สถาปัตยกรรมยุคเปลี่ยนผ่านในสมัยรัชกาลที่ 7

Transitional Architecture of King Rama VII Era

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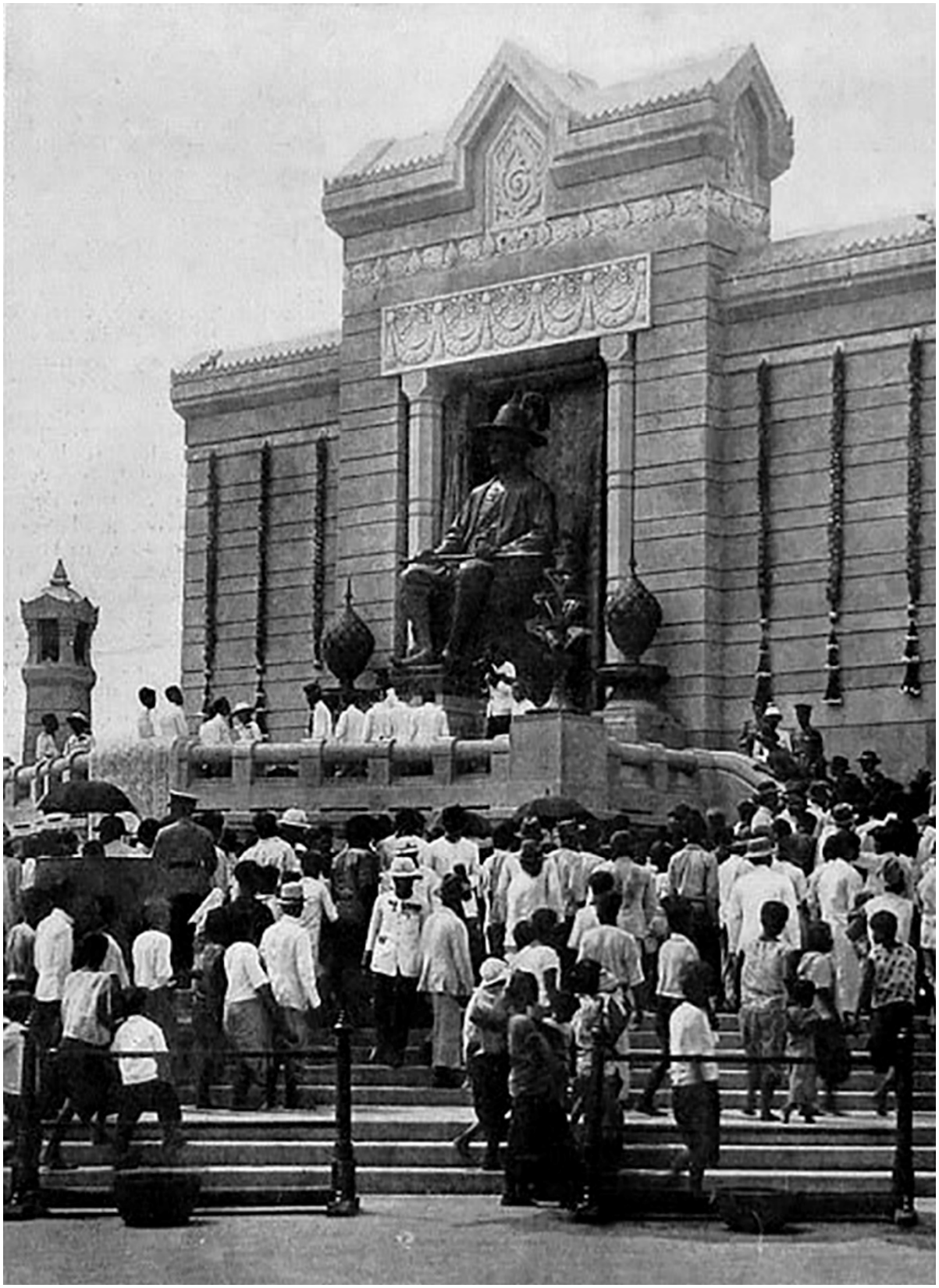
บทคัดย่อ

สถาปัตยกรรมในสมัยของพระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว รัชกาลที่ 7 ถูกใช้ในการแบ่งงานสถาปัตยกรรมของยุครัชกาลที่ 6 ก่อนหน้า และสถาปัตยกรรมในยุคถัดไปอย่างสถาปัตยกรรมของคณะราษฎร อย่างไรก็ดี นอกเหนือจากการศึกษาเชิงการเมือง บริบททางสถาปัตยกรรมหลายด้านของยุครัชกาลที่ 7 นี้ถูกละเลยไป ซึ่งในการอ่านสถาปัตยกรรมนั้นตัวสถาปัตยกรรมสามารถที่จะบ่งบอกได้ถึงประเด็นที่สำคัญ และสามารถบอกข้อมูลเชิงลึกถึงแนวทางการเคลื่อนไหวที่เกี่ยวข้องในยุคนั้น บทความนี้ศึกษาสถาปัตยกรรมบางส่วนที่แสดงถึงยุคสมัยรัชกาลที่ 7 อันได้แก่ อาคารที่สร้างขึ้นในจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย คืออาคารคณะวิทยาศาสตร์และอาคารจักรพงษ์ ที่เป็นตัวสะท้อนการเปลี่ยนผ่านรูปแบบสถาปัตยกรรมและการปฏิบัติวิชาชีพสถาปนิก รวมถึงสถาปัตยกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องและใกล้ชิดกับพระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว คือศาลาเฉลิมกรุง, วังไกลกังวล, พระปฐมบรมราชานุสรณ์ และสะพานพระพุทธ-ยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลก บทความนี้สรุปถึงภาพสะท้อนและร่องรอยความเชื่อมต่อของงานสถาปัตยกรรมสมัยรัชกาลที่ 7 ในงานสถาปัตยกรรมคณะราษฎร และการกลับมาใช้รูปแบบงานประเพณีในยุคหลัง

คำสำคัญ: พระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, สถาปัตยกรรมยุคเปลี่ยนผ่าน, สยาม, อาคารคณะวิทยาศาสตร์, อาคารจักรพงษ์, พระปฐมบรมราชานุสรณ์ และสะพานพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลก, วังไกลกังวล, ศาลาเฉลิมกรุง

Opposite page:
The monument of King Rama I
Source: "le cent cinquantième anniversaire de la dynastie siamoise," **L'ILLUSTRATION** 7 (May 1932): 28.



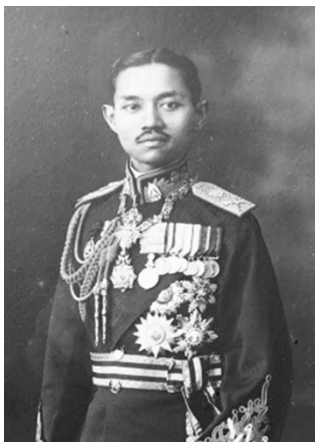
Abstract

The architecture of the King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) era is used to divide eras that preceding and following it (of the Rama VI and Khana Ratsadon eras, respectively). However, not include the study in a political perspective, many architectural contexts of this era have been overlooked. A closer reading of that architecture can reveal powerful clues to what was to follow and insights into reactionary movements of more recent times. The paper discusses emblematic buildings of Chulalongkorn University from the Rama VII reign that reflect the transformations in both architectural style and practice at that time. The account then shifts to buildings that more closely reflect both the personality and the agenda of the King: Chalermkrung Theatre, his own Klai Kang Won Palace in Hua Hin (also subsequently favoured by Rama IX), and the Rama I Monument and Memorial Bridge. The paper concludes with reflections on traces from the Rama VII era in the architecture of the Khana Ratsadon and in the return to subsequent traditional representation.

