



Chirg Silpakornok, Indro Hotel & Shopping Complex, Bangkok, Thailand, 1970. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2016.

Modern Architecture in Thailand

BY PONGKWAN LASSUS

The influence of modern architecture became more visible in Thailand after the country shifted from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932 and also as a result of economic circumstances and world trends. The first generation of Thai Modernist architects (or the pioneers of modern architecture in Thailand) had their education in Europe because of the necessity to modernize Thailand. The second generation were Thai architects who received their architectural education in Thailand as well as some continuing their studies in the USA. Their works reflect the International Style with a concern for a tropical architecture vocabulary and local material utilization based on economics. As the architectural profession was declared a protected profession in 1965 for Thai architects only, there was very little modern architecture in Thailand designed by foreign architects.

Introduction: the Pre-Modernism Western Architecture in Thailand (1851-1917)

Architecture in the Kingdom of Siam (former name of Thailand) gradually changed after the arrival of Western influences during the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868). All neighboring countries were colonized by either Great Britain or France. In 1855, King Mongkut (1804-1868) signed the so-called "Bowring Treaty" which abolished import duties and integrated Siam into the world economy.

King Mongkut's son, Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1853-1910) ascended the throne in 1868. He was entirely Western educated and he tried to modernize the country in order to avoid being colonized by showing how Siam was as civilized as Western countries. He sent his children to study abroad. During his reign (1868-1910) there was reform in every field: education, the military, finance, justice, transportation and infrastructure. Bangkok, the water-based settlement capital, was transformed into a Western land-based city with more roads and railways. During his reign, architects from the West were commissioned to design many important buildings. The iconic architecture of this period was the *Chakkri Mahaprasat* Palace (1876), designed by John Clunis (?-1894, worked in Thailand since 1875).

There were some Italian architect-engineers who worked in Siam during this period such as: Joachim or Giochino Grassi (1837-1904), Carlo Allegri (1862-1938), Mario Tamagno (1877-1941) and Annibale Rigotti (1870-1968), as well as another important German architect, Karl S. Dohring (1879-1941). The *Anantasamakom* Palace (1908), a very important building, was designed in the Italian Renaissance style by Carlo Allegri, Mario Tamagno and Annibale Rigotti. Another iconic work of architecture designed by German architect Karl S. Dohring in Art Nouveau is the *Baanpuen* Palace in Petchburi (1910). So many important ministerial buildings were built after governance reform and most of them were designed by Western architects and engineers. A variation of architectural styles was found in this period: Classicism, Italian Renaissance, Palladianism, Baroque, Neoclassicism and Art Nouveau.

During the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1880-1925; reign: 1910-1925), there was an economic recession in Siam. The first university in Siam was established in 1916. In 1917, Siam joined the Allies during WWI. Construction of luxury Western architecture in this period slowed down and changed from grand symmetric planning into a more asymmetric floor plan. Siam began to fabricate Portland cement for its own use in 1913. The most important building in this period is the Bangkok Railway Station at Hualamphong designed by Karl Dohring (1912-1915). This building utilised the new construction technology of 50-meter-long semi-circular steel arches, but the front façade was still be designed in a symmetrical Neoclassic style. Several palaces in this period were designed with asymmetrical floor plans and with free form gardens. We can find different styles of architecture such as Romanticism, Neo-gothic, Venetian Gothic, etc. There was a return to traditional Thai architecture reinforcing the idea of nationalism that can be seen in the Vajiravudh College, built in 1925, and the first building of Chulalongkorn University, built in the same year, designed by Edward Hilly. Many railway stations all over Thailand were built during this period. The Huahin Railway Hotel (1924) was the first resort hotel, built in Huahin (Rachuabkirkun province) and included the first golf course, designed by an Italian architect who worked for the railway department at that time.

Modern Thailand

During the reign of King Prachadhipok (Rama VII, 1893-1941; reign: 1925-1935), the group of Thais, which called themselves *Khana Ratsadon*, seized power from the absolute monarchy on June 24, 1932. They installed a constitutional monarchy with Prachadhipok as king. Later on, the many unsettled constitutional roles of the Crown and the dissatisfaction with *Khana Ratsadon's* seizure of power culminated in 1933 in a counter-coup, which resulted in a small-scale civil war. King Prachadhipok abdicated and he was replaced by his 9-year-old nephew Prince Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII, 1925-1946).

