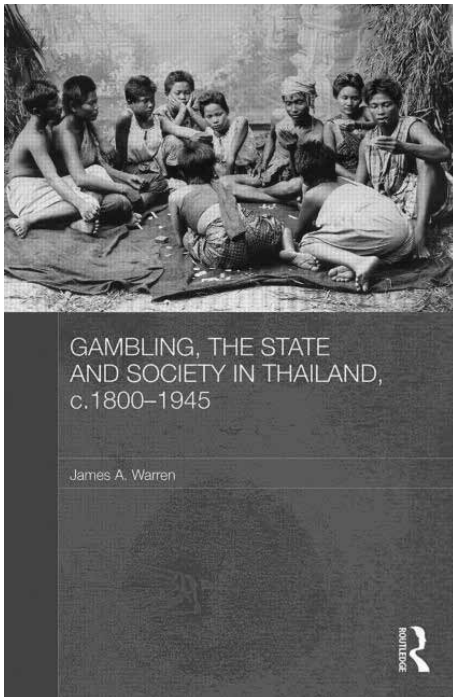


Reviews

Gambling, The State and Society in Thailand, c. 1800-1945 by James A. Warren (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). ISBN 978-0-415-53634-9 (hard). ISBN 978-0-203-55210-0 (e-book).



The subtitle of this excellent book by Dr. James A. Warren, which is an expansion of his PhD dissertation completed at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, could have been “The more things change, the more they stay the same,” as Dr. Warren lucidly outlines the attitude towards gambling of various Thai governments and society in general during the period under examination, but more tellingly details how little has really changed in regards certain key aspects of Thai society over the last hundred or so years.

Gambling today is broadly prohibited in Thailand, with some exceptions. The only legal forms of gambling are the bi-monthly lottery run by the Government Lottery Office, horseracing run every week by the Royal Turf Club in Bangkok and gambling on Muaythai boxing matches sanctioned by the Army Welfare Department of the Royal Thai Army at New Lumpini Boxing Stadium (although this stadium is scheduled to be relocated to the Ramindra area of Bangkok). Even the manufacture and distribution of playing cards is subject to strict control. Under the Playing Cards Act of 1943, the Ministry of Finance-owned Thai Playing Card Manufacturing Factory has a monopoly on the production of playing cards in Thailand.

Yet, despite the general prohibition, many forms of gambling are extremely widespread; indeed, illegal gambling continues to flourish throughout the country, especially the enormous underground lottery and betting on the English Premier League and major international football championships. A government sponsored study entitled *The Role of Thai Frontier Casinos in Thai Society*, conducted by Chulalongkorn University and released in January 2003, found that the amount of gambling taking place in Thailand had increased significantly since the economic

crisis of 1997. The study stated that gambling was thought to account for some forty per cent of the local economy, with approximately forty million Thais spending, on average, more than US\$220 per person annually on one or more of fifteen different forms of gambling. The study found that gambling businesses in Thailand generated between US\$12-20 billion per annum, and that Thai gamblers spent around US\$2 billion in one of the thirty or more casinos located just across the border in the neighbouring countries of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

Although the Thaksin 1 government mooted the possibility of legalizing casino gaming, that liberalisation never materialised. Given the entrenched and vested interests of various politicians and men in uniform and the fact that many people still object to gambling on moral and social grounds, there is little likelihood of any change in the legal status of gaming in Thailand in the foreseeable future. As evidenced by recent, but short-lived, police crackdowns on the proliferating number of illegal casinos operating in Bangkok—now said to number more than one hundred—illegal gambling is only likely to have increased over the last few years, thus making the author's examination of the history of gambling in Thailand particularly timely and pertinent.

The book comprises an Introduction, nine chapters and a Conclusion. In his Introduction, Dr. Warren provides general definitions of gambling, examines the issue of why certain forms of gambling have been criminalised, and then discusses gambling in the wider Thai historiography before providing an overview of his study. Each chapter examines certain aspects of gambling or prevailing social issues during the period under study. He provides fresh research on the important role that gambling revenues played in the construction of the modern Thai state. Moreover, he provides interesting insights into the law enforcement, legal and judicial processes and penalties, as well as how the Thai elite, the emerging middle class in Bangkok, the press and the Buddhist clergy all viewed gambling. In an interesting, although perhaps unintended, juxtaposition of the situation in today's politically divided nation, Dr. Warren explains how many Bangkokians resented the influx of people they perceived as country bumpkins in order to gamble and avail themselves of the delights of the big city. He also discusses how the Bangkok elite dominated policy in regards to gambling, as they knew best regardless of the wishes of the rest of population (the silent majority). As part of the overall process of demonstrating to the outside world that Thailand was a civilized country, certain traditional Thai gambling games, such as cock fighting, were designated as being uncivilized whereas games popular in the West, such as playing bridge, horse racing and billiards, were seen not only as civilized, but also as being desirable.

During the 19th century, there was a large increase in the level and types of gambling in Thailand. Dr. Warren examines the reasons behind this increase and determines that the causal factors lay not in any cultural disposition on behalf of Thais towards gambling, but rather was due to the country's economic transition that

led to increased prosperity and more disposable income; even more importantly, for many Thais, gambling was one of, if not the only, form of entertainment available at that time.

As an important adjunct to the subject matter, this book provides a fascinating look at the development and role of the Thai police force, especially in terms of their enforcement, or somewhat more pertinently failure to enforce, existing laws prohibiting gambling, and the subsequent criminalisation of gambling. There is also a very interesting comparison between Thai government policy on gambling with those on opium use and prostitution. Whereas, the government was more concerned in the early 20th century with suppressing vice activities that attracted Thais, they apparently were more than happy to encourage Chinese labourers to spend their earnings on these very same vices, thus accruing several benefits to the state: their money would be retained in Thailand; the labourers then had insufficient funds to return home; and, they would therefore have to continue to work on important infrastructure projects.

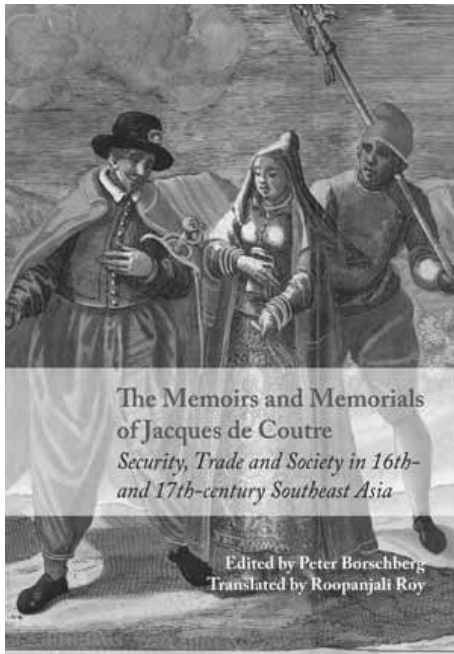
If history has taught us anything, it is that government-enacted prohibition—whether of alcohol, narcotics or gambling—simply does not work from a financial or social perspective. The Thai government opened and licensed gambling farms in the 19th century, and taxes on gambling became a major source of state revenue that underpinned many of the reforms carried out by King Rama V. Later, casinos and state-run lotteries were opened in the first half of the 20th century, yet ultimately the Thai elite sought to regulate gambling through a series of increasingly restrictive and punitive laws until government decided that gambling was a social evil that should be wholly prohibited, the same situation that exists today. Consequently, Dr. Warren's erudite analysis on page 144 of the prevailing attitudes to gambling remains as pertinent today as during the period under review:

Clearly, people continued to gamble even when it was in contravention of the law, though this was probably due not so much to ignorance or outright defiance as indifference. Indeed, if the aim of the government's gambling policy was to change people's behaviour by getting them to forego particular games, then it is fair to say that for the period covered by this study it failed.

Dr. Warren's highly readable study is based on his research of a variety of Thai and English language archival sources, including government reports, interesting legal cases, journals and newspapers. Despite its hefty price tag, this book should become essential reading for anyone interested in the history of 19th century and early 20th century Thailand.

Paul Bromberg

The Memoirs and Memorials of Jacques de Coutre: Security, Trade and Society in 16th- and 17th-century Southeast Asia translated by Roopanjali Roy, edited with an introduction by Peter Borschberg (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014). ISBN: 978-9971-69-528-6 (soft)



This fine book is a major addition to the early accounts of European visitors to Siam. It has relevance also for the history of Singapore, Asian trade, and many other topics, but in this review I shall concentrate on the passages concerning Siam.

Jacques de Coutre (1572?-1640) was an adventurer, born in Bruges in present-day Belgium, who spent most of the years between 1593 and 1623 in Asia, including eight months in Siam from May to December 1695 as well as visits to Ligor, Pattani, and Tenasserim. His memoirs contain the earliest eye-witness account of Siam other than Pinto's problematic work, and the only known first-person description of King Naresuan.

The book contains English translations of De Coutre's memoirs along with four memorials he wrote to the King of Spain and Portugal and some ancillary documents. The memoirs appear to have been written for publication, but were never printed and lay in the National Library of Spain in Madrid until discovered by scholars in the 1960s. An edition in the original Spanish was printed in 1991. Soon after, an English translation of the chapters on Siam, done by the late Philippe Annez, circulated among some Thai historians. It is infinitely better now to have a more polished translation by Roopanjali Roy along with copious notes and glossaries by Peter Borschberg of the University of Singapore, who also contributes a long introduction on the man, the manuscripts, their historical context, and their significance.

In Asia, De Coutre made his living as a gem trader and eventually settled in Goa. He travelled to Ayutthaya from Melaka in the company of a Portuguese friar, Jorge de Mota, who was officially sent by the Portuguese governor of Melaka to promote trade with the Siamese capital and to find out about some Portuguese nationals who King Naresuan had hauled away from Cambodia. In De Coutre's account, however, De Mota is a rogue. He manufactures a false translation of his diplomatic missive, turning himself into a relative of and envoy from the King of Spain and Portugal. King Naresuan is suitably flattered and is preparing to send De Mota off to Lisbon in a ship groaning with presents for the king when De Coutre, fearing that this could all

end very badly, exposes the hoax to a Siamese royal consort. Soon after, De Coutre leaves Siam. The tale does not quite add up as King Naresuan does not visit his wrath on De Mota, and De Mota does not take revenge on De Coutre.

Whatever the exact truth of this caper, it keeps De Coutre in Siam for eight months and gives him several fascinating experiences to recount. He attends three audiences with King Naresuan. The second, with the presentation of the fake letter, is a full-dress affair with many similarities to the famous French embassy seventy years later. At the third, there is a tiger tethered at the foot of the throne to make sure De Coutre is suitably terrified. De Coutre trails after the king on an elephant-hunting expedition in the western hills, allowing him to describe Suphanburi and the fierceness of its mosquitoes. After the narrative he adds two chapters on the striking things he has seen: floating rice, penis bells, cremations, elephants, the royal audience halls, some temples, the funeral of an important royal elephant, and the king's cruel punishment of offenders.

His visit to Pattani is brief, but he confirms other accounts that the Pattani queen is a great merchant, and describes the port as a concentration point for pepper from the archipelago. One of the appendices mentions a massacre of the entire thousand-strong Portuguese community at the port.

The memorials to the Iberian king present an overview of Asian trade, including descriptions of the main exports from Ayutthaya, Pattani and Tenasserim.

De Coutre eventually married and settled in Goa, but with growing rivalry between European states in Asia, he was accused of spying for the Dutch and repatriated to Europe in 1623. Both the memoirs and the memorials were probably written to refute these accusations by showing himself a loyal friend of Spain and its king. He was exonerated in 1632 and died eight years later in Trinidad.

As Borschberg notes, De Coutre wrote his memoirs in the style of the picaresque tales popular in his day. Time after time, he gets into unlikely scrapes (like his experience in Siam), but escapes on each occasion like a matinee hero. Time and time again, he makes and loses a fortune, shrugging off the experience with nonchalance.

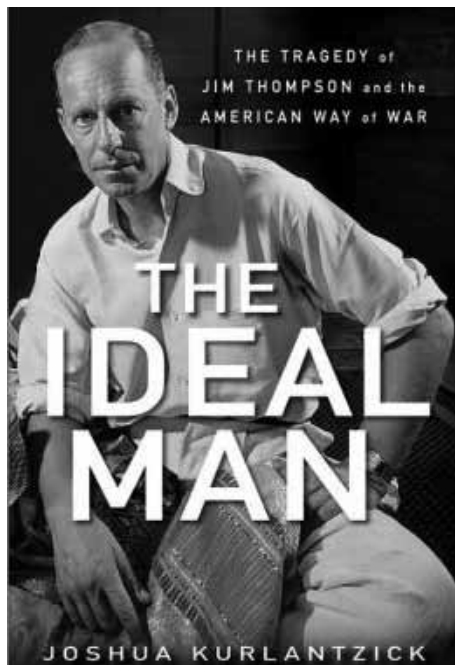
Herein lies the difficulty of assessing his memoirs. They were probably written around thirty years after his time in Siam. There is little chance that he kept any sort of journal that would have survived his escapades, so he was composing from memory. He was a gem-trader, not a profession that requires skill in recording and writing. He was writing to please an audience. He is a storyteller in the style of Elmore Leonard, who does not like to pause the plot too long while describing the scenery. Some of his descriptions (e.g., of audience halls and temples) make sense up to a point, but then become difficult to imagine or to reconcile with other information – perhaps a result of De Coutre's faulty memory or his clumsy expression. For example, the Buddha statues in temple cloisters include sitting and standing figures but also "others ... mounted on horseback with little flags in their hands".

These factors make it especially difficult to evaluate his fascinating passages on King Naresuan. He claims to have witnessed the king ordering punishments for some Siamese nobles involved in De Mota's deception, for some young palace women accused of robbery, and for a woman accused of adultery. He also claims to have seen convicts executed by wild buffaloes, gladiator-style, and elephant keepers disfigured for dereliction of duty. He recounts other examples of "barbarity" which he presumably heard from others. Some of these stories are not so surprising. Punishments of their sort are detailed in the Ayutthaya laws, and were not very different from punishments enforced in parts of Europe at the time. But some examples, such as the animal-assisted execution of the adulterous woman, have no support in the Ayutthaya laws. Was De Coutre pandering to a taste for exotic sadism?

