

A Record of Historical Conservation, 1964–2012

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This article presents a record of historical conservation activities that I have kept since 1964. It covers projects undertaken with a group of architects and like-minded colleagues from other disciplines. Initially, most of the programmes were part of the work at the Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) where I was attached. However, the need to work outside officialdom became pressing. In 1968, the Fine Arts Commission was established within the Association of Siamese Architects (ASA) with Pinit Sampatisiri as chairman. Nai Lert Park then became the venue for the group's gatherings. The Society for the Conservation of National Treasure and Environment (SCONTE) followed in 1971, and the Siam Society's Arts Committee soon after in 1974. These organisations were the early, if not the earliest, conservation NGOs in this country.

In retrospect, the heritage conservation movement can be classified into three distinct phases:

Phase 1 ran from the mid 1960s to 1982. It began when the group campaigned against the destruction of old buildings and historical sites which was then rampant. The group functioned like an action brigade for the Fine Arts Department (FAD) whose work was hampered by red tape and insufficient funds. In this period, the desperate fight to preserve old buildings and sites afforded little time for those involved to think about the question of adaptive re-use, social issues and sustainability.

Phase 2 was from 1982 to about 2000. The year 1982 was significant in that HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn took charge of the restoration of the Grand Palace and the Royal Chapel in conjunction with the Bangkok Bicentenary. It was a turning point for Thai society, which had come to appreciate the idea of heritage preservation.

Phase 3, starting from around the year 2000, was marked by a social agenda that stressed the importance of community participation. It led to campaigns to preserve communities often on academic grounds without involving any buildings of architectural or historical merit. But these campaigns broadened the cultural horizon.

It certainly helped when the Thonburi canal communities backed me with over a thousand signatures in a landmark court case against the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA). The verdict put a stop to the authorities building flood walls and locks. These had caused canal water to stagnate, thus destroying fruit orchards and the traditional way of life on the canal, not to mention boat traffic, canal tourism and the fact that the Wat Sai floating market was completely wiped out.

There were moments of desperation, danger even. Two former FAD director-generals almost lost their lives in the line of duty. I myself went through several harrowing experiences: in the campaign for Ayudhya Historical Park in 1967 when I was threatened by a local leader; over the relocation of the Weekend Market from Sanam Luang in 1968, which caused huge protests; in organising a protest march in 1970 to besiege the Bank of Thailand, which planned to demolish Bang Khun Phrom Palace located on its grounds under the watchful eyes of the military government of the time; and in instigating the demolition of Chalermthai Theatre in 1989 to open up the view of Loha Prasat and Wat Ratchanadda, and, in the process, make way for a monument to King Rama III, a public plaza and a garden.

The latter project was like eating one's own hat as protests were launched against the project's perpetrator, who was an advisor to the prime minister General Chatchai Choonhavan. To stop the theatre's demolition, the protesters marched to Soi Rajkhru and sealed off the residence of the prime minister who remained unperturbed throughout. In fact, at the advisor's suggestion, he went on to order the removal of the Tobacco Monopoly's warehouses in order to make way for a public park, now christened Queen Sirikit Park, and, at his own initiative, directed the creation of Benjasiri Park in place of a mooted commercial development on the old premises of the Meteorological Department. Every prime minister should follow such examples and make the greening of the city a priority!

Early days: Eyeing destruction of historical sites

In 1964, I took leave from university to carry out doctoral research on water towns while working at DTPC. I started to collect old town plans and materials on Ayudhya which, among other things, led to the publication of the "Reconstructed Plan of Ayudhya" (Figure 1) in the volume, *In Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajdhon*, published by the Siam Society in 1970. The Reconstructed Plan became the basis for subsequent zoning of Ayudhya Historical Park and was freely copied or used by other authorities.

As part of the campaign to turn Ayudhya into an historical park, I took the issue to UNESCO in Paris, and with the help of the *Courier* editor wrote a lead article "Ayutya-Venice of South Asia" in the *UNESCO Courier* of October 1966 (Figure 2). The park project might be seen as a forerunner to the creation of World Heritage Sites and historical parks in Thailand.

