Tension and Passion: Political Statements through Buddhist Iconography in the Art of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee in the Cold War Era

Submitted date: 11 October 2025 | *Revised date:* 2 March 2026 | *Accepted date:* 20 March 2026

Szu Ying, Hsu[1*]

Abstract

Background and objective (s): Buddhism is one of the fundamental aspects of Thai identity, and Buddhist iconography is often discussed within religious contexts. By momentarily stepping away from their role as sacred objects, the study for this paper sheds light on the underexplored socio-political perspective of Buddhist iconography in Thai art with respect to Cold War Thailand – the period that was packed with political tensions and social movements – focusing on Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee, whose art practices intersected with student movements and calls for freedom of speech. This study demonstrates how Buddhist iconography became a vehicle for political statements during the Cold War era.

Methodology: Based on iconology, this study highlights the socio-political connections between Buddhist iconography and the Cold War social landscape across three levels: "pre-iconographical description," "iconographical analysis," and "iconological interpretation." Combining multiple qualitative data with evidence sourced from the Asia Art Archive and the Rama IX Art Museum Foundation, artists' family archives. The study involved

[1] Thai Studies Center, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.
*Corresponding author 6588802522@student.chula.ac.th
This article is part of the research entitled "Buddhist Iconography in Thai Art from the 1940s to the 1990s: Dynamism in Art and Reflection of Society"

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

fieldwork at galleries and cultural institutions, and close readings of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee's paintings during the 1970s.

Main result: The paper articulates how Buddhist iconography in the Cold War era operated as a political statement with four following findings. Firstly, two keywords capture the socio-political landscape of society during the Cold War: tension and passion. "Tension" refers to the conflict between opposing ideologies, manifested in volatile social upheavals and transformations, while "passion" reflects grassroots claims and the political statement of people at the level of civic awakening. Secondly, the case of Pratuang Emjaroen reveals "tension" in the student movement (1973), while "passion" is the artist's commitment to give voice to ordinary people, as seen in ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973), ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976). These paintings show Pratuang Emjaroen's indictment of violence, mourning of the dead, and express a hope for an inclusive society. Another work, ***the Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)*** (1976), reflects his empathy for the people who were suffering from extreme political tension. This practice indicates a significant breakthrough as Buddhist iconography shifts from holy serenity to a social commentary that mirrors social agitations. More specifically, the Buddha is interpreted as an anguished sufferer (with bullet holes in the face and a severed head), symbolizing the moral ethic trauma. Thirdly, Thawan Duchanee's works underscore the tension between the public's deep-rooted recognition of Buddhist iconography and artists' autonomy as Thawan engaged Buddhist iconography with nudity and animal motifs to highlight the human paradox between the transcendent side and the secular side. For example, to critique the acts of cutting up and trafficking Buddha images, his work Untitled (1970-1971) fuses temples and stupas with nude figures. This innovation provoked considerable backlash, and his works were vandalized. Lastly, this paper argues that the Cold War also brought new economic activity, which directly benefited the growth of art exhibitions with non-institutional art groups (e.g., Dharma Group), bank and entrepreneur-led patronage systems, and the emergence of art foundations (e.g., BIMA), fostering artistic freedom. These networks address "tension and passion" as a cultural duality between Cold War tensions and artists' individualized statements.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Relevance to Thai Studies: The study explored the interaction between artists, Buddhist iconography and Cold War influence in a Thai context, thereby refining studies of the Cold War's socio-political transformation and offering a new perspective on the analysis of Buddhist iconography.

Conclusion: Cold War Thailand was a crucible in which multiple differences and tensions coexisted. Although the student demonstrations ended in brutal repression, the Buddhist iconography of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee have become a lasting cultural legacy, testifying to the passions of Thai people who strove for freedom of speech in the 1970s. The wave was not only personal but also owed to the social structural transition as seen in private sponsorship from emerging capitalists and non-institutional art groups, signaling a trend to a more inclusive society.

Keywords: Cold War; Buddhist iconography; political statement; Pratuang Emjaroen; Thawan Duchanee

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Introduction

Buddhism is a fundamental aspect of Thai identity; it is the ground of Thai culture and has been involved in the country's social transformations. In academia, Buddhist iconography has typically been discussed in Buddhist contexts, especially how it mobilized the ruling authority's legitimacy. Yet, the overlooked social aspect in existing studies is the context of modern art. Buddhist iconography functions differently from holy objects of veneration: it conveys artists' personal viewpoints, including political statements (Caruso, 2005; Evans, 2019; Peleggi, 2019; Simoniti, 2021). In this light, Buddhist iconography became a vehicle for freedom of speech germinated from grassroots power. Such characteristics were significantly reflected in the Cold War era—a period that was packed with political tensions, ideological conflict and the growth of grassroots communities within social transformations. During this phase, Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee emerged as pioneering art figures who incorporated Buddhist iconography into social critique. For example, Pratuang Emjaroen's works engaged with his reflection on the student movement (1973); Thawan Duchanee's paintings show the criticism toward the act of cutting and selling Buddha statues. However, the existing studies emphasize these two artists' techniques or biography compilation. The connection between their artistic production and the Cold War socio-political climate is limited. The paper offers a new aspect of interpreting Buddhist iconography in Thai art, a different form of engaging individuals and Cold War society.

Research objective

This study investigates how Buddhist iconography in the works of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee functioned as vehicles for political statements about freedom of speech during the Cold War era.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Research Framework and Methodology

Based on Panofsky's three phases of iconology (Panofsky, 1939/1972), the first phase is "pre-iconography", which is defined as "primary or natural" status. This stage is not involved in any symbolic direction or aspects of cultural backgrounds; it merely shows a direct description of what is seen in the identification of objective perception among the visual elements, such as color, size and material. The second phase is called "iconographical analysis"—an epitome of established meaning. This level explores the origin of symbols in artworks, attempting to understand the connotations based on shared knowledge. The final phase, "iconographical interpretation," is labeled as "intrinsic" by definition. The strata unveil the essential concepts hidden in artworks through the socio-cultural content. In fact, Panofsky regards artwork not as an isolated incident but as the product of the historical environment through a comprehensive understanding rooted in images, text, and the cultural context of the artwork. To grasp the cultural phenomena, Panofsky integrates supporting information such as the artist, the artwork's social circulation (Panofsky, 1972, p. 91). In short, iconology's three-tiered analysis progresses from simple to complex, achieving a holistic interpretation of artworks and cultural phenomena. He stated:

> It is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of the nation, a period, a class, a religion or philosophy—unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work (Panofsky, 1972, p. 7).

