



**A NATIONAL MUSEUM FOR THAILAND : STEPS TOWARD A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR
DEVELOPMENT**

**By
Katat nixon Chen**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILISOPHY
Program of Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism
(International Program)
Graduate School
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This research is to frame the National Museum, Bangkok with new meanings. Ever since the introduction of the museum concept to Siam, the National Museum, Bangkok has been assigned with a political mission that once made the museum relevant to its time and space of existence. Facing the changes in the Thai society, the museum faces the risk of becoming irrelevant to its current time and space. The museum has to release the political mission and to transform itself into a socially based museum: To associate itself with the development and the change of the Thai society. To make the museum relevant to the Thai society, the museum has to reframe with new meanings: To re-design its discourse, to make the best use of its consumable nature and to introduce a series of effective and efficient interpretations. A research was carried out in order to collect information for setting up frameworks for the new development of a national museum for Thailand. This dissertation is to tell the importance of a national museum for Thailand to be able to reflect the current time and space of the Thai society and the contributions that the museum is able to give to the society. A national museum for Thailand is a museum of hope and perception. It is to help foster a better Thai identity, a better Thai society and after all a better world.

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Table of Contents

		Page
Abstract.....		c
Acknowledgements.....		d
List of Figures		k
Chapter		
1	Introduction.....	1
	The meaning of a framework.....	3
	The National Museum, Bangkok	3
	Historic development of museums: The reasons for existence.....	4
	Research questions.....	7
	Objectives of the research.....	8
	Methodology	8
	Primary data: On-the-site visits	9
	Primary data: Interviews.....	10
	Secondary data: Publications and websites.....	11
	Structure of the dissertation	12
	Statement of significance.....	12
	Significance of the dissertation.....	12
	Part 1 Evolution of the National Museum Bangkok and the National Museum, Bangkok today	14
2	Evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok	16
	King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.-1868A.D.)	16
	To bring progress to Siam.....	16
	The power of art, culture and ancient civilisation.....	18
	The power of exhibition.....	19
	The power of museums.....	20
	The introduction of the museum concept to Siam	20
	King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.)	20
	Giving Siam a space.....	21
	Giving Siam a timeframe	23
	The power of exhibition.....	23
	The Royal Museum, the first public museum in Siam.....	24
	King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.-1925A.D.) and King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.-1935A.D.)	25
	Social and political changes in the 1920s and 1930s.....	25
	King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.-1925A.D.)	27
	King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.-1935A.D.)	29
	The Bangkok Museum.....	30
	The National Museum, Bangkok	31
	The National Museum, Bangkok after 1934.....	32
3	The National Museum, Bangkok today	34
	The history galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok	35

Chapter		Page
	The art galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok	37
	The classical art in the north and south wing.....	37
	The minor art in the central palace building	38
	Gallery for the Royal Funeral Chariots.....	44
	The Buddhaisawan Chapel	45
	The archaeology galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok.....	46
	The National Museum, Bangkok today	47
	Part 2 The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum, a national archaeology and a national history museum.....	49
4	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum	51
	Thai classical art	51
	Main form of classical art in the National Museum, Bangkok.....	51
	Specific features of the sculptures in the National Museum, Bangkok	52
	Dvaravati Art	52
	Srivijaya Art.....	53
	Lopburi Art	53
	Sukhothai Art.....	54
	Lanna Art	54
	Ayutthaya Art.....	54
	Rattanakosin Art	56
	Common features of these Buddha-images	56
	Other forms of Thai classical art.....	57
	<i>Wats</i>	57
	<i>Stupas</i>	60
	Murals	61
	Thai minor art	64
	The cultural legacy that the minor art in the National Museum, Bangkok reflects	64
	Craftsmanship for the Thai king	64
	Materials for the Thai king	66
	Products for the Thai king.....	67
	Other types of Thai minor arts	69
	Village crafts	69
	Modern art.....	69
	Chinese art	70
	Islamic art.....	70
	Art is an expression of excellence	73
5	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national archaeology museum	74
	The cultural chronology of Thailand	74
	An ancient and diversified civilisation	74

Chapter		Page
	Influences of Hinduism, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism on Thai Theravada Buddhism.....	77
	Hinduism.....	77
	Mahayana Buddhism	77
	Vajrayana Buddhism.....	78
	Sculptures that reflect these influences.....	78
	Cross influences of the cultural epochs	82
	No uniformity of art style	83
	Reflection of political and socio-economical preferences	86
	A unique Thai culture	87
6	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum	89
	The trinity concept of <i>chat</i> , <i>satsana</i> and <i>phra mahakasat</i>	89
	<i>Chat</i> (Nation)	90
	The time of Thailand.....	90
	The space of Thailand.....	93
	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “nation”	97
	<i>Satsana</i> (Religion)	98
	Origin of Theravada Buddhism	98
	The holy document of Theravada Buddhism and Thai Buddhist identity	98
	The context of Theravada Buddhism: Kingship	99
	The context of Theravada Buddhism: The Sangha.....	100
	The implication of Buddha-images.....	101
	The context of Theravada Buddhism in the National Museum, Bangkok	101
	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “religion”	106
	<i>Phra mahakasat</i> (King).....	106
	By the Thai kings	106
	Of the Thai kings	107
	For the Thai kings	109
	The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “king”	111
	Part 3 A national museum for Thailand as a place of discourse, a place of consumption and a place of interpretation.....	112
7	A national museum for Thailand as a place of discourse	114
	Relationship between the object and the discourse.....	114
	The importance of a discourse for a national museum	115
	A discourse pivots the meaning of a museum	115
	A discourse reflects the nature of the time.....	115
	A discourse caters to the uniqueness of a museum.....	116