01 Mew (Chitrasaen) Aphaiwong, the Central Post Office, Bangrak, Bangkok, Thailand, 1937-1940. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2016.



02 M.C. Samaichalerm Kridakorn, Chalerkrung Theatre, Bangkok, Thailand, 1940-1943. The first theater in Bangkok. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2014.



In 1938, Plaek Pibulsonggram (1897-1964) became prime minister. He was an open supporter of Mussolini and Hitler and began to move the government towards the Right. In 1942, he issued a series of cultural decrees *Rattaniyom*, or Thai cultural mandates, which reflected the desire for social modernization and exaggerated nationalist spirit. He changed the country's name of Siam to Thailand, which was based on the idea of a "Thai race". This nationalist modernization obliged Thais to use Western clothing including hats for men and women, and gloves and high heels for women. The arts and architecture were also tools used to identify this nationalist modernization, the best example of which was the group of buildings along Rajadamnern Klang Avenue (1937-1940), the *Suphacalasai* Stadium (1938) and the Central Post Office (1940) designed by Mew Aphaiwong.

Modern Architecture in Thailand

During the King Rama VII era (1925-1934), Thailand was hard hit by the world economic recession resulting from WWI. The government had to cut back on most projects including building construction. About this time, after returning to Thailand, European-educated Thai architects began to play more important roles. As a result, the influence of modern architecture became more visible in Thailand after the country shifted from the absolute monarchy.

It can be said that modern architecture in Thailand resulted from economic necessity, from a transmission of European concepts and technology via European-educated Thai architects and from political change to a more democratic system.

Pioneers of Thai Modern Architecture: the First Generation of Thai Modernist Architects

Among Thai architects who graduated from the West during the Rama VII era and contributed to modern architecture in Thailand was M. C. Itthithesapwan Kridakorn (1889-1934). His designs included the Piamsook Royal Residence in Klai Kangwong Palace (Huahin district, Prachuab Kirikhan Province, 1926), Sra Phatum Palace in Bangkok (1926). Another important figure was M. C. Samaichalerm

Kridakorn (1895-1967), a *Beaux-Arts* graduate who designed the headquarters office of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (1955) on Dinsor Road (some parts of his design, however, were omitted from the completed buildings). He also produced a sign for Thailand's National Theatre (1965), although the building that resulted was not based entirely on his design. He also designed many buildings for the Chiangmai University Campus. His masterpiece was a co-design of *Sala Chalerkrung* Royal Theatre (1931). The architecture and decoration of this building was an Art Deco or early modern design. Nart Bhotiprasart (1901-1954) was a co-designer and calculated the structure for this building. He graduated with the Gold Medal honors from Liverpool University (England) and worked at the Civil Engineering Department before assuming a teaching post at the Faculty of Architecture of the Chulalongkorn University. He wrote an important book on the history of Thai architecture, *Architecture in Thailand* (Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, 1944). He was the most important person who founded architectural education in Thailand. Other works of Nart Bhotiprasart evinced the early modern style, including the Bangkok Metropolitan Police building, Royal Air Force headquarters, and the Central Hospital (1939). Another famous architect of this era was Mew (Jittasen) Aphaiwong (1905-?). His first famous project was the *Dome* building (the headquarters building of *Thammasart* University) (1934), the second university of Thailand specialising in political science. The style of this building was not easy to identify: "it can be referred to as the European Domestic Revival style". After the success of this building, the government commissioned him to design important buildings to demonstrate that Thailand was a modern country. These well-known buildings are the group of buildings on Rajadamnern Klang Avenue (1937-1940), the *Suphacalasai* Stadium (1938) and the Central Post Office (Bangrak, 1940). Jung Siri-arak Somchat mentioned in his book that "all of these buildings were designed in the Art Deco style, mixed with 'Stripped Classicism', which was chosen to identify with the 'Modernity' of the 'Thai Democracy Period', the period of democracy by the military in the Thai context at that time".

