

The Vietnam War and Tourism in Bangkok's Development, 1960–70

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Abstract

This paper explores the reasons behind Bangkok's rapid growth in the 1960s, concentrating on two particular influences: the Vietnam War and its related developments, and the first significant upsurge in tourism. It is suggested that US military involvement in the Vietnam War had a significant impact on the development of Bangkok's service and construction industries. Particularly important was a major burst of construction activity in the 1960s: new suburbs developed and hotels and other commercial building sprang up. The financial, commercial and tourist industries experienced rapid growth, and construction followed in their wake. The presence of the US military in Vietnam indirectly induced an influx of foreign direct investment boosting the growth of industry in Bangkok. Tourism added to the expansion of services and construction. Among the reasons for the increase in tourism were the stable political atmosphere and the development of Bangkok as a crossroads of international air transportation. The hotel industry and retail industry both expanded rapidly due to tourist demand.

I Introduction

The 1960s was a crucial decade in the history of Bangkok. It was a period which saw an astonishing pace of development, in road building, housing development, hotels, and in various other ways. In 1950 Bangkok was still a relatively small city, with a population of some one million. Canals still dominated movement, and *samlor* (pedal *samlor*) plied all the main streets. By 1960 many canals had been filled in, new roads took their place, and the *samlor* was disappearing.

This paper explores the reasons behind this rapid change, and concentrates on two particular influences: the Vietnam War and its related developments, and the first significant upsurge in tourism.

II The Vietnam War

The decade of the 1960s saw (1) the involvement of the U. S. A. in the Vietnam War and (2) the influx of foreign direct investment to Thailand. The latter was to an extent

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