Chapter	Page
The discourse of the National Museum of Bangkok	117
The National Museum, Bangkok manipulates the memory of visitors.....	117
The discourse of other national museums.....	118
The National Museum, Malaysia.....	118
The National Museum of Singapore	120
The Asian Civilisation Museum (Singapore)	120
The Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.).....	121
The British Museum (U.K.).....	122
The discourse of a national museum form the perspective of non-national museums	123
The National University of Singapore, Museum	123
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.).....	123
The discourse in common	123
The discourse of a new national museum for Thailand	124
To consolidate the multi-race Thailand into one identity	124
To reflect the relationship between the Thai people and their living environment.....	124
To understand the link of Thailand with the world.....	125
A national museum for Thailand should be a museum of hope and recognition	125
8 A national museum for Thailand as a place of consumption.....	126
Relationship between visitors and museums	126
A question of output or outcome	126
National museums are places for the consumption for output.....	128
The pedagogic context of some national museums	129
The National Museum, Malaysia.....	129
The Asian Civilisation Museum (Singapore)	130
The Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.).....	132
The British Museum (U.K.).....	133
The pedagogic context of a national museum for Thailand.....	133
A national museum for Thailand has to be a learning institute	133
A national museum for Thailand has to outreach to new visitors.....	134
A national museum for Thailand has to interact with its visitors.....	134
The content of its exhibition has to be relevant	134
A national museum for Thailand has to consider children to be its main user	135
The pedagogic context of the National Museum, Bangkok.....	136
The gaps of the pedagogic context of the National Museum, Bangkok	138
A national museum for Thailand has to cater to the cognitive nature of its visitors.....	139

Chapter	Page
9	A national museum for Thailand as a place of interpretation..... 140
	Content or presentation style 140
	The contents of a national museum for Thailand..... 141
	Multi-faces of Thailand: The Communities Behind 142
	The Timeline of Thailand: The Artificial Landscapes Behind . 145
	A Shared Culture: Thailand and its Neighbours 148
	Thailand: A Part of the World 149
	The presentation style of a national museum for Thailand..... 151
	To in-reach and to outreach to its potential visitors..... 151
	To make exhibitions understandable 155
	To cater to the learning nature of visitors, particular children.. 158
	To fascinate visitors 159
	A national museum for Thailand has to be a place of truth and enrichment..... 162
10	Conclusion 163
	Controversies of this dissertation..... 164
	The future of the National Museum, Bangkok 166
	Bibliography 167
	Appendices..... 177
	Appendix A A Thai flag 178
	Appendix B An orientation map of the National Museum, Bangkok 179
	Appendix C Kings of the Sukhothai epoch, the Ayutthaya epoch, the Thonburi epoch and the Rattanakosin epoch 180
	Appendix D Different <i>mudras</i> of the Buddha..... 182
	Appendix E The Chinese arts objects in the British Museum can be appreciated from different perspectives 184
	Appendix F The permanent exhibition of Chinese ceramics in the Hong Kong Museum of Art 187
	Appendix G The Islamic art objects in the Islamic Art Museum, Malaysia..... 190
	Appendix H The Islamic art objects in the Victoria and Albert Museum is to demonstrate the art as a way of living 192
	Appendix I Hooper-Greenhill’s Holistic Approach to Museum Communication (1994) 195
	Appendix J Knez & Wright’s Communication Model (1970)..... 196
	Autobiography 197