03 Saroj Sukhyanga, Rattanakosin Hotel, Rajdamnern Klang Avenue, Bangkok, Thailand, 1940. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2017.



04 Saroj Sukhyanga, Ministry of Justice, Bangkok, Thailand, 1940. This important building was demolished in 2013. © Chatri Prakinnonhakarn, Seminar paper on Supreme Court demolition, Bangkok, Faculty of architecture Silpakorn University, 2013.



Other important architects who worked for the Thai government were Saroj Sukhyanga or Phra Sarojratananimarn (1895-1950). Graduating from Liverpool University, he designed most of the important government buildings. His early design was a Neo-gothic style *Manusnakwitthayatar* building at *Bovornniwet* Temple (1923) and the Neo-thai style *Niphanopphadol* building at the *Thepsirin* Temple (1923-1924). In 1947, he was in charge of the construction of the Siamese pavilion at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la vie Modern*, in 1937 (Paris). This exhibition changed completely his vision of architectural design. In 1948, he went to New York with the same mission. From then on, his work changed completely: “He still used the symmetric classical plan but designed the massive facade which looks like the Art Deco Style or Stripped Classicism”³. His famous modernist works were the Ayutthaya Town Hall (1939-1941), the Ministry of Justice (1940), the Faculty of Pharmacy and Faculty of Chemistry at the Chulalongkorn University (1940), the Rattanakosin Hotel (1940), the Rasa-meevittaya building and the *Siriraj* Hospital (1939). A Cambridge graduate, M. C. Vodhayakorn Varavan (1900-1981) worked as the architect of the State Railways Department. His projects appeared after WWII. He designed the New Bangkok *Noi* Railway Station (1946-1950) and the *Siriraj* Hospital’s old O. P. D. Building (1953). “His design was a mix of modernist floor plan with the European Domestic Revival style which came from his education in England”⁴. The new Chiangmai Railway Station (1938) was influenced by the Northern Thai style in the same way as the *Siriraj* Hospital’s *Rajapaetayalai* Hall (1960) which reflects the central region’s traditional Thai style. He taught architecture in the Faculty of Architecture at the Chulalongkorn University for several years and he was the one who gave the basis of architectural construction in Thailand as using local materials, the “form follows function” theory and the architectural aesthetic based on economic criteria.

Postwar Situation/Americanization

After WWII, elections were held in January 1946. These were the first elections in which political parties were legal,

and Pridi’s People Party and its Allies won a majority. Pridi (1900-1983) became Thailand’s first democratically elected Prime Minister. In 1946, the young King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) was found shot dead in his bed, under mysterious circumstances. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX, 1927-2016) Pridi was forced to resign. After an interim Prime Minister Kuang Aphaiwong (1902-1968) led the government for a short time, in 1948, the army brought Pibulsonggram back to be Prime Minister. Although nominally a constitutional monarchy, Thailand was ruled by a series of military governments.

In 1955, Pibulsonggram was losing his leading position in the army to Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1908-1963) and general Thanom Kittikachorn (1911-2004). The regimes of Sarit and Thanom were strongly supported by the USA. Thailand had formally become a USA Ally in 1954. In the 1960s, the Vietnam War hastened the modernization and Westernization of Thai society. The American presence and the exposure to Western culture had an effect on almost every aspect of Thai life in every class of the Thai people. The traditional rural family unit was broken down as more and more rural Thais moved to live in the capital of Bangkok. The economic recession forced Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat’s government to reform its national economic plan in line with global market forces. The Bureau of National Economic and Social Affairs was established in 1961. Modern Thai architecture reflected the process demonstrated in a Bangkok increasingly driven by a capitalist consumer lifestyle. Besides developing a basic infrastructure of “running water, bright lights, good roads, ample jobs and hygiene”⁵, the nation moved quickly to open up to local and foreign investors. The rush to build up education and public utilities paralleled the emergence of a changing urban elite with new values and consumption patterns.

