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# REMAKING MODERN BANGKOK: Urban Renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard, 1932-1957

Pinai Sirikiatikul

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# **Declaration**

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Pinai Sirikiatikul

## **ABSTRACT**

The research question is about ways in which architecture and urban space are used as a vehicle for social and cultural agendas; how social, cultural as well as political identity can be translated into spaces and built forms. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries, Thailand was never a colony and therefore Thailand's assimilation of Western culture cannot be satisfactorily interpreted through post colonial discourse, although this has been used productively elsewhere. The study is of Bangkok between 1932, when the monarchy was overthrown, and 1957, when the monarchy was restored. The main features of this period were the establishment of a new constitution, the emergence of the People's Party, and the events of World War II and its aftermath. The progressive nationalist policies of the People's Party extended into many aspects of cultural and social life, including the city's development, and in particular, urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard in the centre of old Bangkok.

The thesis examines the transformation of urban space and architecture on Rajadamnern Boulevard between 1932 and 1957. The focus is on the ways in which the new state inserted its identity, ideology and propaganda into the city by remaking its fabric. The thesis investigates how the new state used urban space as a stage set to establish and display collective identity, as well as the ways in which pre-existing urban forms were given new narratives. The aim is to show how Rajadamnern Boulevard, whose physical appearance and use changed over time, reconstituted meanings in the city during a period of political change.

The research draws upon archival sources: documentary evidence from state papers, ordnance maps, and unpublished documents at the Crown Property Bureau (Bangkok), and upon first-hand analysis of urban space and architecture. The findings will revise existing histories of architecture in post-1932 Thailand.

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Photographs except as noted by the author.

## Introduction

The morning of 24 June 1940, the Democracy Monument was opened at the centre of Rajadamnern Boulevard in Bangkok commemorating the inauguration of Constitutional Regime in Thailand. A clean sweep was made of the former tree-lined artery of the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard - from *Phan Bibhob-lila* Bridge to *Paan Fa-leelaat* Bridge, while either side of the boulevard was cleared of existing properties to create sites for a total of ten multi-story apartment building blocks and other modern edifices. One year after, when the group of apartment buildings was completed, their massive size and imposing façades obscured those surroundings at the back and at the same time gave the street a completely new appearance, producing an impression that the whole was the outcome of a unified design. Contrasted with surrounding neighbourhoods, the new scheme of Rajadamnern Boulevard was nothing but utopian. (Fig.1)

The new space of the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard was unlike anything seen in Bangkok before. This completely new urban space is particularly interesting in that it created a new symbolic configuration out of a pre-existing monument. A new layer having been laid over its old tree-lined fabric laid out in 1903 in the Fifth Reign, Rajadamnern Boulevard illustrated the efforts that the People's Party went to in transforming the monarch's monuments into a new symbol. As a result, the boulevard has become steeped in memories and meanings, so that subsequent debates amongst members of society reveal differing identities through the collective memory of certain monuments and places of the boulevard.

Fig.1 - The new space of the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard, photographed in 1946

For royalists, urban artefacts built by, or for, the monarch, carry reference to the monarchy, and are considered more significant than any created by the People's Party, regarded by royalists as their political opponents. Following the collapse of the People's Party after WWII, there has been an attempt to distort, deform, and destroy the symbols of the People's Party. In 1953, for example, the statue of the constitution at the centre of Democracy Monument was proposed to be replaced with the statue of King Prajadhipok – though this plan was not implemented. In another case, in 1987 Chalerm-Thai Theatre,

National Archive, Bangkok, (1) MT 1.1.3.3/1; See Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2004), p. 475-76.

one of the building blocks along the boulevard was demolished in order to create a clear vista to a royal temple situated behind.<sup>2</sup> The theatre was turned into a pocket park in which a monument of King Rama III was erected. In addition, recent controversial debates about the 2003 redevelopment plan of Rajadamnern Boulevard have also drawn attention to this very issue of historical prejudice. In a proposal to commemorate the 222nd anniversary of the Chakri Dynasty and of Bangkok city, the final report of the 2003 plan emphasised the boulevard's history; however, in spite of referring to two equally important periods of boulevard's history - the period between 1899 and 1907, when the boulevard was first built in the reign of King Chulalongkorn and the era of the People's Party who commissioned the remaking of the boulevard between 1939 and 1944 - the plan of the committee of 2003 launched an urban renewal programme that would have invoked a single continuous history of the boulevard instead, by referring only to the history of the monarchy.<sup>3</sup> In term of the architectural history of the boulevard, while the report provided ample information about works under the monarchy, it made no reference to works done under the People's Party or the history of the People's Party itself; the only mention the report made to the boulevard during the era of the People's Party was as follows:

In the reign of Rama VIII [1932-1944] there was an attempt to modernise and westernise the country. Buildings and governmental buildings were designed in Western Style, and neo-Thai Style [...] the buildings on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard were designed by Chittrasen (Miow) Aphaiwongs, who graduated from Ecole des Beaux Arts. [The buildings] were finished around 1940 [sic].<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, works built under the monarchy such as palaces, bridges, and temples were proposed for preservation, whereas those built under the People's Party were regarded

Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Khana Ratsadon Chalong Ratthathammanun: Prawattisat Kanmuang Lang 2475
Phan Sathapattayakan 'Amnat [Political History of Post 1932 through Architecture of Power] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2005), p.23-24.

The plan was proposed by the corroboration between National Economic and Social Development Broad and the Crown Property Bureau. See National Economic and Social Development Broad and the Crown Property Bureau, "Final Report Submittals: The Master Plan for Land Development: Rachadamnoen Road and Surrounding Area," (National Economic and Social Development Broad, March 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

as less important. Despite the survival of all building blocks on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard by now converted into retail stores, there was no reference in the report to their having been works of the People's Party. The 2003 Plan suggested renewal of Rajadamnern Boulevard in such a way that the identity of the People's Party was to be suppressed.

As time has passed, whatever might make one remember the People's Party through the physical fabric of the city has been transformed and recast in favour of the monarchy.

The identities the People's Party once created by means of the boulevard have gradually been blasted into oblivion; even though most of works of the People's Party still survived, what they commemorated has been deliberately forgotten.

For historians and other people, the works of the People's Party on Rajadamnern Boulevard not only epitomise the existence of the People's Party in urban history, but could also remind us of the People's Party's purpose in rebuilding the boulevard. After the 2003 Plan was approved by the Cabinet, the press criticised the plan as benefiting only the project's owner (the Crown Property Bureau) and foreign tourists, and neglecting the people who have long been settled around the boulevard. As the plan emphasised the continuity of the monarchical history, it proposed that the neighbourhoods within 1.5 kilometres from the boulevard would be displaced in order to restore spaces reserved only for palaces, temples, gardens, and a tourist zone. The press criticised this neglect of existing communities. A historian, Chatri Prakitnonthakan, added that the 2003 Plan not only ignored the people and their communities, but it could be seen as an attempt to delete, in particular, the history of the People's Party in the city. For him, this plan not only deemed the people and their community as insignificant,

Manager Online, http://www.manager.co.th/QOL/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9480000071908', (accessed on 06 April 2007); http://game.thaiset.com/thaiset/news/040247/new02.jsp , (accessed on 06 April 2007)

but so also the People's Party. Due to political instability, the 2003 Plan of Rajadamnern Boulevard redevelopment is not yet implemented. Although we do not know what the new development of the boulevard in future will be, we are certain that the boulevard's artefacts and spaces have been considered as an agency of identity for different groups in society. While for some it represents the identity of the monarchy, for others it stands for the People's Party and the common people. There are good reasons, therefore, to examine the redevelopment of the Rajadamnern Boulevard under the People's Party in order to understand why the present controversy has arisen.

Urban renewal that aimed to remake the existing physical fabric of the city in order to create a new identity for emerging regimes gave rise to the problems with which this study is concerned. Short of totally rebuilding a city, renewal is never sufficiently comprehensive to entirely displace traces and memories of the city left from the previous regimes. How could existing buildings and sites rich in memories from the past become the representations of the new era? How could urban renewal reconstruct a new history of an emerging nation-state out of the fabric of the existing city? How could the city's fabric be edited, reshaped, and redesigned to serve new political agendas? In a word, how could a new meaning be given to old structures and forms?

The time span of this covers the rapid political, cultural, and social transformation of Thailand between the coup of 1932, when the monarchy was overthrown, and 1957, when the monarchy was restored. The main features of this period were the establishment of a new constitution, the emergence of the People's Party, and the events of the World War II and its aftermath. The progressive nationalistic policies of the People's Party extended into many aspects of cultural and social life, including the city's development, and in particular, urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard. The thesis examines the

<sup>6</sup> Chatri Prakitnonthakan, http://www.asa.or.th/download/journal/4904/4904088.pdf, accessed on 18 July 2007

transformation of urban space and architecture on Rajadamnern Boulevard between 1932 and 1957. The focus is on the ways in which the new state inserted its identity, ideology, and propaganda into the city by remaking its fabric. The thesis investigates how the new state used urban space as a stage set to establish and display collective identity, as well as the way in which pre-existing urban forms were given new narratives. The aim is to show how Rajadamnern Boulevard, whose physical appearance and use changed over time, reconstituted meaning in the city during a period of political change.

# Chapter 1

# Founding a Myth

#### The coup of June 24th 1932

In the early hours of the morning of June 24th, 1932, the Siamese experienced the shock of a revolution for the first time. A group of middle level officials in the military and civil services seized control of the capital. Colonel Phraya Phahon-Pholpayuhasena proclaimed that the absolute monarchy had been overthrown and substituted by a constitutional government led by the People's Party. He gave vent to the feeling that the policy of the King Prajadhipok was unsatisfactory, leading the country to suffer from depression and unemployment. It was the time, therefore, to overthrow the absolute monarchy and adopt a new constitutional government. The king, though still being the head of the country, must be subjugated to a constitution. People were asked to be obedient and to leave the matter to the People's Party, who guaranteed to look after their welfare and give them employment and freedom. At the same time a similar message was sent to King Prajadhipok, who did not object to the demand for a constitution. On the next day the king signed the Provisional Constitution, which stated that the highest power in the land belongs to all people, marking the establishment of a constitutional King and thus putting an end to the absolute monarchy in Siam.

A revolution, whether political or cultural, is not only a physical activity, but also a concept. It can be seen as a pause dividing two periods. It can be considered as a new beginning. While whatever preceded it can be considered dead, progress becomes

The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 24, 1932, p. 26. The event of the 1932 revolution was described in Thawatt Mokarapong, History of the Thai Revolution: A Study in Political Behaviour (Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1972).

its motto. Revolution has been associated with the concepts of eradication, alteration, and replacement of one set of systems with another. Thus, it is rather to be expected that during each revolutionary period old buildings full of elements and symbols associated with the previous regime are often destroyed and replaced with new ones. Such 'revolutionary destruction' threatening to eat away the old regime is based on the assumption that the success of the new regime relied on its capacity to overcome the previous regime.

Like most revolutionaries, the People's Party considered its era as a new beginning; it foresaw the need to distinguish its era from the preceding period. Being the monarch's successor, the People's Party had to be able to prove that it had been worth overthrowing the absolute monarchy; it could not simply afford to be contented with whatever had been normal under the absolute monarchy. Lack of any progress could be used as a criticism of its claims to rule the country.² Between 1932 and 1937 the People's Party achieved two significant goals: first, the establishment of constitutional administration for the first time in Siam in 1932; second, the success of the 1937 treaty with foreign powers that brought a full sovereignty to Siam as a truly independent country. While the constitutional administration could be claimed a better system of rule than the absolute monarchy, the success in negotiating the treaty provided proof that the People's Party deserved the right to rule. Together these two achievements provided justification of the People's Party claim to be superior to the former ruler.

In effect, these two achievements had an important influence on propaganda produced by the state and in 1939 they culminated in impressive ceremonies on National Day, 24

June, when the official ceremonies of 'the laying of the foundation stone of Democracy

Monument' and of 'anointing the Treaties between Thailand and various Foreign Powers'

<sup>2</sup> Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford U. P, 1995), p. 105.

were held on the same occasion.<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram broadcast:

I am happy to be able to speak to you on such an important day, the 24th of June, a day which had been selected by the Thai race, as our National Day, and which also affords us the opportunity to celebrate the revision of the treaties with the various nations [...] The Treaty obligations which in the past prevented us from progressing in the way we desired, have now happily been brought to an end through the good fellowship of those countries which had such treaties with us. We have received the freedom of the Courts of law and may now decide cases concerning foreigners in this country without interference from the nations concerned. We are also enabled to fix our custom duties as we desire. We also promulgate laws to enable our countrymen to carry out trade in keeping with our status as independent country. Finally I wish to tell you that we have celebrated to say with a great deal of satisfaction the revision of our treaties.<sup>4</sup>

The celebration of National Day, 1939, started in the morning with a long procession of cars carrying high officials, and with the military parade along the Rajadamnern Boulevard, while in the evening various entertainments was held at Pramane ground. While Rajadamnern Boulevard was used as a centre for the celebration, it was planned to be remodelled. It was chosen as the site for the statue of Democracy, while both sides of the boulevard to be lined by a series of multi-storey modern building blocks. Democracy Monument was finished one year after and opened on National Day in 1940 (Fig. 2), and in following year, 1941, the completion of a total of ten apartment buildings was marked by celebrations (Fig. 3).

See the report of the event on National Day, 1939 can be found in *The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, June 26, 1939, p. 2-9.

<sup>4</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 4-6.

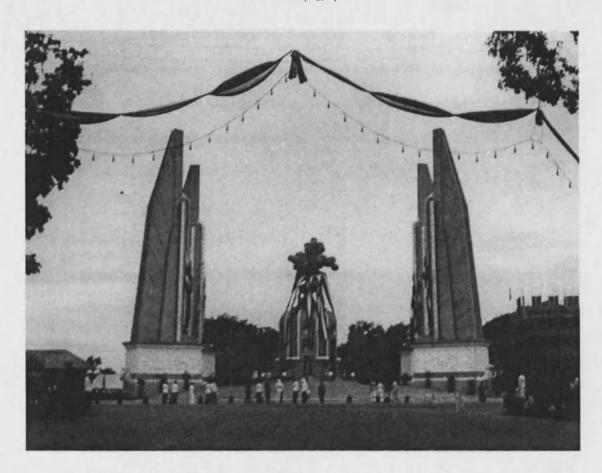


Fig. 2 - The opening celebration of Democracy Monument on National Day, 24 June 1940



Fig. 3 - A long procession of cars carrying high officials on the opening day of Rajadamnern Boulevard, 24 June 1941

According to Malinee Kumsupa in her book, there had appeared a previous scheme for the redevelopment of Rajadamnern Boulevard in July 1937.<sup>5</sup> But this scheme, rather different from what was actually done in 1941, indicates a different set of intentions and illustrates something about the way in which the People's Party had been thinking beforehand, about how the boulevard should be developed.

#### The Previous Scheme of July 1937

In the preliminary plan of July 1937, there are at least two indications that the committee which prepared the plan regarded it as having a continuity with the existing royalist development. In the first place, at the junction where the east-west axis of the Central Boulevard was traversed by the double arteries, the Rama VI Monument, not Democracy Monument, was to be placed on an oval roundabout (whose size is slightly larger than the executed one for Democracy Monument). The committee for the 1937 plan considered the location of the Rama VI Monument in the city in relation to two other monarchical monuments: Rama V Monument and the Memorial Bridge, the most significant architectural project built under the Seventh Reign (Fig. 4-7). 'In the future, it should have the street that continues from the Memorial Bridge [...] for this would make the monument of Rama VI much more distinguished, 6 the committee reported. If Rama VI Monument were implemented on that spot, this would give a significant meaning to Rajadamnern Boulevard. Being the meeting point between two streets, one running from the Rama V Monument, another from Memorial Bridge, the Rama VI Monument would complete a historical link between two existing monarchical memorials. And while there was a proposal to develop the whole plot of land between Phan Bibhob-lila Bridge and Tanao Road to turn it into a new compound of government buildings, it was also planned in harmony with the existing boulevard. Most of the trees along the boulevard were kept as they were, and where the street line affected the existing trees, new trees would be

Malinee Khumsupha, Anusawari Prachathippatai Kap Khwammai Thi Mong Mai Hen [Democracy Monument and Its Invisible Meaning] (Bangkok: Wiphasa, 2005), 110-11.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p. 110. (my translation)

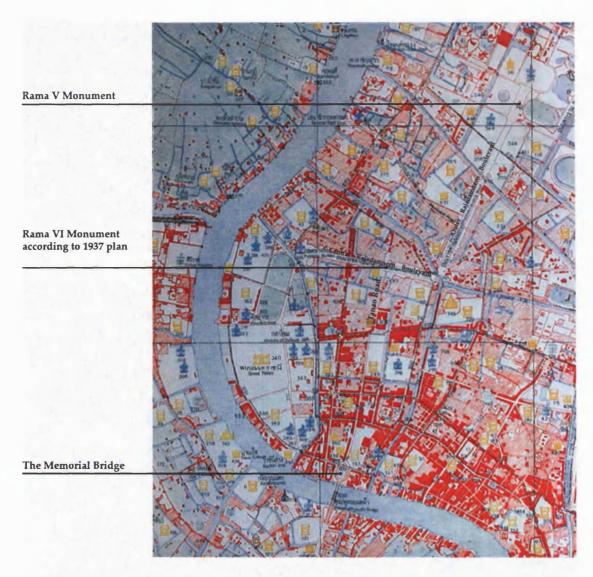


Fig. 4 - Map of Bangkok shows the positions of three monarch's monuments according to the 1937 plan for Rajadamnern Boulevard redevelopment.



Fig. 5 - The Rama V Monument at the Royal Plaza



Fig. 6 - The Statue of Rama VI by Corrado Ferroci. The Monument of Rama VI might be erected in this form, if the 1937 plan for Rajadamnern Boulevard were implemented.



Fig. 7 - The Stutue of Rama I erected at Memorial Bridge, built under the Seventh Reign



Dinsor Road running from the Memorial Bridge

Fig. 8 - The 1937 unimplemented plan for Rajadamnern Boulevard redevelopment

planted in line with the old trees. For example, at the position of the Rama VI Monument where the former street was turned into the oval roundabout, the existing trees were to be continued by new ones to go around the roundabout, and at the new development plot, between *Phan Bibhob-lila* Bridge and *Tanao* Road, the former trees in front of the site would be broken only to make way for access to the site (Fig. 8).

From the above concerns, it appears that the government wanted to keep new urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard in harmony with the existing royal urban landscape.

The proposal for the Rama VI Monument and the aim to preserve the tree-lined

boulevard point to the suggestion that the 1937 plan was designed in relation to the preexisting surroundings both in terms of meanings and urban forms. As the interconnection between the past and the present might be an important issue to the government, the concern of 'continuity with the past' affected the ways in which the 1937 plan for the redevelopment of Rajadamnern Boulevard was designed.

Before we turn to look at the implemented scheme of 1939, one might want to ask: why was the previous scheme aborted? A historian might attribute the rejection to the conflict between the monarch and the People's Party during the 1930s, particularly following Laung Phibun Songghram's rise to power in December 1938. At the very beginning of his regime, Phibun and his government had tried in many ways to diminish the power of the monarchy, for example, by the execution of a number of royalists who were considered as Phibun's major adversaries, by the state's policies for reducing the prestige and authority of the monarchy, and by some actions directed against the monarch such as the prohibition the display of pictures of ex-King Prajadhipok, and by suing him for misuse of crown property. Such moves by Phibun against the monarchy has been emphasised in the accounts of post 1932 architecture.

In his book *Politics and Society in Architecture*, Chatri Prakitnontakan suggests that Phibun's regime between 1938 and 1944 used modern architecture to turn against the monarchy. He suggests that the style of post-1932 architecture, which is simple, was evidently an attempt to throw out the ornaments and other decorative motifs used by the ruling monarch; symbolic motifs which were always elaborated with symbolic iconographies representing more or less about the king were considered as dysfunctional elements. For Chatri, the absence of ornaments in the new architecture built under the People's Party was a deliberate attempt to represent the 'equality of rights,' or 'a classless

society'. But while Chatri's interpretation relates to changes in architecture after 1932, he took no account of urban form and, none in particular, of the transformation on Rajadamnern Boulevard.

In 2005, Malinee Khumsupha in her book *Democracy Monument and Its Invisible Meanings* interpreted the project of Democracy Monument by making use of the following report from the Newspaper *Prachachart*, about the new road cut from the Memorial Bridge to Democracy Monument.

The road [...] that was newly cut from the Memorial Bridge, [...] to meet
Rajadamnern Boulevard at Saphantugdin Intersection means that since the
foundation of the capital, Siam has continually progressed until the country
has a constitutional system, [...] so this road has to be named the road toward
constitution.<sup>8</sup>

From this account, Malinee suggested that 'there were attempts to create continuity with the past through built works built in the city after the change of ruling system.'9

For her, the proposal of the Democracy Monument and urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard under the People's Party was considered as a continuation of King

Chulalongkorn's project in urban development. The idea that the urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard was in continuity from the previous regime actually can be found in the Prime Minister's speech of the opening day of Rajadamnern Boulevard in 1941. Prime Minister Phibul said:

For Rajadamnern Boulevard, King Chulalongkorn wanted to create a wide artery, along which governmental buildings and department stores would be lined, as found in civilised countries. But his intention is not yet achieved, for since the laying of the boulevard in 1899, no development on the boulevard was made

Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2004), p. 299-323.

As quoted in Khumsupha, Anusawari Prachathippatai Kap Khwammai Thi Mong Mai Hen [Democracy Monument and Its Invisible Meaning], p. 108. (my translation)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (my translation)

any further. In 1939, the government of the Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram considered that this was the proper time to maintain and develop the city of Bangkok [...] in the era that the ruling system is Constitutionalism; for this reason, urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard of King Chulalongkorn is to be implemented in order to create a modern city planning and to establish a commercial zone in the centre of the city.<sup>10</sup>

But such account does not correspond to what was built on the boulevard in 1941. The new appearance of the boulevard self-evidently broke with the previous royalist model of the city. This lack of correspondence between what was actually done to the boulevard and what were said and written about it, leaves us with the question of why the harmonious scheme of 1937 was changed into a more radical plan of 1941 unanswered; for answers, we would do better to turn to other artefacts produced in relation to urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard. If we return to the two major achievements of the People's Party, the establishment of constitutionalism and the success in the Treaty negotiation with Foreign Powers, we can see various artefacts produced to celebrate those themes, and whose purposes and reasons for existence may inform us what was really thought about the boulevard as well.