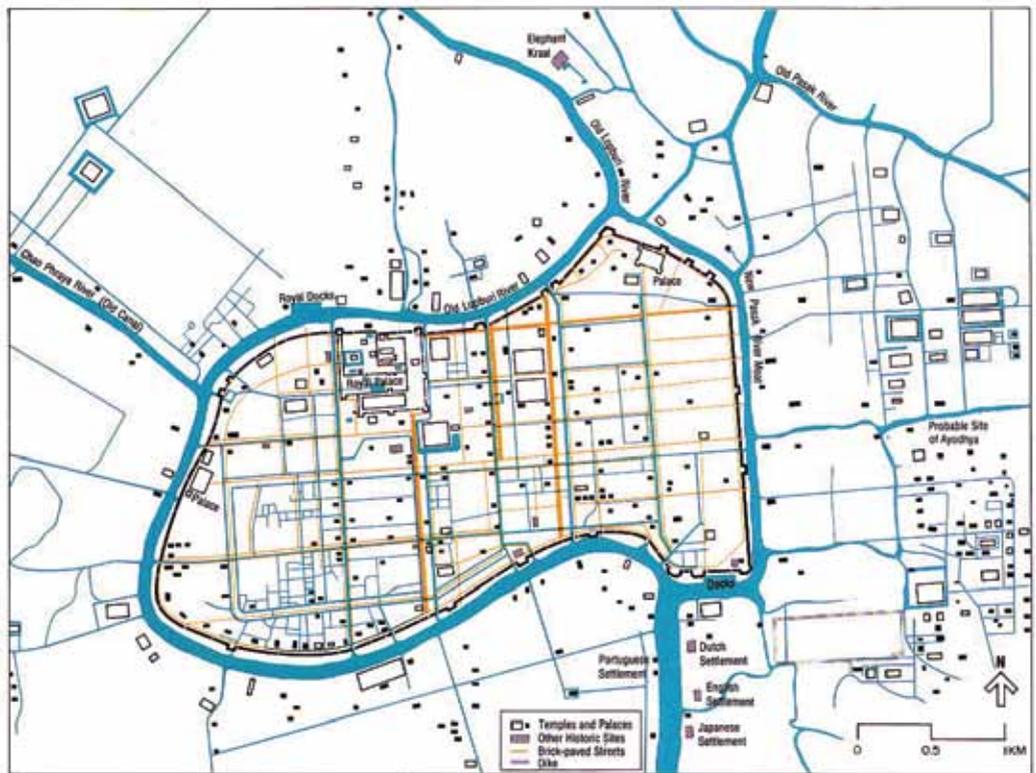


Figure 1. Reconstructed plan of Ayudhya (1667) based on seventeenth century maps and other materials, in particular Phya Boranrajathanin's sketch plan of 1926, the Public Works Department's survey map of 1965 and the aerial photograph taken in 1953. The city and its environ seen in this plan show a 12-kilometer long city wall with 17 forts and 100 city gates, including 20 canal gates; a canal network of over 140 kilometers; and approximately 550 monasteries and historical sites.



Figure 2. Cover of UNESCO Courier, October 1966.

Plans for the Ayudhya Historical Park were actually presented to the Cabinet on 31 March 1966, but only adopted on 2 July 1967. In a parallel programme, Sulak Sivaraksa initiated (and I and others participated in) “Ayudhya Commemoration”, an event on 28 December 1967 in the old capital to commemorate the bicentenary of its fall and to campaign for its conservation (Figure 3).

Elsewhere a campaign to preserve city walls and moats resulted in the Ministry of Interior issuing an order, dated 3 June 1965, to all provincial governors to stop destroying historical sites. Darrell Berrigan, editor of *Bangkok World*, helped me with the campaign.

In Chiang Mai, the governor ordered



Figure 3. Ayudhya Action Group at the National Library, Bangkok 1967. Seated, left to right: Phya Anuman Rajdhon; HH Prince Krom Muen Bhidhyalap. Standing: Uab Sanasen; Sirichai Naruemit-rekhakarn; Sawaeng Sudprasert; Pipop Thongchai; Vichai Chokvivat; William Klausner; Sulak Sivaraksa; Chalerm Thongsripongs; Patya Saihu; Paitoon Sinlaratna; Warin Sinsoongsud; Denduang Pumsiri; Saner Nildej; Sumet Jumsai.

the removal of the old city walls. An urgent ministerial order was sent to stop him razing the town walls and filling in the moats. Perhaps fearing punishment, the governor erected some fake city gates, which over time have become regarded as genuine and “ancient”.