Second Generation of Modernist Architects in Thailand and their Works in the 60s and 70s

Thai architects were starting to be trained in Thailand around 1960. They had studied mainstream international designs, believing that those designs were the suitable

forms, including not only construction technology but also the popular forms themselves. All these had contributed to the bloom of modernism which, after the drafting of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan in 1961, combined well with the development of the Thai economy. This was because as private sector businesses became successful, companies began to build commercial buildings, such as hotels, shopping centers, banks and office buildings. Most Thai architects during the 1960s and 1970s adopted the International Style from the Western world, especially from the USA. They considered function as the key design principle. Not only did function depend on practical usage, but it also depended on geographic location and climate. The use of strip windows and walls made with ventilation cement blocks were designs that took the climate into consideration, which was always another principle of the International Style.

Thai architects in this period began their careers by working as architects in different government organizations such as: the Department of Civil Works, the State Railways, the Crown Property Bureau, the Police Department, the Department of Army, the Civil Affairs, or teaching in a university. After a while they established their own architectural firms when there was more demand from the private sector. Some of them had the experience to work with the foreign firms in Thailand. Chira Silpakanok (1928-2013) used to work with a Japanese company in the project for the Thai Military headquarters. Trungjai Buranasomphop (1942-2016), a Thai female architect who worked for *Intaren Architects*, a French-Swiss architecture firm, mentioned that “this firm was very keen to design fins on the façade and was concerned about tropical architecture and its heat protection”⁶. Chatchawal Pringpuangkaew (1939-) was working for Louis Berger Group inc., a big American architectural firm, with John Rifenberg and Robert G. Boughey (1936-) as its chief architects. For him, “these two American architects have put the idea of local identity into Modern Architecture in Thailand”⁷.

There were five main groups of architects during this period who contributed to the Thailand modern built environment.

The first group was the group of Thai architects who graduated from Chulalongkorn University and mostly continued their studies in the USA in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

The most important figure who contributed to architectural change in Thailand was Dr. Wadhanyu Na Thalang (1925-2013), who graduated from Chulalongkorn University and received his master in architecture from Cornell University in USA. He dedicated himself to the decentralization of architectural education by teaching architecture and construction in the North-Eastern Institute of Technology in Nakhon Ratchasima (1957-1967). He became the Governor of the Housing Authority of Thailand in 1973, and was a very important figure in the preservation of architectural heritage in Thailand. Among the buildings designed by Dr. Wadhanyu are the Life Insurance building in Bangkok and a dormitory for Bangkok Technical College, with no record for year of construction. The dormitory was a fine exam-

ple of an architectural design having to comply with the height-limit regulations and functional requirements, with the distinctive feature of sunshade panels. Another masterful design by him was the Teacher Seminar building in the *Rajamangala Institute of Technology's* Nakhon Ratchasima Campus (1960), an exemplary instance of advancements in engineering technology combined with use of local materials. Another important figure was M.L. Santaya Issarasena (1925-1984). He also received his master in architecture from Cornell University. He designed the *Phuphan Palace* (1975) in Sakon Nakorn province and the *Thaksin Rajanivet Palace* in Narathiwat province (1976). His works also included the headquarters of Building Materials Company Limited on Phaholyothin Road (1969), a group of buildings for Siam Cement Group (Bang Sue district) and the Bank of Thailand Banknote Printing House in Bangkok (1968). Chira Silpakanok received his master in architecture from the University of California (USA) in 1959. He began his career in the Ministry of Defense, and then established his own firm, Chira Silpakanok & friends, in 1976. Most of his architectural works were for the bank. But the most well-known work was the *Indra Hotel & Shopping Complex* in Bangkok (1970). This project was Bangkok's first integrated commercial leisure center. To maximize its commercial potential, Chira Silpakanok designed the layout of the shopping arcade, cinema, hotel rooms and facilities, allowing 24 hours a day access to the arcade. The stylish fin façade, inspired by traditional Thai motifs, gave the building a design edge over its competitors. This project offered shopping, eating, and the movies all under one roof; Western-inspired lifestyle options which were slightly out of the spending reach of most city inhabitants at the time. The 5-star hotel was a new choice for foreign investors and tourists, and a dining entertainment venue for local elites.