Keywords: King Prajadhipok, transitional architecture, Siam/Thailand, Science Building, Chakrabongse Building, The Rama I Monument and Memorial Bridge, Klai Kang Won Palace, Chalermkrung Theatre

Introduction

King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r.1925-1935) was an unexpected monarch, the last son of Rama V to inherit the throne at a time of economic crisis from the Great depression in 1929. Further, the monarchy was held in low popular esteem from the retrenchment policy between 1931-1932. Many government officers had been dismissed, and the national budget was significantly reduced.



The royal portraits of H.M. King Prajadhipok
Source: Kroen Silpapet, **The royal portraits of H.M. King Paramindr Maha Prajadhipok Pra Pokklao Chowyoohua and containing his coronation year B.E. 2468** (Bangkok: Siam Postage Stamp Co., 1925), 56.

Moreover, a group of mainly Western-educated Siamese was dissatisfied with the traditional regime, the King and State Council, which were perceived to be ineffective in solving the economic problems that became one of the motives for the Siamese revolution in 1932.[1] Crucially, this financial constraint affected a new architectural development in King Prajadhipok's reign, whereby edifices of this period were designed with a sparing approach and stripped of ornaments, a style that remained in favor post-revolution.[2] The first group of European-trained local architects began applying modern ideas that conformed to the decreased budget. The Siamese style architecture was still created in this period, supported by King Prajadhipok and the elite, but was in simplified traditional forms with less complicated details.[3]

King Prajadhipok's father, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r.1868-1910), had been especially concerned with modernising the administration of the realm and with international relations as a defence against colonialism while simultaneously projecting an imperial vision. The architecture of his reign reflected this agenda, for instance, the Western Classical-style buildings in the Grand Palace and Bang Pa-In Palace. Chulalongkorn's successor, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r.1910-1925), ruling in an era of a seemingly global monarchical eclipse, turned to nationalism and its representation in cultural production, including in architecture; he also turned to extravagance, revived traditional arts, and created architecture with plenty of Siamese style decorum.[4] King Chulalongkorn's modernisation had been largely based on the import of a diversity of European experts to serve in his government. This included architects, notably Italian but also English and German. King Rama VI's architecture had been similarly dependent on Western architects, whether retained from the previous reign or new hires.[5]

However, their fees and salaries were very high and, hence, King Rama VI concurrently supported Siamese students to study abroad in the architectural field. This small group of Siamese architects returned home in the reign of King Rama VII and played a major role in the period's architecture direction. Skilled in designing modern buildings, utilizing architectural drawings and modern materials, they gradually replaced Western designers and played part in a significant transformation in the Siamese architectural working practice in this last period of the absolute monarchy. Key figures include Phra Saroj Rattananimman (1895-1950),[6] educated at the University of Liverpool. In a few emblematic projects, he was matched with traditional Thai artisan, Luang Visal Silpakam[7] (1884–1982), that led to a distinctively hybrid style,[8] lacking both the sophistication and extravagance of the Rama V era and the avant-garde tendency of Rama VI– there was a relative austerity enforced no doubt by the economic restrictions of the time. The Science Building and the Students' Union of Chulalongkorn University are important evidence of the new working process in Thailand.

Moreover, architecture directly associated with King Rama VII reflects his modernizing agenda that shifts towards those that benefit the people, such as the civic space around Rama I Monument and the Memorial Bridge, the first to cross the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok or contribute to a modern lifestyle such as the Chalermkrung Theatre. The Rama I Monument was a collaboration between Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong (1863-1947) and Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (1892-1962), while the Chalermkrung Theatre was designed by Prince Samaichalerm Kridakorn (1895-1967) and can be seen to be a direct precursor to Khana Ratsadon's modern architecture. The sole palace that Rama VII built for himself, Wang Klai Kang Won, reflects his personal stylistic preferences. The Mediterranean-style seaside villa was designed by his personal

architect, Prince Iddhidebsan Kridakorn (1890-1934), Samaichalerm's half-brother. Both Kridakorn brothers were trained at the École des Beaux-Arts.

This paper proposes that the architecture of King Prajadhipok's reign are significant, innovative, and should be recognized as a transition period in architectural development in Thailand. The nationalism of King Rama VI's period (1910-1925) produced architectures that have a strong sense of traditional Thai style, characterized by effusive ornamentations that represent the ambition of the ruler to revive and promote Siamese identity as a reaction to the previous projects of Westernization.[9] In the period after the 1932 Siamese revolution, the new regime used the concept of modern architecture and constructed solidly geometric buildings[10] reflecting the desired break from both colonial-influenced and traditional conceptions. Therefore, the paper proposes that the period between 1925 and 1932 of the absolute monarchy period of King Prajadhipok's rule reveal important architectural development and transformation, characterized by the transition from the adoption of traditional ornaments towards plain, geometric modern architecture. Moreover, the buildings in King Rama VII's period reflect the ruler's agenda and personality.

Method

Transitional architecture merges one style with another and transitions from one period to another.[11] The architecture of King Prajadhipok's period can be categorized as transitional architecture that transits from King Rama VI's expression of nationalism to Khana Ratsadon's stripped ornamentation that served as the foundation of the Modern style of the following period. The paper applies an architectural history and theory

approach to read, analyze and compare the issues and primary data within the political, social, cultural, economic, material, and technological contexts of the last period of Siam's absolute monarchy (1925–1932). Consequently, the research focuses on and scopes the architecture commissioned by King Prajadhipok or the elites in that period of the absolute monarchy. Two buildings located in Chulalongkorn University, Thailand's oldest tertiary education institution, stand prominent. These are the Science Building (อาคารคณะวิทยาศาสตร์) commissioned by Prince Mahidol Adulyadej, and the Chakrabongse Building (อาคารจักรพงษ์), which is the former Students' Union of the University created by Prince Chula Chakrabongse. Focusing on King Prajadhipok's initiation, the paper also focuses on the Memorial Bridge (สะพานพระพุทธยอดฟ้า) and the monument to King Rama I (พระปฐมบรมราชานุสรณ์-the founder of Bangkok) and Chalermkrung Theatre, built to commemorate Bangkok's 150th Anniversary in 1932, and Klai Kang Won Palace (วังไกลกังวล) which is significant as the only palace constructed in this reign.