This publication makes available a fascinating early European source on Southeast Asia. The editor provides a long introduction, detailed annotations, very full glossaries of places and things, a timeline, and many old maps and prints. What historians ought to make of De Coutre's memories is another matter, but it is great to have this source in clear sight.

Chris Baker

The Ideal Man: The Tragedy of Jim Thompson and the American Way of War by Joshua Kurlantzick (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011). ISBN 978-0-470-08621-6 (hard)



Ask anyone, in Thailand at random, "What do you remember of Jim Thompson?" Typical answers will doubtless include: "He disappeared"; "He is an American"; "He was the Silk King of Thailand"; "He was a CIA agent". Each one of these answers alone is not particularly relevant to the make-up of the man.

Jim Thompson disappeared in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia in 1967. This was a shocking event, but many white men have disappeared in Asia. They did not become famous.

Jim Thompson was indeed an American. So what? Americans are everywhere, often in places they should not be. Still, America being the most powerful country in the world,

the disappearance of an American citizen could, and in this case did, create a lot of media attention.

Jim Thompson also made a great fortune in Thailand. He became “The Silk King” and left behind a lasting commercial legacy in the form of his Jim Thompson Company. This company still has its beautiful flagship store at the corner of Surawong Road and Rama IV Road in central Bangkok and operates the Jim Thompson Thai House museum. The latter is undoubtedly one of the landmark tourist attractions in Bangkok. There have actually been many “Built To Last” companies in Thailand founded by Occidentals, including B. Grimm, T. Leonowens, East Asiatic Co., etc. None of the founders of these enterprises became a “legend” like Jim Thompson.

So, Jim Thompson was a CIA agent. Really! There were so many CIA agents in Thailand and Southeast Asia, especially in the wake of the Vietnam War. Most of them are not famous. Actually, they try hard not to attract too much attention. Moreover, Thompson was certainly not a distinguished spy like Philby, Burgess or even Matahari. So why should he be famous?

Yet Jim Thompson is famous! Could it be that he owed his fame not to any one particular reason or event? Rather, each of these individual innocuous responses, lumped together, has created a cacophony of sound that greatly magnified the Jim Thompson myth.

The *Ideal Man* is actually a book about a famous man. The misplaced title suggests that the glamorous life of Jim Thompson embodies the humanist ideal of “the life well-lived”, worthy of emulation wherever possible. The author appears to stand in awe of the fame achieved by his subject. Indeed, any biographer would be immediately confronted by the enormous legacy of Jim Thompson, for better or for worse. The aura of fame - like a pleasant mist - colours the author’s perception of Jim Thompson throughout. Wearing tinted spectacles can assist a biographer in certain ways by casting light on key aspects of their subject’s life. But they can also obscure other areas of interest.

Nevertheless, Joshua Kurlantzick has written a very informative book on the life and times of Jim Thompson, which is clear, readable and interesting. The book portrays a very human, but sad, story of a man engaged in an unrequited love affair with Thailand, caught between two cultures. As might be expected of a writer who usually focuses on politics, Kurlantzick provides a vivid background of the political context of the Vietnam War and its impact on Thailand. For readers who are interested in a clear snapshot account of Thailand’s modern history and the country’s role prior to and during the Vietnam War, the book serves as a welcome primer.

The author also makes Jim Thompson’s house come alive with a constant parade of celebrity guests, including members of the Kennedy and Eisenhower families, Barbara Hutton, Doris Duke, Truman Capote, Benny Goodman, and nearly every prominent European royal or heiress passing through its cultured corridors and dining rooms. If they did not exactly eat out of his hand, they all basked in his

hospitality and hung on his words, as Thompson pontificated about Thai culture, the Vietnam War and world geopolitics.

As a result, Kurlantzick's book is likely to become the definitive work on Jim Thompson. Only U.S. Government files that have not yet been declassified might shed more light on this topic. Otherwise, one would be hard put to find more information in one volume about Thompson's background and career.

Having praised the author for doing a thorough job in documenting the life of Jim Thompson, let me venture to offer some reservations. It seems that the author started writing a book based on the assumption that Thompson is an important historical figure. Since he is so famous, he must be historically important. Moreover, many important historical political figures - like the Kennedys - appear to be his friends. The author did not assess the basis of Thompson's fame. He did not set out to exorcise Thompson's ghost. He wholeheartedly accepted Thompson's fame at face value.

But is that fame justified? Is there much substance to Jim Thompson's famous political ambiguity? I think the book fails to determine whether Thompson is historically an important figure. The author cannot even establish whether Thompson was spying for the CIA. He merely reports that Thompson used to work in the OSS (the CIA's precursor). His definitive claim comprises the fact that Thompson's CIA file has not yet been declassified. Moreover, despite the author's best efforts to cast new light on Thompson's disappearance in the Cameron Highlands, his attempt to prove a conspiracy behind the disappearance also meets a dead end. After reading this book, we are no wiser as to why Thompson disappeared, who might have killed him or whether he arranged his own disappearance. There have been so many hypotheses over the years, but American historian Dr. Edward van Roy is probably spot on when he said, "The attempt to prove a conspiracy theory behind the disappearance of Jim Thompson is just a storm in a teacup. Jim Thompson probably fell into a hole in the jungle floor at the Cameron Highlands and was eaten by wild animals."

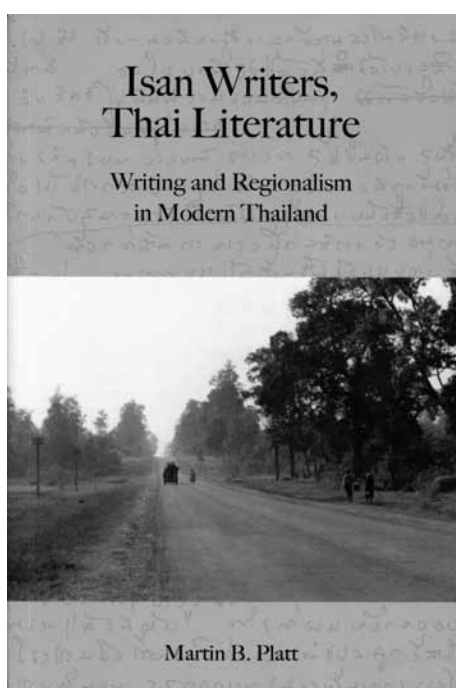
Yet, the legend that has become Jim Thompson remains an entrepreneurial success story. Thanks to his famed house-cum-museum, and the enormous success of the silk company he founded, there is considerably more substance to Thompson the creative entrepreneur than to Thompson the ambiguous political man and glamorous spy. He discovered the beautiful Thai silk produced by the Muslim Cham weavers of Baan Krua by Bangkok's Khlong Saen Sap. He started a silk production company and got the Cham weavers and dyers at Baan Krua to supply him with silk textiles. He began to promote internationally Thai silk with novel patterns, bright pigments and exotic designs. By the end of the 1950s, Thompson had made Thai silk globally popular and he fully deserved the title of Thailand's "Silk King." His career as an entrepreneur and founder of a "Built to Last" company, which has become a global brand, is highly commendable.

Joshua Kurlantzick is a serious political writer whose analysis of contemporary

events in Southeast Asia is well written and thought provoking. In this case, these events overshadow the book's subject. Unfortunately, the author's search for Jim Thompson the political, or "ideal" man, turns out to be a chase after a mirage.

Jeffery Sng

Isan Writers, Thai Literature: Writing and Regionalism in Modern Thailand by Martin B. Platt (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press; and Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2013). ISBN: 978-9971-69-697-9.



In Thailand today everyone knows that Isan refers to northeastern Thailand, but the term is understood by urban people differently from those who live, or have their roots, in the region. For most urban middle and upper class people, Isan is assumed to mean a place of uneducated and unsophisticated country people who speak an unrefined language (primarily Lao). In the political rhetoric of the 21st century, the *khon isan* (คนอีสาน), the northeastern people, are often symbolized as stupid water buffaloes. What Platt succeeds in doing in this pioneering work is demonstrating that for at least half a century there have been a number of men and a few women who write from their own experience of a mainly rural world where most people speak as their native language a dialect of Lao or, in some cases, of

Khmer, but who write in the national language and whose contributions are to the national literature of Thailand.

What makes a writer an "Isan" writer? This is a question that Platt pursues throughout his book in which he examines some two dozen writers whose published work appeared in the second half of the 20th century. First, a modern Isan writer is not one whose education was gained as it was traditionally, in a monastic school, and who learned to write in Lao, Khmer or what is called *tuatham* (ตัวธรรม) (literally 'dhammic script'), an orthography once used for Buddhist texts not only in northeastern and northern Thailand, but also in Laos. Rather, a modern Isan writer writes in standard Thai, the language he or she learned in a government school. Secondly, although a modern Isan writer may draw on the traditional literature of the region – legends incorporated into sermons given by monks or used as the basis for performances of

folk opera, *môlam mu* (หมอลำหมู่) – the modern Isan writer situates himself or herself with reference to novels, short stories, and poetry that has been composed by other writers in standard Thai. Finally, in contrast to traditional or modern *môlam* whose audiences have always been primarily people from northeastern Thailand, “few Isan writers, especially those working at the end of the 20th century, saw themselves as writing specifically for other Isan people....Isan writers recognized that their audience was the Thai reading public in general, and thus their goals were primarily to educate outsiders, to bring about social and political change (and thereby to improve the conditions of Isan) or simply to assert the presence and significance of Isan.” (230) An Isan writer, Platt concludes, is typically one born in, and who usually grew up in, northeastern Thailand and whose “writing is related to Isan,” (226)¹

Some writers who originally came from northeastern Thailand, like the highly published Kanchana Nakkhanan (กาญจนา นาคันนันท) (b. 1921), have not been identified as *khon isan* and have written only a little about northeastern themes. Platt includes her as one of the first Isan writers, because in some of her stories her portrayal of rural people – based on those in the Northeast – shows these people “worthy of sympathy and respect.” (48) Two other writers who are a little younger than Kanchana – Khamsing Srinawak (penname, Lao Khamhawm) (คำสิงห์ ศรีนอก / ลาว คำหอม) (b. 1930) and Khamphun Bunthawi (คำพูน บุญทวี) (1928-2003) – whose work has been based much more on their own Isan experience are recognized as foundational Isan writers. Khamphun’s work, and notably *Luk Isan* (ลูกอีสาน), his most famous work, is at once autobiographical and what I would also term ethnographic in its detailed depiction of rural Isan life; “in its humorous, reduplicative non-linear characteristics [*Luk Isan*] recalls the techniques of Isan/Lao oral arts.” (126) In contrast, Khamsing, who was influenced by Western scholars associated with the Cornell project of the 1950s for whom he worked, is more analytical in his approach, wanting as he said “people with power in the cities to understand and sympathize with people like Nai Nak Na-ngam,” a northeastern villager who is the main character in one of his stories (quoted at p. 57). He influenced the Isan and other writers who came to be associated with leftist movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

By the mid to late 1960s, Thai society had undergone a radical socioeconomic transformation. In the post-Second World War period, the Thai economy boomed as a result of the marked increase in Thai exports – mainly of rice and other primary products, the extremely large transfers of aid from the United States, and the side-effects of the American war in Vietnam, including the establishment of American military bases in Thailand and the servicing of hundreds of thousands of GIs on ‘rest and recreation’. An increasingly larger percentage of rural northeasterners – first male, and then also female – found temporary and sometimes, more rarely,

¹ The volume published by the Isan Writers Association, *สาบอีสาน: รวมเรื่องสั้นของนักเขียนภาคอีสาน* (‘Scent of the Northeast: Collected stories by Isan Writers’) [พระนคร]: เคส็ดไทย, 2551, might well be read as a companion volume to Platt’s book.

permanent work in Bangkok. During this period when Thailand was under a military dictatorship, there was marked corruption and no political will to institute policies that would have ameliorated the growing inequalities in wealth between Bangkok and rural Thailand. These inequalities became the concern not only of a growing student movement, but also of writers who took as their responsibility producing stories to promote attention primarily to the plight of rural people.

These writers took inspiration from Jit Phumisak, the Thai philologist, historian, and Marxist, who was killed in 1966 while fighting alongside the Communist Party of Thailand. Jit had argued that literature and art should serve the people, a proposition that was taken up by writers under the banner of “Literature for Life” (*wannakam pheua chiwit* / วรรณกรรมเพื่อชีวิต). In the 1960s and 1970s, most well-known Isan writers became identified with this movement.

Platt discusses several of these writers, including Surachai Janthimathorn (สุรชัย จรรย์มิตร) (b. 1948) and Prasert Jandam (ประเสริฐ จันด่ำ) (1945-1995). Surachai, who came from the minority Khmer-speaking people of Isan, had acquired an impressive ability as a writer in Thai of short stories, poems and songs, and used his ability “to speak forcefully against injustice and the suffering it causes.” (86) After the coup of 1976 when the student movement and its supporters were forcefully repressed, Surachai “went to the jungle”, that is, he joined the revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of Thailand. He, like many others who joined the ill-fated communist-led revolution, became disillusioned with the party and, after an amnesty in 1980, returned to society. His subsequent writings evolved from revolutionary themes to manifestations of the “growing regionalism in Thai literature.”

Prasert, a Sisaket native, in his numerous books and poems made himself “almost synonymous with Isan writing, political struggle, and Literature for Life” (86) in the 1970s. Although his life was short, since his death he has become a legend as people have “rediscovered his writing and associated him somewhat nostalgically with the golden age of political activism and literary presence on the national stage.” (105)

The shift away from seeking the revolutionary overthrow of the Thai political system to the quest by Isan people to become recognized as full citizens of Thailand, with the right to help choose the leaders who govern them, was foreshadowed in the writing of Khamman Khonkhai (คำหมาน คนไค) (b. 1937). Platt notes that Khamman’s primary interest “is education and teaching,” (127) as is manifest in his well-known *Khru Ban Nok* (ครูบ้านนอก), “Village School Teacher,” a book made into a film and translated into English by Gehan Wijewardene and published as *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*. The teacher in a Thai government school in rural Isan holds a very critical position serving, as I have shown elsewhere, to reshape Isan villagers’ identity so that they come to see themselves as Thai citizens, but with a distinctive

regional character.² Khamman's writing dramatically pursues this theme.