# **Making Democracy Visible**

Amongst the artefacts on Rajadamnern Boulevard, the most traditional, and therefore the most unusual, is the figure of 'the constitution on bowls' at the centre of Democracy Monument. While most constructions on the boulevard were modern in appearance, the centrepiece, by contrast, appeared in an antique form. As the centre of attraction, the design of the statue is symbolic of the introduction of the Constitutional regime. It is worth, therefore, examining how the figure of the constitution came into existence: why should the design of the constitution be made in the first place, in a particular form

<sup>10</sup> 





Fig. 9, 10 - The document of the constitution was produced firstly for the ceremony in December 1932 (left), yet eight years later similar form of the constitution was enlarged into the centrepiece of Democracy Monument (right).

and why should the figure of constitution be applied to the design of the Democracy Monument? By doing this, I will compare the figures of the constitution as it first appeared in 10 December 1932 Ceremony and the 1940 version as it appears in the centrepiece of Democracy Monument (Fig. 9, 10). Although they appeared in similar forms of 'the constitution on bowls,' there were differences in the thinking behind the two artefacts. To understand these ideas we need to examine how the forms of the constitution came into existence and the ways they were made to attract public notice.

#### 10 December 1932 Ceremony

After the coup on 24 June 1932, a Provisional Constitution was used temporarily, while the permanent constitution was being drafted. The People's Party planned to promulgate it at the ceremony in December when the king would hand over the constitution to the representatives of the people. The figure of the 'Constitution on bowls' was one of the new inventions for the ceremony. What was peculiar about the ceremony was that despite being acknowledged as one of the most significant events in modern Siamese history, the ceremony was conducted in accordance with ancient customs.

The majestic scene was set in the Throne Hall where people participating in the ceremony were dressed in royal uniforms: the king was in his great crown for the first time after his coronation, while all members of the Assembly were in grand full dress in the robes of the Order of *Chula Chom Klao*, which was the most elaborated form of Court dress in Siam at the time. The royal astrologers were asked to choose the most auspicious moment for promulgating the constitution when the king began affixing his signature to the document. As soon as His Majesty had signed the constitution, the gong was sounded and a blare of music from conch shells and ancient instruments announced that the ceremony had reached its culminating point. The king then handed the constitution to the President of the Assembly of the People's Representatives, after which the Royal Scribe proclaimed that National Constitution had been handed to the people. The volume of the constitution was then placed upon a traditional double-tiered bowl standing on a golden bench exactly under the dome of the Throne Hall, accompanied by two high-ranking officials on either side of the bench. <sup>11</sup>

The document of the constitution was a novelty - there was no precedent of this kind of document in Siam's history - but, like the ceremony, the document was made in apparently traditional manner. It had been inscribed on strips of bamboo and was covered with black lacquered blinding with the edges of the document also lacquered. The actual size of the document is 6 inches wide, 18 inches long and about 11 1/2 inches deep, on which the golden emblem of the Garuda was inscribed both the front and back covers. It looks like more the ancient Scripture than a modern document. Its conventional appearances expressed resistance to its content which was otherwise wholly modern. Accordingly, with the monarchical ritual of the ceremony and the antique appearance of the document of the constitution, the novelty of the constitution was obscured.

<sup>11</sup> The 10 December 1932 ceremony was reported in *The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, December 12, 1932, p.3.

Even though the ceremony was held in collaboration between the monarchy and the 1932 promoter, its significance to each group was not necessarily the same. For the monarchy, on the one hand, the ceremony represented the grant by the king of the constitution to the representatives of the people. This ceremonial act invented a story that a sovereign power had belonged to the king before and he gave it to the people of Siam.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, this ceremony had a different meaning to the promoters of the 1932 constitution. Nidhi Aeusrivongse has suggested that by placing the constitution in a bowl, the meaning of the ceremony was changed. According to Nidhi in Siamese tradition, if a king grants a thing to someone, it is not necessary for it to be received with a bowl, but if a thing were presented to the king, it must be put on a bowl. During the ceremony, the constitution was put on the bowl and the people's representative carried it to the king, who then signed it as a confirmation that he agreed to relinquish his power and to be subjugated to the constitutional law. Thus, this meant, as Nidhi argued, that the constitution came from the bottom (people) to the top, (the king). 13 By using 'the bowl' supporting the constitution, it represents the civil right that belongs to the people, no longer to the king. According to this interpretation, the presence of the bowls was necessary to how the People's Party presented the constitution to the public.

Nevertheless, despite the care with which the ceremony was staged, it aroused little public interest. It has been said that people had to be rounded up to cheer outside the Throne Hall. One of the 1932 promoters later complained about the public lack of interest in the new system of the administration that 'perhaps people would have been more enthusiastic if the promoters had laid on entertainment and noodle soup.' This fact showed that in the early period of Constitutionalism, the People's Party failed to generate any enthusiasm about the new ruling system. This contributed to other difficulties for the

<sup>12</sup> Nidhi Aeusrivongse, Chat Thai, Mu'ang Thai Baeprian Lae Anusawari: Waduai Watthanatham Rat Lae Rupkan Chitsamnu'k (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2547 [2004]).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.107

<sup>14</sup> Judith A. Stowe, Siam Becomes Thailand (London: Hurst, 1991), p.34.

People's Party in building up the constitutionalism.

The first problem in establishing constitutionalism was the uneducated. There are many tales of misunderstandings about 'Democracy' and the 'Constitution,' making it apparent that for many people the meanings of these two words that the People's Party had tried to promote were far from recognised. One case was of two Siamese peasants who thought that the constitution of which he heard so much must be the new-born son of King Prajadhipok<sup>15</sup>; while another peasant believed that 'Constitution' was a son of the Prime Minister Phraya Phahon-Pholpayuhasena. Another case was the man who had supposed that democracy offered all people equal rights to others' properties; he then argued about this point when he was found entering the home of the others without permission. And the problem went from bad to worse when participation in elections did not favour the Constitutional Government as much as it had been hoped.

Of all difficulties in building up constitutionalism, the most crucial was outright rebellion. There were attempts to overthrow the Constitutional Government to turn the country back to the absolute monarchy. In October 1933, a rebellion led by Prince Boworadet, the ex-minister of war in the cabinet of King Prajadhipok, marched from northeast of the country to the suburbs of Bangkok, calling on the government to resign immediately or be removed by force. The government ignored the ultimatum and instead took steps to defend the capital. These resulted in three days civil war between the rebels and the government troops, causing many casualties and great damage. Although in the end the government gained firm control of the state, the fear of attempts to return to the old system of absolutism pre-occupied the government from then on. The royalist rebellion 'gave a sense of urgency' to the government<sup>17</sup>, as immediately after the counter

<sup>15</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, February 1, 1939, p. 13., See also David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short Story (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> Khumsupha, Anusawari Prachathippatai Kap Khwammai Thi Mong Mai Hen [Democracy Monument and Its Invisible Meaning], p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> see Scot Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 110.

revolution, on 5 November 1933, the Act for the Protection of the Constitution was promulgated, followed by the establishment of special courts to try those accused of insurrection.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, the government took the problems of misconception of the constitution amongst the uneducated and the fear of losing political authority very seriously, for, as Scot Barmé observes, 'while the government sought to fortify its position with the Act, it also attempted to popularize the constitution through the establishment of a new body known as the Association of the Constitution.'19 On 14 December 1933, the Association was established, whose basic purposes were to 'support the Constitution of Siam, [...] promote co-operation in the ranks of the people, [and to] assist the Government and people in securing progress for the nation [...] according to the channel of the Constitution'.20 Fundamental education was proposed throughout the country, including the establishment of University of Moral and Political Sciences in 1936 in Bangkok. It was 'proposed that all school teachers [were to] require their students to commit the constitution to memory'21, while government officers were sent out to several towns to explain the change in administration to the people.<sup>22</sup> Besides, from 1932 onward, the Constitution Fair was held regularly each year as the chief social event at several parks throughout Bangkok, and people were allowed to be off work to enjoy during the fair. Through the grounding in education, the fair, and the state's advertising, a series of measures to promote the constitution was effected throughout the country.

But, while the urban population might have 'understood the rational, legal notion of a constitution, the vast majority of the people did not.'<sup>23</sup> The misconception about

Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 248.

Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, December 14, 1933.

Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity, p. 107.

The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, July 20, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity, p. 111.

constitutionalism was mainly because the people still had a vivid memory of the monarch as their ruler, and as in the case of two peasants mentioned earlier to make the constitution known to them 'as a practical code defining the relationship between the people and the state'<sup>24</sup> was hard to achieve. The Association of the Constitution quickly realised that if they were to promote the constitution to the people, it had to be made more accessible to them.

While the rational approach was through education, the People's Party also promoted the constitution by creating a myth about it. After 1933, three solutions were developed for making the constitution better known. First of all, the constitution was held to promise a better society in which happiness, wealth, and progress were the benefits that people would gain. These claims recurred in various kinds of state propaganda. In the late 1930, for example, the images of constitution were publicised with slogans like 'the constitution leads the country to the future.' The emphasis on the significance of a constitution was to make people believe that only this system of rule could bring such benefits. And there seemed no better way to pursue this argument than to make the old administration seemed obsolete when compared with constitutionalism. Broadcast on National Day of June 24th 1939, Prime Minister Phibul stated:

In days gone by the country was ruled by a Monarch [...] the whole power rested in the hand of the Monarch who had to be satisfied that the people were obeying his injunctions. [...] Working plans issued by such an individual naturally suffered to a certain extent because they lacked minute consideration and as a consequence the people and the country suffered, this leading in the first instance to unrest and ultimately to disorders.

Apart from this the system of absolute monarchy was not only obsolete but was prejudicial to the people, because it was not based on the principle of

<sup>24</sup> Ibio

<sup>25</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, December 2, 1932, p. 31.

benefiting the people, [...] people began to realize that such an administration enables neither progress nor advance for the people themselves. [...]

We decided on the June 24th, B.E. 2475 [1932], not to proceed any longer the old route, but to go on to a new one, because the old did not lead to progress but we had hopes that the new route would. <sup>26</sup>

He then differentiated the two systems even further by comparing the budget spending between the two systems.

If you look at the expenditure side of the Budget for the year B.E.2474 [1931], before the change in administration was effected, you will find that the total amount was about Tcs. 92,354,706. In B.E. 2481 [1938] under the new régime the total expenditure allotted for the development of our country in all directions has been raised to about Tcs. 138,877,492 – this being more than Tcs. 46,522,786 as compared with B.E. 2474. It must also be emphasized that the Government in B.E.2475 had reduced certain forms of taxation by half, and had abolished other forms of taxation. This was done with a view to lightening the burden of the people [...] it is not possible to achieve real advancement and progress [...] if we had continued under the old form of administration. <sup>27</sup>

The second myth-creating task was to make people believe that the constitution was an object itself carrying power. It had been suggested that this was done in order to divert attention from the monarch, hoping that this would 'turn the loyalty of people from a monarch to the constitution'.<sup>28</sup> The idea to value the constitution as a sacred entity recurred in a number of state ceremonies. In August 1934, for example, the Association of the Constitution organised a ceremony 'which saw the document being ritually linked to the religious domain in Thai culture'<sup>29</sup>, as Scot Barmé wrote: 'The Regent

<sup>26</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 5.

Batson, The End of Absolute Monarchy in Siam, p. 261.

<sup>29</sup> Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity, p.111.

anointed miniature copies of the Constitution for each of the 70 Changwads [towns], while the assemblymen representing the Changwads [towns] were stationed behind their respective copies as monks chanted religious stanzas, accompanied by a fanfare of musical instruments and the beating of gongs.'30 Another case appeared four months later, as Sir John Crosby witnessed:

In a pavilion set apart for a religious service to be held subsequently, I observed that three altars had been erected. One was dedicated to the Buddha, whose statue rose above it, whilst another was for the King and was in conformity with the time-honoured custom, surmounted by a portrait of His Majesty. The third altar was that of the Constitution, a miniature copy of which was placed upon it; this altar, the largest of the three, occupied the centre of the stage, the others being relegated to the background, and I was surprised to find the same offerings of candles and of flowers had been arranged in front of it. In other words, semi-divine honours were being paid to the Constitution, in the hope, presumably, that the simple-minded Siamese would be induced to regard it as a real entity upon which he could lavish some personal devotion which he had hitherto for the monarch of the land.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, the Association of the Constitution promoted the constitution not as a legal document, but as the powerful fetish whose significance was cared for in an elaborated metaphor as equivalent to the importance of the Buddha and the monarch. To express respect for the constitution became compulsory for people at large, and, in particular, for those who were directed by the government's subject such as the military, members of the National Assembly, and political prisoners.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the government was requested by a number of provincial representatives from the National Assembly to produce copies of the constitution, so that their constituents could partake in locally organised

30 Ibio

<sup>31</sup> Great Britain, Foreign Office, F.O. 371/19377, 11 December 1934; as quoted in Ibid., p.112.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.112-13.

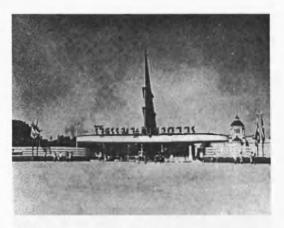




Fig 11, 12 - One of the pavilions in the Constitution Fair carried the slogan 'Constitution must be stable' (left), while in another pavilion, where the constitution's figure was housed, two military cadets stood guarding nearby (below).

ceremonies. While this approach might seem perverse, the popularity of it proved that this was an acceptable way of promoting constitutionalism.

The third approach to promoting the constitution was to present it as a precious thing. Although the royal ceremony in December 1932, to some degree, had made the constitution seem precious, at no time was it more apparent than in 1933, when the counter-revolution made the People's Party give the constitution special protection. Immediately after the counter-revolution, the idea was suggested in the first state's political play, *Luk Rathathamnun* [Child of the Constitution]. Deliberately referring to the counter-revolution, the play showed the honour of the victorious military forces and called on the audience to be willing to make any sacrifice for the constitution.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, one of the pavilions in the Constitution fair carried the slogan 'Constitution must be stable' and also in another pavilion, where the constitution's figure was housed, two military cadets stood guarding nearby (Fig. 11, 12). In addition, in 1936



Fig. 13 - The Laksi Monument of 1936 built in the form of the constitution to commemorate the seventeen militaries and policemen who lost their lives in the 1933 counter-revolution.

the government built a monument in the form of the constitution to commemorate the seventeen military and policemen who lost their lives in the 1933 counter-revolution. The monument was built at *Lak Si* district, exactly where the civil war had taken place (Fig. 13). Its main purpose was to warn of the consequences of attempts to re-establish the old system of absolute regime. With illustrations of the atrocities in the civil war at the moment proceeding in Spain, the booklet issued as a souvenir on the opening day of the monument gives a summary as follows:

This monument to the seventeen brave military and policemen [...] should not, in my own sincere opinion, have been erected at all because it is a monument put up after the saddest of all events – in that the Thai, through a difference of opinion, laid hold of weapons to slay one another. Such an event has indeed done much damage to the nation and country, it is an event which I greatly abhor. But there is another feeling brought about at seeing this monument, for we have had

good order, peace and happiness for the last three years. I therefore in the name of all the fighting forces, and I trust that I am also voicing the real feelings of all those honourable guests of to-day, declare that we are very delighted indeed to be able to show our gratitude to these seventeen brave men who sacrificed their lives for the benefit of the nation.<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, the fear of losing political authority made the People's Party put special emphasis on the constitution's need for protection, and if necessary, personal sacrifice.

Through these three approaches to promoting the constitution, the People's Party made use of the form of the constitution in the ceremony and turned it into a symbol. Yet, while the figures of the constitution that had been repeated in different places resembled that of the original version of the 1932 ceremony, they were conceived and used with a new set of ideas. If the original version was conceived in terms of tradition, its later versions were the opposite. The progress, the fetish, and the precious were new conceptions that arose out of the particular situation when the People's Party founded itself in a state of urgency having to promote constitutionalism.

A far more complex version of the constitution monument was completed four years later in 1940 at the centre of Rajadamnern Boulevard; however, the period between 1937 and 1941 (that is to say, between Lak Si Monument and Democracy Monument) was the time of important developments in the state's foreign policy, with the Treaty negotiations with Western powers, confirming Siam's complete sovereignty, and these successes affected the design of both the monument and the boulevard. We should briefly look at the relationship between Thailand and Western powers, and, in particular, Siam's territorial dispute with France, in order to understand its impact on the design of the new Rajadamnern Boulevard.

34

The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, October 15, 1936, p. 18.

### Recovering the lost territories: Remaking the boulevard.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Siam, in the reign of Rama V, had lost some territories to France, and further in 1904 and 1907, Siam had ceded two enclaves west of the Mekong River and the full control of that water way to France. The lost territories were treated by the People's Party as some of the most tragic events in Siamese history - a mark of Siam's failure to gain complete autonomy. For the People's Party, to recover the lost territories was crucial for the country's independence. Apart from promoting constitutionalism, this issue became another urgent task for the People's Party after the revolution, and it had an influence on a variety of artefacts produced by the state during that time.

### 1935-36 Maps

Between 1935 and 1936, the Ministry of Defence published a series of maps and distributed them to high schools and military colleges. This series of maps was studied by Thongchai Winichakul in his book: Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, hence I will only summarise his account here. Thongchai observed that the series of maps produced between 1935-36 was a creation out of the situation when the People's Party concerned with calling for the return of the lost territory. One map in this series depicts the movement of Thai immigration from ancient to modern times (Fig. 14). It shows that the Thai race was originated from *Antai* Mountain in the south of China, and since Thais were forced by the Chinese, they then moved southward to the Golden Peninsula where Thailand is nowadays. Other maps show in chronological order the boundaries of the Thai kingdom in several important periods, from *Nanchao* era in A.D.

Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 150-56.



Fig. 14 - A map shows movement of Thais from Ancient to Modern Times





Fig.15 - Maps of Kingdon of Naochao, Kingdom of Sukhothai, Kingdon of Ayuddhya, and Kingdom of Thonburi.

Fig. 16 - 'History of Thailand's Boundary.' A Map summarises 'the lost territories,' which Siam had been forced to cede to Foreign Powers from the eighteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century. In this map, each lost territory was marked by different colours with the numbers 1 -8 assigned to each of the eight losses. For example, the area of orange colour, no. 6, representing the Lao regions on the right bank of the Mekhong, opposite Laung Prabang and Champasak, were ceded to France in 1904.

in the past was 'non-bounded'<sup>36</sup> – there was no boundary between countries until the nineteenth century – the maps shows the 'assumed territories' of what Thai Kingdom had once been in the maps and how its territories had changed from time to time as a result of foreign interventions. This same message was concluded in another map summarising 'the lost territories,' which Siam had been forced to cede to Indo-China, Burma, and Malaya from the eighteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century when the country was threatened by Western Powers (Fig. 16). This series of maps gave the message that Thai kingdom had faced foreign threats from time to time, yet the Thai kingdom was still an independent state because heroic kings were capable of fighting back for the realm. The real purpose of the maps was not for historical geographical study, but rather to arouse the awareness of the threat from Western Powers. Accordingly, what should be a map for 'a historical geography' turned out to be, as Thongchai put it, a map of historical consciousness of 'the origin and life of the nation'. The nonexistent

In his book Siam Mapped, Thongchai stated that the concepts of national sovereignty and boundary were introduced to Siam and other Southeast Asia's countries by the Western powers in the nineteenth century. Before that time, every kingdom was non-bounded. Rulers could regard their limit of kingdom through their people who shared the languages, customs, and laws, rather than by territorial integrity. Different groups of people belonged to each authority might go across boundaries without the necessity of acknowledging the division. Although vast areas of forests and mountains were used to be buffer areas in the past, there was no particular attempt to draw a line to divide exactly which area belonged to which kingdom. In this respect, there was no territory of Thai kingdom as in 1935-1936 maps. See Ibid.

territory in the past was depicted in the light of present purposes.<sup>37</sup> Referring to the lost territories, Prime Minister Phibun once broadcasted a rousing call to the armed forced to remember 'the obligatory cession of what was once our territory' by standing ready to repel any foreign invasion.

#### **National Plays**

While such a strategy in 1935-36 maps of the country's sovereignty was available only to students and armies, a more popular and intriguing method of arousing the public's awareness of national independence was through a literary construct. Similar to 1935-1936 Maps, two new recurrent themes in national plays were created to promote a campaign to restore the national sovereignty and to recover the lost territory. One was the 'pan-Thai' theme. Previously themes in Thai plays had centred on the characters of people in the capital and related towns, yet once Thailand was acknowledged to cover not only Siam and Laos, but also areas nearby frontiers, historical plays then shifted to cover stories of those regions. A historical narrative of various small regions was rapidly researched, or sometimes invented, in order to connect rural histories with that of the capital. Yet, as several regions did not necessarily share the same history with Bangkok, historical plays then shifted to the 'pan-Thai' as a more suitable theme. Based on the example of the Austrian Anschluss, which provided a new idea of territorial unity based on race, language, and culture, the 'pan-Thai' theme emphasises the rich cultural heritage of Thailand shared by the vast family of *Tai*-speaking people.<sup>38</sup> This new theme made it possible for the People's Party to create a sense of belonging in those remote regions. Another theme, the struggle for independence, was also connected to the pan-Thai theme, but focused particularly on stories of heroes. In this theme, stories of heroic Thai kings, who exceptionally succeeded in declaring the state's independence from various regions in different periods of times, were adopted as the main content for national

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.150-56.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, A History of Thailand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 132.

Fig 17 - An Illustration in heroic play 'Chadok.' c.1940-2. The theme of heroic kings declared independent did much to arouse spirit of the people to recover 'the lost territories.'



Fig. 18, 19 - Figures of war heroes and soldiers were amongst the most favourite entries in art competitions during the 1930s.

plays. The stories always started with the suffering the Thai people faced because of foreign invasions, and showed how a heroic king restored the country's independence. Again, like the 1935-36 maps, the main message of the plays was to arouse the spirit of the people to recover the lost territories negotiations for which the People's Party was involved in at this moment. One of the scripts of the plays shows: 'We must recover our Independence. Independence is the heart of our life. For any *Prathet* [nation] without independence, people of that *Prathet* [nation] are not human.'<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 17)

Furthermore, the theme of the struggle for independence also became a popular theme in art and monument building activity. In 1937, the first art competition took place at the *Saranromya* Palace, students and staff from the Arts and Crafts School and the School of Fine Arts submitted their works to the exhibition. The theme of this art competition was

Luang Wichitwathakan, Wichitsan [Selected Works of Luang Wichitwathakan], 5 vols. (Bangkok: Mongkol Printing, 1965-66).; as quoted in Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, p. 157.



Fig. 20 - A sketch for the monument of heroic King Taksin, proposed by Corrado Feroci in 1939.