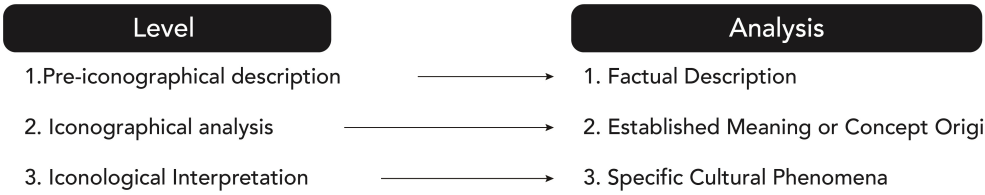


Figure 1: Panofsky's three phases on iconology: 1) pre-iconographical description; 2) iconographical analysis and 3) iconological interpretation

Methodologically, the case study lays the foundation of iconology. By closely investigating works and their cultural context, the analysis accounts for how Buddhist iconography functioned as vehicles for political statements about freedom of speech during the Cold War era, requiring multiple references with specific themes. Therefore, the study references are combined with multiple qualitative sources comprehensively. Evidence derives from documents including art publications, exhibition catalogues from the Asia Art Archive and the Rama IX Art Museum Foundation, and self-publications provided by Pratuang Emjaroen's family—together with fieldwork at art galleries and museums, including *200 Years Journey Through Thai Modern Art History*, the National Gallery Bangkok and Pratuang's works at the National Gallery Singapore.

Literature review

Studies on the political aspect of Buddhist iconography mainly centered on how ruling elites mobilize Buddhist iconography to consolidate their political legitimacy through its religious authority (Béguin, 2009; Swearer, 2010; Van Beek, 1999). The prominent case is King Rama I (1782-1809); when he founded the Chakri dynasty, the sacred authority of Buddhist images helped the new kingship consolidate its official legitimacy. Many Buddha images from abandoned temples were transferred from regional centers to Bangkok, including the image of Phra Si Sakyamuni from Wat Mahathat in Sukhothai, which was restored in the ubosot[2] of Wat Suthat; and the image of Phra Phutthalokanat from Wat Phra Si Sanphet in Ayutthaya was placed in Wat Pho. The two Buddha images were used to enhance Bangkok's influence as the capital and reinforce the political order. In the same vein, similar cases emerged in other Asian countries. Joung-hwan Jin elucidates how the government of Later Paekche (892-936) utilized Buddhist art as a cultural recourse for unifying ideology. For example, when Kyŏn Hwŏn[3] established his rule, Buddhist art

[2] The Buddhist pavilion or ordination hall for the monastic ceremonies.

[3] Kyŏn Hwŏn was the founder of Later Baekje and a key figure during the Later Three Kingdoms period in Korea.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

combined influences from northern Silla regions with selective references to older Paekche forms to persuade people that he was the rightful successor of Paekche and to maintain support from Silla groups, as seen in the cases of the Stone Buddha Triad at the Pongnim Temple site in Wanju (Jin, 2024). The approach also appeared in China's Yungang Grottoes (Yungang Shiku), which were constructed during the Northern Wei period (386-534) in China. The Han Chinese-style clothing depicted on the Buddha figures suggests the belief that "the emperor is the same as the Buddha" under the Han-centric policy (Su, 1991, pp. 170-199).

The phenomenon of approaching Buddhist iconography as individual opinion, including political statements, first emerged in the Cold War period when grassroots voices germinated. The significant figures are artists Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee in the 1970s, the phase interlocked with anti-communism, student protests and the rise of new economic activity, resonating with broader calls for civic awakening (Bae et al., 2019). Mashadi (2011) points out that Pratuang Emjaroen attempted to address broader ethical calls through repurposing Buddhist iconography in his painting. Likewise, in *Modern Art in Thailand*, Poshyananda (1992) mentions Pratuang Emjaroen's work reflects his empathy for the poor and mourning of those who died in the 1973 student uprising, as seen in ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974), ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976). Poshyananda also indicates Thawan Duchanee's ***Untitled*** (1970-1971) reflects the artist's criticism of the malicious acts of cutting up and trafficking Thai Buddha images. Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee's pioneering interpretations of Buddhist iconography influentially paved the way for art diversity in later generations. In the case of ***Buddha Return to Bangkok*** (1992), Vassan Sitthiket (born 1957) shows his political critique of the May massacre (1992) by depicting the Lord Buddha witnessing ruin and degradation in Thailand (Queensland Art Gallery, 1993, p. 52).

However, the current studies on Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee mainly focus on their artistic analysis and chronicle. For example, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre published *Pratuang Emjaroen: Traces and Trails* (2016), which provides a detailed biography

of the artist, including his career, his inspiration from surrealism and abstract art, his poetry and his painting about nature, such as the sun, lotuses and the sky. Indeed, his nature-related works are more frequently mentioned than social critique works in art history, such as ***The Golden Grains of Rice*** (1979), ***Lotus Leaf*** (1978) and **White Clouds Hovering over the Mountains** (1984) (Hoskin, 1984, pp. 81-97). On the other hand, Seankat (2001) explores Thawan Duchanee's surrealist painting with special attention to style, content, technique and inspiration. In the same logic, some studies profile Thawan's ordinary life and art practice through a deep interview (Marcus, 2013; Wenk, 1979), underlining the Buddhist story embedded in Thawan's sketching and paintings. As for Poshyananda's study on Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee, although *Modern Art in Thailand* mentions their works related to social criticism (Poshyananda, 1992), there is no detailed discussion about the connection between their art movement and the broader social landscape in the Cold War.

The above studies reveal important gaps: although Buddhist iconography has been discussed in academia from political perspectives, existing scholarship tends to treat how authorities have used it to consolidate their ruling power, the cases of ordinary people approach it to express social criticism with less emphasis. On the other hand, the detailed discussion on Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee's works during the Cold War era is limited in art research. In this light, this paper aims to investigate how Buddhist iconography in the works of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee functioned as vehicles for political statements during the Cold War.

Result

According to Panofsky's iconology, the analytical process includes describing artworks, examining the established meanings of iconography and interpreting the broader social significance of artworks through contextualization within Cold War society, supported by data on artists' careers and exhibitions.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

1. The Buddha as Sorrowful Icon: Works by Pratuang Emjaroen

As a devout Buddhist and an artist compassionate for the suppression of student movement, the Buddhist iconography by Pratuang Emjaroen departs from typical narratives—in which the Buddha appears in a transcendent state with a gentle smile and peaceful gaze. In his paintings, ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974), ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976), and ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)*** (1976), the Buddha's "noble" symbols remain, yet he enters the frame as one who shares in suffering, becoming embedded in social engagement. These three works position high notes in Thai history as they capture an unstable period characterized by student protests and military repression in the 1970s.

1.1 The Bullet Holes in the Buddha's Face

Inspired by Mexican muralists[4] and Picasso's anti-war painting ***Guernica*** (1937), the painting ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974) was created in the aftermath of the student movement (1973). The title foregrounds a stark conflict: in Buddhism, "Dharma" refers to the Buddha's teachings—truth, righteousness, and justice—whereas "Adharma" signifies evil, wrongdoing, and injustice. This giant painting (200 × 500 cm) intensifies the grief emotion. The Buddha's face in the center, pocked with many bullet holes, his lips tightly closed and his eyes staring ahead, either in shock or silent pain endurance. His face is melting under intense, penetrating light, symbolizing people who had been hurt in the protest (1973), and that violence destroys the pure side of Thai society. The chaotic force issues from densely packed figures and objects—weapons, a bullet-riddled flag, dismembered limbs with blood pouring out, faces twisted in pain. The *Dharmacakra* whirls into spikes and gun barrels. The *Dharmacakra* most commonly symbolizes the Buddha's teachings. The juxtaposition of Dharma's symbols with instruments of violence—spikes and gun barrels—foregrounds the discussion of "Dharma and Adharma": What is right? What is wrong? On the left, spirits hover, their flag shredded by bullets as they brandish flowers in defense.