In 1966, I drew up plans to preserve the old governor’s residence in Songkhla. Two years earlier, A. B. Griswold had urged the FAD to preserve the old residence. Eventually, in 1979, restoration work was undertaken. Also in 1966, I proposed protecting Songkhla’s forts and city walls, as well as the town’s famed Laem Son (pine peninsular.) Meanwhile in Nakhorn Srithammarat the authorities were razing the city walls and fortifications. All I could do was take photographs of the main fort being dismantled. These were published in the book *Seen* (1970).

Campaigns to stop the destruction of walls and moats at Roi-et and Surin met with similar failure. One of the last conservation projects that I undertook at DTCP was to initiate the masterplan for the Sukhothai historical park. Nikhom Musikakhama, who was to become the park’s warden, was almost killed by a bomb thrown at him as he tried to implement the plan. He later became director general of the FAD.

Gathering momentum: plans, projects and campaigns

In 1968, numerous historic conservation programmes were launched while the

Ayudhya project was being pursued. These included a campaign to stop the Minister of Foreign Affairs razing the Saranrom Palace to make way for a 7-storey office building. After the press took up the issue, only the east wing of the palace was demolished to build a 4-storey office building. The latter was in turn demolished in 2007 to make way for a complete historic reconstruction of the palace.

Also in 1968, I initiated plans to preserve the house, otherwise known as the Scripture House of Wat Rakhang, of Phra Rajvarindr, or King Rama I, before his accession to the throne. His Majesty the King graciously gave me a sum of money to kick-start the house's preservation. Key persons involved in the house's restoration were Princess Louisa Diskul, Prince Yachai Chitrabongse, Fua Hariphithak, Nid H. Shiranan, Sulak Sivaraksa, Vatanyu na Thalang, and M.R. Sarisdiguna Kitiyakara who funded the final phase of the work. The project was completed in 1982 in time for the Bangkok Bicentenary.

Around this time, I drew up a plan to preserve the gateway to the palace of Prince Krom Luang Sanphasatsuphakij. The restoration was undertaken by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) in 1973. In the same vicinity on Bamrung Muang Road the palace of Prince Krom Muen Rajasaksamosorn, a magnificent Palladian style building, was threatened. I tried to get the authorities to preserve it, but in the end it was demolished to make way for a police station. I thought that the image of law and order would have been better enhanced under a Roman pediment.

That same year at DTCP I started a programme to relocate the Weekend Market from Sanam Luang. It proved to be a lengthy affair but ended well. I left the Department at the end of 1968. All the foregoing projects and many thereafter had the constant support of Preeya Chimchom and Nid H. Shiranan, former director-generals of the DTCP.

The Association of Siamese Architect's Fine Arts Commission (FAC) was established on 6 June 1968. The inspiration for this body came from the Royal Fine Arts Commission in the UK. I became its secretary until assuming the chair in 1978. The FAC took over most of the ongoing conservation programmes including: a conservation plan for Lumpini Park, removing Kinaree Nava Restaurant and other commercial concessions and eyesores from the park; instituting a "Tree Planting Day for Bangkok" with Princess Ubolrat planting the first tree on Rama I Road on 12 August 1969; proposals for Klong Prem Park, Saranrom Park, and other parks; a campaign to save the last tram line on Phra Athit Road in October 1968; and drafting a Cultural Map of Bangkok in association with Sirichai Naruemit. The map led to a number of historical landmarks being listed. The publication of the Association of Siamese Architects' (ASA) Cultural Maps followed in 1981, which in turn contributed much to the Rattanakosin Island Project.

In 1969, I accompanied Sompop Piromya, director general of the FAD, to Wat Samphanthawong to beg the temple authorities not to destroy an ordination hall. The building dated to the reign of Rama III and had well preserved murals. Within

a few days the building was bulldozed to rubble. In an attempt to stop Wat Saket building shophouses at the foot of the Golden Mount, Sirichai Naruemit and I took issue directly with the prime minister, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. Oddly enough in this campaign, my life was threatened over the phone by someone with a vested interest.