Hybrid practice, hybrid style

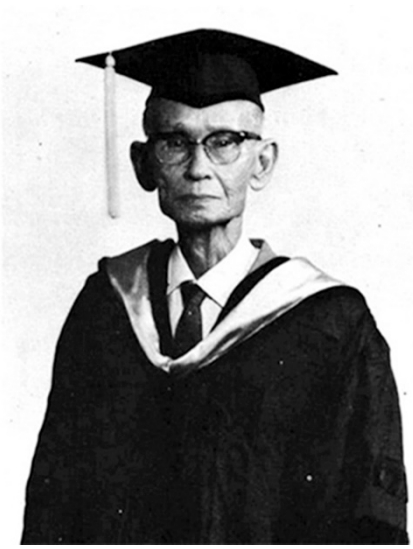
The hybrid practice and hybrid style between Western and Siamese architecture in Bangkok can be traced back to the 1876 Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall, as an early example. The building was originally planned and designed in classic Western style by the British architect, John Clunich but, in a move that has been interpreted as an old guard resistance to Western influence, it was then topped with a traditional Siamese spire roof, under the supervision of Chaophraya Chuang Bunnag, one of the most powerful noblemen at the time.[12] In Rama VI's reign, a studied synthesis was attempted and manifested in Chulalongkorn University's Maha Chulalongkorn Building, one of the campus'

earliest buildings (commenced in 1914). One of the first education buildings built with concrete, it was ironically wholly designed by foreigners, led by English architect Edward Healey.

The hybrid practice of King Rama VII's reign was different, characterized by stripped classicism or early modern style combined with stripped Siamese style. The period's architecture, characterized by fewer decorations, simpler forms, and cleaner lines, can be attributed to economic factors but also reflects the change in global trends towards a preference for Modern architectural styles. The royal elites who initiated the Science Building and the Students' Union building might have anticipated this new Modern aesthetic in which architecture is designed based on function and with fewer ornamentations.[13] Hence, the hybrid architectures of King Prajadhipok's period may also reflect the new, global modern taste.

Crucially, in the production of the hybrid architecture, a unique collaborative working process occurred in the last period of the absolute monarchy. Siamese artisan cooperates with the Western-educated Siamese architect, who replaced Western designers. Specifically, European-trained Phra Saroj Rattananimman was paired with the senior traditional master, Luang Visal Silpakam.

This combines the skill, knowledge, and experience expressed in the traditional style with modern functions and construction technology. The young architect designed the planning, functions, and produced architectural drawings, while the artisan designed and had oversight on the overall aesthetic and details.[14] While local artisans had closely collaborated with European architects before, the most famous output being Wat Benchamabophit Dusitvanaram (the Marble Temple) that was a collaboration between Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong (1863–1947) and Italians, engineer Carlo Allegri and architect Mario Tamagno



Phra Saroj Rattananimman and Luang Visal Silpakam. ***Source:*** Vorachart Meechubot, Vajiravudh College Archives, **Vajiramongkut Building**, accessed January 10, 2021, available from https://www.vajiravudh.ac.th/VC_Annals/vc_annal67.htm

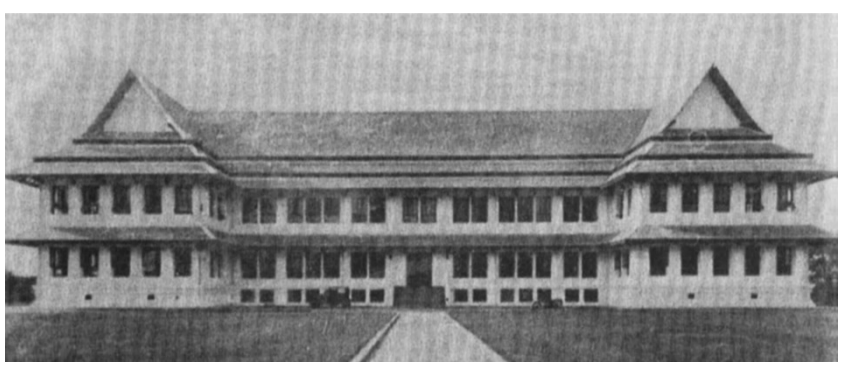
versed in modern construction and utilizing imported Carrera marble, this was the first time it was a wholly local affair– a landmark achievement.

Phra Saroj Rattananimman and Luang Visal Silpakam collaborated on the Science building and Chakrabongse building at Chulalongkorn University, the first tertiary institution in the country, was founded in 1917. The buildings follow in King Rama VI's experiments with nationalist architecture, namely the aforementioned Maha Chulalongkorn Building on the same campus, decorated with full traditional Siamese ornaments highly favoured by King Rama VI. In contrast, due to budget constraints in King Rama VII's period, both the Science and Chakrabongse buildings were designed with a cleaner form, plain walls, and reduced traditional roof ornaments.[15] There are some conventional decorations in the interior, such as stair balusters and handrails and light windows,[16] conveying a sense and mood similar to the Maha Chulalongkorn Building.

Science Building

The Science Building was commissioned by Prince Mahidol Adulyadej (1892-1929), a half-brother of King Prajadhipok, who initiated and supported science education in Siam. In 1924, he became the director of Chulalongkorn University and negotiated with the Rockefeller Foundation to send professors to help set up the first science faculty in Siam at the University. The four professors requested a building that could be used for work and as laboratories. Prince Mahidol conveyed his intentions to Phra Saroj Rattananimman and Luang Visal Silpakam that this building should be economical and reflect the glory and prosperity of the country.[17]

Phra Saroj was inspired by modern architecture, a combination of symmetrical planning, utilization of the new material of concrete, and the Siamese style and traditional elements. The two-storey concrete structure has a main entrance in the middle of the building, where staff rooms and auditorium are located. Two gable porches at the east and west wings of the building contained four laboratories: a biology lab, a physics lab, and two chemistry labs. The building has a terrace along the south side as a central circulation, helping to protect from the tropical elements.
This building had functions introduced for the first time in Siam, which are laboratories for science students. The architect had to accommodate these functions to fit with a simplified Thai style to present the national characteristic. The enormous gable-hip



Science Building, Chulalongkorn University, c.1927.
Source: Chalermpol Tosaradej, "The study of architectural design of Luang Visal Silpakam (Chue Pattamajinda)" (Master Thesis, Silpakorn University, 2006), 100.

Siamese roof with red terracotta tiles defines the building's character. The roof structure is a timber structure over a concrete slab as the attic floor. The doors and windows have a simple rectangular form. The construction of the Science Building commenced in 1926 and was completed in 1929.

Although the Science Building suggests a stylistic austerity, especially when compared with the more elaborate Maha Chulalongkorn Building, it still exhibits a traditional aesthetic with the overlapping roofs. The building has eaves roofs that encircled the building above the ground and the upper floor that protected the rooms from heavy rain and sunlight. Thus, it is a significant development of hybrid Siamese architecture designed and planned by local architects responsive to orientation and the tropical climate.

Chakrabongse Building

Initiated by Prince Chula Chakrabongse, King Prajadhipok's nephew, the building was originally built as a Student Union of Chulalongkorn University. The prince visited the University in 1931 and found that students did not have a suitable and permanent union house. Accordingly, he donated money to the University to create a permanent building for students and commissioned Phra Saroj Rattananimman and Luang Visal Silpakam to design the project. The prince desired a durable building, and hence concrete was chosen for its construction.[18] This two-storey building's construction took eight months and was completed in 1932. The architects designed the building with a balcony, decorated with Siamese-style columns and balusters, as the main entry and extended porches on the east and west sides. Designed in the Siamese style, the main roof had a two-tiered roof and used red terracotta tiles like the Science Building. The eaves roof has brackets to support it, and the wall had pilasters so as not to look too plain.