List of Figures

Figures		Page
1	The location of the National Museum, Bangkok	1
2	The site Ban Chiang is famous for its pottery vessel.....	35
3	The coloured stone beads from the site of Baan Don Ta Phet.....	35
4	The metal bracelets and bangles from the site of Baan Don Ta Phet	35
5	The Ramkhamhaeng stele was found at Sukhothai by the then Prince Mongkut	36
6	King Naresuan freed the Thai from the Burmese	36
7	King Narai inaugurated “the glory of foreign relations”	36
8	Rama I, the founder of the Rattanakosin epoch.....	36
9	King Chulalongkorn, one of the most reputable kings of the Rattanakosin epoch	36
10	His Majesty King Bhumibol, the reigning king of Thailand	36
11	The <i>dharmachakra</i> was popular among the Mon artists	37
12	The sculpture of Srivijayan Avalokitesvara reflects the highly skilled craftsmanship of the Srivijayan artists.....	37
13	The sturdy look of the Lopburi’s Vishnu contrasts the graceful look of the Srivijayan Avalokitesvara (figure 12)	37
14	The Sukhothai Walking Buddha is said to be an innovation of the Sukhothai artists.....	38
15	The Ayutthayan Buddha-image was generally heavily decorated....	38
16	The fully attired Brahma of the Rattanakosin epoch)	38
17	The precious objects exhibited in the Muk Krasan Hall.....	38
18	The precious objects exhibited in the Muk Krasan Hall.....	38
19	The precious objects exhibited in the Muk Krasan Hall.....	38
20	The Rajenthayan in the Bhimuk Monthian Hall.....	39
21	The precious ivory howdah.....	39
22	The spectacular Sawetra Chatra throne of King Pinklao	39
23	The <i>nang yai</i> showing a female playing the <i>sor sam sai</i> , a three-string musical instrument	40
24	The <i>hoon krabork</i> puppetry show was popular during the King Chulalongkorn period	40
25	Phra Prot, the leading male character of the <i>hoon luang</i>	40
26	The Sangalok in the Wasantaphiman Hall.....	40
27	The Sino-Thai Bencharong	40
28	The golden background of the Sino-Thai Lai Nam Thong is made of real gold	41
29	The ancient Chinese ceramics, one of the few Chinese arts in the National Museum, Bangkok	41
30	The ivory products reflect the skillful craftsmanship	41
31	The ivory products reflect the skillful craftsmanship	41
32	The ivory products reflect the skillful craftsmanship	41
33	The pulpit in mother-of-pearl inlay in the Pachima Bhimuk Hall	41
34	Mother-of-pearl inlay is commonly used for receptacles	41

Figures		Page
35	The door panels from Wat Suthat. Some of the design was crafted by Rama II.....	42
36	The circular base pulpit from Wat Khang Khao in Nonthaburi Province	42
37	Precious textiles that were mainly for the royalty	43
38	Precious textiles that were mainly for the royalty	43
39	The gold objects at the Wayusathan Amares Hall	43
40	The gold objects at the Wayusathan Amares Hall	43
41	The seven tiered royal umbrella for the queens	43
42	Nielloware is a common diplomatic gift of the Thai royalty.....	44
43	The fully decorated Buddha is considered a piece of decorative art by the National Museum, Bangkok	44
44	A gold-gilded Lai Nam Rot cabinet.....	44
45	The fully decorated Phra Maha Phichairotcharot	44
46	The sandalwood urn of Her Royal Highness, the Princess Mother ...	45
47	The sandalwood urn of Queen Rambhai Bharni of King Prajadhipok	45
48	Rows of celestial deities and celestial beings on the mural inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel.....	45
49	Murals inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel illustrate the Jatarka of the Buddha	46
50	Murals inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel illustrate the Jatarka of the Buddha	46
51	The look of Dvaravati epoch's Buddha was influenced by Gupta art	46
52	The Buddha looks very guarded during the Lopburi epoch	46
53	The body shape of the Buddha became supernatural during the Sukhothai epoch.....	46
54	The Buddha was a preacher in the Dvaravati epoch.....	47
55	The Buddha became a king in the Lopburi epoch	47
56	The Buddha was bejeweled during the Rattanakosin epoch.....	47
57	The <i>dharmachakra</i> was the most popular theme of the Mon artists	52
58	The standing Buddha with two hands performing the <i>vitarka mudra</i> was a creation of the Mon artists	52
59	The face features of the Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch.....	52
60	The graceful Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara of the Srivijaya epoch....	53
61	The Srivijaya's Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara bears a full cheek and a fully decorated body	53
62	The Khmer style Shiva appears very sturdy and guarded.....	53
63	Under the Khmer artists, the Buddha had become a king.....	53
64	Towards the end of the Lopburi epoch the Buddha was a preacher again.....	53
65	The face of the Buddha was oval during the Sukhothai epoch.....	54
66	The "Sukhothai" flame protrudes from the <i>ushnisha</i> of the Buddha.	54
67	The famous Sukhothai Walking Buddha	54
68	The Buddha's face of the Lanna epoch reflects Indian Pala art	55