[4] The murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros depicted class struggle while celebrating the revolutionary solidarity of workers and peasants.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

All these elements are served for presenting complexity of the emotions in the tragic event as the artist explained:

> I wanted to capture the feeling of confusion, shock, and horror. I used symbols like crying faces and stormy clouds. The face of the Buddha is symbolic of Thai people who have been hurt; his eyes are closed, tears are streaming, bullet holes are shot across his face (Poshyananda, 1996).

Dharma and Adharma (1973-1974) reflects the artist's sorrow over the October 14, 1973, protests as well as document one of the most heartbreaking moments in modern Thai history. This work received great attention from the public, as viewers wept before it when the painting was exhibited at the National Gallery in Bangkok in 1975 (Poshyananda, 1992, pp. 161-162).



Figure 2: Pratuang Emjaroen, ***Dharma and Adharma***, 1973-1974, oil on canvas, 200 × 500 cm
Source: Image courtesy of Pratuang Emjaroen (provided by Srisilp Emjaroen); used with permission



Figure 3: Detail of ***Dharma and Adharma***
Source: Image courtesy of Pratuang Emjaroen (provided by Srisilp Emjaroen); used with permission

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

1.2 A Weeping Buddha

In contrast to the intense emotion and chaotic visual arrangements of ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974), ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976) present a calmer elegy for those who died in the demonstration. Through symbolism and the use of color, the work is packed with contrasting messages of "trauma" and "hope." First and foremost, an inscription carved into the stone at the upper-right corner of the painting attests to Pratuang Emjaroen's political statement:

> When humans take up arms and fight, the destruction and ruin of the nation, the separation of parents, siblings, and children, become the shameful legacy of humanity. The land stinks with blood and gore; countless miseries befall humanity (Pratuang Emjaroen, 1976, translated by the author).

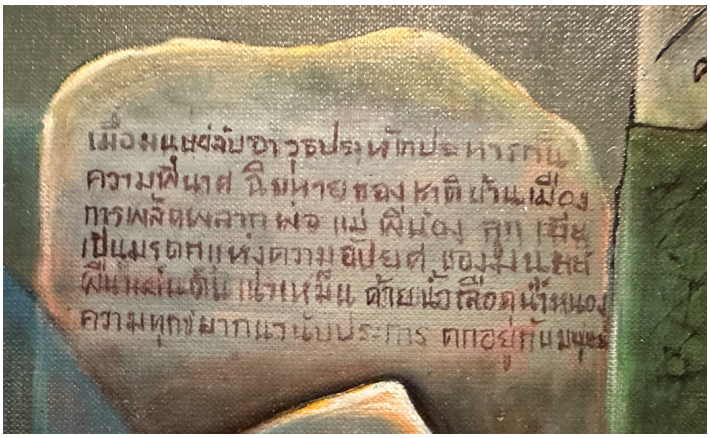


Figure 4: The Handwriting by Pratuang Emjaroen on ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun***
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, The National Gallery Singapore, June 28, 2025

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6



Figure 5: Pratuang Emjaroen, ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun***, 1976, oil on canvas, 135 × 165 cm
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, The National Gallery Singapore, June 28, 2025

Next, Pratuang Emjaroen charged objects as narrative symbols, resonating messages of "trauma" and "hope." The explanation is as follows: The depiction of "the head falling from the Buddha's body" at the middle right corner of the painting is important—it carries powerful messages of "violation" and "trauma" related to Thai ancient history. During the Ayutthaya period, mutilating a Buddha image was considered a grave offense. To sever its head was equated with committing murder. Such acts were not merely crimes against property but profound moral transgressions. Another related fact is that during the late 18th century, when long years of warfare ravaged northern Siam, numerous Buddha images were broken and fell into ruin from neglect.[5] The colossal image known as *Sri Sarbejña* ("the Omniscient One"), once the object of deepest veneration at Ayutthaya, was found too badly damaged to repair; it was therefore reverently entombed in a large stupa built for the purpose at Wat Pho. The remaining images were distributed among various monasteries in Bangkok and Dhanapuri; more than half were deposited at Wat Pho (Griswold, 1974, pp. 21-22). Taken together, the destruction of Buddha images has left an indelible scar on the nation. From this point of view, Pratuang Emjaroen's expression offers a new symbolic

[5] After peace was secured, the ruler of Chiang Mai set about restoration. A similar mission was performed during the Rattanakosin reign was—the Wang Na (Front Palace) prince, acting on the orders of his brother, King Rama I (1782–1806), traveled to Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok, and other cities to rescue images neglected during the Burmese wars. He brought hundreds of them—many life-size or larger—to Bangkok by raft.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

connection—the "trauma" caused by the military repression in the 1970s is an icon of denouncing the military and its betrayal of Buddhist virtue (Seng, 2017, p. 225). The second evidence of trauma is the Buddha "weeping" while his head is detaching from the body, suggesting the Buddhist morality is shattered by violent destruction.



Figure 6: Detail of ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun***
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, The National Gallery Singapore, June 28, 2025

As for messages of "hope", tears fall from the Buddha's eyes and transform into spirits; these spirits drift into the rotting corpses, and symbolically generate new life—maggots on decaying corpses. It is a narrative that wishes a fresh, bright future after destruction and death. In fact, the artist approached many symbols to show his hope for a peaceful Thailand, for example, "the morning glory" (a resilient plant) in the left corner of the canvas was applied to symbolize the selfless presence that gives without demanding anything in return, as Pratuang stated in ***Flowers by the Roadside*** (1977):

> A flower is a pure object that comes from nature. Even though it appears on the side of a path where humans step on cloth, its cleanliness and clarity are still beneficial to all humans of all forms, names, and classes, allowing them to appreciate it and alleviate the stress that has been accumulating in their minds, without wanting anything in return (Emjaroen, 1979).

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6



Figure 7: Morning glory in ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun***
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, The National Gallery Singapore, June 28, 2025

The contrast elements intertextually make the painting fascinating. For instance, the colors carry an emotion of pain: black, grey, dark blue, and deep red signify death—the skulls chained to the bayonets of rifles, a mouth of cannon on the stone, a bleeding moon. However, the artist also introduced many symbols of hope, including golden sunlight, fresh green leaves, and bright red blood. These visual elements are packed with emotions of "trauma" and "hope" that resonate with the weeping Buddha's narrative—expressing the hopeful wish that tragedy could give Thai society a new beginning.