The first high rise office building appeared on Sukumvit Road in the east part of Bangkok in 1969. Although the building featured a glass curtain wall, Rangsan Torsuwan (1939-) designed the building grid to fulfill the demand of the tropical climate. To save energy, he limited glazing to



05 Rangsan Torsuwan, Chokchai International building, Bangkok, Thailand, 1969. The first high rise office building in Bangkok. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2016.

06 Vadhanyu Na Thalang, Kurusamanakarn (teacher's seminar building) at the North Eastern Institute of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, 1960. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2015.



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Essays



07 Amorn Srivong, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, 1970. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2016.

parts of the north and the south façade only. But, a few decades after, for aesthetics and design fashion, the building façade has been modified by installing glass on the concrete facades. Rangsarn Torsuwan received his master's degree from MIT, in 1966, and created a unique style of modern architecture for over 100 Thai Farmers Bank branches all over Thailand. These iconic buildings were designed following the logo of the Thai Farmers's Bank representing rice.

Other Thai modernist architects in this group that could be mentioned were Duang Yossunthorn (1920-), Thaweesak Chantraviroj (1931-1977), Chaiya Poonsiriwong (1932-1990) of Duang-Thaweesak Chiya & associates, Jen Sakoltharak (1926-1973), Yiam Wongvanich (1937-), Dan (Thanasit) Wongprasat (1939-), Chuchawal Pringpuangkaew (1939-) of Design 103, Mati Tungpanich (1941-) of Design Develop co.ltd, Nond Buranasomphop (1938) and Trungjai Buranasomphop (1942-2016) of Nond-Trungjai architects and planners.

The second group of modernist architects in Thailand were the Thai architects who received a Western architectural education.

Among those architects who graduated from abroad, Sumet Jumsai na Ayutthaya (1939-) is still the most famous Thai architect with an international reputation. He graduated from the University of Cambridge (UK), in 1961, received his master in architecture in 1965 and a PhD degree in 1969 from the same university. He began his career in the Department of Urban Planning and then established his own firm, Sumet Jumsai Architect, from 1975. He is the most well-known architect of Thailand, as he participated in several international architectural competitions and also taught in the Department of Architecture at the University of Cambridge, between 1989 and 1991. He was also involved in architectural conservation and was a founding member of ASA Architectural Heritage Committee established in 1968. He was selected by the Ministry of Culture to be the national Thai artist, in modern architecture design in 1998. His early projects are: the Crown Property Bureau in Sea Phantom Place (1969), the British Council in Bangkok (1970), the Siam Country Club in Pattaya (1972), the School for the Blind (1973), and the Science Museum in Bangkok (1976). For the Science Museum, he designed for children in fun and futuristic geometrical shapes, reflecting the city's growing interest in science and technology at the time. He kept the interlocking steel roof structure exposed, saving on construction materials, while opening up a large space for the display of oversized objects like spacecraft models. The museum marked the beginning of government interest in creating knowledge centers for the nation's youth.

Krisda Arunvongse Na Ayudhaya (1932-2010) graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1959. He began his career in the Department of Army Civil Affairs, then became an architecture teacher at the Chulalongkorn University, serving as Dean between 1974 and 1978. He was elected Mayor of Bangkok in 1992. He also had his own architectural firms Krisda Arunvong Architect and *Casa*. His famous projects are: the President Hotel (1966), the AUA. Library (1970), the Xavier Church (1970), the Bangkok Bank

headquarters (1974), and the Central Department Store, *Ploenchit* (1974). He also designed a very important building of this time, the New *Suan Amporn* Pavilion, in 1972. Economic growth and the rising population led to ever larger product fairs and festivals in the city, creating the need for a multi-purpose building suitable for a variety of civic events. He designed the huge 15 meters, column-free expanse, using the latest concrete engineering techniques and incorporated a folded plate roof which created a large space adaptable for various uses. The brief for the pavilion included serving as an occasional badminton court for the king, and as a reception hall for the queen's state visitors. Significantly, his new *Suan Amporn* Pavilion was built on royal grounds, but functioned as both a public use building and a royal venue. In stark contrast to the surrounding backdrop of *Amporn* Palace and *Ananda Samakom* Throne Halls, this modern structure was a symbol of the evolving relationship between the Monarchy and the people.

