] all things being equal”? Or perhaps “Leading his subjects to [an awareness of] the sameness of [all] the teachings (*dharma-samatām*) of those belonging to the four [Brahmanical] walks of life, [...]”? While it seems more than likely that the Buddhist notion of *sarva-dharma-samatā* is in some way alluded to, no translation of the stanza seems to us entirely satisfactory.

Verse IV. As Diwakar Acharya observed to us (pers. comm.), the combination of a genitive and a dative (*candanavihārasya arthāya*) would be more normal for expressing the sense “he gave this charter for the sake of the Śrī Candana Monastery”. Nonetheless, the first dative could be the result of attraction to the case of the second. Or we can interpret as we have, with two parallel purposive

The Buddha, equally beneficent towards all beings, penetrates the sameness of all *dharmas* (I, § 10, st. 8). In order to beg correctly, one should penetrate the sameness of all *dharmas* (III, § 11). One must, through the sameness of the depravities, penetrate the sameness of the Absolute Good (III, § 13). Subhūti is promised recompense if he can, through the sameness of material objects, penetrate the sameness of all *dharmas*, through the sameness of all *dharmas* penetrate the sameness of all Buddha attributes, through the sameness of the five acts of immediate fruition penetrate the sameness of deliverance (III, § 16).

³³ Cultivating this state of mind leads to liberation, as outlined in the summary of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* given by Lamotte, rendered into English by Sara Boin (Lamotte 1976: LXIX):

See also pp. 982–983 of Lamotte’s French rendering of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, which does not survive in Sanskrit, but has been translated from the Chinese (Lamotte 1949: II, 982–983).

datives: “for wealth” and, at the same time, “for the *vihāra*”. Another possibility would be to take only *arthāya* as a purposive dative and to understand “he gave this charter to the Śrī Candana Monastery for the sake of its wealth”. Note that it is not said that the king made any donation himself. Pre-Angkorian inscriptions that record expenditure by the ruling king seem to be rare (Goodall 2023: 27–36). Here no benefactor is mentioned, which perhaps suggests that the king’s edict relates to the disbursement of wealth that is regularly donated in small amounts by many individuals.

Verse V. We could have taken the expression *mādhave mādhave* distributively to mean in “every month of Vaiśākha”, but since the element *niyata-* already expresses fixedness and therefore calendrical regularity, there is no need for the repetition of *mādhave* to express this. Indeed, this repetition seems elegant precisely because the word is used in two different senses. Admittedly, one could argue that *niyata-* is instead used to qualify the festival as “restrained”, in other words a ceremony in which the participants were expected to restrain themselves from sensual enjoyment and fix their minds on the Buddha and his teachings. But this might seem an anachronistically post-Protestant interpretation, since Hindu and Buddhist festival processions often allow a joyful suspension of norms. This is furthermore arguably suggested by the opening *mādhave*, “In Springtime! [...]”, a time for joyous festivals all over the world from time immemorial.

We have silently assumed that *pratimā-gamanam* is intended as a metrically expedient alternative to some more standard expression for a procession, such as *pratimāyātrā*, although it is just conceivable that it refers to “the approaching of the Buddha image (for veneration)” (*pratimā-āgamanam*). Still, this is less likely, since festivals archetypically involve processions—in South India invariably so, to the point that *utsava* is often used to mean “procession”, e.g. in the expression *utsavamūrti*. For other allusions to religious processions in the Khmer epigraphical corpus, see K. 290 (9th c., st. LXVI–LXVII, Buddhist); K. 853 (9th c., st. XIV, Śaiva); K. 356 (10th c., st. XI, a processional image, described as *utsavayāyin*, of a golden Viṣṇu mounted upon a silver Garuḍa); K. 276 (11th c., lines 4–6, Śaiva); K. 277 (11th c., lines 33–34, Śaiva); K. 1222 (12th c., southern face, Śaiva). See also the passages referred to by Bhattacharya in his brief discussion of the subject (1961: 89–91), to which we have alluded above. There are numerous other references of course to *utsavas*, such as a Śaiva one in K. 55, st. XIV, which also belongs to the 7th century, but without explicit references to processions or processional images. It is also worth noting that a 12th-century lintel from Prasat Hin, in Phimai, depicts a procession carrying a buddha image sheltered by a *nāga*’s hood on a palanquin.³⁴

Verse VI. As for *dāsa* and *karmakara* (which latter are presumably servants with a different legal status from the

³⁴ See: Lintel depicting the procession of Buddha Sheltered by Naga’s Hood.

dāsas, perhaps because they are not as completely owned), the Śaiva author Brahmaśambhu draws this distinction in his *Naimittikakriyānusandhāna* of 938 CE. According to this text (f. 73v),³⁵ when the religious master (*ācārya*) transfers his responsibilities to his successor, he should say:

*idaṃ sthānam iyaṃ vṛttir iyaṃ
pustakasamhatih*

*amī vai bharaṇīyās tu dāsāḥ
karmakarās ca naḥ*

*etat sarvaṃ mayā tubhyaṃ dattam
adya tvayāpi ca*

*pālanīyaṃ tathā samyag
yathāsmābhiḥ prapālitaṃ*

Such is the foundation; such is the revenue; such is the library; and these are the slaves and workers that are to be supported. All this I have given to you this day, and you should properly maintain it as I have done.

The term *karmakara* “worker” is attested in at least two later inscriptions: (1) the group of almost identical *āśrama* inscriptions at Angkor in Sanskrit (K. 279, K. 290, K. 701 and K. 1228), belonging to the reign of the 9th-century king Yaśovarman; (2) the inscription of Samrong (K. 258) in Old Khmer, dated

1107 CE. The contexts in which the term appears do not make clear whether they were different from the slaves (*dāsa*). Even in modern Khmer, the word is still used in its Pali forms *kammakara*, “male worker”, and *kammakariṇī*, “female worker”.

Verse VII. The Governor mentioned here is presumably one of the successors to Vidyāviśeṣa, the governor of Tamandarapura who authored K. 604 and K. 1235 in 627 CE (for editions and translations of which, see Goodall 2019). The fact that this figure is assigned the administrative burden of ensuring the correct use of these resources seems indeed to confirm that we may speak of him as a “governor” (as argued by Goodall, 2019 *passim*). It was clear already that the various other mentions of Tamandarapura in the epigraphic corpus (K. 9, K. 604 and K. 1235), when all taken together, suggested the location somewhere in southern Vietnam.³⁶ The discovery of K. 1426 at Óc Eo might indicate that Tamandarapura was in fact the ancient name of Óc Eo. As for the nature of the compound name Tamandarapura, which, apart from the element *-pura*, does not seem to be Sanskrit, see the summary of past discussions given by Goodall (2019: 29), and see Chhom & Griffiths (2025: 55), who conclude:

³⁶ Thus Vickery 1998: 339 and Goodall 2019: 29. Although K. 604 is in Sambor Prei Kuk, Tamandarapura may nonetheless be a toponym referring to Óc Eo (or a place in the vicinity of Óc Eo) since there is nothing implausible about the Governor of Tamandarapura recording an endowment that he made in the vicinity of Tamandarapura (K. 1235) as well as an endowment that he made in the then capital city (K. 604).

While *pura* means “city” in Sanskrit, the element *tamandara* is hard to explain in Sanskrit or Khmer and may perhaps reflect an indigenous language of the Austronesian family: in Malay, for instance, *taman darat* could mean “flatland garden”, and it is likely that a very similar expression also existed in the ancient Cham language. So the name may be an indication that the ethnolinguistic profile of the ancient Mekong Delta, and the polity of Funan, included other people beside Khmers.

B6. Tamrāñ (តំរាំង) is a rare toponym. In a variant spelling (of presumably trivial significance) it appears as Tamrañ in the inscription of Ban Hin Khon (K. 388, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, possibly 7th c.).³⁷ Is Tamrāñ the Khmer form of the Sanskrit Tamandara(pura)? To give an example of the sometimes rather substantial differences between (presumably primary) vernacular names and their guise in Sanskrit context, we may first refer to the epigraphy of Campā, where Panrāñ is the vernacular toponym to which Pāñḍaraṅga (or Pāñduraṅga) corresponds in other contexts (Griffiths & Southworth 2011: 285–291). We are also reminded of the possible correspondence between the Sanskrit name Kāmarāṅga for Arakan (Rakhine, in present-day Myanmar) and the Old Burmese toponyms Kam Rarñ or Kamḥ Yam (Griffiths 2015: 307). If

Tamrāñ does indeed form a pair with Tamandara, then the Malay or Cham explanation of the latter, proposed just above, may need to be reconsidered, or else it must be assumed that the vernacular Khmer term came into existence only after the Sanskritization of an originally Austronesian name had taken place.

B7. The word *cnañ* (ច្រាំង) is clearly the Old Khmer word meaning “year”, as found for instance in the inscription K. 90 (Kampong Cham, 7th c., lines N7–10) *nivandha ge ta gui utsava ta pon hvat ta gui cnañ ta moyya*, “Provision for the people at the four festival occasions in one year”. The word *cracar* (គ្រាគ្រា), by contrast, is not recorded in Pou’s Old Khmer dictionary (2004) while in Jenner’s dictionary of pre-Angkorian Khmer (2009: 144), based on a single attestation in the inscription K. 1004 (Kandal, 691 CE), it is analyzed as a derivation from the verb *car* “to write (note, jot) down in order”. However, in unpublished notes on that inscription to which we have access, Jenner translates the word *cracar triai*, “daily” (literally *cracar*, “every”, and *triai*, “day”). If our intuition is correct that the context in which the word *cracar* appears in the inscription K. 1426 is comparable to the one where *cracar triai* appears in K. 1004, our translation of *cracar cnañ* as “every year” stands to reason. We would then propose a different morphological analysis from Jenner’s: *cracar* could be derived from the (otherwise unknown) Old Khmer antecedent of the word *cuor* (ជួរ) word that means “line, row” in modern Khmer. With the prefix of intensification

³⁷ See: <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSCIK00388>.

cra-, the resulting meaning could then be “one after another in a line or a row”, somewhat like the words “règle” and “régulier” in French which can refer both to straight lines and regularity.³⁸

B8. The word *cmap* (𑄎𑄑𑄖) is formed with the infix *-m-* whose original function seems to have been to create agent nouns, so *c-m-ap* “seizer” from *cap* (𑄎𑄑) “to seize” (Griffiths 2015: 307). However, it needs to be recognized that the inherited affixation of Khmer had already become fossilized to a certain degree by the stage of Old Khmer.³⁹ In the context where *cmap* occurs in K. 1426, it is likely that the word functions as equivalent to the verb *cap* although the alternative interpretation as an agent noun cannot be entirely dismissed. The syntactic context is similar to that where *c-m-er* (𑄎𑄑𑄖) occurs, interchanging freely, it seems, with unaffixed *cer* (𑄎𑄑) “to transgress”, in the formulaic phrase of King Jayavarman I’s inscriptions: *ge cer/cmer ājñā vraḥ kamratāñ añ ge daṇḍa*. This can be translated by “those who transgress the order of My Lord are punished” if *cmer* is understood as a verb or “those who are transgressors of the order of

My Lord are punished” if it is taken as an agent noun.

B10. Like the word *cracar*, *cralak* (𑄎𑄑𑄖𑄎) is formed with the prefix of intensification *cra-*, here attached to the verb *-lak* “to cut a notch, groove, make an incision; to hollow out; to trim, clip; to cut into; to scratch, score, groove, mark; to incise, engrave; to gouge, chisel”. The resulting meaning, “to cut intensely”, underlies our interpretation “to cause damage” in the context of the inscription (Jenner 2009: 417). To date, the word *cralak* appears in three inscriptions, i.e., K. 502 (Chanthaburi, 7th c.; this inscription is fragmentary), K. 1267 (Kompong Speu, 7th c.) and now K. 1426. The context in which the term *cralak* appears in K. 1267 seems to confirm our interpretation. The sentence *ge ta cralak gui pañ tiñ ti mās kaddi moy* can thus be translated as “Persons who cause damage [to the donation of the king] shall pay a fine of one *katti* of gold” (Pou 2001: 194).

B11. Analogously to the word *cmap* above, the noun *k-n-ar* (𑄎𑄑) is derived from the verb *kar* (𑄎𑄑) “to obstruct” with another affix, *-n-*, whose original function was likewise to form agent nouns, but contextually more likely to have been intended as a verb.

B12. The expression *qnak nam pitai* (𑄎𑄑𑄎𑄑 𑄎𑄑 𑄎𑄑) “*nam pitai* people” cannot be entirely understood: while the meaning of *qnak* “person” is certain, that of the word *pitai* remains obscure and the word *nam* might be a noun meaning “cake” or a verb meaning “to lead, bring, take”. According to Jenner (2009: 310), *pitai* is the name

³⁸ For a discussion of the prefixes *c-* and *cra-* in Khmer, see Jenner & Pou 1980–81: xxxvii–xxxviii.

³⁹ Cf. Jacob (1976: 608): “The fossilization may be described as follows. Although the function of many Mod.K. [Modern Khmer] words containing an O.K. [Old Khmer] affix could in a given context be recognized by means of the affix, there are also many words of similar construction in the use of which the original function does not operate any more. In addition to this, other, newer affixes have confused the picture. The infix *m* occurring between two consonants, for example, can be nominalizing or causative, at least since the Mid.K. [Middle Khmer] period”.

of an unidentified cake (*nam*) which was presumably offered to the dead.⁴⁰ However, if one considers *nam* to be a verb, then *pitai* must be its object and it may no longer be assumed to be any kind of cake. The expression *qnak nam pitai* figures also in another inscription of King Jayavarman I, i.e., the

stela of Preah Kuhea Luong K. 44 (Cœdès 1942: 10–13). The text alludes to the presence of some *nam pitai* people within the precincts of a sanctuary. Similarly, these people in K. 1426 probably had the privilege of entering the precincts of the Lord.

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⁴⁰ For a discussion of the rare expressions with *pitai*, and notably *vrah pitai*, “sacred *pitai*”, in several inscriptions of the 9th to the 12th centuries CE, see Vickery 1999: 76–77.

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PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF EARTHENWARE PRODUCTION FROM THE SHWE CREEK EXCAVATION IN BAGAN

Saw Tun Lin,¹ Khin Kyi Phyu Thant² & Moe Sat Wathan³

ABSTRACT—This article analyzes earthenware sherds from Shwe Creek (Operation 315a, Unit 315a-1) in Bagan, Myanmar, as part of the IRAW@Bagan project. Focusing on diagnostic rim sherds from the 2019 excavation season, the research employs typological classification and seriation to establish a preliminary chronological framework. Findings suggest a high degree of standardization in pottery production, particularly for utilitarian ceramics, and highlight both elite-controlled (attached) and market-driven (independent) production modes. Despite limited data, this preliminary archeological report provides a foundation for future ceramic research and relative dating of historical sites, emphasizing the need for continued analysis of Bagan's earthenware traditions.

KEYWORDS: Bagan; Earthenware; Myanmar; Pottery Production; Shwe Creek; Typology

Introducing IRAW

Bagan, located in Myanmar's central arid region on the eastern side of the Ayeyarwady River, was established around the middle of the 9th century CE (Hudson 2004: 220, 265–66). It prospered as the capital of a prominent political entity from the 11th to the 14th centuries, exerting control over large parts of modern-day Myanmar (Higham 2001: 134; Hudson 2004: 183; Stadtner 2013:

14, 18). Following this prosperous era, Bagan underwent significant socio-political changes and evolved into a provincial capital and a hub for pilgrimage (Hudson 2004: 234–245; Stadtner 2011: 215–216). Today, the site of Bagan is marked by the remains of more than 3,800 structures, including temples, monasteries, and reservoirs (Myo Nyunt Aung 2018: B23).

The IRAW@Bagan research project aims to investigate the social and ecological history of residential patterning, agricultural practices, and water management at the classical Burmese (Bama)

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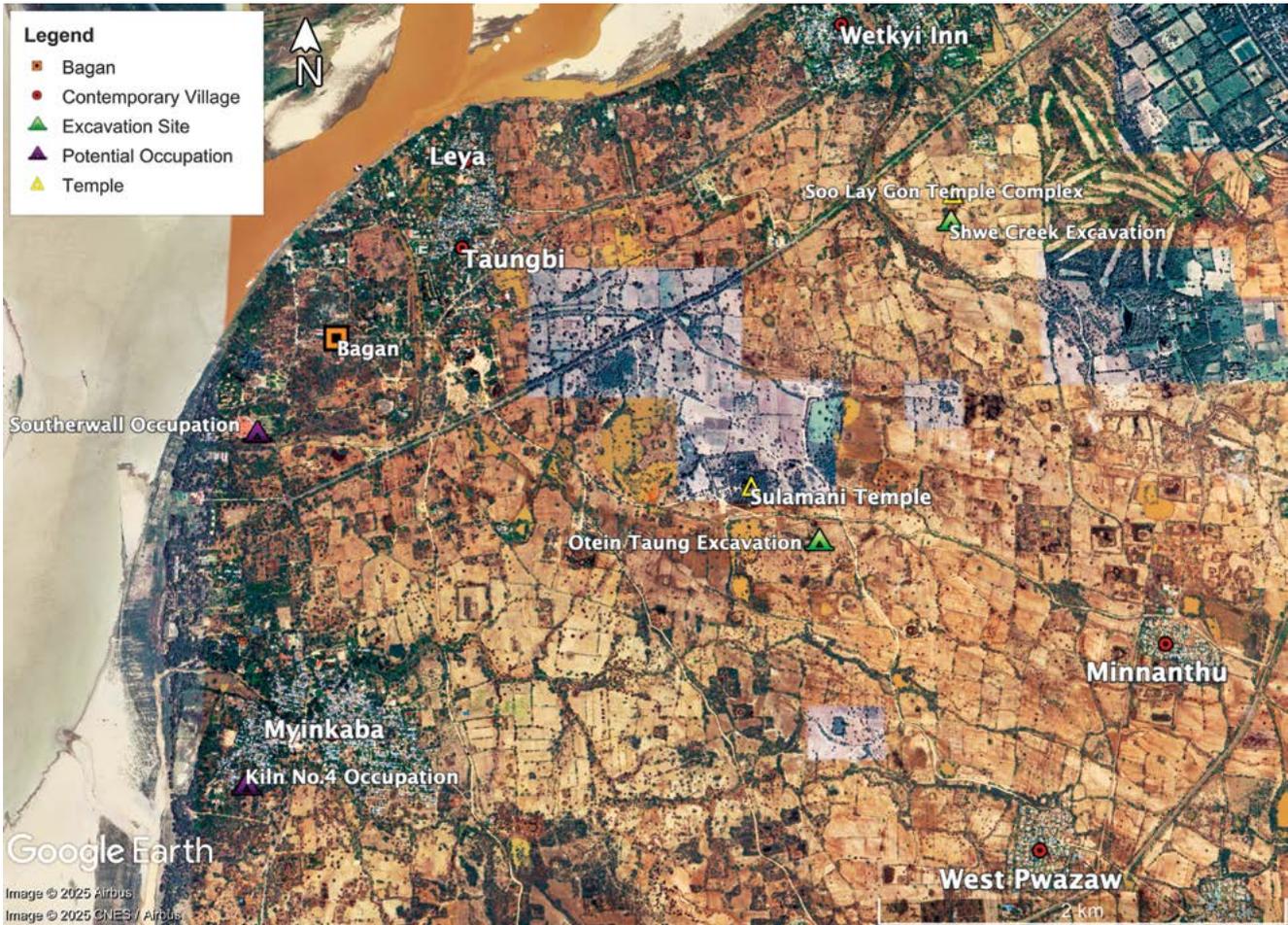
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capital of Bagan, Myanmar, from the 11th to 14th century CE. As part of the 2019 field season, quadrant-base surface collection and four test excavation units were carried out in Shwe Creek and Otein Taung (Operation 748) occupation sites (Iannone et al. 2019). Shwe Creek (Operation 315a) is situated 3 km northwest of old Bagan and about 1 km south of Wetkyi Inn village, near the Soo Lay Gon temple group and close to the Anawrahta Road, the main east-west road between Nyaung-U and Bagan [MAP 1]. Surface reconnaissance by IRAW@Bagan during the 2017 field season revealed a high quantity of ceramic scatter, suggesting that Shwe Creek was a possible residential settlement (Iannone, Pyiet Phyo Kyaw & Macrae 2019: 13). Operation 315a was chosen for its location at the center of significant ceramic scatter. Unit 315a-1, an excavation unit measuring 1 m x 4 m, revealed six distinct levels and three features. Due to time constraints, the excavation did not reach bedrock (Tamura & Cheong 2019). Hundreds of thousands of earthenware sherds were exposed from the excavation and they were systematically recorded in context. The preliminary identification of excavated earthenware began with diagnostic sherds from Operation 315a, as we were not able to carry out a study of form variation of the sherds from all four surface collections and their associated test units, given the vast quantities of sherds recovered.

At both Shwe Creek and Otein Taung, numerous artifacts were found, including abundant ceramics across various layers, clay anvils, *kendi* spouts, freshwater shells, and fragments of charred animal bones. The discovery of a clay spacer at

Shwe Creek suggests possible earthenware production at the site, similar to Otein Taung (Rivera & Cheong 2019). Excavations by the IRAW@Bagan team indicate that Shwe Creek likely served as an earthenware production site, supporting the McIntosh (1991: 206–211) model which posits urban clustering where specialized communities, such as earthenware specialists, provided services to a larger region. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the article.

In considering the importance of earthenware production in Bagan, previous research indicates that both upper class and ordinary people at Bagan extensively used earthenware in their daily lives, ritual ceremonies, and building materials, reflecting their socio-economic and religious characteristics and technological development (Fraser-Lu 1994: 187–220; Than Tun 2005: 105–110; Stadtner 2013: 50–52). No systematic documentation and detailed examination of archeologically excavated earthenware has ever been conducted in Bagan, except by IRAW. Our first attempts examined variation in vessel forms within the sherd sample recovered during the surface collection and excavations at the Shwe Creek site (Operation 315a). This research is crucial for Myanmar archeology because earthenware, especially pottery, from settlement sites offers opportunities to reconstruct historical events and variation in terms of the development of ceramic production, the history of the settlement, and the possible identification of ethnic diversity, as well as religious, cultural, social and economic exchange. Addressing these topics has been hampered by lack of detailed



**MAP 1: Initial four settlement testing areas and 2019 excavation sites—
Shwe Creek (Op. 315) and Otein Taung (Op. 748) © Saw Tun Lin**

chronologies for sites which cannot be dated using inscriptions or other forms of stratigraphy. Although the IRAW research project provides absolute dating to aid in chronology building, this study attempts to provide a preliminary chronological seriation of earthenware to help develop relative dating for other historical sites in the region. This article will also briefly situate the pivotal role of earthenware in the daily lives, rituals, ceremonial practices, and religious activities of Bagan society.

Previous Research on Bagan Ceramics

With regard to the Bagan ceramics, several scholars have sought to identify the history of the role of glazed ceramics in religious and socio-economic aspects of Bagan. The first archeological excavation to investigate ceramic productions was conducted by Sergio Della Strologo and U Kyaw Nyein in 1963 at the south-east of Myinkaba village in Bagan. Unfortunately, they made no explicit statement as to whether this was a kiln to produce glazed architectural tiles for

temples and monasteries or whether it was for glazed ceramic production (Strologo & Kyaw Nyein 1963). To solve this question, six more kilns were subsequently excavated. Aung Kyaing, retired Director of the Department of Archaeology, Bagan branch, suggested that these kilns were used to manufacture glazed-wares and decorative tiles for the Buddhist monuments as well (Aung Kyaing 1999). Don Hein and W. Ross H. Ramsay (2014), based on a re-examination and re-excavation of kiln structures and evidence of glass beads, wasters, and jar crucibles involving mass glass in the immediate vicinity, made the more plausible explanation that these Myinkaba furnaces manufactured glass. Moreover, they suggested that these furnaces may have also produced glazed tiles for Buddhist monuments (Hein & Ramsay 2014). Nevertheless, scholars still questioned where the vast number of earthenware sherds found on the surface of Bagan were manufactured.

As noted, although glazes were extensively used in decorative architectural tiles at Bagan, there is less evidence of their use in pottery and domestic ware. However, an extensive amount of unglazed earthenware survives as a witness to its daily use in the lives of Bagan people. The identification of Bagan historic earthenware is not a popular subject in Myanmar for either archeologists or art historians, due to the relative scarcity and lack of systematic archeological excavation throughout the region. Most scholarly contributions in the field of Bagan ceramics have focused on general descriptions of terracotta and glazed

plaques depicting Jātaka stories of the historical Buddha. Additionally, *kendi* or libation jars have been the favourite subject discussed as ritual pottery used in the Buddhist ceremonies (Brown 1977: 99-112; Guy 1989: 6-10; Fraser-Lu 1994: 187-220).

With the aim of discovering the earthenware production sites at Bagan, Bob Hudson and Nyein Lwin excavated from 1999 to 2001 two mounds locally called Otein Taung (Pottery Hill). This site was also tested by the IRAW@Bagan team in 2019 as Operation 748. According to the radiocarbon dates and results from excavation, the site operated from 9th to 14th century. As the main purpose of the excavation was for dating and general characteristics, no detailed analysis of pottery typology and decoration was conducted (Hudson et al. 2001: 48-74; Hudson 2004: 207-212). Hudson and Nyein Lwin also discovered potential pottery production sites and residential areas with earthenware sherds in Bagan and its peri-urban zone during excavation and surveys of the legendary 19 founding villages of Bagan between 2001 and 2003 (Hudson et al. 2002). Except for analysis of apparent fabric and surface treatment techniques of pottery, no significance determination was carried out.

In Southeast Asia, types of pottery are traditionally determined based on the whole vessels (Bayard 1977; Sawang 2003: 61). Distinctive collections of burial urn types were recorded from the excavations of Pyu cities dating from about 1st CE to 9th CE in Myanmar (e.g., Aung Thaw 1968). Typological analysis of the pottery in Bagan is entirely absent

due to the scarcity of complete pottery, although some chance finds are displayed in the Bagan Archaeological Museum. Many surface finds and excavations expose 99% of earthenware sherds, which are not recorded systematically in any database. The archeological evidence from two palace site excavations in Bagan during the 1990s, 2001–2002, and 2003 exposed some complete pottery and large amounts of sherds which are now in storage in the museum storeroom (Department of Archaeology 2003a, 2003b). Unfortunately, no systematic records during the excavations were undertaken. The initial examination of the ceramics from these two palace excavations and random surface collections of materials from Bagan vicinity were carried out by John Miksic and Goh Geok Yian between 2008–2011 and 2013–2014 (Yian 2018: 187–188). This was done under the auspices of “The Myanmar–Singapore Archaeology Training–Research Project” (MSATP) which is a collaborative initiative aimed at gathering data on life in the ancient royal palace of Bagan and training Myanmar scholars and students in advanced archeological techniques. Conducted in cooperation with the Myanmar Ministry of Culture and the University of Yangon, the project focused on joint research, capacity building, and disseminating information through publications and conferences. Initially intended to conduct fieldwork from 2014 to 2020 at Bagan, the MSATP inventoried a total of 24,310 sherds weighing a total of 1,094,789.72 grams over multiple phases from 2014 to 2016 (Yian & Miksic 2019). No research

outcome has been released since the project’s inception, except a brief overview of the project in a web page⁴ and a brief book chapter analyzing some Chinese porcelain sherds and locally produced glazed wares found in Bagan (Yian 2018: 179–197).

Methods

For this project, the IRAW@Bagan team focused on the preliminary assessment of formal variation of earthenware, based mainly on diagnostic fragments including rims, bases, handles, spouts, and decorated body sherds, from one 1 m x 4 m excavation unit (Unit 315a-1) at the Shwe Creek Site (Operation 315a). Eventually, quantification is used to establish the relative frequency of different ceramic types in the assemblage. The main methods of quantification are sherd counts, sherd weight in grams, rim and base diameters, and measurement of thickness, lengths, and widths. The detail data of each sherd and completed pottery is recorded in the IRAW ceramic recording forms.⁵

Seriation, the principal technique for ordering assemblages and pottery types to create relative chronological order (Orton & Hughes 2013: 226–231) is used in this study. This can, however, be achieved only after the complete classification of earthenware sherds in all excavation units. To accomplish this task, a traditional method, termed

⁴ See: <https://epress.nus.edu.sg/sitereports/msatp>.

⁵ However, we could not make a detail record using this form for our created type series during the 2019 field season (see recording form in Iannone et al. 2019: 381–384).



FIGURE 1: Preliminary assessment of rim sherd variations by the IRAW team, with each bag containing examples of an identified rim form from different occupation levels, 2019 © Saw Tun Lin

unstructured “Form type Series” is applied to classify the variation in pottery forms (Orton & Hughes 2013: 83–84). “Attribute based seriation” approach is also used, especially for plain body sherds, in order to understand techniques and symbolic contents of patterns as this technique can allow a high percentage of sherds from a particular site to be diagnosed (Sawang 2003: 61).

During the 2019 field season, the ceramic analysis was initiated using the unstructured method of “form type

series”. In this way, we started by observing the first specimen rim sherd and named it Form 1. Then the next specimen is compared with the first and if different was assigned it to Form 2. If a new specimen was closely similar to the previously created form, it was made into sub-form, for instance, Form 1-a, Form 1-b, etc. The entire Unit 315a-1 diagnostic sherd assemblage was evaluated based on the shape of rims. As the subjective nature involved in the typological assignment of a sherd to a form

TABLE 1: Non-diagnostic and diagnostic sherd count of all excavated units in 2019

Site	Unit	Non-Diagnosed	Diagnosed	Total
Shwe Creek	315a-1	7,473	1,912	9,385
Shwe Creek	315a-2	2,814	671	3,485
Otein Taung	748a-1	4,960	1,050	9,495
Otein Taung	748a-2	2,868	689	3,557
Total		18,115	4,322	25,922

was influenced by personal experience (e.g., Plog 1978: 159; 1983: 136), to reduce substantial discrepancies in form identification we worked together in groups of two or three persons; before assigning a new form we had to double check to ensure both accuracy and agreement [FIGURE 1].

Results

Most of the sherds from the excavation were too fragmented to be assigned to a specific vessel form. Therefore, sherds excavated from all four units excavated in 2019 at Shwe Creek and Otein Taung were divided into two groups: (1) non-diagnostic sherds⁶ (body), and (2) diagnostic sherds (rims and bases). A total of 25,922 earthenware sherds, including 18,115 non-diagnostic sherds and 4,322 diagnosed sherds, were excavated from the four test excavation units at Shwe Creek and Otein Taung sites during the 2019 field season [TABLE 1]. Due to insufficient time for assessment, only 1912 diagnostic sherds from Shwe Creek (Unit 315a-1) could be

classified into forms. It is noted that 99% of the diagnostic sherds are rim sherds and not all diagnostic sherds can be assigned into forms because some of them are irregular shapes which are hard to reliably assess.

