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PUMIN VARAVARN: LANDSCAPES OF CONSUMPTION AND HIDDEN HERITAGE: A CASE STUDY OF SUKHUMVIT ROAD. THESIS ADVISOR: PROF. ROSS J. KING, 170 pp.

Bangkok's southeastern growth corridor, starting at Rattanakosin Island, is built around a road that begins as Rama I, becomes Phleonchit, and ends as Sukhumvit. Sukhumvit, as an area, is over-built, congested, chaotic, and represents Bangkok in its most urbanized developed form, for better or worse. It also has the region's heaviest concentration of western tourists, hotels, bars, prostitutes and represents Bangkok in its most venal state. This thoroughfare is both urbane and vulgar and a very recent manifestation: until the 1960s, the Sukhumvit area was rural and quietly suburban.

In 1857, Rama IV (King Mongkut) built Wat Srapathum along with his vacation palace, Srapathum near the end of Rama I Road. The dissertation approaches Sukhumvit as overlaying and inter-weaving layers of reality. Initially, there is the Sukhumvit of memory, perhaps most easily understood as a history of the area at its simplest level: the various kings and their legacies, the wats, the palaces and the few remaining khlongs, survivors of an older, aquatic realm. Second, Sukhumvit is an area of consumption – of constant change, an area of refurbishments and reinventions used to attract the tourist dollar, contemporary Sukhumvit at its cosmopolitan, tolerant, inventive best.

Third, though not quite as conspicuous, is the Sukhumvit of the intellect, as a place for scholarly speculation as academics from East and West strive to make sense of an urban realm that does not seem to conform to the comfortable stereotypes of urban space. Finally, there is Sukhumvit as a field of discourse, home of a million lives and a million stories. It has its writers, its Buddhist scholars, its philosophers and administrators, its poor stall-holders and rich investors expressing views and desires all of which create a rich cacophony that matches the life of the street itself.

The fundamental institution of Nation, Religion and King is revered and respected but the triad becomes less foundational in the limited awareness of immigrants and visitors who lack a profound knowledge of local lore and history. It is necessary to communicate a Thai interpretation of the area and to note Thai people's understanding, or lack of understanding, of Thai cultural heritage. Sukhumvit, it seems, is a place of appropriation – of the past existing in the present, of diverse cultures continuously absorbed into a metamorphosing Thai culture and heritage, and of the tolerated *farang* (western foreigner). Any interpretation of Sukhumvit and, by implication, of Thai urban space, must involve a process of explaining this appropriating, hybridizing nature of Thai culture. This will be revealed in the form of a discourse on literary writings, pertinent discussions, and inter-textual analysis, to analyze the significance of *surface* in a Thai view of the world and the significance of this characteristic, critical to any understanding of Thai responses to globalization.

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