On 5 February 1969, an important memorandum was despatched to the FAD on the need to list more historical landmarks and to put a stop to the sale of stolen antiques. About this time, Sirichai and I obtained funds from the Asia Foundation to hire draftsmen to work at the FAD under our supervision. The purpose was to draw plans of historical buildings to be published in the Royal Gazette for official listing. As a result, some 30 historical monuments were listed within a short time.



Figure 4. Cover of ASA Report of the Fine Arts Commission 2, 1970, reprinted 2007. The picture shows shophouses being built at the base of the Golden Mount and Mahanak Canal.

With the assistance of Vichit Chinalai and Nit Rattanasanya as sub-editors, I edited the first report of the FAC in April 1969, and the second in April 1970 (Figure 4). About that time, the FAC held an “Exhibition to Commemorate the Centenary of the Change from the Reign of King Rama IV to King Rama V”, with the aim of promoting public awareness of historical conservation.

In 1970, I organized the first ever protest march against cultural heritage destruction. The Bank of Thailand planned to pull down Bang Khun Phrom Palace located on its grounds. University students were recruited to besiege the Bank which has subsequently preserved and meticulously restored the old palace.

The year ended with the publication of *Seen—Architectural Form of Northern*

Siam and Old Siamese Fortifications, a book of photographs taken from historical sites all over the country. It became a source book for the good and the bad in the architectural profession, from the design sensitivity of Metha Bunnag’s works to the plagiarism and profanity found in a 5-star hotel in Chiang Mai.

In 1971, I was among the co-founders of the Society for the Conservation of National Treasure and Environment (SCONTE), an offshoot of the FAC. Mayura Visetkul was a key person besides the FAC members. A year later, SCONTE formulated its first project: “Rattanakosin Island”. This entailed establishing conservation rules and strict building codes for the historical core of Bangkok at

Rattanakosin Island and the adjacent areas. The shortfall of SCONTE's creation, the Rattanakosin Committee, is that it has become merely a "cultural police" that stops short of being pro-active and creative.

During the Thanom-Praphas military regime in 1972, my associates and I attempted to revive the Ministry of Culture. As advisors to the Revolutionary Council on cultural and religious affairs, we proposed numerous plans, including: relocation of the Weekend Market (continued from 1968); a tourist cultural map, which was a continuation of the as yet unrealized cultural map project; a programme to create new parks in Bangkok, including the Bang Kachao wetland project; conservation of Phra Sumen Fort, Mahakan Fort and Mahanak Canal, the latter under the aegis of the ASA; an attempt to set up a Royal Commission on Parks, Recreation Areas and Environment which was announced in a decree of the Revolutionary Council on 22 March 1972; an attempt to set up a National Cultural Institute in lieu of the Royal Fine Arts Commission, or the Ministry of Culture, neither of which materialized; and an action plan to thwart illegal excavation and sales of Ban Chiang pottery.

While I drew up a masterplan for Ban Chiang village, the director-general of FAD, Sompop Piromya, was on the warpath to clamp down on the pillage of Ban Chiang pottery. The resulting conflict of interest led to his car being ambushed. Bullets were sprayed on the car and his chauffeur died on the spot while he made good his escape in the most dramatic way.

A few years later, I arranged for R. Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao to visit Ban Chiang. They designed a demountable geodesic dome to cover the excavation site without any columns that would have interfered with the digs. A bamboo prototype was built (Figure 5) so that it could be replicated for use on other similar sites and for site museums. But the project was never followed up to advantage.

In 1973, a campaign to preserve the White Elephant Pavilion in front of Parliament House succeeded with the intercession of Princess Viphavadi Rangsit. This was followed by a campaign to preserve the old Mint Building, which was scheduled for demolition. The director general of the FAD, Sompop Bhirom,



Figure 5. Demountable geodesic dome prototype, devised by R. Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao in 1981, for covering Ban Chiang and other sites.

interceded, and the building is now used as the National Gallery. With the FAC's backing, the director general then went on to list the old town hall of Chachoengsao, a charming old building in an area of some commercial value.