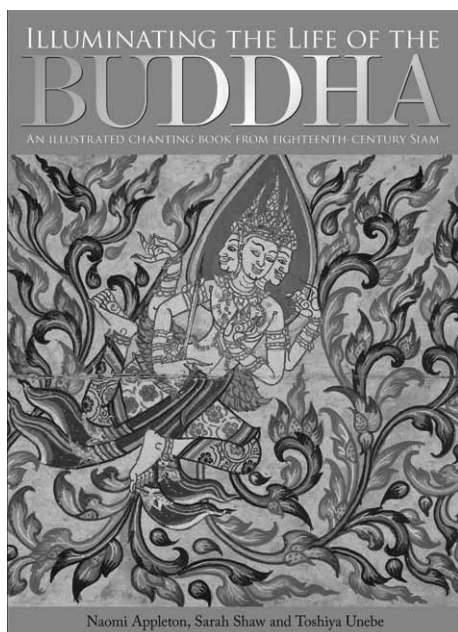
Platt shows how Isan writers such as Yong Yasothorn (ยงค์ ยโสธรร) (penname of Prayong Mulsan) and Fon Fafang (ฟอน ฟาฟาง) (penname of Wira Sudsang), who both emerged from the late 1970s on, embraced a regionalism (*thongthin niyom* / ท้องถิ่นนิยม) that seeks to identify, discuss, and assert the value of Isan artistic, historical, linguistic, and local cultural products as significant components of the cultural heritage of Thailand. By the end of the 20th century, the fact that newer Isan writers such as Phaiwarin Khaongam (ไพวรินทร์ ขาวงาม), the winner of the prestigious SEAWrite Award, Prachakhom Lunachai (ประชาคม ลุนาชัย), winner "of all the major Thai literary awards except the SEAWrite Award," (192) Manote Phromsingh (มานิต พรหมสิงห์), "among the most promising of the new generation of Isan writers," (197) see themselves as contributing more generally to Thai literature, and not only to a regional literature, has made the category of Isan writers less clearly demarcated than it was in the 1970s.

Platt's book, with its exceptional combination of critical readings of a large body of Thai literature by Isan writers, interviews with many writers, and insightful reflections on how these writers have developed in the turbulent decades of late 20th century Thailand, has made a unique contribution to the understanding of writers with roots in the distinctive region of northeastern Thailand. One looks forward to Platt writing a new chapter that examines Isan writers in the era that began early in the 21st century with the rise of the populist politics most associated with Thaksin Shinawatra. As support for these politics is very marked among northeasterners, one would expect that a newer generation of Isan writers would be shaped not only by general trends in Thai literature, but also by the experiences of the Red Shirt movement and the conflict with those of the Thai middle and upper classes.

Charles Keyes

² See "The Proposed World of the School: Thai Villagers Entry into a Bureaucratic State System," in *Reshaping Local Worlds: Rural Education and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Charles F. Keyes. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies), 1991, pp. 87-138.

Illuminating the Life of the Buddha by Naomi Appleton, Sarah Shaw, and Toshiya Unebe (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2013). ISBN 978 1 85124 283 2.



With few publications in English about Thai painting, the arrival of a new one that helps to shed light on any variety of information about paintings (dating, function, purpose, etc.) is cause for celebration. In this case, *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* does not disappoint.

The book is an in-depth examination of an 18th century *samut khoi* manuscript in the collection of the Bodleian Library in England. Scholarship presented in the book is shared equally and successfully by its three authors whose specialties lie in the field of religious studies. The book is rich with color images of the manuscript and related objects throughout. *Samut khoi* are accordion-folded mulberry paper manuscripts that were

carefully and finely created with written text and, often, illustrated with beautiful depictions of popular Buddhist narratives. Dating back to the 16th century, *samut khoi* were particularly popular in Thailand in the 18th and 19th centuries before their production waned, replaced by printed versions.

From the start it is clear that the manuscript will be presented by the authors with great care in relation to its detail. On the first pages the illustrated folios of the manuscript are reproduced with color photographs and on the following two pages, a map of the manuscript is offered that is helpful for gaining a better understanding of how the paintings and text are laid out. Focusing the book on a single manuscript is an excellent approach to expand our understanding of the structure, function, and life of a *samut khoi*.

Each chapter of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* explores different aspects of the Bodleian's *samut khoi*, referred to in the book by its accession number: MS. Pali a. 27 (R). Chapter 1 introduces the book and its Thai Buddhist context, exploring *samut khoi* manuscripts, their structure, function, and composition. This chapter compares the Bodleian manuscript with the presentation of Buddhist images at Buddhist monasteries in the region as "principal ways that Southern Buddhists, lay and monastic, have come to appreciate the teaching." (p. 1) It also provides insight into the role of text and image in *samut khoi* in general, and specifically in MS. Pali a. 27 (R). Because *samut khoi* are often a collection of the visual and the verbal, both aspects should be explored in order to give a complete picture of a painted Thai

manuscript. The reader is also reminded, following Peter Skilling’s insightful work, that the paintings in the manuscript are illustrative, yet not specifically illustrations, since they function outside of the written text as a reminder of the Buddha’s perfections.

The *samut khoi* manuscript that is the focus of this book presents paintings of the final ten *jātakas* and the Buddha’s life story in its folded pages. These stories and their significance are explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. We learn that the order of the painted narratives and their specific locations throughout the manuscript have significance. Chapter 2 introduces the Pāli text from which the manuscript comes, known as the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* or “Commentary on the *jātaka*” (p. 10), and outlines the importance of the last ten births or great stories. The stories are recounted, explained, and illustrated generously with depictions from the manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R) and supplemented with other Thai manuscripts and various works of art. The strength of the chapter is the sequence of information, its accessibility, and the illustrations. I found the discussion of the history of depicting the ten final lives in art and the situation of manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R) within Thai manuscript history particularly interesting.

Chapter 3 details the final life of the Buddha, echoing the order of its presentation in manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R). His life as a prince and then as the enlightened one is the subject of the manuscript following the *jātakas*. The incorporation of forty illustrations of the final life of the Buddha in the manuscript is unusual for a *samut khoi*, and this fact together with an analysis of their placement is highlighted throughout *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. This chapter identifies the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, “an extra-canonical biography of the Buddha composed in Pāli,” (p. 56) as the textual source of the life story paintings. Its history and importance are examined as are discrepancies between the *samut khoi* paintings and the *Paṭhamasambodhi*. Chapter 3 stresses that seeing the Buddha in painted images is an important way of seeing the Buddha and being in the presence of the Buddha and his teachings.

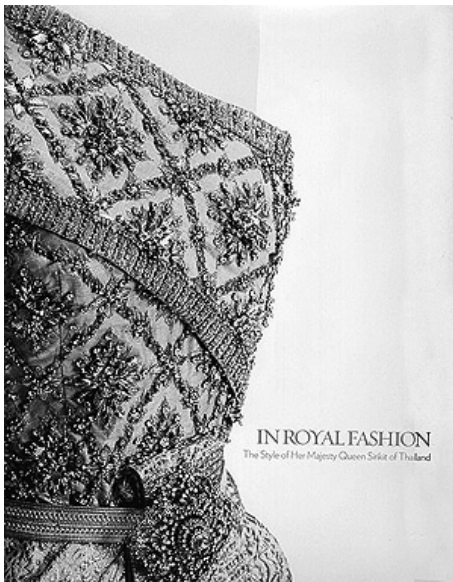
Chapter 4 explores “The lifestory of a manuscript” and gives a great deal of background in the process. Readers learn how the authors dated the manuscript and its possible inclusion in the gifts from Siam to Ceylon in the mid-18th century. The chapter also details the written content of the Bodleian manuscript and, importantly and typical of *samut khoi*, the fact that the written content does not match the subject of the paintings. Of course a manuscript’s life continues after its creation – especially one now residing in a British collection – and Chapter 4 does a wonderful job of discussing the provenance and “travels” of the manuscript. I found this chapter to be compelling because of the analysis involved and the overall discussion of the manuscript, and its particulars were details I found myself missing in the previous chapters.

The authors’ affection for their subject comes through in *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. This book is a delightful contribution to the field of Thai and

Buddhist studies and I am thrilled to have it as part of my library. It offers a variety of perspectives and insight for researchers, teachers, or students. I hope its publication is an inspiration to others and that it is just the start of an increased interest of scholars and publishers in the field of Thai manuscripts and painting in general.

Rebecca Hall

In Royal Fashion: The Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand by Melissa Leventon and Dale Carolyn Gluckman (Bangkok: Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, 2013). ISBN 978-616-91379-0-0 (hard).



When the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles opened to the public on 26 April 2012, the first exhibitions in the grandly renovated former offices of the Ministry of Finance were created in honor of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. After nine years of study, planning, renovation and assembling collections, the new museum located in the compound of Bangkok's Grand Palace was created to serve as a center for those who wish to study and learn about Southeast Asian and Asian textiles. For the inaugural exhibitions the new museum focused on the exemplary role that Queen Sirikit has played in supporting Thai textiles and included themes on fashion and

Thai national dress. An impressive Thai language catalogue ราชศิลป์พิสดารภรณ์พิพิธภัณฑน์ผ้าในสมเด็จพระนางเจ้าสิริกิติ์ พระบรมราชินีนาถ that featured a forward by the museum's Patron, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, was produced.

An English language edition *In Royal Fashion: The Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand* appeared a year later. Both catalogues cover the displays in two of the museum's principal halls. In the first gallery, the exhibition is entitled "Artistry in Silk: The Royal Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit" and a second gallery houses "Fashioning Tradition: Queen Sirikit Creates a National Dress for Thailand". The original catalogue that appeared in Thai in 2012 was written by a committee of museum staff and scholars. Although the photographs and most information in the two editions are similar, the text for the English version was completely rewritten by the authors Melissa Leventon and Dale Carolyn Gluckman.

In comparing the Thai edition and the English version, the changes and additions

were clearly intended to assist an international audience to better understand the topic by providing additional historical and cultural background. As the work was first written in Thai, a direct translation would have been complicated for a foreign readership to follow. This is because, when writing about royalty, *rajasap* ราชาศัพท์, the royal Thai language, must be used. This honorific language makes the text extremely formal and repetitive. Additionally, the titles of personages in the royal family are long and complex, and are often not the same as those commonly used in English. As a result, a direct translation of the original Thai edition would pose problems for an English language reader unfamiliar with Thai court etiquette and succession. The authors, who have both served as consultants since the outset of the museum's creation, have carefully focused on providing supplementary and complimentary information to the original text.

Following the Forward by HRH Princess Sirindhorn, the catalogue's Introduction provides readers with a brief biographic background of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit and stresses the important role she played in creating a modern Thai national dress. As the authors point out, "Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the dress of members of the Thai court had gradually Westernized to the point where there was no 'traditional' Thai dress suitable for Her Majesty". This fact is pivotal as the *raison d'être* for the exhibition and the major role that Her Majesty played in reshaping a national Thai fashion identity. The other essential point is that the Queen focused a great deal of attention on rural women and, through this concern, became very interested in supporting traditional textiles.

The book's first chapter is entitled "Women's Fashion at the Thai Court and Beyond, 1860 to 1960". This differs from the Thai edition that has a first chapter entitled "The Evolution of Women's Attire during the Rattanakosin Period" and is divided into three sections starting with a brief one covering the period from 1782 to 1851. The second section of the Thai edition covers the period of the Westernization of Thai dress and the third section deals with the period starting at the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932. The English edition touches on the early Bangkok period as well, and then moves on to the reign of King Rama IV. The authors note that an early photograph of King Rama IV and his Queen Debsirindra was sent to US President Franklin Pierce, and was probably taken in the 1850s.

As a result, the introduction of photography is clearly a crucial development in the study of royal Siamese attire, because for the first time it is possible to know exactly what a personage is wearing. Thus, it is unclear why the English edition uses the starting date for the first chapter as 1860, which is in the middle of the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1863). It would seem more suitable to have chosen the 1850s, the decade that Rama IV's reign began and photography was introduced, unless the authors chose the date 1860 because around this time women in the court reportedly began to appear in Western style dress when greeting visitors. Aside from this minor point, the first chapter is filled with useful explanations of how fashion evolved over the decades.

Of note is the fact that in both the Thai and English editions the year 1932 is highlighted as a turning point in the history of Thai fashion. This is because the Prime Minister at the time issued a Cultural Mandate that discouraged the wearing of some types of traditional Thai attire. He considered that the local population would appear more “civilized” if they used Western dress. While this did not have as much effect in rural Thailand as in the cities, following the Second World War Western fashion took hold even in remote rural areas.

The second chapter in the book covers the story of how Her Majesty prepared for state visits by developing a new type of national dress. In total, eight different styles of women’s attire were created, each named after an important royal place. As the authors point out, most visitors and younger Thais assume that these styles are part of a continuous tradition, when in fact, they are not. The main feature of these new fashion creations is that although they appear to be hip-wrapped and draped like traditional attire, in fact, they are constructed in the same manner as Western style dress.

The third and final chapter focuses on how the Queen encouraged the use of locally woven textiles. Initially her wardrobe was made from silk produced by the company started by locally based American Jim Thompson. However, in 1976 Her Majesty established the Foundation for Promotion of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques (SUPPORT) which encouraged many types of crafts. As a result, the Queen began to wear clothing made from locally woven cottons and silks, thus starting a fashion trend followed by many Thai women.