The classification of earthenware during the 2019 field season can be divided into three forms: (1) special forms which provide potentially chronological sequence, (2) common forms, and (3) isolated forms. The detailed result of each form will be discussed in the respective sub-categories. Almost all diagnostic sherds from Shwe Creek (Unit 315a-1) were classified into 151 forms including sub-forms. Unfortunately, the data from Level 5a from Unit 315a-1 were inadvertently mixed with another level due to confusion when cataloging during the laboratory process. Furthermore, we cannot at this time provide the data of fabric, temper inclusion, sherd count, and weight of each form in this research.

It is worth mentioning that the proportion of the total number of sherds in each occupation layer may reflect the density of pottery usage in the population. According to the stacked bar [FIGURE 2], a total of 1,874 non-diagnostic and 534 diagnostic sherds were excavated from Level 4, 2,274 non-diagnostic and 630 diagnostic sherds

⁶ Although body sherds are called non-diagnostic sherds, the identification of decorated and plain body sherds is important to understand ceramic chronology and variation in style and decoration in pottery of different periods. The analysis of non-diagnostic sherds may be conducted in the future.

TABLE 2: The stratigraphic/temporal occurrence of each special form within the Unit 315a-1 assemblage

Form	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4a	Level 4b	Level 5a	Level 5b	Level 6a	Level 6b	315a-1 F/8
1b		■	■	■	■	■			
1e					■			■	■
1f					■			■	■
2d					■	■			■
2f					■	■		■	■
2h		■			■	■			
2i					■			■	■
2j			■		■	■			
10			■	■	■	■			
11			■	■	■				
12a			■	■	■	■			
13a			■	■	■	■			
13b					■	■		■	■
13g					■	■			■
14b		■			■	■			
18d					■	■		■	■
18e				■	■	■			
19				■	■	■			
21a				■	■	■			
23i		■		■	■				
24a				■	■	■			
31c					■	■	■		
32a				■	■	■			
32b				■	■	■			
33b					■	■		■	
36a				■	■	■			
37a					■	■			■
39a				■	■	■			

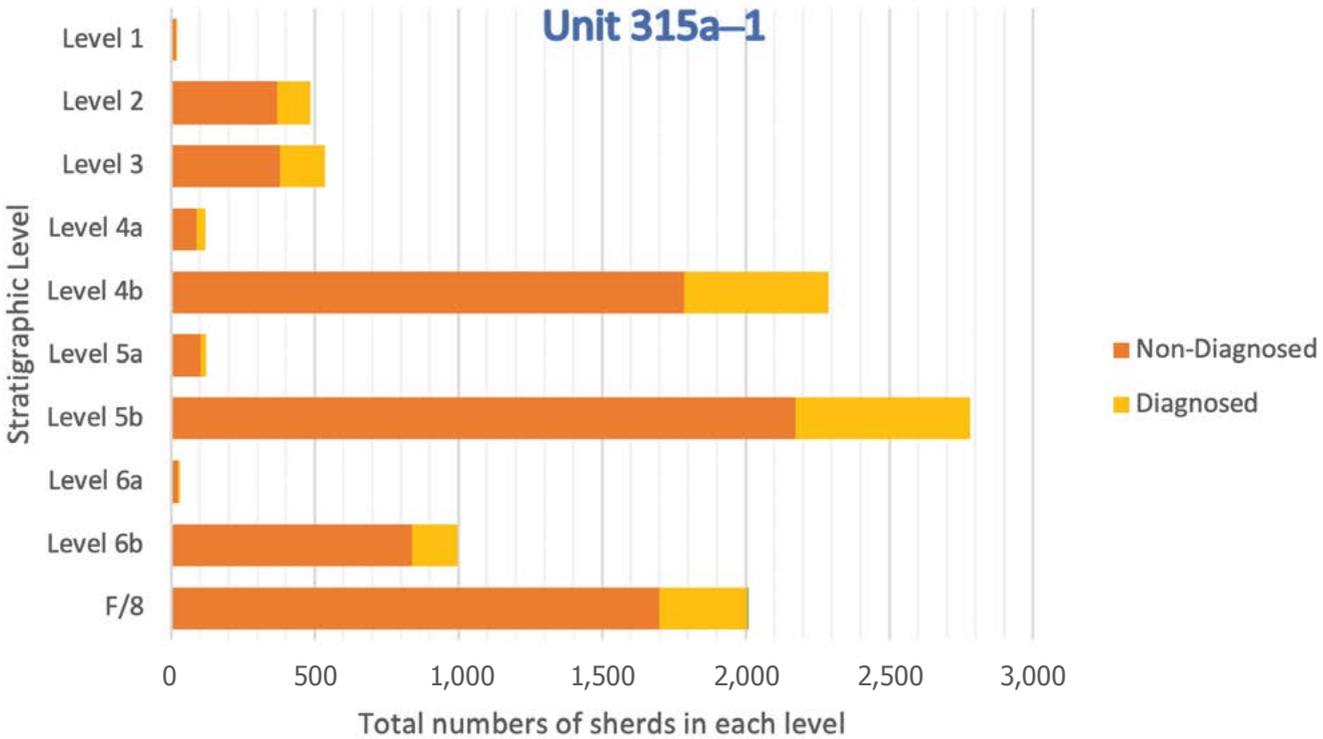


FIGURE 2: Number of sherds excavated from Unit 315a-1 with the successive layers from bottom to top © Saw Tun Lin

from Level 5, and 2,562 and 472 sherds from Level 6 and the associated pit feature (315a-F/8). The overall sherd counts from occupation Level 6, including sherds from the pit-fill, are much higher than those from other levels in the assemblage. This may simply reflect variations in the degree of fragmentation of certain sherds in Level 6 in comparison with other levels.

Special Forms

Special forms can be defined as a particular type of pottery which was frequently used in certain periods of time and stopped being used after that period or, in other words, a form that seems to be an indicator of chronology. They mostly occur in one cultural layer

followed by another. The present data base consists of 28 special forms tentatively recognized during the preliminary assessment of the diagnostic rim sherds from the Unit 315a-1 [TABLE 2]. These special forms can be regarded as significant for their occurrence in the 9 excavation layers in Unit 315a-1. The profile drawings of all special forms of the rim sherds can help us in future classification of sherds in other assemblages [FIGURE 3]. Nevertheless, in this preliminary study we cannot provide details of the exact rim shape, for example, exterior thickened or interior folded.

For absolute dating of occupation levels, two reliable radiocarbon dates are available from Unit 315a-2 at Shwe Creek; these can help us in dating the

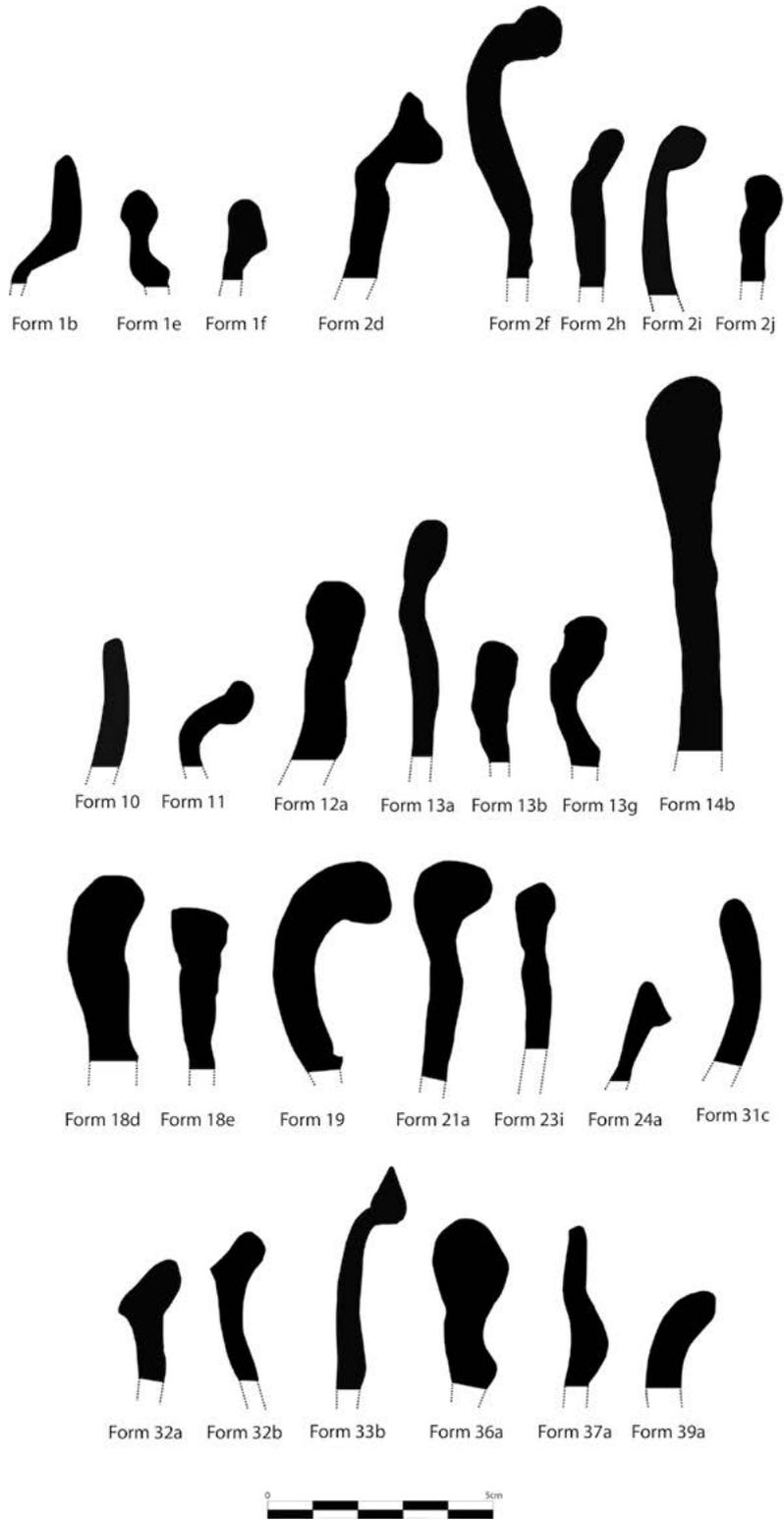


FIGURE 3: Rim sherd profiles of all special forms in Unit 315a-1 (Shwe Creek) © Saw Tun Lin

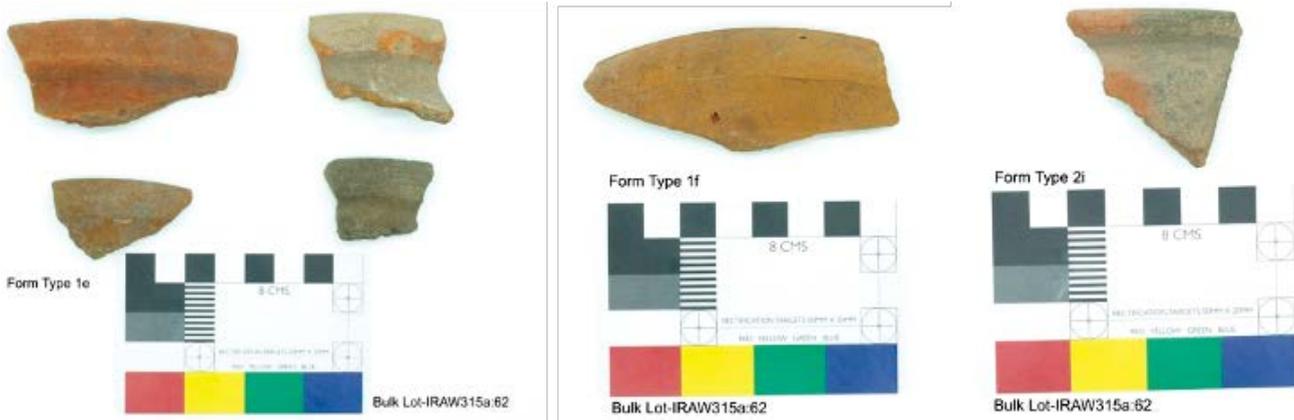


FIGURE 4: Special Forms 1e, 1f, and 2i found in Level 6b and 315a-1 F/8 © Gyles Iannone

special form series. Out of the successive occupation levels that were excavated in the 2019 field season, Level 5 has been dated to 1254–1295 cal (calibrated) CE and Level 6 to 1045–1216 cal CE. With reference to C14 dates, the other corresponding levels in Unit 315a-1 can also be assigned to a relative date at Shwe Creek. Moreover, it is possible to determine a chronology for diagnosed sherds in respective occupation levels.

For example, Forms 1e, 1f, and 2i only occur in Level 6b and 315a-1 F/8, pit fill associated with Level 6 [FIGURE 4]. These three forms appear to be completely absent after the Level 6 occupation. It would seem reasonable to date these three types to between the early 11th century and early 13th century CE.

Furthermore, there are other significant forms that can be assigned to common use between 1045 CE and 1295 CE. They are as follows: 2d, 2f, 13b, 13g, 18d, 31c, 33b, and 37a, which are found in Level 5 and Level 6 of the Unit 315a-1. Based on the associated C14 dates, it is determined that these forms were widely used throughout the Bagan period (11th to 13th centuries).

Other distinctive forms such as 1b, 2h, 2j, 10, 12a, 13a, 14b, 18e, 19, 21a, 24a, 32a, 32b, 36a, and 39a, were unearthed between Level 2 and Level 5. These forms seem highly likely to be in use from the mid-13th century onward. It should be noted for Forms 14b and 2h that there is a small gap between their first occurrence in Level 5b and second occurrence in Level 3, which is a sub-plow zone and thus a mixed deposit.

Form 23i, which is unique for its occurrence after the mid-13th century, was found in Level 4b and Level 3 (sub-plow). This form seems to be used only after the Bagan period [FIGURE 5].

Common Forms

Common forms are types which mostly occur from the lowest level to the topmost level of the excavation unit. Nonetheless, there are significant gaps in some common form distributions. These forms are chronologically important as they might have been used from the early 11th century to the post-Bagan period. There are 22 common forms classified according to their occurrence within the

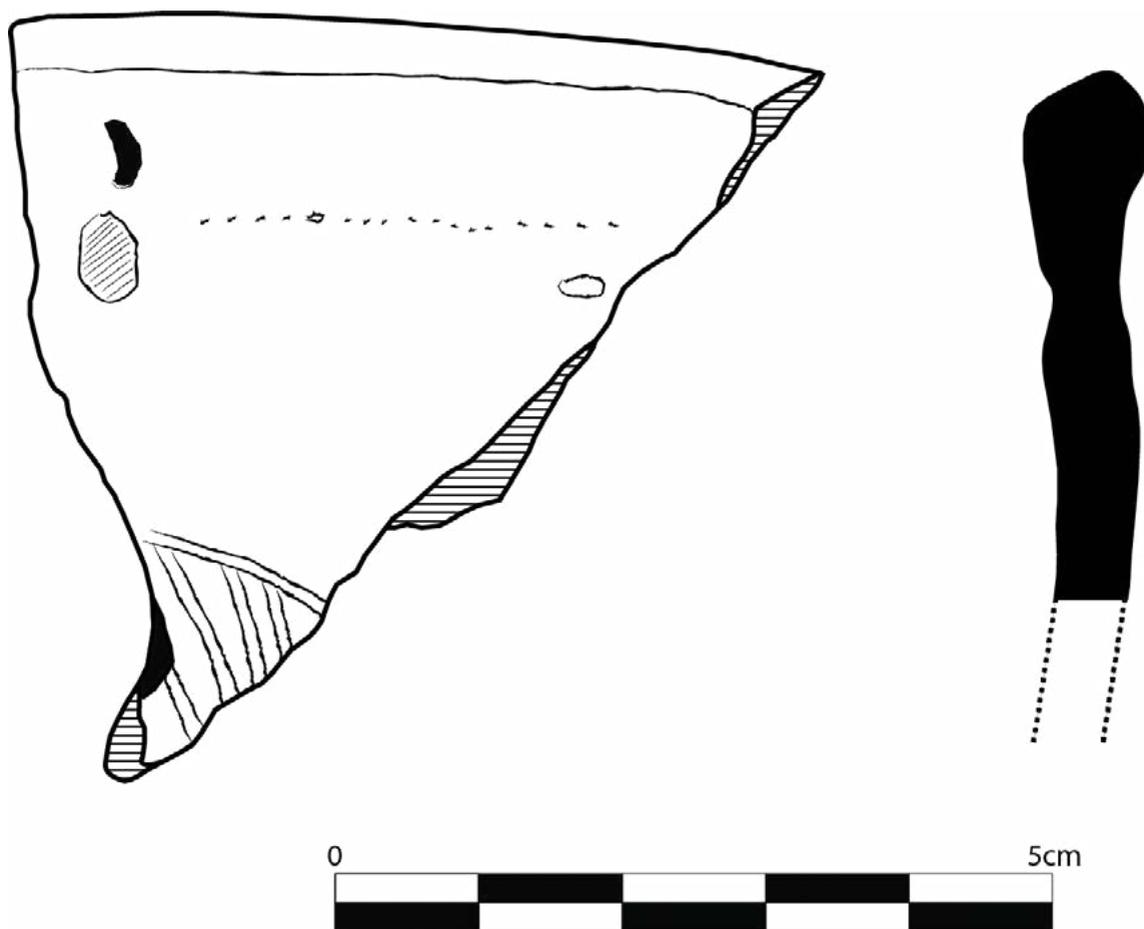


FIGURE 5: Drawing and profile of Form 23i, probably post-Bagan period © Saw Tun Lin

assemblage [FIGURE 6]. TABLE 3 presents the occurrence of each common form in the excavated levels in Unit 315a-1. A disparity exists in occurrence of each Form between layers. It is found that Forms 1a, 2a, 2b, 2c, 5, 6a, 12c, 13d, 18a, 18b, 18h, 23a, 23c, 33a, and 34b are consistently found in each occupation level. For this reason, we can assume these forms were continuously used and were probably the most popular ones from the early Bagan period to post-Bagan period. Forms 1c, 2l, 13e, 18i, and 39b do not occur in all levels, but they do appear in the lowest occupation level.

Moreover, there are significant intervals of occurrence within the stratigraphic levels. It is possible, therefore, that we can observe these forms becoming increasingly common in the early 11th century and perhaps there was a short interval of decrease in usage or absence before they were more widespread again.

Isolated Forms

Isolated form means a particular type which is present only in the single stratigraphic layer. In other words, the forms of all sherds in this type do

TABLE 3: Occurrence of common forms in Unit 315a-1

Form	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4a	Level 4b	Level 5a	Level 5b	Level 6a	Level 6b	315a- 1 F/8
1a									
1c									
2a									
2b									
2c									
2l									
4a									
4b									
5									
6a									
12c									
13d									
13e									
18a									
18b									
18h									
18i									
23a									
23c									
33a									
34b									
39b									

not match with the other recognized forms. A total of 101 isolated forms were identified in Unit 315a-1 [FIGURE 7]. Whether these represent limited production of certain vessels during a limited period or whether they were produced idiosyncratic forms that were never reproduced, cannot be ascertained given the available data from the single test excavation unit. It is tentatively suggested that these forms were not as popular as the special and common forms in the assemblage.

Standardization

Standardization in ceramic production offers a lens through which to examine the organization of craftsmanship, economic systems, and cultural practices in ancient societies (Costin 1991: 144–148; Rice 1991; Orton & Hughes 2013). The analysis of earthenware sherds from Shwe Creek provides insights into the degree of standardization in pottery production and its implications for understanding the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the Bagan period. By categorizing sherds into special, common, and isolated forms, the study reflects varying levels of standardization within the assemblage.

Special forms, identified as unique to specific chronological layers, suggest a degree of standardization in their production. These forms were likely crafted to meet specific functional or cultural requirements within a defined temporal framework. The consistent presence of these forms in specific stratigraphic levels indicates that potters followed standardized practices to maintain uniformity in shape and

design for particular uses. This standardization might reflect centralized control or specialized production workshops during the Bagan period.

Common forms, which are found consistently across multiple stratigraphic levels, demonstrate a higher degree of standardization. Their widespread and prolonged use suggests they fulfilled daily utilitarian functions, requiring repetitive and uniform production processes. This consistency implies that pottery workshops produced these forms in large quantities, adhering to standardized templates that facilitated their replication over centuries.

Isolated forms, by contrast, exhibit a lack of standardization. Their presence in only single stratigraphic layers or their idiosyncratic designs might reflect experimental production, individual creativity, or limited production for specific, short-term purposes. The absence of repetition for these forms suggests a divergence from standardized practices, highlighting the coexistence of both standardized and non-standardized ceramic production within Bagan society.

Attached and Independent Modes of Production

In Bagan, craft production reflected both attached and independent modes [TABLE 4], as defined by Costin (1991). Cathy Costin defines attached production as the creation of goods by artisans under elite control for high-status, religious, or ceremonial purposes. In Bagan, the terracotta Jātaka plaques adorning stupa and temple terraces

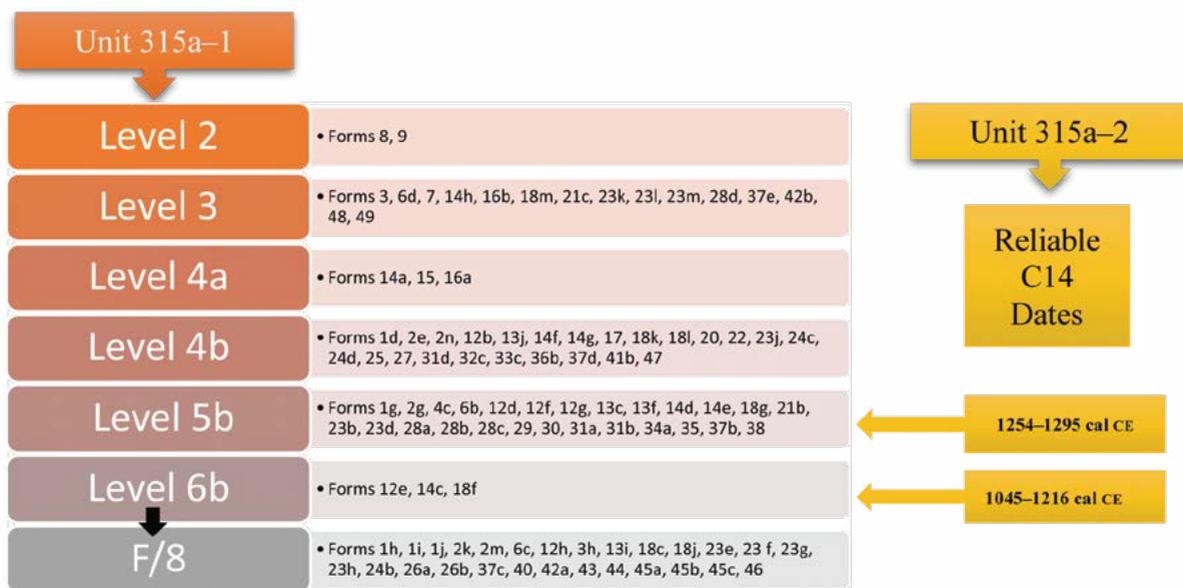


FIGURE 7: Occurrence of isolated forms in stratigraphic levels of Unit 315a-1 with reliable C14 dates from corresponding levels of Unit 315a-2 © Saw Tun Lin

exemplify this system. Likely commissioned by royalty or religious leaders, these plaques reflected elite wealth, piety, and status, reinforcing Bagan social and religious fabric. This tradition of elite patronage extended beyond Bagan, as evidenced by 19th century historical records indicating that artisans were commissioned to replicate the Jātaka plaques from the Ananda temple in Bagan (Stadtner 2001). These replicas were used to create similar glazed Jātaka plaques, which were installed at the Mingun stupa in Sagaing under the patronage of King Bodawphaya (ဘိုးတော်ဘုရား; r. 1782–1819).

The artistic skill and specialization evident in the plaques suggest that artisans were attached to royal or religious institutions. This aligns with Bruce Trigger’s (1990) argument that attached specialists often produce symbols of power and status in hierarchical societies. We can thus conclude that the plaques were products of

centralized elite-controlled craft specialization, serving both religious and political purposes.

In contrast, earthenware sherds found at the IRAW excavation sites and elite locations such as the Bagan palace most likely reflect independent production, characterized by artisans working autonomously to meet community needs. These utilitarian wares, such as cooking pots and storage vessels, were crafted for daily use across all social strata. The decentralized nature of independent production is evident in the variety and functionality of these ceramics, which were essential for everyday life. Their widespread use, even in elite households, highlights the versatility and significance of independent production in Bagan society.

The coexistence of attached and independent production modes in Bagan underscores the interconnectedness of its socio-economic structure. While attached production focused on high-

TABLE 4: Comparison of attached and independent production at Bagan

Aspect	Attached Production (Terracotta Plaques)	Independent Production (Earthenware)
Control	Controlled by elites (e.g., royalty, religious institutions)	Produced by local artisans for both commoners and elites
Purpose	Religious/ceremonial or for elite status and prestige	Utilitarian, made for daily use across social strata
Scale of Production	Likely large-scale, highly organized, and possibly centralized	Small-scale, localized, and decentralized
Artisans	Specialized artisans with high skill, attached to elite groups	General craftsmen, working independently or in small groups
Distribution	Possibly limited to religious sites or elite households	Widely distributed for commoners and elites
Example in Bagan	Terracotta Jātaka plaques	Earthenware from commoner sites at IRAW excavation and elite contexts like the Bagan palace

status goods such as the Jātaka plaques, independent production fulfilled essential daily needs across social classes. The presence of utilitarian wares at elite sites reflects the reliance of all societal levels on large-scale decentralized production. As Costin (1991) notes, these systems demonstrate varying degrees of integration, with independent production playing a vital role in daily life at Bagan.

Discussion and Conclusion

The ceramic assemblages from Shwe Creek and Otein Taung offer valuable insights into the multifaceted roles of ceramics in Bagan society. Beyond their functional utility, ceramics held cultural,

economic, and ritual significance that shaped both local practices and regional interactions. The prevalence of utilitarian wares such as water vessels, kitchen utensils, construction materials like roof tiles and bricks and ceramic stamps (Cheong 2019: 69–70; Rivera & Cheong 2019: 162, 285; Tamura & Cheong 2019: 124, 127, 232–233), illustrates their integral role in daily life. These materials point to independent specialization, where artisans produced goods to meet the daily needs of a broad societal base. These items were not exclusive to elites or institutions, but were integral to the lives of commoners as well. This reflects a more generalized form of specialization, where potters balanced the production

of utilitarian ceramics, addressing the overlapping cultural and practical needs of Bagan society. Such flexibility aligns with the concept of functional diversity in specialization, emphasizing the ability of artisans to cater to a wide range of societal demands.

The libation jar (*kendi*) illustrates how specialization extended beyond utilitarian functions to address spiritual and cultural needs. These libation jars, integral to Buddhist merit-making practices, required artisans with specific skills to produce standardized forms suited for ritual smashing and other ceremonial acts, as evidenced by inscriptions (Taw Sein Ko & Forchhammer 1899: 96, 160) and the archeological recovery of fragments. This reflects a form of attached specialization, where potters catered to the religious demands of Buddhist practices. The production of *kendi* jars also underscores the link between technical proficiency in ceramic production and its socio-cultural significance, demonstrating how specialized crafts contributed to the religious fabric of Bagan.

Diagnostic sherds from Shwe Creek (Unit 315a-1) reveal 151 distinct forms, categorized into special, common, and isolated types. Special forms, with chronological significance, were found across six levels, while common forms persisted from the early 11th century to post-Bagan periods. Isolated forms, unique to single layers, suggest limited production or specific use. Radiocarbon dating contextualized the special forms within a chronological framework, but cataloging errors and methodological limitations highlight the need for a more structured classification approach,

incorporating multiple attributes to enhance accuracy and insights. Despite limited data, the preliminary analysis reveals significant characteristics of Bagan's earthenware, useful for establishing a regional ceramic chronology. These findings on ceramic forms and their chronological contexts provide a foundation for understanding the interplay between production organization and socio-cultural dynamics during the Bagan period.

The presence of production tools such as ceramic anvils and kiln bricks further attests to Shwe Creek's role as a ceramic production hub. This aligns with evidence from Otein Taung, which also functioned as a multipurpose site with residential, industrial, and ritual activities. Furthermore, an inscription referencing the Queen of Bagan commissioning ceramic vessels from Twante in lower Myanmar (Luce 1969: 20, n. 61) illustrates the internal trade and craft production networks within the kingdom. Twante, recognized for its ceramic production, was capable of meeting the demands of the Bagan court, reflecting a high degree of specialization and organization of craft industries in the region. This historical account not only emphasizes the role of ceramics in Bagan's material culture but also demonstrates the integration of local and regional production systems in supporting the socio-political and economic structures of the Bagan period.

While local production catered to daily and ceremonial needs, imported ceramics demonstrate Bagan's participation in regional trade networks and highlights the intersection of local and global craft industries. The presence

of Chinese porcelains and celadons imported from lower Myanmar in Bagan, as documented by Kong F. Cheong (2019: 69–70) and Goh Geok Yian (2018: 179–97), provides compelling evidence of regional and interregional trade networks during this period. These imported ceramics, known for their high-quality craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal, highlight active participation in broader commercial exchange systems, underscoring the economic and cultural connections with neighboring regions and beyond. Notably, the limited quantity of high-value porcelains and celadons at Bagan may reflect differing economic or social statuses between the elites and commoners. This may also indicate how specialized goods could reinforce social stratification, with imported ceramics symbolizing wealth and prestige.

The analysis of earthenware sherds from Shwe Creek thus highlights both standardized and non-standardized aspects of pottery production during the Bagan period. While the presence of special and common forms indicates organized production and long-term standardization, the isolated forms and irregular diagnostics suggest variability and exceptions in the system. However,

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limitations such as fragmentation, insufficient data on material properties, and cataloging errors underscore the need for more comprehensive and meticulous data collection in future studies. These results provide a foundation for further exploration of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of ceramic production in the Bagan period.

Moreover, the dual presence of attached and independent production systems in Bagan reflects the interconnected and layered nature of its socio-economic structure. Attached production exemplified by the terracotta Jātaka plaques was elite-driven, symbolizing power, religious devotion, and status, while independent production, as seen in utilitarian earthenware, fulfilled the practical needs of daily life across all social strata. The coexistence of these systems highlights a dynamic interplay between centralized elite-controlled craft specialization and decentralized artisanal networks. This integration underscores the reliance of even the upper echelons on locally produced functional goods, illustrating the complementary roles of both production modes in shaping cultural and economic landscape at Bagan.