Chakrabongse Building (the Students' Union), Chulalongkorn University.
Source: Memorial Hall of Chulalongkorn University, **Student Union of Chulalongkorn University**, accessed May 23, 2021, available from http://www.memohall.chula.ac.th/article/%E0%B8%AA%E0%B9%82%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%95%E0%B8%88%E0%B8%B8%E0%B8%AC%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%AF/

This building also reflects the development and evolution of Siamese-style planning. Traditional Siamese architecture in the past, such as temples and large-scale brick palaces, are gable-front buildings and use the gable porch as the main entrance.[19] Traditional side-gabled buildings can be found in the timber residential architecture but are rarely used in large-scale public architecture. It could be surmised that Phra Saroj Rattananimman might have been inspired by Western architecture in the application of the veranda porch and the style of side-gabled building.

Attending to the main function of the student association, the architects designed the interior with large hall rooms (both upper floor and ground floor) as community spaces and meeting areas for the students.[20] To honor Prince Chula Chakrabongse, the leading benefactor of the building, the architect designed the building's pediments with the emblems of the house of Chakrabongse.[21]

The Chakrabongse Building is more elaborated than the Science Building, possibly reflecting the more generous private budget. However, both exhibit the somewhat stripped-down traditional style that was adapted to new functions and institutions of an emerging modern age.

Architecture for Rama VII – the 150th-anniversary commemoration

During King Prajadhipok's reign, the prestige of the monarchy was not entirely positive. Ordinary Siamese citizens and noblemen were dissatisfied with the King and royal family resulting from the vast national debt from the lavish expenditures of the previous King, the reduction of bureaucrats due to the economic problem, and the young gentries' campaign for political changes. These made King Prajadhipok concerned about the future of the monarchy in Siam.[22] The 150th-anniversary of Bangkok provided an opportunity to redress the monarchy's negative image, and there are three significant projects directly connected to King Rama VII that reveal his intentions. These are the Monument to Rama I and the associated Bangkok Memorial Bridge, and the Chalermkrung Theatre.

Background

King Prajadhipok initiated the project to celebrate Bangkok's 150th year in 1932, early in his reign in 1926. The King wanted to build the monument of King Rama I, as the founder of Bangkok.

> Bangkok is nearly at the 150th year... It could have celebrations and festive events, but the celebration the people could easily forget...Nothing is better than creating a permanent monument to remember King Rama I, the founder of the ruling Chakri Dynasty and this city[23]

Alternative locations for the project had been discussed over many years.[24] The State Council of Siam proffered many alternatives to the King to create the memorial for King Rama I. In 1928, Prince Naris, the master of Thai royal artisans and a supreme member of the State Council, suggested that the King Rama I monument in Bangkok should consist of a statue with a grand building as a background and proposed building the statue at the front of Wat Suthat temple, which King Rama I established.[25] He was inspired by the National Monument of Victor Emmanuel II in Rome that had a monument of the Italian King's statue with a grand building as a background and a civic center for people's use in front. King Rama I honored Wat Suthat, a very significant temple in Thailand, as the heart of Bangkok city.[26] Prince Naris also planned to the monument as a civic center. However, at that time, the front of Wat Suthat temple had a local market that compromised the condition and aesthetic of the famous temple. The State Council accordingly proposed to remove the market to create the monument.

Prince Dhani Nivat, the Minister of Education, suggested the economical solution to construct only King Rama I's monument in front of the temple and that it was not necessary to create the civic center. In contrast, Phraya Chindabhiromya, the Minister of Justice, recommended building the monument and new supreme court to symbolize the modernization of the country's judicial administration system at the Royal Field. The court building would serve as the celebration memorial building, and this proposal gained the most support in the State Council. However, King Prajadhipok rejected these ideas as they would not directly benefit ordinary people.[27]

The idea of the first bridge across the Chao Phraya river in Bangkok was advanced by Prince Purachatra Jayakara, who proposed a new landmark that combines two parts, the monument

The painting of Bangkok Memorial Bridge by Dorman Long.
Source: Dorman Long and Company Limited, **Brides: A few examples of the work of a pioneer firm in the manufacture of steel and steelwork** (London: Dorman Long, 1930), 56.

of King Rama I, based on Prince Naris' intention, and the Bangkok Memorial Bridge.[28] During that time, in Bangkok, around 550,000 people lived on the east side of the Chao Phraya River or Pra Nakorn, and about 170,000 people lived on the river's west side or Thonburi.[29] The memorial bridge directly benefited all Bangkok people, especially those residing on the Thonburi side, making it more convenient to cross the river. The bridge expanded the city and residential area to Bangkok's west side and enhanced economic growth.[30]

King Rama I's monument is set as part of a symmetric composition with the Memorial Bridge, designed as an iconic monument. Apart from economic and social benefits, the bridge offered significant symbolic benefit, as it signifies the linking of Rattanakosin and Thonburi, reconciling the political division that marked the founding of Bangkok. Importantly, the project was also seen as a strategy for enhancing the somewhat tarnished reputation of the monarchy. King Prajadhipok concurred with and implemented this idea.

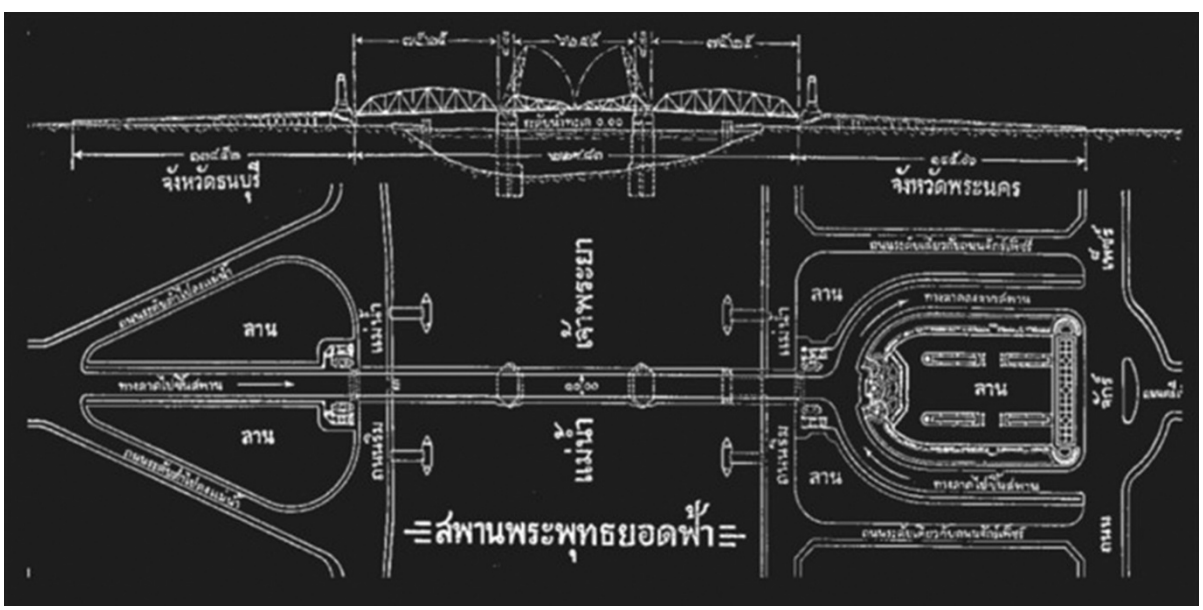
> as a remembrance of this moment (The Bangkok 150th year) creating a building or bridge or anything for the public, this is excellent... This should be something that gives benefit to the people[31]

It could be inferred that the King selected this proposal that reconciled the State Council's intention of building King Rama I monument with his own desire that the project is beneficial to citizens. King Rama I monument and the Memorial Bridge was completed and opened at the Bangkok 150th year celebration on 6 April 1932. These were the finest and most significant buildings of King Rama VII's period and had a high historical value as the last edifices created in the absolute monarchy period.[32]

The Memorial Bridge

In the Siamese context of the time, the bridge's engineering would have presented as both impressive and sophisticated–sustaining the image of a civilizing and modernising monarchy.