'the theme of Constitution,' to which many art works expressed a patriotic feeling. The first prize, for example, was awarded to a painting of a Thai angel carrying the nation's map and the Constitution, while a sculpture of war heroes was the most popular work in the competition.<sup>40</sup> (Fig.18, 19)

## On the Monument

With regard to the lost territories, the people's party planned to build a series of monuments for historical heroes of Thai kingdoms. In October 1939, it proposed to build a series of monuments for eight heroic Thai kings. Some heroes existed in history; others appeared only in oral tradition, or mythology (Fig. 20). Yet whatever their origins, the monument's proposals were aimed at gathering those heroes in the same category of Thai historical kings. It was an attempt to build up a continuity of the country from the past to the present though their heroes.

<sup>40</sup> Apinan Poshyananda, Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Singapore: Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1992), p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, (3) ST. 0201.57/5

However, another purpose of the monument was more striking. Just like the 1935-36 maps and the heroic plays, the real purpose of the proposal for the monument was in relation to the anti-colonial theme and this was expressed in the criteria of selection for the subjects of monument, of which there were three: First of all, a heroic king should have declared the independence of the state; second, a heroic king had expanded the realm, and third, a heroic king should have brought progress and prosperity to the country. <sup>42</sup> Such criteria, of course, could also be applied not only to those heroes in the past, but also to the present. The merits of declaring independence, expanding the country territory, and bring prosperity were precisely the People's Party own claim for itself. In June 1940, France surrendered to Germany; the event gave Thailand an opportunity to readjust the border with French Indo- China, allowing the country to gain back the lost territories: two enclaves on Thailand side opposite Luang Prabang in Laos, and Pakse in Cambodia were returned to Thailand. The People's Party met perfectly well all the same criteria as the monuments.

The gradual success in negotiating the revision of the treaty with the Western powers since 7 December 1937 was a watershed in Thai politics. And it was this idea of revising all Siam's foreign treaties to remove all lingering traces of Western domination that also dominated the theme of most artefacts produced by the People's Party since 1937.

To return to the question of why the 1937 plan of Rajadamnern Boulevard was rejected in favour of a more radical plan of 1941, while there is no direct evidence for the cause of the alteration, through our investigation of various other artefacts produced by the state from 1932 up to 1941, we see two themes – making democracy visible and recovering the lost territories - used repeatedly. And here, in the urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard - that is to say in the reconstruction of artefacts in the city - we can see further representation of those two same themes.

42

Before 1938 there had been no proposal for Democracy Monument, only the monument for Rama VI. While it was understandable to propose Rama VI Monument, as such a monarch was the source of inspiration for building up nationalism, to build a monument to him, particularly on the boulevard that would complete a historical link of three monarch's memorials in a row was, perhaps, not what the People's Party in the late 1930s wanted to be known for. The Monument of Democracy, proposed in 1939 at nearly the same time of those of heroes of Thai Kingdom, was rather a more radical choice. The success in Treaty negotiation made the People's Party consider itself as one of the heroes of Thai kingdom who deserved the monument. For while it had proposed monument for past monarchical heroes, it planned the Democracy Monument to commemorate its own successes. In this respect, the People's Party was concerned to present itself in the tradition of the heroes of the Thai kingdom, as a ruler who sought to extend boundary and establish independence of Thai people. Democracy Monument was then not only built to commemorate the arrival of the constitutional administration for the first time in Thailand, or to show the achievement of the People's Party in protecting the constitution against royalist counter-revolution, but, like the other artefacts, it also represented the ambitions for political independence that dominated the party's policies in 1937-41. And then when the lost territory was eventually returned to Thailand in 1940, this success further inspired the People's Party to remodel Rajadamnern Boulevard. Since the loss of territory was a former monarch's mistake, retrieving them offered the chance for the People's Party to prove itself a better successor. Rajadamnern Boulevard previously represented the power of King Chulalongkorn who, however, lost territories to Western Powers, so the success of the People's Party in recovering these losses could not be represented with the same urban form. The boulevard, which would be a setting for the 'Democracy Monument' for the People's Party, then, required a new character that must be distinct from the existing street, associated with the monarchy.

# Chapter 2

## The Transformation of Rajadamnern Boulevard, 1939-41

Urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard took place against awareness of the risk of war. When the foundation stone of Democracy Monument was laid in June 1939, the proposal for a new development on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard had not yet been approved. In the Annual Cabinet Meeting of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939, People's Representative Arun Tongputchachot asked Minister of Finance Pridi Phanomyong whether the government should carry out the new development at all as the international situation was so uncertain. Pridi Phanomyong, who then also directed the Crown Property Bureau, defended the project arguing that the government should undoubtedly carry it through as it could bring many benefits to the country. First of all, he explained, the project would be financed by the Crown Property Bureau; the government would not pay. Second, a new development would bring benefit to all groups of people; for example, ordinary people would get opportunities to own properties as well as a chance of earning a livelihood, whereas the Crown Property Bureau could also get more income from rent fees, better than keeping moneys in the bank for a low-rate interest. Third, the new development could help many construction industries such as Siam Cement Company, which had been recently established, to stay in business. For these reasons, the project should be put forward as part of the policy of economic reforms, Pridi continued. Convinced of his arguments, the Parliament approved the reconstruction of Rajadamnern Boulevard on 3 October 1939.1

As architects for the new project, the People's Party decided to make use only of people who had been trained abroad, rather than ones with experience of designing traditional

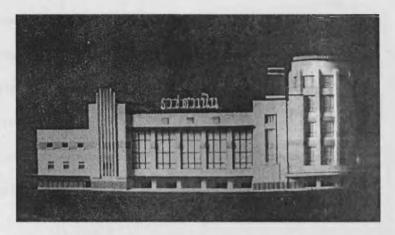
National Archive, Bangkok, Ngor 3. SR. 2481[1938]/28: Annual Cabinet Meeting of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939.

buildings. Of all people who were involved in the project, Miow Aphaiwongs (1905-1963 – he took the name Chittrasen Aphaiwongs in his later life), an Ecole des Beaux Arts trained architect, played the most significant role in designing urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard. Miow Aphaiwongs was only thirty-four when he was commissioned. Little is known about his background. Nor is it clear how he got the job, except that his brother, Khuang Aphaiwongs, had been involved with the 1932 Promoters, and the fact that he had direct personal contact with the Prime Minister Phibun and other members of the People's Party dating back to their student days in Paris. So it has been supposed the reason for the commission was due to his close relationship with the leaders of the People's Party.<sup>2</sup> Besides, there were also good reasons to choose Miow as an architect of the boulevard because of his architectural skill. By 1939, Miow had already acquired a reputation as the assistant of Saroj Ratananimanka (1895-1950) in designing the General Post Office at Bangrak (1935-1939), and Miow's architectural drawings for this building were praised as 'exquisite.'3 This debut led to his appointment as principal architect for the design of the headquarters building of the University of Moral and Political Sciences (1935-1936). With his growing reputation, he became the favourite (though not particularly experienced) architect of the People's Party who then appointed him chief architect of the Crown Property Bureau, responsible for rebuilding the boulevard. The commission allowed him not only to establish the most important work in his biography, but also to carry out the most radical and extensive change so far seen to Bangkok's topography.

Although it is recorded that Miow was the architect, his direct involvement with the design for the boulevard has never been conclusive. Neither his works of the boulevard, nor its architecture are satisfactorily described. Many books and articles have been written about Democracy Monument – not designed by him, but by another Beaux-

Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Thammasat University Archive Bulletin 10 (June 2006-May 2007): p. 28.

Thammasat University Archives, Report No. 3/2478, "Restoration of the University's Headquarters," 3 May 1935, p.1; Quoted in Ibid.: p. 24.



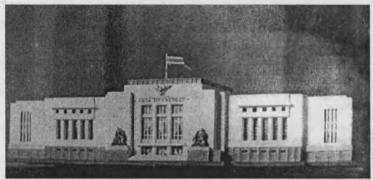


Fig. 21, 22 - The models of Rajadamnern Boulevard buildings.

Arts trained architect, Pum Malakul and the Italian Artist Corrado Ferroci (1892-1962) who is today chiefly remembered for having designed a base-relief of the Democracy Monument, but very little discussion touches upon the boulevard or the buildings along it. The only contemporary account, according to Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura, states that the boulevard's buildings were designed in Neo-Plastic style.<sup>4</sup>

This lack of discussion about the change of the boulevard during the period of the People's Party may have been due to the lack of evidence. While a number of state documents relating to architectural projects under the People's Party have been stored at the National Archive, Bangkok, very little evidence exists there about the boulevard. There is correspondence between the Department of Fine Arts and the Crown Property Bureau about models for seven of the buildings along the boulevard, cast in plaster by the Fine Art Department at the request of the Crown Property Bureau, but pictures of

<sup>4</sup> Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura and others, Development of Contemporary Thai Architecture: Past, Present and Future (Bangkok: Architectural Association Thailand, 1993), p. 51.

only the models of the theatre and the bank survive.<sup>5</sup> (Fig.21, 22) However, the records of the Crown Property Bureau to which I have had access provide an alternative source of documents for the study of the boulevard. The records are of the expropriation of lands on Rajadamnern Boulevard, where the former residences before the reconstruction were listed, and of correspondence between the Crown Property Bureau and tenants of about ten of the new apartment buildings blocks.

This chapter draws primarily upon the records of the Crown Property Bureau for recounting the transformation of Rajadamnern Boulevard between 1939 and 1941. The questions we are concerned with are to what extent was the boulevard transformed and what can we read from this change? How could an existing boulevard built to serve one regime in the past become the representation of the new regime with a different political agenda? How could the physical fabric of the city be edited, reshaped, and redesigned to serve this new political agenda? To understand these questions, we must first start by considering the existing condition of Rajadamnern Boulevard and see how it was changed during the reconstruction process, then attempt a reading of what the urban change might reveal, as well as what it conceals.

### Pre-1932 Boulevard.

The construction of Rajadamnern Boulevard was the main urban development undertaken during the Fifth Reign (1868-1910) as part of a programme to transform Bangkok into a modern metropolis (Fig.23, 24). Between 1899 and 1903, after King Chulalongkorn returned from his first trip to Europe in 1897, the boulevard was cut through the old fabric of the city, linking the Grand Palace in the old compound of royal temple and royal residences and the Dusit Palace, a new aristocratic suburb which was to be the site for Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, summer palaces, as well as a number of residences for princes (many of whom would soon come back from their

5 I got the photographs of these two models from Chatri Prakitnonthakan.



Fig. 23 - Map of 1899 Bangkok. The first part of Rajadamnern Boulevard was cut in 1899. The Outer Boulevard runs southward 1.5 Km. as a straight tree-lines artery.

Fig. 24 - The Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard starts at the Royal Plaza in front of Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, photographed in 1946.

Rajadamnern Boulevard, starts from a Royal Plaza in front of Dusit Palace, where the monument of King Rama V was to be erected and it runs southward as a straight tree-lined artery, crossing *Padung Krung Kasem* Ring Canal in between, until it reaches *Bang Lumpoo* Canal at *Phan Fa-leelaat* Bridge. As it crosses the bridge, the boulevard then shifts its direction westward, creating the second part of another straight tree-lined boulevard, also known as *Rajadamnern Klang* or the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard. As it reached another canal, *Lord* Canal at *Phan Bibhob-lila* Bridge, its direction is once again shift southward, creating the third part, the Inner Rajadamnern Boulevard, and ends at the Grand Palace. (At the same time as the Inner Boulevard was in the making, *Phra Meru Ground*, a royal plaza in front of the Grand Palace, was enlarged and reshaped from a trapezoid to a football stadium-like shape to which the Inner Boulevard lays adjacent.) Once completed in 1903, the tree-lined boulevard created a smooth linkage between the royal palaces (Fig.25-27).

Like most other constructions during this period, Rajadamnern Boulevard was designed after European models. It was inspired by the wide arteries in European cities King Chulalongkorn had witnessed during his visit to Europe in 1897. (It has been said that the Mall of London, where the street runs straight to Buckingham Palace and the Champs-Elysees of Paris were his models.) However, the king particularly favoured Italianate art and cities, and to pursue the King's passion, a team of Italian experts, including seventeen engineers, ten architects, and four painters, was commissioned for cutting the boulevard. In addition, the opening ceremony of the boulevard in November 1907 closely followed Western prototypes for such events. A total of nine striking temporary arches were set up one after the other along the route of the boulevard, representing the main ministries. The

King Chulalongkorn once wrote '...during my stay here [Italy], most of the time, I have met a great number of painters and sculptors which is very pleasant for me as I have a love for art...Kings and royals of other kingdoms usually have their great art pieces created here. Italians have been always artists throughout their history...' See Chulalongkorn, Letter to Queen Saowapa during his first trip to Europe in 1897, quoted in *Muang Boran* 24 no. 2 (April-June, 1998).

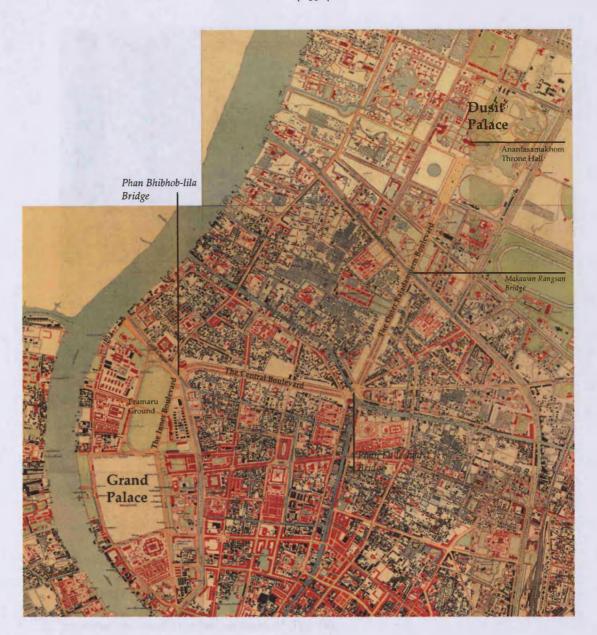


Fig. 25 - Map of 1925 Bangkok



Fig. 26 - The Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard in the Fifth Reign (1868-1910). A view towards Anantasamakhom Throne Hall.



Fig. 27 - The Inter Rajadamnern Boulevard in the Fifth Reign (1868-1910). A view towards the Grand Palace.



Fig. 28 - One of temporary arches erected in November 1907on Rajadamnern Boulevard to welcome-home King Chulalongkorn after his trip to Europe.

king started the procession by riding in carriage passing through the nine arches, while in between them welcoming addresses from clergy, officials, and merchants were presented to him. Illumination flashed at night along the route. Although in Siam, there had been a royal custom of processions such as a procession by land on the occasion of the King's coronation and by water in the annual ceremony, it was the 'grandest pageant of Western absolute monarchies' in European cities impressed by the King during his visit that provided the model for the procession (Fig. 28).

But, while the boulevard attracted public attention at its inauguration, it was not designed for everyday public use. Its original purpose served only the interests of sovereignty, and this was where the name of the boulevard came from - *Raja-damnern* or Royal Passage. For while lands all along the boulevard were preserved for royal residences and governmental buildings, its fifty eight metres width was designed for sidewalks, horse drawn carriages, and automobiles. As Michael Smithies observed: 'this

Maurizio Peleggi, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), p.129.

Ibio



Fig. 29 -A procession of royal cars on Rajadamnern Boulevard in 1908.

street was lined with palaces and used less for walking than for riding on horseback or more often in carriages and, at the end of the [nineteenth] century, for the royal craze of cycling. At the beginning of this century it was also the scene of processions of motor cars [...]'. (Fig. 29) It was only thirty two years after the boulevard was first opened that it started to be noticed and used by the people at large.

While its first realisation of 1903 was designed solely by an Italian team after European Models, its second redevelopment of 1941 was carried out by native architect Miow Aphaiwongs, whose knowledge of modern urban space was made use of by the People's Party. Yet, although the boulevard was designed and redesigned as a direct result of the rulers' engagement with processes of Europeanisation as understood at different dates, we cannot simply assume the second development was a direct continuation from the first - though some of the state documents do write about the second development as a

Michael Smithies, Old Bangkok (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 40.

continuation of King Chulalongkorn's effort. The new revolutionary spirit of the People's Party charged it with the obligation to change history. The desire to break with the past, look forward to the future, to represent modernity, and to recognise the successes of the People's Party, all contributed to what the new appearance of the boulevard should be.

### Confiscations of the monarchy's properties

Although the proposal to redevelop Rajadamnern Boulevard was first conceived in 1935, as part of a plan to expand the zone of government offices along the boulevard, the proposal was not however realised until the era of Phibun's first Government (1938-1944), when the original proposal was substantially reworked. The urban renewal of Rajadamnern Boulevard only became possible in 1937 when the government took control of the monarchy's financial resource and expropriated lands along the boulevard to make space for new constructions. These two events were achieved by the single action of taking over the Privy Purse Bureau.

The monarchy's financial resource was taken over by the government two years after King Prajadhipok abdicated. In March 1937, the Assembly assigned the Ministry of Finance to take over the administration of the Privy Purse Bureau. Following this transfer, the Ministry of Finance made an inspection of the Privy Purse Bureau and transferred almost all the monarchy's property to a new institution, the Crown Property Bureau, under supervision of the Prime Minister. As a result, even though the Privy Purse bureau continued to run some business for the monarchy, it was lessened its strength as only 10 properties of monasteries and a few royal palace remained in its control. This confiscation of the monarchy's financial institution enabled the People's Party to carry out urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard to its own design. For instance, the budget

<sup>10</sup> National Archive, Thailand, (2) SR. 0201. 69/12, p. 4, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Judith A. Stowe, Siam Becomes Thailand (London: Hurst, 1991), p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Porphant Ouyyanont, Crown Property Bureau and Its Commercial Investments (8 June 2006 [cited 5 Feb 2007]).

for the construction of the Democracy Monument came from the money taken from the royal expenses for 100,000 Baht, while other costs for the construction of the street and buildings along it were funded by the Crown Property Bureau.<sup>13</sup> The next seizure of crown properties was of land along the Central Boulevard. From the Phan Bhibhob-lila Bridge to the Phan Fa-leelaad Bridge, although lands along the street had been owned by four different groups of people, the majority of them were in possession of members of the royal family. Of the owners, the heirs of former monarchs held nearly more than two third of all lands. King Rama VI held eight pieces of lands altogether of 19,988 square meters (26.28%),14 while King Rama VII though possessed only five pieces but they were in total of 32,372 square meters (42.47%).15 Another group of landowners were members of royal families, whose ancestors had been given lands from King Rama V since 1899. Amongst them, M.L Luan owned two pieces of lands altogether of 498.5 square meters (2.6%), 16 whereas M.L. Wad was in possession of 475.75 square meters (2.5%). 17 Apart from former monarchs and royalists, two pieces of lands of 1,100 square meters (5.8%) were in the possession of Bowonniwet monastery. Finally, the rest of the lands were already possessed by the government Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education. As we have seen, most lands along the Central Boulevard were held by the royal families, and thus this confiscation could also, to some degree, be seen as a political clearance (Fig.30).

Although lands along the Central Boulevard were largely possessed by royal families, they were however still largely undeveloped since the Central Boulevard had been laid thirty seven years before in 1902. According to the 1932 map, those lands were occupied sporadically by one or two-storey wooden houses, where other bigger structures could

<sup>13</sup> National Archive, Thailand, Ngor 3. SP. 2481[1938]/28: Annual Cabinet Meeting of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938.

Lands no. 89, 46, 26, 90, 45, 23, 44, and 6/67; See The Crown Property Bureau, "The Expropriation on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 182.1/61-65.

<sup>15</sup> Lands no. 27, 43, 24, 25, and 86; See Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Lands no. 134, 75.; See Ibid., File 182.1/61-65.

<sup>17</sup> Land no. 73. See Ibid.

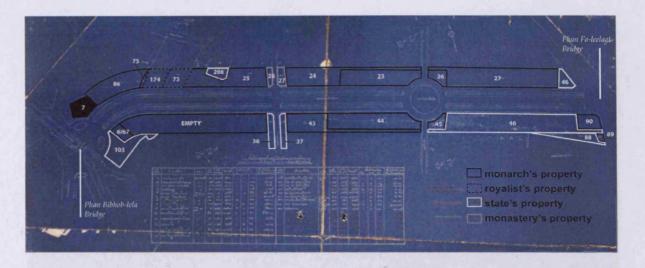


Fig. 30 - Lands along the Central Boulevard to a depth of forty metres extending from the Phan Bibhob-lila Bridge to the Paan Fa-leelaat Bridge were expropriated from former residences. Map of the 1939 expropriation of lands and properties on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard.

also be found (Fig. 31). First, on the north side of lands at the *Phan Bibhob-lila* Bridge, the three storey building of the former Batman and Co. department store, which after1932 was converted into a university and later on the Department of Public Works, was kept untouched (Fig.32). Second, on the same side of the boulevard, there were two properties owned by two royalists: M.L. Luan and M.L. Wad, who possessed houses and other buildings (Fig.33). The third group of existing structures to be cleared were two rows of old street shops at the junction of the boulevard and *Tanao* Road, in total twenty units (Fig.34). Fourth, on the south side of plot between *Tanao* Road and *Dinso* Road, the building of the *Satri Vidya* School for Girls was to be demolished, and the school moved to a site on the opposite side of the boulevard. Fifth, and finally, at the middle of traffic intersection between the boulevard and the *Dinso* Road, a circular shape of land was to be cleared to prepare the site for Democracy Monument (Fig. 35, 36).

After the Cabinet approved the proposal for the Rajadamnern Boulevard renewal and its budget in 1939, the reconstruction of Rajadamnern Boulevard began, transforming the existing boulevard into a new city centre. The first task of the project was to expropriate those existing properties to prepare the site for a new construction. A 1939 Legislation for Urban Planning of Rajadamnern Boulevard and a Royal Decree for the Expropriation of

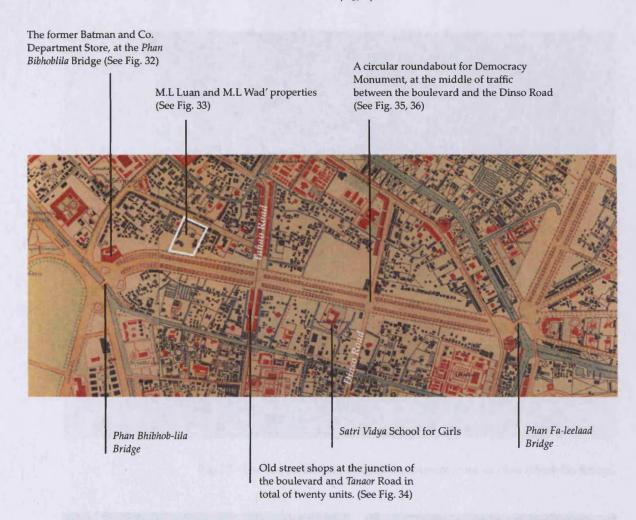


Fig. 31 - The pre-existing structures on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard. Map of 1925.