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AN UNUSUAL SAWANKHALOK CERAMIC AT THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM, AND ITS INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Forrest McGill¹

ABSTRACT—An unusual 15th–16th-century Siamese ceramic in the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco poses intriguing questions. What is it, exactly—that is, what was it used for? Who were its envisioned clientele? What are the sources of its form and decoration? Tentative answers to all these questions hint at far-flung trade connections with Indonesia, Iran, other parts of the Islamic world, as well as China. These connections hardly show up in written records, so we must depend on objects to reconstruct the story.

KEYWORDS: Asian Art Museum; Islamic World; Mosque Lamp; Sawankhalok; Siamese Ceramic; Trade Connections

Introduction

As the archeologist Mark Horton noted in 2004, writing of medieval exchanges between northwest India and East Africa, “[i]f we were to rely solely upon documentary evidence, then much of the trade of the Indian Ocean maritime world would be invisible”.²

Something similar could be said of another place and time, namely 15th–16th-century Ayutthaya, where surviving documentary evidence is meager and largely restricted to matters of immediate interest to the royal court. Overseas trade relations and certainly the designing and manufacturing of trade goods to appeal to far-flung markets must be inferred from thin foreign

records and, most of all, from objects viewed as documents in themselves. Cultural historians have, in recent decades, paid increasing attention to objects and their histories—“Tales Things Tell”—to gain insights into aspects of history recoverable in no other way.³

An unusual Siamese export ceramic in the collection of the Asian Art Museum (AAM) of San Francisco [FIGURES 1a–b] is worth considering in this light.⁴ Its function, form, and

¹ Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (Curator *Emeritus*). Email: forrestmcgill@outlook.com.

² Horton 2004 quoted in Flood & Fricke 2024: 1. Transregional, if not global, connections in the design, creation, and trading of Sawankhalok ceramics were discussed in two unpublished papers by Woodward 1998a and 1998b. Woodward’s papers have been helpful and stimulating.

³ Flood & Fricke 2024. The introduction is useful as an overview of issues and methods. I am grateful to Andrea Norris for calling this book to my attention. For another recent approach to object-based global history, see Cooke 2022.

⁴ This object, 2023.46, and others in the Asian Art Museum (AAM) collection referred to below, may be seen in the museum’s online collection database (<https://searchcollection.asianart.org/collections>). 18 photos of 2023.46 are presented, from all sides, top, and bottom. The museum bought the object in 2023 from Zetterquist Galleries, New York City. Zetterquist was selling it on behalf of the Mary & Cheney Cowles collection, Seattle, which had held it since about 1980. Previously it was in the collection of Floyd



FIGURE 1a: Lamp or water vessel, Thailand, approx. 1500, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, H. 21 cm × Diam. 18.7 cm, high-fired ceramic with underglaze painting, acc. no. 2023.46, Museum purchase with exchange funds from the gifts of James and Elaine Connell and Avery Brundage © AAM



FIGURE 1b: Different view of the object © AAM

decoration whisper of connections, link by tenuous link, from Spain to Indonesia. Along the way may be Persian metalworkers, Chinese merchants, and Javanese mosque-builders. However, caution is necessary from the beginning: some of what follows is speculation, and is often reliant on

Whittington of Seattle, who was in the Foreign Service in Thailand 1958–1962, in Indonesia 1962–1964, and in Southeast Asia in business until about 1972. Much of the Whittington ceramics collection was given to Western Washington University and can be seen in the university’s online database (<https://mabel.wvu.edu/whittington-collection-asian-ceramics>). Where the object was found is not known, though Indonesia (or the Philippines) is likely. Painstaking examination by the AAM’s objects conservator, who has extensive experience with Thai ceramics and has X-rayed a number of them or submitted samples for TL testing (and has identified several fakes and pastiches in the museum’s collection) found no reason to doubt the authenticity of this object. Laboratory investigation found tiny mineral deposits (identified with X-ray fluorescence analyzer as iron and manganese) suggesting that the object was once buried.



FIGURE 1c: The object from above, showing tube and presumed fill hole © AAM

subjective judgments of what resembles what and how much.

The object was made in the Sawankhalok (Si Satchanalai) kilns of upper central Thailand probably, as shipwreck and other evidence would suggest, within a few decades of 1500 (Brown 2009). It is of glazed stoneware with a bulbous body raised on a foot ring, having a tall neck with a cutout in the shape of a rounded W with a leaf-like element at the middle. Two small loops would have allowed for hanging; directly below each loop is a hole in the foot ring, so perhaps a suspension cord passed through one loop, through one hole, across the bottom, through the other hole, and then up through the other loop.

Inside the neck, a floor divides the neck area from the body proper [FIGURE 1c]. A hole in this floor presumably allowed filling and emptying. Behind the leaf-like element is a small



FIGURE 2: Jug, Timurid-period Persia, 1450–1500, Victoria & Albert Museum, H. 12.8 cm × Diam. 12.5 cm, brass with gold and silver inlay, inv. no. 750-1889 © V&A



FIGURE 3a: Sawankhalok object, approx. 1450–1550, University of Michigan Museum of Art, H. 17.9 cm × Diam. 14.5 cm, high-fired ceramic with underglaze painting, acc.no. FIC2006.356 © UMMA

integral tube, also of glazed stoneware. This tube gives access to the interior of the body.

The object's general shape, with bulbous body (18.7 cm in diameter) and cylindrical neck, probably derives from Timurid Persian metalwork jugs [FIGURE 2]. The shape, sometimes with an added handle, has a complicated history, turning up also in Chinese ceramics.⁵

The examples of Persian metalwork and Chinese ceramics do not have the cutout in the neck, the leaf-shaped

⁵ See Komaroff 1992: 53–55. A 15th-century Chinese example is Metropolitan Museum of Art 2004.163. The Met's record notes "The shape of this tankard is derived from Islamic metalwork: it seems likely that the piece was produced for export".



FIGURE 3b: The object from above, showing presumed fill holes © UMMA

central element nor, of course, the floor inside the neck with its fill hole and tube.

Purpose

The handful of somewhat similar published Sawankhalok ceramics have been called either water vessels or lamps.⁶ Usually photos looking down into the neck areas of these other examples are not available, so it is not clear if they have a fill hole or tube. Perhaps the most closely similar object in shape, but not in decoration, is in the collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art (formerly at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology). It has two holes in the floor inside its neck, but no tube [FIGURES 3a–b].⁷

⁶ For example, water vessel or canteen: Kritsada et al. 2535: 44, 72, 143 (which is also illustrated and discussed in English in Burin 2016: 9); lamp: Guérin & van Oenen 2005: pl. 169a–b, and figs 158–160; Übersee-Museum Bremen 1977: 35.

⁷ It is illustrated in Wagner 1979–80: fig. 9. Thanks to

If the AAM object functioned as a pouring vessel, perhaps as a *kendi* does, and the tube was its spout⁸—or, for that matter, the liquid was poured out from the side opposite the spout—why the suspension loops? One scholar speculates “suppose it was for ceremonial cleansing or for lustration of sacred objects. It could have been suspended over a table”.⁹ Alternatively, could it have been intended as a sort of canteen? But it seems too heavy and unwieldy, especially if filled with water, to imagine slung over the shoulder. Also, though canteens, or related pilgrim flasks, are common enough in other Asian ceramic traditions, they seem not to have been made in the Sawankhalok kilns.

Alternatively, might the object have been a lamp? If so, presumably the tube supported a wick long enough to trail down into oil inside the body. Laboratory examination by AAM conservator Mark Fenn using a borescope found no visible trace of oil residue in the glazed interior and no remnants of soot around the tube. In addition to objects of this type, Sawankhalok produced other possible oil lamps, but their shapes are entirely different and they have no loops for hanging.¹⁰

curator Natsu Oyobe for examining the object and sending photos.

⁸ Objects conservator Mark Fenn at the AAM tried filling the vessel with water and pouring it out through the spout. This worked, but Fenn noted that if the tip of the leaf-like element were not chipped off, the tip would have interfered with the water stream.

⁹ Hiram Woodward, email of 17 June 2024.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Thai ceramic lamps in general, see Guérin & van Oenen 2005: 132–141. Also, for example, AAM 1989.34.87, 1990.110, and 1990.157. An interesting Sawankhalok oil lamp, the body of which has a decorative scheme related to that of the object of focus here, is in the Art Gallery of New South Wales

My best guess is that the object may be a mosque lamp. Some ceramic mosque lamps contemporaneous with it from the Islamic world are not vastly different in shape and had loops for hanging [FIGURE 4].¹¹

Decoration

The body is decorated with four cusped lozenges set against a background of foliate scrolls. Within each lozenge is a half-length celestial figure making a gesture of respect termed *thepphanom* (เทพพนม) in Thai. The figures are backed by a pointed frame and the rest of the inside of each lozenge is filled with foliate scrolls similar to those in the general background.

On the neck are motifs for which English does not seem to have a good term. I will call them upside-down cusped heart shapes. Between these are smaller right-side-up heart shapes that are not cusped.

The Lozenges

The four cusped lozenges are bordered by double bands. The double bands continue beyond the lateral points of the lozenges, connecting them in a chain. Unusually, between the lozenges the double bands twine through two of what might be Chinese coins with

(AGNSW) in Australia, 224.2006. One wonders, however, if the AGNSW object may be made up of components that did not originally go together.

¹¹ The lack of soot could mean that the tube has been cleaned at some point or that the object was intended as a lamp but never actually used as such. On the form and symbolism of mosque lamps, see Graves 2018. Thanks to Qamar Adamjee for drawing this article to my attention.



FIGURE 4: Mosque lamp, Turkey, Iznik, approx. 1510, British Museum, H. 27.8 cm × Diam. 18.5 cm, ceramic with underglaze painting, with later replacement suspension chains, inv-no. G.5 (Godman 5) © British Museum

their square openings. But almost certainly, rather than seeing bands passing through Chinese coins, we are to see complicated knots of figure-eight shape.¹²

The exact prototypes of the cusped lozenges on the AAM object are not obvious. Cusped lozenges appear in Islamic metalwork and Chinese porcelain as much as two centuries earlier,¹³ and on a mid-14th-century engraved slab at Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai.¹⁴ The Wat Si Chum design may itself have Persian, or, perhaps more likely, Chinese connections. During and after the period of Mongol domination in Persia and China motifs and artistic ideas flowed back and forth, so it is not easy to say where a pattern or ornament originated, or at least first came into fashion (Medley 1973). Of course, the creativity of Siamese ceramic designers must also be considered.

These examples are mostly single cusped lozenges; the idea of joining them in chains seems to come more

specifically from Timurid, Safavid, and other 15th–16th-century Islamic metalwork. Examples abound, but usually, in the Islamic examples, the linked motifs are not all the same; lozenges tend to alternate with cartouches [FIGURE 5].

There is a puzzle related to where else a similar design motif on Sawankhalok ceramics is found. The design is cusped lozenges linked in a chain with the double bands bordering each lozenge twisting as they continue to the next lozenge. This chain motif appears fairly often in *kendi* decoration, but much more rarely elsewhere.¹⁵

The Celestial Beings

As such celestials often do, these rise from a lotus flower. The motif appears only rarely in the underglaze-painted decoration of Sawankhalok (and Sukhothai) wares, but is common enough in 15th–16th-century ceramic architectural components such as roof ornaments, and in stucco.¹⁶

Oddly, while on the AAM object the crowns and jewelry of the celestials are delineated with care, the celestials

¹² For drawings and descriptions of various chains of cusped lozenges, including one with knots (ปมเงื่อน, *pom-ngueang*) between, see Kritsada et al. 2535: 71, figs 36.1–36.3. A vessel of a different type with almost identical knots between the lozenges is shown on p. 40.

¹³ Islamic metalwork: for example, the “Courtauld bag”, an inlaid brass object thought to have been made in Iraq about 1300–1330; Chinese porcelain: innumerable examples of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), for instance British Museum PDF, B661 and Krahl et al. 1986: pl. 577. A large Yuan blue-and-white jar with cusped lozenges found in the crypt of Wat Mahathat, Ayutthaya; see www.ayutthaya-history.com/Temples_Ruins_MahaThat.html. Examples in 15th–16th century Persian design are: (1) book cover: British Museum 1992, 0431, 0.1; (2) carpet: the “Ardabil Carpet”, V&A Museum 272-1893.

¹⁴ Boisselier 1976: 68, fig. 37, where he mentions the possibility of “Iranian influence”. Woodward (2009: 155), on the other hand, would tend to think the connections Chinese.

¹⁵ Such *kendi* are not uncommon. Examples include AAM 1989.34.38 (where the bands make a knot rather than a twist), Met 238.23, ACM, Singapore, C-1440, and Guérin & van Oenen 2005: figs 198, 210. An unusual example on a dish is AAM 2018.12.

¹⁶ Ceramic roof ornament, one example among many: a 15th-century Sukhothai ceramic roof ridge finial in the AAM 1990.16; stucco: at for example, Wat Chulamani, Phitsanulok, of approx. 1464. A good image of a *thepphanom* in stucco at Wat Chulamani can be seen at: <https://www.timsthailand.com/prang-wat-chulamani-khmer-ruin/> (accessed 25 January 2025). For Wat Chulamani and its stucco decoration, as well as helpful comparative material, see Santi 2539.



FIGURE 5: Detail of jug in FIG. 2 © V&A

have no facial features. The low-relief celestial on a 15th–16th-century ceramic antefix at the AAM (1989.34.66) also has no facial features and several Sawankhalok *kendi* with faceless figures are known.¹⁷ Why no faces? A thought that springs to mind is that Siamese ceramic designers were trying to avoid offending the sensibilities of Muslim customers. But human figures with faces turn up often on Persian ceramics both before and after the period of the AAM object (for example on *Mina'i* and Kubachi wares) and very commonly in Persian and Indian Islamic paintings of the period. The question why the celestials on some Sawankhalok ceramics have no facial features remains open.

¹⁷ LACMA M.84.213.65, Guérin & van Oenen 2005: pl. 199. Unusually, on both vessels the figure is full-length, not half-length as with the typical *thepphanom*.

The Cusped Heart Shapes

The cusped heart shapes on the neck are easy to match in the 15th–16th-century Siamese decorative vocabulary. The shape appears, for example, on ceramic antefixes and also in stucco on Wat Chulamani (วัดจุฬามณี) in Phitsanulok (approx. 1464), which descends from earlier wall decoration at Phimai, and the 15th-century Wat Nang Phaya (วัดนางพญา) in Si Satchanalai.¹⁸

Key Points and Scenario

- Persians were aware of and had a presence in the Ayutthaya kingdom by the period of the object.¹⁹

¹⁸ Antefix: AAM 1990.163; stucco at Wat Chulamani: Woodward 1978: fig. 1; also, Santi 2539; Wat Nang Phaya, Si Satchanalai: images can be found easily by Google search.

¹⁹ For a summary, see M.I. Marcinkowski 2002 and C. Marcinkowski 2014.

- The adaptation in Ayutthaya of Persian or other Islamic decorative motifs in the 15th and 16th centuries (and later) has been mooted by art historians.²⁰
- 15th-century Vietnamese ceramics made their way into old Iranian and Turkish collections, showing that goods from mainland Southeast Asia were reaching Iran and Turkey; presumably, goods could move in the other direction as well.²¹
- In the 15th and 16th centuries certain motifs or configurations of motifs appear in the decorative arts of Europe, much of the Islamic world (including Indonesia), China, and Ayutthaya. Presumably, makers of trade goods were responding to the tastes of customers.²²
- Large quantities of 15th–16th-century Sawankhalok ceramics were exported to Indonesia and the Philippines.²³
- It is possible that the AAM object was found in Indonesia.
- 15th-century Vietnamese ceramics of unusual shapes were used in the decoration of Javanese mosques and it is thought they must have been specially ordered.²⁴ If special orders were placed for Vietnamese ceramics, it seems likely that such orders could be placed for Sawankhalok ceramics too.
- Chinese merchants (as well as Indians, Arabs, and Persians) arranged long-range trade from entrepôt to entrepôt; Ayutthaya was one node of this trade. Some of these Chinese traders were Muslim.²⁵
- Ethnically Chinese Muslims lived in Java at least from the time of Admiral Zheng He’s voyages in the early 15th century.²⁶

²⁰ For example, Boisselier 1976: 68, 75 and Wagner 1979–80: 491, n. 18. For a later period, see Listopad 2022.

²¹ “Vietnamese Wares” in Krahl et al. 1986: 487–488.

²² Various sorts of strapwork, with interlacing, sometimes twisting, bands are seen in elaborate knot designs attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, 1490–1500, and related designs by Albrecht Dürer which are themselves thought to derive from Islamic sources (Dackerman 2023, 2024); 14th-century stuccowork in the Alhambra, Spain; Mamluk, Timurid, and Safavid metalwork; early Indonesian Islamic tombstones, e.g., Musée Guimet MG18251; Javanese stone reliefs such as a circular pattern of knot motifs dated 1559 (Guy 1988–89: fig. 20); and early Ming porcelain such as Met 1991.253.37.

²³ Sawankhalok ceramics were an export ware, and more pieces (especially intact pieces) have been found in Indonesia and the Philippines than in Thailand. See, for example, Spinks 1959 and Brown 2009, *passim*. The very extensive “General Bibliography on Southeast Asian Ceramics” prepared by the staff of the National Museum of Asian Art may be found at <https://publications.asia.si.edu/publications/seaceramics/resources/general-bibliography.php>.

²⁴ See Guy 1988–89: 27–28, 32, 38, 42; also Dupoizat 2013: 112.

²⁵ One discussion is Woodward, 1998a. See also Medley 1973 and Bailey 1996.

²⁶ Lambourne 2008, though it focuses on Sumatra, is useful also for Java and has an extensive bibliography.

In conclusion, as to how the AAM object came to be, we may conjure a scenario, though of course many are possible. Let us imagine that the authorities of a mosque in Java were satisfied with the Vietnamese ceramics they ordered and decide they would like some lamps. A trader, likely Chinese and possibly Muslim, suggests ordering the lamps from Ayutthaya. Receiving the order, the potters of Sawankhalok, who have never made a mosque lamp, are puzzled, but come up

with a form and decorate it with some motifs that in their minds are Islamic. Conceivably, there were imported mosque lamps for them to see, but mosque lamps are sometimes also represented on carpets and ceramic tiles from the Islamic world, so possibly one of these provided a notion of the design of a mosque lamp.²⁷

Now this may or may not approach what really happened. But the AAM object tells some such tale of the wide-reaching interchange of ideas and forms.

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²⁷ Carpet: the Ardebil Carpet of 1539–1540 (see LACMA 53.50.6, of which there is a photo detail of one lamp); tile: Royal Ontario Museum 955.129.2.

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DEFAN DOESN'T RECALL: AN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

John Clark¹

ABSTRACT—This review article examines *Defan, an Oral Telling of the Lineage of Someone Whipping a Tiger, from Saiburi* (เดฟั่น เรื่องเล่าของตระกูลคนเขี่ยนเสือจากไทรบุรี), a 2021 SEA Write Award-winning novel by Siriworn Kaewkan (ศิริวรรณ แก้วกาญจน์; b. 1968). The novel's 65 chapters explore themes of memory, lineage, and historical amnesia through the protagonist, Defan, who metaphorically tames a tiger. For simplicity, this article adopts the shortened title *Defan Doesn't Recall*. It provides a biography of the author, a detailed summary with critical commentary, and an analysis of the novel's complex structure and symbolic elements, complemented by diagrams illustrating the narrative's spatial and kinship dimensions.

KEYWORDS: Historical Amnesia; SEA Write Award; Siriworn Kaewkan; Southern Thai Literature; Symbolism and Lineage

Preamble

This review article discusses the content and structure of the SEA Write Award winning-novel in 65 chapters by Siriworn Kaewkan, first published in 2021, with second and third reeditions in 2022 [FIGURE 1]. It has not yet been published in English translation. The rather long title straightforwardly translates as *Defan, an oral telling of the lineage of someone whipping a tiger, from Saiburi* (เดฟั่น เรื่องเล่าของตระกูลคนเขี่ยนเสือจากไทรบุรี), that is, the main character, Defan, controls the tiger by a whip while riding on its back. For purposes of simplicity and as an indicator of the historical amnesia which is one theme of the novel, I have shortened the title to *Defan Doesn't Recall*.

The first part of this article is a brief biography of the author. A list of most of his other publications, two of which have been previously translated into English, is in the **APPENDIX** at the end of this article. The second part is a summary of the book, together with my added comments on the actions that take place in it, which can be convoluted and difficult to follow, and on the style of writing. There are two diagrams: one of the physical and symbolological location of the village Fon Saen Ha, Downpour Village (ฝนแสนห่า); the other is my construction of Defan's kin relations based on the author's comments in various places in the text. The third part deals with structural aspects of the novel and my interpretation of the author's intentions.

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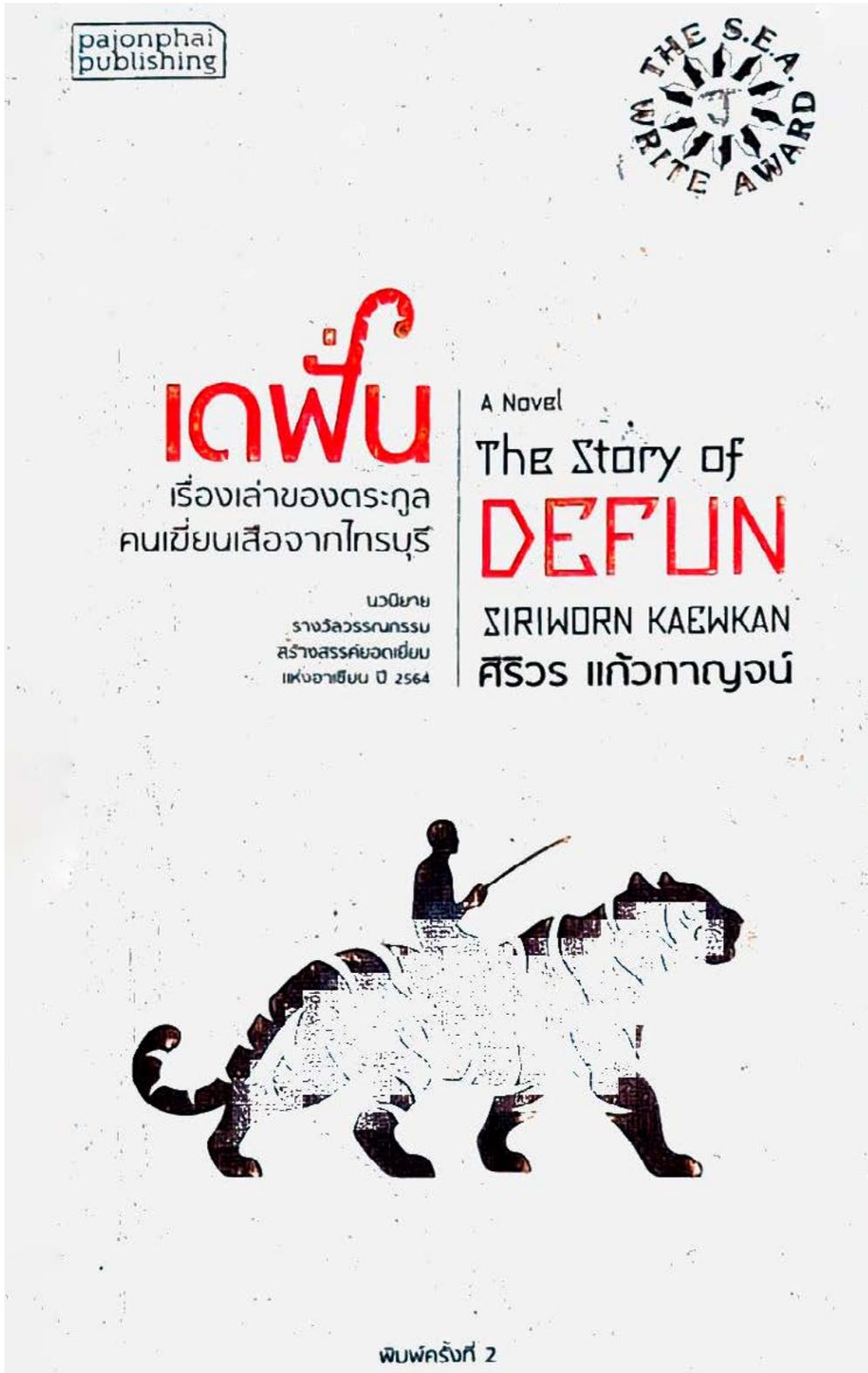


FIGURE 1: Book cover of *Defan's* second edition, 2022 © Pajonphai Publishing

The Author

Siriworn Kaewkwan (ศิริวรรณ แก้วกาญจน์) was born in Nakhon Si Thammarat on 8 March 1968. He was the son of a first-generation farmer; his mother was the third generation of those who had originally migrated from Saiburi (ไทรบุรี), today Syburi in the state of Kedah, then under the control of Siam but which is now in Malaysia. They cultivated the rubber and palm oil trees of their Chinese owner. Siriworn's father died when he was in the 4th year of elementary school, aged about ten. Siriworn had only one faded photograph of his father and heard stories about him from relatives. Some people think he looks like his father; Siriworn thinks the relation is the other way round. He hoped that if he knew himself better than his father then one day he would know his father better.

People say his grandmother was a Muslim, but this was not actually correct. Whilst she was a Buddhist, in practice she would not eat pork and if she did her mouth would swell up.² It was the generation of his maternal great-grandmother who were Muslims. Yet the area in Kedah from which his great-grandmother came was also Buddhist and Muslim beliefs had declined gradually by the generation of his grandmother. From her he learned many stories; her name was Mae Thao Sang Phromasut (แม่เต่าช้าง พรหมสุทธิ) in the southern language and Siriworn dedicated most of his books to her. Such stories included one about a man who nearly became a tiger, another about ancestors of distant

centuries. Another story was about someone who when crossing the ocean was given a ride by a shark. "It was like there was a treaty between us that we were not allowed to eat, or even touch, a shark", a weird story told to him when Siriworn was a child.

Siriworn identifies with the broad cultural and politico-administrative region of southern Thailand where education is in high repute. As a sign of his individualistic and stubborn character he decided, even after pressure from his family, not to apply to become an Army officer, a sure career path for rural intellectuals without a rich family or previous military background.

Highly intelligent in school, Siriworn belongs to the second generation of southern writers from the Klum Nakhon (กลุ่มนาคร) literary group centered in city of Nakhon Si Thammarat.³ The Klum Nakhon group preceded him by around 15 years and, despite its concern regarding rural poverty, was noted for its conservative absorption in rural, regional themes featuring southern lifestyles, language, and landscapes. One of its leading writers, Kanokphong Song-somphan (กนกพงศ์ สงสมพันธุ์), who died in 2006, wrote carefully about relations between Buddhists and Muslims in the short story, "The Cat of Buke Kruea So" (แมวแห่งบูเกะกรือซอ; Maeo Haeng Buke Kruea So), included in his collection,

² Much of the material in this section comes from a 2024 interview and email with Siriworn.

³ The general background to this group is found in ไปขายหนังสือที่งานสัมมนานักเขียนภาคใต้-สำนักพิมพ์คมบาง ["Using books at a seminar for writers from the South"], webpage retrieved at: <https://www.combangweb.com/ไปขายหนังสือที่งานสัมมน/> (accessed 14 December 2024). The Australian Thai Studies scholar Patrick Jory is reported as saying at the seminar that the Klum Nakhon is "characterized by its pre-Modern styles".

Another Land (แผ่นดินอื่น, *Phaendin Uen*), that won the SEA Write Award in 1996, two years after Siriworn had begun to publish poems.

Kanokphong is often credited as a stylistic precursor to Siriworn, though Siriworn's works draw on techniques from foreign authors, such as fragmented time and geographical discontinuity, which are absent in Kanokphong's linear narratives. In *Buke Kruea So*, a village in Narathiwat, a military unit protecting a school faces tensions as Buddhist and Muslim soldiers navigate personal conflicts, including a love triangle involving a Muslim teacher, Farida, who mysteriously disappears. In "Goats in the Cemetery" (แพะในกุโบร์, *phae nai kubo*), cultural overlaps and tensions unfold through the bond of two boys raised by the same woman, one Muslim and one Buddhist, as a tragic accident highlights unresolved histories tied to a former Muslim burial ground. Both stories underscore Kanokphong's focus on rural lives and cultural intersections, though his work, marked by linear storytelling, lacks the fragmented style seen in Siriworn.⁴ While Kanokphong's sympathies for the rural poor are clear, his works do not fully critique the state's role in fostering nationalism. Despite dying young, he remains a revered figure in Thai literature.

The Klum Nakhon group, led by Kanokphong's brother Jen, later founded a publishing house. While Kanokphong's works show deep sympathy for the rural poor and skillfully depict how ordinary people are affected by conflicts, they

do not fully critique the role of state or military manipulation in fostering nationalism. Kanokphong died of influenza at 40 and has since become a folk cult figure.⁵

Siriworn studied Humanities at the Crafts College of Nakhon Si Thammarat province, where he obtained a diploma in 1989. However, he did not go on to study a full degree at university. He was conscripted for one year's military service, discharged in 1990, and arrived in Bangkok in 1991. After a spell writing as a trainee in a weekly progressive political newspaper, *Motherland* (มาตุภูมิ, *Matuphumi*), he decided to become a full-time independent writer. Siriworn witnessed the Black May 1992 massacres which totalled around 350 victims in Bangkok, but he was surprised when his editor called him back early from the street scene in order to meet his text deadline. The experience disillusioned him about politics, leading him to resolve to remain an observer from then on. He could no longer accept high-minded Marxist interventions to which he felt he had previously been gullible. He published his first collection of poems in 1994 and his first novel in 2001. His other novels, short stories, and poems are mostly about social and political issues [APPENDIX].

After receiving other prizes in 2004 and 2007, in 2021, Siriworn finally won the prestigious SEA Write Award with

⁴ Siriworn's first complete novel is *A Scattered World* (โลกที่กระจัดกระจาย) published in 2001 (2544 BE), translated in English by Marcel Barang in 2014.

⁵ A large number of such local cults seem to exist in non-metropolitan Thailand. On the amuletic beliefs associated with one policeman, see Reynolds 2019. For a quasi-folkloric celebration of Kanokphong 13 years after his death, see: <https://youtu.be/QC6PAKE5JEE?si=sNipZJP11RXq3hSj> (accessed 22 February 2025).