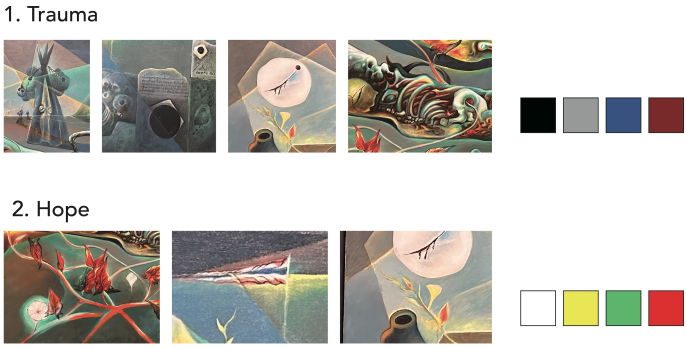


Figure 8: Symbols and colors of "trauma" and "hope"
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, The National Gallery Singapore, June 28, 2025

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

1.3 Fasting Buddha: In Synchronization with People's Suffering

Just as appropriating Buddhist iconography for socio-political concerns, ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)*** (1976) draws an analogy between the Lord Buddha's suffering and that of the Thai people. The antecedents of the Fasting Buddha derive from Siddhartha Gautama's regimen of austerities, through which he believed extreme training could lead to spiritual enlightenment. Siddhartha meditated for long hours, exposing himself to heat and cold, and subsisted on the bare minimum of food and water needed to sustain his life. In the story, six years of harsh austerities did not bring him spiritual enlightenment but instead brought him close to death from starvation. He realized that the correct approach to life is to avoid both extremes—self-indulgence and self-mortification, which is the Middle Path—a balanced approach that leads to awareness, wisdom, and enlightenment (Chicarelli, 2018, pp. 18-19).

The story of the Fasting Buddha is widely attested in the Thai tradition, illustrating the lesson that when people pursue things to extremes, the outcome often fails to meet expectations, while the body endures immense suffering. In artistic practice, "Fasting Buddha" is conventionally visualized in a meditative pose with an emaciated body—his skin sunken and stretched tightly over his bones; his face gaunt, with deep hollows beneath the eyes. This became the inspiration for Pratuang Emjaroen to metaphorically portray the ***suffering*** of Thai people during that turbulent decade of political turmoil. ***The Fasting Buddha Sacrifice*** (1976) presents the fundamental tenet of human suffering through showing the Lord Buddha sitting in a meditative posture on a globe filled with suffering—screaming faces, skulls, a pale, emaciated figure, the innocent, and the incarcerated on the downside of the painting (Phillips, 1992, p. 67). On the Bottom right side appears a praying figure embodying spiritual piety. The artist made strong use of visual contrast: a line bisecting the body serves as the world's axis, dividing "left" and "right" to signify duality; the white halo stands in sharp contrast to the black void in his abdomen. On the right side, a bullet hole next to the Buddha's heart pierces his flesh (Poshyananda, 1996). The disturbing use of Buddhist iconography and bullet holes is intentional—the Lord Buddha is both a witness to barbarity and catastrophe and one who experienced extreme political repression in Thailand.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6



Figure 9: Pratuang Emjaroen, ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)***, 1976, oil on canvas, 137 × 175 cm
Source: Courtesy of Pratuang Emjaroen (provided by Srisilp Emjaroen); used with permission

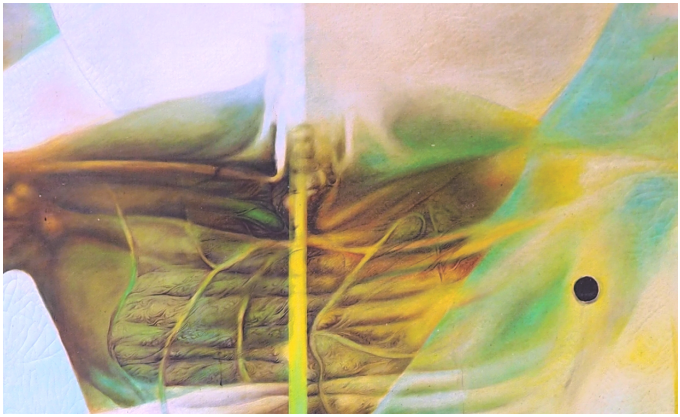


Figure 10: Detail of ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)***, a bullet hole next to the Buddha's heart pierces his flesh
Source: Image courtesy of Pratuang Emjaroen (provided by Srisilp Emjaroen); used with permission

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

1.4 Social Commentary: The Buddha as a Sufferer of Anguish

In the aspect of artists, Pratuang Emjaroen is one with humble beginnings who lived a grand and extraordinary life and eventually became a representative figure in the art world. His prime years of art coincided with the ideologically intense 1970s—a period of social agitation between the ruling power and ordinary citizens during the Cold War. Art became a direct way to record this era, both socially and emotionally.

The works of Pratuang Emjaroen reveal tension between government authority and ordinary people, as evidenced in the student movement (1973), while "passion" is the artist's commitment to an equal and inclusive society, as ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974), ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976) indictment of violence, mourn the dead, and express hope for a better future. ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)*** (1976) reflects Pratuang Emjaroen's empathy for the minorities who are suffering. These three works of social criticism miraculously survived the third Dharma Group exhibition at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) in 1976. ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** are now in the National Gallery Singapore's collections, demonstrating the social unrest of 1970s Thailand.

Compared with temple images of the Buddha in detached serenity, an important breakthrough of Pratuang is that he interpreted the Lord Buddha as a sufferer with bullet holes in the face and body, and a severed head, symbolizing moral trauma. Additionally, the message of trauma is enhanced by symbols of violence, such as rifles and the mouth of a cannon carved into the stone. From this point of view, Buddhist iconography moves from sacred precincts into experimental art spaces, shifting viewers from ritual veneration to confronting contemporary social pain and toward a form of social commentary. For Pratuang Emjaroen, his political statement is to apply Buddhist iconography to arouse the good in human beings, and addressing empathy is the path to ending conflict.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

2. Germination of Grassroots Power: Pratuang Emjaroen and Dharma Group

2.1 A Self-taught Artist: Pratuang Emjaroen

Pratuang Emjaroen's life is an inspiring story that demonstrates an ordinary person without an institutional diploma can become a celebrated artist. In his case, painting skill was not the only factor in his success; equally important were his courage to fight for social justice and breaking hierarchy. Born into an impoverished family in 1935 in Thonburi, Bangkok, Pratuang Emjaroen's early artistic cultivation came from popular art that took root in Thailand when the movie and advertising industry was imported. At the age of ten, he took a job at an advertising firm, where he learned to paint commercial billboards—his initial art training. His life took a decisive turn in 1965 when he saw the biopic of Vincent van Gogh, *Lust for Life (1956)*. The movie inspired him to pursue fine art rather than a career in commercial painting.

As a self-taught artist, Pratuang Emjaroen created art that mostly came from extensive readings and observation of nature, including the sun, land, and water. He developed a distinctive abstract style that employs brilliant colors and explores themes of the universe and society. However, Pratuang Emjaroen's artistic peak was the late 1960s to 1970s, through his politically charged works (Poshyananda et al., 2024, p. 203). With socio-political concern, his paintings expressed empathy for the poor and mourning of those who died in the 1973 student uprising. He regarded the artist as a social reformist as he stated, "Once an artist steps into the field, one must have an 'ideology'. This ideology takes its role in society as a guide directing what is right and what is wrong" (BACC Channel, 2020c, 2:49-3:06).