Land was put into effect in May 1939, providing the Crown Property Bureau with the authority to expropriate the lands. <sup>18</sup> Frontage sites of the boulevard to a depth of forty meters extending from the *Phan Bhibhob-lila* Bridge to the *Phan Fa-leelaad* Bridge were to be expropriated from the former residences, allowing property holders to remove their dwellings to new sites within the time period of sixty days. <sup>19</sup> The owners were not given the right to appeal, but were forced to sell their lands and immovable properties to the government who would pay compensation in accordance with the value of properties. Within a year, almost all the lands along the Central Boulevard were taken from former owners to make a way for a new construction (only a few conflicts between former residences and the Crown Property Bureau delayed this street clearance, for in cases of

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., File 182.1/18.

<sup>19</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 8, 1939.

Fig. 32 - The former Batman and Co. department store, at Phan Bibhob-lila Bridge.



Fig.33 - The expropriation map of the proprieties of M.L Luan and M.L Wad, 1939.

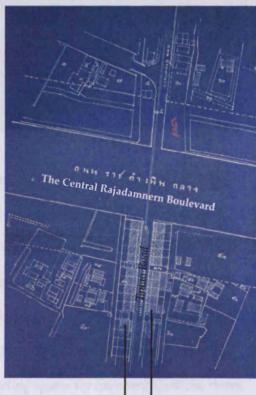
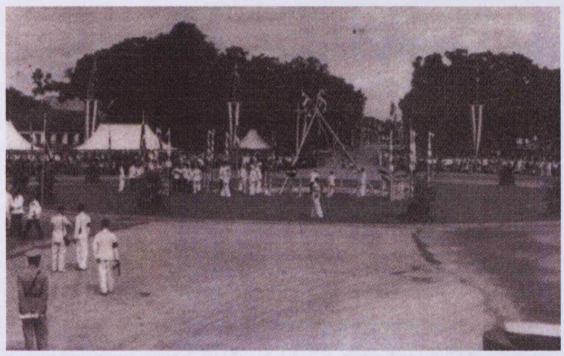


Fig. 34 – The expropriation map of properties at the junction between the Central Boulevard and Tanao Road, 1939. A total of twenty old street shops were to be removed for modern buildings.

Fig. 35 – The expropriation map of lands at the middle of the traffic between the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard and the Dinsor Road to prepare the site for Democracy Monument, 1939.



Fig. 36 - The ceremony of laying the foundation stone for Democracy Monument, National Day, June 24, 1939.



two owners, M.L Luan and M.L. Wad, negotiations with the Crown Property Bureau about their compensations were not resolved until 1 December 1941.) <sup>20</sup> A clean sweep was made of all the existing structures along the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard; old houses and other structures were demolished. After 1939, the reconstruction of Rajadamnern Boulevard became a major project in Bangkok. Democracy Monument was established at the centre of the boulevard as a new symbol of the People's Party, meanwhile the modern building blocks providing spaces for commercial offices, stores,

<sup>20</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "The Expropriation of Lands on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 181.1/408.

hotels, apartments, and theatre were about to make the former boulevard acquire an image of modernity.

From the record at the Crown Property Bureau (Bangkok), Miow was involved in urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard following the stage of expropriation. Since the Cabinet had promulgated 'The 1939 Act of Expropriation of Property on Rajadamnern Boulevard for Building Governmental Buildings and Other State Infrastructures,' his roles were, first, to survey the site for Rajadamnern Boulevard's new development; second, in cases of sites occupied by existing properties, Miow had to estimate the compensation to former owners<sup>21</sup>; third, and the most important of all, he was responsible for remodelling the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard and designing modern building blocks along it, in order to turn the former boulevard into a modern one.

## 1939-41 Rajadamnern Boulevard

To make the boulevard a desirable image for the revolutionary regime, Miow employed various approaches to distinguish the new boulevard from that of the earlier period. Firstly, there was the selection of the site. The site chosen for the location of the new development was seemingly guided by the understanding of the People's Party's desire to create its own identity in the city and at the same time to distinguish it from that of the monarchy. As Rajadamnern Boulevard linked two royal palaces, both terminal ends of the boulevard were already occupied by magnificent royal works of architecture; *Pratinungchakri Mahaprasat*, the Throne Hall of Grand Palace on the south side and *Anantasamakhom Throne Hall* of Dusit Palace on the north side (Fig.26-27). These two ends of the boulevard, thus, can be seen as unwanted associations with the monarchy from which the People's Party would want to distance itself. If new constructions were built within these already monarchical occupied domains, suggesting association with

<sup>3&</sup>lt;sup>rd</sup> meeting of *The 1939 Act of Expropriation of Property on Rajadamnern Boulevard for Building Governmental Buildings and Other State Infrastructure, 10* April 1940, at the Crown Property Bureau. See The Crown Property Bureau, "The Expropriation of Lands on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 181.1/2.

the past, how were people to be convinced that this was the era of the constitutional regime, no longer that of the absolute monarchy? This issue was clearly a concern to the People's Party and its architect, as the new constructions were built only along the Central Boulevard, the central section from where the royal buildings were out of sight. The location of the Central Boulevard was thus advantageous for the new regime, being the only part of the whole boulevard with no direct visual connection to the royal buildings. By concentrating on this part, the People's Party was able to shift the centre of gravity of the boulevard, and of the city, away from the royal buildings.

The second way of making the novelty of the new development explicit was the clearance of the existing trees along the Central Boulevard. Existing double rows of mahogany trees and the pavements beneath them were removed and replaced with a single row of central islands, reshaping the street from the multi-lane, tree-lined boulevard into a two lane artery. The removal of the trees, which had provided shade, but also obscured the view of the street, turned the boulevard into an open space of long, uninterrupted views, along which everything was visible. The junction of the boulevard and *Dinso* Road, at which previously, in the 1937 plan, Rama VI Statue had been planned to be erected, was to be occupied by a large roundabout upon which Democracy Monument would stand instead. Though there was no urgent need in terms of traffic improvement on this boulevard to clear the trees, the clearance was executed in order to produce a long vista and a more dignified, and visible place for Democracy Monument (Fig. 37).

As well as from the selection of the site and the clearance of trees, the third strategy to make clear the boulevard's discontinuity with the past was the cutting off from the new space of the surroundings. With the desire to make the boulevard look like a street in a modern city, it was predictable that the site of the Central Boulevard, which previously had been occupied by old houses, street shops, and the old school building, would appear unsatisfactory to the People's Party. Previously, trees had hidden unwanted views

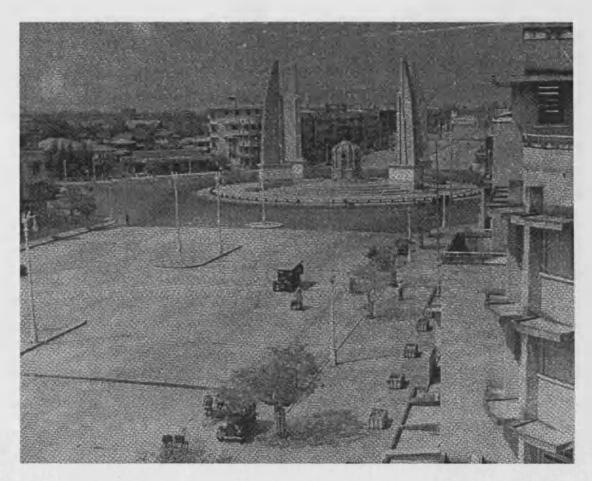


Fig. 37 - The removal of the trees, which had provided shade, but also obscured the view of the street, turned the boulevard into an open space of long, uninterrupted views, along which everything was visible. The Central Rajadamnern Boulevard in 1946.

of these poor neighbourhoods, but after the clearance of trees, the new space of the boulevard exposed them. Therefore, it would be not suitable at all for the new monument would be sited amongst these unsatisfactory conditions. To achieve the imagery of modernity, the People's Party wanted to reject these unwanted characteristics of the boulevard. As Director of the Crown Property Bureau Chun Pintanon once declared that both sides of Rajadamnern Boulevard had been un-maintained, disorderly, and untidy due to unplanned developments over centuries, therefore it was not well-suited for its location in the city centre. In order to change these unacceptable conditions of the boulevard and reshape the physical environment to make it look like a street in the city centre, the new boulevard needed to have big buildings; accordingly, new multi-storey buildings were proposed. Not only were they proposed to provide ample spaces for

Monument was to be situated in the middle of a prominent junction, new multi-storey street architectures were planned to line up on both sides of the boulevard, creating 'the image of the city.' The whole group of new buildings stand upon a continuous pavement of concrete. Stepping back from the street, the multi-story buildings rise detached in powerful masses of modernist architectures. Between the individual buildings, small gaps of ten meters width were provided, broad enough for circulation, but also narrow enough to conceal what lies behind the buildings. This group of buildings is unified horizontally, which is the most important feature in such a street-perspective; the linear forms of the seventeen solid and massive buildings created not only a strong vista towards Democracy Monument, but at the same time act as walls or fortifications screening the irregularity of unwanted elevations behind and making the space appear totally new.

The site selection, the street clearance, and the establishment of the new buildings shows the intention to make the Central Boulevard into a self-contained entity independent from the rest of Rajadamnern Boulevard, and to produce a uniform urban scenery. Once this unified entity was constituted, a new perspective and a new hierarchical structure of the city arose. For what had once been the secluded tree-lined linkage of the two royal palaces was transformed into a modern very public concrete artery, providing a new centre for the city in the People's Party's own image.

To understand the Central Boulevard as a distinctive part of the whole, it would be useful to compare it with its companion, the Outer Boulevard, which at the time was still kept more or less untouched. If you entered the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard from the outer one, along which were situated the former monarch's properties inaccessible to the public,<sup>23</sup> you could see nothing distinctly, for rows of trees obscured what lay

<sup>23</sup> All buildings were not opened to public, except for the boxing stadium which was built in 1936.

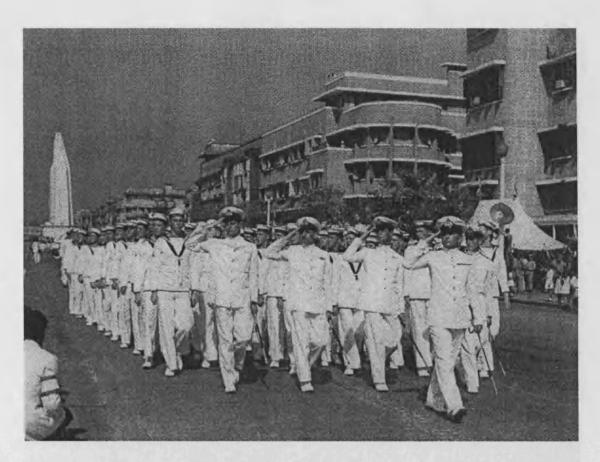


Fig. 38 – 'the play of the horizontal lines of protruding window lintels, window frames, and canopy of the buildings works perfectly well, guiding the eye from their facades towards Democracy Monument'. The Central Rajadamnern Boulevard in 1946.

behind. Only when you crossed the *Phan Fa-Leela* Bridge over the ring canal where the boulevard turns its direction westward into the Central Boulevard, did the space open out. On the Outer Boulevard only the bridge and trees could be seen; entering the central one, by contrast, you were allowed to see things much more clearly. The Democracy Monument catches the eye as a strong prominent feature of the view, and the building blocks stand out from their surroundings, explicit for what they are. Moreover, the play of the horizontal lines of protruding window lintels, window frames, and canopy of the buildings works perfectly well, guiding the eye from their facades towards Democracy Monument (Fig.38). Whereas on the Outer Boulevard, one's attention would be drawn only to the magnificence of royal throne hall, here on the new space of the Central Boulevard you would no longer see it, and you were drawn to the Democracy Monument instead. Once you were on this section of the boulevard, you were cut off from the past, in front of the monument and enclosed by new buildings accessible to the public (Fig.39-41).

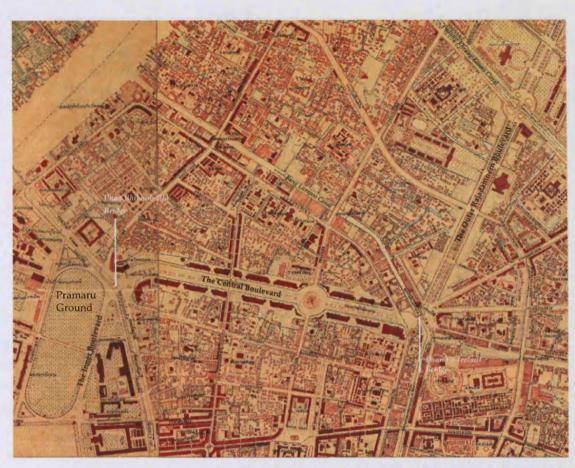


Fig. 39 - Map of the 1940s Central Rajadamnern Boulevard.



Fig. 40 – On the Outer Boulevard, only the bridge and trees could you see.



Fig. 41 – 'entering the central one, by contrast, you were allowed to see things much more clearly. The Democracy Monument catches the eyes as strong prominent feature of the view, and the building blocks stand out from their surroundings, explicit for what they are.'



Fig. 42 – The Central Rajadamnern Boulevard under construction in 1940-41: 'the modern boulevard gave no impression of preserving Bangkok's urban inheritance, of allowing for the privileged, or of connecting to pre-existing order, but rather aimed at disconnection from each of these things'.

The street clearance and the establishment of the monument as well as new buildings according to the 1939 plan brought radical changes to the boulevard's characteristics both in its function and its image, displaying extraordinary discontinuity. By the new appearance the architect wanted to evoke not harmony of the new urban structure with its surroundings, but the achievements of the People's Party. Whatever had been done to the boulevard beforehand, its second reconstruction set out to show the superiority of the People's Party over the previous regime in all things (Fig. 42).

While what the state documents reveal about urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard is that the People's Party wanted literally to fulfil the King's wish, what we discovered from the records of the Crown Property Bureau and from analysing them in relation to the transformation of the boulevard's fabric is a rather different interpretation. The principal task of Rajadamnern Boulevard lay not in the search for solutions for growing urban development so much as in fulfilling the needs of political ideology. Its renewal

did not just serve the practical purpose of making room for a large public artery, but was a symbolic gesture to break with the past. In sum, the modern boulevard gave no impression of preserving Bangkok's urban inheritance, of allowing for the privileged, or of connecting to pre-existing order, but rather aimed at disconnection from each of these things.

+ + +

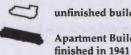
With the establishment of public buildings, the modernising character of the People's Party became even more apparent. Home to new functions such as offices, stores, hotels, and theatres, the multi-storey modern buildings not only provided the modern look, but also, by serving public and commercial functions, fulfilled the economic modernisation initiated by the People's Party. They created public places open to everyone; while new apartments were available for the people who could afford to live in, other buildings such as theatre, hotels, and department stores were opened for all walks of life. The image was of a city without class division.

Nevertheless, although the government had launched an advertising campaign to encourage people to rent Rajadamnern Boulevard building units to run a business, they attracted little attention from private investors. In 1941, when the street and the building were nearly ready to be opened, a number of units were still left unoccupied. (Amongst these private businesses, shops of everyday necessity seemed to be the most common, other less popular ones were businesses such as a restaurant, a pharmacy, a motor car company, and an insurance company.) To help let the building, the government reduced the initial rent by about one third.<sup>24</sup> Later on, when it was apparent that this had not attracted tenants, the government put the buildings to its own use. In Apartment Buildings No.5, for example, all areas on the second floor, originally designed

The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.5 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.5.



Fig. 43 – Map of the Central Boulevard shows ten apartment buildings finished in 1941 and other modern buildings under construction.



unfinished buildings of 1941 Apartment Buildings No. 1-10,

for dwellings, were converted into a school for training medical students.<sup>25</sup> (Fig.43) Likewise, in another case of Apartment Building No.6, all areas of the second floor, including a side unit at the ground floor, were converted to function for the training of apprentices in leather sewing.<sup>26</sup> Other smaller offices run by the state such as hairdresser's schooling, Milk Industry Co., the Department of Livestock, the Food Industry Co.Ltd., the Department of Fine Arts Shop and the State Printing House, could also be found amongst other buildings.<sup>27</sup> (Banking was another important activity on the boulevard. At the junction of the boulevard and Tanao road, Government Saving Bank and The National and City Bank of Thailand were planned to be a financial centre in the city - but the building was not finished until after the war; in 1941 only ten apartment blocks were finished.) Moreover, there were also buildings units hired by the members of the People's Party whose Thai Niyom Panich Company occupied a number of building on the boulevard. Running the businesses of importing, exporting, distributing commodities, and building construction, Thai Niyom Panich Company expanded its businesses to cover

<sup>25</sup> 

<sup>26</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.6 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.6.

See The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.1-10 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.1-7, File 27 237.1-4.

one entire building of its own at the *Phan Fa-leelaad* Bridge and all areas of the second floor and the third floor of Buildings No. 2 and No.8.<sup>28</sup> As the apartment buildings seemed not to appeal to the people as much as the government had hoped, occupation by the state and the People's Party could be seen as a way of ensuring that the units were let and occupied, a necessity for the successful image for the street.

### A shoddy apartment

Although Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings were conceived to be showpieces of the government, they were apparently not well made (and this may have contributed to their lack of appeal to the public.) From the records of correspondences between the Crown Property Bureau and the tenants, there were a number of problems that made it clear that they were rather far from practical and secure buildings. First of all, the buildings lacked sufficient basic facilities of electricity and water supply. For instance, on the upper floors of almost all the apartment buildings, the water supplies were inadequate due to pumping problems,<sup>29</sup> and in some cases, tenants needed to carry water from the ground floor to their units themselves. And, on account of the shortage of water on the upper floor, a number of lavatories were needed to build behind building blocks at ground level afterward. Moreover, in another case, Apartment Building No. 6, although the building had been opened for use for more than a year, its second and third floor still lacked the electricity on the corridors.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, another more serious problem tenants had to face within the building was the fear of theft. Both tenants who hired units on the ground floor and those on the upper floors were confronted with this problem. In the first place, the property of tenants on the ground was stolen due to the building's doors being poorly made, allowing robbers to enter easily.<sup>31</sup> On the upper floor, taps in a shared bath room were often stolen. With five entrances behind the apartment building without any

The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.2 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.2.; The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.8 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 237.2

<sup>29</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.6 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.6/116.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., File 236.6/50.

The Crown Property Bureau, "Building No.8 on Rajadamnern Boulevard," File 236.8/82.

security guard, the buildings allowed anyone to enter the building without difficulty.

From the building records of the Crown Property Bureau, we discover that in social terms the project of Apartment Buildings during the period of the People's Party was, indeed, far from successful.

## Chapter 3

#### A Place without 'Cultural Slackness'

'Muang Thai cannot become a truly Great Power without wathanatham [culture].'

 $[\ldots]$ 

'And what does it mean, [...]'?

'Whatever the meaning, the government says we must acquire it for Muang

Thai to get to be a real Great Power'

'And what do we have to do to acquire it?'

'We must wear hats, [...]'

'Are you playing one of your childish games with me? Hats and Great Power? Where's the connection?'

 $[\ldots]$ 

'[. . .] , you'll have to do it, my dear girl.'

'And if I don't?'

'The police will get you.'1

The above conversation in Kukrit Pramoj's best known novel, *Si Phaendin* [Four Reigns], describes the real situation in one of the most peculiar periods in Thai history, when a wartime government attempted to reform social behaviours. Amongst other rules, a dress code was introduced, with the slogan 'Hats lead Thai to Great Power.' A series of wartime measures was part of a nation-building campaign to stimulate Thai values, so that the country would be recognised as 'cultured' in international relations.<sup>2</sup> In the proclamation of cultural reforms the Prime Minister Phibul referred to 'cultural slackness' as an obstacle to the country's autonomy: 'cultural slackness in many states has led to their being colonized.'<sup>3</sup>

Slackness here is a sort of backwardness. In international relations, slackness had to be removed. To prevent the country from being condemned as slack, people must cultivate

<sup>1</sup> Kukrit Pramoj, Si Phaendin [Four Reigns] trans. Tulachandra (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1982), p. 590.

See Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford U. P, 1995), p. 102-62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 109. (italics added)

proper manners, etiquette, and dress codes to prevent them from being looked down upon as barbarians. Nevertheless, social practices are dependent on culture; what is acceptable in a certain region may be improper to other places. And it may cause much trouble to make what is acceptable in one place standard for others.

This chapter concentrates on the effect that international political relations at the outbreak of the Second World War could have had upon Rajadamnern Boulevard. At that time, changing relations between Thailand and the Western Powers, especially France, created aspirations to equivalence with other powers, leading to a series of ambitious attempts to reform national culture. The image of 'progress and civilisation' based on European models regarding 'proper' behaviour was introduced into almost every aspect of Thai life. When this 'culturedness' was firmly established, there would be no limits to Thailand's greatness. Carried out in parallel with the cultural reform programme, the urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard could be seen as part of an attempt to establish new codes of public behaviour.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the country was faced with questions of 'progress and civilisation,' monarchs dealt with them by cultural appropriation: an importation of 'Things Western' was taken ranging from dresses, art, banquets, and social behaviours. <sup>4</sup> In terms of built environment, Western architecture was a desirable reference for almost all built works constructed in Bangkok. The Chakri Throne Hall (1880) and Anantasamakhom Throne Hall (1916), for example, were built in Western styles, and although the roof of the former throne hall was changed into Siamese traditional style when the building construction reached roof level, its interior was westernised as initially planned. <sup>5</sup> Also, Rajadamnern Boulevard, built to link between

<sup>4</sup> Maurizio Peleggi, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

According to a contemporary witness, the Chakri Throne Hall 'had a monumental marble staircase and furniture that had been imported from London.' As quoted in Ibid., p. 24.

the two throne halls, was designed after Western models.<sup>6</sup> King Chulalongkorn had seen prototypes in European cities during his nine-month visit in 1897, and its designs were planned by an Italian team.<sup>7</sup> In the domestic sphere, moreover, Western settings were set up in princes' and princesses' palaces, to which Western interior decorations, chairs, books, and dresses, were introduced. Thus, when foreign guests came to visit their homes, hosts could welcome them with dignity. As John Bowring observed when he visited the residence of Prince Chutamani.<sup>8</sup>

This house is fitted up, for the most part, in European style, and is filled with various instruments, philosophical and mathematical; a great variety of Parisian clocks and pendules, thermometers, barometers, telescopes, microscopes, statues, - among which I remarked those of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, nearly of the size of life, in their Court costumes; pictures of celebrated individuals, a considerable collection of books, copying machines, handsome writing-desks; - in a word, all the instruments and appliances which might be found in the study or library of an opulent philosopher in Europe.9

His own apartments are convenient, tastefully fitted up, and, except from the suspended punkah and the great height of the rooms, the furniture and ornaments would lead you to believe you were in the house of an English gentleman. His conversation, in excellent English, is cultivated and agreeable.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, Western elements appeared to Siamese monarchs as an assurance of being civilised, preventing them from being looked down upon as barbarians.