Defan Doesn't Recall.⁶ This is the most significant annual writing award in Thailand, for which he had previously been nominated nine times.⁷ After twenty years of peripatetic residences, in 2016 Siriworn Kaewkan moved to the small town of Satun on the Andaman Sea, in the deepest south of Thailand. He is married to Beer Kitaya (เป็ียร์ คีตญา) with whom he has had one son. Together husband and wife operate a small bookshop in addition to a publishing business.

The Story of the Stories

The novel *Defan Doesn't Recall* starts with a writer outside the narrative who is alerted by some children calling out that “someone is whipping a tiger” as he rides it into town. The man whipping the tiger becomes a narrator inside a succession of linked stories that simply represent a man appearing to float on misty clouds that flow in from the sea. That the reader is brought into this “magical” relation to the story testifies to Siriworn’s skill as a writer. The man, who the reader later learns is Defan (เดฟัน), walks past the village clock tower in the direction of the public library and thus becomes positioned in an imagined village, not the actual one where the reader supposes the main action of the stories occurs.

⁶ Previous SEA Write Award winners include Kanokphong Songsomphan (1996) who passed away in 2006, Prabda Yoon (ปราบดา หยุ่น; 2002), and Veeraporn Nitiprapha (วีรพร นิติประภา; 2015, 2018). For my previous articles on the work of Veeraporn, see Clark 2020 and 2022.

⁷ As noted by his translator into English and French, Marcel Barang (1945–2020), in his blog for 2016: <https://marcelbarang.wordpress.com/tag/siriworn-kaewkan/>.

The imagined village is where most of the action—which Defan cannot recall—occurs. This is a fundamental literary device of magical realism: things and events exist in an unreal space which yet possesses a compelling reality by the ways these things and events are presented to the reader.⁸ It means the author can present events which are not placed in a normal chronological order. The author can examine figures such as ghosts or departed people as if they were actually present, yet not seen by people in the actual world.

The reader learns this village is imagined because the first chapter does not include the key phrase which is repeated in every other chapter except the last, “Defan doesn’t recall”. The phrase can be interpreted in an active sense, as if Defan had decided not to remember. It could also inactively suggest “Defan couldn’t remember”, a description of a vague, ambiguous, and in-between state of mind, shared between the reader and the author. This domain of magical realism is well known to Siriworn and his generation via translation from foreign languages. His awareness of this technique as a way to use actual events as fantastical simulacra for the real motives of his characters, and for the state which directs them for its own purposes, brackets the book, excepting the first and last chapters. An excursion is thus signaled for the reader by means of

⁸ However unfamiliar, there should be no surprise at the liminality of Thai spaces in Siriworn’s work, one found cross-culturally in many other Magical Realist texts: “The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds” (Zamor & Faris 1995: 6).

the general notion of magical realism available from Thai translations into a history whose facts Siriworn apparently only randomly cites, but which the Thai state systematically obscures.

The narrative switches into historical mode with the information that Defan's paternal great-grandfather, Pu Thuat (ปู่ทวด),⁹ had once moved with his family northwards from Saiburi. This town lay across the border from Siam in Kedah, now in Malaysia, from which he escaped British colonization further south. The family crossed in 1908, the year Siam "gave" Kelantan to Great Britain, nominally in "exchange" for investment in Siam's railways. Great-grandfather Pu Thuat was not afraid of white people, but he did not want to live under their domination. After a week of travel, Pu Thuat and family entered Perlis, now a state in northern Malaysia, and after they had sold off their carts to local Chinese traders, crossed a mountain range into southwestern Siam, then governed as part of the Siamese administrative circle, *monthon* (มณฑล), of Phuket. Great-grandfather Pu Thuat came with 32 people, 12 cows, 5 horses, 3 fighting cocks, 7 hens, and 2 sets of dogs and cats.

They came to a place where a legend told of a hero, spoken of as a rootless gypsy, rode on a tiger's back, controlled

⁹ The name is close to that of the famous southern Thai monk Luang Pu Thuat (หลวงปู่ทวด; 1582–1682) from Sating Phra in Songkhla province, renowned as miracle worker, saint, and latter-day figure on amulets which believers see are endowed with magical powers. The perpetuation of tales about Luang Pu Thuat via oral dissemination could have served Siriworn as an index of popular tales maintaining a non-orthodox and non-state sanctioned history. On later uses and misuses of his legend and amulets dedicated to him, see Jory 2008.

with a whip. The local people were characterized as primitive, eating leaves. Physical descriptions of the landscape are mixed with actual dates, for they arrived in October, the year denoted in the story as the same year the North Amerindian chief Geronimo died, 1909.¹⁰ Perhaps specification of the month implies an association with the Thammasat massacre of students which was to take place on 6 October 1976. By mentioning Geronimo, the story historically alludes to a distant and (Siamese) officially ignored anti-colonial resistance towards an outside power.

Later, the tiger magically remained in the form of a stone statue found on a hill where Pu Suka (ปู่สุกะ), son of Pu Thuat, went into exile. This village came to be called Fon Saen Ha, literally "Rain of the hundreds of thousands", or Downpour Village. The rain swamps the village of "he who whips the tiger". There was only one season, the rainy, which thus "climatically" locates the village between the oral narrative myths and the stories of the real.¹¹

As a child, Defan role-played the members of his family, engaging with the refugee experience of his ancestors. In this he imitated figures in oral history.

¹⁰ In March 1909, Siam signed the Treaty of Bangkok with Great Britain, ceding Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis to Great Britain. In exchange, Great Britain ceded Patani to Siam and Siam received a loan from the Federated Malay States to build a railway line in southern Siam (Paget & Devawongse 1909).

¹¹ The story notes that the change of the village name from the "Village of he who whips the tiger" (หมู่บ้านคนเขี่ยนเสือ) to Fon Saen Ha coincided with central government concerns that Karl Marx had arrived, but these anxieties were not those of the whole nation. America too sent troops and Thailand became a base for those called, after an earlier colonial term, "the warriors with rice-milk eyes".

His younger sister Kanchaya (กัญชญา) wanted to ride on the tiger, but was not allowed to because she was a woman. Pu Thuat had not yet married her great-grandmother Ya Thuat (ย่าทวด) when he arrived on the tiger's back. However, in the end, Defan let his sister role-play Ya Thuat and Defan (as author) thought that, if we cannot make up stories, they would not be fun: pleasure is lost if the stories were too true. The settlement was established in the rainy season and the journey halted when it had reached an old community called Bukit Yamu in Malay. Pu Thuat—who had arrived on the tiger's back—initially recited the stories as poetic tales with a set rhythm as in a shadow-puppet play (หนังตะลุง, *nang thalung*). He waved his long stick at the heavens to get the rain clouds to cease raining so that his family could pass.

Yet he decided not to return home after a conflict with pirates and the group made a house. They were given food by a local Muslim family, an indication of Pu Thuat's cross-cultural flexibility and appeal, clear also from his relationship with minority forest people such as the Sakai (ซาไก). Pu Thuat wanted to go on to Nakhon Si Thammarat (where a relative had built a reliquary stupa for the Buddha), but he would let anyone from the group who wished it to stay where they were now. They were to cross the Nok Yung Ram Phaen (นกกยูง รำแพน) mountain range during August, when the southwest Monsoon would make travel difficult.

Animals in the forest avoided Pu Thuat as he whipped and rode on the tiger, thus the journey went smoothly. Even cows were unafraid because the

tiger had been fed leaves since the time he was small. He had become tame in the Cameron Highlands where Pu Thuat served as a tracker for the British. The family eventually came to a valley with two streams which emerged from a spring in the mountains; the water flowed into a swamp. This circuitous travel is difficult to imagine so I have drawn below a diagram showing the routes [FIGURE 2].¹²

The tiger walked around the eventual site of Fon Saen Ha Village in a counter-clockwise direction, as if he did not want to follow the clock and thus not go with the flow of time.

Pu Thuat did not want to oppose the tiger's will either. For the first time he called the tiger by its real name, Si Fai (สีไฟ). Pu Thuat stuck the stick for taming the tiger into the ground at the center of the circle around which the tiger had walked. They could then see the lake at Songkhla, 50 kilometers away. Pu Thuat earlier used his stick to part the clouds, thus neither rain nor storm had come.

The Journey of Pu Thuat

The forest was full of different trees all of which Pu Thuat could name. They followed the creek until it disappeared into the ground. The big Magnolia (จำปา, *champa*) tree was the origin for the unusual fragrance emitted by the water. The two sides of the stream joined at the swamp, which was as clear as a mirror. Pu Thuat sent a signal to

¹² In the January 2024 interview, Siriworn mentioned that the shape of the swamp and the two trees was like a *namtao pung* (น้ำเต้าป่อง) or gourd, somewhat symbolic of the origin of human life.

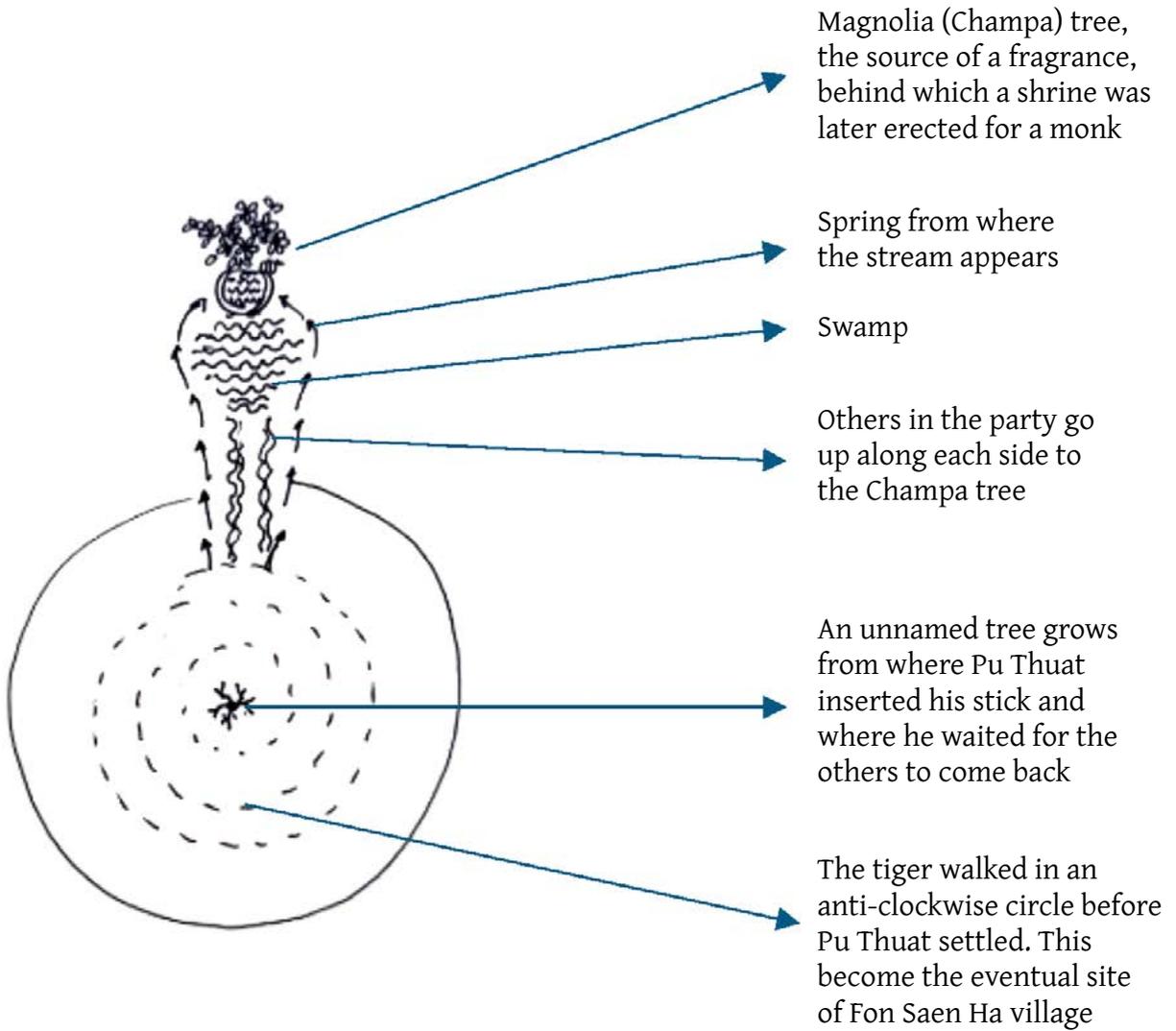


FIGURE 2: The Peregrinations of Pu Thuat
© Phaptawan Suwannakudt/John Clark

everyone to come together, then they followed the stream which became a well under a large tree. Pu Thuat stuck his stick into the ground and stayed where he was in the center of the circle the tiger had gone around. The stick started to grow into a tree. He decided that was where their village would be.

The tree which grew from the stick became a point where past and future, life and death intersected. It became the origin of the village Fon Saen Ha where “he who whips a tiger” arrived.

As a child, Defan had enjoyed life and eaten leaves from the trees. Pu Thuat travelled further north to a lake, possibly Songkhla, where he saw a Hokkien girl. He married her and she became Ya Thuat, the great-grandmother of Defan and Kanchaya. One day Pu Thuat came back to the village accompanied by a pilgrim monk. The monk settled in the sacred place under the Champa tree by the well before a shrine had been built. The Buddhist monk lived in the shrine and became the first abbot of the Hermitage of He who Whips a Tiger (สำนักสงฆ์คนเขี่ยนเสือ, Samnak Song Khon Khien Suea).

A magical presence came with two twins who appeared in Fon Saen Ha. They were bald and spoke as one person in a question-and-reply format. They were somehow related to Chansaeng (จันทร์แสง), father of Mali (มาลี), mother of Defan. When they met, Pu Suka, father of Anda who subsequently was father of Defan, asked the twins “Who did you escape from?” They replied: “From the one who ordered the hanging of Chansaeng”, at Pak Phanang (ปากพนัง) in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Chansaeng had fought the Japanese and Pu Suka

revealed that in the past he had allied with him, ambushing a Japanese camp.

Pu Suka was born two years after Pu Thuat’s migration. As his first-born child Pu Suka used to ride on horseback between both sides of the mountain range. Pu Suka met Chansaeng on the road; he persuaded Pu Suka to go along with him. Chansaeng had come from Pak Phanang. In the end they split, Chansaeng going to Padang Besar, now in Malaysia on the border. Pu Suka went to Perlis and then went by horse into the water by the mangroves, near Satun. A fisherman told him this was the place of Buaya Bute (บัวบาบูเต๊ะ), the White Crocodile. Pu Suka then went across to Aceh in northern Sumatra. From there he returned with a woman, Chansaeng’s daughter, who became the mother of Rahman (see below). Her second son, Anda (อันดา), was born two years later in an unstated year, during a significant political change, presumably the fall of the absolute monarchy in 1932.

Defan’s family relationships are set down discontinuously throughout the book and thus are not easy to grasp at one reading. The reader may find the next diagram useful [FIGURE 3].

In reading to this point, the palimpsest quality of tales-wrapped-by-tales becomes more evident. At the very end of the book, Siriworn inserts a closing sentence that there were stories within stories about Pu Thuat, thus telling the story about itself, the story of Defan. Later the story told by Pu Thuat disappears: did it actually take place, or was it blown away with the wind?

The main narrative then revolves around Uncle Rahman (ลุงรามัญ): the author signifies this is a real person by

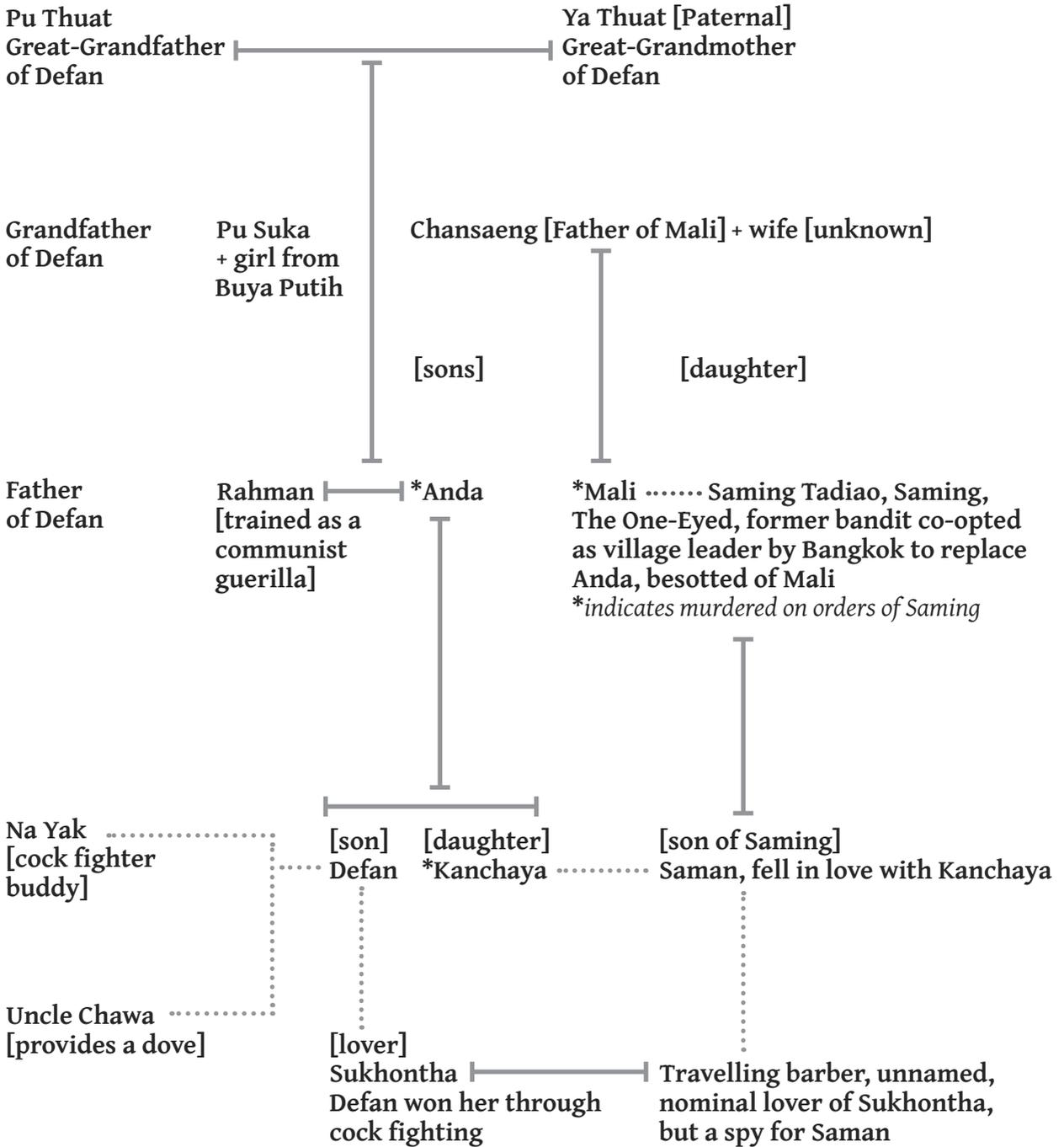


FIGURE 3: Genealogical relationships of Defan
 © Phaptawan Suwannakudt/John Clark

the use of “Uncle” and thus the brother of Defan’s father, Anda. Pu Suka (son of Pu Thuat, father of Rahman and Anda) had first sent Rahman to learn Chinese at a school in Penang in the colony of the Straits Settlements, where his relative had helped the communist Chin Peng (จีนเป็ง; Chen Ping in Mandarin) in the anti-Japanese underground. Rahman was five to six years younger than Chin Peng who was to become Secretary of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1947. The relative took Rahman to the Sankhalakiri (สันกาลาคีรี) mountains to learn guerilla tactics with the MCP. Rahman was then accepted by the Party and sent for further training to China. He waited in Bangkok for members from other regions to join in the slum area near the Phra Pradaeng port, downstream from central Bangkok and Si Phaya, the quay for leaving for the Gulf of Siam. Rahman went to Hong Kong, Macao, then on to Beijing by railway. After some months he moved to Sichuan for his training and then to Vietnam after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu (1954). He came back to Fon Saen Ha via Laos at the time of the Sarit Thanarat coup in Thailand (1957). The task assigned to Uncle Rahman by the Party was to collect Chin Peng from Betong (เบตง) on the Thai–Malay border. Both had to hide their identities and pretend to be plantation workers. They then proceeded by motorbike along Highway 410 via Phattalung and then clandestinely to Trang, Ranong, across to Chumphon, Phrachuap Khiri Khan, and, finally, to a safe house in Bangkok.¹³

¹³ The level of geographical detail about clandestine movements may suggest Siriworn had access to

Meanwhile, problems had arisen on rubber plantations due to a fall in the global price of rubber. Rahman led the farmers to adjust the tax on rubber crop earnings. He got rid of the influence of local gangs and deposed the district chief who was under their sway. Rahman then left to join the communist guerillas which his brother Anda could not join because he had a family. Anda and Mali had a son, Defan, and a daughter, Kanchaya. Defan is identified as born in 1951 by reference to a coup one year earlier in 2493 BE (1950 CE), the year of the revival of the Anti-Communism Law.¹⁴

Mali’s father was Chansaeng, a shadowy presence and enigmatic local hero. Another figure, Uncle Chawa (ลุงชวา), who had fled from the Japanese invaders in the Dutch Indies, turned up one day with a singing bird, a dove. Also, Uncle Giant or Na Yak (น้ำยักษ์) brought a fighting cock to the village supposedly sent from Chansaeng. Defan travelled around Malaysia and Indonesia with Uncle Giant, who became a surrogate uncle, and even went with him as far as New Guinea. Defan looked for fighting cockerels which he could then breed and wager on in competitions.

Defan’s prize in one cockfight was the girl Sukhontha (สุคนธา); she asked Defan to be kept under a roof resem-

communist materials. Chin Peng or Chen Ping 陈平 (1924–2013) died in Bangkok and was refused burial in his native village by the Malaysian government. This information may also have come indirectly from Thai government sources. Among many biographies is Chin Peng 2003. The most details about Chin Peng are in Chin & Hack 2004.

¹⁴ Writer Kulap Saipradit (กุลลาบ สายประดิษฐ์; 1906–1974) was arrested in 1952. He went into exile in China in 1958 where he died in 1974. He also spent two years in Australia, 1947–1949 (Barmé 1995).

bling a fighting-cock cage. Then Defan became her lover. She later left and returned only briefly to hand over to Defan a baby who was called Suea (เสือ) or Tiger. There is a change in the narrative when Sukhontha arrives: Defan's sister Kanchaya finds his story no longer entertaining because Defan's world is no longer that of their childhood imagining.

Defan won a bet on fighting cockerels, leading him to connect with a former buddy of his father, Anda, the one-eyed bandit Saming Tadio (สมิงตาเดียว). "Saming" identifies a tiger spirit, somewhat akin to a were-wolf (เสือสมิง, *suea saming*); its amulet, endowed with great power, is given to animist adepts. Saming was an outsider; no one knew where he came from. Anda said Saming wanted to capture the White Crocodile with his bare hands, so they went off together to catch it. The two became friends until both of them fell in love with Anda's wife, Mali. Saming became Anda's enemy because of his jealous love for her.

A change takes place in the story at the same time as the central government intervenes at the village level. With the establishment of a new central government and due to Cold War fears, the Army was brought into the village. It established a camp in the jungle at which the Army tortured suspected communists, the sound of their cries being concealed by a diesel generator. Saming Tadio was forced on the people as head of the village by the government as Kamnan (กำนัน) in place of Anda. Saming wanted to get back at Anda who had won over Mali, mother of Defan. He was jealous of Mali and became the killer of Anda.

A travelling barber, the secret lover of Sukhontha, came to the village fair and courted Kanchaya to lure her to Saman (สมาน), Saming Tadio's son. At the fair, a magician performed, who would cut a piece of wood with a sharp blade and then cut his own hand, yet no blood appeared. These semi-public events had an occult atmosphere. Saming had lost his eye after a fight where he challenged Anda to grab a tiger with his bare hands. Saming refused his help and thrust the eye back in its socket by himself. Saming then went to learn magic skills with a magician. He also collected the eyes of the enemies he had murdered. Animism is a domain of belief and action which could protect an adept from danger; this protection was embodied in an amulet.¹⁵

The barber was actually a spy for the authorities. Saming's son Saman was in love with Kanchaya; Saman negotiated with the barber to get him to abandon Kanchaya. But the day Kanchaya disappeared provided evidence that Saming controlled the village. She was later murdered and her corpse was seen floating among hundreds of bodies in the canal. She had been killed, the reader must suppose, during the Army's anti-communist actions.

The story ends with Defan buried alive on top of his mother's body. She died in a hole below which is the corpse of his father, Anda, murdered earlier by Saming Tadio. As mother and son are forced to dig their grave, the sound of a

¹⁵ On this, see in general Reynolds' section "Amulets and Protection" (2019: 119–128). See also the last Special Edition of JSS on the "The Amulet Culture of Thailand" (Vol. 112, Part 2, December 2024).

machine gun comes from the other side of a canal. An ethereal voice utters the word “Chansaeng” from the bottom of the pit, as could the unidentified sound of Rahman. These portents point to the heroic isolation of Chansaeng and Rahman from the rest of the suffering family.

The last chapter identifies actual places, including Wat Chanathip (วัดชนาธิป) in Satun—not the fictitious Fon Saen Ha—, but Defan floats away across these, like the wraith he was at the very beginning of the story. Defan was rescued, just in time, by the Sakai (ซาไก) or Maniq (มะนิก) ethnic group. “Sakai” is a pejorative term meaning “barbarian”, to denote a forest minority which Defan befriended when he was in the jungle. They thought he was actually Rahman brought back to life, and this may be why they dug Defan up and saved him from death with his mother. He came back to life in their village of Fon Saen Ha, “unable to recall” what he had endured.

The Structure of the Story

The following is largely my interpretation. Author Siriworn suggests that history belongs to those who lived through events which are not written down in the official histories as taught in school. These events are carried on in oral tales, in one form as Nang Thalung, the folk shadow-play, passed around between different communities and generations. They are passed on in other kinds of oral transmissions, such as those that Siriworn received from his grandmother, the daughter of a southern Muslim.

I propose that Siriworn shows resistance to the “official” written texts of Thai public history, which still are largely those approved by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943), a son of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). Because of their royal progenitor, these texts cannot be altered. Siamese and Thai history is a royally approved chronicle, not a debated or contested discourse. In its official form, such history occludes many events the details of which are nonetheless still recalled in speech and local stories. Because these tales were not written down,¹⁶ these events cannot easily contest the views of the state which chooses to ignore much that is still buried in popular memory. Yet oral transmission does allow the tale to survive occlusion by the state.

¹⁶ Whilst some scholars such as Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (พระยาอนุมานราชธรม; 1888–1969) have studied Thai oral tales, no overall or systematic compendium of Thai folktales from all the different regions—i.e., northern/Myanmar borders, Lanna, Isan, eastern and western central Thai, upper southern in Nakhon Si Thammarat, lower southern in Narathiwat and Phattalung—exists according to Siriworn in 2024 interview. Unwritten oral folktales can become performed, written, and/or later printed court literature over time, with additions and variations. This evolution may occur even though the link with any putative original or set of supposed original events becomes increasingly tentative the more distant the court recension or its later printed version is from the oral tales. See Warunee 2017. See also “Prince Damrong’s Prefaces”, around 1917, in Baker & Pasuk 2010: 881–912, especially 892–897, and 1339–1392. In France, François Rabelais (fl. 1483?–1553) collected folktales in various forms after 1532 and Charles Perrault (1628–1703) around 1697. In Germany, folktales were compiled by the Grimm brothers—Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859)—in 1812–1857 and, in Italy in 1956, by Italo Calvino (1923–1985) from largely 19th century compilations.

Some of Siriworn's earlier chapters begin and almost every chapter ends with the phrase "Defan doesn't recall". Thus, the text functions as a membrane carrying the congealed knowledge of past events omitted from the official record, to which his text is a form of silent resistance. Instead of directly taking to task the self-seeking deceptions of the state by parading known facts which have been passed on orally, a writing strategy which might be politically and personally dangerous, Siriworn indirectly circumvents these untruths and punctures the membrane, saying orally what has been lost to history and implicates the self-interest of the state which has obscured these events.

The tales are structured as one story which is, in turn, a palimpsest of separate stories linked by common characters who recurrently appear in the same geographical locations in southern Thailand and its near neighbors in Malaysia and Indonesia. This wide range of locations and individuals who move around Southeast Asia without constraint serves as a physical metaphor for the variety of people and places not under the control of the central government or of other nations such as Malaysia or Indonesia.¹⁷ This zone begins where there is no central state and ends when the extent of the control by the central state remains in question. The indiscriminate or haphazard way in which the various figures are linked is beyond the domain of the rational state. The local has nothing to

do with the world beyond even though it may map parts of a nascent history via reference to world events. It depends, perhaps evanescently, on moments when the central government intervenes locally due to the necessities of its own business, or sometimes when local presences mediate the Cold War. Defan lived a life without memory. This may well be due to the links between three generations of the same quasi-family possibly severed by the unevenness of central state interests. These links, perhaps, would have maintained a real historical presence for that quasi-family, if they could have remembered them.

Siriworn is neither a theoretician of literature nor does he want to make ideological points from a given position. But he broadly reads world literature translations into Thai and the range of his references can be surprising, from Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) to Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), from William Blake (1757–1827) to Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), not to mention, as we have seen, Latin American magic realism. He also has mentioned that he has read William Faulkner (1897–1962) in translation. Traces of other non-canonical modern writers are surprisingly eclectic. For example, Siriworn believes he read Ambrose Bierce's *The Moonlit Road* (1907), before he saw the film *Rashōmon* (1950) by Kurosawa Akira, based on an Akutagawa story (1915) that closely follows Bierce.¹⁸

Of the meta-story of Defan, much is told by the dedications to many of Siriworn's books, particularly to the

¹⁷ Resistance to central governments by the *orang asli* and other mobile populations such as the *orang laut* is systematically discussed in Scott 2009.

¹⁸ Siriworn briefly mentioned his knowledge of non-Thai literature via Thai translation in my 2024 interview with him at Songkhla.

grandmother who was the daughter of a Muslim and who did not eat pork.¹⁹ The author figure just tells stories and becomes a spokesperson for those who do not, or cannot, speak. At the end of the story, Defan must call out to his mother, not to Anda, his absent and earlier murdered father.