The Bangkok Memorial Bridge project began in 1929 with Prince Purachatra as the project's supervisor and director.



Side and plan of the Bangkok Memorial Road Bridge.
Source: Chatri Prakitnonthakan, **Politics and socials in architectural, Siam's period–applied Thai–nationalism]** (Bangkok: Matichon, 2007), 258.

The Thai government hired Dorman Long from England to construct the bridge. Dorman Long was a renowned engineering company that had also built the Sydney Harbour Bridge at around the same time. In fact, the architect of both the Memorial Bridge and the Sydney Harbour Bridge was Sir John James Burnet. The bridge was built from cast iron warren girders with two fixed spans, which are 246 feet each, and the depth of the girders is 37 feet. The middle of the memorial bridge had two bascule arms with electric motors that could open for clearing the river and for larger ships to pass through. It was very technologically advanced and modern for Siam in 1932.[33] Half of the construction budget came from King Prajadhipok's donation from his royal asset.[34] It could be read that King Rama VII was a leading supporter of new modern technology and public infrastructure for Bangkok.

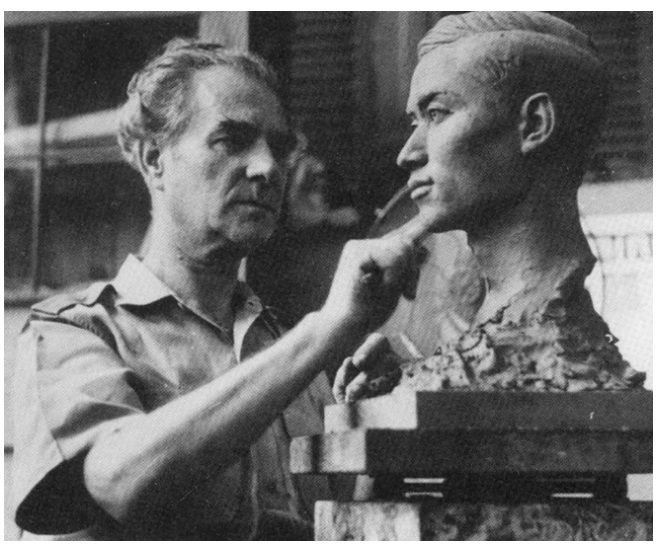
Hiring leading engineers and architects from the hegemonic British Empire that was simultaneously building the globally iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge also reflects and conveys Siamese ambitions on the international stage, even if the Bangkok Memorial Bridge was a far smaller project. The Bangkok bridge was about 250 meters long and cost around 260,000 pounds (2,800,000 baht), while the Sydney Harbor Bridge was tremendous in size and budget; approximately 1,250 meters long and cost 4,200,000 pounds to build. Being designed and built at almost the same time, both bridges shared many features, such as the steel girder structure and the stripped, purely decorative classicist pylons[35] that framed the bridges' ends. The pylons could be labelled Art Deco and were unprecedented in a Siamese context. The two bridges were constructed and opened simultaneously; the Sydney Harbor Bridge was started in 1930 and opened in March 1932,[36] and the Bangkok Memorial bridge commenced construction in 1930 and opened on 6 April 1932.

Opposite Page (Right): Corrado Feroci or Silpa Bhirasri, the sculptor who created many of Bangkok's famous statues, includes King Rama I monument. ***Source:*** Art and culture magazine, **the 126th anniversary of Silpa Bhirasri's birth**, accessed May 20, 2021, available from https://www.silpa-mag.com/this-day-in-history/article_11494

King Rama I Monument

The Rama I monument was a unique, bronze statue that is three times human size and sculpted by Corrado Feroci, the Italian artist employed by the Fine Arts Department. The statue's base, back wall, and ornaments were constructed from concrete and designed by Prince Naris. This monument provided evidence that Thai traditional designers had acquired the knowledge and skill to design with modern materials. The hybrid style of the back wall was a design innovation that marked the beginning of a modern Siamese style, which would be influential in the ensuing Khana Ratsadon period. It combines simplified Siamese architecture and Western stripped classicism that revealed Art Deco influences.

The King Rama I monument as part of the civic center served a symbolic function that complemented the urban utility of the bridge. Leading Thai architectural scholar Chatri Prakitnonthakan argued that King Prajadhipok wanted to redress the monarchy's negative image. Therefore, Rama VII chose to create King Rama I's monument for the important anniversary celebration and revive the people's faith in the monarchy by using the monument to symbolize the monarchy's merit and legitimacy.[37]



Left: Prince Narisara Nuvadtivongs, a great Siamese designer. ***Source:*** Somchart Chungsiriarak, **Modern Architecture for a civilized nation: A comparative study of the searching between Japan and Siam from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century** (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage, 2020), 234.

King Prajadhipok and King Rama I Monument open ceremony in the 150th year Bangkok celebration, 1932. ***Source:*** Museum Siam, Digital Archive, **The opening ceremony of Memorial Bridge (Saphan Phra Phutta-yotfa)**, accessed May 24, 2021, available from https://www.museumsiam.org/da-detail2.php?MID=3&CID=16&SCID=298&CONID=3739

The monument was a reminder to ordinary Thai people to remember the merit of the monarchy that established the city. Nidhi Eoseewong, a prominent Thai historian, compared the monument of King Rama I with the earlier equestrian monument of King Rama V at the Royal Plaza. The King Rama V monument represented the absolute monarchy's power to the commoners. However, King Prajadhipok tried to change the absolute monarchy's political image with King Rama I's statue in an unprecedented seated position to convey the monarchy's merit and benevolence.[38]

This paper proposes another interpretation of the King Rama I monument. While the decision to build a memorial to King Rama I can be construed as a strategy to restore the monarchy's esteemed position, it is also a departure from precedents where the incumbent monarch was also celebrated, such as Rama V's equestrian statue or Rama V and VI monuments at Chulalongkorn University. In this context, King Prajadhipok's was a self-effacing gesture. From the historical evidence and background of King Prajadhipok, he was humble, tolerant, and had concerns for the people's wellbeing.[39] He gave priority

and contribute to the prosperity of the country and desired to modernise and develop transportation and urbanization.[40]

Here it could also be read that while the monument commemorates King Rama I, its design–seated and within the physical reach of the people–represents King Prajadhibok's personality and his desire to re-image the monarchy to be more intimate with the people in conjunction with the image of a modernising monarch. The Rama I monument was integrated with a modern civic center, arguably the first of its kind designed for commoners' use, and the bridge that benefits the people. Moreover, the government conserved the budget and prioritized economic development over the aesthetic in the commemorative projects. For instance, the reduction of ornaments saved around 25% of the construction budget, and the utilization of in-house designers and procurement for the monument also contributed to significant savings.[41]

Chalermkrung Theatre

Perhaps of the architecture of King Rama VII, Chalermkrung theatre is the most significant in both stylistic and cultural influences. The orientation of architecture and infrastructure towards the idea of direct public benefit was further extended to modern media and entertainment, which directly affected people's experience of modernization. In fact, the 'national cinema' has been an important tool in the elite's formation and shaping of a modern national identity. Realizing the power of the medium and being heavily invested in the film industry,[42] the King contributed 9,000,000 baht towards the construction of the largest and most modern theatre in the region that had an original capacity of 1,500 seats. The cost of this building was about three times higher than the memorial bridge and monument.