It has been said widely that amongst the model of Rajadamnern Boulevard are the Mall of London and Champs-Elysees of Paris.

<sup>7</sup> See Rachaporn Choochoey, "Bangkok's 7 Tales of Modernity: Short Circuits and Cultural Crossover" (University of Tokyo, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> King Mongkut's half-brother, or Phra Pinklao second king.

<sup>9</sup> John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, 2 *Vols.* (London: John W. Parker And Son, Weststrand 1857), p.1:410-11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2:324.

While such cultural practices in earlier times had been used at the court or around the king,<sup>11</sup> it became generalised to all parts of society from the end of 1930s onward and maintained until the end of World War II. Between 1939 and1944, when the coming of war in Europe had extended to Asia, the desire to be a 'Greater Power' as much as other Powers awoke Thailand.<sup>12</sup> In the cabinet meeting in 1939, the Prime Minister Phibul expressed his concern with the issue of civilised culture, which he saw as necessary to prepare the country for the war.

The world today is rapidly moving on. It does not crawl along as in the olden days. The world is running forward. At present, we have arrived at a junction; one direction is to plod along according to our own sweet time, this way the people will not be disturbed ... However, the country will lose as we cannot keep up with the rate of progress of others. The other direction would surely save our country from all dangers and bring us progress for now and the time to come.<sup>13</sup>

We must be as cultured as other nations otherwise no country will come to contact us. Or if they come, they [will] come as superiors. Thailand would be helpless and soon become colonized. But if we were highly cultured, we would be able to up hold our integrity, independence, and keep everything to ourselves.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Prime Minister, 'The exhibition of high culture by the people is one

Peleggi, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image, p. 24.; Scot Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p.21.

<sup>12</sup> Apart from 'Hat lead Thai to Great Power', another wartime slogan was 'Wake Up Muang Thai.'

National Archive (Bangkok), (3) 0201.55.7, Phibul to the Cabinet and Senior Officials on the Significance of Maintaining and Strengthening National Culture, 16 October 1941; as quoted in Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.111.

The Prime Minister Phibul's speech in the cabinet meeting, 30 August 1939, as quoted in Thamsook Numnonda, "Pibulsongkram's Thai Nation-Building Programme During the Japanese Military Presence, 1941-1945," Journal of Southeast-Asian Studies 9, no. 2 (September, 1978): p.234..; B.J. Terwiel, Thailand's Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times (Bangkok: River Books Co. Ltd., 2005), p.271.

sure way of maintaining the sovereignty of the nation.'<sup>15</sup> In 1939, his government began a cultural campaign with the announcement of *Ratthaniyom*, Royal Decrees, or what he described as something 'similar to the proper type of etiquette to be observed by all civilised people.'<sup>16</sup> A total of twelve decrees were issued between 1939 and 1942 to define what national culture should be. Guidelines of civic attire, social behaviour, and life style based on European customs were specified for everybody to follow in order to eliminate uncivilised behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

Of all decrees, the 'Proper Social Etiquette and Mannerisms' and the 'Dress Code' were of most interest here because they related in one way or another to urban space on Rajadamnern Boulevard. Royal Decrees instructed what disorderly behaviours people must avoid in public and what behaviours were acceptable and desirable to perform. As Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian observed in details:

[...] the people should no longer indulge in betel-chewing, spit, or queue-jump when buying theatre or cinema tickets or getting on or off public transport. The people were also forbidden to sit along the pavement or by the roadside which provided no public benches as this conveyed the impression that the Thais were physically weak and indisciplined, characteristics which contradicted the government's effort to create a strong, disciplined, and progressive society. They were asked to conduct themselves in a manner befitting the citizens of a 'civilized' country in every aspect of their daily lives. These included greeting one another [...] on meeting for the first time each day; clapping hands to show a proper appreciation of performances – music, drama, and speeches; eating with forks and spoons in public instead of with the hands; washing hands before

National Archive (Bangkok), STH 0701.29.1, Phibul to the Minister of Education, 14 March 1942; quoted in Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957*, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 7.

Royal Decrees promulgated between 1939 and 1944 are discussed in Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades,* 1932-1957, chapter 3, p.102-62.,; The state document about Royal Decrees was compounded in Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents,* 1932-1957 (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand; Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1979).

eating at home; and always using polite and proper language as prescribed by the authorities.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently influenced by dress reform campaigns introduced in Ataturk's Turkish
Republic and Sun Yat-Sen's Chinese Republic<sup>19</sup>, a new Dress Code was promulgated in
January 1941, specifying three types of clothing considered 'proper': authorised uniforms
worn as occasion require, western clothing properly worn, and traditional clothing
properly worn.<sup>20</sup> The dress campaign became even more serious issue when Thailand
had a serious confrontation with French Indo-China on the territorial dispute, and the
government re-promulgated the dress code more urgently.<sup>21</sup> In September 1941, the

In public places or areas within the municipality people must not dress in improper manners which will damage the prestige of the country, e.g. wearing loose-ended sarong, wearing only underpants, wearing sleeping garments, wearing loincloth, wearing no blouse or shirt, women wearing only undershirt or wrap-around.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 44)

Such decrees were conceived as if to show that the country deserved to recover its lost territories. Here, thus, we see the influence that certain forms of conduct and dress features could have upon the sovereignty of the country. Before the Thai war with French Indo-China broke out, Phibul gave an interview:

<sup>18</sup> Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p. 116.

Barmé, Scot, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 158; For Kemalist dress reform, see Sibel Bozdoğan, Modernism and nation building: Turkish architectural culture in the early republic (Seattle, WA; London: University of Washington Press, c2001), p. 62-3.; Toby Clark, Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture (London Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p. 92

<sup>20</sup> Chaloemtiarana, Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents, 1932-1957, p.253.

Although Thailand had negotiated a treaty of friendship with France since 1936, a negotiation on revision of territory had not yet been agreed. The chance to recover lost territory that France had taken from Thailand in 1893 and 1904 occurred in June 1940 when France suffered defeat at the hands of Germany, and in the meantime Japanese troops began to move into France Indo-China. Thailand then invaded the west of Laos and western Cambodia in November 1940. The country successfully occupied such contested regions. The Japanese, afterwards, came to mediate between Thailand and Indo-China; as a result, four provinces of Laos and Cambodia were given to Thailand.

Royal Decree Prescribing Customs for the Thai People, given on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1941; quoted in Chaloemtiarana, *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents*, 1932-1957, p.257.



Fig. 44 – On propaganda poster of Thai culture, traditional clothes are contrasted with new Western style clothes.

Proper attire is a positive way to maintain the independence of the country. If we wore only dirty rags or had no proper garments, others would certainly look down upon us. It would also offer them excuses to interfere [in our affairs] on the pretext of introducing us to civilization [...] cultural slackness in many states has led to their being colonized [by the Western powers] ... Consequently, in order to defend the independence of the nation, we cannot depend on military strength alone, but must rely on other means as well.<sup>23</sup>

In this context when the question of sovereignty came to dominate the government's thought, 'cultural slackness,' seen as a symptom of uncivilised acts, certainly needed to be removed. And in the attempt to restrict cultural slackness, while various measures being undertaken concerned social customs, proper dresses, and behaviours, we could also see urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard, being carried out in parallel with

National Archive, Bangkok, (3) SR 0201.55/42, The Significant of the Cultural Reform (October 1940); as quoted in Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957*, p.109., note 18: p.153.

such measures, as part of the same practice. For while other measures were set in rules asking people to conform to them, the boulevard, which was now a new urban space just created in the city, became a stage for people to perform their 'cultured' actions. With the Royal Decrees, people's behaviour in public space was now under scrutiny by the state in a way that never happened before. Even without anything in the decrees specifically about urban buildings (only the absence of public benches was described) they actually had an effect on urban life and urban space. In modern Bangkok of the first half of 1940s, thus, everyone in the street became open to inspection; the street became a place of surveillance. The public space of the boulevard became a kind of arena for the observance of the decrees.

#### Royal Decrees VS. Building Code

Turning to Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings, while they were no doubt meant to create images of progress and civilisation, there is a more than coincidental connection between the Royal Decrees and the Building Code of Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings. It is because the new space on the boulevard was so public and visible (the clearance of the mahogany trees made everything twice as visible), that it put everyone both living on the street and in the buildings on display. Had there been people coming and not conforming to rules along here, it would easily destroy the whole effect of orderliness and uniformity. Although there is no direct evidence, it is likely that the Building Code was set up to control people's behaviour within the buildings in the same way as Royal Decrees were to control people's behaviour on public spaces. The buildings of Rajadamnern Boulevard established particular rules which had a direct and determinate effect upon the ways people behaved.

To understand the Building Code we have to consider it in the context of Royal Decrees.

Just as a person should perform properly in public, the boulevard and its architecture too should be used with correct behaviour. The Crown Property Bureau promulgated

the building code of Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings, specifying what behaviour was required of inhabitants and what was prohibited. On the ground floor, for example, a shopkeeper must dress properly, including wearing a shirt, whenever he or she was working or in public view.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, on the dwelling floors other tenants must dress appropriately whenever they were outside their rooms<sup>25</sup>, on a corridor, for example. Apart from dressing, the building code also suggested proper behaviours for tenants to follow; disciplines to ensure quietness and cleanliness, for instance, must be maintained.<sup>26</sup> Rules both on the boulevard and in the buildings became intermingled, making everyone under surveillance whether they were on the street or not. Consequently, Rajadamnern Boulevard, both in terms of urban space and architecture, became a determinant of people's behaviour.

However, since people had no culture for living in apartments, nor experience of such urban or building regulations beforehand, one could expect a clash between unregulated behaviour and the restricted rules. One case was of those two tenants renting the ground floors of apartment buildings next to each other. One was a shopkeeper selling cosmetic equipments; another was a seller of charcoal. By the nature of his product, the charcoal seller could not control cleanliness thoroughly in his shop; therefore, it made the cosmetic shop and the pavement in front of the buildings full of dirty dust. The cosmetic shopkeeper complained to the Crown Property Bureau; as a result, the charcoal-seller was required to stop selling the problematic product.<sup>27</sup> Or in another case, on a second floor apartment, one tenant cooked her meal then threw garbage out of the window.

Accordingly, she was asked to leave the building, and her case, afterwards, was added into the building code as a prohibition.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, another tenant was to have the

Building Code No.8 (on the ground floor) See The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.2," File 236.2, no page number.

Building Code No.6 (on 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> floors). See The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.2," File 236.2, no page number.

Building Codes No.6, 7, and 10 (on the ground floor); Building Code No.8 (on 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> floors). See The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.2," File 236.2, no page number.

<sup>27</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.6," File 236.6.

<sup>28</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.2," File 236.2.

tenancy of his room withdrawn on the grounds that he had brought a person classified as 'undesirable' to stay with him. The tenant was then required to ask his neighbours to approve his partner's behaviours, in order to secure the tenancy.<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, through the regulations controlling users' behaviours, not only did Rajadamnern Boulevard create a modern image for the city, but it also produced a restricted framework for urban living, making it more than a universal generic urban space. Through the intersection of the Royal Decrees and the Building Codes, Rajadamnern Boulevard had in the government's view become 'the place without cultural slackness': it left no room for human idiosyncrasies and traditional ways of life. On Rajadamnern Boulevard, where we can see the assurances of 'progress and civilisation' was not just in its newly laid wide artery or modern buildings, but in the fact that people on the boulevard did perform 'cultured' practices. When Prime Minister Phibul broadcast on the National Day 24 June 1939, he said: 'We still have with us some parts of the old inheritance which needs a revision, and it is the hope of all that the present form of administration [...] will enable us to eradicate these [...]'30; Rajadamnern Boulevard was part of that eradication of 'cultural slackness'

### 'Real' or 'Artificial' façades: a question of 'propriety' in architecture

While we now see how the new space and architectures of Rajadamnern Boulevard set up standards of 'propriety,' we should also examine whether similar ideas applied to works of architecture. The façade of Rajadamnern Boulevard's architecture was unique, similar only to the facades of civic architecture built during the early 1940s. While in most 1930s architecture in Thailand as elsewhere, the smoothness of the façade was used as a sign of novelty; here, on the boulevard, its building's facades were incised with lines to make them look like stone walls, which, by contrast, made the buildings look less modern.

<sup>29</sup> The Crown Property Bureau, "Apartment Building No.4," File 236.4.

<sup>30</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 5.

Post-1932 in Thailand is the period that historians have described as the time that politicians and architects turned away from their historical past and witnessed the beginning of a new era. Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura in 1993 said that the modern architecture built during this time was one of the means to distinguish post-1932 period to the times earlier. Moreover, in *Politics and society in architecture* (2004), probably the most widely read book on post-1932 architecture, Chatri Prakitnontakran described the austerity in post-1932 buildings as suggesting that the hierarchies and class differentiation represented through ornaments found in crown's buildings were being suppressed, making post-1932 architecture suited to the ideology of social equality promoted by the People's Party.<sup>32</sup>

However, in the early 1940s a different attitude towards finish emerged that does not correspond to Chatri's interpretation. Certain buildings, built and finished between 1940 and 1944, did not follow the trend to finish the exterior facade with smooth surfaces, but rather with cement render marked as stone. This particular kind of finish that presented itself somewhat as a decoration, rather than an attempt to suppress it, seems at variance with the austerity of post-1932 architectures. A quick sketch of successive ideas towards finishing will indicate that the accepted interpretation of austerity in post-1932 buildings is not sufficient to explain what appears as stone-marked cement render in the early 1940s architectures.

Since Rajadamnern Boulevard's apartment buildings were opened, they have often been cited as specimens of modern architecture in Thailand, but what makes them different

See Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura and others, Development of Contemporary Thai Architecture: Past, Present and Future (Bangkok: Architectural Association Thailand, 1993).;Koompong Noobanjong, Power, Identity, and the Rise of Modern Architecture: From Siam to Thailand (United Kingdom: Dissertation.com, 2003), p. 252.

Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2004), p.299-323.; Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Khana Ratsadon Chalong Ratthathammanun: Prawattisat Kanmuang Lang 2475 Phan Sathapattayakan 'Amnat [Political History of Post 1932 through Architecture of Power] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2005), p. 32-38.



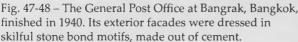
Fig. 45 - On the opening day of Suriyanon Hotel in the early 1940s.



Fig. 46 – The façade of Rajadamnern Boulevard buildings were made to look like stone walls.

from post-1932 architectures in general is that their exterior surfaces were made to look like stone walls. Observed from a distance, the buildings seem to be made out of stone masonry. Yet on further observation, it becomes obvious that this expression is neither consistent nor complete. The bonding pattern on their facades seems unusual: some bond patterns are large; others are smaller. When you notice openings on the facades, you realise that they are not load bearing walls; the facades are not made out of stone construction as they seem to be - for if you look at bond patterns over doors or windows, you find that they stretch across the head of openings apparently unsupported, denying all expression of the force of gravity. The stone bonding on the exterior building surface is in fact a veneer, a thin sheet of material attached to a cement block wall to make it looks like a stone wall (Fig. 45, 46).







Another example of this finish can be found in a General Post Office designed by the same architect of Rajadamnern Boulevard Miow Aphaiwongs.<sup>33</sup> Built in 1934 and finished in 1940,<sup>34</sup> the General Post Office is the first building showing a different attitude towards finishing from post-1932 architectures in general. Its exterior facades of the front and sides were dressed in skilful stone-bond motifs, made out of cement (Fig. 47, 48). (It is worth noting that in Miow's earlier practice of the University of Moral and Political Sciences, designed in 1935 and finished in a following year, its building façades were treated with smooth surfaces.) Moreover, Victory Monument, erected after the government declared victory over the French in the territory dispute of 1942, <sup>35</sup> also has applied stone patterns on its surfaces of the monument's base, while its main object, built in the form of a sword was made out of concrete (Fig. 49, 50). Apart from these examples, in 1942 the Ratanakosin Hotel (Fig. 51) and in following year, 1943, a new Ministry of Justice were opened (Fig. 52, 53). Both buildings were designed by Saroj Rattananiman

<sup>33</sup> A very brief bibliography of architect Miow Aphaiwongs (1905-1963) can be found in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Thammasat University Archive Bulletin* 10 (June 2006-May 2007): p. 27-30.

The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, July 2, 1940, p. 4. Although the general post office was started its construction since 1934, presumably its exterior finish of bonding pattern was carried out during the later year of its construction, in 1940.

The Victory Monument was built to contain the ashes of soldiers, policemen, and volunteers who lost their lives during the Indochina War; it was also built to commemorate the victory that Thailand once had over France in that war; See Michael R. Rhum, "'Modern' and 'Tradition' in 'Thailand'," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (May, 1996): p. 341.

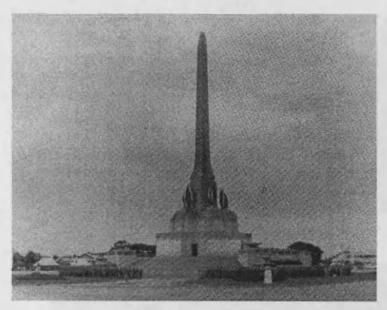




Fig.49 – The Victory Monument, built in 1942. (left) Fig. 50 - The facades of the base of Victory Monument, built in 1942, were marked with imitation stone. (right)



Fig. 51 - On the opening day of Rattanakosin Hotel in 1942, the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard.

(1895-1950), who before 1942 had designed a number of governmental buildings, none of them covered with the pattern of dressed stone,<sup>36</sup> but here in his two buildings of 1942 and 1943, their exterior surfaces were applied with stone-bond patterns, though, like the earlier cases, they were made out of cement. In the contract document of the latter

<sup>36</sup> See a list of Saroj Rattananiman's works in his Cremation Volume; Silpa Bhirasri, Silpa (Pranakorn: Rong Pim Chaisiri, 1950).

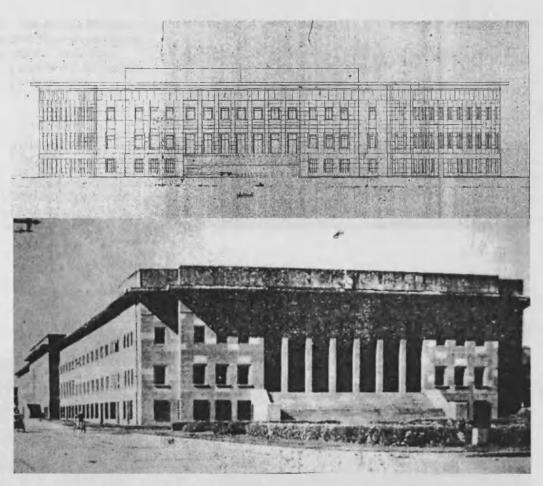
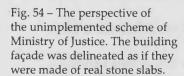


Fig. 52, 53 – (Top) The front elevation of the Ministry of Justice, designed by Saroj Rattananimman in the early 1940s. (below) The building facades of the Ministry of Justice were applied with stone-bond patterns.





building, the architect specified: 'after walls were already made up [...] then inscribe patterns on walls.'<sup>37</sup> The intention to finish the building facade with stone patterns appeared earlier in the perspective of its preliminary design.<sup>38</sup> In this drawing, apparently the building surfaces were delineated as if they were made of real stone slabs (Fig. 54).

<sup>37</sup> National Archive (Bangkok), (4) ST.2.3.6/14 (my translation).

This perspective can be found in Ministry of Justice, Wattanatham Tang Kan San [the Culture of Justice] (Sophonpipattanakorn Printing Co., 1943), no page number.

Fig. 55 – The Aomsin Bank at the junction between the Central Boulevard and Tanao Road, finished after WWII. Its façades were smooth surfaces.



Fig. 56 – Of buildings completed after WWII, only Chalerm-Thai Theatre had its surface marked with artificial stone.



It is also important to observe that the trend to decorate exterior building surfaces with artificial stone finish ceased in architecture designed after World War II. Moreover, on most buildings first designed and under construction from 1939 but not completed until after WWII, the facades were smooth surfaces. This change is evident in three buildings of the boulevard at the junction of the boulevard and *Tanao* Road (Fig. 55). Of buildings completed after WWII, only *Chalerm Thai* Theatre had its surface marked with artificial stones (Fig. 56). Accordingly, it is likely that imitation stone surfaces emerged out of concerns specific to the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. The fact that several architects had turned to artificial stone finishes at that time indicates that the choice was not the concern only a particular architect. None of those who used this finish ever proposed to apply such a finish on their works before 1940 and after WWII, so it could be said that it arose out of a particular wartime situation.

In terms of construction methods, the finishing of imitation stone does not make any sense. As cement was the main material applied onto the facade, it was more trouble to mark it with stone-bond patterns, particularly since the sizes of stone-bond patterns are inconsistent, and do not correspond to the patterns of cement-block masonry beneath the surface. This made the task of finishing even more difficult. (It would be much easier had the patterns of imitation stones correspond to bond patterns of cement-block masonry.) In short, the finished surface did not replicate the material which it covers.

The result is not unlike that described by Adolf Loos in his essay 'Potemkin City,' in which he described Viennese architecture as like the canvas and pasteboard towns erected to impress Catherine the Great. The buildings of Rajadamnern Boulevard, and those of the early 1940s, 'are not actually made out of the material of which they seem'<sup>39</sup>, and indeed there are two layers of deception. First, the buildings that create the modern setting of the boulevard screen off unwanted surroundings, making the space of the boulevard look completely new, and second, the buildings made of concrete block are made to appear as if faced in stone.

As making the buildings to look as if they were made out of stone required more budget, times, and labour, why was this done? In the absence of any direct evidence from the architects, I would like to propose a possible explanation of why such a feature was created at this particular period of time and circumstances.