The catalogue’s sixty-two page text is followed by well over one hundred pages of outstanding images that document the ensembles worn by Her Majesty juxtaposed with photographs showing the historic event where a particular outfit was worn. In addition, there are design sketches and close-up photographs that highlight the superb craftsmanship that went into creating many of the fashions. The selection and order of the photographs in the 216-page tome follows the same order in both Thai and English editions. One would assume that while the text could be revised, changing the order of the illustrations from the original format would be more difficult. While the photography of the Queen’s attire is outstanding, the concept behind the layout of illustrations is unclear. It would have been more helpful if the photographs had followed a historic timeline or that the Thai-inspired fashions and foreign designs were grouped separately.

Since the reign of Rama IV, when the King sent photographs of himself to European royals, the Thai nobility has astutely recognized that making an international fashion statement can greatly contribute to the Kingdom’s standing and image as a modern nation. Fashionable King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), the first Siamese sovereign to visit Europe, greatly impressed continentals with his sophisticated taste and elegant style. The beautiful and impeccably attired Queen Sirikit upheld this tradition by gaining international fame for her elegant sense of fashion. Beyond this achievement, Her Majesty contributed even more to the national image by designing

and implementing a new fashion identity for Thai women that also encouraged and supported rural development. Through an informative text and hundreds of beautiful illustrations this achievement has been carefully recorded for posterity in *In Royal Fashion: The Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand*.

Jane Puranananda

How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities edited by Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2012). ISBN 978-616-215-044-9.



How Theravāda is Theravāda? is a set of essays that question one of the most important ideas we have about Buddhism in the region: the concept of Theravāda, usually understood as a coherent “school” of Buddhism based upon a community that is aware of themselves in contradistinction to the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Tibet and much of East Asia. It turns out, however, that the term “Theravāda”, in the sense of denoting a set of practices and a community, surfaced only in the 19th century through the writings of foreign scholars. Local scholars and monks took up the term with alacrity, culminating in its use at the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Sri Lanka in the early 1950s. What is also remarkable is the extent to which the concept of “Theravāda Buddhism” has become central both to scholarship and the

so-called Theravadin societies of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia themselves. National histories from the region often project a sense of always having been a Theravāda nation.

Taken as a whole, this volume asks in effect, what do we do with the term “Theravāda”? Despite the fact that it is a recent intellectual construct, what are the historical forerunners of it, and what did earlier terms denote? Even if there were no terms that meant exactly what Theravāda does today, can we find evidence of a shared sense of identity, community, practice, or thought world? How did practitioners in the region understand themselves, and what were their connections between each

other? The contributors, ranging from the fields of religious studies and art history, with some leanings towards philology, ponder these questions. Readers who are not specialists in those fields may find some chapters more accessible than others.

Where does the term “Theravāda” then come from, and what did it, or its predecessors, mean in the past? In the Introduction, Peter Skilling observes that the Pāli chronicles speak of the transmission of the *theravamsa* or “lineage of the elders through *simas* (spaces where ordinations into the monkhood take place) at Anurādhapura in what is now Sri Lanka. Through this lineage have circulated the teachings of Buddhism throughout Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, together with bodhi trees, relics, and more recently, images. On more than one occasion, the actual lineages themselves have been “planted” and replanted in various places where an ordination lineage was either broken through attrition among the monks, or through perceptions of degeneracy. Aside from this one predecessor of the concept, when we do find the term *theravāda* in pre-modern records, it refers simply to the idea of “what the elders said.” With this emphasis on precedence, the term does not imply a set of practices, much less an entire school of religion. An early mention in a Burmese text is in reference to monks not wearing their robes correctly.

The idea of lineages, practices, and a sense of community between the Theravadin civilizations is a theme several contributors take up. In Chapter 1, Rupert Gethin focuses on the figure of Buddhaghosa, who wrote many of the defining texts of what has become Theravāda Buddhism. In looking into some of those texts—Lankan works composed up to the 12th century—for signs of religious identity, Gethin finds lineages of the *theras* or elders, a set of missions between the Theravadin countries, the *vibhajjavādin* analytical tradition, and a connection to the Mahāvihāra “Great Temple” in Anurādhapura. Together, these references build a sense of a shared religious community of the time.

Jason Carbine, in his chapter, looks at a specific instance of the formation and continuation of a community. Through an examination of the Kalyāṇī Inscriptions of late 15th century Thaton, a Mon polity in what is today Lower Burma, Carbine finds connections between *simas*, practices, lineages, and the creation of a sense of community. The Inscriptions are the earliest roots of a lineage and practice, based on a site and on the Inscriptions themselves, through which a monastic community has maintained and reproduced itself. While the Kalyāṇī Inscriptions have become a text central to how Burmese and Mons understand their religious identities today, I would also note the hand of British colonial scholarship in positioning the Inscriptions in Burmese historiography. Similarly, Anne Blackburn finds evidence of a shared sense of community and lineage in three monastic histories of Lanka.

Peter Skilling introduces a useful concept, that of the Pāli *imaginaire*, to describe the possibility of a community having a shared “thought world,” or set of ideas, practices, lineages, and places. From a modern perspective, Wat Phra Chetuphon, a late 18th-century Thai temple built in the early Bangkok period, is thoroughly

“Theravadin” in its architecture, art, and inscriptions, without seemingly being self-consciously so. The interaction between Pāli-language and vernacular traditions in cosmopolitan early Bangkok resulted in the temple, a visual and intellectual instantiation of an unnamed thought world that we would identify as Theravadin.

Turning to the contemporary notion of Theravāda, we learn that it has evolved out of a century and a half of western and Japanese engagement, largely textual, with South and Southeast Asia. In his contribution—what is in effect a monograph—Todd LeRoy Perreira traces the genealogy of the term Theravāda back from the pivotal moment on 25 May 1950, when during the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Kandy, the Venerable Mahā Nāyaka Thera of Malwatta was the first of many participants at the conference to speak of Theravāda Buddhism and its pristine state of purity in Sri Lanka at the time. This event, with its use of the term “Theravāda Buddhism” and connotations of purity, was the culmination of several developments coming together. Foreign scholars had studied the religious practices of colonial India and Ceylon, including early Pāli expert Rhys Davids, who was one of the first scholars to bring a textual bias to the current study of Buddhism, especially in the West. Many Japanese scholar-monks, such as D.T. Suzuki, were interested in representing their religious practices to the outside world and participated in debates about the various forms of Buddhism. Sri Lankan and Thai scholar-monks also sought to study and promote their own religious practices during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These many streams fed into a conversation that came to establish the current meaning of the term Theravāda. Perreira also alludes to the role of politics: the British presence in the region enabled scholars to study Buddhism systematically in the first place. Behind the speeches on 25 May 1950 also stood the interests of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism to assert domination over the newly-independent country. At the same time, Ambedkar, leader of the Dalits in India, was keenly interested in establishing a “pure” form of Buddhism to which the Dalits could convert as a form of liberation from the oppression of the Hindu caste system.

The role of foreign scholarship in fostering local understanding is one that Arthid Sheravanichkul continues in his contribution. Looking through the correspondence of King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868-1910) of Siam with Prince Narisranuvattiwong, the author finds evidence that the king’s ideas of a division between Hīnayāna (a now disused term, which “Theravāda” has come to replace) and Mahāyāna Buddhism, were influenced by contact with Japanese and Western scholarship in English. Although the king was not overly concerned with imparting great meaning to a division, Arthid argues that the very idea of a division arose through contact with outside scholars and scholarship.

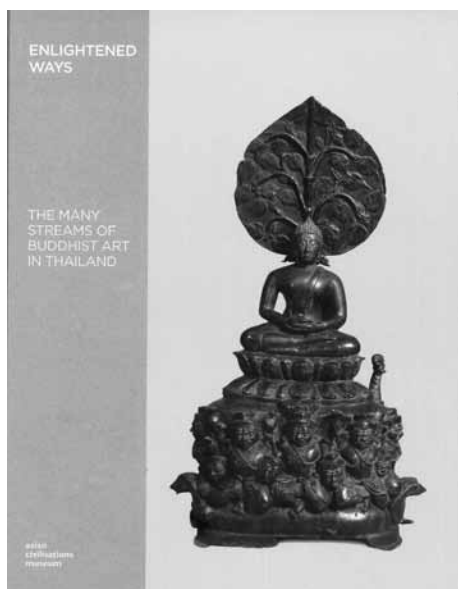
Some contributors raise the question of using a more appropriate, indigenous term to talk about Buddhist practices, lineages, and communities in the past. Carbine, for example, offers the term *sāsana*, a Pāli term commonly understood simply as “religion.” Perhaps this is close to how some people in the past may have articulated

their own sense of community and practice. However, I would argue that it is risky to try to find a term for something that did not yet exist, however strong some of its antecedents may be. To take a nod from the world of American celebrity, can we speak of the “Religion/Practice/Lineage Latterly Known as Theravāda” before it was so christened? The Western academic tradition arranges the world into discrete categories and piles them into ever higher superordinate structures. While notions of ethnicity, identity, religion – just a few of the big categories of modern thought – all have their roots “out there” in the observable world, the very act of bringing together disparate phenomena under a delineated rubric and giving it a name is in itself an act of creation and birth.

How Theravāda is Theravāda? features rich illustrations of the art, personalities, artifacts, and architecture of the Theravāda world. While some of these plates support the text, others are rather more examples of cultural riches, with a decided emphasis on the art of Thailand. Readers who are not specialists of Thailand would no doubt have appreciated the use of dates in preference to the exclusive use of reign names in some of the contributions. The essays in this volume together offer a highly useful reminder that many of the categories of thought that we use to understand the past are of very recent provenance, and that the solidity that we attribute to the past may disappear under closer investigation.

Patrick McCormick

Enlightened Ways: The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand edited by Heidi Tan (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2012). ISBN: 978-981-07-4628-5.



I was indeed fortunate in 2013 to have been able to visit the fascinating exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in Singapore for which this book served as the accompanying catalogue. I was overcome not only by the quality of the exhibits that Principal Curator Heidi Tan and her team had managed to assemble from the ACM's own collection, the Thai National Library and several National Museums around Thailand, but the superb way they had been arranged and thoughtfully displayed. The lighting and the clear signage were excellent. Fortunately for those who could not travel to Singapore, there is still an opportunity to examine

carefully the more than 160 exhibits illustrated in this beautiful 267-page publication that demonstrate the extraordinary range and beauty of Buddhist art in Thailand over 1,500 years.

The catalogue comprises a Foreword and six short chapters written by leading Buddhist and Thai art historians, followed by the catalogue of exhibits. Interspersed throughout are short one-page summaries describing the standard “Periods of Thai Art” – divided into eight periods: Early confluences, Dvaravati culture, Srivijaya empire, Lopburi with Khmer influence, Sukhothai kingdom, Lan Na kingdom, Ayutthaya kingdom and Rattanakosin period – then the role of “Brahmanism in Thailand” and various aspects of “Merit Making”. In his *Foreword*, Alan Chong, Director of the ACM, explains the background and aims of the exhibition, and why the organisers covered such considerable ground; they have not tried to define “genuine Siamese or Thai culture or what true, doctrinal Buddhism encompasses.” Rather, the aim of the exhibition was to examine “art related to the evolving practice of Buddhism” in the geographic area that now constitutes Thailand.

In the opening chapter, *The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand*, Heidi Tan provides a concise, yet highly readable, survey of Buddhist art in Thailand chronologically and by region, and notes that “the very eclecticism of the artistic styles in Thailand shows how Buddhism has taken on multiple meanings.” She then takes the reader on a journey through the various periods of Thai art history, highlighting the cultural exchange that took place, before showcasing the wide variety of styles found in the production of assorted devotional and utilitarian objects. Lay practitioners commissioning the manufacture of such articles likely wished to demonstrate their religious devotion, and thus make merit. For artisans involved in their production, merit would have been continuously accumulating. Tan finally examines the “syncretism, hybridity and globalization” that are now taking place, and their impact. She concludes that the ways in which merit making can be expanded appear limitless, and have even taken on a global dimension thanks to ease of communication and the Internet.

Peter Skilling structures his chapter, *The Aesthetics of Devotion: Buddhist Arts of Thailand*, around the two “bodies” of the Buddha, namely *rupakaya*, his “form body” or representations of the Buddha in the form of relics, images and statues, and *dharmakaya*, his “dharma body” that comprises his body of teachings. Skilling quickly covers plenty of ground, providing an overview of Buddhism in Thailand in the Dvaravati and early period before looking at the mass production of moulded images, better, but incorrectly according to Skilling, known as votive tablets. He then reviews the production and types of various images of the Buddha before examining Buddhist painting, the Ten *Jātaka* tales and stories of the miracle-working monk Phra Malai, who is frequently depicted in folding manuscripts. Skilling reminds us that ‘Buddhist art was not made to be viewed in a museum’, and that the objects he has reviewed “are produced by spirituality and inspire spirituality.” Yet, the

Buddhist art objects illustrated in this catalogue clearly demonstrate the level of artistic achievement that has been attained, to the degree that some can certainly be considered “among the masterpieces of world art”.

John Listopad’s chapter, *The Walking Buddha in Thailand*, concisely explores the history of this famous figure “striding fluidly through time and space,” that gained in popularity from around 1400 as a visual aid for “meditation and ascetic devotion”. He then provides examples of different types of Walking Buddhas, focusing in particular on those now more commonly referred to as Sukhothai Buddhas, before connecting the role of these figures to the creation of images of the Buddha’s footprint. Although popular in the northern regions throughout the 15th century, this type of Buddha image declined in popularity in the Ayutthaya kingdom. Listopad speculates that its decline perhaps occurred due to “fundamental changes in the practice of Buddhism”.

The chapter titled *Naming the Buddha: Thai Terms for Images of the Buddha* by Amara Srisuchat, a former director of the National Museum in Bangkok, is quite revealing in detailing how names given to various Buddha images “shed light on popular perceptions and expressions of faith”. After providing information about epithets for the Buddha that appear in the Pāli Cannon and Sanskrit scriptures, Amara examines many popular terms for the Buddha, and how the type, material, posture, weight or height might lead to a particular nomenclature. The chapter ends quite suddenly after a review of names given to the Sinhal Image of the Buddha and the etymology of the name of the revered Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace.