Figures		Page
69	The flame that protrudes from the <i>ushnisha</i> reflects Sukhothai art influence	55
70	The Lanna's Buddha bears a very wide shoulder and a tiny waist....	55
71	Buddha-image was heavily decorated during the Ayutthaya epoch..	55
72	The Buddha became a divine king in the Ayutthaya epoch.....	55
73	The western look of the Buddha during the King Chulalongkorn period	56
74	This heavily decorated Buddha is exhibited in the gallery of decorative art instead	56
75	The carved door panel of Wat Mongkhon Bophit, Ayutthaya.....	58
76	The gilded lacquer window shutter of Wat Panan Choeng, Ayutthaya.....	58
77	The carved door panel of Wat Doi Khem, Chiang Mai.....	58
78	The highly decorated <i>naa baan</i> of a building of Wat Na Phramane, Ayutthaya.....	58
79	The <i>naa baan</i> of a building of Wat Panan Choeng, Ayutthaya.....	59
80	The very rich and eye catching <i>naa baan</i> of a building of Wat Don Jan, Chiang Mai.....	59
81	The gold gilded Lai Nam Rot window shutter.....	59
82	The paintings on the back door of the Buddhaisawan Chapel.....	59
83	The <i>naa baan</i> of the Buddhaisawan Chapel	59
84	Chedi Phu Khao Thong, Ayutthaya	61
85	Chedi Si Suriyothai, Ayutthaya	61
86	<i>Chedi</i> at Wat Chaiyamongkhon, Ayutthaya	61
87	The Chinese theme of a mural inside a building of Wat Panan Cheong, Ayutthaya	63
88	A traditional Buddhist theme that is drawn on the mural inside a building of Wat Don Jan, Chiang Mai	63
89	A fully decorated <i>naa baan</i> of the old palace building at the National Museum, Bangkok	65
90	The symbol of Vishnu standing on Garuda on the <i>naa baan</i> of the Sivamokkabhiman Hall symbolises the special status of King Pinklao	65
91	The rich design of the <i>naa baan</i> of a <i>sala</i> in the National Museum, Bangkok	65
92	Buddhism finds new expression in the art of Thawan Duchanee.....	70
93	The oil canvas by Sawasdi Tantisuk.....	70
94	Victory over the Mara by Panya Vijnthanasarn.....	70
95	The unnatural body shape of the Sukhothai Walking Buddha	76
96	The surrealistic physique of the Srivijayan Vishnu	76
97	The Buddha was a noble in the Srivijaya epoch.....	76
98	The Buddha was a king in the Lopburi epoch	76
99	Shiva image was popular in the 12 th century. The Shiva image in the Gallery of Lopburi epoch looks very guarded.....	79

Figures		Page
100	The body shape of Vishnu of the Srivijaya epoch is totally out of proportion.....	79
101	Vishnu of the Lopburi epoch appears more naturalistic when compared to the one of the Srivijaya epoch (figure 100).....	79
102	The “Buddha on Panaspati” on the left clearly shows the two Boddhisattvas on the two sides of the Buddha. The “Buddha on Panaspati” on the right clearly shows the Hindu creature	80
103	Vishnu of the Lopburi epoch wears a cylindrical <i>mitre</i>	81
104	The royal look of Vishnu of the Sukhothai epoch	81
105	A very heavily decorated Vishnu of the Rattanakosin epoch	81
106	The Brahma-image of the Rattanakosin epoch.....	81
107	Despite the hands were broken, Avalokitesvara of the Srivijaya epoch was originally cast with four arms	82
108	The Maitreya of the Lopburi epoch also bears four arms.....	82
109	The look of the Buddha of the Lopburi epoch resembles the look of Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch (figure 110)	82
110	The broad face and contoured lips of the Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch.....	82
111	Some Buddha images of the Srivijaya epoch bear Lopuburi art’s handwriting	83
112	The resemblance of the Buddha of the Srivijaya epoch and Avalokitesvara of the Lopburi epoch lays in the mouth and the moustache	83
113	The Buddha bears a Khmer look	84
114	The Buddha bears an oval face that was quite unusual in the Srivijaya epoch.....	84
115	The look of the Buddha is not as refined as the one on figure 113 and figure 114	84
116	The Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch in <i>bhumispara mudra</i> (9 th – 10 th century).....	85
117	The Buddha of the Lopburi epoch in <i>samadhi mudra</i> (12 th – 13 th century).....	85
118	The Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (Ayutthaya, 13 th century)	85
119	The Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (Nakhon Ratchasima, 13 th century)	85
120	A highly decorated Buddha of the Ayutthaya epoch.....	87
121	Buddha-image of the Rattanakosin epoch follows the tradition of the Ayutthaya epoch	87
122	The Buddha was given a westernised look during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.....	87
123	The historic events of Malaysia are illustrated on the mosaic hanging on the front wall of the National Museum, Malaysia	91
124	Early Hong Kong was a fishing port.....	94
125	Hong Kong began to develop its secondary industry in the 1950s.....	94