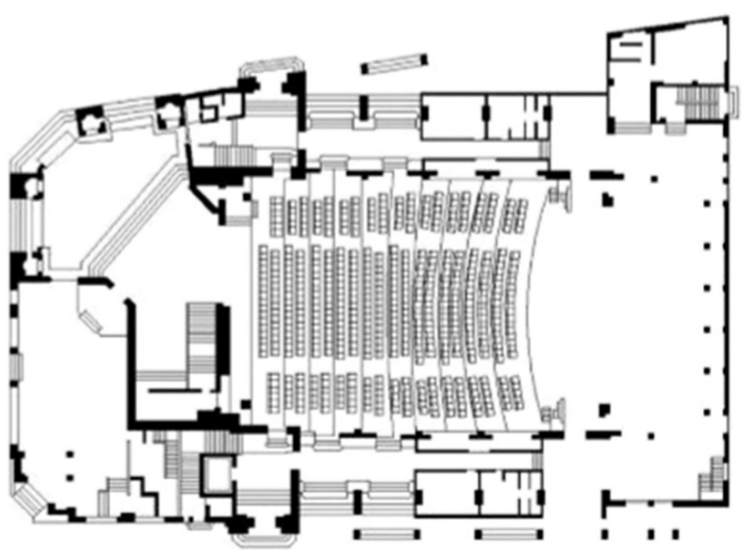
Chalermkrung Theatre
Source: Sukhothai Thammathirat, Open University Library, **Chalermkrung Theatre**, accessed May 20, 2021, available from https://library.stou.ac.th/odi/sala-chalermkrung/index.html

Chalermkrung Theatre–which literally translates as 'celebrate the city' – is also the first air-conditioned theatre in the country with a chilled water system from the USA and one of the most technologically advanced theatres in Asia in the 1930s. It was a building that produced entertainment, and Lawrence Chua argues that the air condition created a comfortable environment that makes audiences relax and escape from the outside tropical and humid climate. The Chalermkrung theatre was a stage for the monarch to play as the initiator, who brought this new civilization to Saim.[43]

The building is located at a major urban node at the intersection of Charoen Krung Road, Bangkok's first modern and main commercial strip, and Ti Thong road that forms an urban axis leading south, directly to the Rama I Monument and Memorial Bridge. These urban assemblages later precipitated the Wang Burapha modern commercial and cultural precinct. The main entrance hall was distinctive, with a chamfered corner designed as part of a modern four-story façade that prominently faces the intersection. Apart from the stenciled decorations of the round windows on the fourth floor, the building's exterior is very simple and clean compare with contemporaneous architecture in Bangkok.

The theatre was one of Prince Samaichalerm Kridakorn's first commission upon returning from France in 1928, having studied under Rama VI's scholarship. While trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, Samaichalerm designed Chalermkrung Theatre combining Modern and Art-Deco features that served as a significant foundation for the architecture of the ensuing period. Due to the substantial cost, this pioneering modern Siamese architecture's plain geometric form is more likely deference to contemporary global trends than budgetary constraints.

Even though Siamese architects in King Rama VII's period might not yet have insights into Modern architectural philosophy and imitated the striped style from the West, the Chalermkrung theatre could be an exception.[44] The planning and design of Chalermkrung were unique. The main structure is concrete, and voids were created appropriate to their functions. The asymmetrical design is responsive to the context of the intersection location, corner site, and entertainment functional requirements. The circulation avoided dead-end, providing users with easeful egress in the case of emergencies. The theatre was primarily designed as a movie theatre but also offered a large area at the front of the screen for plays and traditional Siamese dances.



Plan of Chalermkrung Theatre
Source: Somchart Chungsiriarak, **Modern Architecture for a civilized nation: A comparative study of the searching between Japan and Siam from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century** (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage, 2020), 245.

In that period, cinema and theatre were a symbol of a civilized and prosperous society, and the Modern style was merely starting in Europe. Prakitnonthakan argued that King Prajadhipok intended to create the public building as another apparatus to revive the image of the monarchy. King Prajadhipok bequeathed this state-of-the-art entertainment architecture in the new avant-garde style as a gift for Siamese citizens. Crucially, the theatre project is also personal as filming was one of King Prajadhipok's favourite pastimes. In fact, he filmed and directed one of the earliest Siamese movie, "Van Wiset" (แหวนวิเศษ, the magic ring) in 1928 and recorded many private and public ceremonies between 1926 – 1931.[45] However, while King Prajadhipok presided over the foundation laying ceremony in 1930, he was absent from the theatre's opening after the revolution in 1933 as his film businesses, productions were either banned or transferred to the government.[46]

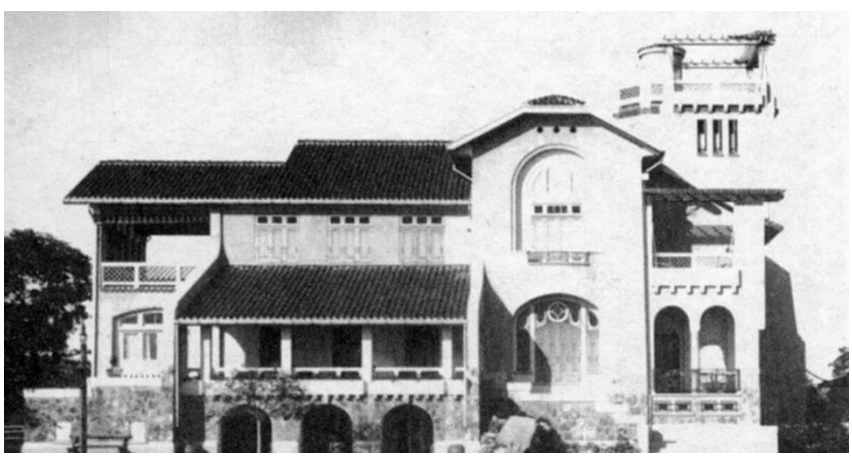
Architecture for Rama VII – Klai Kang Won Palace

The Science Building, the Chakrabongse Building, The King Rama I monument, and the Bangkok memorial bridge can be seen to express the age of Rama VII. However, they can scarcely be seen to reflect the agenda and personality of the King in the way that buildings of earlier reigns might enable a reading of the personalities of those earlier kings. Therefore, to study the willful expression of the monarch's personality and idiosyncratic, they can be seen in the palace that was constructed in his reign.[47]