The standout chapter is Justin McDaniel’s essay on amulets titled *A Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand: Amulets in Buddhism*. Although there is abundant material available in Thai – magazines, newspapers, books, TV shows, Internet sites, etc. – there has to date been little written in English about the history and role of amulets in Thai society. Amulets come in many forms in Thailand and continue to be hugely popular due to their supposed protective powers. McDaniel examines the materials, the categories and types of amulets produced before looking at the social and economic roles played by these small devotional objects in Thai Buddhism. He argues that the trade in amulets is not a commercialisation of Buddhism, but a legitimate means of benefiting monasteries and creating communities. There is room for further research, and perhaps even another exhibition could be held, on this fascinating topic.

Alexandra Denes provides an interesting insight into more recent and current roles of Buddhist faith and art in the lives of ordinary people in her chapter, *Trees of Offering: The Salak Yom Festival in Lamphun Province*. After a short preamble about popular Buddhism in Thailand, Denes explains why The Salak Yom (literally “lottery trees”) festival of the minority Yong people of Lamphun in northern Thailand is a good example of the reconstruction of rituals associated with merit making. Traditionally, a young, unmarried woman prepared and offered the tree to show that

she was ready for marriage, but also to demonstrate the importance of making merit in return for happiness and prosperity. This tradition has now disappeared, as groups of villagers produce trees decorated with gifts that are disbursed to monks through a lottery system. With the revival some ten years ago of this annual festival between September and October, the trees appear to grow taller and more ostentatious each year. Despite criticism that sees “competitions and monetary prizes for the best Salak Yom tree as a distortion of the original Buddhist values of merit making”, the festival now attracts large numbers of domestic tourists and wealthy donors.

If it seems churlish to offer criticism of the catalogue of exhibits – actually this is more mild disappointment - I would like to have seen an even broader range of artefacts displayed, including Bencharong utensils or tiles (such as those used to decorate Wat Phra Kaeo and the charming Wat Rajabophit), mother-of-pearl decorative objects or furniture, enamelled copperwares, betel sets and other paraphernalia, such as fans, used by monks during religious ceremonies. Although rarely used now, all of these objects have played an ubiquitous role in Thai Buddhist ritual, and fine examples can still be found at the royal Buddhist temples of Bangkok and in museums.

In summation, this is a “must-have” book for anyone interested in learning about Thai Buddhist art history, and provides a suitable legacy to the original Exhibition while the photos certainly do justice to the many rare and important exhibits. We should be grateful to the ACM for assembling one of the finest exhibitions ever on this subject matter.

Paul Bromberg

The Philosophical Constructs of Wat Arun by Chatri Prakitnonthakan (Bangkok: South East Insurance Pcl, 2013). ISBN 978-974-289-781-9.



Over the past few years, the Fine Arts Department and the Royal Institute have published high-quality versions of some of the oldest and most important Thai texts, particularly from the early Rattanakosin era. This represented a significant and very welcome change from the parsimonious policy of these bodies in the past. The result is a new wave of scholarship, based in part on these texts, which is substantially revising the history of the late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok eras.

This book could serve as a coffee-table ornament. Its stunning illustrations include a complete reconstruction of the Thonburi Illustrated Traiphum, old photos and engravings, countless maps from the 16th century to the present, computer reconstructions of Wat Arun at various points in the past, and some very high quality contemporary photography of both interiors and exteriors.

But it is the text that makes this book especially valuable. Chatri Prakitnonthakan, who teaches at Silpakorn University, is one of a small group who are making architectural history one of the most exciting areas of Thai historiography at present. His interests include the politics of architecture in the 20th century and conservation issues today, but also stretch back to the linked roles of religious philosophy and architectural design in early Bangkok.

The book has three parts. The first traces the history of Wat Arun. The monastery was probably founded (as Wat Makok) in the late 16th century on the bank of Khlong Lat, one of the canals cut to shorten the route down the Chao Phraya River from Ayutthaya to the sea. After 1767, it became the palace temple of King Taksin of Thonburi, was renamed as Wat Chaeng (dawn), and briefly housed the Emerald Buddha brought from Vientiane. King Rama II renamed it as Wat Arun and resolved to transform it into the principal relic stupa of the new capital of Bangkok by raising the *prang* from 16 to 67 metres, ensuring that it has continued to dominate the skyline of the old city centre until the present day. Subsequently, there have been many renovations and repairs, but the layout today was more or less fixed at the end of the big renovation of the Second and Third Reigns in 1842. Chatri traces the changing layout by detailed research of old maps and documents, and displays the results in neat computer reconstructions of the complex's various phases.

In the second part of the book, Chatri turns from the fabric to the texts. Many studies have concluded that the *prang* symbolises Mount Meru, the mountain at the centre of the Buddhist cosmology of the Three Worlds, and have assumed the symbolism is based on the version of this cosmology attributed to the Sukhothai era and known as *Traiphum Phra Ruang*. But Chatri shows that this text seems to have been unknown in the early Bangkok era, and argues that a new and subtly different version of the cosmology under the title *Traiphum Lokawinichai* was much more important. He also argues that this different version of the cosmology is represented in the several Traiphum Illustrated Manuscripts of the same era, especially the one known as Thonburi 10.

In this new version, the cosmology of the universe, the history of Buddhism, and the present-day world are much more closely interrelated. The sacred geography of Jambudvīpa, the sites of events in the Buddha's life, and the modern geography of Southeast Asia are not separate conceptual realms but layers of a single map. Siam is at the centre of the world of Buddhism, and Siam's monarch is a *thamma racha*, a "Buddha of the world". Indra is recast from his role as a Hindu warrior god to become a divinity, who facilitates the emergence of Buddhism and serves as a model

and symbol of kingship. At the centre of this discussion is a magnificent layout of the whole Thonburi Traiphum manuscript on one single extended spread.

Chatri's argument is essentially the same as in his article on Wat Pho in this issue of *JSS*, but presented in much greater detail.

The third part of the book shows how Wat Arun was "designed as a perfect replica of the worlds and the universe according to Buddhist belief during the Early Rattanakosin period." Chatri notes that the renovation begun in the Second Reign did not only include the enlarged *prang*, as generally presented, but also a complete remodelling of the complex including some thirty new or modified buildings. This new ground plan was divided into three areas with distinct symbolism. The complex around the *prang* represents the Traiphum cosmology in great detail, and Chatri nails down the significance of each statue, image and mural. The second area to the north around the *ubosot* represents Jambudvipa, and the third area to the west around the Footprint Mondop represents Lankadvipa. The argument is presented with elaborate diagrams matching the material fabric with the imagery in the Traiphum Illustrated Manuscripts.

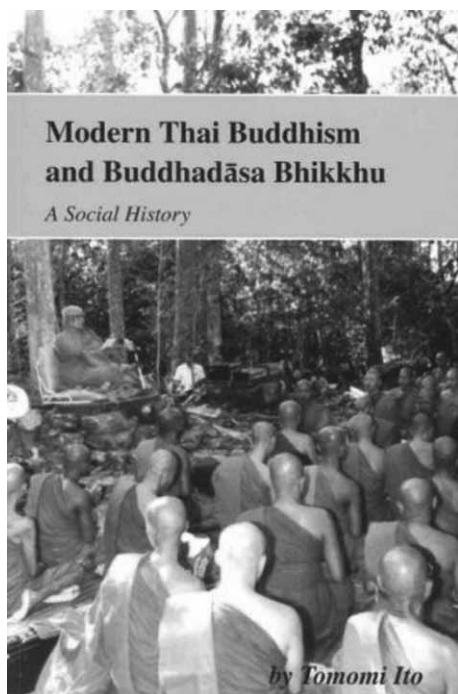
The text appears in both Thai and English. The translation by Bancha Suvannanonda and Steve Van Beek reads very well, although some more thought could have been given to making the technical terms in the cosmology easier for English-language readers to understand. The book's title also tries a little too hard; the Thai is more simply, *The Symbolism and Design of Wat Arun Ratchawararam*. The layout and proofing of the English text is a bit shoddy, which is a pity given the size of the overall investment in production. The book has proper annotations, bibliography, a good glossary and index in both languages.

The retail price (2,500 Baht) is expensive, but is justified by the contents, and is almost certainly subsidized by the publication's sponsors, the Southeast Insurance and Finance Group, which has Wat Arun in its logo. Part of the proceeds will go towards maintenance of the *wat*.

Anyone who is intrigued by Chatri's article in this issue should move on to this book for an extended and more heavily illustrated version of the argument. It is a major contribution to the historiography of early Bangkok, and a model for the use of images and illustrations in academic argument.

Chris Baker

Modern Thai Buddhism and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: A Social History by Tomomi Ito (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012). ISBN: 978-9971-69-572-9.



This superb work by Tomomi Ito – Associate Professor in the Graduate School and Faculty of Intercultural Studies at Kobe University, Japan – can undoubtedly be considered one of the best books on Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, after the pioneering and still essential research done by Donald Swearer, Louis Gabaude and Peter Jackson. I believe that this study should be considered a fundamental reference book not only by those who want to know Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu better, but also by scholars of Thai history and people interested in Southeast Asia. The numerous and very accurate references to the primary literature, translated by the author from Thai into English, and the meticulous quotes from studies in European languages as well as works in Japanese, give this work of Tomomi Ito a unique status among the various studies

dealing with the life and work of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu.

The layout of the volume is elegant and precise (I have spotted only one venial typo on page 45), the text is readable and the maps and figures – all printed in black and white – are clear. The final exhaustive bibliography adds a useful tool for further studies and research.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born Nguam Panitch (เงียม พาณิช) in Phumriang (พุมเรียง) in 1906. His monastic name was Phra Nguam Indapanno (พระธรรมโกศาจารย์ เงียม อินทปัญโญ), and later he assumed the name “Buddhadāsa” (พุทธทาสภิกขุ), or “slave of the Buddha.” Until the day of his death in 1993, he earned the reputation of being one of the most important figures of Thai Buddhism, not only in his homeland, but also in many Western countries. During his life and after his death, his speeches were translated into English and other languages, and have often been reprinted. Wat Suan Mokkh, the forest hermitage he founded, still hosts many scholars and people devoted to meditation.

The author broaches every facet of the complex personality and thought of Buddhadāsa. His biographical notes appear to be extremely deep and well organized. For example, a particular emphasis is given to the description of his relationship with his younger brother, Dhammadāsa, who was a very important figure for him. Through his brother, Buddhadāsa had his first contact with western Buddhist

scholars and with studies and translations of Buddhist texts in English. The formal preparation of Buddhadāsa in the study of Pali did not reach the highest academic levels, although he later studied Pali on his own. Nevertheless, he was always respected as a *pariyatti* scholar, a monk who excels in the theory of Dharma and Buddhist scriptures, although the emphasis he placed on interpretation of the Buddhist texts was always balanced by his attention to meditative practice (the designation *paṭipatti* is given to a monk who excels in the practice of meditation). An example of this equilibrium has been visible at Wat Suan Mokkh since its establishment in May 1932: there they focused on combining the more theoretical parts of Buddhism with the practice of *vipassanā* meditation.

During the earliest years of his monastic life, from 1933 until the end of the Second World War, Buddhadāsa was also involved in various editorial projects. The magazine *Buddhism*, published by his Dhammadāna Group, joined the already established *Thammachaksu*, published by the Mahamakut Buddhist Academy, and *Phuttha-tham*, published by the Buddhist Association of Thailand. In the magazine *Buddhism*, there were not only many sections containing translations from Pali texts, but also chapters with comments and teachings focused on *vipassanā* meditation. The author provides a very interesting and accurate comparison of these magazines.

One remarkable section of this publication deals with the first lecture that Buddhadāsa gave at the Buddhist Association of Thailand. In this speech, Buddhadāsa analyzed the Dhamma of the Buddha. He began by saying that *pariyatti*, or “the teachings of the Buddha”, and *paṭipatti*, or “the Dhamma that makes us become a Buddha”, could have been considered the prerogative of few selected and learned persons. However, the third aspect, *paṭivedha*, or “the normality of the Buddha”, was in his words “available to everyone, everywhere it exists, and is ready to touch every person in every moment” (p. 68). This is one of the focal points of Buddhadāsa’s thought and in this volume it is rightly emphasized.

The book is very well structured. It begins with an overview of Thai Buddhism in the 20th century when Buddhadāsa was active. This introduction clearly shows that the solid historical approach of the author to the study of Buddhadāsa is far from a hagiographic simplification. The following chapter examines all the Buddhist movements and publishing activities that arose in those years, and the active role played by Buddhadāsa in many of them.

The third chapter deals with the dissemination of his teachings in the north of the country and among the “urban masses” with the help of many disciples, monks and also laymen. It is worth mentioning that one of these laymen, Pun Chongprasoe (1915–1980), was among the first Thai intellectuals to disclose publicly the deterioration of the Buddhist Sangha. He also edited *A Handbook of Humankind*, one of the most famous works of Buddhadāsa. Another important figure among his first disciples was Sawai Kaewsom (born 1928), who enthusiastically devoted himself

to spreading among Buddhist devotees an attitude not blindly linked to superstition, but committed to a serious interpretation of Buddhist principles.

In the fourth chapter, the author examines Buddhadāsa's explanations and exegesis of suttas and passages of Buddhist texts, especially those which concern the difficult concept of *suññatā*, emptiness. Buddhadāsa explained that the human mind should be free from defilements, becoming an "empty mind" (*chit wang* in Thai), as it is naturally pure, even if often tainted by transient defilements. We should empty our mind of all the hindrances and restore it to its original purity. This basic immaculateness is clearly announced in the famous passage from the *Āṅguttaranikāya*: "Luminous, monks, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements" *pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave, tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham*, *Āṅguttaranikāya*, PTS I, 10. (On this complex assertion, an enlightening note by Bhikkhu Bodhi should be read. See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Somerville, 2012, pp. 1597–1598). These ideas were strongly opposed by members of the Abhidhamma groups. They refused the postulation of an original purity of human mind using the argument that there is a presence of underlying tendencies (Pali: *anusaya*), which contradicts what is said in the sutta. This controversy is not confined to a merely scholastic debate. It also touches the delicate conception of the *Buddha-vacana* (the Buddha's words) in which the sutta flatly states "*this mind* is luminous". Bhikkhu Bodhi masterfully notes that this is an undeniable fact.