Figures		Page
126	The container harbour of Hong Kong is one of the world's busiest container harbours.....	94
127	The physical landscape of today's Hong Kong	94
128	Some indigenous literature that aroused the social consciousness of the Malaysian after the Second World War	95
129	Examples of scholars who contributed to this social consciousness .	95
130	The National Museum, Malaysia exhibits some old newspapers that reported the progress of Malaysia towards the road to independence.....	95
131	The Fashion Gallery of the National Museum of Singapore exhibits the early fashion of the main races of Singapore.....	96
132	The Malaysian badminton team won gold medal in the Thomas Cup in 1992.....	97
133	The Mak Yong Theatre is a UNESCO world heritage (2005 Proclamation)	97
134	The signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20 th January, 1874. Under this treaty, Malaya became a British colony	119
135	The Malaysian flag and the Declaration of the independence of Malaysia.....	119
136	Photos that illustrate the achievements of Malaysia in the world.....	119
137	Photos of old Singaporean movie stars in the Film Gallery	120
138	The National Museum of Singapore also addresses some social issues of old Singaporean society	120
139	A virtual local host to interact with visitors.....	131
140	A gallery guide that explains the context of the exhibitions of Chinese civilisation.....	131
141	The highlights map that introduces the most interesting objects of the museum	131
142	The precious objects in the Muk Krasan Hall are locked inside an iron gate	137
143	Labels mainly mentioned the type of objects and the approximate year when those objects were made.....	137
144	An example of wall text.....	137
145	A traditional wedding costume of the Han Chinese bride	143
146	An Indian bride in her wedding costume.....	143
147	A diorama of the palanquin that carries the bride to the house of the bridegroom on the day of marriage.....	144
148	A painting illustrates a simple Indian Muslim funeral in the late 19 th century	144
149	A traditional Chinese funeral. A deceased was carried by a heavily decorated palanquin	144
150	A close look of a palanquin with a coffin inside	144
151	The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall signifies the full westernisation of Siam under King Chulalongkorn.....	146
152	The construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall	146

Figures		Page
153	King Chulalongkorn laying the foundation stone of the Hall.....	146
154	Soldiers assembled in front of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on the day of the 1932 <i>coup d'etat</i> on 24 th June	147
155	Soldiers stationed in front of the Government House during the <i>coup d'etat</i> in 2006	147
156	The PAD protestors settled in front of the Government House in 2008	147
157	A Thai <i>stupa</i> in Wat Doi Khem, Chiang Mai	149
158	A Burmese <i>stupa</i> in Ragoon	149
159	A <i>stupa</i> in the form of a pagoda.....	149
160	A Nepalese <i>stupa</i>	149
161	Horses are popular themes for Chinese paintings.....	150
162	The use of horses on Chinese arts.....	150
163	The theme of the 24 th SEA Games was “Spirit, Friendship and Celebrations	151
164	Prapawadee Jaroenrattanakoon won the first weightlifting gold medal at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing for Thailand.....	151
165	Thai art in the British Museum is mostly represented by religious images	154
166	Thai art mainly in the form of sculptures occupies a small space in the Musee Guimet (France)	154
167	Thai art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.).....	154
168	A gold belt that belonged to Queen Saowabha Pongsi, wife of King Chulalongkorn.....	154
169	A diamond brooch that was wore by Queen Saowabha Pongsi on state occasions.....	154
170	The orientation centre of Victoria and Albert Museum.....	155
171	The Real Thing Cross by David Poston.....	157
172	The Durga Mahishasuramardini image.....	157
173	The Royal Chariot at the Wat Xengthongrasavora Vihan in Luang Prabang, Laos.....	160
174	The remains of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana are carried in a royal chariot from the royal crematorium at Sanam Luang to the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in 2008	161

Chapter 1

Introduction

Museums are vital to a society. Tomislav Sola (1997) sees the vitality of a museum in its ability to generate a self-recognition of people towards their own identities and to continue with the identities. Stephen E. Weil (2002) sees a museum as an instrument capable of improving the quality and the well-being of people. Hilde. S. Hein (2000) sees the vitality in the pedagogic capability of a museum to enrich and enhance the diffusion of knowledge.

By making itself meaningful to a society, the linkage between a museum and a society is confirmed. The meaning of a museum to a society is expressed in its discourse. In an unpublished teaching material distributed by Russell Staiff (2006), discourse means “to convey certain values, ideas, ideology or truth”. As a national museum, this linkage with the society appears to be essential. A national museum stretches its two arms linking both the public and the nation. This relationship could be seen as an isosceles triangle with the national museum on the top seeking the support of the two, or an inverted isosceles triangle with the museum at the bottom supporting the two.

The National Museum, Bangkok is the central museum of Thailand. It has nearly 50 branches of local national museums throughout the country (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, former Director of the National Museum, Bangkok, personal communication, February 26, 2008). The National Museum, Bangkok is located at the Na Phra That Road flanked by the Thammasat University in the south-west and the National Theatre in the north (figure 1).