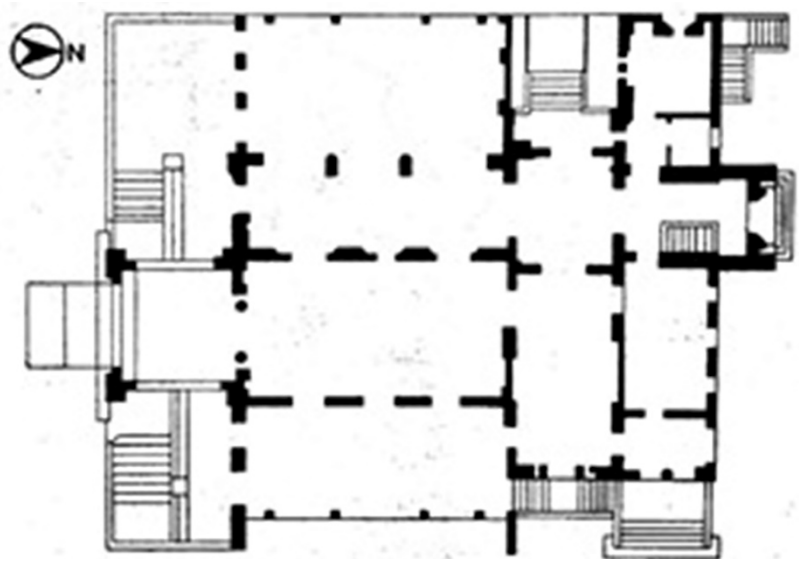
The significant palace connected directly to King Rama VII is his Klai Kang Won Palace (วังไกลกังวล) in Hua Hin, the only palace that the King built during his reign. The King utilized his private money (พระคลังข้างที่) without resorting to the government budget. Located in the beach town of Hua Hin, ~190kms southwest of Bangkok, Klai Kang Won Palace was designed by Prince

Iddhidebsan Kridakorn (1890-1934), who was the first Siamese architect to graduate from a Western academy and was the personal architect to Prajadhipok. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and graduated in 1916.

While the concept of the palace as a place of relaxation was inspired by Sans-Souci Palace at Potsdam, Germany, the summer palace of King Frederick the Great,[48] the style and functions were different. Klai Kang Won Palace was designed and decorated in the Spanish or Mediterranean style, which is more appropriate for the Siamese tropical seaside climate. Prince Iddhidebsan did not apply the symmetric Beaux-Arts planning or traditional Western decorations. Phra Tamnak Piam Suk (พระตำหนักเปี่ยมสุข), the main building of Klai Kang Won, used as a residential building of King Rama VII and the queen, is a three-story Spanish vernacular architecture characterized by the asymmetric plan, arches, and terracotta roof tiles with a courtyard garden and pergolas. Klai Kang Won Palace did not follow any rules or orders of the Siamese or Western palace; for instance, it did not separate between the monarch and the court areas. The simple and clean plan seemed less focused on the privacy and security of the usual royal palace. In effect, the palace has a sense of a villa retreat of the gentry rather than a monarch's palace[49] in keeping with its name that translates literally as 'far from worries.



Phra Tamnak Piem Suk, the residence building of King Prajadhipok, Klai Kang Won Palace. ***Source:*** Art and culture magazine, **Which household god is dwelling in Klai Kangwon Palace's Shire?**, accessed May 20, 2021, available from https://www.silpa-mag.com/history/article_58954



A plan of Phra Tamnak Piem Suk, Klai Kang Won Palace.
Source: Somchart Chungsiriarak, **The Western style architecture in Siam during King Rama IV–1937** (Bangkok: Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, 2010), 524.

While the exterior's architecture utilized local materials like stones, tiles, bricks, cement, the palace's interiors were designed in the extravagant Art Deco style, popular in that period. Windows, furniture, balusters, door handles were Art Deco wrought iron designed by Paul Kiss and imported from France. Apparently, King Rama VII and the architect tried to use local material to the extent that they could, importing accessories that Siamese artisans are not familiar with.[50] Compared to previous Siamese monarch's palaces, Klai Kang Won Palace illustrates the relatively humble atmosphere and modern residential space, consistent with King Rama VII's agenda to modernise and transform the Siamese royal family's glamorous and lavish lifestyle to be more down to earth.

In one sense, the palace represents a relatively unostentatious seaside villa, projecting the image of a frugal monarch conscious of the difficult economic circumstances confronting his subjects–a simple villa versus the Grand Palace or any of the palaces of his predecessors. Klai Kang Won Palace can be seen as an attempt at re-imaging and another tool to revive the faith in the monarch.

Discussion

Three lessons can be read from the architecture of the Rama VII era. They relate first to the personality and agenda of King Prajadhipok himself; second to the changing conditions of the time; then third, and more speculatively, to the architecture of later times.

Prajadhipok, modernity and the past

King Prajadhipok was caught in an era of the poor national economy in part consequent on prior royal extravagance but then buffeted by the Great Depression. The deliberations around the Rama I Monument and Bridge reveal a threatened, insecure monarch seeking to purchase legitimacy. However, while these deliberations that construct an image of a frugal, socially concerned monarch seem to contradict with the continuing royal extravagance behind the walls of the Grand Palace and hidden in the interiors of Klai Kang Won Palace, this has to be weighed against the fact that the palace is the only one built during the King's reign with his private funds. Besides, the conservation and reconstruction of the Grand Palace during this reign utilized around 600,000 baht; of which the King contributed about 200,000 baht of his own money.[51]

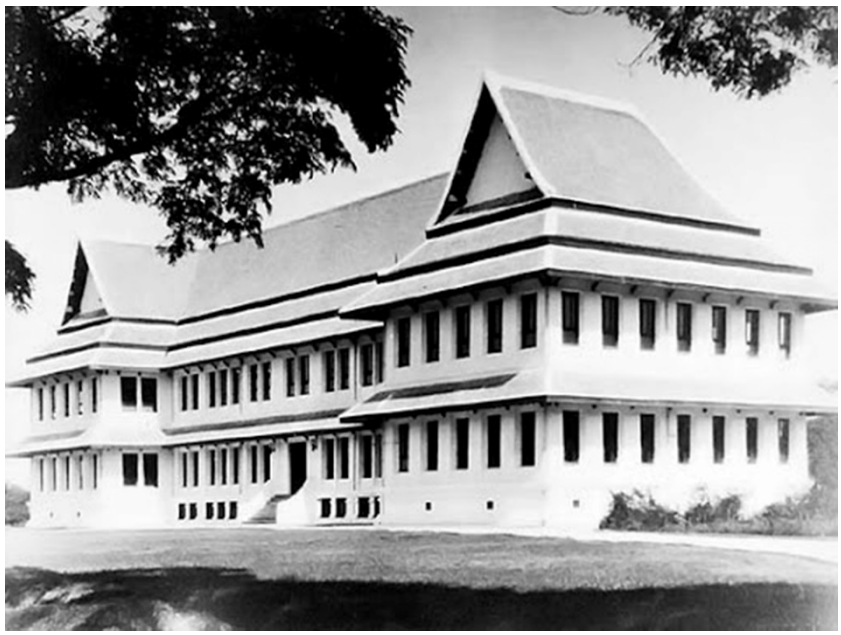
While the Monument and Memorial Bridge and theatre present novelty and intimations of modernity, the innovatory elements of the project would seem attributable to 'others': Prince Naris, Prince Iddhidebsan, Prince Samaichalerm, Sir John James Burnet, and Dorman Long company. The underlying agenda remains conservative, namely to celebrate the dynasty's lineage and its hoped-for continuity, albeit with a willingness to reform as conveyed by the Monument and Bridge, and these are more clearly linked to Prajadhipok. The tension between inserted modernity with a conservative agenda and the desire for a radical

change continued at a far more overtly political level in Prajadhipok's confrontation with the Khana Ratsadon, also in 1932, only a few months of Bangkok's 150th Anniversary.

