

45056965: ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM
KEYWORDS: MODERNITY/ PERSONALITY/ ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION
SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTRA : INTERPRETATION OF
SIAMESE MODERNITY THROUGH THREE COUNTRY PALACES IN
PHETCHABURI. THESIS ADVISOR: PROFESSOR ROSS KING, 148 pp.

This research investigates the different visions of modernity and of the tasks of modernisation held by three successive Siamese leaders through the medium of three static palaces in Phetchaburi: Phra Nakhon Kiri of King Mongkut, Phra Ram Ratchanivej of King Chulalongkorn, and Mrigadayavan of King Vajiravudh.

The built environments of the three palaces have ‘heritage’ values in establishing what is known about the respective personalities of the three monarchs, their political views of modernity and Westernisation.

At Phra Nakhon Kiri, King Mongkut used traditional architecture as a means of bolstering national pride and political legitimacy. The bell-shaped religious structure reflected the key concepts of his reformed Buddhist sect, Thammayut, which was characterised as rational, intellectual, and humanistic. Siam’s position as a modern state was manifested through the European-Sino-Siamese hybrid architectural styles. The colonial observatory also reflected his interest in Western scientific knowledge.

King Chulalongkorn manifested his political views of civilisation and modernisation through the Jugendstil architectural style at Phra Ram Ratchanivej. This palace served as a ‘footnote’ in his multi-polar politics. However, it possibly reflected the cordial relationship between King Chulalongkorn and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany while countering the powers of France and Britain at the end of his reign.

The remarkable design and layout of Mrigadayavan reflected King Vajiravudh’s revival of traditional identity by linking it with his official nationalism. However, he had a strong inclination towards contradiction between traditional and Western lifestyles. And this yielded a context for an attempted synthesis of Siamese and Western cultural experience. This seaside palace also reflected his ‘romantic’ personality, ‘English’ lifestyle, and European tastes that he had adopted.

The research has yielded three major insights. There is firstly a methodological problem as it is impossible to ask questions of the three kings. Therefore, how is one to impute the intentions, values, and personalities from architectural expressions? Secondly, it is important to have a holistic knowledge of other disciplines in order to understand the complex interplay between the kings and their palaces. Thus, how is one to bridge the gaps between *Realpolitik*, personalities, and architectural expressions? Thirdly, there is an underlying epistemological problem: the way of seeing how the world changed radically over a period of 74 years. There were absolute shifts in the way that Thai knowledge and modernity were being constructed in accordance with and in reaction to Western influences.

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