In the FAC's name, the "Bangkok Urban Renewal Study" was then proposed with the aim of conserving old parts of the city. Sadly it was not followed up at the time. Today there are a number of similar studies and reports which are academic in nature.

In 1972, the Arts Committee of the Siam Society was established in association with the ASA. Sirichai was chairman in 1974 and I took over in 1975, with Nit Rattanasanya as secretary. The Committee organised numerous lecture programmes; raised funds for folk art and various performing arts including a shadow play; issued several publications, including reprints of rare books and Sirichai's *Old Bridges of Bangkok*; recorded performances of folk music; initiated conservation work on old Lanna manuscripts, and on temple murals, in particular at Wat Khongkharam; and funded a classical music and dance troupe to go to the Oriental Music Festival in Durham, UK with Dacre Raikes as organizer and chaperon.

Working together with Kris Inthakosai and Ura Sunthornsarathoon, I formulated a project to reconstruct the city walls, forts and gates of Chiang Mai in accordance with archaeological evidence. A report was made on 8 April 1974, but no action ensued.

In 1977, I was active on various Rattanakosin Island committees, and the following year with the FAC when I became the chairman and when Vichit Chinalai produced four heart-rending posters depicting decapitated Buddha images. It was a desperate campaign to put an end to the sale of Buddha heads.

Between 1978 and 1980, as a member of the National Environment Board's Committee on Conservation of Nature and Art, chaired by Vatanyu na Thalang, I participated in agendas such as instituting customs regulations to stop the export of religious artefacts, principally Buddha statues. However, the proposals to establish a National Cultural Institute and to conserve Phuket's old town centre, in particular the Thai Airways building, came to nothing. On the other hand, a proposal to reconstruct the façade of the old Post Office Building was approved although no immediate action was taken.

In 1980, Ban Phitsanulok came under threat from a project to build a new Ministry of Justice on the same site. The project, proposed at the end of the Kriangsak government, would have destroyed the old house. After General Prem Tinsulanonda came to power, M.L. Tri Devakul helped by talking personally to General Prem, who then approved the conservation of the old house. My proposal that the building should also be used as the official residence of the prime minister was given up after a night's trial due to the premises being haunted.

In 1981, the ASA finally published through DD Books four cultural maps on Bangkok, the Grand Palace, Thonburi Canals and Ayudhya. Vichit Chinalai was in charge of the artwork and production while I wrote or edited the texts.

From Bangkok Bicentenary to Anand I government

In the run-up to the Bangkok Bicentenary in 1982, reconstruction of two urban landmarks was undertaken: the clock tower or Phrathinang Phuvadolphasnai, originally built by King Rama IV, in the Grand Palace but subsequently demolished (Figure 6), and the Drum Tower. With the help of deputy prime minister Pramarn Adireksarn, the plans which I asked architect Sawan Im-Arrom to draft were duly implemented. However, another proposal to revive the tramway around Rattanakosin Island, already acknowledged by the Cabinet, ground to a halt at the Ministry of Environment.

Throughout 1981–2, Sumet Jumsai Associates (SJA) and Asian Engineering Consultants Company (AEC) worked together under a BMA contract on the conservation and landscaping of the inner moat and canals of the Rattanakosin Island area. The purpose of the project was actually to install a sewage treatment system under the canals, but the terms of reference were extended to include environmental improvement. For this work, Sirichai was the project manager.

While working with Sirichai, Chaiya Poonsiriwong, governor of Chiang Mai, and Thaveesak Senanarong, the director general of the FAD, I pushed for the reconstruction of Tha Phae Gate in Chiang Mai based on historical evidence. This resulted in a fierce attack from people who had become used to other gates which were incorrectly reconstructed, but had become regarded as genuine and ancient.

In 1982, inspired by awards made on the occasion of the Bangkok Centenary in 1882, I managed to have the ASA institute the Royal Gold Medal awards for architectural design and architectural conservation (Figure 7). These were bestowed every other year by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. For the Bangkok Bicentenary, Sirichai and I co-hosted a series of TV programmes to highlight the occasion and the need to revive the royal barges procession. At that time, the royal barges had long been in disuse and all but forgotten. The final restoration work on King Rama I's house was also completed in time for the Bangkok Bicentenary with



Figure 6. Clock Tower, or Phra Thinang Phuvadolphasnai, originally built by King Rama 4 in the Grand Palace, here reconstructed on a site nearby but outside the Palace.

funding from the Shell Group of Companies under M.R. Sarisdiguna Kitiyakara.