The need to decorate building surfaces with stone bonding pattern could not be done just for protection against weathering, or if it was meant to do so, the covering should be applied to all exterior building surfaces. The fact that the backs of the buildings, seen in Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings (Fig. 57) and the General Post Office (Fig. 58), were

Adolf Loos, "Potemkin City," in *Spoken into the Void : Collected Essays, 1897-1900* (Cambridge, Mass. : Published for the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago, Ill. and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, N.Y., by MIT Press, 1982), p. 95.





Fig. 57 – The back façades of Suriyanon Hotel were left as smooth surface.

Fig. 58 – The back façades of the General Post Office were smooth surfaces.

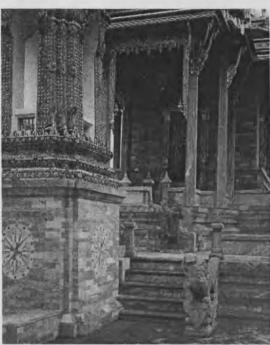
always left bare as smooth surfaces draws our attention to the point that the covering of stone-bond patterns was likely to be done for picturesque reasons: it was meant for spectators in front of the buildings, or on the street. If then the stone-bond covering was not for protection against weathering, what other explanations are there?

It should be emphasised that stone was not used as a facing material in Siam before the middle of the nineteenth century. Although stone may have been used as wall-infill and foundations, it was almost always covered in another material, either white stucco or ceramics, imported from China. But in none of these traditional cases were building surfaces clad in stone. Stone appeared as a choice for building surfaces as the result of the relations with the West from the mid-nineteenth century, and continued for decades after when one of the reforms in various fields introduced in order to express civilised status and western taste. In terms of architecture, to clad buildings in stone became regarded as one of the main features of the 'modern style.' We see this earlier in crown buildings in the Grand Palace. The first use of marble clad on building surfaces appears at *Phra Buddha Ratthanasathan* Chapel, <sup>40</sup> built during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-

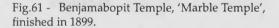
<sup>40</sup> Naengnoi Suksri, *Palaces of Bangkok: Royal Residences of the Chakri Dynasty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p. 176.



Fig. 59, 60 - (top, right ) Phra Buddha Ratthanasathan Chapel, built during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868).







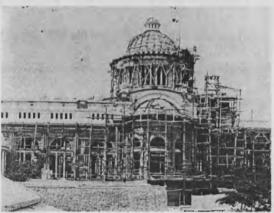


Fig.62 - Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, 'a marble cathedral', completed in 1916.

1868), whose pillars and exterior walls are covered by grey marble slabs (Fig.59,60). A more extensive use of marbles, to make buildings appear modern and civilised, is found in many buildings built in subsequent reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Two buildings amongst these deserve to mention. One is *Benjamabopit* temple or what have been labelled, since it was finished in 1899, as a 'Marble Temple,' or as Erik Seidenfaden remarked in 1928 as 'the finest and purest example of modern Siamese style'<sup>41</sup>, its

<sup>41</sup> Erik Seidenfaden, Guide to Bangkok: With Notes on Siam (Singapore; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

building surfaces both outside and inside walls were clad with white Italian marbles, <sup>42</sup> so as to signify luxury and ennoble the monarch who made it (Fig. 61). Another case is Anantasamakhon Throne Hall, completed in 1916, or what Maurizio Pelleggi remarked as 'a marble cathedral in the desert of Bangkok's royal suburb'. <sup>43</sup> Designed by Italian architects, this prefabricated throne hall was made in Italy and sent to be assembled in Thailand (Fig. 62). Accordingly, there had been a belief since the mid-nineteenth century that through imported stone, architecture would be able to express modern and civilised status, though this meant higher costs than traditional materials. Expensive imported stone signified propriety.

In this regard, it seems that Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings performed a similar approach to the idea of propriety as those pre-1932 buildings. Whereas from the midnineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century the idea that a building could present the condition of being civilised was to be achieved through stone cladding, in the early 1940s this similar task was to be done through imitation stone. If there is one thing the architectures of the boulevard owed to pre-1932 architectures, it is here in the employment of architectural propriety, through the creation of another layer of surface decoration.

In modern architecture, whose smooth surfaces lacked any sort of decoration, 'propriety' could hardly be satisfied.<sup>44</sup> The peculiarity of the buildings on Rajadamnern Boulevard is that while they were partly conceived to be modern, they needed at the same time to present themselves with propriety, which was to be properly 'dressed.' So, the architecture of the boulevard broke a principle of modern architecture by being covered

The idea to cover the temple with marble slabs came from Carlo Allegri, Italian engineer of the Public Works Department. See National Archive (Thailand), RV. Ministry of Public Works 1/26; Peleggi, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image, p.87.

Peleggi, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image, p. 99.

See a discussion about architectural decorum in Adrian Forty, "An Architecture of Respect," in Designing the Warsaw Embassy, ed. Tony Fretton Architects (Trieste, Italy: Navado Press, 2006), p.76-95.

with simulated stone works, which indeed made the buildings looks less modern. This strange and perverse choice of finish may be understood in terms of the obsession with social decorum and propriety promoted by the People's Party at the same time. Proper behaviour meant being dressed correctly, following western models – and the same principle seems to have been applied to architecture, even when the result detracted from the modernity of the buildings.

\* \* \*

Although it seems as if there was a return to practice of making buildings 'cultured' like in the period of absolute monarchy, we cannot simply regard the Rajadamnern Boulevard buildings as a straight forward continuation. Even though both materials - 'real stone' and 'imitation stone' made out of cement - were appropriated to serve the same purpose for architectural propriety, the reason for the choice in each case were not the same, and resulted from the changed economic circumstances.

From the second half of nineteenth century to the first decade of twentieth century, cultural importation was significant to the city's development. Architects, artists and even materials from the west were imported. The cultural importation which cost enormous amounts of money was made possible by the wealth of King Chulalongkorn. His Privy Purse, established in 1890, was the main financial resource for the development of the city during his reign. The economic situation after 1932 revolution was, however, different. With the retrenchment of the early 1930s when the Great Depression hit Siam, the number of western advisors had been decreased enormously. The economic crisis gave the People's Party grounds for criticising the importation policy of King

<sup>45</sup> Porphant Ouyyanont, Crown Property Bureau and Its Commercial Investments (8 June 2006 [cited 5 Feb 2007]).

Foreign architects and engineers working at the Ministry of Public Work were reduced from more than 35 experts to just a few. With this shortage of western architects since 1930, it is not surprising to find that urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard was designed and carried out mainly by native architects.

Chulalongkorn, and anything imported from the West might be condemned as over luxurious; for example, the prefabricated Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, whose budget was perhaps the largest of any edifice ever built in Siam, <sup>47</sup> was criticised by Wichit Wathagan, one of the high officials of People's Party government, for its excessive expense and uselessness, <sup>48</sup> of which he said: 'King Chulalongkorn spent 5 millions baht on Anantasamakhom Throne Hall; there is no benefit at all for our nation.' <sup>49</sup> This criticism was actually based on the fact that during that period the government's economic policy was one of 'economic nationalism,' <sup>50</sup> when Thai products were preferable to imports and anything not Thai could be found fault with.

With the policy of economic nationalism, the government moved to reduce and weaken the economic role and power of foreigners over the country, and to increase jobs for Thais.<sup>51</sup> The government issued *Ratthaniyom* V, Royal Decrees no.5, to create a preference for Thai goods amongst Thai people, as the Prime Minister Phibul stated:

what is [...] needed in order to achieve success is the co-operation of [...] Thai with [...] Thai. What is manufactured by the Thai and sold by the Thai we being Thai should purchase, before we think of purchasing the goods of other people. We should always show approval of Thai goods and give them preference over the goods of other people.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Tamagno described in detail all of the building elements imported from Europe: the exterior walls' lower sections and the passages were covered with Chiampo marble from Marmifera Ligure of Carrara, while the rest of the exterior walls were covered with white marble from Triscorina of Carrara and Catella of Turin. The marble for the relief of the exterior walls was from G. Novi of Genoa. The granite stone was from Cirla in Milan. The interior doors were from Lippi of Pistoia, and the exterior doors were made by Mazzuccatelli in Milan. Bronze and copper were ordered from Metallwaren Fabrick of Geislingen in Stuttgart, Germany. Ceramic tiles were from Austria's famed Wiener Werkstatte in Vienna. Tapestries and carpets were from England.' quoted in Choochoey, "Bangkok's 7 Tales of Modernity: Short Circuits and Cultural Crossover", p.189.

<sup>48</sup> Arguably, the People's Party converted it into the National Assembly after 1932.

<sup>49</sup> Wichit Watragan's letter to Prime Minister Phibul on 18 February 1939. See National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.41.1/26

<sup>50</sup> See Chatthip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasertset, The Evolution of the Political Economy in Siam, 1851-1941 (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand,n.d.); Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1939, p. 7.

This was followed by the Decrees on Jobs and Vocations Reserves for Thai Citizens in 1942; it named twenty-seven kinds of jobs or vocation which were to be kept legally solely for Thais.<sup>53</sup> The government believed that the Thais could not afford anymore to allow foreigners to dominate the Thai economy '[...] for foreigners, [there should be regulations] on the kind of job and profession they could pursue. They should not be allowed to take all kinds of jobs from the owners of the country.'<sup>54</sup> On the occasion of National Day, 24 June 1939, the Prime Minister again continued:

We must compete with them. We must build up Thai communities such that Thais become sellers and buyers; and not ... merely buyers as at present ... Whatever products sold by the Thais should also produced by them. We are Thai, we must buy Thai first; we must prefer Thai products; we must believe that Thai products are better than foreign-made ones.<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, a strict system was introduced to control the commercial activities of foreigners: a series of laws was passed by the National Assembly, aiming to reduce and prevent foreign participation in certain commercial businesses. For example, in any enterprise it was proposed that 51 percent of capital must be invested by the state and another 25 percent by Siamese citizens, while of the remainder no more than 24 percent would be allowed to foreigners. <sup>56</sup> Consequently, various concessions in a number of big industries, formerly granted to foreigners, were revoked by the government. <sup>57</sup>

It was in these circumstances that Thailand found itself facing an ambiguous situation: on the one hand, it wanted to keep peace with western Powers because they were sources

Royal Gazette, 59 (9 June 1942); Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p. 147.

Prime Minister's speech on 31 March 1939: quoted in Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>55</sup> Royal Gazette, 56 (1939): 826-7; quoted in Ibid., p. 161, note 19.

Virginia Thomson, Thailand: The New Siam (New York: Macmillan. Co., 1941), p.614.

Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957*, p. 148-9.; see also 'We, the Thai race, have to take the example set us by cunning people who have arrived in our country to start trading and do business here. When they have been able successfully to wrest the trade and occupation from our hands, should we not use all our influence to get the same back in our own hands?' The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, June 26, 1940, p. 7.

of knowledge, technology, and investment deemed essential for status in the world community; on the other hand, foreign powers could endanger the independence of the country due to their economic intervention; therefore, it was necessary for Thailand to dissociate itself from western investors.

Of all the businesses that the government took over, oil, tobacco, rubber, sugar, paper, clothing, foodstuffs, rice, and saw-milling, the most successful was the Siam Cement Company. Its products had a particular value in relation to the policy of economic nationalism. Looking at the history of the Siam Cement Company, we can see how cement started to become preferred over other materials in this particular period when the government was actively weakening the role of western investors.

The history of the Siam Cement Company was studied by Ian Brown in his book: *The Elite and The Economy in Siam c.1890-1920*, which, I will only summarise here. In Siam before the 1910s, although there had been a substantial and rising local demand for cement, this demand was supplied by imports. In 1910, the amount of imported cement shows 16,000 tons per year; the foreign suppliers were from French Indo-China, who had a main plant at Haiphong, Denmark and Hong Kong. Nevertheless, this imported product was expensive because it had to bear high freight charges and the Bangkok cement dealers used their domination in marketing to force up prices. A group of local investors was confident that it could produce cement for a lower retail price than that currently being demanded for imported brands, because raw materials for cement production could be obtained domestically. The Siam Cement Company was then founded in 1913; its capital was shared by Thais investors who held of 75 percent and a Danish entrepreneur, Captain W.L. Grut, with 25 percent. 59

Thomson, Thailand: The New Siam, p.492.; Ian Brown, The Elite and the Economy in Siam C.1890-1920 (Singapore: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.151-52.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, The Elite and the Economy in Siam C.1890-1920, p.153.

After its establishment, with its ability to supply the increasing local demand for cement effectively, the Siam Cement Company became the most commercially successful business of the time. While in 1915 its total sales of cement were 5,000 tons, it quickly arose to 25,000 tons in 1920, and by 1930 the company sale's increased to 70,000 tons, then almost doubled to 135,000 tons in 1940.60 However, not only was the company successful in its product's sales, but also in its resistance against foreign competition. By using the raw material discovered within the country, cement imports from foreign countries were considerably reduced and replaced by the domestic product. The amount of cement imports fell from a little over 22,100 tons per year between 1911-1914 to 7,700 tons per year between 1920-1923, and for the remaining years of the inter-war decades, although there were sometimes increases in cement imports, at no point during these years were they were over 'one-fifth of the domestic market and indeed in most years the proportion was very much less,'61 according to lan Brown. With these successes 'the Siam cement company,' he concluded, 'possessed a crucial measure of [...] protection against foreign competition.'62

Whereas Siam Cement Company was very successful in resisting foreign competition, other construction industries, on the contrary, were less so. In the teak industry, for example, the state failed to challenge Western dominations in forest operation.<sup>63</sup> Even in 1930 the state only had a very small share in the teak industry. A Forestry Department was involved in only 1 percent of business,<sup>64</sup> while a small number of European firms took 85 percent, and although during the 1930s People's Party government began to take more part in the teak business,<sup>65</sup> not until the end of 1950s could the government remove

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<sup>0</sup> Ibid., p .154.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p .155.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p .119.

A Forest Department was set up in 1895 under the direction of a British forest officer. See James C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand*, 1850-1970 (Stanford (Cal.): Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 111.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

the final interest of the foreign firms from the teak investment. In such a situation as this, timber, although it was available and produced within the country, could not be valued by the government as a superior material to cement in building construction. One contemporary observed the preference for using cement in construction: 'concrete has to be a basic necessity always available with in the country as did table and chair always now in our homes [...] No construction material is ever so much popular as is concrete.' Foreign ownership of the teak business made timber a less attractive material than concrete, which, by contrast, was produced almost entirely by Thai entrepreneurs.

The policy of economic nationalism discouraged the purchase of anything not Thai, making the importation of luxurious construction material unwelcome. To use native timber processed and marketed by foreign entrepreneurs was bad enough, but to import precious stone from a foreign country would have been humiliating.

The combined circumstances of the government's policy of economic nationalism and the success of the Siam cement company as the only construction material producer to resist western domination, 'cement' became preferable over other materials, and this may be one reason why cement was chosen as the material for the exterior surface finish of Rajadamnern Boulevard buildings. Cement became popular and used widely not only because it was available and affordable for constructions, but also because the company manufacturing it showed the ability to resist the foreign domination of its capital and entrepreneurship. The cement industry offered a perfect model for the policy of economic nationalism. In the construction of Rajadamnern Boulevard, cement could be seen as another element of nationhood: while the most modern material, it was at the same time

<sup>&#</sup>x27;In early 1952, the government announced that when leases held by foreign firms expired they would not be renewed. The forests were to be leased to local firms or worked by the government itself;' quoted in Ibid., p. 111.; See also Brown, *The Elite and the Economy in Siam C.1890-1920*, p. 124.: note 139.; The Sri Racha Company set up in 1947 see Ouyyanont, *Crown Property Bureau and Its Commercial Investments* (Icited).

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture], p.365-66. (my translation).

the most indigenous material.

While from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century the material used by the absolute monarchy to achieve architectural 'propriety' was imported marble, in the inter-war time, when economic nationalism was predominant and imported products were restricted, 'propriety' was to be achieved through cement marked as stone, produced within the country and chiefly by native entrepreneurs. Cement then fulfilled architectural propriety in two ways, in its capacity to imitate stone, and also in its significance as the material manufactured domestically mainly by Thai entrepreneurs. If there was one thing in particular that distinguishes what appeared as stone in the early 1940s from the precious stone used by the monarchy earlier, it was not just that one was real stone and that the other artificial, but that one was imported, and the other fulfilled architectural propriety without any loss of currency to foreigners. With the regard to the choice of cement as a desirable and through the curious finish, particularly visible material in the project, Rajadamnern Boulevard, therefore, could also be seen as a site of resistance not just to royalists, but also foreign entrepreneurs.

## Chapter 4

# 'Thai-ness' in Post-War Architecture: A Retreat from 'Modernity'

At the end of the Second World War, the People's Party collapsed. It was blamed for the war and for the alliance with Japan. Although the subsequent government could repudiate the declaration of war against Great Britain and United States, making Thailand seem an unwilling participant<sup>1</sup>, many post-war reactions blamed Phibun's wartime government for association with fascism. Phibun was charged as a war criminal<sup>2</sup>, while the People's Party itself had disintegrated and never recovered. Between 1944 and 1948, post-war governments abandoned almost every policy promulgated during the wartime. Royal Decrees regarding 'civilised cultured,' modes of dress and behaviour, which had provoked severe resistance, were no longer valid, and traditional customs were re-introduced. Furthermore, the territories of the Cambodian and Lao Provinces that People's Party government managed to recover from France in 1942 were now, in return for French agreement to Thailand's admission to the United Nations, returned to French Indochina in 1947.3 Blamed for involvement in the war and for the fact that its prewar achievements now seemed to have disappeared, the impetus of the People's Party faded into insignificance. 4 The war left the People's Party with nothing to be remembered for.

On account of the interruption of WWII, urban renewal on the central Rajadamnern

Boulevard was not completed; only a total of ten apartment buildings and Rattanakosin

Hotel were finished and opened to the public. According to the records at the Crown

<sup>1</sup> Not all members of the council of Regency had signed the declaration of war.

<sup>2</sup> Phibun was accused of wilful collaboration with the Japanese and of crimes against humanity.

<sup>3</sup> David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short Story (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel J. Brailey, Thailand and the Fall of Singapore: A Frustrated Asian Revolution (Boulder; London Westview, 1986), p.143-46.

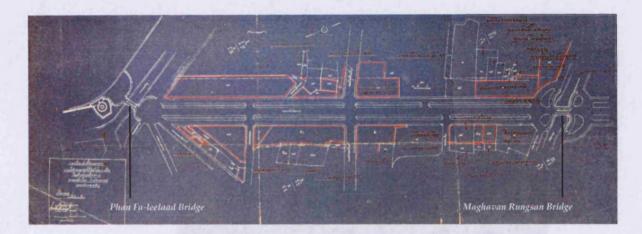


Fig. 63 - Lands along the Outer Boulevard to a depth of forty meters extending from the Phan Fa-leelaad Bridge to the Maghavan Rungsan Bridge were expropriated from the former residences during the 1950s.

Property Bureau, a group of four buildings at the junction between the boulevard and Tanao Road remained half-done throughout the war, while the Chalerm Thai Theatre had been used as a store and a camp for Chinese workers during the war.<sup>5</sup> Although the unfinished buildings did not suffer much, the Crown Property Bureau seemed to have lost interest in completing them, and rather than finish the buildings, in 1948 leased the properties to the open market. It was not until some years after the war that work on these incomplete buildings was resumed.

At the same time as the unfinished buildings on the Central Rajadamnern Boulevard were privatised, the government moved to carry out new construction on different sites: the Inner and Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard. Most of these post-war projects were planned for government offices; only a single project was for public use: a National Theatre. Having been planned earlier for the development of the 1941 Central Boulevard, A 1939 Legislation for Urban Planning of Rajadamnern Boulevard and a Royal Decree for the Expropriation of Land was applied to the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard in 1947 to expropriate lands along the street between Phan Fa-LeeLaad Bridge to Makawan Rungsan Bridge in order to prepare sites for new constructions (Fig. 63). During the 1950s, new

Between June 1945 and June 1946, Department of Railways was permitted to use some rooms on the ground floor of *Chalerm Thai* Theatre for keeping its belongings; the stage and seating areas of the theatre were used as a camp for Chinese workers under control of the Japanese army. ; See the Crown Property Bureau, "Chalerm-Thai Theatre," File 248.3.



Fig. 64 - Map of the 1950s Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard.

ministerial buildings and government offices were established along the street (Fig. 64, 65).

Urban renewal on Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard after the war differed from that of the period earlier in at least two significant aspects. First of all, it was not planned as a unified design. Unlike the urban renewal on the Central Boulevard where buildings along the street were intentionally planned as a single unit, controlling the space of the street, and making the street look long, the post-war development lacked such urban qualities. Individual buildings established along the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard were randomly placed. In addition, by not clearing the trees as had been done on the Central Boulevard,



Fig. 65 - Ministry of Forests on the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard was designed as neo-traditional buildings.

but keeping them as they were, the new buildings on the Outer Boulevard were hidden from view. Because of these changes, there was no longer a sense of a long street like the central one. Secondly, what was also distinct about this post-war development was that its buildings were all designed as neo-traditional buildings; almost every building had a traditional roof accompanying traditional decorations, over buildings whose construction was otherwise modern. A steep-pitched roof, a feature familiar from Thai traditional architecture, was deliberately employed in almost every building sponsored by the state during the 1950s (and this trend continued for decades). By this change of architectural style, it seemed to suggest that the modern style buildings that had been widely constructed and preferred during the 1930s and 40s were no longer favoured.

As there was a deliberate policy to add buildings with traditional roofs and motifs, it seems as if a traditional style of Thai architecture was a solution to whatever problems the government faced after the war. But to build traditional roofs required much more budget in construction than with flat roofs – for the structure of traditional roof and traditional decorations, the most skilled part of building elements attached at the end of the gable, always raised the building construction cost. Minutes Reports of the new building of the Court of Justice confirm that the cost of a traditional roof was considerably more than flat roof construction. While the country was in a state of

See National Archive (3) SR. 0201.30.

financial difficulty after WWII, such a revival of elements of traditional architectural style was not an economically rational solution to the problems facing the country. If, then, the reintroduction of traditional elements in post-war architecture could not be explained on economic grounds, what other cultural or political reasons were there?

The new post-war scheme on the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard was not planned to relate to what had been done to the Central Boulevard beforehand, rather the reverse. In terms of urbanism, the post-war government seemed to have had a different attitude from the People's Party, and, to a certain extent, seemed to want to distance themselves from the works of the People's Party; whatever the People's Party had done on the street, its successors now did the opposite. While the widespread adoption of modernism in architecture between the 1930s and WWII made those in power keen to adopt such trends for the urban renewal of Rajadamnern Boulevard, but with the war and the collapse of the People's Party, it was no longer in the interests of the post-war government to draw attention to modernity or any other feature of the People's Party. In 1951, for example, there was an attempt to replace the statue of constitution, the centre piece of Democracy Monument, with the statue of King Rama VII.7 Although this proposal was not implemented, it indicated the rejection of everything associated with the People's Party by its successor.