2.2 Dharma Group: Art Open to All People

To speak for those at the bottom of society, Pratuang Emjaroen founded the Dharma Group in 1971 by gathering forces beyond Silpakorn University (an official art institution), as its members came from diverse social classes and regions. In fact, the Dharma Group is a particular art group among art communities that held social-political concerns during

the Cold War. Unlike the United Artists' Front of Thailand (TAFT), who used their works as direct street protest, the Dharma Group adopted a more eclectic approach: it expressed a political stance and concern for the working class, yet remained inclusive—bringing together academics, self-taught artists, and art enthusiasts—and maintained cooperation with art galleries. The term "Dharma," used to denote the Buddha's teachings and moral laws, was transformed into an artistic ideal and creative ethos. According to their statement, the group believe that art should be inclusive of all human beings and should benefit society as a whole, advancing three main arguments: The current definition of art is confusing; a more universal understanding is needed; art's value lies in its core of kindness and beauty—compassion is both the heart of art and the backbone of Thai society; In a world rife with suffering, art offers spiritual consolation to humanity as it stated:

> When it comes to art, there are always conflicts of understanding and misunderstanding . . . There are still no standards that truly define the quality of art, and no one can truly clarify its value. A key reason is that our country lacks individuals with the national ideals to truly dedicate themselves to the art world . . . In the matter of the truth of art, the value lies in the core of goodness and beauty that results from the creation of emotions, feelings, thoughts, and the knowledge of the true nature of life and truth. There is a pure intention filled with compassion from the human heart that should be shown towards each other as the basis for creating art . . . Art is therefore something of value to all human beings and is something that originates from the human mind and hands directly (Emjaroen, 1979, pp. 9-10).

The statement suggests the Dharma Group's belief that anyone with passion can be an artist, which they put into practice by welcoming artists from diverse backgrounds, some of whom are from farming or fishing families. [6] In the *Second Dharma Group Exhibition of Modern Paintings* (1975), different works by self-taught artists alongside graduates of Silpakorn University were displayed (Table 1).

[6] For example, Phithak Piyapong (พิทักษ์ ปิยะพงษ์), who was born in from Chachoengsao Province in 1941, was the son of a fisherman father and a farmer mother. Biographical information is from National Gallery of Thailand. (1975). The second Dharma Group exhibition of modern paintings: February 27–March 15 [Exhibition catalogue]. Bangkok: National Gallery of Thailand.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Table 1: Artists (without institute diplomas) in the Dharma Group Exhibition (1975)

English Name	Background
Wirot Nuibut	Surat Thani
Winai Sakcharoen	Setthakit Field Village (Student of Pratuang Emjaroen)
Suphan Krachangphen	Bangkok
Phaitun Duangchai	Field Village
Silai Kajai	Chiang Rai
Bunying Emjaroen	Phra Pradaeng (Student of Pratuang Emjaroen)
Wang Xiqing	Ethnic Chinese

The emergence of the "self-taught artist" reminds us of a claim by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2000) that educational institutions serve as legitimizing structures that transmit both economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984); thus, a formal diploma carries symbolic power in distinguishing between "artists" and non-artists. In this light, "self-taught artist" marks an inspiring breakthrough, showing that ordinary people were able to cross the class barriers of making art.

The exhibition of the Dharma Group also reflects the extended criteria of being an "artist"—practitioners were recognized through exhibitions, rather than relying solely on art institutions. This not only reflects individual upward mobility but also signals a broader cultural capacity for inclusion. Their openness and flexibility are also evident in their exhibition locations, ranging from cultural institutions to art galleries: The first Dharma Group exhibition was held in 1971 at the Agricultural Building of Thawich Klinpratoom. [7]The second (1975) took place at the National Gallery and the Old Mining Building, under the patronage of the Fine Arts Department and Bangkok Bank Public Company Limited. The third (1976) was staged at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA)—the most politically charged, and was violently shut down by the military on 6 October.

[7] Near Klong Toey Pier (Between 2 December 1971 and 2 January 1972).

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Now, the glaring question is why the art group, grounded in a humanistic, community-minded spirit, was pulled into student movements. It all directed to its third exhibition in 1976; the exhibition titled "The People's Arts" *(Sinlapa khong prachachon)* drew attention to General Thanom Kittikachorn. Some paintings, including works by Pratuang Emjorean, showed criticism toward the then-current society, particularly toward the student demonstration (1973). As a result, the Dharma Group was labeled as "leftist" after one of the leading politicians, Surin Masadit, presided at the opening in BIMA. The next day, when Thailand's sharp right-wing turn culminated in the 6 October 1976 massacre, the military also shut down the exhibition (Poshyananda, 1992, p. 165). A lot of artworks were destroyed by artists for fear that they might be used as evidence to accuse them of anti-government acts, and Pratuang Emjaroen eventually turned himself in to the police. [8]The exhibition witnessed the most tragic political tension in the 1970s.

Although the flowering of student protests in the 1970s was short-lived, the spirit of equality and resistance to entrenched authority did not fade in art. The Dharma Group, and others all aimed to allow everyone to participate equally in its exhibitions. [9] Backing to the Dharma Group's ideal that art's value lies in its core of kindness and beauty—compassion is both the heart of art and the backbone of Thai society; in a world rife with suffering, art offers spiritual consolation to humanity. Such communities reflected a longing for a democratic attitude among artists—that art should not be a privilege of elites at the top of the pyramid, thereby setting a precedent that encouraged later generations to express their voices.

[8] Meanwhile, the violence shut down the activities of the United Artists' Front of Thailand (TAFT) and the Dharma Group, forcing TAFT artists to go underground or flee to the countryside.

[9] TAFT opposed capitalists and imperialists, and it aimed to create art for the masses. Other art groups include the Student Christian Center and the Bangkapi Gallery, along with artist groups such as the Van Group, the Bangkok Dice Group, the Earth Walker Group, the White Group, and the Thai Association of Fine Art (formed in 1979).

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

3. Freedom of Speech: Buddhist Iconography by Thawan Duchanee

If the "political statement" is understood as the social concern in Pratuang Emjaroen's works, then Thawan Duchanee's works show individual statements within a Buddhist frame, emphasizing freedom of artistic expression. Thawan Duchanee's works underscore the tension between the public's deep-rooted recognition of Buddhist iconography and artists' autonomy. To discuss the paradox of secular and transcendent human society, Thawan Duchanee's works reveal visual innovation by fusing them with nude body and animal form as seen in ***Untitled*** (1970-1971) and ***Despair's Eclipse of Intellect*** (1968).

3.1 Nudity: Irrational Act of Trafficking Buddha Images

The rapid social changes of the 1970s led to problems such as pollution, crime, prostitution, and moral decay (Poshyananda, 1992, p. 232), forming the backdrop for Thawan's use of Buddhist iconography to critique society. His works are not as mere Buddhist dogma; they breathe fresh life into religious and spiritual themes (Hoskin, 1984, p. 73). Specifically, Thawan Duchanee integrated Buddhist iconography with nudity to evoke a subtle, internalized power of desire, and his unconventional interpretation provoked social controversy. The point became starkly evident in 1973, when students vandalized several of his paintings, as he depicted a muscular body as a visual approach for addressing the secular side of human beings. By adopting a realist technique, ***Untitled*** (1970-1971) presents a charged confrontation between the secular (nude body) and the transcendent (Buddhist iconography).

At the center of the canvas, a muscular male torso is seamlessly joined to a Buddha head. The Buddha's outstretched arms firmly dominate the composition, and his upright stance forms the shape of a cross. Meanwhile, on the right, a man's limbs are fused with a Thai stupa; on the left, a shrine-like frame is connected to another man's limbs. Through this visual strategy, the artist appropriately links Buddhist iconography with the fleshly body, which suggests human desire. The work was made for a strong current critique of the

malicious acts of cutting up and trafficking Thai Buddha images, and the inappropriate combination is set to allude to the looting of antiquities from reliquary mounds (Seankat, 2001, p. 49).