Other famous architects in this second group were: M. L. Tridhosyuth Devakul (1942-), graduating from the Harvard University and Ong-art Satrabhandhu (1942-), graduating from the Cornell and Yale Universities.

The 3rd group of modernist architects in Thailand was the group of Thai architects who received a Thai architectural education.

Among Thai architects in this group, Pongpun Pisalsarakit (1933-2003) was the most famous. He used to work with Jen Sakoltharak (1933-2003) and he established the architecture studio 110 architect co., ltd. which gained experience in designing hospitals and office buildings. Pajit Pongpunprug (1938-) began his career by working with Jen Sakoltharak as well. His famous architectural designs were *Masjit Nurul Islam* (1973) on Pattanakan Road and the Islamic Center Foundation (1983) on Ramkamhaeng Road (Bangkok).

The 4th group of modernist architects in Thailand was the unique case of Amorn Sriwong (1928-2013), who was self-educated by working in a construction firm. Without attaching to a style or teacher's vision, he designed more creative architectural works with a structural beauty. His well-known buildings were constructed all over Thailand, in Bangkok: the university campus in Hadyai and Chiangmai. Those buildings are the *Satang Mongkolsuk* building at the Faculty of Engineering, Songklanakarin University, Hadyai (1966), the *Suanmali* branch of Thai *Pattana* Bank (1970), the Faculty of Science building, Mahidol University (1970).

The 5th group of modernist architects in Thailand were the foreign architects who worked in foreign companies at the time when there were foreign investors investing in Thailand. They hired foreign architectural firms such as Louis Burger (an American firm), Gerson & Son, and *Intaren* Architects (a French-Swiss firm). Robert G. Boughey, Rifenburg, OICC to design their office buildings. We don't have much information about those architects but one American architect who still continues to practice architecture in Thailand, and has his own firm, is Robert G. Boughey (1936-). He is the only foreign architect who obtained a Thai architect license after the Thai architectural professional practice law was enforced in 1965.



Since 1965, the architectural profession in Thailand has been declared a protected profession that could be practiced only by Thai architects, with the exception of some special projects, commissioned by the government, which permitted some foreign architecture firms. Because of this, there is not much modern architecture designed by foreigners or world master architects. Some modern architecture designed by Japanese architects appeared in governmental educational co-operation projects, such as some buildings for the *Ladkrabang* Institute of Technology in Bangkok, Hadyai and Chiangmai Institute of Technology. Some exceptions which appear are the luxurious hotel projects, such as the Siam Intercontinental hotel (1966), designed by Joseph P. Salerno (1915-1981), and the *Dust Thani* Hotel (1971), the tallest hotel (22 stories high) and a new Bangkok landmark, designed by the Japanese architect, Yozo Shibata (1927-2003).

Modern Thai Architecture in the 80s and 90s

An economic boom resounded through Thailand during the 80s and 90s. Large financial institutions built huge structures. When the president of the Thai Farmer's Bank returned from his business trip in the USA he had an idea to build a glass covered building, which was a very popular style in the USA. Rangsan Torsuwan (1939-) designed a modern steel and glass skyscraper with an open plaza fronted by a piece of contemporary sculpture. The architectural formula signified the bank's progressive vision and innova-

tive management. The architect was criticized for designing a building which reflected light and heat upon its neighbors. At that time, the technology was insufficient regarding heat reduction and energy conservation for glass and related elements. But glass is beautiful, and it was increasingly popular both in the West and in Asian countries.

The Bangkok Bank on its 33rd anniversary, in 1982, commissioned a new 33-story head office on Silom Road, in the heart of the city's financial district. The Head Office of the Bangkok Bank was finished in 1984 and was the tallest building in Bangkok at that time. Architect Krisda Arunvongse Na Ayutthaya (1932-2010) had a far-sighted design including higher-than-usual ceilings in the car park, so that the space could be transformed into additional offices in the future when good public transport would reduce the need for private cars. He designed an International Style modern building with tropical features such as horizontal fins to filter heat.