It was a busy time for drawing up conservation plans. SJA, under contract to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), undertook a Chiang Mai Tourism Masterplan in which historical conservation was an important component. In this contract, Weeraphan Shinawatra was the project planner. It was followed by the Regional Cities Development Programme under contract to the Public Works Department and UNDP. This programme included plans to restore Chiang Mai's outer wall, or the so-called "earthen wall" (which is actually a brick construction). More plans were drawn up to restore this outer wall under other contracts, but nothing has ever been done.

"Water-Origin of Thai Culture" was published as a chapter in the book *Laksana Thai*, edited by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. The chapter was originally written in English and translated into Thai by Ni-on Snidwongse. The English text was separately published by Oxford University Press in a book entitled *Naga-Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific*, with a contribution by R. Buckminster Fuller. The work has become a source book for the conservation and propagation of water-based architecture and planning.



Figure 7. Certificate of the Siamese International Exhibition 1882 for Gold and Silver Medals in painting and sculpture

In 1985, the Dutch government wanted to redevelop the site of its Bangkok Embassy to capitalize on the high land price. I conspired with the ambassador, Peter van Walsum, to save the residence from demolition by having it awarded the Royal Gold Medal for architectural conservation, the effective equivalent of having the building listed. The old house, the former palace of Prince Boworadej, has since been beautifully renovated. The ambassador

then came to open the drawbridge near Wat Rajborphit which I had reconstructed using the FAD's budget. Sawan Im-Arrom, again, was the project architect.

In 1989, a project, conceived in 1981, to open up the view of Loha Prasat and Wat Ratchanadda by demolishing Chalermthai Theatre was finally implemented. Key help came from HRH Prince Bhanubhandhuwongvordej while deputy prime minister Bhichai Rattakul took charge of the ground work. I produced the overall plan while Avuth Ngermchuklin designed the royal pavilion used for receiving state visitors.

Around this time, I was made a recipient of the "Conservationist of Thai Heritage Award 1990" under the aegis of the FAD.

In 1991, as advisor to prime minister General Chatchai Choonhavan I proposed creating a park on a 500 *rai* plot, including a lake, owned by the Tobacco Monopoly. The prime minister approved the idea which was then passed on to his successor, Anand Panyarachun, in 1992. It is now known as Queen Sirikit Park.

In 1992–3, as an advisor at Government House during the Anand I government, I was able to push through the Bang Kachao wetland project. The idea began with Nid H. Shiranan in 1964, was submitted to the Revolutionary Council in 1972, and again to the National Environment Board in 1979–80 before any action was taken. Meanwhile, in 1993, I was made a recipient of the ASA’s “Royal Award for Architectural Conservation”. Plans to create Santiphorn Park on the site of the State Lottery were submitted and approved by the Anand I Cabinet at its last meeting. The project has since gone through many design versions but is still not implemented. I also worked in the Anand government with minister Paichit Uathavikul on the final review of the draft legislation to protect the nation’s environment. I took the opportunity to stretch the definition of environment to include the cultural and urban environment besides the purely industrial usage of the term.

Schemata ad infinitum

In 1994, the revised masterplan for the historical park of Ayudhya was undertaken for the FAD. Somkiat Yuwavitayanich was the project planner. Some parts of the scheme were implemented in 1996, namely the Suan Somdet Park, restoration of a sample of the city wall, and conservation of Wat Khun Saen, all funded by the Thailand Business Council for Sustainable Development.

When communications minister Colonel Vinai Kongsompong proposed building expressways on the Bangkok river front, we at the ASA campaigned against the proposal which was subsequently dropped.

In 2000, I was involved in more campaigns, including one for canal conservation on both the Bangkok and Thonburi sides of the city. The campaign against the BMA building a mass transit line over Phasi Charoen Canal was effective with the help of Khunying Chodchoi Sophonpanich. Yet another plan to revive the old trams on Rattanakosin Island was tried and failed. Proposals for the TAT to conserve and promote the floating houses at Phitsanulok and the singular amphibious village of Tha Khanon in Surat Thani Province as tourist destinations also failed.