Paradoxically, it was not the artist's social concerns that captured attention but the "nude" expression, which offended viewers, provoking considerable conservative backlash. After being displayed in a group exhibition at the Indra Hotel, the work attracted a *Thai Rath* journalist who described the paintings as "degrading" to Buddhism; shortly thereafter, his other ten works, displayed at the Student Christian Center, were slashed by eighty students (Poshyananda, 1992, p. 149). This event is marked by both conflict and irony. The conflict stemmed from students' aversion to Thawan's bold expression; the irony, meanwhile, lies in the fact that although Buddhism espouses cultural inclusivity, [10]many viewers had already formed fixed attachments to its artistic interpretation.

3.2 Animal Motifs: Non-human Aspect of Humans

By the same logic, animal motif also symbolizes the non-human aspects of personality rooted in human character, such as lust, hatred, sloth, worry and doubt. For instance, ***Despair's Eclipse of Intellect*** (1968) foregrounds the reinterpretation of the Kakusandha Buddha—the 22nd Buddha who kept 30,000 concubines prior to renunciation, according to Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. In the Theravada lineage, the rooster symbolizes Kakusandha (The National Gallery of Thailand & The Art Auction Center, 2024, p. 185). Though drawing on Buddhist sources, Thawan departed from a traditional manner; instead, he depicted the Kakusandha Buddha as a giant two-headed rooster: the downward-pecking head pecking toward a nude woman, represents Kakusandha before ordination, while the upraised head signals enlightenment after renunciation. The rooster was painted in black, red, indigo blue and green to interrogate the visual tension. The two nudes personify temptation, recalling the legend of 30,000 concubines.

[10] *The Kālāma Sutta's* epistemic openness in the Theravāda canon (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* AN 3.65) counsels testing teachings against experience and ethical criteria—freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion—rather than accepting them on authority alone.

In fact, the integration of animal motifs and muscular torsos in presenting Buddhist iconography became Thawan's aesthetic characteristic throughout his whole career, as seen in ***tosachat*** (Ten Lives of the Buddha) (n.d.), ***The Mahajanaka Jataka*** (1974-1976). He stated:

> My whole ambition as an artist is to materialize the image of irrationality (lust) with the most imperialistic fury and precision so that the world of imagination and conquered irrationality becomes an object of the same durability and with the same meaningfulness and communicable thickness as the external world of phenomenal reality (Hoskin, 1984, p. 70).



Figure 11: Thawan Duchanee, *Despair's Eclipse of Intellect*, oil on canvas, 1968, 200 × 238 cm
Source: Szu-Ying Hsu, ***200 Years Journey Through Thai Modern History,***
The National Gallery, Bangkok, August 18, 2024

4. Supportive Social System Behind Political Statement

The final level of iconology seeks to explore the essential concepts hidden within artworks through socio-cultural content. To capture the general social landscape during the Cold War, this section examines the social trend behind the art moves of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee. Namely, the 1970s are an important period that

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

fundamentally shaped Thai democracy, as Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee's practices intersected with civic awakening and the student movements of the time. However, they would not have succeeded without the germination of private patronage that fostered reedom of speech, contributing to artists' autonomous practices that were valued. In other words, private patronage made art production and circulation more diverse because it was driven by individuals and entrepreneurs, thereby helping different voices to be heard.

By the way of explaination, in the context of the Cold War, the notion of "private patronage" reflects the emergence of bank-and entrepreneur-led patronage that took root alongside art foundations. These developments signal the rise of a new form of capitalism that contributed to civic awakening in the 1970s. Capital underwrites the capacity to shape discourse, as we see in art. In contrast to state-sanctioned exhibitions such as the *National Exhibition of Art*, [11] private- patronage exhibitions display greater flexibility and inclusiveness toward nascent art groups (e.g., Dharma Group) and experimental artists such as Thawan Duchanee. Private-patronage exhibitions also tend to involve simpler decision-making because an exhibition can proceed as soon as an agreement is reached between the artist and the organizer (or patron).

4.1 Rise of New Economic Activity and Private Patronage of Art

As the United States' assistance expanded from military to economic aid in the 1960s (Girling, 1981, p. 96; McMahon, 2000, p. 202), [12] foreign investment (notably Japanese) flowed into Thailand in the 1970s. New capital enabled new collaborations and social classes, especially the urban middle class and domestic capitalists, who laid the groundwork for diverse artistic demand and organizations. For example, Thailand's banking sector played a prominent role in sponsoring art exhibitions, collections and operations. Bangkok Bank sponsored the first *Bua Luang Art Competition* in 1974; at the same time, Toshiba and Thai Farmers Bank (TFB) actively organized annual art competitions and provided artist

[11] *The National Exhibition of Art* was initiated in 1949 by Silpa Bhirasri to develop modern Thai art by showcasing various forms of art, including painting, sculpture, printmaking, and mixed media. It has been organized annually by Silpakorn University.
[12] Thailand received over US$ 2 billion from Washington, making it the second-largest aid recipient in Southeast Asia, after Vietnam. The U.S. also supported materiel, engineering, and advisory expertise.

grants for artists to travel to Europe for international inspiration. The Bangkok Dice Group (formed in 1976) received support from The Bangkok Bank Inc in organizing its exhibition (1977).

Private patronage and art collection operated mutually. As examples, Bangkok Bank not only sponsored the *Bua Luang Exhibition* but also actively purchased prize-winning artworks for its own collection; Siam Commercial Bank began acquiring artworks for private collections. These banks' purchases not only supported emerging artists but also strengthened their cultural profile and their institutional prestige. Similarly, Thailand Investment and Securities Public Company Limited (TISCO) started building its own art collection in the 1970s. It held the *TISCO Contemporary Art Competition* in 1977 (Henderson, 1997, p. 154).

The demand for expanding cultural influence from enterprises also benefited art diversity in the 1970s, as the patronage of hotels and shopping malls provided great platforms for art displays. Namely, the most interesting point of Thawan's case is that his experimental works of Buddhist iconography were shown in private sectors—the Indra Hotel and the Student Christian Center, signaling the crucial role of private organizations in supporting non-institutional art. Thus, an excellent work owes not only to the artist's distinctive expression but also to the supporting systems behind exhibitions; these private sectors indicate a new era of openness to different ideas that arrive.

4.2 BIMA: Public Art Gallery and the Student Movement

Unlike the 1940s-1950s, when Silpakorn University helped initiate the modern art movement but lacked community engagement (Gridthiya, 1996, p. 16), the 1960s-1970s saw stronger networking efforts as exhibition spaces expanded, allowing the general public to obtain non-formal art education. There were various institutions, [13] among them, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) was the leading space for experimental art (Smithies, 2023, pp. 572-577).

[13] Examples include the National Gallery in Bangkok (established in 1977), Suan Pakkad Palace (founded by Princess Chumbhot), the Siam Society, and private galleries such as Bangkapi Gallery, Trio Gallery, Sala Gallery, the Student Christian Center (Phaya Thai Road), and the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art.