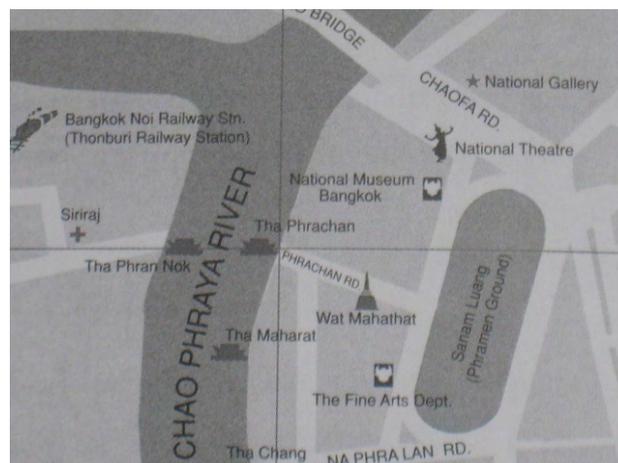


Figure 1: The location of the National Museum, Bangkok
Source: Chongkol, C. (1999). *Guide to the National Museum Bangkok* (4th ed.).
Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department.

Traditionally, museums and historic parks in Thailand are “to culture and identity as an ideological barrier against radicalism” (Peleggi, 2007, pp.177-178). The National Museum, Bangkok is then associated with a “political” discourse.

Nonetheless, some books look at the National Museum, Bangkok from another perspective. The National Museum, Bangkok is “arguably the most comprehensive museum in the region” (Kelly, 2001, p. 101) as it covers “every sort of Thai cultural material” (Lenzi, 2004, p.145). It is believed that the National Museum, Bangkok is “the largest of its kind in the world” (Lenzi, 2004, p.145). These books introduce the consumable nature of the National Museum, Bangkok in relation to the appreciation of art and culture, while not in the political linkage and the political meaning of the museum to the society.

The perspective taken to look at the National Museum, Bangkok becomes more comprehensive with Mr. Na Nakhonphanom (personal communication, February 26, 2008). In the interview, he said that the objectives of the National Museum, Bangkok were to disseminate the knowledge of art, archaeology and the history of Thailand through the collections, and to improve the facilities and amenities of the museum. He added that he had proposed a five-year budget of THB300 million to the Thai government to improve the current facilities of the museum. Mr. Na Nakhonphanom focuses on the interpretation of the museum in relation to the exhibition contents and the ways of presenting the contents.

Despite the differences in the perspectives taken, these perspectives are closely intra-related and connected. To know the discourse of the National Museum, Bangkok is to know the contribution of the museum to the society. This discourse shapes the vision, mission and eventually the meaning of the museum to the society. To know the consumptive nature of its main users is to know the consumable value of the museum. This consumptive nature acts as guiding principles in the design of the content and the presentation of the discourse. To know the interpretation of the National Museum, Bangkok is to know the contents, the forms and the styles of presentation. This interpretation is to ensure and to facilitate the understanding and the conveyance of the discourse of the museum to the visitors.

Based on this understanding of the National Museum, Bangkok, it is best to look at it from these three perspectives. The National Museum, Bangkok as a place of discourse addresses the meaning of the museum in relation to the society. The National Museum, Bangkok as a place of consumption defines the relationship between the museum and its main users. The National Museum, Bangkok as a place of interpretation conveys the consumable value and the understandability of the discourse in relation to the consumptive nature its main users. These three perspectives form the basic tripod of the museum that needs to be supported by the administration, the governance policy, the financial sector and the management of the operations for the museum. They also form the basic outlook for the collection of research data and eventually for the design of new

frameworks for the development of a new national museum for Thailand in this dissertation.

The meaning of a framework

Based on the interpretation of Jacques Derrida, the French Philosopher, on the concept of framing for cultural theory, Janet Marstine (2006) elaborates the function of frameworks is to “provide an ideologically based narrative context that colors our understanding of what’s included” (p.4). This dissertation is to design new frameworks for the new development of a national museum for Thailand. If to develop a national museum for Thailand is to process the museum with an idea and a concept, and a means to communicate and to materialise this process, then to frame the museum is to set a boundary so as to let people understand and further work on the context of this process. As a place of discourse, a national museum for Thailand has to frame its meanings so as to specify its roles in a society and to make a difference between museums of other nature. As a place of consumption, a national museum for Thailand has to frame its consumable nature so as to influence or to rationalise or to provide something new to the perception and preconception of its users. A national museum for Thailand as a place of interpretation has to frame its exhibitions’ content and style so as to communicate its discourse to its users within its capacity and capability.

Further based on Preziosi’s perception of framework, Janet Marstine (2006) sees framework is also a “process to create a vision of the past and future based on contemporary needs” (p. 4). To apply this perspective into this dissertation, if to develop a national museum for Thailand is to arouse the consciousness of the museum to the needs of different times than to frame a national museum for Thailand is to give the museum different meanings at different times. As a place of discourse, the discourse of a national museum for Thailand shall and has to change incessantly in accordance with the changing needs of a society. As a place of consumption, the consumable nature of a national museum has to be changed in accordance with the change of relationships between the museum and its main users. As a place of interpretation, the communicating values of a national museum have to be redesigned continuously so as to achieve a maximum integration of its capacity and capability.