The question this chapter asks concerns the meaning of architecture and urban space on Rajadamnern Boulevard in the situation after WWII, when the trend towards novelty was abandoned and new schemes turned in a different direction, to something traditional.

This return to tradition went against the trend of almost every other country after WWII - for while almost everywhere people adopted modernity, especially those who had found themselves on the losing side, only in Thailand, and Italy, two countries where

Vasana, C., 'A monument to change,' Bangkok Post, 24 June 1999. quoted in Kim Dovey, "Memory, Democracy and Urban Space: Bangkok's 'Path to Democracy," Journal of Urban Design 6, no. 3 (2001): p.277.

modernism had been compromised by association with fascism, do we find a retreat away from modernism. In Thailand, this was especially evident. In order to understand this, it is necessary, first, to look at the political circumstances after the war.

By 1948, although Phibun, after release from war criminal charges, was able to form his second government by the support of the 1947 Coup Group, he was not able to rule as a dictator. During his second government between 1948 and 1957, Phibun needed to share power with three groups: his own group, the leaders of the military coup of 1947, and the conservative-royalist group, including royalists who had long been silenced by the People's Party since the 1933 counter coup.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Prime Minister 'Phibun was forced to adjust to the change in political circumstances and the new socio-political surroundings'<sup>9</sup>, and one of his challenges was finding a way of coming to terms with the recent past. Being aware that his association with the Japanese was a severe political burden, Phibun's government quickly dismantled many of the regulations which had given the country the image of a totalitarian state, and every policy that would have reminded people of the wartime government was rescinded. <sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, by the time Phibun became Prime Minister in 1948, Communism had already made substantial gains not only in surrounding countries, but also amongst the Chinese community within the country. Many thus believed that Communism would eradicate the cherished Thai values and ideas and feared that the main national institutions of religion and the monarchy that form an important part of Thai psychology would also be uprooted. However, the government still inclined toward a policy of political neutrality, and it was not until 1950 when it was certain that by joining an anti-

Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents, 1932-1957* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand; Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1979), p.43-44.

<sup>9</sup> Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957 (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford U. P, 1995), p.135.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.137, B.J. Terwiel, Thailand's Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times (Bangkok: River Books Co. Ltd., 2005), p.279.

<sup>11</sup> Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.135-44.

communist alliance the country would have support from the United Stated that Thailand decided to align with the Western powers against the Communist bloc. <sup>12</sup>Although foreign countries, especially Great Britain and United States still regarded Phibun with profound suspicion due to his wartime role in allying with the Japanese, his approach to join on the side of the Free World won back respect for his government and assistance from the Western powers.

The pro-West policy and anti-communist policies of Phibun's government after 1950 made it possible for Thailand to carry out the reconstruction of the country, for the United States and Great Britain agreed to provide various kinds of assistance, mainly because they wanted to turn the country into a 'bastion of freedom in South-East Asia' to save Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from Communism. In 1950, after the country became a strategic area for the containment of communism, military and economic aid was given to Bangkok. And especially after Thailand had joined the South East Asian Treaty Organisation in September 1954, the United Stated military and economic aid to Thailand increased substantially.

Subsequent writings on history of Thai architecture have categorised the neo-traditional building in post-war period as a continuation from the works of traditionalist architect Phra Phrompichit whose most important works were carried out during the early 1940s. In 1993, Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura interpreted the post-war traditional architecture in his book, *Development of Contemporary Thai Architecture: Past, Present and Future,* as follows:

The works of traditional architecture between 1932 and 1957 had been developed from the works of architecture in the early Rattanakosin Period [1782-1851].

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 4: The Search for Security in Donald E. Nuechterlein, *Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965).

Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.281.

John L.S. Girling, Thailand: Society and Politics (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 231.

Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.283.

During 1940s traditional architecture was done to express the quality of material of concrete construction, which was to give a building a massive expression and this trend was developed further into new style so called *'Thai Prayuk'* [literally means 'applied Thai'] during the end of 1950s '16

This theme of 'continuity' was partly due to a respect for Phra Phrompichit's works.

For during 1990s the admiration for him was evident, and a publication of Phra

Phrompichit's works and life was published in 1990. PReferring to this book, Vimolsiddhi

Horayangkura identifies the significance of Phra Phrompichit's work in the development

of Thai architecture as the prototype for post-war architecture. This account encourages

readers to see the development of architecture before and after the war as a continuous

progress. But, this idea of 'continuity' is only partly true because we can not describe

the traditional style buildings before the war and after as a simple linear development.

For while during the interwar years, the state had built traditional buildings, traditional

architectural forms had been relatively marginal, compared to the modern style which

had been more desirable. But just after the war the neo-traditional style building became

a major trend, and replaced the previous preoccupation with modernity.

A more recent discussion on post-war architecture in 2004 by Chatri Prakitnontragan, following the historian Saichon Sattayanurak<sup>18</sup>, attributes these changes of style in architecture to the political situations that Phibun's second government (1948-1957) encountered after the war. The post-war architecture, he stated, was made to represent the concept of 'Thai-ness,' which was redefined after WWII. From Saichon's book, *The* 

Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura and others, Development of Contemporary Thai Architecture: Past, Present and Future (Bangkok: Architectural Association Thailand, 1993), p. 94 (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> See Mahawitthayalai Sinlapako'n [Faculty of Architecture Khana Sathapattayakamsat, Silpakorn University], Prawat Læ Phonngan Samkhan Kho'ng Achan Phra Phromphichit [the Life and Works of Phra Phromphichit] (Krung Thep: Mahawitthayalai Sinlapakon [Silpakorn University], 2533 [1990]).

<sup>18</sup> Saichon Sattayanurak, Khwamplianplaeng Nai Kansang Chat Thai Lae Khwampen Thai Doi Luang [the Change in the Creation of Thai Nation and Thai Identity by Laung Wichit Wathagan] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2545 [2002]).

change in creation of Thai nation and Thai identity by Luang Wichit Wathakan, Chatri derived the idea that Thai identity was not a static concept,<sup>19</sup> and that the difference between the pre-war and post-war eras was the difference in self-esteem of the country at these two periods, causing Thai identity to be redefined.

Thai-ness after 1947 was no longer the image of Greater Thailand that those in power during the wartime had imaged. The concept of Greater Thailand had come to nothing and the territories that Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram managed to gain during the war were returned. The Thai nation then turned back to being a small country, no longer as great as its war time ambitions. [...]

Nationalism promoted to the people after the war was not conceived as a vehicle to lead the country to be the great nation as had been the case during wartime, but rather there was an attempt to suggest in a different way that Nationalism could be a benefit to a small country surrounded by foreign powers [...] Thai-ness was shifted to the theme of localism. <sup>20</sup>

Chatri's intention in suggesting 'the change of Thai identity' was to find a main reason in the socio-political field for the reintroduction of Thai traditional architecture. But while he drew the concept from other disciplines, and noted that visible symbols of national identity took many forms, for example, arts, literature, archaeology, as well as architecture, no attempt is made to show how the concept of 'Thai-ness' occurred in the discourse of architecture. It remains, therefore, necessary to describe how 'Thai-ness' was constructed in architectural discourse. How was national identity in architecture made?

See Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2004), p.435,37.; Sattayanurak, Khwamplianplaeng Nai Kansang Chat Thai Lae Khwampen Thai Doi Luang [the Change in the Creation of Thai Nation and Thai Identity by Laung Wichit Wathagan], p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang Lae Sangkhom Nai Sinlapa Sathapattayakam: Sayam Samai Thai Prayuk Chatniyom [Politics and Society in Architecture], p.438-42. (my translation).

## Dimensions of 'Thai-ness' in pre-war architecture

Wichit Wathakan was a key figure in the creation of national identity in pre-war period<sup>21</sup>, for while almost every form of official Thai culture, produced by the state to guide the political behaviour of the people, was prepared under his influence, it was in his role as Director-General of Fine Arts Department between 1934 and 1942 that he contributed to the formation of the concept of 'Thai-ness' in architectural discourse. He wrote in 1937 that the task of a bureau of architecture in the Fine Arts Department was to pursue a national architecture to give the nation dignity. As Wichit said:

The bureau of architecture should work for only artistic works especially the works that are intended to be [not only] the art of the nation, but also meet a requirement of the present; for example, government buildings that have enough rooms, and their forms meet the present requirement of government, but also, in one way or another, have some characteristics recognisable as being 'Thai.' This way of working maintains the dignity of the nation. Japan has been doing this successfully, even so has Burma. Our Thais had done some important works such as Chakri Mahaprasart Throne Hall and some buildings at Chalalongkorn University. We should research how to develop [them] further ... [and make building possible], and not too expensive. Or, what prototypes of Thai architecture from the past should we adapt to meet present-day requirements.<sup>22</sup>

Also, on this occasion, he plainly claimed the role of a Bureau of Architecture of the Fine Arts Department as a sole creator and authority of 'Thai-ness'. For him 'Thai-ness' could be achieved through the works of architecture executed only by the hands of the architectural bureau. Wichit continued:

Another, that is unacceptable, is that sometimes, and many times, the Bureau

<sup>21</sup> See Scot Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).; Sattayanurak, Khwamplianplaeng Nai Kansang Chat Thai Lae Khwampen Thai Doi Luang [the Change in the Creation of Thai Nation and Thai Identity by Laung Wichit Wathagan].

<sup>22</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.9.1/3 [1] (my translation).

of Architecture needs to work relying on owners' decision; for example, in constructing of temples and related buildings, officials of the Bureau of Architecture are always guided by an abbot; this is wrong in the principle of Department of Fine Arts! The Bureau of Architecture of Fine Arts Department should be the one who acts as if the judge in architectural art, whom no one had an influence upon.<sup>23</sup>

In his directive, while Wichit Wathakan gave the Fine Arts Department hegemony in the control of a single, uniform taste in architecture, he suggested that contemporary Thai architecture should promote the notion of 'Thai-ness' by taking inspiration from indigenous traditions, and at the same time satisfying current purposes. In this regard , 'Thai-ness' in architecture can also be comprehended in Eric Hobsbown and Terrace Ranger's term of 'invention tradition', of which they wrote:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices normally governed by overly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuality with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past ... However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.<sup>24</sup>

In the process of designing Thai architecture, the Fine Arts Department thus played a large role in such invented traditions, and one proposal for a monument in 1939 illustrates this. In 1939, after Thailand's success in treaty negotiation with Western

<sup>23</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.9.1/3 [1] (my translation).

<sup>24</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.1-2.

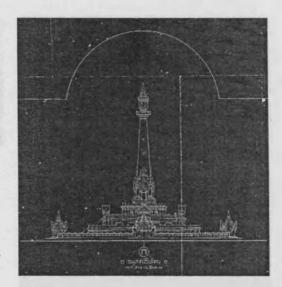


Fig. 66 - Phra Phrompichit's first scheme for the Thai Monument, 1939.

Powers, the Department of Fine Arts proposed to recognise this recently acquired national dignity with a Liberty Monument. Possibly, it was one of the earliest, if not the first, occasion on which Wichit Wathakan discussed what he meant to be 'Thai' in architecture. The Liberty Monument proposed in January 1939, sometimes referred to as the 'Monument of the Treaty of the Nation', and later called the 'Thai Monument', was ambitiously planned to be not only the most important architecture ever built in Thailand, but also to be 'One of the Wonders of the World.' 'Talking about culture and art creation,' Wichit Wathakan said, 'we will be able to show the world in terms of history of Thai architecture. [...] This monument will be the very dignity of the nation and of ours [...].'25 The Monument of the Treaty of the Nation, proposed as architectural competition to be built at the end of the road running from Bangkok to Samuthprakran province, 'aimed to build whether in forms of a statue or a monument, that has to be distinguishable in the sense that the nation has truly gained sovereignty'26. Although there are no surviving drawings for the competition, one scheme was proposed before an announcement of the competition by the chief architect of the Department of Fine Arts. Phra Phrompichit first proposed in February 1939 the monument to be built in the form of lighthouse (Fig. 66). Although deliberately articulated in Thai style, his first

National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.41.1/26, p.11. (my translation).

National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.41.1/26, p.35. (my translation).



Fig. 67 -Lohaprasat built in 1846

Fig. 68 - Phra Phrompichit's second scheme for the Thai monument, 1939.

scheme, however, was rejected on the ground that it looked not 'truly Thai': 'the form of monument which was already designed as a lighthouse is not distinctive, omnipresent; it should be redesigned to be "truly Thai", not similar to anywhere else', said the official of Wharf.<sup>27</sup> Through this process of defining 'Thai-ness' in architecture, the Thai monument was meant to demonstrate a visibly unique aspect of the self of the nation, which had just gained true sovereignty, the most immediate aspect of Thai-ness in architecture was to be national distinctiveness.

If the first scheme design in form of lighthouse did not meet such a quality of distinctiveness, the second proved more passable, and is where we can see how Thai-ness in architecture was understood. Proposed by the same architect, the second scheme for the Thai Monument exploited one of the Thai architectural types - so called *Lohaprasat* built in 1846 - that exhibits distinctiveness of form (Fig.67, 68). Presumably following Wichit Wathakan's suggestion, Phra Phrompichit's second proposal no longer performed

as a lighthouse, but provided the functions of economic museums, hotels, restaurants, ballrooms, and meeting rooms within one edifice. The form, iconography, and spatial organisation arrangement of *Lohaprasat*, conventionally designed for religious worship, was adapted to use for secular purposes. As Thai monuments in the past had almost always been designed to serve only monarchical or religious purposes, to adapt the past style of architecture a new secular function such as this, had no precedent. Being aware of the criticisms that might be made of the proposal, Wichit Wathakan confidently explained to the Prime Minister why forms, styles, and spaces of past architecture could be reworked for new secular purposes such as hotels. He said 'the only problem the monument might have been disapproved of is using it as a hotel, of which I am not afraid'29 - although he never later gave evidence for this view.

While it was sensible to stress Thai-ness when representing the nation-state, it should not be forgotten that at the time the modern style of architecture was gaining currency, and for that reason perhaps the opportunity to realise Thai-ness through the Thai Monument was not realised. In April 1941, the proposal for the Thai Monument was rejected since it was considered less important relatively than other construction projects under construction such as Rajadamnern Boulevard modern apartments, Wat Phra Srimahathat (planned as a temple as well as a tomb of the People's Party), and Victory Monument.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the proposal for the Thai monument was rejected in favour of modernist architecture. Architectural ties to the past were not yet a practical way of representing Thai identity. Later on in the post-war period the concept of Thai-ness was re-formed, and by this time it was drawn in relation to a broader circle of cultural practices, relating partly to anti-communist policy.

<sup>28</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.41.1/26, p. 11-13

<sup>29</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.41.1/26, p. 12 (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST.0701.42/10, p.1

# 'Thai-ness' in post-war architecture

After the war, when fear of Communism dominated Thailand, Phibun's government saw in nationalism a solution to whatever problems it encountered. For the Communist 'was depicted as the greatest threat against the valued Thai traditions, ways of life, and religious, as well as the institution of kingship'<sup>31</sup>, and the government looked for ways to legitimate the idea of a unified Thai nation, believing that nationalism would be able to rally the people together in support of the government.

On this premise, the government undertook an active programme for the 'promotion of national culture' for the mental and moral development of the people. This task was assigned to the Ministry of Culture. Set up in 1952 under the direction of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Culture consisted of three main departments: Department of Culture, Department of Religion, and Department of Fine Arts. Just as in his first government, Phibun used works of art and architecture as vehicles of the government's campaign for promoting the image of Thai identity and national pride, but what was different in the cultural programmes between his first and second period of office was that emphasis was turned away from the earlier preoccupations with modernity and towards the search for the spirit of national culture, which was to be about maintaining, developing, expressing Thai identity, and resisting the external currents of artistic culture.

The programme of tracing the historical roots of the Thais was carried out through six branches of culture: Performance, National Archive, Archaeology, Literature and History, Architecture, and Decorative Arts. The programme included the restoration and repair of archaeological sites and historical buildings; for example, Phimai Stone Castle, the old capital of Ayuddhya, and the old Chiengsaen Town. Between 1948 and 1957, a total of 5535 temples throughout the country were restored. Traditional Thai dance was included in the primary school curriculum, while Thai dance troupe became

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Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.136.

a means of introducing Thai culture abroad. A National Archive was proposed for Bangkok, where state documents were restored. New writings on the history of Thailand, Thais, and Thai culture was researched and published. A series of 'SILPAKON' journal produced by Department of Fine Arts was published twice a year. Its content was focused fundamentally on the subject of Thai culture.

Along with this programme of tracing historical roots, the concepts of 'national character,' 'Thai style,' and sometimes 'Thai-ness' were widely used and repeated to identify national character in cultural discourse. And it should be noted that when 'national character' began to flourish in earnest, it was at the very time that the strong rejection of the modern style of art and architecture occurred. And it is not surprising to find that the very person who beforehand had been part of introducing modern trend into Thailand during 1930s-40s would shift his attitude towards the modern in favour of tradition. Silpa Bhirasri (C. Feroci), for example, after he changed his nationality to Thai, wrote in 1950 'as we received [and used] Western civilisation as [standard for] our culture, we brought Western Art, and thought that it has more value than our [Thai] Art; we have neglected our traditional way of constructing a government building. Just as our architecture loses its "national character", as a result, other Art loses [their national character] too.'32 Moreover, in 1950 M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a well-known writer, intellectual, and politician, criticised western influence in the Thai art sphere. He wrote in his newspaper article 'the works on display are either like those of farang [westerner] or sloppy like children's painting; '...each one' he continued 'screams loudly of Gauguin! or Van Gogh! or Salvador Dali! which was extremely offensive to the eye.'33 However, he preferred works whose subjects, he said, 'reflected a feeling of indigenous art more than those of foreigners'. In 1954, again, Bhirasri repeated his earlier argument in his article:

Silpa Bhirasi, The Exhibition of Life and Works of Professor Silpa Bhirasri at the Casting Workshop, Fine Arts Department, 15 September - 15 October 1992 (Krung Thep Maha Nakhon: Mahawitthayalai Sinlapakon: Krom Sinlapakon, 1992), p.131 (my translation).

As quoted in Apinan Poshyananda, Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Singapore: Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1992), p.56.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

'by adopting many peculiarities of Western art through importing semi-commercial art objects and using foreign artists and architects, traditional art came to an abrupt standstill.'35

Another account of 'national character' in works of art and architecture concerned the race of the person who made it, which meant that 'national character' in works of art or architecture could only be achieved by indigenous artisans. In his article of 1957 'Note on some Thai works of Art', where seven pieces of Thai art and architecture were chosen for discussion of their artistic and cultural values, Dhawat Sumawongs explained why the most important Buddha statue of Thailand could not be considered as Thai artefact. Even though, he said, Emerald Buddha statue was the most highly worshipped by Thais, but because it was proved by archaeologists that it was originally made in India [sic], and not by an indigenous artist, it therefore could not be a Thai art work.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, we then see that Thai-ness meant to be made by indigenous people.

Furthermore, in the conference of the Eastern Committees of International Association of Plastic Arts of 1959, at which Bhirasri represented Thailand, and gave a speech, he said:

In our days all civilized nations have adopted the same economic system and scientific appliances which affect traditional art, giving rise to what we could term a 'trend to international artistic expression', this particularly where abstract and cubistic forms are concerned. From an easterner's point of view we daresay that such a trend of universalism is not desirable. We know that eastern arts, having been eminently conventional, repeated from century to century the same subjects and forms until their exhaustion. Thus at present in many countries of the east we are in a transitional period from which an art conveying the spirit of eastern culture has to spring up [...]<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>36</sup> Dhawat Sumawongs, "Notes on Some Thai Works of Art," Silpakon 1, no. 2 (July 1957): p.82.

<sup>37</sup> Silpa Bhirasri, "International Association of Plastic Arts (I.A.P.A)," Silpakon 3, no. 1 (May 1959): p.39.

He then concluded:

Art changes in style and technique but in general it should reflect the characteristic of each race, thus the actual trend to universalism in art expression is not desirable.<sup>38</sup>

During the 1950s, questions of 'national identity' in cultural discourse, where Thai art and architecture were concerned, began to be constructed against the background of external influence. The experience of modernity promoted by the People's Party had made people keen to find ways of indicating their identity and of expressing their nationality in art and architecture. These debates were not only about the most suitable style for Thai art and architecture, but concerned wider questions about the function of conveying national identity in this post-war situation, where the trend toward modernity and universalism was no longer a satisfactorily solution.

These debates are important for they corresponded to the situation in post-war architecture where the recent past of progressive nationalistic enthusiasm of the People's Party was replaced with the favour of traditional subject, and the revival of traditions in architecture became the desirable trend. And it is against this setting that the new development on the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard could be understood.

Returning to the problem with which this chapter is concerned, although what we are trying to understand is the style of the new post-war buildings on the Outer Boulevard, the origin of the revivalist trend in architecture was, as we have seen, actually developed in parallel with other cultural practices at large. But to speak more specially about architectural discourse, although it is quite difficult to indicate at what point the question of Thai-ness reappear in post-war architecture, we can say that it emerged at around the same time as the National Theatre was being designed during 1950s. As this was

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contemporary with the post-war development on Rajadamnern Boulevard, we can take the discussion of Thai-ness around the National Theatre to inform what was happening along the 1950s Outer Boulevard as well.

The history of the building of the National Theatre is where the debate about nationality in architecture was most evident, particularly when different schemes of the building designs were compared and discussed amongst a building committee, whose members included politicians and cultural experts on art, Thai architecture, and literature. Through their discussion about the building's character, it is possible to discover the thoughts of the committee about Thai-ness in relation to architecture. The National Theatre is the starting point where people representing the government started to debate on what Thai-ness could be, and their shared perception about nationality in architecture could possibly reflect on other government-sponsor buildings, especially since at least one member of the building committees, Laung Burikhomkovit, was also involved in their constructions, too. A series of meeting reports concerning the proposed designs of the National Theatre between 1952 and 1962 is thus important for the fact that the style of the building had to be appropriate to what the building committee called 'Thai-ness.' 39

### The creation of 'Thai-ness' via the National Theatre

The National theatre was amongst the first in a series of major post-war public buildings that were later in the 1980s called by architecture critics 'Thai Prayuk' (applied Thai) in style. The proposal for the National Theatre was not a new building programme initiated after the war, but was initially planned around 1940, during the first period of Phibun's administration and indeed its construction had been started at Misakawan Garden, on the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard. However, when construction was almost finished, in 1942 the building abruptly collapsed. After investigation of the causes of its failure, the

The main unpublished source on the building history of the National Theatre, Bangkok is from National Archive, Bangkok, (2) SR.0201.69.16 and ST. 0701.40.2.