Although named after Silpa Bhirasri, BIMA (1974-1988) emerged as a private gallery under the administrative board of the Bhirasri Institution of Modern Art and the Bhirasri Foundation Board in 1977 (National Museum (Singapore), 1988, p. 175). BIMA played a unique role in mediating between private capital, experimental art practices, and public interests as it operated with support from patrons such as Princess Chumbhot of Nagor Svarga (1915-2008) and Thai Farmers Bank (Kasikorn bank), for initiatives such as the *Contemporary Art Competition.*

With support from different sectors, BIMA operated as an international, multi-faceted art space open to all. As it declared: "We need to obtain an enlarged number of exhibits, Thai and foreign. We need a much wider program of activities—concerts, lectures, film showings. We need to increase our audience" (Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, 1975). To promote participation by both artists and art lovers, the gallery welcomed the public through membership schemes for different communities (student, ordinary and sustaining members) and housed a multifunction auditorium for music, film, drama, dance, and discussions—bringing art into the lives of the general public.

The openness that encouraged diverse voices and even supported socio-political ideas that involved BIMA with military suppression in 1976. As mentioned previously, the Dharma Group exhibition ended violently, showing tension between the military and artists. It ended with Prapan Sritsuta (born 1939), the director of BIMA (organizer of the exhibition), forced to resign, and Professor Puey Ungpakhorn (1916-1999), the ex-governor of the Bank of Thailand, which had financed BIMA, was forced into exile. The Dharma Group was temporarily deactivated by the order of the coup after 6 October. Fortunately, BIMA weathered political turmoil (1976) and continued operating into the late 1980s. BIMA held over a hundred exhibitions between 1976 and 1988, making it the most active and experimental gallery in Bangkok during the 1970s.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

5. Tension and Passion: Buddhist Iconography in the Cold War Era

As the famous opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities goes*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," this phrase aptly describes Cold War Thailand, which experienced both progress and hardship, as well as bravery amid social transitions, agitations, and tensions. The 1970s were a series of social transformations, including new economic activities, and the student movements of 1973 and 1976—the wave through which ordinary people strove for freedom of speech. Through iconology, Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee's works reflect two keywords of the internal contradictions and transition of Thai society during the Cold War: "tension" and "passion." The keywords indicate a dual relation as the "tension" refers to the conflict between opposing ideologies, manifested in volatile social upheaval and transformations, while the "passion" reflects grassroots claims and the individual expressions of people and artists at the level of civic awakening.

5.1 Social Landscape of the Cold War Thailand

As the Western liberal camp and the communist bloc made Southeast Asia a theater of rivalry, Thailand became significantly positioned in the binary confrontation of the Cold War and a key U.S. strategic ally for maintaining Western influence in the area. Essentially, the Cold War delivered substantial military, economic, and cultural resources to Thailand from the Western democratic camp, accelerating modernization. Yet—perhaps ironically—the political elites who deepened cooperation with the United States also embraced uncompromising anti-communism, narrowing cultural tolerance within society. The authoritarianism sharpened the divide between the state and ordinary citizens who demanded free expression. The tensions intensified in the 1960s and peaked in the 1970s, culminating in the student demonstrations of 1973 and 1976, which ended in deadly violence.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

5.2 Freedom of Speech: Buddhist Iconography as a Political Statement

Indeed, student demonstrations were the painful moments in modern Thai history, but the protests also revealed a civic awakening from ordinary people and their courage to confront the authorities. During this period, some Thai artists aligned themselves with ordinary people and gave voice to their struggles, giving rise to a new kind of art—politically charged works, as evidenced by Pratuang Emjaroen's paintings. ***Dharma and Adharma*** (1973-1974), ***The Fasting Buddha (Sacrifice)*** (1976), and ***Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*** (1976) are three of his most recognized examples that show indictment of violence, mourning the dead, and expressing hope for mutual understanding within society.

Compared with the temple image of the Buddha in detached serenity, an important breakthrough is Pratuang's reinterpretation of the Lord Buddha as a sufferer of worldly anguish—bullet holes in the face and body, and a severed head—symbolizing moral trauma. From this point of view, Buddhist iconography moved from sacred precincts into experimental art spaces, shifting viewers from ritual veneration toward confronting contemporary social pain and a new form of social commentary. The tension here lies in the conflict between the people and the government, while the passion is the artist's commitment to voicing for ordinary people.

In addition to Pratuang Emjaroen, Thawan Duchanee was another artist of note in this period. His works underscore the intensity of self-expression, highlighting an uncompromising spirit for his aesthetic. To reveal the secular side of human beings, he integrated Buddhist iconography with animal motifs and nude bodies, such as ***Untitled*** (1970-1971). His innovation resonated with the era's spirit of challenging established art traditions, sparking considerable controversy from conservatives—some works were vandalized. The tension here is the public's predetermined recognition of Buddhist themes between artistic creativity; the passion here is the artist's insistence on personal expression.

5.3 Freedom of Speech, Private Patronage and Inclusive Society

This paper argues that the Cold War brought multiple economic activities, which directly supported a wave of experimental art practices arising from bottom-up social transformation. In the 1960s-1970s, bank and entrepreneur-led patronage systems took root, and new art foundations and collaborations emerged, fostering artistic freedom. As a result, artists' autonomy became increasingly visible on private platforms, where individualized practices were highly valued. The exhibitions of the Dharma Group and Thawan Duchanee reflect a deep sense of inclusiveness within social networks, especially the Dharma Group, which suggests the rise of self-taught artists who signified a breakthrough of class transcendence.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

Conclusion and discussion

Art is both aesthetically related and socially connected. To admit, Thai art of great splendor presents various ideas; Buddhist iconography is only a part of the spectrum that reveals art's socio-political connection. Thus, this paper is not aimed at establishing a definitive parameter of Buddhism and modern art, but to address an underlying dynamic interplay between artworks and their social meanings. Furthermore, the paper identifies areas for future research of Buddhist iconography in a non-religious context, unpacking a new scope of Thai studies.

Cold War Thailand was a crucible in which multiple differences coexisted and intertwined: ideologies clashed, student movements surged, and differences among classes, opinions, and groups came starkly into view. Thailand, as a microcosm of the Cold War landscape, had suffered from such tensions for decades, especially during the 1970s. Through iconology, the paper reveals that although the student demonstrations ended in brutal repression, the Buddhist iconography of Pratuang Emjaroen and Thawan Duchanee became lasting cultural legacies, testifying to the passions of people who strove for freedom of speech in an era full of tensions and uncertainty. The wave was not only personal but also owed to the social structural transition as seen in sponsorship from emerging capitalists and non-institutional art groups, signaling a trend to a more inclusive society.