The metaphor of coming back to life is implied here and, significantly, Defan is buried on top of his mother. It turns out Defan is still alive and is discovered by the local tribe of the Sakai people who assist his recovery. Anda, Defan's father, had stopped Defan from going to school. After Defan became obsessed with cock fighting he ended attending school. Anda said Defan might as well eat grass and leaves like a buffalo. Defan did not care; Pu Thuat was known to eat leaves too. Marginalization is presented as a character device: only those characters exist who have been cut off, or partially cut off, from a full existence.²⁰

Some other artists refuse this marginalization as a device for positioning others. There is the example of the peregrinations by textile artist Jakkai Siributr (จักกาย ศิริบุตร; b. 1969) via Patani, Myanmar, and Phayao, to discover marginal or non-standard Thai lives. Siriworn himself spent six months in 2012 on the Thai–Myanmar border trying to see what the conditions of

marginalized refugees between the two cultures might be.

The geographical margin functions as an inverse way of questioning the idea of “Thainess” which becomes more authentic the more it is subject to marginalization by the non-Thai, or, put more relationally, the “other-than-Thai”.²¹

It is quite difficult to accept how enlightened members of the elite can subscribe to marginalization of the other. The apparently casual comments by members of this elite indicate how empty it would be for art theory, including the theoretical description of literature and music, to make interpretations along the lines of a left/right, yellow/red, or even Royalist/Thaksinite-populist opposition. Such comments hint at how widely shared among the court-focused educational elite is the simplistic assessment of those looking down on the provincial farmers or the uneducated as ignorant. It calls them *kwai* (ควาย), “buffaloes”.

Thus “Red Shirt” opposition to the status quo in 2010, the year the Thai military were deployed to put down “Red” opponents under the direct orders of Prime Minister Abhisit Thejavira (in office 2008–2011), may simply have been against norms of public order, however they were defined. In this novel, published some ten years later, Defan resists a system which does not easily permit critical thinking about figures in authority. The reader cannot tell how far Siriworn himself—as

¹⁹ For some biographical details given here, I am grateful also particularly to Siriworn's email of 16 March 2024.

²⁰ Character has hitherto been conceived in an analysis of early modern Thai literature as a function of othering from a higher or lower status position, not as here, from marginalization at or beyond the “Thai” geographical periphery; this dissolves in most cases for Defan. See Suvanna 1995.

²¹ Edward van Roy (2017) has shown how varied and geographically heterogenous the earlier ethnic components of the modern Thai population were and still are.

differentiated from his various writing personae—actually thinks like this, despite his known past resistance to Prime Minister Thaksin in 2006.

In this novel the metaphor of Thai in the South surrounded by “primitive tribes” while allowing Siriworn to represent animist beliefs and follow non-text based oral transmission of historically occluded events, is perhaps less important than the shifting consciousness of the protagonists. The movement of characters both within and between stories allows for the reader’s simple perplexity at forgotten or obscured events. In this context, obscurity is not a function of simple truth-telling but is, as in literary cultures elsewhere, dependent on the shifting viewpoints of the author and reader. In the southern Thai world of Defan there is no social constancy, no geographical continuity of the state’s territory. There is—to this reader—the bewildering facility of major characters to freely travel all over Southeast Asia, where there is no regular and unimpeded control from the center, no dominance of one religion, and,

probably, no solid and unbending formation of the personalities of particular characters.

This may be because familism—functional, informal, and inclusive links to a genealogical bloodline, marked by an over-lapping string-bag of stories—works as a universe builder both for the state and for the intimate structures of individual personalities. Familism also works paradoxically to exclude. Siriworn binds his characters into a set of practices which is bound to become circular, in a repeating double bind. It is the drive of social practice not to hurt friends which is made semantically equivalent to not hurting family. Structurally disparate or geographically fragmented, family must come first. It is unclear how far Siriworn recognizes the limitations of ego conformity to this repeating structure, but he does seem to be unhappy with the functioning social idea that this world is “our” choice, that this is what “we” want.

At base, within the mental frame of familism, anything apart from the family does not matter. Anything else is an imposition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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28 January 2024, which clarified certain issues, as well as for his email of 16 March 2024 in response to written questions in English. Saiburi (Syburi) refers to the area that is now the Malaysian state of Kedah. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their several useful suggestions.

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APPENDIX: SIRIWORN KAEWKAN'S WRITINGS

- 2537 BE (1994 CE) ถ้ามข่าวถึงแสงตะเกียง [*Inquiring About the Lantern Light*]
- 2539 BE (1996 CE) เพลงปีกผีเสื้อ [*Melody of Butterfly Wings*]; by pen name Bunga Yawi (บุหงา ยาวี)
- 2542 BE (1999 CE) ท้างน้ำภายใน [*The Inner Abyss*]
- 2544 BE (2001 CE) โลกที่กระจัดกระจาย ปกรณัม-ตำนาน-นิทาน-ประวัติศาสตร์ในหีบกลของเรื่องเล่าหลังสมัยใหม่; *A Scattered World, Myth, Legend, Folktale, History* [*Inside the Puzzle Box of our Postmodern Story*], trans. by Marcel Barang (2014)
- 2547 BE (2004 CE) ประเทศที่สาบสูญ [*The Lost Country*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2548 BE (2005 CE) เรื่องเล่าของคนบันทึกเรื่องเล่าที่นักเล่าคนหนึ่งเล่าให้เขาฟัง [*The Tale of a Story Keeper, as Told by a Storyteller*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2549 BE (2006 CE) กรณีฆาตกรรมโต๊ะอิหม่ามสะตอปา การ์เด; *The Murder Case of Imam Storpa Karde*, trans. by Marcel Barang (2010)
- 2550 BE (2007 CE) เก็บความเศร้าไว้ให้พ้นมือเด็กเด็ก [*Keep Sadness Out of Children's Reach*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2550 BE (2007 CE) ลงเรือมาเมื่อวาน [*Set Sail Yesterday*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2551 BE (2008 CE) เมื่อฉันหายไปจากโลกใบหนึ่ง [*When I Disappear from One World*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2551 BE (2008 CE) บันทึก(ไม่)ปะติดปะต่อ [*A (Dis)Connected Journal*]
- 2552 BE (2009 CE) มาลีฮวนน่า ฮองกง เซินเจิน [*Marijuana, Hong Kong, Shenzhen*]
- 2553 BE (2010 CE) ฉันอยากร้องเพลงสักเพลง [*I Want to Sing a Song*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2553 BE (2010 CE) ช่างซ่อมตุ๊กตาจากอาเคเซีย [*The Puppet Repairer from Acacia*]
- 2555 BE (2012 CE) โลกประหลาดในประวัติศาสตร์ความเศร้า [*A Weird World in the History of Sadness*]; in final round for SEA Write Award
- 2555 BE (2012 CE) ความว้าเหวแห่งเอเชีย [*The Loneliness of Asia*]
- 2564 BE (2021 CE) เดฟัน เรื่องเล่าของตระกูลคนเขี่ยนเสือจากไทรบุรี [*Defan, an Oral Telling of the Lineage of Someone Whipping a Tiger, from Saiburi*]; SEA Write Award
- 2566 BE (2023 CE) ท่านกัปตันและเรื่องเล่าของคนอื่นๆ [*Captain and the Tales of Others*]

ALIX AYMÉ : EXPOSITION AU MUSÉE NATIONAL DE LUANG PRABANG

« De grands murs blancs, quoi de plus tentant pour le pinceau d'un décorateur !
La perspective de ce travail m'enchante »

Alix Aymé à Maurice Denis, 10 décembre 1929
(cité dans André-Pallois 1997 : 164)



FIGURE 1 : Portrait d'Alix Aymé,
vers 1929–1930 © Archives AAAA

Alix Aymé renouvelée... en son décor

Depuis mi-août 2024, le Musée national (anciennement palais royal) de Luang Prabang au Laos, présente une importante exposition permanente d'une œuvre majeure et restaurée de l'artiste française Alix Aymé (1894–1989) [FIGURE 1]. Celle qui se définit comme « décorateur » auprès de son maître et ami, le peintre *nabi* Maurice Denis, n'a

que 25 ans lorsqu'elle a pour mission de décorer le palais du futur et dernier souverain du Royaume de Luang Prabang (Royaume du Laos après 1945), Sisavang Vong (ສີສວາງວິງສ໌ ; r. 1946–1959). « C'est une femme peintre qui m'a fait cela ! » aurait confié ce dernier à un visiteur à propos de celle qu'il décorera de l'ordre du Million d'Éléphants et du Parasol Blanc avant qu'elle ne rejoigne Paris et l'exposition coloniale de 1931. Elle aura résidé près de 18 mois, entre 1929 et 1931, en ce lieu où les visiteurs d'aujourd'hui peuvent découvrir les dix-neuf grandes toiles fraîchement restaurées qui ornent les murs de l'actuel Musée de Luang Prabang.

Le vernissage officiel de cette exposition a eu lieu sur site le 15 août 2024. Il fut suivi d'une présentation de l'Association des Amis d'Alix Aymé (AAAA), donnée dans les jardins de l'Institut français par son président, M. Pascal Lacombe, puis de celle de l'équipe des restaurateurs d'art : huit Français et deux Laotiens. L'exposition en ce lieu de plusieurs œuvres graphiques d'Alix

Aymé a pu offrir un contrepoint aux présentations des conférenciers¹.

Ces événements sont l'occasion de retracer le parcours de cette artiste qui fut, dès 1920, « en route vers l'Extrême-Orient », découvrant tour à tour Shanghai, Yunnan Fu (Kunming), Hanoï, le Cambodge, puis le Laos – du Sud au Nord, avec en particulier ce séjour prolongé à Luang Prabang.

Une commande prestigieuse

Alix Aymé est une artiste-peintre française, proche du mouvement *nabi*, qui a vécu et travaillé en Indochine entre 1920 et 1945. Dans un numéro de la revue *Le Monde colonial illustré*, elle a retracé son périple au Laos et sa participation à l'Exposition coloniale organisée à Paris en 1931. Elle y avait présenté 47 grandes toiles et pastels réalisés au Laos, en Chine, ainsi qu'au Vietnam où elle résidait alors avec son premier mari, Paul de Fautereau-Vassel. En 1929, elle fut sollicitée par le Gouvernement général de l'Indochine et détachée auprès du Résident supérieur du Laos pour réaliser un décor mural dans la salle de réception du palais de Sa Majesté le roi Sisavang Vong².

Cette commande fut donc honorée et menée à terme, sur place, dans un atelier de fortune, avec des matériaux et moyens du bord. L'artiste partit ensuite, seule, découvrir le pays, remontant le

Mékong, jusqu'à l'extrême-Nord et séjourna à Mueang Sing (ເມັງສິງ), non loin de la frontière chinoise, partageant la vie des villageois tout en s'adonnant à son plaisir de dessiner et de peindre sur le vif.

Chronologie d'une restauration

Au cours d'une visite officielle que Mme Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, Ambassadrice de France au Laos, effectua au Musée national de Luang Prabang en 2019, sa directrice, Mme Vanpheng Keopannha, lui fit part de l'état de dégradation de l'œuvre d'Alix Aymé, et sollicita l'appui de la France pour sa restauration. L'ensemble comprend dix-neuf grandes toiles peintes sur lin, collées sur châssis de teck. Un travail minutieux a été nécessaire pour respecter les bords tendus et gravement abîmés. Ce projet fut rendu possible grâce à un engagement plein et entier – en termes logistique, technique et financier – des deux maîtres d'œuvre, Pascal Lacombe et Guy Ferrer, respectivement président et trésorier de l'AAAA, dont ils sont également les fondateurs. Il aura fallu, pour mener à bien ce projet, surmonter d'innombrables lenteurs et contraintes administratives (signatures, conventions, déplacements, demandes de visas) et s'accommoder de la crise du COVID qui a fermé le pays pendant plus de deux ans.

L'Association, initialement sollicitée par l'Institut français du Laos à Vientiane, proposa donc de conduire le projet. En 2020, les deux dirigeants contactèrent l'École Condé Patrimoine à Paris pour établir un devis et réaliser les travaux de restauration. Une convention

¹ J'ai pu visiter l'exposition le 16 août 2024 et rencontrer, le lendemain, M. Pascal Lacombe, qui fut le maître d'œuvre de la restauration. C'est grâce à son témoignage oral et aux notes qu'il m'a confiées que j'en retrace ici les étapes.

² Voir André-Pallois, 1997 : 163-164. Sur l'artiste, voir aussi Lacombe & Ferrer 2012 et Gagneron 2025.



FIGURE 2 : Deux élèves restaurateurs au travail, juin 2023 © Lacombe & Ferrer

fut signée. La réalisation fut prévue en deux temps et mobilisant deux équipes de restaurateurs (constituées d'élèves de l'École Condé [FIGURE 2] et de deux superviseurs-enseignants)³. La première phase (juin–juillet 2023) vit les restaurateurs s'atteler à la réfection des supports en toile de lin et de coton, fortement endommagés et aux châssis rongés par les termites.

La deuxième phase débuta en mai 2024, mais fut retardée par des contraintes administratives conjuguées des deux

³ Au total, 20 restaurateurs (élèves et enseignants) de Condé Patrimoine Paris se sont succédés pendant les deux phases de travaux – d'abord dirigés par M. Van Gaver, spécialiste des supports, ensuite (à partir de 2024) par M. Lim, éminent restaurateur des supports et des couches picturales.



FIGURE 3 : Présentation de l'œuvre achevée, août 2024 © Lacombe & Ferrer

parties, française et laotienne : demandes de nouveaux visas et d'autorisations de chantier, signatures de conventions et de mémorandums, etc. Les équipes purent enfin reprendre leur travail en juin 2024, lequel s'étendit sur huit semaines. Deux acteurs laotiens furent impliqués dans cette nouvelle phase : Sadhu Obi, moine bouddhique et restaurateur de bâtiments religieux, et Phone-paseth Keosomsak, architecte, tous deux présents sur le chantier de façon continue. Sensibilisés à l'entretien de la salle, ils seront à même de superviser, le cas échéant, les restaurations futures.

Le 14 août 2024, la restauration fut enfin achevée [FIGURE 3]. Les 19 tableaux d'origine furent replacés sur les trois murs de la salle de réception. Le coût total de ces travaux s'éleva à 82 900 €, entièrement pris en charge par l'AAAA.

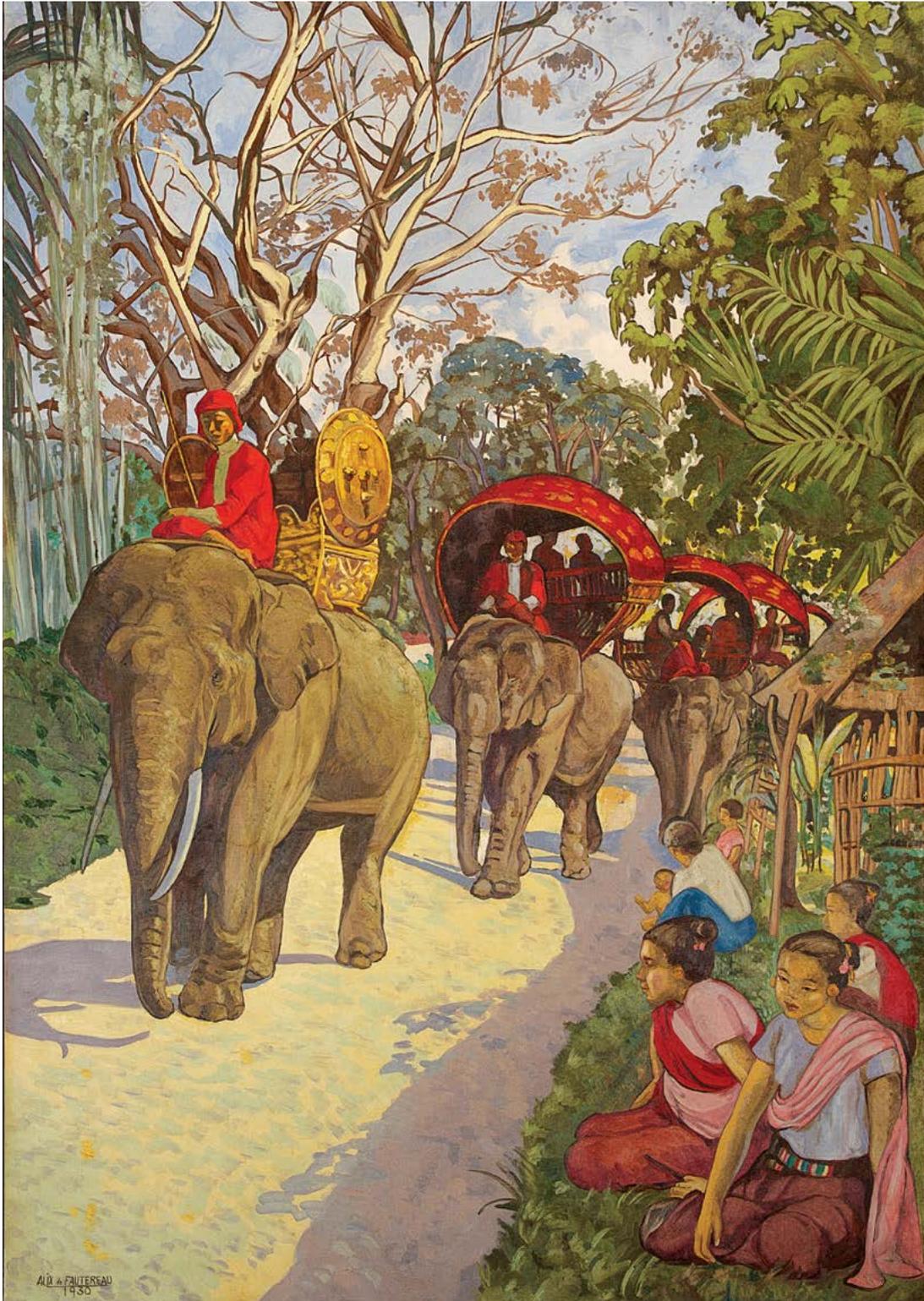


FIGURE 4 : Alix Aymé, *Procession royale d'éléphants*, peinture à l'huile sur toile, 1929–1930, Musée national de Luang Prabang © Lacombe & Ferrer

De l'aube au crépuscule : approche de l'œuvre

Le thème général de l'impressionnante frise peinte évoque, comme l'indique le titre de l'œuvre, le passage d'une journée traditionnelle à Luang Prabang, de l'aube au crépuscule. Les grandes toiles forment une série de panneaux mesurant chacun 4 x 3 m environ. La succession des scènes est la suivante : « Lever du soleil sur un paysage de campagne » (voir couverture), « Matin sur la rivière Nam Khan », « Procession royale d'éléphants » [FIGURE 4], « Grande cérémonie rituelle au Vat Xieng Thong », « Scène du rituel bouddhique », « Marché du soir aux portes du Palais Royal », « Rencontre dans l'enceinte du Vat » [FIGURE 5], et enfin, « Scène traditionnelle de "cour d'amour" dans un jardin sous la lune ».

En marge des grands panneaux sont figurées des scènes plus intimes de la vie locale et, au-dessus des fenêtres sur jardins, sont répartis d'étroits panneaux décoratifs à simples motifs floraux.

Cette description, quelque peu littérale, ne suffit pas à dépeindre le véritable tourbillon émotif qui saisit le visiteur à la découverte de cette œuvre majestueuse. Celui-ci est d'abord gagné par l'impression de se trouver face à la puissance d'un pays « réel » ; mais cette impression cède rapidement le pas à celle d'être plongé dans un pays « rêvé », transfiguré. La succession des tableaux nous ouvre en effet sur l'intimité des lieux, des gens, des mouvements, des animaux et des végétaux. Tout le « représenté » devient harmonie musicale. La distribution des jeux de lumière, des couleurs vives, cernées par

un dessin subtil, ouvrent sur la vérité vécue de l'artiste. N'est-ce pas sa voix en effet qui murmure cette mélodie, là, quelque part derrière la toile ?

On imagine alors la jeune peintre en 1929, dévoilant ses esquisses préparatoires au monarque lao d'âge mûr, lui carapaçonné dans son lourd vêtement d'apparat, elle virevoltante de jeunesse. Elle lui révèle sa propre vision de son pays, avec déférence et respect mais armée de cette force que seuls les artistes savent exprimer : la capacité de voir avec son âme. Elle, l'étrangère, a imposé sa gamme, transposé ses sensations fugitives, ses moments vus et vécus en une émotion vivace. Un siècle plus tard, le visiteur est encore à même de ressentir sa subtile vibration. L'œuvre résonne alors en instaurant à la fois une histoire et un substrat : cette terre et cette humanité discrète en chemin vers un temple pour chanter l'amour universel. Alix Aymé ou la présence et l'enchantement. La vision qui enlace et entraîne le spectateur est bien de l'ordre d'une traversée du miroir. N'est-on pas saisi dans la ronde des sens, des yeux, des voix ?

Le visiteur exigeant voudra cependant ajouter un bémol à cette nouvelle exposition. S'agissant de la mise en scène de l'œuvre, il pourra déplorer que cet enchantement soit soumis à un contrôle strict à l'entrée à ce point précis (fouille des sacs, interdiction de photographier, parcours balisé, gardiens pressant à circuler). Il s'étonnera surtout qu'aucun document informant sur l'artiste, l'histoire de l'œuvre et de sa minutieuse et rigoureuse restauration, ne soit mis à disposition du public. Rien non plus n'est dit sur les restaurateurs et



FIGURE 5 : Alix Aymé, *Rencontre dans l'enceinte du Vat*, peinture à l'huile sur toile, 1929–1930, Musée national de Luang Prabang © Lacombe & Ferrer

les donateurs et leur généreuse implication sans laquelle ces œuvres n'auraient pas connu telle renaissance. Ce silence inexplicable relatif au contexte historique, artistique, voire patrimonial d'un chef-d'œuvre, jette une ombre empreinte de déception sur l'enthousiasme que suscite par ailleurs cette visite.

L'œuvre est là pourtant, intangible, qui donne à voir un pays, une histoire, une culture, un peuple, et qui instaure plus qu'un dialogue, un véritable ravissement.

À la vue de l'œuvre d'Alix Aymé, le visiteur averti pense inmanquablement à celle de Marc Leguay (1910–2001), autre peintre français ayant peint le Laos, évoquant sa vie rurale et religieuse. En effet, à la fin des années 1960, l'une de ses œuvres (sans titre) ornait un grand mur de l'ancienne École des Beaux-Arts de Vientiane, rue Chao Anou. Il s'agissait également d'un ensemble de dix panneaux (2 x 6,25 m) commandés par le Ministère des Travaux publics, des postes et des télégraphes pour un affichage prévu à la première exposition nationale de

timbres-poste organisée à Sri Lanka en 1967. Cette grande « fresque » a également été restaurée en 1998, mais transportée en France à cet effet. Bien que trente ans séparent ces deux œuvres, une certaine familiarité est évidente, ne serait-ce qu'au travers des scènes évoquées : visite du temple, procession des éléphants, quête des bonzes, marché rural, etc.

On retiendra aussi que l'œuvre produite par Alix Aymé au Vietnam, après son second mariage (avec le général George Aymé, en 1931), continue d'étonner ceux qui, nombreux, la classent parmi les artistes de la modernité universelle et du « dialogue entre les cultures ». Elle s'est, certes, d'abord fait remarquer en Indochine, dont elle a partagé l'histoire et les tragédies pendant un demi-siècle ; elle occupe cependant une place singulière dans l'histoire de la peinture de cette période⁴. Alix Aymé a non seulement su créer une œuvre originale, mais a aussi initié un dialogue passionné avec les arts du Vietnam, notamment pour sa contribution à la technique de la laque.

En peinture, l'« exotisme » est souvent perçu comme l'illustration de la part pittoresque de choses et d'impressions étrangères, dérangeant délicieusement les conventions de goût ou d'usage. Cet aspect de l'exotisme a la vie dure et persiste de nos jours. Il s'agit le plus souvent d'une simple reproduction de clichés qui transposent les apparences ou les couleurs locales d'une société.

Le refus de cet exotisme de pacotille est perceptible dans l'œuvre d'Alix Aymé ; elle qui interroge autrement le monde, faisant sien le fameux vers de

⁴ Une exposition intitulée « Peintures des lointains », organisée au musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac à Paris du 30 janvier 2018 au 6 janvier 2019, a présenté 220 œuvres d'artistes des XIXe et XXe siècles. D'Indochine, seule Marie-Antoinette Boulard-Devé, y était mentionnée. À ce sujet, voir également Jarrassé & Houssais 2015.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) appelant l'artiste à « peindre, non pas la chose dans son étrangeté mais l'effet qu'elle produit ». Cet échange constant entre le proche et le lointain initie un jeu de miroir et d'écho d'une vision

personnelle dévoilant des vérités secrètes. C'est du moins ce dont Alix Aymé a su témoigner. Non pas tant sa propre vision des choses que, par un transfert instantané et constant, l'écho de leur présence.

REMERCIEMENTS

Je remercie chaleureusement Pascal Lacombe et Guy Ferrer pour leur aide précieuse à la rédaction de cette note, ainsi que pour les photographies gracieusement mises à disposition pour la publication. J'adresse également mes

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RETURN OF BAN CHIANG ARTIFACTS & UNESCO SEMINAR
ON ILLICIT TRAFFICKING (14 NOVEMBER 2024, BANGKOK)



*Ceremony Marking the Return of Ban Chiang Artifacts
and Seminar on the Occasion of the International Day
against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property*

พิธีส่งคืนโบราณวัตถุบ้านเชียงและการเสวนาเนื่องในโอกาสวันสากล
เพื่อการต่อต้านการลักลอบค้าทรัพย์สินทางวัฒนธรรม



Thursday 14 November 2024
Isara Vinijchai Throne Hall
Bangkok National Museum

วันพฤหัสบดีที่ 14 พฤศจิกายน 2567
พระที่นั่งอิศราวินิจฉัย
พิพิธภัณฑ์สถานแห่งชาติพระนคร

FIGURE 1: Poster of the UNESCO Ceremony and Seminar
on 14 Nov. 2024 © UNESCO, Bangkok

On 14 November 2024, the Fine Arts Department (FAD) of Thailand, U.S. Embassy in Thailand, and the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok co-hosted a ceremony marking the voluntary return to Thailand of several ancient artifacts from one of the most important prehistoric settlements in Southeast Asia: the UNESCO-listed Ban Chiang Archaeological Site.¹ Attended by high-level dignitaries and coinciding with UNESCO's International Day against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property,² this celebratory “welcome home” ceremony was followed by a seminar where experts from law enforcement, museums, and international agencies discussed best practices for combating cultural property trafficking [FIGURE 1].³

Seated amid the gilded, regal grandeur of the National Museum Bangkok's Isara Vinijchai Throne Hall, attendees gained insights into legal frameworks, forms of international cooperation, and ethical debates ongoing in this expansive field—and heard some panellists underscore the critical need for more robust preventative action. During these discussions, the Kingdom of Thailand's efforts in this regard were broached, including the Thai government's slow progress towards ratifying the main legal framework addressing the international fight against illicit trafficking: UNESCO's 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of

Cultural Property.⁴ Another objective of the event was to encourage more Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, to ratify this convention, as the region currently holds one of the world's lowest ratification rates.⁵

The day's agenda began with the handover of four ancient artifacts—the latest in a spate of returns from the United States over recent years. A U.S. federal law enforcement agency, Homeland Security Investigations, returned two Khmer-era lintels forfeited by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco in May 2021,⁶ for example, while in May 2024 representatives from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York handed over two 11th-century Khmer bronzes, including a statue known colloquially within Thailand as “Golden Boy”.⁷

During his opening remarks, the Director General of Thailand's FAD, Phanombootra Chandrajoti (พนมบุตร จันทรโชติ), hailed these developments and the strength of U.S.–Thai cooperation on such matters and expressed his

⁴ See: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and-transfer-ownership-cultural>.

⁵ According to a UNESCO Bangkok fact sheet for the event, only four out of ten countries in ASEAN—Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam—are “enforcing the spirit of this Convention in their national laws and policies”. To date, 147 states globally have ratified the 1970 Convention.

⁶ See *Los Angeles Times*, 26 March 2021: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-03-26/archaeologist-thai-artifacts-san-francisco-asian-art-museum>; also: <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/hsi-investigation-leads-return-2-thai-religious-relics-reported-stolen-thailand-and>.

⁷ See *Bangkok Post*, 21 May 2024: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2796534/golden-boy-is-returned-from-us>.

¹ See: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/575>.

² See: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/against-illicit-trafficking>.

³ The whole ceremony and the seminar can be watched here: https://youtu.be/yb09sWBu_Pw.



FIGURE 2: The four artifacts returned to Thailand on 14 Nov. 2024
© U.S. Embassy, Bangkok

gratitude for the latest returns.⁸ After him, the current U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, Robert F. Godec, explained that the four Ban Chiang items being returned this day—a fired clay vessel, a bracelet, and two cylindrical rollers of “yet undetermined use” [FIGURE 2]—had originally been gifted to an American

soldier in the 1960s, but later came to be stored at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. While he did not believe these artifacts were taken illegally, their repatriation today was a gesture of goodwill, he added, that aligns with the U.S. government’s increasing commitment to proactively return cultural objects to their “rightful owners”.

Against this backdrop of bilateral cooperation, two UNESCO officials delivered remarks. Ernesto R. Ottone, its Assistant Director-General, began by outlining the benefits to states of ratifying the UNESCO 1970 Convention.

⁸ One of these developments includes the signing, on 25 April 2024, of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Kingdom of Thailand “formalizing a shared commitment to collaborate on exchanges of art, expertise, and the display and study of Thai art”. See: <https://www.metmuseum.org/press-releases/thai-mou-2024-news>.

He expressed hope that the U.S. and Thai governments would continue to cooperate “in the spirit of the 1970 Convention”, and pointed out that this collaboration aligns with UNESCO’s MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, which calls for open and inclusive international dialogue for the return and restitution of cultural property to countries of origin outside the scope of the UNESCO 1970 Convention.⁹ UNESCO Bangkok’s Regional Director, Soohyun Kim, stressed the importance of Ban Chiang artifacts for humanity’s understanding of ancient civilization in Southeast Asia and underscored the convention’s low ratification rate in the region. Thailand’s Minister of Culture, Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol (สุดาวรรณ หวังศุภกิจโกศล), delivered the final remarks of the ceremony, after which the artifacts were officially handed over and tokens of appreciation exchanged in front of the media [FIGURE 3].