The idea of the empty mind was used by Buddhadāsa to indicate the opportunity for a person to have a less self-centred mind. This produces a valuable form of selflessness that makes social commitments for the common good easier to accomplish. Although his approach was much less inclined to play an active role in society compared to, for example, that of Ambedkar, Buddhadāsa was certainly aware that his attempt to emphasize the real *Buddha-vacana* could not fail to have a strong social impact. This position was rejected by Kukrit Pramoj, who could not even imagine any commitment to work not motivated by a form of attachment. Strong desire and lust seemed to him the real dynamic element of any human activity.

This debate was based on the eternal division between *lokuttara Dhamma* (teachings indicating supermundane states) and *lokiya Dhamma* (teachings indicating mundane states). Buddhadāsa and Kukrit interpreted these two aspects of reality differently. In Buddhadāsa's thought, supermundane teachings are useful for society and we should not interpret them as "abandonment of the world". Kukrit thought that the only possible method to teach the Dhamma to lay people was to use the Buddha's worldly teachings. In Kukrit's ideology, these mundane teachings also have the advantage of contradicting Marxist theories and forming a sort of protection against communist principles. In fact, the idea of "empty mind" was even accused of being problematic for National Security during the escalation of the Vietnam War. Pun Chongprasoet defended Buddhadāsa's position, and the discussion between

these great Thai intellectuals during this complicated historical period in Southeast Asia became very lively and interesting.

Another great opponent of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu was Kittivuddho, who had studied Buddhist textual tradition and was well qualified in Abhidhamma. He attacked Buddhādāsa on several occasions, and one of his refutations was based on Buddhādāsa's interpretation of the *Dhammadinnasutta* (*Samyuttanikāya*, PTS V, 406–408). Kittivuddho showed that it was incomplete and misleading. He claimed that Buddhādāsa confined himself to mentioning only selected parts of the text to demonstrate that the Buddha himself had advised lay people to study more complex concepts, such as the idea of emptiness. “From time to time we will enter and dwell upon those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness”. (translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Somerville, 2000).

Kittivuddho argued that Buddhādāsa forgot to mention the section just following the quoted passage, in which Dhammadinna eventually realized that for a householder living as a lay person, it is almost impossible to follow such complex teachings. When the Buddha saw that Dhammadinna preferred a different approach to his Dhamma, he changed his teaching style to a simpler one and told him, “Thus train yourselves: ‘We will possess confirmed confidence in the Buddha (reciting *itipi so* ...), in the Dhamma, in the Sangha [...]’”. Kittivuddho's objection could appear philologically correct, since Buddhādāsa did not quote the entire passage, but the second part of the sutta does not necessarily mean that *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* cannot understand difficult concepts. It may even appear disrespectful towards Thai lay people, implying that they deserve only simple, effortless, and basic teachings. We should also remember that there are different legitimate approaches to the Buddha's teachings, and also different methods of teaching them (*upāya-kosalla*). The attack on Buddhādāsa became even more explicit when Khamhuno (Chamrat Duangthisan) charged that Buddhādāsa was spreading communism in Thailand and that he had to be restrained from teaching the Dhamma. In this chapter, the author offers several interesting details about the discussions that were carried on among Thai intellectuals during those difficult years. This section is particularly interesting to those studying Thai and Southeast Asian history.

The fifth chapter discusses the disputes over Abhidhamma studies in Thailand. A detailed and necessary introduction to the history of the Abhidhamma study groups in Thailand precedes the analysis of Buddhādāsa's involvement in this discussion. A large part of this chapter is devoted to the description of the fruitful arrival of monks from Burma, who had a tradition of profound study of the Abhidhamma and were also well versed in *vipassanā* meditation. Phra Thammatrailokachan (1903–1989), better known as Phra Phimolatham, strongly supported this exchange of competences and knowledge, and requested also a complete *corpus* of Pali Canonical texts, including commentaries and sub-commentaries. In those years, there were three Abhidhamma

groups: one had been founded by Phra Phimolatham, the second was a group of lay teachers belonging to the Buddhist Association, and the third was the group founded by Kittivuddho. The main point upon which these groups and Buddhādāsa disagreed, and maintained different positions, was the authenticity of the Buddha's words. Buddhādāsa stated that the designation "*buddha-vacana*" given to the Abhidhamma could be accepted only if interpreted as pure meaning (*attha*) and not interpreted literally (*vyañjana*) because that might indicate that the Abhidhamma texts were not the words of the Buddha himself. This triggered a vast outcry among supporters of Abhidhamma studies, but also, unfortunately, a decrease of interest in Abhidhamma within the Buddhist Association.

The sixth chapter deals with the encounter between Buddhādāsa and some Marxist thinkers. Marxism was already present in Thailand, imported directly from China and merged in the Communist Party of Siam. But it did not perfectly coincide with Marxist thought introduced by Thai intellectuals, who had had contact with political ideas and movements in Europe prior to the Second World War. The most influential and famous among them was certainly Pridi Phanomyong (1900–1983), but very important positions were also occupied by Prasoet Sapsunthon (1913–1994) and Kulap Saipradit (1905–1974). Buddhādāsa had discussions and correspondence with them that allowed him to know the political and philosophical aspects of Marxism. He developed the idea that the negative opinion of "religion" in the theoretical texts of Marxism does not refer to Buddhism. According to Buddhādāsa, Marx did not know Buddhism in depth. The negative opinion is based on religions intended as supernatural beliefs (*saiyasat*). Unfortunately, Buddhādāsa suffered slanderous and defamatory attacks following dissemination of these ideas and was accused, without any evidence, of being a communist. This dimmed the vitality of the philosophical debate in Thailand and turned the natural, sometimes argumentative, but always beneficial exchange of ideas and opinions into an unfair fight. This theme is treated by the author, with constant references to texts and documents, so that even a sensitive argument like this one can be understood without partiality in the political context of those years.

The seventh chapter concludes the examination of this theme and explains in detail the idea of Dhammic Socialism developed by Buddhādāsa. The author places it within the context of the time in which it was elaborated, when various similar movements also appeared. For example, the "Buddhist Socialism" movement was promoted in Burma and Cambodia, and social engagement Buddhism developed in the 1960s. A basic intuition was shared among all of these: a reduction of selfishness can only lead to a more just society.

In the final part, the author writes extensively about Buddhādāsa's efforts to promote a discussion of the presence of a female Buddhist Sangha, and in general the role of women in modern society. Since his early years as a monk, he and other members of the Dhammadāna group always supported the plan to revive the

bhikkhunī order. One of the Pali verses that Buddhadāsa used to recite is particularly meaningful:

*Na hi sabbesu thānesu, puriso hoti paṇḍito
Itthīpi paṇḍitā hoti, tattha tattha vicakkhaṇā*

In the transcription of the Pali text given in the book, there are wrong diacritics and a regrettable lack of reference to the Pali canon. The stanza appears in *Apadāna* (PTS II, 562), in *Manorathapūraṇī* (*Aṅguttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, PTS I, 372), in *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (PTS II, 221), in *Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā* (PTS 100, 104), and in *Jātaka* (PTS, III, 438). It is worth mentioning the old translation of the verse by Eugene Watson Burlingame: “Wisdom is not always confined to men. A woman, too, is wise, and shows it now and then”. (*Buddhist Legends*, reprinted Delhi, 2005, vol. II, p. 229). The second verse is also very interesting, and I translate it here to offer a better understanding of what these words meant:

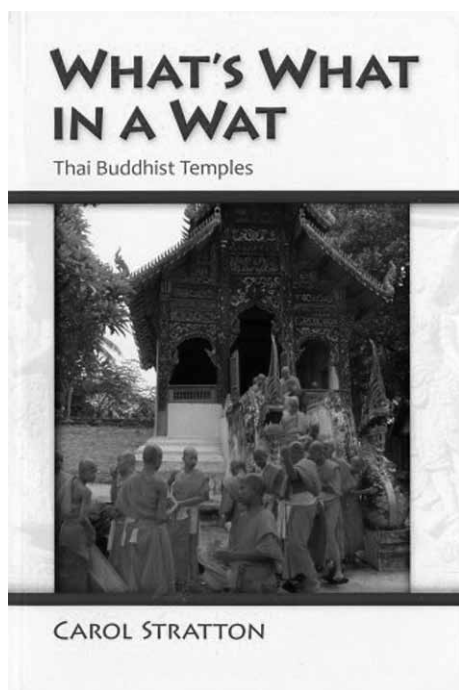
*Na hi sabbesu thānesu, puriso hoti paṇḍito;
Itthīpi paṇḍitā hoti, lahuṃ atthaṃ vicintikā*

“A man is not wise on all occasions. A woman, too, is wise, quickly pondering over motives and utility”.

This book is not only a unique and meticulous description of the thought of Buddhadāsa, but also an extraordinary chance to penetrate the history of Thailand and to understand Southeast Asia and its position in the political events of the 20th century. Nowadays, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s message appears more relevant than ever: “We all have a natural right to take as much as we need, but not more. If we were each to exercise this natural right to the extent allowed by Nature, this world would be filled with a contentment such as we attribute to heaven, the realm of God, or the Buddha Maitreya, where there is no *dukkha*, no unsatisfactoriness”. *Dhammic Socialism*, Bangkok, 1986, p. 63.

Claudio Cicuzza

What's What in a Wat. Thai Buddhist Temples: Their Purpose and Design by Carol Stratton (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010). ISBN: 978-974-9511-99-2.



First-time visitors to a Thai Buddhist temple can be so overwhelmed by the many structures, statues, and decorative motifs they encounter that they fail to notice or understand much of what is around them. In this handy little handbook, art historian Carol Stratton leads a visitor through a *wat* compound and explains its sometimes seemingly disparate components and their function as integral elements of the Buddhist cosmos. Ms. Stratton, who co-authored a pioneering study of Sukhothai and wrote a comprehensive analysis of Northern Thai Buddhist sculpture, began her education about Thai art on the ground as a National Museum volunteer. She later led small informal tours around Chiang Mai's landmark *wats* for many years. This book is a kind of postscript to those earlier experiences.

What's What in a Wat takes an on-the-ground approach and guides the reader through a monastery compound, entering by passing under a gateway decorated with vegetal and animal motifs, as if "entering the sacred Himaphan Forest of Buddhist cosmology that is inhabited by myriad mythical beings". (p. 18) With this cosmology as the basic premise of *wat* symbolism, the seemingly disparate structures and figures found in a monastery compound can be understood as related parts of a unified landscape within which the Buddha dwells.

Moving on to a *wat's* structures, the reader is shown how architectural elements such as eave brackets, roof finials, and barge boards are inhabited by the beings of this mythical forest, including both mythical and real fauna and flora. Others include hybrid creatures composed of two different species, like the *khotchasi* (part elephant and part lion), Hindu deities, door guardians and the ever-present naga.

While general readers will probably not remember all the terms, they will surely notice them, perhaps for the first time, and recognize them at their next encounter.

The book skillfully addresses the fact that *wat* buildings and compounds vary greatly from region to region by including ground plans of northern and central compounds to illustrate similarities and differences. Progressing from exterior to interior, the reader is alerted to both the obvious elements such as the pulpit and manuscript chests, and those that are less obvious, like ceiling decorations and

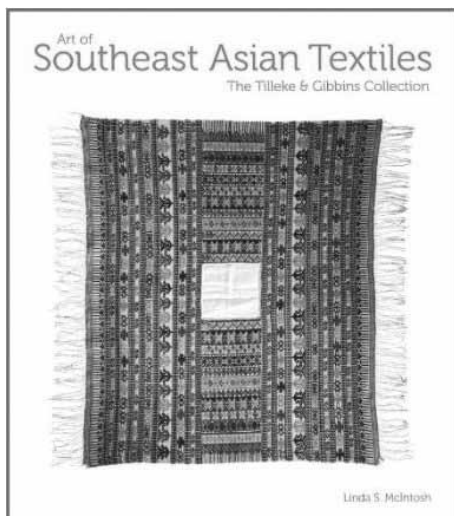
internal beam structures. The book also reveals the existence of important *wat* elements that are *not* visible, including the nine *luk nimit* (sacred stone balls) that lie buried beneath an ordination hall's boundary markers and the sacred remains (relics, bones, etc.) contained in stupas. There are also pages on other buildings, such as the library, living quarters for monks and nuns, spirit houses, and shrines for revered deceased monks and semi-mythical monks like Upagutta and Sankachai.

What's What in a Wat begins with the most basic question: What is a *wat*? The answer, that it is not only a Buddhist center but also a community center, provides insight into how laity and monks interact. Importantly, the book includes a page on *wat* etiquette and clarifies the fact that when monks accept alms, they are not begging, but providing laypeople the opportunity to make merit. The book ends with a brief chapter on the Buddha and his representation in sculpture, including the Southeast Asian idea of eight different Buddha images representing the eight planets and days of the week. Fittingly, the final picture is that of the Buddha in the most prevalent pose, seated cross-legged with his right hand on his knee, pointing down to the earth as he attains enlightenment.

The book is small enough (13 x 20 cm) to fit in a handbag or shoulder bag, and can easily be taken along on a *wat* excursion. Embedded in the text are 125 figures, consisting of ground plans, diagrams, and high-quality photographs primarily in color, from *wats* in every region. A brief glossary of terms is also included. Remarkably comprehensive for a 98-page volume, *What's What in a Wat* does everything a handbook is supposed to do and more. While aimed at a general audience, even an art historian or Buddhist studies specialist will find this book useful as a quick reference, and might well assign it as supplementary reading for a university course on Thai or Southeast Asian art.

Bonnie Brereton

Art of Southeast Asian Textiles: The Tilleke & Gibbins Collection by Linda S. McIntosh (Bangkok: Tilleke & Gibbins International Ltd. in association with Serindia Publications, Inc., 2012). ISBN: 978-1-932476-59-0



This superbly illustrated, but heavy 312-page publication, provides an excellent introduction to the diversity of Southeast Asian textiles through an examination of the well-known collection of Mainland Southeast Asian textiles from various cultures of the region, accumulated by the Bangkok-based law firm, Tilleke & Gibbins, over a period of nearly thirty years.