History always repeats itself in different ways; the key lies in what we learn from it. Unfortunately, wars and conflicts continue in the 21st century. At the core of these conflicts lies a fundamental question: how much tolerance do individuals, societies, or nations truly have for difference? The answer was already revealed on canvas by the Thai artists, silently but warmly. This is the most significant socio-cultural reflection of modern Thai art during the Cold War.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

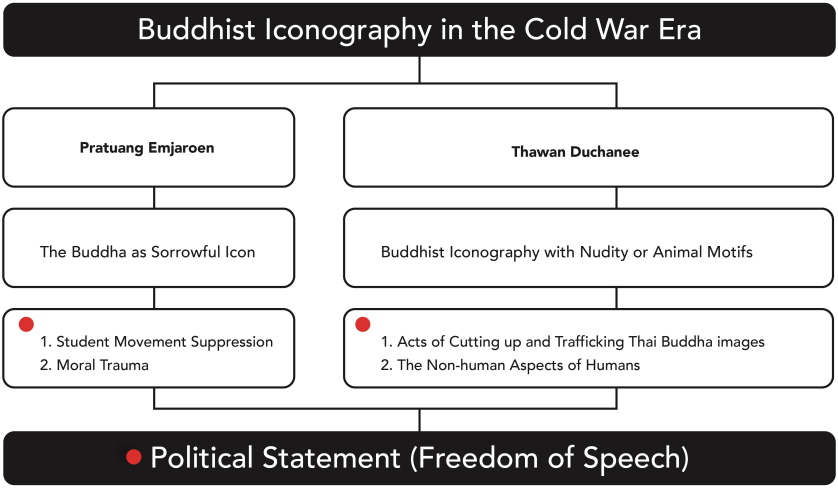


Figure 12: Iconological Interpretation of Buddhist Iconography in the Cold War Era

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.JTS.22.1.6

References

BACC Channel. (2020, May 28). *Exhibition: PRATUANG EMJAROEN: Traces and* Trails_Teaser 3 (2016). [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RiDR4l6_eo

Bae, M., Seng, Y. J., & Suzuki, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Awakenings: Art in society in Asia, 1960s–1990s* [Exhibition catalogue]. The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; The National Gallery Singapore.

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre. (2016). *Pratuang Emjaroen: Traces and trails*. Bangkok: Bangkok Art and Culture Centre Foundation.

Béguin, G. (2009). *Buddhist art: an historical and cultural journey* (N. Chakrabongse, Trans.). Bangkok: River Books. (Original work published 2009).

Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art. (1975). *First Anniversary Exhibition: May 14* [Exhibition catalogue]. Bangkok: Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1979).

Caruso, H. Y. C. (2005). Art as a Political Act: Expression of Cultural Identity, Self-identity, and Gender by Suk Nam Yun and Yong Soon Min. *Journal of Aesthetic Education, 39*(3), 71-87. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3527433

Chicarelli, C. F. (2018). *Buddhism and Buddhist Art: An illustrated introduction*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Emjaroen, P. (1979). *P. Emjaroen* [Unpublished lecture handout for a lecture at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Teacher's College].

Evans, F. (2019). *Public art and the fragility of democracy: An essay in political aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Girling, J. L. S. (1981). Thailand: *Society and politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gridthiya, G. (1996). *An Alternative Space for the Arts in Thailand: Assessing the Feasibility*. [Unpublished Independent Study]. School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Griswold, A. B. (1974). *What Is a Buddha image?* (Thai Culture New Series No. 19). Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.

Henderson, V. (1997). *The Social Production of Art in Thailand: Patronage and Commoditisation, 1980-1998*. [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. https://digiverse.chula.ac.th/Info/item/dc:81617

Hoskin, J. (1984). *Ten Contemporary Thai artists*. Bangkok: Graphis Co., Ltd.

Jin, J.-H. (2024). Buddhist Artwork as Political Symbolism: With a Focus on Buddhist Artwork Created in the 920s in Later Paekche. *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies, 24*(2), 187-207. https://doi.org/10.1215/15982661-11361743

Marcus, R. (2013). *Thawan Duchanee*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Mashadi, A. (2011). Framing the 1970s. *Third Text, 25*(4), 409-417. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2011.587686

McMahon, R. J. (2000). What Difference Did It Make? Assessing the Vietnam War's impact on Southeast Asia. In *International perspectives on Vietnam* (p. 197-214). L. C. Gardner & T. Gittinger (Eds.). College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Musikawong, S. (2010). Art for October: Thai Cold War State Violence in Trauma Art. *positions: east asia cultures critique, 18*(1), 19-50 https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2009-023

National Gallery of Thailand. (1975). *The second Dharma Group exhibition of modern paintings: February 27–March 15* [Exhibition catalogue]. Bangkok: National Gallery of Thailand.

National Gallery of Thailand, & Art Auction Center. (2024). *200 years journey through Thai modern art history* [Exhibition catalogue]. Bangkok: National Gallery of Thailand & Art Auction Center.

National Museum (Singapore). (1988). *The Directory of the Museums of ASEAN*. Singapore: National Museum.

Panofsky, E. (1972). *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance.* New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1939).

Peleggi, M. (2019). When Art Was Political: Historicising Decolonisation and the Cold War in Southeast Asia through Curatorial Practice. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 50*(4), 645-654.

Phillips, H. P. (1992). *The integrative art of modern Thailand* [Exhibition catalogue]. Berkeley, CA: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

Poshyananda, A. (1992). *Modern art in Thailand*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Poshyananda, A. (1996). *Pratuang Emjaroen, Dharma and Adharma* [ธรรม อธรรม] [Exhibition catalogue]. Bangkok: The Art Center, Centers of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University.

Queensland Art Gallery. (1993). *The first Asia-Pacific triennial of contemporary art*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery.

Seankat, S. (2001). *Thai Contemporary Painting in Surrealist Style: A Case Study of Thawan Duchanee's Painting*. [Master's thesis, Srinakharinwirot University]. http://thesis.swu.ac.th/swuthesis/Vis_Art/Suwat_S.pdf

Seng, Y. J. (2017). Cultural Wars in Southeast Asia: The Birth of the Critical Exhibition in the 1970s. In *Charting thoughts: Essays on art in Southeast Asia* (p. 215-230). S. W. Low & P. D. Flores. (Eds.). Singapore: National Gallery Singapore.

Simoniti, V. (2021). Art as Political Discourse. *The British Journal of Aesthetics, 61*(4), 559-574. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayab018

Smithies, M. (2023). The Bangkok Art Scene in the Early 1960s: A Personal Souvenir. In *The modern in Southeast Asian art: A reader* (p. 572-577). T. K. Sabapathy & P. D. Flores (Eds.). Singapore: National Gallery Singapore. (Original work published 1978).

Su, B. (1991). Pingcheng shili de jiju he "Yun'gang moshi" de xingcheng yu fazhan [The concentration of Pingcheng's strength and the formation and development of the "Yun'gang model"]. In *Zhongguo shiku: Yun'gang shiku (yi)* (p. 170-199). Yun'gang shiku wenwu baoguan suo (Ed.). Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe.

Swearer, D. K. (2010). *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia.* 2nd edition. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Van Beek, S. (1999). *Arts of Thailand*. Singapore: Periplus.

Wenk, K. (1979). *Die buddhistische Kunst Thawan Datchanis: Zeichnungen und Gemälde.* Zürich: Iñigo von Oppersdorff Verlag.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the editorial board of the Journal of Thai Studies, the Thai Studies Center, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and my advisor, Associate Professor Wasana Wongsurawat, Ph.D., for her unwavering support in my studies. I am also deeply grateful to SriNaam Emcharoen (Srisilp Emjaroen), Asia Art Archive, and the Rama IX Art Museum Foundation for their assistance with data collection. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Joseph, my family, and friends for their spiritual support during my Ph.D. studies.