A Q&A session with media was then followed by a keynote address from U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Policy, Rafik Mansour. Mansour said that the U.S. had supported 128 cultural projects in ASEAN countries since 2001 through the Ambassador’s Funds for Cultural Preservation, including 20 projects in Thailand.¹⁰ Home to the largest art market in the world, the U.S. has also returned at least 250 looted and stolen cultural objects to ASEAN

countries—the result of the “dedication of law enforcement officials who spent years, sometimes even decades, pursuing leads and conducting investigations to ensure that the United States lives up to its commitments to protect cultural property”.

After lunch, the afternoon seminar [APPENDIX] began with a keynote speech by UNESCO expert Étienne Clément, a Belgian international lawyer. His presentation focussed on the “universal background”—the international frameworks, laws, and conventions—surrounding the protection and return of cultural property. This included insight into the provisions—spanning preventative measures, cultural property restitution, and international cooperation—contained in the 1970 UNESCO Convention. He termed this convention “the main and first international comprehensive legal framework addressing the fight against illicit trafficking”. His discussion also referenced the UNIDROIT Convention adopted in 1995,¹¹ designed to complement the 1970 Convention by addressing some shortfalls and ambiguities—such as the issue of Article 7 (ii) insuring “just compensation” for the “innocent purchaser” of stolen cultural property. In conclusion, Clément argued that while bilateral negotiations (such as that between Thailand and the U.S.) can be successful, these are “not sufficient to address crimes of international dimensions”.

This speech framed the first panel discussion, during which Thai and

⁹ For the full text of the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, see: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-world-conference-cultural-policies-and-sustainable-development-mondiacult-2022>.

¹⁰ For details on U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation projects in Thailand, see: <https://th.usembassy.gov/education-culture/ambassadors-fund-for-cultural-preservation>.

¹¹ For the full text of the UNIDROIT 1995 Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, see: <https://www.unidroit.org/instruments/cultural-property/1995-convention>.



FIGURE 3: Official presentation of the returned artefacts on 14 Nov. 2024 © Thai Ministry of Culture, Bangkok

international experts spoke candidly about existing legal frameworks for antiquity protection and challenges to their implementation. Moderated by Clément, the panel began with Nitaya Kanokmongkol (นิตยา กนกมงคล), Director of the Office of National Museums, FAD, outlining the scope of the Kingdom's national laws for protecting antiquities, the 1961 Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art, and National Museums,¹² and its 1992 amendment. These laws stipulate that antiques and objects of art of special interest must be registered with the FAD and approval must be obtained for the export of all antiques and objects of art from the Kingdom. Insights into the role of Thai

law enforcement in handling cultural heritage crimes were then provided by Police Lieutenant Colonel Niyom Kaseng (พ.ต.ท. นิชยม กาเซ็ง), Deputy Superintendent of International Affairs and Cooperation, the Royal Thai Police. Maleeporn Kumkasem (มาลีภรณ์ คุ่มเกษม), Head of Legal Affairs, FAD, outlined the historic limitations of Thai law regarding the protection of the cultural property of neighboring countries and gave a frank assessment of where the Kingdom of Thailand stands vis-à-vis ratification of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The desire to ratify is there, she explained, but legal provisions concerning the definition of cultural property and its importation from other countries need to be amended first.¹³ “When our national law is ready,

¹² For an English translation, see: <https://www.unesco.org/en/cultnatlaws/act-ancient-monuments-antiquities-objects-art-and-national-museums-be-2504>.

¹³ That the scope of the 1970 UNESCO Convention includes objects of paleontological interest has

we will propose it”, she said regarding ratification.

These insights were complemented by the input of two U.S. experts: Mary Cook, Senior Advisor for the Cultural Property, Art and Antiquities Division, U.S. Government Homeland Security Investigations, and Tess Davies, Executive Director of the Antiquities Coalition, a Washington D.C.-based NGO. Cook outlined the multifaceted scope of the Department of Homeland Security’s work on combating illicit trafficking—and stressed the centrality of the U.S.’s Cultural Property Implementation Act, or CPIA (which implements the 1970 UNESCO Convention) to these efforts.¹⁴ Davies of the Antiquities Coalition also spoke extensively about the CPIA, which she hailed as “not only a tool for the U.S. government but also a tool for foreign governments to recover their stolen cultural objects should they surface on the black market”. Under the CPIA, which came into effect in 1983, state parties to the 1970 Convention can enter into bilateral agreements with the U.S. These prohibit the importation of a country’s cultural objects into the United States without proof of valid export.

created difficulties for the FAD and some government ministries, remarked Khun Maleeporn, as “fossils are not considered cultural per our definitions”. Meanwhile, an amendment to the 1961 Act mentioned above (namely, the addition of articles controlling the importation of cultural property that originates in other countries) has been drafted but is still making its way through the legislative branch of Thai government. She was unsure how long this process will take. “We have many laws in the country waiting in line, and the priority might shift so our law might be pushed to the back”, she said.

¹⁴ For the full text of the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act, see: <https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/97-446.pdf>.

Shifting the burden of proof to the importer of cultural property has, in many cases, led to significant seizures of looted artifacts at U.S. borders and facilitated their swift return to countries of origin. She also stressed that such agreements are not designed to impede the legal trade in cultural property and that more of them are needed. “A major impediment has been the lack of understanding about the process”, she said, adding that the Antiquities Coalition stands ready to offer its assistance.

The second panel discussion centered around the importance of provenance research and ethical acquisition of art and antiquities in the museum sector. Moderated by Anaïs Mattez, Research Associate at Harvard University and UNESCO Consultant, it featured input from two museum professionals, including Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met)’s Head of Provenance Lucien Simmons, who joined the Met from Sotheby’s in May 2024. The team of 11 provenance researchers he oversees are committed to researching the provenance of 1.5 million objects in its permanent collection on an ongoing basis, but currently focussed on those dislocated during the Holocaust in Europe, archeological and ancient art acquired since 1970, or “works that came to the Met from art dealers under investigation by law enforcement in the USA and elsewhere”. The Met publishes details of repatriated works of art on its website, he added, and forges partnerships with governments and institutions—including in Thailand—as part of its commitment to be a collaborative, transparent, and responsible member of the museum community.

A Senior Curator at the Thai FAD's Office of National Museums, Disapong Netlomwong (ดิษพงศ์ เนตรล้อมวงศ์), a member of Thailand's Committee for the repatriation of cultural property, offered the contrasting perspective of a Thai museum professional seeking to establish that Thai or pre-Thai objects in Western institutions belong to Thailand. Old archeological surveys by the FAD, as well as archival materials and photographs from other sources, are, in some cases, proving key to this time-consuming work.¹⁵ Through careful provenance research his team attempts to create a timeline of an object and ascertain if it was legally exported or not. Khun Disapong pointed out that Thailand has had an act controlling the export of antiques and *objets d'art* since 1926 (during the reign of King Rama VII), but no foreign museums with objects on Thailand's repatriation list have been able to produce valid export licenses.

Concluding the panel was James Potboy, the U.S. Homeland Security Investigations Attaché for Cambodia. Introducing him, moderator Mattez pointed out that Cambodia being a member of the 1970 UNESCO Convention (unlike Thailand) "helps considerably

when handling cases".¹⁶ Potboy, noting the bilateral agreement between the two nations,¹⁷ gave an overview of his close working relationship with the Cambodian authorities. Alongside local law enforcement, he visits archeological sites to investigate provenience or utilize customs information to track smuggling. Moving to discussion of Douglas Latchford's looting of Khmer artifacts from Cambodia, Potboy explained that the gathering of evidence in collaboration with the Met, private collectors, and former smugglers is leading to their repatriation.¹⁸ At the heart of such investigations is a high level of cooperation and partnership; he sees such partnerships as key to the eradication of the scourge of cultural theft and cultural smuggling globally.

¹⁶ Cambodia ratified the 1970 Convention on 26 September 1972, making it one of the first countries to do so (alongside Bulgaria, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon).

¹⁷ First signed in 2003, this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and the Royal Government of Cambodia concerns "the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Categories of Archaeological and Ethnological Materials of Cambodia". See: https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/cambodia_tias.pdf. While bilateral agreements may not last more than five years, this one has been periodically renewed (the last occasion being on 30 August 2023). According to the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, this MoU "has facilitated the return of over 100 priceless antiquities and built the capacity of Cambodians working on cultural heritage preservation" over the past 20 years. See: <https://kh.usembassy.gov/signing-of-cultural-agreement-between-cambodia-and-the-united-states>.

¹⁸ This is a diplomatic take on events—during their years of investigation into artifacts trafficked by infamous art dealer and collector Douglas Latchford, negotiators and lawyers representing the Kingdom of Cambodia frequently complained of a lack of cooperation by the Met. See *inter alia*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/arts/design/met-artifacts-cambodia.html>.

¹⁵ It bears noting, however, that many examples of cultural property in Thailand are not properly documented and have no paper trail, which makes provenance research extremely challenging. Two timely examples, both linked to Buriram province in northeast Thailand, include the so-called "Prakhon Chai hoard" bronzes currently dispersed and held predominantly in collections of U.S. museums (Tanongsak et al. 2024), and the pilaster fragment from Phanom Rung temple which the Art Institute of Chicago has deaccessioned with a view to imminently returning it to Thailand (Revire 2024).

From this reviewer's perspective, absent from this day of sanguine speeches and discussions was an unvarnished, in-depth assessment of the recent history of the illicit trafficking of cultural property in Southeast Asia. While the seminar offered a fascinating window into best practices, it also raised questions about bad practices and lessons learned only superficially touched on. Regardless, it proved a

fitting way to mark the International Day against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property—an annual event coinciding with the day, 14 November 1970, when the UNESCO Convention was signed.

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APPENDIX: CEREMONY AND SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Thursday 14 November 2024

10h30 **Ceremony for the Return of Artifacts from the U.S. Embassy to Thailand & Opening Remarks**

Phnombootra Chandrajoti, FAD, Bangkok
HE Robert Frank Godec, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok
Ernesto R. Ottone, UNESCO, Paris
Soohyun Kim, UNESCO, Bangkok
HE Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol, Thai Ministry of Culture, Bangkok

11h30 **Keynote**

Rafik Mansour, U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C.:
“U.S. Support and Cooperation with Southeast Asian Countries on Heritage Preservation and Cultural Property Repatriation”

11h45 **Press Conference (Q&A)**

12h00 **Lunch Break**

13h00 **Keynote**

Étienne Clément, UNESCO (Retired), Bangkok:
“What is the Role of International Law in Stopping the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property?”

13h15 **First Panel Discussion: Legal Actions and Challenges in Implementing Laws for Antiquity Protection**

Moderator: Étienne Clément
Pol. Lt. Col. Niyom Kaseng, Royal Thai Police, Bangkok
Mary E. Cook, Homeland Security Investigations, Washington, D.C.
Maleeporn Kumkasem, FAD, Bangkok
Nitaya Kanokmongkol, FAD, Bangkok
Tess Davis, Antiquities Coalition, Washington, D.C.

14h00 **Second Panel Discussion: Provenance and the International Trade of Antiquities—Ensuring Ethical Acquisitions**

Moderator: Anaïs Mattez

Lucian Simmons, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

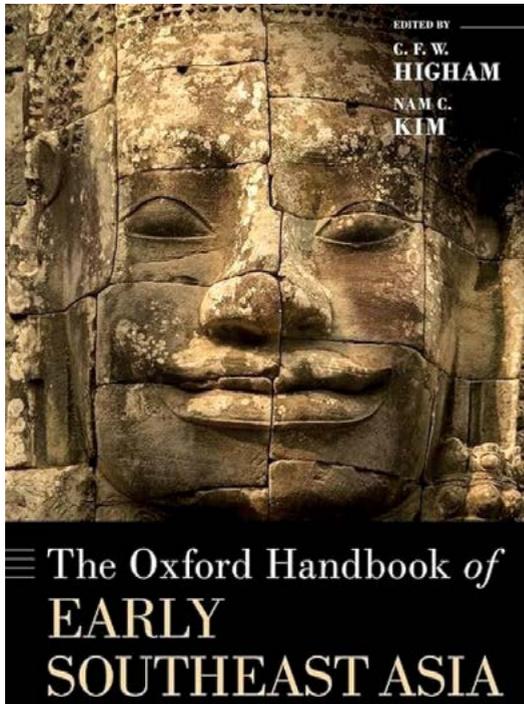
Disapong Netlomwong, FAD, Bangkok

James Podboy, Homeland Security Investigations, Phnom Penh

14h45 **Closing Remarks**

Phnombootra Chandrajoti, FAD, Bangkok

Charles F.W. Higham & Nam C. Kim, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022, 902 pages, £157.50, ISBN 978-0199355358 (Hardback)



Southeast Asia is an archeologically rich region, with a long and continuous record of human occupation comparable to that of other major regions worldwide. This makes it an important area for archeological and historical research. Recent discoveries, such as early *Homo sapiens* remains in Laos dating back more than 50,000 years (Freidline et al. 2023) and, in Indonesia, the world's oldest figurative rock art (Oktaviana et al. 2024), have garnered significant attention from scholars as well as the general public. These recent findings challenge earlier narratives and underscore that Southeast Asia is not an archeological or historical backwater,

but a key region for understanding human evolution and cultural development. Although a variety of academic journals and monographs in English and regional languages address Southeast Asian archeology, comprehensive handbooks remain scarce. A notable exception is *The Handbook of East and Southeast Asian Archeology* (Habu et al. 2017). The *Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* fills a critical gap, offering an exhaustive examination of the region's prehistory and early history while demonstrating Southeast Asia's importance in a global context.

This ambitious volume comprises 902 pages divided into 38 chapters, each written by leading scholars. It covers a wide range of themes, including subsistence strategies, settlement patterns, social and political organization, technology, language, and symbolic behavior. The chapters are structured chronologically, spanning the Paleolithic period through the early historic era, including key polities such as Dvāravatī and Śrīvijaya. The editors categorize the chapters into four broad sections: (1) the Paleolithic and Mesolithic, (2) the Neolithic, (3) the Metal Age, and (4) the early historic period, when urban centers, states, and kingdoms emerged. Each chapter reflects the expertise of its contributors, offering detailed case studies and interpretations from across the region.

While the chapters are meticulously structured, the technical nature of the content and the specialized terminology may make the book challenging for general readers or those unfamiliar with archeology and related disciplines. The chapters vary in scope, focus, and

thematic emphasis, making it difficult to synthesize their findings without a strong grounding in the subject. However, the inclusion of diverse illustrations—maps, photographs, line drawings, tables, and charts—enhances accessibility and enriches the reading experience. Most chapters are well-illustrated, though the type and quantity of visuals vary. For instance, Chapter 13 on language families includes only maps, while Chapter 15 integrates maps, photographs, and line drawings. All photographs are black and white, which, while clear, may limit their impact when compared to color images.

One notable aspect of the volume is its geographical emphasis. Of the 38 chapters, 27 focus on Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA), reflecting the editors' research expertise in Thailand and Vietnam. Archeological data from these countries are featured, while Laos and Malaysia are conspicuously absent. Two chapters (Chapters 7 and 26) explore southern and southwestern China, regions culturally linked to Southeast Asia. These inclusions are justified, but the lack of balanced coverage of Island Southeast Asia (ISEA) raises questions about the comprehensiveness of the volume.

The chapters follow a generally chronological sequence. The book opens with discussions on *Homo erectus* and early *Homo sapiens*, described as “anatomically modern humans”, from the terminal Paleolithic (ca. 70,000–25,000 years ago). The first five chapters examine early subsistence strategies, lifeways, and lithic technologies. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on later hunter-gatherers and the so-called “Hoabinhian

culture”, spanning the terminal Pleistocene to the Holocene (ca. 25,000 BP–1200 CE). The Hoabinhian is a particularly contentious topic, with Chapter 7 emphasizing its definitional ambiguities and the need for further research.

Chapters 8 to 17 address Neolithic farming societies, offering detailed studies from MSEA, with the exception of Chapter 16, which focuses on ISEA. These chapters provide crucial insights into early agriculture, mortuary traditions, migration patterns, symbolic practices, and identity formation. The Neolithic legacy is carried forward in the chapters on the Metal Age (Chapters 17–26), which examine the technological and social developments of the Bronze and Iron Ages. However, these chapters concentrate almost exclusively on MSEA, leaving unanswered questions about the Metal Age in ISEA and its role in broader regional developments.

Chapters 27 to 35 focus on the emergence of urban centers, states, and kingdoms, covering both MSEA and ISEA. Chapter 36 provides an overview of Philippine prehistory, adopting a holistic approach that spans multiple periods and cultures rather than focusing on a specific timeframe. Chapter 37 shifts the focus to maritime archeology, introducing methodologies and findings that expand the scope of the volume. The final chapter (Chapter 38) addresses cultural heritage management, a departure from the archeological and historical focus of the preceding chapters. While its inclusion might seem incongruous, it serves as a timely reminder of the importance of preserving Southeast Asia's rich archeological record.

Despite its strengths, the volume's imbalance in regional coverage is notable. The predominance of MSEA reflects broader trends in Southeast Asian archeology, where countries such as Thailand and Vietnam have traditionally received more scholarly attention and funding. The omission of dedicated chapters on Laos and Malaysia, as well as the limited discussion of ISEA during the Metal Age, highlights areas for future research. Additionally, while the chronological organization of the chapters provides a clear structure, the diversity of topics and case studies may challenge readers seeking a cohesive narrative.

Overall, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* remains a valuable resource for scholars, students, and specialists in archeology, history, and related disciplines. Its comprehensive coverage and detailed analyses make it an important publication that will remain a standard reference for years to come. Although new discoveries will

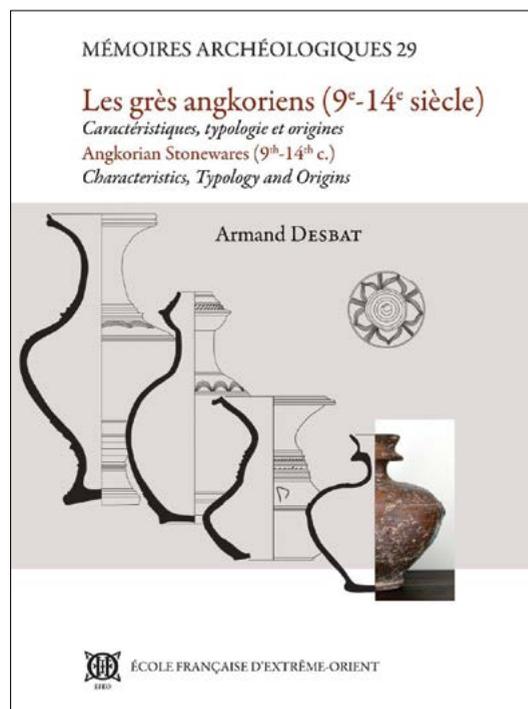
undoubtedly reshape our understanding of the region, this volume provides a robust foundation for future research and underscores Southeast Asia's pivotal role in global human history.

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Armand Desbat, *Les grès angkoriens (9e–14e siècle) : caractéristiques, typologie et origines/Angkorian Stonewares (9th–14th c.): Characteristics, Typology and Origins*, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2023, 372 pages, 122 plates, 52 figures, €40, ISBN 978-2855394282 (Paperback)



After several decades, the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) returned to Cambodia in 1990 to resume recording and preserving cultural heritage, principally of the Angkorian Khmer (9th–14th c.) remains. Ironically, the Khmer Rouge reign forestalled the excesses of rapid development that, in adjacent regions of mainland Southeast Asia, proved inimical to the preservation of monuments and historical sites. After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, the development of Cambodian cultural and archeological heritage became a focus of several international teams meant to

enhance local economies and foster local training and collaboration (Darith et al. 2008; Evans et al. 2013). Part of this renewed focus has been on better understanding ancient Angkorian Khmer landscapes, monuments, and material culture.

The volume under review represents the culmination of work on one prominent line of evidence, Angkorian Khmer glazed and unglazed stoneware—a ceramic defined by kiln firing to the point of extensive fusion, typically at ~1100–1200° C. where all but the most refractory minerals (i.e., quartz) have been absorbed into the fabric. Angkorian Khmer ceramics in general—and stonewares in particular—are notable for a wide variety of highly idiosyncratic types. They have a constrained distribution that closely follows the political footprint of the Angkorian Khmer; most, if not all, of the major central and regional production centers in the form of actual kiln complexes have been identified. The chronological prominence and demise of Khmer stoneware types has been reconstructed from excavated contexts.

The author, Armand Desbat, with extensive expertise of archeological ceramic analysis in Mediterranean and European contexts, is based at a major center for archeological ceramic analysis in France—the Lyon branch of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). As a lead researcher on a decade-long effort sponsored by the EFEO/CNRS to characterize Angkorian ceramics, Desbat brings this background to structure the content of the present work. His goal is to present a typology of Khmer ceramics that makes use of

the large volume of ceramics recovered from excavated contexts as well as the strong links to production sites to study the patterned distribution of types and establish a workable relative chronology. While several previous attempts (Groslier 1921; Rachna et al. 2020) have been made to produce a typology of Angkorian Khmer ceramics, the aim of the present work is to provide a systematic classification based on the current extensive database of types that allows “improved typology of Khmer stoneware through a design *readily amendable to expansion and chronological clarification*” (p. 338; my emphasis).

The organization of the book following Desbat’s earlier scheme is chronological, with the earliest green glazed white wares from the Kulen Ranges adjacent to Angkor, followed by wares from Buriram production centers in Thailand, brown glazed stoneware from the southern production center of Choeung Ek, south of Phnom Penh, and finally brown glazed stoneware from the last Angkorian Khmer production center, Torp Chey, east of Angkor.

Each section is introduced by a summary of technical specifications, decoration, and chronology followed by the ceramic typology for that production center illustrated with scaled standard archeological cross-section drawings of each type. Technical specifications relate to observable (by eye) characteristics that range from color photographs of cross-sections of fabrics, to glaze finishes, as well as commentary on forming techniques (e.g., coiled, wire cut, kiln furniture). Descriptions of decoration are more perfunctory but well supported by illustrations, while

chronology summarizes the state of knowledge about the assigned chronological range for a production center. The typological repertoire is parsed among nine major classes (100–900) from bowls to miscellaneous, with a proposed production center prefix (e.g., Kulen = K) and within each identification of variant forms (e.g., class K[ulen], 400—flask and bottle—type K404 and variants a–d). A total of 326 class/variants are identified and illustrated with sources for the type and variant. Each is given a provenance, a source—whether excavation or survey—and author, linked to a relatively comprehensive reference list provided at the end of the book and a date range.

If there is any weakness in the design of this taxonomic framework it is in the potential for circularity where a reference type is sourced from a consumption site rather than production context and its origin inferred in relation to assumed attributes of a specific production site. However, as recent compositional work has demonstrated (Grave et al. 2021), clear differences can be identified between the major Angkorian Khmer production centers, suggesting a complementary role for compositional analysis.

Overall, the production quality and scholarship of this work makes it a worthy addition to the growing body of literature on Angkorian Khmer material culture. The highly specialized focus makes it more suited to field practitioners than a general audience. Nonetheless, it offers an excellent case study in the formation of an archeological typological approach that is designed to be expandable to incorporate identification of

new types or chronological revisions. The author notes that this is not an end in itself but a necessary foundational tool for future research “including the organization of production, exchange and the geographic distribution of the different production centres” (p. 339).

I believe this work will provide an excellent basis for conversion into an

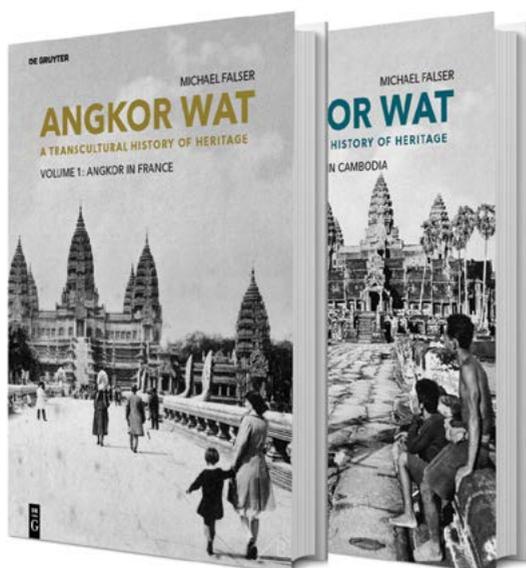
electronic expert system that is queryable where the specialized nature of the material can be made “field friendly”—encouraging the inclusion of current and future Cambodian practitioners.

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Michael Falser, *Angkor Wat—A Transcultural History of Heritage. Volume 1: Angkor in France; Volume 2: Angkor in Cambodia*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, 1,150 pages, €172.95, ISBN 978-3110335729 (Hardback)



This two-volume publication on Angkor Wat by Michael Falser spans an impressive 1,150 pages, featuring around 1,400 high-quality color and black-and-white images, presented in hardcover with a visually compelling design. The first volume begins with a 53-page general introduction, followed by 12 chapters spread across the two volumes. Both volumes conclude with findings, epilogues, and supplementary plate sections.

The first volume, *Angkor in France: From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions* (Chapters 1–8), focuses on the period between 1866 and 1937. It begins with the early expeditions to Angkor led by

Louis Delaporte to collect plaster casts, tracing their evolving displays in France during universal and colonial exhibitions. The author examines how architectural reinterpretations and replicas of Khmer temples played a significant role in France’s cultural appropriation of Angkor, predating the formal return of the Siem Reap region to Cambodia under French colonial control in 1907.

The depth of Falser’s analysis is enriched by digressions and essays that situate Angkor’s architectural representations within broader cultural and political contexts. Noteworthy examples include discussions on the classification systems of universal exhibitions (1867 and 1878), an epistemological exploration of Edmé François Jomard’s contributions (pp. 116–117), and essays on projects such as Théodore Villard and Charles Cotard’s globe model (pp. 189–190) and the Eiffel Tower’s symbolism (pp. 192–193). These insights offer a picture of the mindset of the time for contextualizing the role of architectural reconstructions in French colonial propaganda. The richly illustrated book vividly conveys the hubris of these reconstructions and the atmosphere of the exhibitions.

Chapter 3 offers an exploration of the production and exhibition of plaster casts in 19th-century France, connecting the practices of Alexandre Lenoir and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc with those of institutions such as Berlin’s Völkerkundemuseum and London’s South Kensington Museum. Falser situates the plaster-cast production and exhibition within a pan-European competition among colonial powers, underscoring how these reproductions reflect scientific rivalries.

The first volume's epilogue presents two case studies. The first explores cultural claims to Angkor as expressed through King Ang Duong's coins in Cambodia and the model of Angkor Wat in King Mongkut's royal temple in Siam. The second examines the replication of Angkor Wat in Bihar, India, during the 2010s. A 81-page plate section complements the in-text illustrations, further expanding the gathering of visual material of archival materials, maps, and photographs.

The second volume, *Angkor in Cambodia: From Jungle Find to Global Icon* (Chapters 9–12), shifts focus to the period from 1910 to 1993, following a brief discussion of early maps of the site. Chapter 9 delves into the *École française d'Extrême-Orient's* (EFEO) management and conservation efforts in Angkor Park from 1908 to 1973, drawing on EFEO publications, archival materials, and other archive materials housed in France's Archives nationales d'outre-mer.

Chapters 10 and 11 analyze the mobilization of Angkor as a cultural heritage site and its appropriation within political discourses during the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era (សង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម; lit. "People's Socialist Community"), the Khmer Republic, and Democratic Kampuchea. Falser's research draws on an extensive array of publications, archives, and photographs, offering a remarkable reconstruction of this complex period. The final Chapter 12 examines strategies from 1987 to 1993 to inscribe Angkor on the UNESCO World Heritage List, based on research in UNESCO archives.

As in the first volume, the epilogue presents case studies—here examining

development projects in Angkor. Falser critiques the site's transformation into a "World (Af)fair", highlighting its commodification as a global tourist destination. A concluding 118-page plate section further enriches the volume with diverse visual materials, followed by a bibliography and indexes of names, institutions, and places.

The structure of the publication, split between France and Cambodia, creates a mirroring effect that links events, projects, and political decisions related to Angkor across time and space. The restitution of Siem Reap province to Cambodia under French colonial rule provides the backdrop for the first volume, while the second volume's discussion rests on the idea of a perpetuation of the seminal formulation and representation of Angkor plaster casts and exploratory works by French in the 20th century. Cross-cutting themes, such as the mapping of Angkor, create connections between the volumes, even as their focus and chronology differ. Falser's recurring use of Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* serves as a unifying theoretical thread throughout the analysis (see Vol. 1, pp. 46–53).

Despite the rich visual appeal, these volumes are no mere coffee-table books of photographs on Angkor. Instead, Falser aims to demonstrate how Angkor's heritage was shaped by colonial practices, including the translation of its architecture into plaster casts in France and the conservation and management efforts in Cambodia. He extends this analysis to contemporary UNESCO policies, tracing the site's political and cultural value across the 20th century.

Falser situates his work within post-colonial studies, engaging with scholars such as Penny Edwards and Pierre Singaravélou in the introduction of each volume. His methodological approach—outlined in the first volume’s general Introduction—emphasizes the colonial, postcolonial, and global trajectories that shaped the modern concept of cultural heritage (Vol. 1, p. 5). This innovative perspective positions the publication as a landmark in the field of the postcolonial historiography of Angkor Wat.

As such, these volumes are not an encyclopedia of Angkor Wat. Instead, they occupy a methodological space at the intersection of material history, historiography, and transcultural analysis. Within this broad framework, Falser makes selective choices about the themes and elements he presents and Angkor Wat occasionally recedes into the background in favor of broader reflections on Angkor or discussions of other temples.

While the publication’s specialized focus may appeal primarily to scholars, non-specialist readers can also appreciate its extensive visual documentation, which includes photographs, archival materials, book covers, maps, and institutional websites. These diverse sources offer a broad view of the materials available for studying Angkor.

That said, a chronological timeline would have been a helpful addition, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the site’s complex history. The text’s frequent temporal shifts can make navigation challenging and a clear chronology would have provided useful context.

Falser’s strong authorial position, perceptible in the chapters’ titles, occasionally leads to curious statements. For example, the EFEO archives are described as “hidden” (Vol. 2, p. 323) or “not accessible” (Vol. 2, p. 4), even though Falser accessed them extensively. A substantial portion of the Conservation d’Angkor’s archival records has been released online after this publication,¹ further undermining this characterization.

As other reviewers have noted (Forest 2020; Chemburkar 2021: 21; Lavy 2022: 4), the perspective of the Khmer people on Angkor’s heritage is largely absent from the analysis. Falser acknowledges this omission, explaining in the first volume’s introduction that his position as a Western observer limits his ability to develop this perspective (Vol. 1, p. 9). Still, certain chapters, such as those examining King Norodom Sihanouk’s use of Angkorian history in 1960s architecture (Vol. 2, pp. 189–196) and political discourses during the Khmer Republic and Democratic Kampuchea (Chapter 11), provide valuable glimpses of Angkor’s significance in Khmer heritage. These insights, however, are often framed within the broader narrative of colonial influence, which risks oversimplifying the Cambodian perspective. The epilogue in the first volume, discussing Ang Duong’s coins, offers a rare but significant acknowledgment of Angkor’s pre-colonial cultural significance (Vol. 1, pp. 407–408).