The year 2001 was full of excitement. I urged prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra to set up a Ministry of Culture without giving in to monks who were demonstrating for the establishment of a Ministry of Buddhism or Ministry of Culture and Buddhism. I also put forward the idea of “cultural export” by exposing Thai artists and musicians to full international exposure, and suggested that the ministry should be at the forefront with the task of name-branding the country. The ministry was duly set up, but has become the refuge of junior cabinet ministers waiting in the wings with little interest in culture. That year, I also launched a desperate campaign to preserve the former Russian embassy on Sathorn Road which had been the home of the grandmother of HM the Queen. The developer very nearly demolished it and the FAD took two years to list it. Also saved was the old Chinese Chamber of

Commerce premises, now rented out as the Blue Elephant Restaurant. Meanwhile, a campaign to preserve an old traditional Thai house at Si Phaya failed when BMA governor Samak Sundaravej built a road over it.

In 2002, I worked on a project to create a new public park on the grounds of the Army Survey Map Department after the department had expressed a wish to move to a larger plot of land. The plan reflects Place des Vosges in Paris but is laced with canals. The proposal might yet be revived.

In 2003–4, the proposal to reconstruct the façade of the old Post and Telegraph Office building came to fruition after 30 years of perseverance, with the help of Ura Sunthorsarathoon. Once more, architect Sawan Im-Arrom helped with the construction drawings (Figure 8).

In 2006, with the support of Thonburi canal communities, I took the BMA to the Administrative Court. The aim was to stop the building of locks and flood walls on the canals. Besides being eyesores, these structures caused pollution in the canals and untold damage to the surroundings. The BMA lost the case in 2009. As a result, such civil works must now undergo environmental impact assessment (EIA) and take into account social and cultural implications. However, the scar on Thonburi is irreversible.