Fig. 69 - A map shows the former site of Ministry of Transport, chosen as the site for the new National Theatre.

Fig. 70 - The former site of Ministry of Transport, photographed in 1946.

building was declared not reusable.<sup>40</sup> The project was stopped during WWII and it was not until 1949, in Phibun's second regime, that the proposal was revived. Conceived as part of the search for the spirit of national culture, the project of the National Theatre was

proposed to help promote nationalism and anti-communist policies through stage plays (The theme of 'The Power and Glory' series written by Wichit Watrakan, for example, was intended to arouse people to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the nation.)<sup>41</sup> In 1950, a new site for the National Theatre was chosen on the former site of Ministry of Transport opposite to the Inner Rajadamnern Boulevard (Fig.69, 70). Three existing buildings were then removed to prepare the site for a new construction. Selected from government officials who had a profound knowledge of culture, the building committee of the project was set up, including the architect M.C. Samaichalerm Kritsadakorn. Despite the architect having been nominated, it was also possible for other people on the building committee to propose alternative designs.

The building committee of the National Theatre had great difficulty in defining the features of Thai-ness in relation to architecture. It is surprising that while in the 1941 proposal for the Thai monument, the person behind the proposal, Wichit Wathakan, seemed confident of what Thai-ness in architecture could be (as he put it, something more than tradition, but also responding to current purpose), but the 1950s the National Theatre building committee found it rather difficult to identify what Thai-ness was about, and the only way they could do so was by first knowing what Thai-ness was not. Thai-ness was identified by excluding anything not 'Thai' - this fact indicated that at the time there was no definite meaning to Thai-ness and its meanings could be adjustable. In November of 1952, two architects proposed their designs for the National Theatre. Samaichalerm's design was something like Garnier's opera house in Paris<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 71, 72), whereas Phra Phrompichit planned the National Theatre in Thai traditional manner with the roof as the dominant feature and gables close with Traditional motifs.<sup>43</sup> Phra Phrompichit was then asked to work on the project with Samaichalerm, while

<sup>41</sup> See Suwannathat-Pian, Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957, p.138.

<sup>42</sup> Samaichalerm's use of prominent western dome may indeed be considered Garnier's opera house in inspiration.

<sup>43</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST. 0701.40.2.

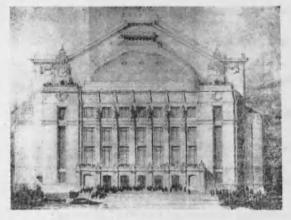


Fig. 71 - The north elevation of Samaichalerm's rejected scheme for the National Theatre.



Fig. 72 - The east elevation of Samaichalerm's rejected scheme for the National Theatre.

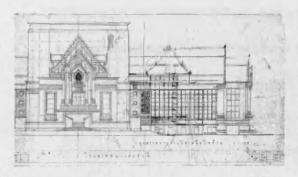


Fig. 73 - The north elevation of the implemented scheme for the National Theatre, presumably following Phra Phrompichit's sketches.

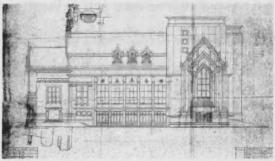


Fig. 74 - The west elevation of the implemented scheme for the National Theatre.

Samaichalerm's Garnier-like design was opposed on the ground that its dome looked too 'Christian'<sup>44</sup>, by which was meant too western. He then was under pressure to adopt the style proposed by Phra Phrompichit, representing a more nationalistic architecture. A subsequent proposal for the National Theatre was proposed in April 1953 by Italian artist Silpa Bhirasri (C. Feroci) in a western manner. Possibly even less Thai in style than Samaichalerm's rejected proposal, Bhirasri's plan was truly western, emphasizing the character of the National Theatre by designing the main building's feature with 'a particular kind of prominent Western Dome'. Although Bhirasri's plan was highly admired by the building committee in its originality and elegance, his proposal was rejected for the similar reason given to Samaichalerm earlier that there was nothing Thai in it. Phra Phrompichit again proposed to adjust Bhirasri's design by appropriating the

<sup>44</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST. 0701.40.2/4.

<sup>45</sup> National Archive, Bangkok, ST. 0701.40.2, 12th meeting report, 23 April 1953.

Bhirasri's Western Dome into one particular type of traditional Thai roofs which shared certain characteristic with the design of Bhirasri's Dome. This is to say that Thai-ness that once appeared to have been developed out of Thai tradition to meet current purpose could now be proposed from another angle: by way of adapting western designs into Thai. As Bhirasri's Western design was rejected, it was clear from this point that the arguments amongst the building committee aimed at the elimination of alien taste in favour of Thai, and because the judgement to decide of what 'Thai' in architecture would be had to be made by those who had been trained in a particular tradition such as Phra Phrompichit and others in the building committee, thus Thai-ness in architecture was not something that could be seen from the outside, but only from within by a certain group of cultural experts. Whether any more proposals were made for the National Theatre, we do not know as the evidence in the report dries up at this stage, and the work of designing the National Theatre in the end went to Samaichalerm, 46 who had to adapt his design to the Thai style suggested by Phra Phrompichit (Fig. 73-74).

If the reason why Samaichalerm's earlier design and Silpa Bhirasri's proposal were rejected was because their designs did not represent Thai-ness, it is clear that Phra Phrompichit's ideas proved more acceptable: the scheme realized was an intersection between Samaichalerm's modern functional arrangement and Phra Phrompichit's version of Thai architecture.

According to the criteria considered by the building committee for the National Theatre, the outward appearance of the building needed to be made 'Thai Style' as much as possible, while the interior, as the report specifies was to be, 'American,' by which was meant the use of modern furniture and equipment imported from United States.<sup>47</sup> The integration of the modern building function within the traditional style of building

The cabinet approved SamaiChalerm's design in June 1953.

<sup>47</sup> See the catalogues of American theatre chairs in National Archive, Bangkok, ST. 0701.40.2/2

was not a new approach in Thai architectural history, as similar approaches had been practiced since the 1910s at least<sup>48</sup>, but only a few architects had shown themselves able to successfully overcome this challenge. And, perhaps, because Samaichalerm based the priority on the arrangement of the plan rather than concerning the outward appearance of the building, as the building committee and Phra Phrompichit asked him to do, the architecture of the National Theatre raises the problem of the appropriate relationship between architectural style and modern plan.

The realisation of Thai-ness in the national theatre could be understood as a deliberate attempt to combine traditional elements of Thai pitched roofs and traditional motifs with what was otherwise a modern functional building. In his implemented scheme, Samaichalearm's modernist approach was evident: the planning of the building was arranged according to its functions (Fig. 75-77). But possibly by keeping the modern arrangement of the plan, the attempt to use Thai historical architectural form and motif here is limited; on the one hand, the roof shapes and forms are strictly controlled by the building plan and therefore can not be freely expressed itself as in traditional architectures, and on the other, because the roof was overwhelmingly traditionalist in character - possibly following Phra Phrompichit's sketch, the modern plan arrangement could not be integrated with the stylistic roof satisfactorily. The fly tower, in which scenery was to be installed, requiring a vast space over the stage, did not allow the architect to add another pitched roof over it, which would have helped to reduce the appearance of its overwhelming size and to make building elevation look well in proportion (just as traditional architects always did in a temple hall.)<sup>49</sup> As a result, Samaichalearm left the tower as what the press at the time satirically called 'the soap box' - the huge mass overshadowing the pitched roof of the auditorium. Even after the

Walter F. Vella, Chaiyo!: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism (The University Press of Hawaii, 1978), p.234.

For traditionalist architects, after adding pitched roofs over a building, the pitched rood will always be divided into smaller parts. This roof's articulation is one of the ways to give the buildings an effect of lightness, even when they are massive in their construction.

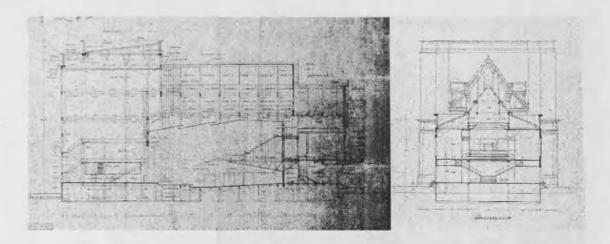


Fig. 75 - The longitudinal section of the National Theatre.

Fig. 76 - The cross section of the National Theatre.

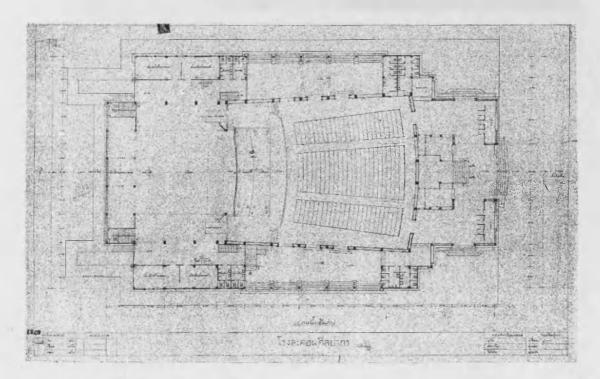


Fig. 77 - The ground Floor Plan of the National Theatre.

building's construction had begun, the problem of the mass of the fly tower had been unresolved. For despite the mass of the auditorium hiding the view on the north side of the fly tower, the fly tower still shows its unsatisfactory size on other three sides, particular on its east side where the building was easily seen from Pramane Ground. During the construction between 1961 and 1965, apparently the building committee proposed to build two other buildings attached to the fly tower, on its east and west sides in order to, as reported, 'reduce its unsatisfactory appearance', although this would have

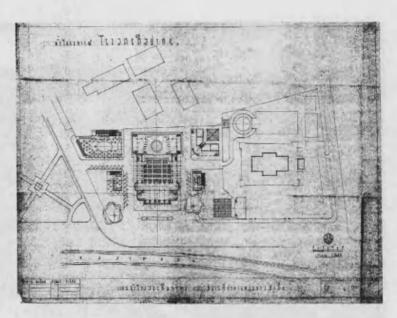


Fig. 78 - The site plan of the National Theatre before adding east-west buildings.

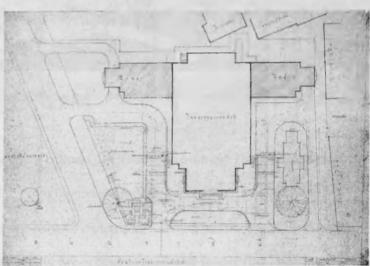


Fig. 79 - The site plan of the National Theatre after adding east-west buildings to hide the fly tower.

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added one-fifth to the building budget.50 (Fig. 78-80)

As we have seen, the architects were forced to resume pre-modern construction practices and while they could not completely abandon the building's modern functional and technological concerns, they tried to conceal modern requirements with traditional elements and give it a Thai character. Special emphasis was placed on roof design: pitched roofs with decorative gables evoked tradition regardless of the modern structure underneath.

The cost of additional buildings on the east and west sides of the fly tower was 10,053,200 in total, that is 18 percent of the overall cost, which was 56,484,465 baht, of the National Theatre. See Prapat Trinarong, "Inauguration Ceremony of the National Theatre," Silapakon 9, no. 6 (March 1966).

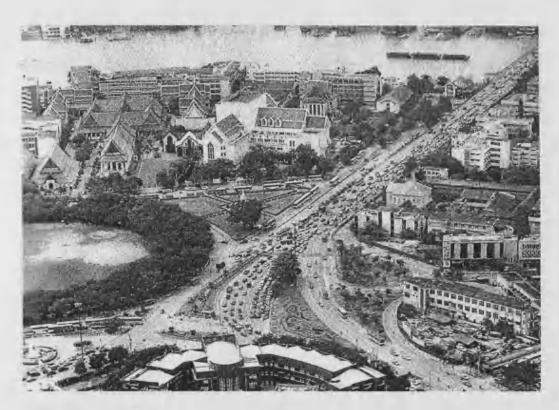


Fig. 80 - The National Theatre. 'The soap box' – the huge mass of fly tower overshadows the pitched roofs of the auditorium.

In the climate where there was a cultural programme to promote Thai-ness, although the aims and strategies of the programme were clear, the architecture of the National Theatre failed to meet its requirements. Subsequent writing has perceived the merging of the two un-matching features between pitched roofs and modern building function as an inappropriate strategy in designing a building; for example, in 1969, just four years after the theatre was completed, as Anuvit Chalernsuppakul put it 'to build a Thai traditional building in which its function is suitable for modern activity [...] is a misunderstanding, because in practical way they [traditional building and modern function] are incompatible.'51 In this regard, the building history of the National Theatre is nothing but tragic. While its first realisation in 1942 was a structural failure, the second building of 1965 was a cultural failure - for it had not produced a satisfactory solution to 'Thai-ness' in architecture.

Anuvit Chalernsuppakul, 'Obstructions and factors in creation of Thai style architecture,' ASA Journal, vol. 1 (1969), p.94; as quoted in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, Kanmuang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam: Sayam samai Thai prayuk chatniyom [Politics and society in architecture] (Krung Thep: Matichon, 2004), p.435.

At almost the same time as the Thai-ness of the National Theatre's project was being discussed, similar approaches to new buildings with Thai-ness in character occurred in the design of several state-sponsored buildings from 1952 onward, including new buildings on the Outer Rajadamnern Boulevard; for example, the United Nation Building (1953, demolished), Ministry of Culture (1954), the SEATO headquarters (1954), Ministry of Agriculture (1956), and the Department of Forests. The responsibility for government-sponsored construction remained with the Department of Public Works whose director was one of the National Theatre's building committee, and whose policy was simply to design post-war constructions in seemingly 'Thai Style.'52 Like the National Theatre, these post-war buildings were sponsored by the government; we can assume that the reintroduction of traditional architectural ornament on the post-war buildings on Rajadamnern Boulevard had a similar cultural and political importance to the National Theatre.

First, the intense nationalism after the war gave rise to a reaction to the modernity that the People's Party had forcefully promulgated in the interwar period, and encouraged certain practices drawn from pre-modern Thai culture instead as a means of maintaining national unity. In post-war state-buildings, attempts were made to cover modern structures by traditional features of pitched roofs and traditional ornamentation. Because modern building, built widely between 1932 and 1945, had totalitarian associations, one of the tasks of post-war government architecture was to escape this association. The reversion to Thai architecture was a deliberate attempt to disconnect from the architectural practice of the recent past regime.

It should be noted that there was no continuation between the group of architects working on the boulevard between the pre-war era and the post war one. This change is a bit unpredictable. On the account of the collapse of the *Chalerm-Chart* Theatre at *Missakawan* Garden in July 1942, Miow Aphaiwongs, who was responsible for the project was convicted of corruption. He was then dismissed from the job at the Crown Property Bureau and a few years later after the Second World War left for France but then came back again in 1947. Yet from this return till 1963 when he died, there was no evidence he had done any significant project. Another architect, Saroj Rattananinman, who designed Rattanakosin Hotel of 1942 died in 1950. While these two pre-war architects disappeared, those who designed post-war project were architects in the Department of Public Works. Most of them were trained within the country. However, this change of architects does not explain the change of the style of architecture, because different architects could have gone doing in the same thing.

Second, as communism was widespread amongst all the surrounding countries from Indochina to Malaysia, there was fear that if communism reached Thailand, it would destroy the values of Thai tradition. If resistance to communism required a strong united nation, the revival of architectural tradition was conceived as one solution amongst other cultural programmes. Like other cultural campaigns, the reviving of Thai architecture could be seen as creating a sense of national pride and love amongst people through their awareness of Thai identity, and therefore preventing them from falling for communist propaganda.

#### Conclusion:

Between 1930s and 1950s, Thai-ness in architecture, as conceived through the proposal for the Thai Monument by Wichit Wathakan and Phra Phrompichit during the prewar period, and later manifested in the debates about the National Theatre, was a changing quality; its meaning and significance changed according to political and cultural circumstances over time. During the pre-war period it was created as something representing the dignity of the nation, while in the post-war years Thai-ness had been used in order to engineer a particular cultural programme whose task was to turn its back on the modernity of the People's Party. Accordingly, Thai-ness was created not just as a concept about the style of architecture; the crux of it lay neither with pitched roofs accompanied by traditional decoration, nor in any direct adaptation of past style of architecture, but in the new task of synthesizing what could be considered Thai in political and cultural terms. In other words, while represented through architecture, Thainess was not necessary about a building character in its own right - for it was conceived as not just about the description of the style, structure, or whatsoever about physical appearance of architecture, rather it was a description of a way of thinking about culture in particular political cultural circumstances, and for this reason it should be stressed that it is not a timeless concept. Thai-ness does not mean simply to represent building with particular kind of building character from the past; it is a rather more complicated

concept for it emerged at a moment in Thai history when it was necessary to think about new cultural things in terms other than 'modern.' In these circumstances, it was essential for the post-war government to produce a post-modern architecture, through developing a critique of modern architecture. By dissociating itself from the recent past of the People's Party and establishing its new identity through cultural revival of the country's glorious past, the post-war government wanted to substantiate itself, not as continuous with the People's Party, but as a successor to the pre-1932 regime.

With the revival of traditional architecture, post-war Rajadamnern Boulevard established an appearance of continuity between the past and the present. And this, to some degree, affects the way in which Thai-ness has been thought of nowadays. In Thailand there has been an assumption that Thai-ness in architecture has existed for a long time. Many, moreover, assume that it is necessary to preserve and promote Thai identity in architecture as if it might one day disappear. Unlike the architectural critic Anuvit Chalernsuppakul, many traditional architects and cultural experts still believe that adding traditional pitched roofs and traditional motifs to a building is one of the ways, or even the only way, to pursue Thai-ness. But, as we have seen, doing that to make a Thai style building only happened in particular circumstances for particular reasons in the post-war situation. It is impossible to point to any pre-existing Thai-ness on which this new style was founded. 'Thai-ness', claimed to be rooted in primordial culture, as something permanent, was actually recent in origin and was invented. In this respect, 'Thai-ness' is similar to what Arata Isozaki describes as 'Japan-ness' in Japanese architecture,53 or what the historian Benedict Anderson states about 'nation-ness' in a broader sense, as an artefact invented culturally and historically.<sup>54</sup> Thai-ness is, in fact, to use Anderson's term, 'imagined'; it was formed by ways of imaging about it, and is

What was different between the formation of nation-ness of Japan and that of Thailand was that in Japan, Japan-ness, according to Isozaki, was invented conforming to external gaze, while in Thailand, national identity was fostered internally amongst cultural experts of the state. See Arata Isozaki, Japan-Ness in Architecture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

therefore not factual. After all, nationality in Thai architecture was part of the formation of the Thai nation after the war, to help facilitate a comfortable continuation of the past with the present, creating in imagined society delusions about its ancestry.

## Conclusion

From the emergence of the People's Party in 1932 to the end of Phibun's second administration in 1957, social, political, and economic circumstances had brought enormous changes to the meanings of Rajadamnern Boulevard. While Rajadamnern Boulevard was first built as a connection between the royal palaces in order to represent the power of the monarchy during the Fifth Reign, its second development carried out under the People's Party was planned, by contrast, to reject that monarchical preoccupation and to create urban imagery in its revolutionary development. The self-contained entity of the Central Boulevard, at the centre of which is the Democracy Monument, created the ideal setting for new ideologies of the People's Party. And around the time the boulevard was opened in 1941, the boulevard activated the pursuit of modernity: spectacles of modernity were played out, whereas cultural slackness and traditional ways of life had no place in it. Royal Decrees and the Building Codes of Rajadamnern Boulevard's buildings made people adapt their social behaviours to conform to new demands of propriety. After the war, however, the collapse of the People's Party and the wartime defeat put everything belonging to that period into recession. Modernism, therefore, was rejected in favour of localism. 'Thai-ness' in architecture was then created on the space of the boulevard. The revival of traditional architecture in postwar architecture was developed as a critique, partly, against the modernity of the People's Party.

## A national artefact

Rajadamnern Boulevard was a national artefact. One of the main tasks for rulers through three decades between 1930s and 1950s was the creation of the new nation, Thailand.

While nation building programmes were carried out in social, political, and economic

realms, in terms of architecture and urban space, urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard was directly connected to the pursuit of nation building. Its significance not simply lay in street widening to make room for modern traffic, nor in establishing buildings along the street for 'modern' uses as offices for the government or as apartment houses for people, but in the new task of depicting a desirable image of what the new nation was expected to be. It was like a microcosm of the entire process of creating a generalised concept of a nation. The physical fabric of Rajadamnern Boulevard, in other words, is a tangible space for the representation of that intangible thing.

Rajadamnern Boulevard is a place where a historical change is most evident, and this is not only because Rajadamnern Boulevard consists of a variety of architectural styles. What is really evident here is in the fact that each subsequent addition to the architecture of the street always eclipsed its predecessor. Each new style of architecture that emerged on this street emerged from the assumption that whatever was there before belonged to history, and was unworkable in the present circumstances. It is now, then, possible to return to the question raised earlier in the introduction: how could a new meaning be given to old structures and forms? The old fabric of Rajadamnern Boulevard only acquired new meanings through the effect of new buildings and street layouts making them outdated and defunct. It was, indeed, this very process of making history, of seeing one thing new against another considered already dead, that we see in the successive transformations of Rajadamnern Boulevard between 1930s and 1950s.

# A place of contradiction

By its very nature as part of the physical fabric of the city, the boulevard can never be a unified work. Previous traces and memories can never be entirely displaced by urban renewal. And for this reason, with the persistence of urban construction from the past to the present, Rajadamnern Boulevard is a place of contradiction. And this is the one certain thing we can learn from its history. The controversial 2003 plan for Rajadamnern

Boulevard redevelopment, which was raised in the introduction, between those in power who wanted to develop Rajadamnern Boulevard as a homogenous representation of Chakri Dynasty's history and those who disagree and claimed for the existence of the People's Party in Thai history, is, to a certain degree, the natural consequence of the contradictory aspect of the boulevard. Because Rajadamnern Boulevard is a very delicate place, built by the accretion of unconnected pieces of historical constructs chained to the single space, where an emphasis upon one must immediately imply or presuppose a critique of the other. This series of contradictions is what the developers of Rajadamnern Boulevard, therefore, must confront and understand. To respond to such historical contradiction, we need to see it as a concatenation of historical constructs whose contradictions have to be acknowledged, and to understand that it has many faces, not one. Thus, the real task of urban renewal on Rajadamnern Boulevard nowadays is not only in searching out the best solution for urban development in functional, economic, and aesthetic terms, but also in finding a place in which all the spaces of historical contradiction can co-exist.

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