In this period of economic boom, there were all kinds of modern International Style commercial buildings such as office buildings, banks, commercial centers, spread all over Bangkok. In the late 1980s, the post-modern movement began to appear in the Thai urban landscape. Some Thai architects who used to design modern architecture were commissioned by clients to design in the post-modern style. We cannot tell that this was the end of the Modern Movement in Thailand but there have been many changes in the way architectural forms are perceived. In the past,

modernism encompassed mainstream architecture, society and other fields of professions. But new architecture has changed. In general, society embraces a diversity of forms and does not hold to one structure for long. In the past, technology was limited so everything was straightforward, based on reason, hence the reliance on simplicity as an ideal. Such a concept was appropriate for the social and economic milieu of the time.

In 1997, Asia faced the huge economic crisis which started in Thailand and was called the *Tom Yum Koong* Crisis, with the financial collapse of the Thai baht after the Thai government was forced to float the baht due to a lack of currency to support its currency pegged to the USA dollar. This marked the end of the Thai economic boom and architectural bloom.

Nowadays, it is a sad fact that many examples of modern Thai architecture have already been lost as very few of them were registered as historical monuments. The Ministry of Justice building was demolished in 2013 and there are many more to come. The *Dusit Thani*, the first Thai luxury hotel in Bangkok, is set to be demolished next year to give way to a huge shopping complex in the center of Bangkok. The Embassy of Australia has just moved to a new location as the previous. Modernist building by the Australian architects, Ancher, Mortlock & Woolley, will be demolished soon and also be replaced by a new commercial development project. Many more examples of modern architecture in Thailand are under threat and some are transformed into other architectural styles due to the lack of knowledge about their value as urban heritage.

Architectural Conservation and Documentation in Thailand

In Thailand, we have had registered historical monuments selected by The Fine Arts Department since the founding of the department in 1911. Those buildings were thus protected by law. But very few examples of modern architecture were registered and are still in danger of being demolished, and are still being replaced by new buildings. In 1968, architects, scholars and people concerned about architectural conservation gathered together, under the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA), to create the Fine Arts Commission under the Scientific committee of ASA which later became the Architectural Conservation Committee with the following objectives:

- To find ways and means to conserve wholesome urban and rural features such as public open spaces and buildings that contain architectural or historical value.
- To consider and give advice on sustainability of locations and architectural standards for major buildings in important areas which, if built, would affect the environment.
- To work in an advisory capacity with the government and private bodies on schemes concerning or affecting the public environment as set out above.
- To propagate to the general public the importance of preservation.
- To make an inventory of places of significance or beauty, man-made or natural well as buildings or structures of

09 Krisda Arunvongse Na Ayudhaya, Bangkok Bank headquarters, Bangkok, Thailand, 1974. © Weerapon Singnoi, 2017.



architectural or historical interest. Such an inventory was to serve as a basis for preservation and restoration. In 1971, this group of people decided to establish a new body to work in parallel concerning protection of the environment in general, called The Society for the Conservation of Natural Treasure and Environment (SCONTE). At the same time, the working group under ASA became the ASA Architectural Conservation Committee, their work focusing on the protection of architectural heritage.

In 1982, ASA initiated the ASA Architectural Conservation award to nominate conservation projects and people or organizations involved in conservation. The award sought to promote these projects so that they would gain more support and a higher profile in the public eye. The award was given in person by H. R. H Princess Mahachakkri Sirindhorn, so the owner would be inspired to continue with the conservation effort.