Originally planned to adorn a new office premises, David Lyman, Chairman and Chief Values Officer of Tilleke & Gibbins, explains in his *Foreword* that the law firm actually had two key objectives behind its Collection:

‘preservation and appreciation’. Over time, the role and nature of the Collection evolved from providing decoration in a law firm to establishing a museum-quality textile collection (currently of some 1,900 examples) that would be located in an on-site state-of-the-art storage facility and be widely accessible. It is hard not to concur with Lyman when he notes that the original aims have been achieved, indeed surpassed, with the publication of this book, and that “textile aficionados and novices alike will surely come to appreciate textiles as true works of art created by masterful weavers” (p. 7).

Author Linda McIntosh, a Lao American textile expert who spends her time between Bangkok and Laos, has written the concise, yet highly informative, text outlining the background to, and rationale of, the Collection, as well as the descriptive captions for each of the approximately 200 illustrated textiles chosen for publication. After the *Foreword* and a chapter on *Collecting Southeast Asian Textiles*, the book is divided into seven chapters describing the textiles in the Collection: *Tai; Khmer and Charm; Malay; Burmese; Kachin, Chin, and Naga; Highland Minority Groups of Laos and Vietnam; and Mien and Hmong*. The author explains the rationale for these headings, noting that “handwoven textiles of the various ethnic groups living in Thailand, especially cloth from Tai cultures, dominate the Tilleke & Gibbins Textile Collection” (p. 14). However, close social, political and economic ties linking the cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia to ones in others areas, such as the island cultures of the region, have resulted in the exchange of cloth. In addition, some textiles produced outside Southeast Asia, in particular in India, have had a major impact on local textile production. Hence, textiles from further afield are also

included in the Collection, which McIntosh thus describes as “a multifaceted and comprehensive collection”.

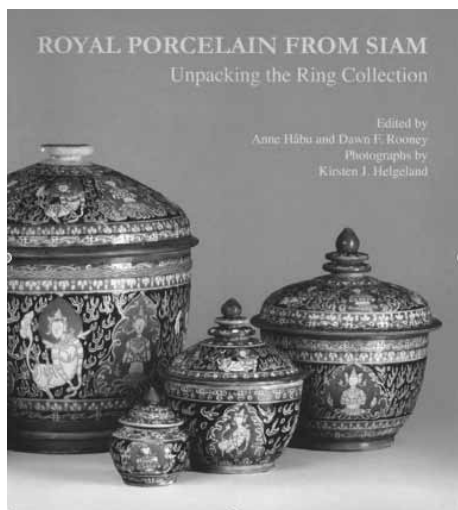
Beyond the discrete geographical division of the textiles, McIntosh also delineates the materials, types and ages of textiles chosen for the Collection, while also examining briefly the creativity and technical ability of regional weavers, who are primarily women. Materials in the Collection range from ‘high-status court textiles to household items’, with most being produced twenty to 120 years ago. The oldest textiles in the Collection are approximately 200 years old. Although the textiles of Southeast Asia are often viewed as ethnographic objects, McIntosh makes clear in this book that hand-woven textiles function not only as clothing, household accessories (such as blankets or sleeping mats) and religious objects (such as temple banners or manuscript wrappers), but play a crucial role in important social occasions. A key theme running throughout the book is that many of these textiles, now appreciated by a wider audience as “sophisticated works of art”, would not exist without the imagination and skill of their manufacturers. In the author’s words, “The producer’s mathematical and technical skills in applying various techniques to form motifs, her creativity in arranging the designs and her ability to blend colors and textures are important factors in a cloth’s assessment as a high quality or fine artwork” (p. 23).

At the end of the book are several helpful Appendices, including a *Map of Ethno-linguistic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* that illustrates the distribution of the main ethnic groups mentioned in the text, *Technical Details* about each textile illustrated in the Collection section, a *Glossary* that will be a welcome reference aid for those unfamiliar with textile jargon, a well-researched *Bibliography* and a detailed *Index* that one would expect of this type of publication.

Of course, the textiles are the real stars of this publication and photographer Pattana Decha has done a superb job. The publishers are also to be congratulated for not stinting in providing high-resolution colour photographs, including many close-up or detailed shots, that supply the requisite level of detail to allow the reader to appreciate fully the diverse techniques, materials, colours and designs utilised in the production of these hand-woven textile gems. Thus, Linda McIntosh can feel proud that she has manifestly achieved her stated goal in providing ‘a beautiful reflection of the great textile wealth’ of this outstanding collection.

Paul Bromberg

Royal Porcelain from Siam: Unpacking the Ring Collection edited by Anne Håbu and Dawn F. Rooney (Oslo: Hermes Academic Publishing and Bookshop A/S, 2013). ISBN: 978-82-8034-200-3



This major publication accompanies the exhibition of the Ring Collection of Bencharong at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, which runs until August 2014. The collection was brought back from Thailand by the Norwegian naval officer, Captain Theodore Ring (1866–1932), who served in the Royal Siamese Navy from 1897–1906, during the reign of HM King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). In 1904, Ring donated the majority of his collection, totalling some 250 pieces, to the Ethnographic Museum, now subsumed under the Museum of Cultural History, and the Museum of

Applied Art, now part of the National Museum of Art, Design and Architecture.

From around the mid-20th century, the collection remained in store for half a century. Martin Hager-Saltnes attributes its rediscovery to Rose Kerr's report of 2006 that hailed the collection as outstanding in size and quality. He unravels the biography of Bencharong and the reasons for its historical neglect, including cultural puritanism on the part of scholars, who considered them as de-contextualised, of a hybrid nature, and historically associated with "disreputable collecting activities".

The publication is laudably ambitious in its contribution to both the history of Bencharong porcelain, the museological aspects of collecting during the 19th century and exhibition making within the context of Norwegian museums today. A more extensive discussion of all thirteen scholarly contributions is unfortunately beyond the scope of this review. However, the following chapter summaries demonstrate the importance of integrating different perspectives in the study of a largely undocumented tradition. The congruities across cultures and different types of materials contribute greatly to the vexing questions of origin and historical developments.

As expected for a publication with so many contributors, there were editorial challenges regarding the balance of content and sufficient cross-referencing. Also, one misses a catalogue section that would have highlighted each piece and provided a record of the whole collection. However, the essays are generously illustrated and the appendix of line drawings provides a useful quick reference of the various vessel forms that are frequently referred to throughout the book.

Part One: Bencharong - Its History and Characteristics

Dawn Rooney's concise overview of Bencharong, or 'five colours', porcelain and its related counterpart Lai Nam Thong, literally 'gold-wash pattern', is a useful way to understand their uniqueness within the wide repertoire of Chinese export porcelain. Made initially for the Thai court, they are ornately decorated with painted enamels in black, red, green, yellow and white. The addition of gold enamel distinguishes Lai Nam Thong wares. Rooney traces the significance of the pallet of five colours back through Thai and Chinese chronicles, Chinese five colour, or *wucaï*, porcelain of the mid-15th century and the symbolism of five colours in Chinese as well as Thai Buddhist traditions. The significance of this becomes abundantly clear as Rooney outlines a strong Hindu Buddhist theme in the repertoire of Bencharong design motifs. Most significantly, Rooney reports that sherds found in 2011 at the Yanhe kiln site at Jingdezhen in China, confirm production took place there around the second quarter of the 19th century.

Pariwat Thammapreechakorn looks further into the origins, development, dating and use of Bencharong. The earliest evidence is sherds from the site of a royal household in Lopburi. Wares were ordered for the first time by King Thai Sa during the early 18th century, although a lack of records remains a challenge for constructing a history of Bencharong. The author's proposed seven-phase chronology offers new scope for dating other categories of export art discussed elsewhere in this publication. The phases correlate with the reigns of Thai monarchs from King Thai Sa of Ayutthaya in 1709 to King Chulalongkorn in 1910. The designs develop progressively from the earliest coarsely painted wares with limited pallet and a yellow ground to the incorporation of signature pink tones of *famille rose* on an increasingly wide range of vessel shapes. Designs feature the deity (*thep panom*) motif amongst the predominant vegetal and floral motifs until the introduction of a covered bowl form, with Hindu Buddhist imagery such as the mythical *norasingh* and garuda during the reign of King Rama I. An example with the mark of the Chinese emperor Jiaqing and another with an unknown factory mark associated with Chinese export wares of this period, provides intriguing additional evidence. Illustrations of these marks would have been beneficial.

Royalty, ministers and provincial governors ordered Bencharong although royal orders probably ceased by the mid-19th century, with the Taiping Rebellion (1855) and the destruction of Jingdezhen. Chinese merchants brokered orders by the late 19th century. Pariwat raises the interesting possibility that kilns at Dehua in Fujian province and at Guangzhou in Guangdong province also produced wares at this time. He ends with a useful list of vessel types and their known uses, which reflect the varying preferences of consumers.

Rose Kerr looks at porcelain production at Jingdezhen through the records of Jesuit priest Père François Xavier d'Entrecolles, written in 1712 and 1722 respectively;

the detailed works on porcelain production by Tang Ying, the superintendent of the imperial kilns between 1728-1756; and the observations of Lan Pu during the Qianlong reign, eventually published in 1815. This centre for mass production of export porcelain to worldwide markets also produced blank vessels that could be sent south for decorating. Between 1730 and 1750, the customization of designs was undertaken in this way. Although evidence is lacking, some Bencharong and Lai Nam Thong wares may also have been decorated in this way. Correlations can be made in terms of form as well as finely painted enamel designs with imperial wares of the Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns. Interesting comparisons are also made with mid to late 19th century Nonyaware, a colourful export porcelain with similar forms and dense designs made for the Straits Chinese communities living around the British Straits Settlements of Singapore and Malaya. Finally, the enamel wares that were typically decorated in Guangzhou have similarities to Lai Nam Thong wares. These were favoured in the Middle East and North America where they were known as Rose Medallion wares. The additional use of gilding made them expensive and hence, just as in Thailand, they were keenly sought by the aristocracy and the wealthy.

Part Two: Collections and Collectors

Anne Håbu's survey of the Ring collection draws on correspondence by the donor for insights into his collecting interests, which were significantly influenced by his relationships with Thai royalty and members of the newly formed Siam Society. Members who viewed the collection before it was sent to Oslo in 1904 included Prince Damrong Rajanuphab and Gerolamo Gerini, whose scholarly works would have had significant influence on Ring. Of note are Ring's written records of local opinions, such as a monk who said that a particular jar would have been an heirloom piece, more likely lost due to a gambling debt than stolen. There is also important museological data about an incomplete set of wares that was split between the two museums but never united despite Ring's requests to the museum director.

Luisa Mengoni's examination of the twenty-three enamelled copperwares in the collection provides interesting comparisons with Bencharong. The copperware tradition first developed in Beijing for imperial use during the late 17th century, and subsequently flourished in Guangzhou where wares were made for Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The chapter also looks at how particular vessel types might have been used. The distinctive yellow-ground wares were a special type of royal gift to confirm the attainment of rank by senior monks – the colour is associated both with their robes as well as with the monarch, as it was in the Chinese imperial tradition. Interestingly, King Chulalongkorn also sent a group of copperwares in 1876 to the Siam Exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Inscribed with dates equivalent to 1868, these wares must have raised considerable interest overseas, as European collectors began to take an interest during the late 19th century.

Anne Håbu also looks at Ring's collecting interests against the political background of the Royal Siamese Navy and its role in Thailand during the turn of the century under the patronage of King Chulalongkorn. We learn that his love of collecting had started in childhood, but that he probably only started to collect seriously when he married and settled down in Bangkok over a period of nine years. His interest in Bencharong and motivation for donating are due to many reasons - fellow Norwegian Carl Bock had sold Siamese Bencharong to the Ethnographic Museum in 1883, and Prince Damrong, whom he knew well from time spent together at sea, would have been a great influence. In 1904, the new museum building programme to celebrate independence from Sweden probably appealed to Ring's sense of national duty, resulting in the gift of the best Thai art in the country.

Arild Engelsen Ruud reveals the ethos of 19th century collecting and offers a counterpoint to Ring's approach through the work of Norwegian explorer-ethnographer Carl Bock. Collections made during his travels through northern Thailand (1880-81) included Bencharong which he sold not only in Oslo, but also to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Bock is very much a product of the colonial enterprise, with an Orientalist outlook that essentializes Thai culture. In his travelogue *Temples and Elephants: The Narrative of a Journey of Exploration through Upper Siam and Lao*, it is clear that Bock did not take well to local culture and his scathing criticisms reflect an attitude of 'dismissive superiority', an attitude of the times applied as much to the lower classes within the home country as to foreigners. Conflicts with local people and a lack of scholarly integrity further characterise his Euro-imperialist role. Unusually, however, he had high praise for Thai royalty and the king's policies of modernisation. Moreover, he supported the independence of the kingdom despite the rapid encroachment of colonial rule in the surrounding regions. Ruud concludes that despite his shortcomings, Bock's support of the king and Thai independence, whilst surprising, appears all the more sincere.

Johanne Huitfeldt discusses other Norwegian collecting interests from the 18th century onwards. *Chinoiserie* was popular by the time the Danish-Norwegian Far East Asian Trade Company was established in 1732. But interest in collecting only really took off in the mid-19th century, particularly among Norwegians who were employed with the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service. Two notable donations are the group of 207 Chinese porcelain wares from the Daae collection given to the Museum of Applied Art, and 2,500 pieces of Chinese art given in 1910 by General Munthe to the West Norway Museum of Decorative Art in Bergen. However, numerous other Norwegians, including women who were posted overseas with their husbands, made donations. Huitfeldt mentions the establishment of the Oriental Ceramic Society in 1993, and considers the challenges of museum collecting today in the face of a strong art market and problems of authenticity.