Some errors and outdated interpretations also appear, particularly in discussions of Angkorian history. For

¹ Available in EFEO’s Banyan digital library: <https://banyan.efeo.fr/>.

example, the introduction to Angkor Wat (Vol. 1, pp. 11–18) perpetuates inaccuracies regarding the temple's name and origins.

As Paul Lavy has observed, typos are frequent, especially in proper nouns. Examples include “Hok Tourn” instead of “Mok Tourn” (Vol. 2, p. 107) and “Service des Eaux et Forêtes” instead of “Service des Eaux et Forêts” (Vol. 2, p. 127). While understandable in a work of this scale, these errors detract from the otherwise meticulous presentation.

Falser's publication reflects over a decade of research, much of it conducted within Heidelberg's Cluster of Excellence *Asia and Europe in a Global Context* (see Vol. 1, Introduction, 1.2). The first volume builds on his earlier work on plaster casts, such as his contributions to the 2013 catalog *Angkor, naissance d'un mythe – Louis Delaporte et le Cambodge*. The

second volume expands on themes from Falser's 2015 edited volume, *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: From Decay to Recovery*, which emerged from conference proceedings.

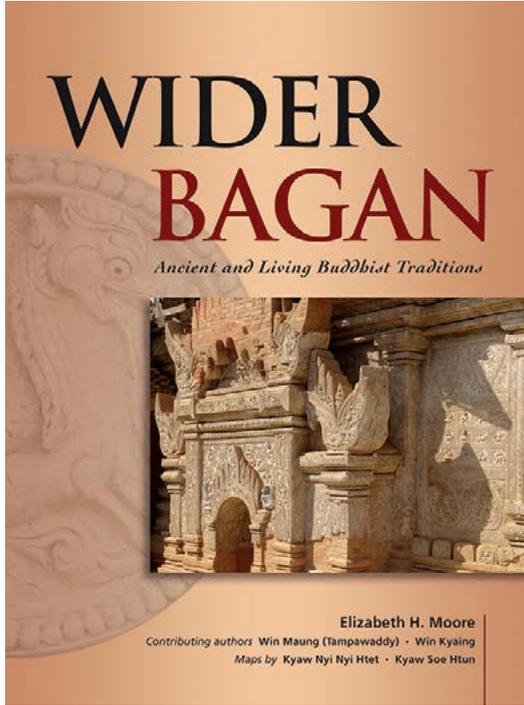
In summary, this monumental publication represents a *tour de force* in the historiography of Angkor, tracing the transcultural entanglements of Angkor Wat's heritage from colonial France to contemporary Cambodia. While its focus and Eurocentric perspective leave gaps for future investigation, its extensive use of archival and visual materials establish it as a reference and an important milestone in the study of Asian cultural heritage.

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Elizabeth H. Moore, *Wider Bagan: Ancient and Living Buddhist Traditions*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023, 456 pages, \$SGD 40, ISBN 978-9814951197 (Paperback)



When you have been working in a field of study for over 30 years and on reading *Wider Bagan* you say to yourself, almost every few pages, “oh, I didn’t know that”, you can be certain that valuable research has been done. The 11th to 13th century urban site of Bagan, a cluster of more than 3,000 Buddhist buildings plus a walled administrative/royal center, located on the bank of the Ayeyarwady River (a convenient transport link) in upper Myanmar, has been well served with literature. A scholarly library on Bagan will already contain *Old Burma–Early Pagan* by Gordon H. Luce (1969), the *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* by Pierre Pichard (1992–2001), *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan* by Claudine

Bautze-Picron (2003), and perhaps the four volume Burmese language *Inventory Record of Conservation of Monuments at Bagan* (ပုဂံရှေးဟောင်းဘုရားပုထိုးများ ပြန်လည်ပြုပြင်ထိန်းသိမ်းမှုမှတ်တမ်း) published by the Department of Archaeology in Myanmar (1999–2003). These volumes will sit on the shelf beside more historically focused studies such as *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* by Michael Aung-Thwin (1985), *Pagan; Stadt und Staat* by Tilman Frasch (1996), and *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit* by Donald Stadtner (2005).

Now, in *Wider Bagan*, the late Elizabeth Moore has gone beyond what we might call the conventional focus on the city. The result is a study in several parts: a detailed inventory, location by location, across the ancient kingdom, of architecture, population, traditions, culture, and religious behavior. At times, the occasional romantic fallacy is gently put to rest. We learn, for example, that brick “forts” across Old Burma, which have often been seen as part of a system of military posts, bravely defending the kingdom, may at times have had the more prosaic but administratively more useful function of tax collection.

This study selects key attributes of Bagan culture: water management, walls, temples, inscriptions, and images. It considers the relationship between these aspects of material culture and the varied population groups that made up what we usually call the Bagan kingdom. But the key word here is “wider”. Bagan is seen within the broad area of all of modern Myanmar. The attributes are studied in detail, with particular emphasis on the way they relate to the settlement-friendly river

valleys of Myanmar in which Bagan remnants have been recorded.

A novel aspect of *Wider Bagan* is the inclusion of a gazetteer of these valleys (174–323), highlighting “a diversity that enabled the capital and the lands beyond to expand and survive”. Evidence is presented which suggests something of an independent trajectory of the periphery in relation to the capital.

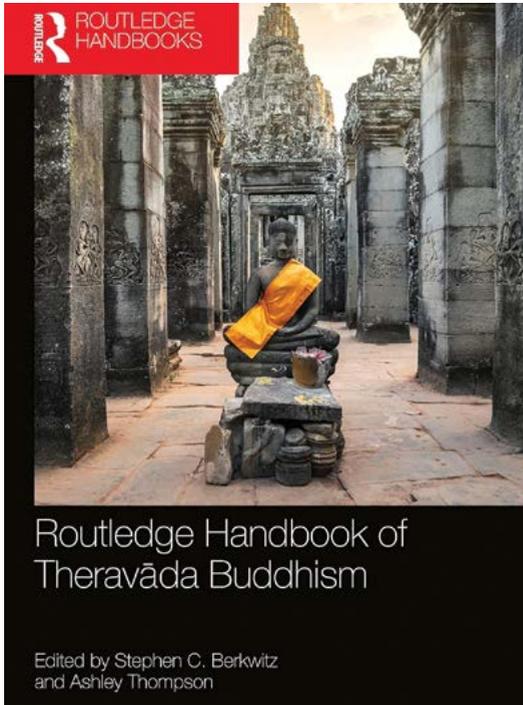
This book contains 456 pages of densely packed data, well illustrated with photographs and more than 40 maps. While *Wider Bagan* is a truly impressive collection of information and analysis, it cheerfully acknowledges gaps that still exist and points to further research prospects. Thus this opus, really, becomes the go-to volume for research not just on the turn-of-the-first-millennium culture of Myanmar, but also on the material and Buddhist culture of the Southeast Asian region in

the same period. A convenient feature of the publication is its availability in a searchable digital version. This makes data instantly accessible to the scholar at their office desk or on a laptop in the field.

Wider Bagan was the last major publication from Elizabeth Moore before her death in January 2024. It was not at all unusual for her to work with Burmese collaborators, in this instance Tampawaddy Win Maung and Win Kyaing, with cartographers Kyaw Nyi Nyi Htet and Kyaw Soe Htun. *Wider Bagan* is a fine legacy, as well as a vital addition to the library of the scholar of Myanmar and its neighbors in mainland Southeast Asia.

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Stephen C. Berkwitz & Ashley Thompson, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*, London: Routledge Press, 2022, 394 pages, £172, ISBN 978-1138493933 (Hardback)



As with most edited volumes, this substantial contribution to the field of Theravada studies is difficult to review. With essays from 23 well-chosen scholars and coverage of a vast range of subjects, it is impossible to offer an in-depth analysis within the confines of a short review. However, I must state from the outset that this book belongs on the shelves of every serious student and scholar in the field. Moreover, it serves as a useful companion volume for undergraduates as an introduction to South and Southeast Asian Buddhist studies, especially when paired with a reliable historical study. It reflects current trends in Theravada studies and

points to potential directions for future research.

The editors, Stephen Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson, are highly respected and qualified scholars representing two distinct subfields: Berkwitz specializes in Sri Lankan and South Asian religious history, while Thompson focuses on art history and Cambodian studies. Their diverse training enriches the volume, drawing on a broad array of scholarly methods and colleagues without rendering the work incoherent. In the Introduction (pp. 1–11), the editors aptly discuss the contested nature of the term “Theravāda” and the reasons for this contestation. While this topic has been heavily explored over the past twenty years, I am glad they avoided excessive repetition, as it has been well addressed by others such as Steven Collins (1990), Peter Skilling et al. (2012), and Kate Crosby (2014). More importantly, they underscore the advancement of Theravada Buddhist studies beyond the confines of the Pali Canon. Chapter 1 on “Theravāda” by Sven Bretfeld (pp. 15–42) and Chapter 2 on “Pāli” by Alastair Gornall (pp. 43–57) are both excellent in this regard. But these works demonstrate that understanding Buddhist ritual procedures, legal traditions, ethical reflections, and institutional distinctions requires close attention to commentarial texts, handbooks, and vernacular guides, which have played a pivotal role in shaping these practices across various kingdoms and nation-states in South and Southeast Asia over time.

The volume also highlights the diverse media through which these traditions—one can even speak of a

single tradition—have been transmitted. These include textual forms (palm-leaf, ivory, gold, bark, and mulberry paper manuscripts, as well as stone and metal inscriptions) and artistic expressions (murals, reliefs, statues, banners, illuminated texts, and more). The editors' decisions regarding which subjects to include or exclude and how to organize the volume are, however, somewhat controversial and may mislead readers. The editors do not describe their rationale for emphasizing certain subjects while others are omitted entirely. To their credit, the editors acknowledge this issue and cannot be held entirely responsible.

To offer some insider perspective, I must confess that I am part of the problem. I was invited to contribute to this volume but, due to my own tight schedule, and for personal reasons, had to withdraw my chapter on "Ornament" after completing the first draft. I suspect that other contributors may have withdrawn for similar (or more noble) reasons. This is an inherent challenge, for even the most well-intentioned editors must contend with the complex career, research, temporal, and family constraints of their contributors. All editors try to be comprehensive in volumes like this, but there are many factors outside of their control.

As a result, readers may find certain contributions quite narrow in focus while some topics are conspicuously absent. For example, the volume includes a chapter on the "Mons" (Chapter 23 by Patrick McCormick, pp. 355–366), a significant literary, historical, and artistic ethnic group that once played a dominant role in the regional history

of mainland Southeast Asia. However, there are no chapters on the Pyu, Shan, Tai Lue, Arakanese, Malay, or other regional groups, and no dedicated chapters on the Lao or Khmer. Similarly, while there is a chapter on "funerals" (Chapter 13 by Katherine Bowie, pp. 194–206), none are on ordination, protection and magic, prognostication, or marriage. Topics such as "repetition" are explored (Chapter 9 by Christoph Emmrich, pp. 140–155), but not music, comedy, or theatrical performance. Chapters on "circulation" (Chapter 3 by Anne Blackburn, pp. 58–69), "tradition" (Chapter 6 by Nirmala Salgado, pp. 99–112), "Canons" (Chapter 14 by Peter Skilling, pp. 209–226), "*vamsa*" (Chapter 16 by Stephen Berkwitz, pp. 243–256) are present, but no specific focus on commentaries, handbooks, murals, manuscripts, or modern electronic media. There is one chapter on the *Abhidhamma* (Chapter 15 by Rupert Gettin, pp. 227–242), but none on the *Vinaya*—although there is a chapter on "discipline" (Chapter 12 by Tomas Borchert, pp. 182–192)—or *suttas*. I am not suggesting that all these other chapters be included, but that the decisions of what to include and what to leave out remain frustrating.

To be fair, certain topics, such as commentaries, are addressed indirectly in the two chapters on "bilingualism" (Chapter 18 by Trent Walker, pp. 271–284), and "Canons" (Skilling, cited above), both excellent. The chapter on "deities" (Chapter 22 by John Clifford Holt, pp. 343–354) touches on protection, while chapters on "visual narratives" (Chapter 19 by Samerchai Poonsuwan, pp. 287–304), "icons" (Chapter 20 by

Ashley Thompson, pp. 305–326), and “affect” (Chapter 21 by Chairat Polmuk, pp. 327–342) explore various aesthetic modes of teaching. The chapter on “discipline” (Borchert, cited above) examines the creative ways in which the *Vinaya* has evolved in specific Theravada communities.

Each chapter is written by a highly qualified scholar, thoroughly cited, and professionally edited. Despite the wide range of styles, writing is surprisingly coherent, crisp, and clear. It is both accessible and thought-provoking. I particularly appreciated not only the diversity of the chapters but also the inclusion of more traditional foundational topics such as “statecraft” (Chapter 4 by Patrice Ladwig, pp. 70–82), “reform” (Chapter 5 by Anne Hansen & Anthony Lovenheim Irwin, pp. 83–98), “meditation” (Chapter 8 by Pyi Phy Kyaw & Kate Crosby, pp. 127–139), and “laity” (Chapter 11 by Asanga Tilakaratne, pp. 170–181). The chapter on “filial piety” (Chapter 10 by Gregory Kourilsky, pp. 56–169), in particular, is a subject often overlooked in studies of Theravada Buddhism and is a refreshing addition. While foundational, these chapters are anything but conventional, showcasing exciting new research and developments in the field.

Interestingly, while the two chapters on “merit” might seem redundant, the approaches they take are markedly different, reflecting the centrality of merit in Theravada ethics, ritual, diplomacy, and economics. For example, Juliane Schober’s chapter on merit (Chapter 7, pp. 115–126), focusing on Burma (Myanmar), is theoretically informed by Steven Collins, Patrice Ladwig, Marcel Mauss, and James Laidlaw, and includes an insightful section on merit and institution building. Meanwhile, Rita Langer’s chapter (Chapter 17, pp. 257–270) examines Sri Lanka, exploring textual justifications and instructions for making merit in Sinhala and Pali texts such as the *Kāvyaśekhara* and the *Saddhamopāyana*, tracing these themes to contemporary guides for making merit. Both chapters are detailed and illuminating.

In conclusion, the *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism* stands as essential reading and reference for scholars and enthusiasts alike, offering both a broad overview of the field and nuanced insights into its most pressing research questions.

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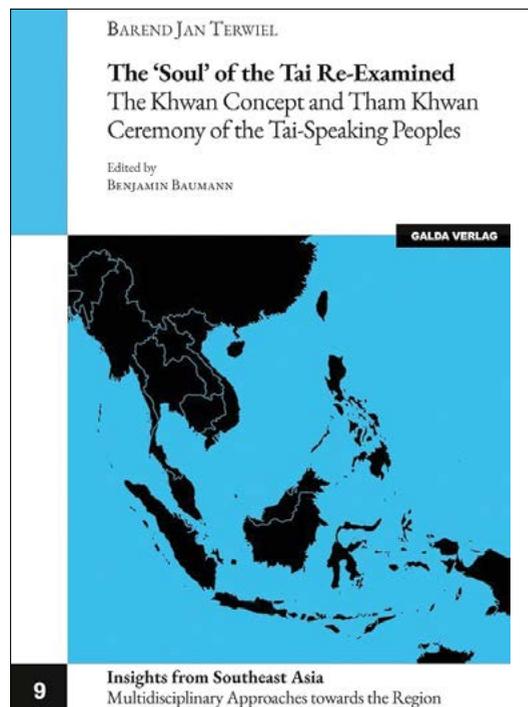
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Barend Jan Terwiel, *The ‘Soul’ of the Tai Re-Examined: The Khwan Concept and Tham Khwan Ceremony of the Tai-Speaking Peoples*, ed. by Benjamin Baumann, Glienicke: Galda Verlag, 2023, 274 pages, €32.99, ISBN 978-3962032982 (Paperback)



Barend Jan (Baas) Terwiel’s latest book, *The “Soul” of the Tai Re-Examined: The Khwan Concept and the Tham Khwan Ceremony of the Tai-Speaking Peoples*, edited by Benjamin Baumann, is an ambitious and deeply insightful work that revisits the concept of *khwan* among Tai-speaking peoples. Spanning Southeast Asia, southern China, and northeastern India, *khwan* is central to the spiritual lives of these groups, whether they have adopted Buddhism or not. Terwiel’s definition of *khwan* as an “element of vitality” or “quantity of life-force” (p. 105) forms the foundation for his exploration of the concept’s variability across different

Tai communities. The book draws upon his decades of fieldwork and scholarship, presenting a re-evaluation of his earlier publications while integrating new reflections.

Tai populations conceptualize humans as endowed with multiple “souls” or “vital spirits” (Th., *ซำขวัญ*, *khwan*; L., *ຂວນ*, *khwan*), each associated with specific body parts such as the head, chest, feet, or ears. The number of *khwan* varies widely across groups: 32 for the Burmese Shan, Northern Thai (*Yuon*), and Lao, 62 for the Tai Lue, 80 for the Tai Dam (Black Tai), Tai Khao (White Tai), and Tai Nuea, and as many as 120 among the Tai Daeng (Red Tai). In some groups, even non-human entities such as buffalo, rice, musical instruments, and, remarkably, pick-up trucks, are believed to possess *khwan* (pp. 238–241). Some neighboring groups have a similar principle—such as the Khmers, who identify 19 *preah lueng* (Kh., *ព្រះលិង្គ*), or vital essences, within the human body. This diversity underscores the fluidity of *khwan* as a concept, its manifestations influenced by local traditions and social contexts.

A fundamental characteristic of *khwan* is its autonomy. Unlike an individual’s fixed soul in Western or other religious frameworks, *khwan* can leave and return to its host’s body at will, often in response to fear or trauma. Illness or misfortune is frequently attributed to the loss of *khwan*, and the complete disappearance of *khwan* signifies death. To address such disruptions, Tai communities perform rituals to “call the souls back” (Th., *ทำขวัญ*, *tham khwan*; L., *ສູ່ຂວນ*, *su khwan*). These ceremonies, led by lay masters rather than monks, serve to reintegrate the *khwan* into the

body of the afflicted individual. They are also performed during major life events—marriage, monastic ordination, travel, or house construction—to ensure the individual’s readiness to face upcoming challenges. Despite their widespread practice in Buddhist societies, *tham khwan* or *su khwan* ceremonies are typically classified as non-Buddhist in scholarship. However, as Terwiel demonstrates, Tai populations often blur the boundaries between Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices, challenging such rigid categorizations.

The book comprises 13 chapters of varying lengths, each chapter either revisiting Terwiel’s earlier work or presenting new insights. The first chapter introduces the *khwan* concept, while the concluding chapter synthesizes the findings. The intervening chapters feature excerpts from Terwiel’s publications between 1975 and 1995, complemented by his retrospective commentary. This format, guided by editor Benjamin Baumann, allows for a unique combination of ethnographic detail, critical reflection, and autobiographical narrative. Although Baumann’s editorial contributions are often valuable, the lack of clear bibliographical references for the excerpts is a notable oversight, leaving readers to piece together their origins.

Chapter 2 (pp. 7–22) includes three excerpts from Terwiel’s seminal work *Monks and Magic* (1975), detailing *tham khwan* rituals associated with birth, ordination, and the erection of a house’s main pillar (Th., เสาคอก; L., ເສົາເອກ, *sao ek*). These vivid descriptions illuminate the integration of *khwan* rituals into everyday life. Chapter 3 (pp. 23–28)

explores the writings of the Thai scholar Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (1888–1969) on *khwan*, integrating them with interviews Terwiel conducted with him in 1969. Chapter 4 (pp. 29–31), the shortest chapter, offers a brief but evocative account of Terwiel’s experiences in a Ratchaburi household after his monastic stay, highlighting how *khwan* is referenced in daily interactions.

The longest chapter, Chapter 5 (pp. 33–84), provides a comparative analysis of funeral rites among various Tai and neighboring groups, tracing the journey of the deceased from body preparation to burial or cremation. This chapter showcases Terwiel’s meticulous ethnographic approach, offering a rich tapestry of practices that reveal both shared traditions and local adaptations. Chapters 6 (pp. 85–94) and 7 (pp. 95–112) shift the focus to Tai populations in Assam, northeastern India. The former adopts an autobiographical tone, recounting Terwiel’s 1978 fieldwork among Tai Ahom, Khamti, and other groups, while the latter examines therapeutic rituals aimed at restoring lost *khwan*.

Chapter 8 (pp. 113–146) stands out for its comparative breadth, examining *khwan* concepts across Tai-speaking groups in Thailand, Laos, India, Vietnam, Myanmar, and southern China, as well as among non-Tai populations like the Khmer, Burmese, and Hmong. A summary table at the chapter’s end effectively distills the similarities and differences in these traditions. Chapter 9 (pp. 147–164) revisits funeral rites among Assam’s Tai populations, with a particular focus on the interplay between Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements. This chapter

emphasizes the dynamic intermingling of belief systems, illustrating how Buddhism has influenced *khwan* rituals—and reciprocally—without entirely subsuming them.

Chapter 10 (pp. 165–177) features an annotated translation of a text used in *tham khwan* or *su khwan* ceremonies among Tai Phakey (or Tai Phake) communities in Assam. This chapter exemplifies Terwiel’s interdisciplinary approach, bridging anthropology, religious studies, and textual analysis. Chapter 11 (pp. 178–200) explores mythological tales shared by Tai and neighboring groups about the origins of rice cultivation, linking these narratives to Buddhist literature such as the *Aggaññasutta* and the *Lokapañatti*. These connections highlight the deep integration of Buddhist and local cosmologies.

Chapter 12 (pp. 221–231) examines a calendric table used by Tai groups in Vietnam and Assam to track the location of the *khwan* within the body, clearly within a hemerological framework based on the lunar calendar. Terwiel suggests that these calendars were personalized for individuals, though it is more likely that they served as personal handbooks for astrologers. This chapter also touches on the influence of Chinese Taoist culture on Tai traditions, an area ripe for further exploration.

Each chapter begins with the author’s classic introduction, offering insights into the circumstances surrounding the initiation and conduct of his research. The editor selects key excerpts from texts previously published by Terwiel, which are then followed by critical commentary from the author himself.

Each chapter concludes with a general summary that synthesizes the material and addresses the central questions of the overarching issue. This editorial structure lends originality to the work, along with epistemological reflections, and provides an autobiographical touch that enhances the reading experience. However, at times, readers may feel a sense of disorientation, as they learn in Terwiel’s commentary that earlier hypotheses or methodologies have been reassessed—such as when the distinctive traits previously outlined for various *tham* or *su khwan* are later recognized as simply variants of a single ritual (p. 144). Consequently, the data must be reconsidered in light of the author’s updated reflections. Additionally, the format leads to some repetition, with similar ethnographic descriptions and analyses appearing in multiple chapters. For example, the funeral rites of the Tai of Assam are discussed in both chapters 5 and 9 and the inconsistency in the number of *khwan* across different Tai groups (and even among informants within the same group) is highlighted several times (pp. 4, 105, 118, 132–133, etc). Furthermore, discussing the rituals practiced by the Lao in north-eastern Thailand (p. 119) and in Lao PDR (p. 120) results in redundancy, as these populations are culturally similar, separated only by the Mekong River. Despite these editorial choices, readers are likely to enjoy revisiting these fascinating pages, even if they are decades old, while discovering Terwiel’s new reflections and updated conclusions. In this regard, the book adds value to existing studies on the *khwan*.

A key achievement of Terwiel's work is his identification of the precise influence Buddhism has had on the concepts and rituals related to the *khwan* and vice versa. He provides numerous examples of the symbiosis—or intermingling—between Buddhist ideas and those he classifies as part of “archaic Tai culture” or “pre-Buddhist Tai culture”, ultimately favoring the latter term (p. 34). Rituals for “calling back the souls”, performed during funerals or before ordination ceremonies to become a Buddhist monk (p. 15), are illustrative of this synthesis. Terwiel notes the presence of wooden poles commemorating the dead among White Tai and Black Tai, two non-Buddhist populations. These are presumably associated with beliefs that certain *khwan* of the dead ascend to heaven by climbing these poles, taking the parasol, or riding a winged horse (p. 67). This observation helps explain the presence of flagpoles and banners near the monasteries of Buddhist Tai populations, where their role is to transfer merit to the deceased (p. 69). This intermingling between Buddhist teachings and *khwan* rituals is also evident in the Tai Phakey text analyzed by Terwiel in Chapter 10, which recalls the vital spirits using Pali verses from Canonical scriptures (p. 167). Even myths that initially appear specific to Tai and neighboring cultures, like the legend of primordial rice, are shown to have roots in Buddhist literature, notably the *Aggaññasutta*, and are further developed in local Pali texts like the *Lokapañatti* and the *Traibhūmikathā* (pp. 201–204). These connections, paradoxically, challenge the book's assertion, made in its introduction, that “*khwans*

were not absorbed into Buddhist thought” (p. xxvi).

Another notable contribution of Terwiel's work demonstrates that elements from different traditions are not in opposition but are complementary or even compatible. For example, the belief in the plurality of *khwan*—some of which are thought to return to heaven, others to reincarnate as ancestors or in a new body—does not necessarily conflict with the Buddhist notion of “non-self” (P., *anatta*). Some Buddhist Tai groups, such as the Siamese and Lao, readily equate *khwan* with *viññāna* (consciousness). We might also note that the belief in the possibility of “sending” or “dedicating” (P., *uddisa*) merit (P., *puññakusala*) to the deceased is not, as Terwiel seems to suggest, a remnant of “original Tai tradition”, but rather a common practice among Buddhist communities across Asia. Furthermore, Terwiel identifies that some Tai groups, such as the Shan of Burma, Lao, and Yuon, count 32 *khwan* for each individual because this number corresponds to the list of “thirty-two [bodily] constituents” (P., *dvatīṃsākāra*) in the Canonical texts of Sinhalese Buddhism (p. 132). For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that Lao and Yuon beliefs attribute part of the *khwan* to the father and the rest to the mother, aligning with local Buddhist teachings on the transmission of bodily elements (Th., ກຸນ; L., ກຸນ, *khun*; P., *guṇa*) from each parent to the child.¹

Such correspondence with “bodily constituents” opens a discussion on the nature of *khwan*, particularly whether

¹ On this, see Kourilsky 2015: 45–50.

they are intrinsic to an individual or simply “inhabit” the body. This ontological question is left unexplored, along with other complex issues, such as the relationships between notions like *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *phi* (ghost), and *khwan* in Buddhist Tai societies.

Given the rich exploration of Buddhism’s influence on *khwan* rituals, it is surprising that Terwiel’s attempt to reconstruct “pre-Buddhist Tai culture” does not rely more heavily on the distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist Tai groups. For instance, in discussing funeral rites, it might have been more insightful to compare Tai groups in southern China, unaffected by Indian influences, with those that migrated to mainland Southeast Asia and integrated with “Indianized” Mon-Khmer populations (p. 143). Only in Chapter 8’s commentary (p. 144) does Terwiel explain his methodological choice, revealing that, due to a lack of evidence from places such as Guizhou, Guangxi, and Guangdong, he initially assumed Tai groups in southern China

were unaware of the *khwan* concept. Terwiel admits that this assumption was later proven incorrect.² This realization exemplifies the occasional disorientation caused by Terwiel’s revisions. Ultimately, he concludes, quite rightly, that although certain ritual elements may have Khmer origins, the preoccupation with “vital elements” in Tai funeral rites is likely a Tai contribution (p. 143).

Despite these minor reservations, *The ‘Soul’ of the Tai Re-Examined* is indispensable for understanding the concept of *khwan*, which is central to all Tai-speaking populations. This book represents the most comprehensive, well-documented, and up-to-date study on the subject, offering valuable insights for specialists and students of Southeast Asian anthropology, particularly those interested in the rigorous, multidisciplinary methods of one of the foremost experts on Tai culture.

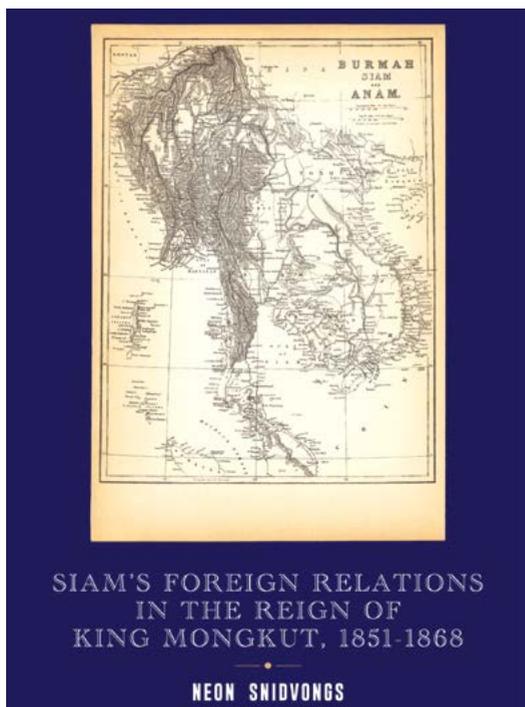
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² See Holm 2004. This information can also be found in earlier French studies, such as Berlie 1991, and Cauquelin 1997.

Neon Snidvongs, *Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851-1868* (วิเทศสัมพันธ์ของสยามในรัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ค.ศ. 1851-1868), Bangkok: International Studies Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, 832 pages, Open Access, ISBN 978-6163411327 (E-Book)



Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851-1868 is a delightful and insightful examination of Siamese interactions with Great Britain and France during the height of the colonial era. The author, Thanpuying Neon Snidvongs (1930-2021), was a well-known Thai historian who received her higher education in Great Britain. The book under review is based on her doctoral thesis (*The Development of Siam's Relations with Britain and France in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851-1868*), presented at SOAS-University of London in 1960. Special mention should be made from the outset

of the extensive and “awe-inspiring” 75 pages of notes and 27-page bibliography. The research undertaken decades ago by Dr Neon warrants recognition and, now that it is widely available through open access, should serve as a valuable resource for future scholars.¹

The study offers a refreshing perspective on a period often overlooked in Western historiography. Western historians have traditionally shown little interest in King Mongkut's (Rama IV, r. 1851-1868) life and achievements, as his reign tends to be overshadowed by that of his son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868-1910), who is credited with modernizing and reforming the Siamese state. Dr Neon's work, however, argues that King Mongkut's reign laid the crucial groundwork for his son's achievements, influencing every aspect of King Chulalongkorn's rule.