Concerning the art of documentation, ASA published bilingual books such as: *Six Hundred Years of Work by Thai Artists and Architects* by Joti Kalayanamitra (1976) and *Northern Thai Domestic Architecture and Rituals in House-Building* by Anuvit Charernsupakul and Vivat Temiyabhandha (1976). In 1996, ASA published 9 more books about architecture in the Thai language, 32 of them were *Siamese Architects (principles, role, works and concept of Siamese Architects from 1932-1994)*, vol. 1 and 2 written by Phussadee Thippatas. In 2004, to commemorate 20 years of the ASA Architectural Conservation Award, the 1st volume of *Architectural Heritage in Thailand* was published (in Thai and English) by ASA and then the second volume in 2013. In 2017, ASA plans to publish the 3rd volume which contains awarded buildings

from 2013-2017. In these 3 volumes, more than 400 awarded buildings are documented, and the document can be found online. In 2010, ASA and the Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, published *Western Architecture in Siam from the reign of Rama IV to 1937* written by Somchat Jungsiri-arak, and in 2014, a research work was published by a group of teachers in the Faculty of Chulalongkorn University, led by Chaiboon Sirithanawatana: *Siamese Architects Route*, a biography of 75 Thai architects who were born between 1887 and 1947.

Another activity of architectural heritage documentation is VERNADOC. The word VERNADOC stands for Vernacular Documentation, a term coined by Finn architect, Mark Mattila, to specify a means of vernacular architectural study which emphasizes collection of data in situ by basic techniques to produce high quality works. It is expected that the results of measured drawings would inspire building owners, or people in the community, to perceive the heritage value of works by outsiders, thus collaborating to conserve those buildings. Markku Matilla started the first international VERNADOC camp in 2005, then Thai architect Sudjit Sananwai has spread this idea and techniques all over Thailand since 2007 under the ASA Architectural Conservation Committee. In 2013, the book VERNADOC vol. 1: *Thailand*, by Sudjit Sananwai and published by ASA, collected drawings and articles from VERNADOC camps held in Thailand during the 5 years from 2007 to 2012.

In 2014, Thailand became a new chapter of **docomomo** through the efforts of the ASA Architectural Conservation Committee and the **docomomo** Thailand working group. We presented *Modern Architecture Conservation in Thailand* at the 13th **docomomo** Council meeting, in Seoul, 2014, and joined the 14th **docomomo** Council meeting, in Lisbon, 2016, as a new working party. Around 25 works of modern Thai architecture were documented under **docomomo** Thailand and which were mainly drawn from ASA Architectural Conservation awarded buildings.

In 2017, the Department of Public Treasury, Ministry of Finance started to make a list of buildings with architectural and historical value and to first take into consideration the list of ASA Architectural Conservation awarded buildings.

Recently, the Urban Heritage Center was established under ASA in April 2017 with the main objective to manage the architectural archives and documentation and give academic and scientific support and advice to the ASA Conservation Committee and Conservation Network in Thailand.

The pioneers of modern architecture in Thailand were the elites in Thai society. Members of the Royal family were sent to Europe for their architectural education and, as they were trained in architectural schools that taught classical architecture, they came back with the skill of classicism's symmetrical plan design. But as the world trend of architecture changed into the Modern Movement together with the Great Depression, they were required to reduce all façade details of their architecture. The architectural forms of Art Deco and stripped classicism were the results. The simplified domestic revival style and traditional Thai simplified style also appeared in this period from 1926 to 1946.

In the late 1950s, the second generation of modernist architects, who were mostly educated in Thailand, and from abroad, began to play an important role in contributing to the Thai modern built environment. We can find International Style architecture similar to overseas which follows the principle of "form follows function" and "less is more", based upon new technologies of construction at that time, particularly the use of glass, steel and reinforced concrete.

Notes

- 1 Somchart Jungsiri-Arak, *Western Architecture in Siam from the reign of Rama IV-1937*, Bangkok, Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA) and the Faculty of Architecture Silpakorn University, 2000.
- 2 *Id.*
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Chaiboon Sirithanawatana, "When Thailand turned towards Modern Architecture", in *Keeping up-Modern Thai Architecture*, Bangkok, Thailand Creative & Design Center (TCDC), 2008.
- 6 Phussadee Thippatas, *Siamese Architects 2: Principle, roles, works and concept (1932-1994)*, Bangkok, Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA) Bangkok, 1996.
- 7 *Id.*

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