Paul Bromberg draws on his experience as a collector of Bencharong in explaining their appeal as 'funky' and 'exotic' porcelain. Their use as sherds for

the decoration of temple architecture would have been appreciated by Ring. Most notable of the temples adorned in this way are Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of the Emerald Buddha) and Wat Rajabopit, also known locally as the ‘Bencharong Temple’. He surmises that Ring would have bought what he could afford, but that the prices of Bencharong had risen considerably even some sixteen years after Ring left Bangkok. Bromberg also retraces the historical progression of Bencharong, highlighting certain aspects that other contributors appear to have excluded. For example, the earliest Bencharong has the reign mark of the Ming Dynasty Emperor Wanli, which others claim is apocryphal. The hypothesis originally raised by Natalie Robinson in 1985 is that export ware of little interest to the Chinese would not have been made to deceive at that early time. He also describes contemporary Bencharong production in Thailand. Proclaimed a national treasure in 1980, the wares are now symbols of Thainess. Although local production is generally targeted at the tourist market, quality reproductions of old wares and contemporary designs signal a healthy future for Bencharong.

Peter Skilling’s contribution on clay tablets dating to the 8th to 10th centuries might seem somewhat misplaced in a publication on Bencharong. However, Ring’s travels took him to the limestone caves of Trang, along the west coast of southern Thailand, where he collected a group of these tablets. Known in Thai as *phra phim* or “stamped or impressed holy image”, they were made in large numbers as part of the Buddhist tradition of merit-making. The impressed images in this case include Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, notably Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Many are also stamped on the reverse with the core Buddhist teaching, the stanza of causation, in Sanskrit. These types were collected in the 19th century and deposited in museum collections in the region as well as in Europe.

Part Three: Motifs and Influences

Prapassorn Posrithong’s comparative analysis of Indian trade cloths made for the Thai market provides another early reference to the notion of ‘five colours’. French records of 1678 of printed cottons from the west coast of India describe them as *pancheranguis*. However, in the early 16th century, the Portuguese Tome Pires had already written about fine textiles being imported from India into Ayutthaya as part of the extensive maritime trade that took place across the Bay of Bengal. By the late 17th century, the trade was expanded when the Thais actively participated as an entrepôt for the re-exportation of textiles bound for China and Japan. Like Bencharong, the imported textiles were reserved only for royal use, and similar motifs such as the floral trellis were used on block-printed textiles, porcelain and enamelled copperwares. Textile designs are found in pattern books supplied by Muslim Indian traders, who placed orders with the woodblock makers of Gujarat. A comparable repertoire of deity motifs include *devaraja*, or the god-king, mythical beasts and floral motifs. The addition of gold leaf parallels Lai Nam Thong wares,

and similarly reflects their royal status. Likewise, by the early 19th century, the quality of imported textiles declined as they became more widely available and their use included offerings to temples.

Arthid Sheravanichkul focuses on an unusual white-ground covered bowl with narrative design based on the literary work *Phra Aphai Mani* by the historically famous court poet Sunthorn Phu (1786-1855). This fascinating account of the epic is illustrated on the bowl. The author raises the issue of the painter's identity – some say it was the nephew of King Rama IV, others say it might be the work of the Bangkok-based merchant Phraya Choduek Ratcha Setthi. During the mid-19th century, imports were increasingly handled by such agents. Whilst Thai, Chinese and Persian sources of inspiration underpinning this literary masterpiece reflect a cosmopolitan Bangkok, the author concludes the work ultimately reflects growing Western influence during the reign of King Rama III. This is seen in the character Laweng Wanla, the Queen of Lanka, who was apparently inspired by Queen Victoria and is wooed by the hero, Phra Aphai Mani.

Jens Braarvig discusses how Thai identity uniquely incorporated and adapted Indian influences, in particular from the Hindu Buddhist traditions. His interpretation of the individual motifs found in Bencharong designs is a useful reference, particularly where stylistic variations from Indian prototypes and local adaptations are highlighted. For example, the variation of the *thep phanom* holding the ritual *vajra*, when rendered in soft enamels, appears to hold sprigs of foliage rather than conventional thunderbolts. The thumbnail illustrations provide a useful visual glossary.

Part Four: Exhibiting Bencharong

Martin Hager-Saltnes discusses the exhibition's objective to look at Bencharong from different perspectives in order to better understand this hybrid art. One perspective is the cultural biography of the collection, starting with the production of Bencharong and their eventual role as symbols of royal power and national identity. In the late 19th century, they became collectors' items, which resulted in the donation of the Ring collection. The new museum's display was, according to Ring, cramped and did not emphasise the beauty of the wares. The author suggests that their original function was probably downplayed in favour of presenting them as objects from the exotic East. Sometime around the mid-20th century, shifts in anthropological interests led to the neglect of the collection. In 1932, thirteen of the Bencharong pieces donated to the Museum of Applied Arts were sold, as they did not fit the aims of the museum.

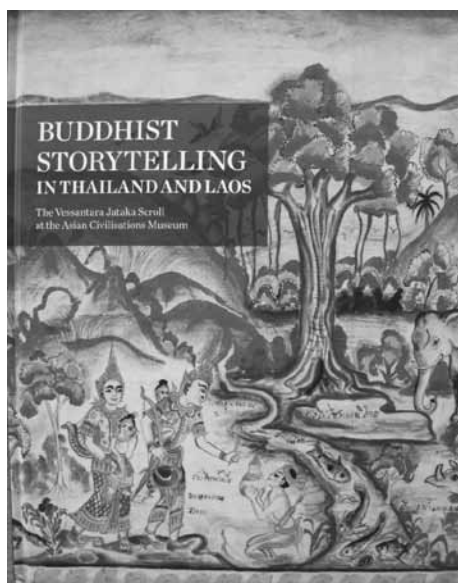
The other perspective is to engage visitors in the tactile qualities of the wares, with pieces made available for handling. But beyond the aesthetic quality of the wares, the author asks how an appreciation of their production, use and hybrid nature should be conveyed. He also identifies potential audiences and their interests,

and concludes with a detailed exhibition design concept that accommodates these different perspectives.

This colourful publication is a fitting tribute to the Ring collection and a long-needed contribution to the study of this exuberant ceramic tradition. The Museum is to be congratulated for dedicating resources to this project and for drawing together an international group of scholars, without whom this unique multi-perspective approach would not have been possible. The result is a publication that appeals to both scholars and general readers.

Heidi Tan

Buddhist Storytelling in Thailand and Laos: The Vessantara Jataka Scroll at the Asian Civilisations Museum by Leedom Lefferts and Sandra Cate with Wajuppa Tossa (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2012). ISBN: 978-981-07-2478-8 (hard).



The study of the art of Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries has long been confined primarily to the stone and bronze works of kingdoms, dynasties, and monarchs. Generally neglected have been the ephemeral works in cloth and wood, created and used by religious devotees far from centers of political power. In recent decades, however, the aesthetic and socio-religious value of textiles and their role in religious practice have been recognized by art historians and ethnographers. Among these scholars are Leedom Lefferts and Sandra Cate, who have co-authored several articles on ritual and artistic aspects of Vessantara Jataka scrolls (*pha yao phra wet*) in northeast Thailand and

Laos. *Buddhist Storytelling in Thailand and Laos* grows from, extends, and integrates that work with a close examination of one such scroll and comparisons of others.

Vessantara Jataka scrolls play a central role in annual merit-making festivals, known as *Bun Phra Wet*, which reenact the story of Prince Vessantara as he perfects the virtue of generosity. The scroll featured in the book is extraordinary in many ways, from the meticulous rendering of human figures, animals, and landscape elements, to the masterful flow of the composition which moves seamlessly from one chapter to the next.

The book begins with a brief introductory chapter situating the scroll in its geographic and cultural context and the unique place it holds in annual Buddhist merit-making festivals of the ethnic Lao people. Through information on the dedicatory panel the authors were able to learn the name of the artist, Sopha Pangchat, who completed painting it in 1960, as well as the *wat* which received the scroll as a donation.

Chapter 1 examines the scroll closely, as if unrolling it, starting with the dedication panel and moving through each of the Jataka's thirteen chapters. The story unfolds not only through the artist's rich visual imagination and attention to detail, but also through his story-telling ability as manifested in his captions. The book's large-size format (9.5 x 12 inches) allows details to be noticed and savored. Particularly delightful is the Mahaphon (Great Forest) chapter, with its forest creatures, especially four flocks of birds that sing to lift the spirits of Phra Wet and his family.

Chapter 2 situates the scroll – and Vessantara scrolls, in general – in the ritual, religious, and social setting of *Bun Phra Wet*, the most important merit-making occasion among the Thai-Lao and Lao. Descriptions of aspects of the festival alternate with the authors' analyses and interpretation in the light of local beliefs. Here they argue that the scroll – and not the written text – is the center of the festival and that it, along with the procession and the community, coalesce to 'actively become' the story (p. 51). In their analysis, Lefferts and Cate emphasize that it is the procession, and not the recitation, which attracts the most participants. The *Bun Phra Wet* festival, they maintain, has an important performative aspect, in that members of the laity – and sometimes monks as well – play the roles of the Jataka's characters.

It should be noted, however, that processions with music, dancing, and offerings of gifts to the Sangha are a main component of many other merit-making occasions as well, including *thod kathin*, ordinations, and even traditional village weddings. Ordination processions could also be said to be performative, in that the young men being ordained dress in royal costume and ride to the *wat* on the shoulders of other men as if on horseback, replicating the Bodhisattva who left his palace on horseback to become an ascetic. Merit-making processions for all occasions usually involve drumming, dancing, and consumption of varying amounts of alcohol.

Complementing this chapter's description and analysis are the authors' photographs of various aspects of the festival, all of exceptional quality, some absolutely stunning.

Chapter 3, "Artists tell the story", examines some of the spatial and organizational issues artists consider when planning the painting of a mural or a scroll. Vessantara Jataka scrolls – at least the older ones, like older Isan murals – differ greatly from each other in virtually every way – composition, narrative imagination, artistic skill. This point is illustrated with examples from more than ten other scrolls. Older scrolls have more details and took a long time to complete, as did

the one by Sopha, which took nearly a year, “suggesting a major investment of time and care.” Contemporary scrolls, however, have few details and are produced in assembly-line fashion with stock scenes, some of which are achieved by using time-saving techniques like stencils. Moreover, some contemporary scrolls exhibit strong compositional influence from prints mass-produced by the Bangkok firm, So. Dhammapakdi & Sons, in the placement and posture of figures. Most of the scrolls in northeast Thailand are now made at two villages, and the final products are standardized and simplified.

Scenes from the Phra Malai story, the tale of the *arhat* who travels to the hells and then to Tavatimsa Heaven, are found on almost all scrolls. In heaven he meets the future Buddha Maitreya, who exhorts him to tell those people in the human realm to observe the Buddhist precepts and to participate in the *Bun Phra Wet*. Hell scenes, vary from one scroll to another and are generally gory and include the thorn tree which adulterers are forced to climb. Lefferts and Cate describe some of these as they appear on scrolls, but claim that descriptions of specific offenses and consequences “are not present in published Phra Malai texts” (p. 85). This is incorrect. Such descriptions are, in fact, found in numerous texts from various periods and in various Thai languages, including works in both poetry and prose.¹ This minor slip-up, however, does not detract from the authors’ well-considered analysis and comparison of visual strategies employed by different artists.

Chapter 4, “The writing on the scroll” examines, scene-by-scene, the scroll itself and points out the location of each line of text in the scroll. It also includes comments and notes by the authors and translator. One is able to compare Wajuppa Tossa’s transcription of Thai-Lao words (written in Thai characters), translation into standard Thai, and translation into English. The transcription is keyed to caption numbers on each scene. It is interesting that the artist, who apparently knew the Dhamma and Khmer scripts, as he included a few statements in them in the scroll, did not use the old local Thai-Lao script known as Thai Noi (or Lao Buhan), possibly because it was not known to most local people. Moreover, many of the “Thai-Lao words” are actually the same as central Thai and use the Thai letter for the sound “r” even though it is not found in Lao. Much of the difference lies in the fact that Lao has few words of *ratchasap*, the royal words used in reference to the Buddha and

¹ These texts include *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*, the southern Thai *Kap Malai*, the northern Thai *Malai Prot Lok*, and the modern novel *Phra Mali Phu Poet Narok-Sawan*. I pointed this out in my book *Thai Tellings of Phra Malai: Texts and Rituals Concerning a Popular Buddhist Saint* (Tempe, 1995), which discusses the relationship between Phra Malai tellings and the Vessantara Jataka. In the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* approximately twenty-five per cent of the text is devoted to hell scenes. (pp. 110-112). The authors also erroneously claim that my study was limited to Central and northern Thai texts and rituals, while, in fact, it included material on the northeastern *Bun Phra Wet* as well. When I brought this to the attention of Leedom Lefferts in an email, he explained that when writing *Buddhist Storytelling* in Singapore, he did not have with him the copy of my book which I gave him.

royalty, and fewer honorific phrases. The lack of *ratchasap* also results in shorter captions, thus saving space.

The book's final section, "Notes on the artist and the scroll in Singapore," provides background information about artist Sopha Panchat's life, education, and work. These are welcome details, as most Southeast Asian art is anonymous. We learn that in addition to painting scrolls and murals, Sopha also produced palm leaf manuscripts and ornate funeral pyres in the shape of the bird known as *nok hatsadiling* for cremations of important monks and local royalty. We also learn how he went about painting a scroll. This section tells us a little about the scroll's life as well, including where the bolt of cotton on which it was painted came from (Japan), its size and the measurements of each chapter and details about wear and tear that reveal how it was held while being carried in procession and how it was folded while being stored.

In sum, *Buddhist Storytelling* is a delight to the eye as well as a rich source of information about Vessantara Jataka scrolls as works of art and mainstays for merit-making through enactment of the Phra Wet story. The book accords these scrolls and the artists who created them their rightful place in the world of Southeast Asian art. Moreover, it highlights the continuing vitality of complex practices and Buddhist beliefs among Thai-Lao and Lao people under changing social, political, and economic conditions. Both stunning and scholarly, it is a book that the reader will want to return to again and again.

Bonnie Brereton