The National Museum, Bangkok

The evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok was a counter response and a reaction to the time and space of its existence. The museum concept was introduced by King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.–1868A.D.) as an instrument to resonate the mission of those European who aimed at enlightening the yet to be enlightened during the Age of Enlightenment. This concept was materialised into a museum by King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.–1910A.D.), whose intention was to use the museum to raise the civilisation status of Siam to that of the west at a time when museums were indispensable in the west. The Bangkok Museum was re-named the National Museum, Bangkok at the time when the Siamese government had to counter-balance its contradictory policy of totally westernising the country and of preserving its old civilisation for the sake of

consolidating power. On the whole, at that moment, national museums were popular in the west.

It may be quite ironical to use an occidental concept and instrument to measure and to justify the cultural and civilisation standard of an eastern country whose history, tradition, beliefs, notion of a country, people's ways of living, social structure and social relationships were very different from those in the west, a museum in Siam and later Thailand was considered an important instrument for the survival and the integration of the country.

Under the administration of the Fine Art Department in 1934, the Bangkok Museum was re-named the National Museum, Bangkok (Yupho, 1968). The museum was basically an art and archaeology museum. In 1982, the Gallery of Thai History was introduced to the museum.

With reference to *Les collections archeologiques du Musee National du Bangkok* (1928), a book written by Professor George Coedes who helped restructure the Royal Museum into the Bangkok Museum in 1926, the *Development of National Museum in Thailand* (1968), a written work of Dhanit Yupho, the former Director-General of the Fine Arts Department, the *Guide to the National Museum* (1984), and the current *Guide to the National Museum Bangkok* (1999), there has not been many changes in the contents and the presentation of the contents of the National Museum, Bangkok. Throughout all these years, the contents of the museum remained basically the same. The Gallery of Thai History depicts mainly the proto-historic development of Thailand. The focus is on the chronology of the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. The objects in the north and south wings of the museum are mainly sculptures. They are a form of Thai classical art and are able to tell the archaeological development of Thailand as well. The 13 galleries at the back of the Issarawinitchai Hall (the Throne Hall) mainly exhibit Thai minor art objects. The objects are to illustrate the wealth of and the craftsmanship for the court.

On the one hand, these objects reflect the mission of the museum to uphold the value of the Thai king to the Thai society, the devotion to Theravada Buddhism of the Thai people and the definition of Thai identity. On the contrary, these objects are so selectively presented that it leads to the question of whether the museum has outcast itself from the current time and space. Does the National Museum, Bangkok need to strengthen, to redefine and to reshape itself so as to cater for and reflect the current time and space?

Historic development of museums: The reasons for existence

The Louvre is the world's first national museum (Newhouse, 2006). In 1793, four years after the French Revolution, the Louvre was open to the public. The Louvre aimed at arousing nationalism and building the citizenry of the French (Marstine, 2006). Following the opening of the Louvre to the public, the 19th century inaugurated a period of public and national museums: The Museum of Versailles and the Musee de Saint-Germain were designed to praise the national

glory of France; the Bargello National Museum in Florence (1859) was established by the House of Savoy amid its progress of unifying Italy; the Berlin Museum of National Antiquities (1830) and the Germanic Museum of Nuremberg (1852) in the German States and those in the Scandinavian countries (Le Goff, 1992) followed a similar pattern of development. National museums gradually became city pillars of countries in Europe and America (Cary, 1994). The 20th century witnessed the flourishing of national museums worldwide (Smith, 2007).

Evolved from the residence of the Muses, which is largely regarded as the embryo of the museum concept in Europe, to the transformation of the Louvre to a national museum, and from the Louvre as a national museum to today when a new museum is said to have set up in every one or two weeks in Europe (Sola, 1997), the museum world is a bundle of controversies.

Prior to the 15th century, the fundamental concept of a museum was still quite blurred. The emanation of the concept was related mythologically to the Muses whose residence laid the foundation of museums as a place for education and entertainment (ASEAN-COCI, 1997 and the Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2008). Nonetheless, the original museum idea might also relate to the Library of Alexandria, Egypt in the third century B.C. (Dean and Edson, 2003). Bearing a very strong political implication of showing off the wealth and power of the Florence-based Medici Family in the 15th century, the museum concept was finally believed to take shape in Europe.

Puzzling in the crossroad of secularism and sacredness, the Renaissance Period was marked by the anxiety of people to investigate the world from a different perspective: The cosmology of mankind. During that period, the bourgeoisie was well-represented by wealthy merchants, scholars and physicians. They exhibited newly discovered anonymities in their private cabinets: the Cabinet of Curiosities (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004). These cabinets resembled a miniature secular world. They were stuffed with rare objects that were to delight and to surprise the audiences or the collectors (Newhouse, 2006). Despite these cabinets represented the interests of the bourgeoisie, up to a point, these cabinets reflected the social anxiety to liberate from the shackle of theology and to explore a new world of its own accord. The Cabinet of Curiosities had become play houses for those bourgeoisies who were keen to search for leisure and excitement.