A transforming age

Western-trained Siamese architects replaced the foreigners and bought modern architectural skills to design, drawing conventions, and understanding of new building technologies and materials. This period initiated the architecture characterized by modern functionality, durability, and public uses presented in the stripped traditional style of the public architecture and infrastructure. Prince Iddhidebsan is interesting as the first foreign-trained Thai architect, albeit from a conservative-focused architectural traditional education, he designed simpler and cleaner architecture, Art-Deco style and creating non-royal style architecture. More emblematic, however, are the returning non-royal architects; they are part of that first generation of Europe-educated, but they were not in the group who were already constituting the Khana Ratsadon (mostly from military and administrative/law schools) and soon to end monarchical absolutism. The architects had served elites to create buildings in King Rama VII's reign, but even after the revolution, they could still work in the same positions with the Khana Ratsadon, reflecting their ideological agility. Khana Ratsadon, a heterogeneous group of competing factions, eventually came to an accommodation with the monarchy after King Prajadhipok's abdication in 1935.

The Science Building and the Chakrabongse Building also represent a new form of architectural practice, from the intersection of formally trained architects with traditional Thai artisans. It is a hybrid form of practice; significantly, it also yields a hybrid architecture of Western-influenced planning for distinctively modern institutions (in education, science, health) combined



Science Building, Chulalongkorn University, c.1927. ***Source:*** Pathomroek Wongsaengkham, "Thai architectural design of Phra Saroj Rattananimman (Saroj Sookhayang), architectural contextualism and inspirational archetypes," **Academic Journal of Architecture** 70, 1 (January–June 2020): 77.

with traditional, climate-responsive forms in what is still a Thai aesthetic. The commitment to 'modern' materials was also significant. They are significant but often unacknowledged developments of King Prajadhipok's architecture that represent explicit links between King Rama VI's architecture of nationalism to Khana Ratsadon's radically different expression of the nation.

Intimations of the future

More interesting is the Rama I Monument and Memorial Bridge, for this had already assumed an aesthetic that was radical in a Thai context. The position of King Rama I monument and the simplified Thai decoration appeared in the reconstruction proposal of the Democracy Monument (อนุสาวรีย์ประชาธิปไตย) in 1952.[52] These ideas were from the intention of Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkhram, Thai prime minister between 1938–44 and 1948–57, and he was one of the People's Party members. In those schematic designs, the original Democracy Monument central fort would be replaced by the statue of King Prajadhipok.

This could be read as the reconciliation with the royals.[53]
The King statue was in the sit position with traditional royal attire, and the statue's base and ornaments were created in a traditional style which presents a similar aesthetic appearance as King Rama I Monument. Even this reconstruction project had been postponed in Pibunsongkhram's era from lacking budgets.[54] Subsequently, after the People's Party period, the King Prajadhipok Monument site had continued. However, the site was relocated to be the old Thai parliament area and finished in 1980. Citing to Nidhi Eoseewong that the concept and style of King Prajadhipok Monument, which firstly intends to replace the center of the Democracy Monument, are transformed and developed from King Rama I Monument and also Rama V equestrian as the significant apparatus for representing the monarchy image.[55]

At the Chalermkrung Theatre, personally supported by King Prajadhipok, a distinct Modern style was applied. The theatre marked a significant architectural transition in Siam and was a symbol of the new age of architecture and modernization. The building's geometry and parapet roof subsequently became recognizable characteristics of ensuing architectures in the Khana Ratsadon period (1932–1957).

There has long been a royalist reaction to the ideology of the Khana Ratsadon and an attempt at a revisionist history to see democracy as Prajadhipok's generous gift (just like the Memorial Bridge). There were recurrent plans to demolish the Laksi Monument, subsequently carried out. In 2013 the Supreme Court building was demolished, to be replaced with a strongly similar building but exhibiting an aesthetic redolent of that of the Science Building, albeit modernised. This reaction seems to have contributed to students' revival of the Khana Ratsadon revolutionary spirit and symbolisms in 2020.

A more lasting legacy is the seemingly conservative interpretation of modern architecture with Thai aesthetics. It began with a design 'accident' of Chakri Mahaprasat throne hall through to the purposeful aesthetic deliberations of Rama VI, the innovative pairing of European trained Siamese architects with traditional artisans during the reign of Rama VII, the formalization into an architecture curriculum under the Khana Ratsadon government with the founding of the Faculty of Thai Architecture at Silpakorn in 1955.

Conclusion

King Prajadhipok is viewed as a transitional monarch of the Chakri dynasty, albeit subject to periodic revisionism. Likewise, the architecture of his reign is commonly seen as less interesting than either that preceding him or that of the following Khana Ratsadon regime. However, closer readings reveal it as the product of an important moment in the evolution of a distinctive Thai practice. The architecture also carries traces that run through the architecture of the Khana Ratsadon age.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to Professor Ross King. He devised the paper's structure and provided insightful observations and helpful feedback. Moreover, the authors really appreciate Dr. Pirasri Povatong for his suggestion and guidance about King Prajadhipok's period and history. Any errors and omissions are of the authors'.

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[6] Phra Saroj Rattananimman or Saroj Sukkhayang is one of the first Thai student to receive a scholarship from King Rama VI to study architecture at the University of Liverpool from 1915-1919. After graduation, he returned to work at the Fine Arts Department (FAD). See: Ibid., 238-239.

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[48] Chiranut Sopha and Wanichaya Seelabutra, **[King Prajadhipok and the art and cultural promoting for Siamese civilization's maintenance during transitional period]**, 98.

[49] Naengnoi Suksri, **[The legacy of architecture of Rattanakosin part 2]**, 193.

[50] Pirasri Povatong, **[The development of the architecture in Siam during King Prajadhipok's period (1925–1934)]**, 88.

[51] Chiranut Sopha and Wanichaya Seelabutra, **[King Prajadhipok and the art and cultural promoting for Siamese civilization's maintenance during transitional period]**, 45.

[52] The Democracy Monument was the concrete monument opened in 1940 as a significant symbol of the 1932 revolution by the People's Party. It was designed by M.L. Pum Malakul, and the friezes were sculpted by Silpa Bhirasri (Corrado Feroci, also the sculptor of King Rama I Monument). See: Thanavi Chotpradit, "Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: The People' Party and the royalist(s) in visual dialogue" (Ph.D. Thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2016), 122-124.

[53] Sarunyou Thepsongkraow, "kān mūang wādūai ʻanusāwarī phrapokklao...kap nǣokhit kasat nak prachāthipatai lang kān ratthaprahān Phoˍ.Soˍ. 2494) [The political of King Prajadhipok's monument and the concept of the democracy king after the 1951 revolution]," **Art & Culture Magazine** 35, 2 (December 2013): 116-120.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Nidhi Eoseewong, **[Thai nation, Thailand, textbook and monument]**, 102-103.

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