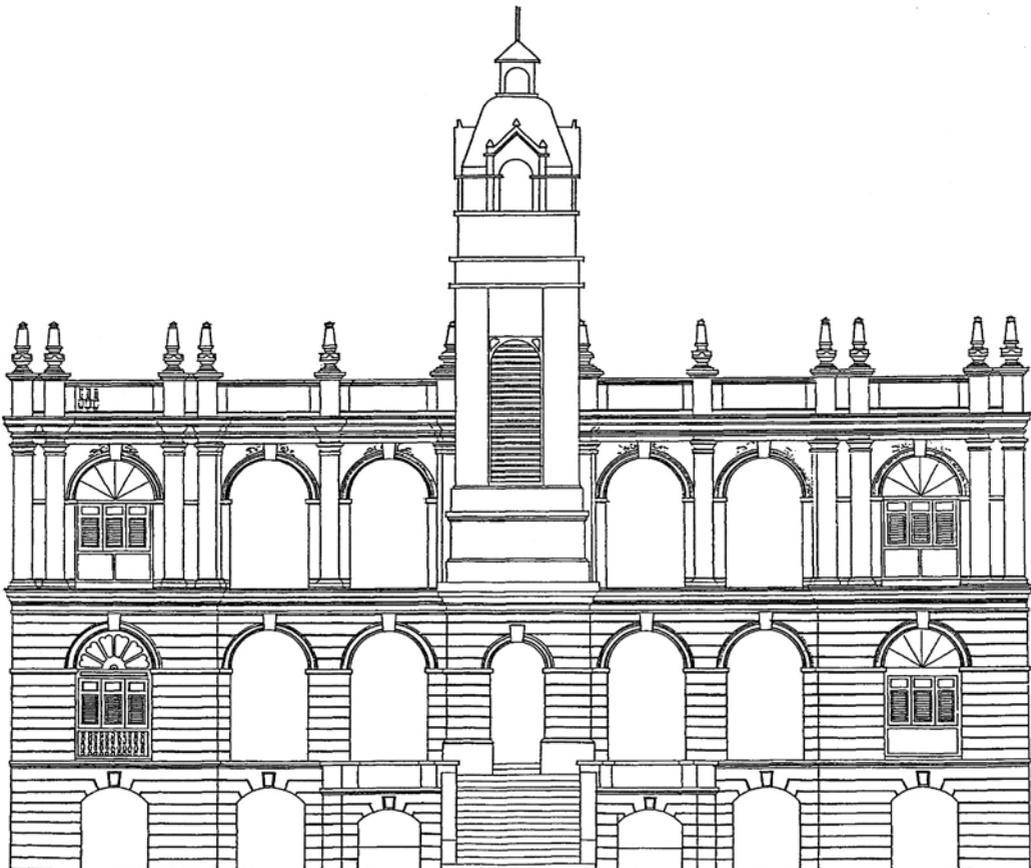


Figure 8. Drawing of the façade of the old Post and Telegraph Office Building, Bangkok.

In 2007, Weeraphan Shinawatra, Pongkwan Lassus and I proposed to the Chai Pattana Foundation to make use of traditional floating houses and floating farms in flood retention zones around Bangkok. The proposal is still going through gestation.

In 2009, I proposed a conservation-cum-tourism plan for Rattanakosin Island to the minister of tourism and sports, Suvit Yodmanee. Besides the usual report, it resulted in the publication of *Rattanakosin and Chao Phraya River Front*, with Weeraphan Shinawatra as editor. It summarises all the essential points in the conservation of the historical core of Bangkok.

With my appointment as chairman of the senior advisors to BMA governor M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra in 2010, several conservation projects were formulated. They are all going through a long period of gestation.

In 2012, I drew up plans for Chinatown Community Park; for Phraeng Sunthorn Phu at Tha Chang, an area full of historical anecdotes; and for the reconstruction of Samyod city gate at Wang Burapha (Figure 9). The proposal for the latter was in a letter to the BMA jointly signed by Nid H. Shiranan. These projects might yet survive through the detractors.



Figure 9. Samyod City Gate (Pratu Samyod) at night.

Conclusion: Overview of history and the use of the past for the future

Shiva destroys in order to recreate. Every culture or civilization goes through this unending Shivaite cycle with its memory and heritage. The British and French forces ransacked and burnt down the Summer Palace and more recently the communist government of China destroyed the city walls of Beijing, yet China is now beginning to show awareness of the need for historical preservation, though unevenly as both conservation and destruction continue in parallel. Europe has also erased numerous historical monuments. In the Shivaite spirit, Napoleon III and Baron Hausmann destroyed half of Paris in order to create the jewel of the city that it has become. The planned transformation of Venice, however, would have been unimaginable. As late as 1950, an autostrada was projected to run from Mestre into Venice over the Grand Canal to a parking lot in St Mark's Square. (Compare this to the Chao Phraya riverfront motorway scheme of 1994!) This plan led to protests from the whole of Europe and to the foundation of European Heritage with the Duke of Edinburgh as patron.

As everyone knows, modern civilization began in the early fifteenth century when the West started to overtake China by recalling Greek philosophy, science, mathematics and architecture, for the large part via the Romans. Until that point, China had been the world leader in science, navigation and exploration, but then relapsed into introversion and retrogression until the "Chinese Renaissance" in the second half of the twentieth century.

In comparison, Thai culture and memory or history are but minor. However, they have traits going back to prehistory that remain relevant in today's world (see *Naga*, 1988). I refer to the latent Thai instinct of living with the water element. In the Chao Phraya delta, the cradle of Thai culture, human settlements consisted of amphibious homes or houses on stilts, and aquatic or floating habitats. The message, or philosophy, was to live with the forces of nature, i.e., flooding, and not try to oppose them. Equipped with modern materials, utility systems, alternative energy and other modern technologies, these living units, indeed whole villages, together with floating farms, can be deployed in flood retention areas ("monkey cheeks") in the Chao Phraya delta, or indeed in other flood-prone or watery regions of the world like the Ganges delta in Bangladesh and the Mekong delta in South Vietnam.

The proposal for conserving the village of Tha Khanon (see year 2000 above) and for building modern amphibious house prototypes (see 2007) would contribute to the above end. The underlying message here is that cultural heritage and history have a crucial role in human survival into the future.