Dr Neon thus skillfully brings to light the often-overlooked contributions of King Mongkut both before and after his ascension to the throne in 1851. For example, she highlights his pivotal role during the reign of his predecessor, King Rama III (r. 1824-1851). Unlike previous Siamese kings, King Mongkut had a unique advantage—during his 27 years as a Buddhist monk prior to becoming a monarch, he traveled extensively throughout the kingdom. These journeys gave him an intimate knowledge of Siam's geography and its people, greatly benefiting him when he later assumed the throne. Dr Neon highlights how this experience set King Mongkut apart,

¹ The e-book is available for free download on the International Studies Center website of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://isc.mfa.go.th>, under Publications > Books.

providing him with insight and understanding to navigate the challenges of governing a country under the growing threat of Western colonialism.

The author also addresses the role of the powerful Bunnag family in Siamese state affairs during King Mongkut's reign. While acknowledging the influence of this prominent clan, she argues that King Mongkut shared power with the Bunnags, working alongside them to administer the kingdom. Importantly, when it came to negotiations with Western powers, it was King Mongkut who took the lead, often making decisive decisions that protected Siam's sovereignty.

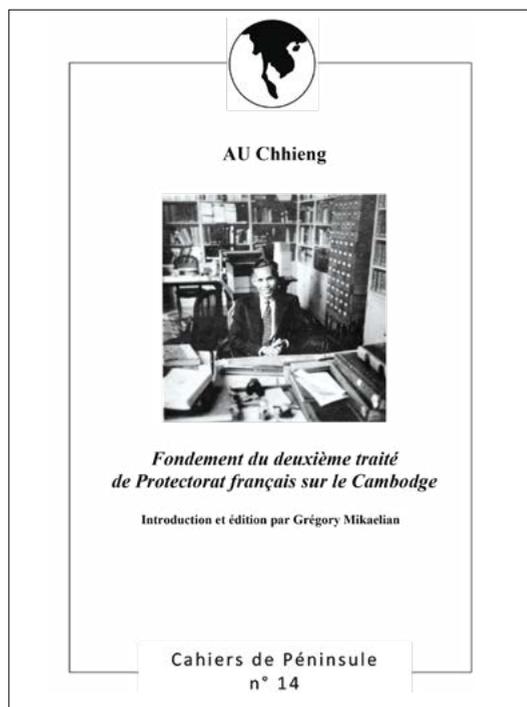
The book offers a detailed analysis of how King Mongkut skillfully countered the British and French colonial ambitions, particularly their designs on Siam's tributary states. Dr Neon sheds light on the King's bold move to end Siamese centuries-old tradition of sending tribute to the Chinese emperor. After the Bowring Treaty of 1855, King Mongkut recognized that continuing this practice could lead to misunderstandings with European powers, who might misinterpret Siam's status as subordinate to China. His decision to terminate the tribute reflected a strategic shift in Siam's foreign policy, one that redefined the kingdom's relationships in the context of a rapidly changing global order.

Another fascinating aspect of Dr Neon's analysis is her exploration of King Mongkut's linguistic prowess, highlighting his early involvement in foreign relations. She emphasizes that he was the first Asian monarch who could communicate directly with British diplomats and other Western envoys without an interpreter, a remarkable achievement for the time. His fluency in English and other languages helped bridge cultural divides and foster more direct and personal relationships between Siam and Western powers.

In conclusion, Dr Neon's book presents a thorough and engaging account of King Mongkut's reign, a pivotal period in Siam's political history. Her nuanced portrayal of this transformative era challenges the conventional view of King Mongkut as merely a precursor to King Chulalongkorn, instead stressing his own significant contributions to Siam's survival and adaptation during the age of imperialism. Those interested in this critical period of Siamese history will find *Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut* an indispensable and rewarding read.

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Au Chhieng, *Fondement du deuxième traité de Protectorat français sur le Cambodge*, introduction et édition par Grégory Mikaelian, Paris: Association Péninsule [Cahiers de Péninsule 14], 2023, 356 pages, €32.50, ISBN 978-235214532 (Paperback)



Grégory Mikaelian here offers two remarkable texts. The volume begins with a fascinating hundred-page biography of Au Chhieng (1908–1992), the first Cambodian Orientalist, written by Mikaelian. This is followed by Au Chhieng’s law thesis, which had disappeared after its rejection and pulping in 1941. For this volume, the thesis has been re-typed and expanded with discreet and welcome notes; the book also includes a set of photographs.

Mikaelian became interested in Au Chhieng while researching exceptional Cambodians who migrated to France at the beginning of the 20th century.

This work paralleled his work on Khmer texts from the Cambodian middle period. He had already published the life story of Arenu Iukanthor, son of Prince Yukanthor (1860–1934). Mikaelian’s deep knowledge of Cambodian history and social order allows him to put his subjects’ lives into perspective.

Au Chhieng is best known to Cambodian specialists for his catalog of Khmer manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). A few researchers, including Mikaelian, encountered the rare writings of this great scholar during seminars given by one of his students, the late Saveros Pou, also known as Saveros Lewitz or Saveros Lewitz-Pou (1929–2020). Few knew that Au Chhieng, the Orientalist scholar, had once hoped for a legal or administrative career.

Through extensive research in archives and numerous exchanges and interviews with Au Chhieng’s family and scholars who knew him, both in France and Cambodia, Mikaelian has pieced together the life of this discreet yet exceptional individual. Born in 1908 in Battambang into a family of dignitaries close to the Aphyayvong family, Au Chhieng was part of the local aristocracy. Destined for a career in the Cambodian royal administration, he studied in Battambang at the monastery, then at the residential school, then in Phnom Penh at the Collège Sisowath, and finally at the Hanoi School of Pedagogy in 1926. He returned to Phnom Penh when Pali and Sanskrit studies were booming and, noted for his seriousness and great erudition, was sent to France in 1931 to pursue his education. He became the first Cambodian to hold a bachelor’s

degree in literature, supporting himself with a scholarship and petty jobs such as teaching Khmer and classifying Khmer manuscripts at the National library. He married a young French schoolteacher, which hindered his upward social mobility in Cambodia. Meanwhile, he began a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris in international law under Louis Le Fur (1870–1943), focusing on the Convention imposed on King Norodom (r. 1860–1904) by the Governor of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, in 1884. Au Chhieng's thesis, presented in 1941, argued the illegality of the Convention, thus questioning the legitimacy of the French Protectorate over Cambodia. Because it questioned its legitimacy, the thesis was rejected and all but two copies were pulped, shattering the spirit and career hopes of the brilliant young man. Mikaelian shows how this trauma radically changed his life path.

Au Chhieng then turned to Khmer studies. He began another doctoral thesis at the University of Paris on Old Khmer, which he never completed, while continuing to teach Khmer and launching a seminar on “Indo-Khmer philology” at the *École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE). Until his retirement in France in the early 1970s, Au Chhieng contented himself with small contracts at the CNRS, never adhering to the academic rules that would have secured him a proper academic career. His published work, in addition to that contained in the volume under review, is characterized by its quality and paucity, including a catalog of the Khmer collection at the BnF, a single contribution to a collective work, and 13 articles.

His extreme erudition, his “truly fascinating vision [...] of Khmer inscriptions” according to George Groslier (quoted by Mikaelian, p. 102), and his extraordinary capacity for work should have earned him academic honors. We owe him the concept of “khmerology”. However, by not completing his second thesis, not publishing his holistic dictionary of Old Khmer (the manuscript of which is now lost), and alienating the great master of the time, George Coédès (1886–1969), he remained an outsider to academia. He trained only a handful of students, including Saveros Pou, who in turn trained a new generation of Khmerologists, among them Grégory Mikaelian.

Mikaelian's biography of Au Chhieng is a striking read. In addition to the career of the Franco-Cambodian scholar, it draws the reader into the maze of family alliances among the elites of Battambang, the burgeoning intellectual and political life of Cambodians in France after World War II, and the narrow-minded world of Parisian academia in the 1950s and 1960s. To explain Au Chhieng's choices, Mikaelian suggests several possible explanations, from the posture of the *gru khmaer* (គ្រូខ្មែរ) to the trauma of the rejection of his first thesis in 1941. The great appeal of Au Chhieng to his biographer is evident. Both scholars share a disdain for academic mundanities, a deep interest in the Khmer language, a huge work capacity, and a determination to master their subject before publishing. It took Mikaelian nearly 15 years to complete this biography.

Following Au Chhieng's biography, the second text in this volume, the law thesis—which was rejected and of which

only two copies were saved, is equally compelling. Written with a subtle pen, the thesis looks back at the circumstances surrounding the imposition of the Thomson Convention in 1884, proposes a legal study of the agreement, and examines its consequences. In the Introduction, Au Chhieng refers to the 1884 agreement as a “second Protectorate treaty” and explores whether it can be considered a “*coup d’État*” (p. 186). The first part, “Les faits [the Facts]”, is probably the most comprehensive study to date of the events by which Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina, forced King Norodom to sign an agreement placing the entire administration of the kingdom in French hands. Au Chhieng used well-known sources: accounts by colonialists, the press in France and Indochina, minutes of parliamentary debates, letters from Norodom, and correspondence from the Governor of Cochinchina published in the press. He did not, however, have access to the archives of the Ministry of Colonies. He wisely used the public sources to piece together the facts within their context, particularly the political debates surrounding the attacks on Jules Ferry’s colonial policy. He also provided a valuable oral account of the events circulating among Cambodian dignitaries at the time. Unfortunately, Au Chhieng considered it “fallacious” to use a “copy of the full text” (p. 199) of this account, of which we have only a French summary. This text provides a unique testimony of the Court’s perception of Thomson’s *coup de force*. Au Chhieng’s intellectual integrity and perfect command of both French and Khmer suggest the text is close to the original. It shows the origin of the

expression used to describe the French as “titans with iron hands and silver eyes”, *asura tai taek bhnaek prak’* (អិសុរៈ ដៃដែក ភ្នែកប្រាក់).

Cambodian and French sources unambiguously show that Thomson used force to impose the treaty on King Norodom. It is unfortunate that Au Chhieng did not delve deeper into the Cambodian perspective. Apart from Louis Col de Monteiro (1859–1923), the king’s interpreter, the names of the Khmer protagonists, particularly the ministers, remain unknown. Au Chhieng’s study of the insurrection following the treaty’s signing is less convincing. Access to archives would have revealed that, contrary to most public sources, order was not restored after the King’s public intervention in 1886 and that unrest continued until 1888.

In the second part of the thesis, “Le droit [the Law]”, Au Chhieng offers a legal analysis of the Convention. The strongest part examines King Norodom’s capacity to act on behalf of Cambodia and Cambodia’s legal capacity as a Protectorate country to invoke international law. Au Chhieng presents an interesting study of the two versions of the 1863 Protectorate treaty in French and Khmer. “The suzerainty of France over Cambodia” appears only in the French version. Au Chhieng repeatedly refers to his strongest argument: the use of violence to secure the 1884 Convention, rendering it null and void.

The subsequent analysis is less convincing. Some arguments appear specious, such as when Au Chhieng considers the king a French civil servant because he received regalia from French

authorities and was allocated a fixed civil list (p. 319). Au Chhieng provides only a partial internal study of the Convention's text (Preamble, articles 1, 2, 3, 10, and 11). Readers of his doctoral thesis might have expected a complete study of the text.

Two articles of the Convention are particularly noteworthy for historians. They posed legal problems, making their application impossible. Article 8 abolished slavery, but the term slave in French (*esclave*) refers to a different legal status than *dāsakar* (ទាសករ) in Khmer. Article 9 sought to establish private property, stating that “the soil of the kingdom, until now the exclusive property of the crown, shall cease to be inalienable”. While traditionally the Khmer king was master of the land and water, private land ownership already existed. Gregor Müller (2006) has shown that this article, as well as the following article 10, aimed primarily at seizing Cambodia's land for France and the French. A scholar of Au Chhieng's caliber, familiar with Khmer codes in the original text, should have addressed these elements. A legal study of the Convention's text, drawing on Cambodian law and not just European international law, would have been fascinating, though it

is unclear whether it would have been palatable to a 1941 jury.

In the first chapters of the third part, “Équité [Fairness]”, Au Chhieng continues his critique of the 1884 Convention, examining its internal structure and delivering a thorough legal indictment of colonization. He concludes by arguing that while the 1884 Convention was illegal, France's civilizing mission legitimized it *a posteriori*. His love for French literature and pride in Khmer civilization are evident.

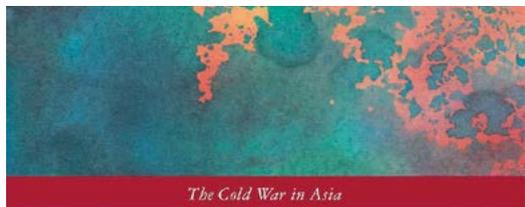
Though published more than 80 years after it was written, Au Chhieng's work, skillfully edited by Grégory Mikaelian, is a welcome contribution to the study of Cambodia under colonial rule and the epistemology of Khmer studies.

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Scott Pribble, *The Barter Economy of the Khmer Rouge Labor Camps*, London: Routledge, 2024, 174 pages, £116, ISBN 978-1032387017 (Hardback)



THE BARTER ECONOMY OF THE KHMER ROUGE LABOR CAMPS

Scott Pribble



The title alone made me want to read this book. A welcome addition to the literature on the Khmer Rouge (KR) and Democratic Kampuchea (DK), it presents a yeoman effort to document a fascinating and impossibly unlikely phenomenon: how Cambodians engaged in unofficial economic exchange in an environment where such activity was punishable (and often punished) by death. Rather than rely on a somewhat unexciting rational choice explanation—the immediacy of starvation overwhelming the most stoic risk-aversion (although this must be, and is, part of the explanation)—Pribble’s argument is more interdisciplinary, combining economic trade-offs, historical societal roles, Khmer culture, and variation in the fungibility of

tradable items to provide a lens into a phenomenon that the existing literature only mentions—tantalizingly—in passing, but leaves unexplored. By engaging existing work and by drawing on archival and new interview data, Pribble constructs a world that is at once familiar and at the same time novel and intriguing.

The stakes could not have been higher: “[T]he abolition of money had cancelled at a stroke all our financial assets [...] we had lost everything that was dear to us, and almost everything that would ensure our survival” (p. 38). This goes beyond life and death and extends into the very question of self: “When the [KR] abolished property rights and appropriated the peasants’ gold and land, they also took a piece of the villagers’ identity and disrupted their way of life” (p. 20). How did Cambodians cope with such an existential crisis?

Pribble defines barter as “any non-monetary exchange of goods or services” and the market as “any space where individuals signaled to each other that they wished to negotiate a trade” (p. 4). He writes that “the barter economy was the riskiest way to obtain food because trade was dependent on the discretion of two or more individuals in a totalitarian surveillance state”, and yet it saved “a significant number of lives”. Indeed, it seems to have been fairly widespread: “despite the regime’s constant Marxian propaganda and indoctrination tactics, basic forms of market capitalism, including a demand for nonessential products, persisted in labor camps throughout the era” (pp. 7–8):

The meager rations provided by the Khmer Rouge at the labor

camps were not enough to sustain life for four years. An extra handful of rice, a dead rat, or a tablet of tetracycline kept loved ones alive. Bartering for these goods involved delicate and skillful negotiations that required trust, discretion, and the respect of villagers from the privileged class to keep these transactions hidden from *Angkar* [the state]. Relationships had to be developed and a deep understanding of the value of commodities had to be constantly reassessed to calculate supply and demand. Those with the skill and daring to collect enough food prolonged their lives until the Khmer Rouge was forced from power in January 1979 (p. 14).

These underground markets revolved around commodities for consumption (“tangible goods that were usually traded once and then consumed within a short period of time”) such as medicine, meats, and other foods; commodities for exchange (nonessential goods without immediate benefit that could be traded repeatedly)—gold, jewelry, watches, or clothing; or some combination of the two. Not surprisingly, quoting Haing Ngor, rice was “the perfect medium of exchange”. It was intrinsically and immediately valuable but could be stored for future consumption or exchange. Another key tradable good was gold (“as a symbol of future prosperity”) “because traders believed that it would always hold value in the Khmer consciousness” (p. 62). Although it was

not measured as precisely as rice (the unit of measurement for which was the ubiquitous *Carnation* evaporated milk can), gold was a relatively familiar commodity. “Secondary currencies included clothing, salt, sugar, medicine, tobacco, meats, and various other products and services” (p. 74). Indeed, the universe of tradable goods was greater than one might initially think:

Khmers bartered for rides on ox carts and boats. They traded food and gold for assistance with the burial of family members and chores around the camps. While the Cambodian riel was worthless, individuals who had stashed away American dollars were able to barter for goods in some camps, depending upon the perceived value and demand. Gemstones and (non-gold) precious metals served as secondary currencies in various camps. Some of the more daring villagers traded for practical items like fishing nets so that they could sneak off and attempt to catch their own food. Khmers bartered household goods such as cooking pots, kerosene, cooking oil, MSG (monosodium glutamate), dishes, blankets, pillows, and even radios. Several villagers reported trading for bicycles and thatch for their roofs. Khmers exchanged food such as crickets, corn, mushrooms, and rice wine (pp. 80–81).

In addition to the foregoing, there are other illuminating insights scattered throughout. For example, some of the Base People (rural dwellers in KR-controlled areas at the time of the revolution) had a strong sense that the DK era would be temporary, that the regime would eventually fall, raising all sorts of questions about short- and long-term gains from trade. Another is that the April 17 People (former urban and rural dwellers forced into labor camps) were in an almost impossibly vulnerable, subordinate position where a “crucial skill involved the identification of safe and trustworthy trading partners” with whom engagement was quite literally, on multiple levels, a life and death decision. These decisions were based on such intangibles as “an ability to interpret body language or tone of voice [that] might help them avoid individuals that disliked city folk or were loyal to the regime”. And yet, they were able to negotiate, sometimes quite effectively: “The ability to extract the maximum amount of value from each exchange became a source of pride among villagers, especially the April 17 people” (p. 64). It speaks to the power of human agency and will even under the most horrific conditions.

The book is organized into chapters on historical traditions, currency types, and schema through which to explore this underground economy—Sino-Khmers, Base- vs April 17 People, women vs men, and cadre preferences (including their preferred contraband—wristwatches and the 1970s kitsch of “lighter chains”).

A major contribution of the study is a set of new interviews with surviving Base people. This demographic is almost

completely unrepresented in the personal memoirs that make up much of what we know about the day-to-day lives of people under the yoke of the Khmer Rouge. Pribble interviewed over fifty “Base people [...] individuals from this social class were intentionally sought out to add divergent perspectives to the research”. This is a major addition to our store of knowledge: “opinions of the Base people were crucial to this study, as they were often portrayed in the memoirs as hostile to April 17 people or tacitly supportive of the Khmer Rouge” (p. 6). He finds the matrix of social relationships far more complex than conventional wisdom suggests, and thus they “supplement and challenge the homogeneous perspectives of [...] [published] memoirs” (p. 7).

Inevitably shortcomings occur. The first has to do with organization of the material itself. This is a slim volume that looks at a phenomenon on which there is almost no surviving data apart from that mentioned above. As a result, there are instances of “padding” that help contextualize the material, but which sometimes stray a bit. The literature review is an example of this, as is the discussion of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia (although the primer on currency in Marxist theory in Chapter 2 is quite good). There are also instances of repetition, although, frankly, less than one might expect. Each chapter has its own endnotes, but they also contain their own bibliography, which I found a bit jarring, especially as sometimes they take up almost as many pages as the chapters themselves (Chapter 6, “Perils and Punishments” is five-and-a-half pages long; the notes and bibli-

ography for the chapter, three pages). In other instances, the discussions do not quite congeal. The analysis on different KR intellectuals' views on currency matters never really gels. As a result, the discussion on the printing and import of DK currency from China feels incomplete. "For most of 1975, the leadership appeared to change their minds on the subject [of the abolition of currency] regularly" (p. 35). What accounts for this back-and-forth? There is also the omission of any discussion of the KR currencies issued in the early 1990s. These remain enigmatic fragments of post-DK history that have somehow defied explanation or even description when it comes to how, when, and why they were issued and circulated.

This volume also represents something of a missed opportunity. The author does a nice job of pushing back against a monolithic view of Democratic Kampuchea ("lack of consistency in Democratic Kampuchea was in some ways a hallmark of the regime", p. 66). Without softening the horrific dimensions of Khmer Rouge rule, Pribble presents example after example of variation along the lines of how draconian versus how (relatively) flexible local cadres were about things such as wearing jewelry, turning a blind eye to barter trade, allowing limited travel outside the cooperative, and so on. In addition, he points to examples of more systematic variation, that is, between the sexes: women were better negotiators, less likely to be punished (and physically searched), and given greater latitude in physically straying from the camps, than were men. Given these multiple dimensions of variation within the lives of Cambodians during this period, the

book might have benefited from engaging Michael Vickery's critique of what he labeled the "Standard Total View" (Vickery 1984 is not even cited). It would have provided more of a grounding for some of the vivid but, as a result, impressionistic variations documented therein.

There are a few other minor quibbles. I am not quite on board with the widespread use of the term "camps". They suggest a different mode of organization than one in which all of society is communalized as was the case in DK. The discussion on the Angkorian economy is good but it misses one of the crucial insights from newly-discovered coinage from the Funan era, a mode of currency exchange that had disappeared by the Angkor period.

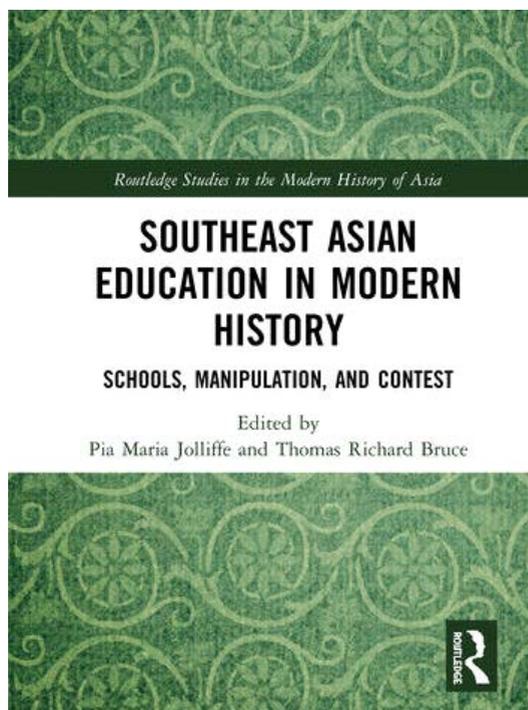
All this having been said, these are largely subjective criticisms that one may embrace or reject without negating that Pribble has provided an important advancement in our knowledge of KR rule as well as valuable insights on how we might reimagine some of the assumptions of DK that hitherto seemed ironclad. In doing so, he provides a valuable link to this brief but unimaginably brutal time and place, fleshes out a fascinating socioeconomic phenomenon, and compels us to update our priors.

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Pia Maria Jolliffe & Thomas Richard Bruce, eds, *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History: Schools, Manipulation, and Contest*, New York: Routledge, 2019, 216 pages, £108, ISBN 978-1138063181 (Hardback)



In the opening of *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History*, the editors describe the volume as “a collection of micro-historical studies” focusing on the evolution of educational policies and practices from the emergence of modern education in the 19th century to the end of the 20th century (p. 1). They provide a well-rounded historical context of Southeast Asia, offering readers a broad framework for understanding the region’s diverse educational landscapes. While the temptation to skip between chapters may be strong, reading the book in its entirety offers a more cohesive insight into the overarching themes and the

intricate relationships between education, identity, and political power in the region.

The book consists of 12 chapters, beginning with Myanmar¹ and concluding with the Philippines, each offering a unique perspective on Southeast Asian education. Five chapters focus on Thailand,² two on Vietnam, and one each on Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. However, the editors note that Laos, Cambodia, and East Timor (Timor-Leste) are not represented (p. 10). In the Introduction’s final paragraph, the editors summarize the “central themes” of the book, which culminate in “an educational history characterized by manipulation and contest” (p. 9). These themes are explored across the chapters, from Myanmar to the Philippines.

The first chapter, “Myanmar Identity and the Shifting Value of the Classical Past: A Case Study of King Kyansittha in Burmese History Textbooks, 1829–2017” by Rosalie Metro, examines how ideologies of ethnic and national identity have evolved under different political regimes, from monarchy to military dictatorship (p. 14). Metro’s analysis of history textbooks provides a detailed look at the ideological manipulation of education in Myanmar, shedding light on the process by which national identity was cultivated and contested.

In Chapter 2, Pia Maria Jolliffe’s “The Legend of the ‘Lost Book’ and the Value of Education among the Karen People in Myanmar and Thailand” focuses on the Karen people’s search for their “lost

¹ Another recent book by Lall (2020) is dedicated exclusively to education in Myanmar.

² See also Penpisoot et al. (2021) for a recent work on higher education in Thailand.

book”, which symbolizes their quest for identity. The chapter explores the relationship between education, religious conversion, and nationalism, illustrating how education served as a tool for both assimilation and resistance.

In Chapter 3, Natanaree Posrithong’s “The Modernisation of Female Education and the Emergence of Class Conflict between Literate Groups of Women in Siam 1870–1910” discusses the role of Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, in modernizing Thai education by establishing schools for both boys and girls. These efforts challenged the traditional elite to establish their own institutions. While this could have led to a contest, the schools initially catered to different social classes before eventually merging.

The theme of national identity continues in Chapter 4, “Thailand’s Early Adult Education in Textbooks: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Literacy, 1940–1944” by Wasithee Chaiyakan, which explores an aspect of nation-building during the Second World War. This chapter is quite engaging. In the sub-section on “Race and Culture”, Wasithee describes the differentiation in costumes of Thailand’s neighboring races, including a Japanese woman in a kimono. Remarkably, Thai people were depicted by a man in a suit and tie. The implication went beyond race, as Thais were defined by their modernity (or civilized status), in stark contrast to their neighbors, including, somewhat ironically, the Japanese (p. 61). In the sub-section “Historical Narrative Regarding a Great King”, there is only a brief, ten-line summary of Thai history, featuring King Khun Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai, where “All the

Thais were happy and content” (p. 63). The period of 1940–1944 coincided with the era of Rathaniyom (รัชนียม) or State Conventions, the first of which demanded that citizens refer to the nation and its people as “Thailand, the Thai Nation, and the Thais” (p. 64). While four textbooks were part of the Early Adult Education Program published in 1941, only the first two have been found; it is hoped that Achan Wasithee will one day uncover the remaining volumes.

Chapter 5, “Contesting ‘Chinese’ Education: Schooling in the Kuomintang Chinese Diaspora in Northern Thailand, 1975–2015”, by Aranya Siriphon & Sunantha Yamthap, is a remarkable contribution to a lesser-known aspect of contemporary history. After the KMT army retreated from southern China to northern Thailand in 1949, some were repatriated to Taiwan in the 1950s, while others chose to settle in the northern mountains. This chapter examines the contest for their hearts and minds between Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China, the latter leveraging its well-funded cultural institutions. The positive outcome of this rivalry is the resilience of the Chinese migrants, who ultimately developed a “Kuomintang–Thai identity” (p. 70). Many of them are now Thai citizens.

In Chapter 6, “Vocational Education, Shoemaking, and the Emergence of a National Economy in Thailand 1895–1973”, Thomas Richard Bruce examines the development of vocational education. Who would have thought that economic history could be explored through the lens of the shoemaking industry in modern Thailand? This chapter is a *tour de force*, particularly

when combined with the history of vocational education, which began with the founding of the School for the Cultivation of Artisans (เพาะช่าง; *pho chang*) in 1912—a school that continues to thrive today.

Moving to Vietnam, Chapter 7 by Marta Lopatkowa, titled “Vân quốc ngữ: Teaching Modernity through Classics: Women’s Education in Colonial Vietnam”, highlights another central theme of this book: the struggle against cultural alienation brought about by colonialism.

In Chapter 8, “Tinkering Your Way to Prosperity: Technical Education, Auto-mechanics, and Entrepreneurship in Late-Colonial Vietnam”, Erich Dewald examines how colonial educational policies were adapted to local needs and economic contexts. This chapter should be read in conjunction with the above Chapter 6 by Bruce.

Chapter 9 by Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux, “Despite Education: Malaysian Nationhood and Economic Development 1874–1970”, Chapter 10 by Theophilus Kwek, “Full Colour Illustrations: Presentations of Race in Singapore’s History Textbooks, 1965–2000”, and Chapter 11 by Kevin W. Fogg, “State and Islamic Education Growing into Each Other in Indonesia”, are unified in their exploration of the central theme of searching for national identity and nationhood through state management, or manipulation, of education, race, and religion. Success or failure is not the primary concern; what is more interesting is the effort to mitigate these challenges.

The final chapter, “American Education in the Philippines and Filipino Values” by Jeremiah A. Lasquety-Reyes, examines the legacy of American colo-

nial education in the Philippines. While the Karen search for their “lost book” to complete their identity (Chapter 2), Filipinos strive to encapsulate their “values” in *kapwa*, “an inner self shared with others” (p. 200).

Throughout the book, the theme of the search for national identity through education is evident, as is the manipulation of education for political purposes. Whether through the efforts of colonial powers or post-colonial states, education has been used as both a tool for control and a means of resistance. The chapters provide a rich and diverse look at the ways in which education has been intertwined with the political, cultural, and social dynamics of Southeast Asia, offering valuable insights into the region’s history and development.

The five chapters on Thai education are particularly notable for their depth and insight, reflecting the co-editors’ extensive research in the country. The contributions are original and filled with previously unknown details. For example, Jolliffe recounts how many Karen found their “lost book” in the Bible and were converted to Christianity, thus providing the roots of Karen nationalism today. Natanaree provides useful information about the missionary-run school for girls, Wang Lang (วังหลิ่ง), which evolved into Wattana School, now located just behind the headquarters of The Siam Society. This development provided the stimulus for Queen Saovabha (1864–1919) to found Sunanthalai School, attended by one of my great-aunts, Khunying Sin Suphansombat, from 1894 to 1900 (p. 47). Sunanthalai School evolved into Rajini School, where I attended the

first three grades of primary school. I have only a couple of quibbles here: on page 40, King Chulalongkorn's reign began in 1868, not 1878; on page 41, the Ayutthaya period started in the 14th, not the 15th century.

Overall, *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History* is a highly informative and engaging volume that offers valuable perspectives on the complex relationship

between education and identity in Southeast Asia. The editors and contributors have produced a book that will be an invaluable resource for scholars and students of Southeast Asian history and education.

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