The continuous search for the odd or exception had grown to such an extent that the world became too complex and complicated to be represented by the cabinets. Secularism had evolved into a stage that rationalism began to govern the mindset of people. People searched for rationality and science. Religion was no longer considered to advance human progress. The search for rationale had grown to such an extent that the mission to mould a homogeneous society started to sprout in the mindset of the monarchies in Europe. The cabinet of curiosities gradually evolved into spaces of specialisation. Art had become a science and a visual education. The duty of art was to instruct and to edify the public. Museums were then open to the public.

Museums, finally, became public spaces to illustrate the achievements of those nations who thought they had successfully brought to all people an equal opportunity to progress. Museums were stuffed with valuable objects. These objects originated from those countries that were being “enlightened”. Museums were to demonstrate the power and the achievement of these nations.

The world has experienced dramatic changes in the 20th century. Starting from the beginning of the 20th century, people began to doubt the concept of Enlightenment and monarchical rule. Monarchies in Europe and in Asia fell one after another. Some of them became constitutional monarchies while some became republics. Russia and Japan shifted the balance of powers eastward from the west. The quest for equal opportunity once again echoed people’s mindset but from a different perspective: Communism.

Museums blossomed in the second half of the 20th century. Stephen. E. Weil (2002) says that at least three quarters of those museums that are still active today were set up during that period. Nonetheless, majority of these museums still echo the glory of the Age of Enlightenment. They are places to take care of and to store those “souvenirs” that they inherited from the days of the Enlightenment.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) was formed in 1946 and a new series of new museology emerged in the 1960s. The formation of the ICOM and the emergence of new museology aimed at changing those museums from embedding in the bed of roses of the Enlightenment days to be more socially responsible institutions. In 1972, the ICOM, officially, declared that museums have to integrate with the societies (Karp, Kremer & Lavine, 1992). To foster this concept, in 1974, the ICOM gave museums a role that was to serve the society and be responsible for its development (Weil, 1990). In 1984, the American Association of Museums (AMM) recommended that the responsibilities of museums were to educate and to commend the cultural pluralism of the American society (Hein, 2000). The ICOM in 1987 and the AMM in 1992 advocated museums should not stress on the preservation of objects (Hein, 2000). New museologists, such as Georges Henri Riviere (1897-1985) who is regarded as the father of ecomuseum, advocated the social responsibilities of museums towards societies.

Despite all these efforts, there was still a lack of a universally accepted museology. Throughout these six centuries, museums developed in accordance with the tidal waves of the time and the will of its “designers”, while not following any guiding principles. Museology is to study the theory, the purposes and the organisation of museums (Sola, 1997 and ASEAN-COCI 1997). To study the museum’s theory is to set up a concept that can guide all museums. To study the museum’s purpose is to define the mission and the vision of museums. To study the museum’s organisation is to materialise these mission and vision. Museology forms the basic tenet for museums to understand their values and to proceed with these values. As a result of the lack of a universally accepted museology, museums blossomed in their own ways.

There is no one definition of a museum. The most widely adopted definition is the one defined by the ICOM in 1974. The ICOM defined a museum as “a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment” (cited in Hein, 2000, p.2). This definition closely links museums with the development of a society. Nonetheless, in Canada, on the statement prepared by the National Museums of Canada for the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee cited in Stephen E. Weil (1990): “Museums collect, they preserve and study what they collect and they share both the collections and the knowledge derived there from for the instruction and self-enlightenment of an audience” (p.45). This definition narrows the linkage of a museum to the enlightenment of the audience. In accordance with the *Museum Accreditation: Professional Standards of the American Association of Museums* (1973), a museum is “an organized and permanent non-profit institution, essentially educational or esthetic in purpose, with professional staff, which owns and utilizes tangible objects, cares for them and exhibits them to the public on some regular schedule” (cited in Weil, 1990, p. 45). Scholars and museologists tend to give their own definition of a museum. Tomislav Sola (1997) defines “a museum is a non-profit institution which collects, analyses, preserves and presents objects belonging to cultural and natural heritage in order to increase the amount and quality of knowledge” (p.285). The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines a museum is a “building in which objects of artists, cultural, historical or scientific importance and interest are displayed”. Under the definition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, museums are simply storage places for important and interesting objects.

Owing to the lack of a universally accepted museology and the existence of various definitions of a museum, museums see their meaning to their societies differently. Some see it with a very mechanical approach. They focus on the physical and empiricism of their objects. Based on this approach, museums are princely galleries or aristocratic infallible institutions. Some are more concerned with the functions of museums in these museums. Some see museums as cultural or community centres. To be meaningful to societies, museums look for ways to fit themselves in with the changing times and to associate themselves with the changing thinking of society in accordance with their own interpretations.

Research questions

Museums exist with reason(s). These reasons are able to illustrate the relationship of museums with their time and space of existence. They enable museums to define their roles and to have their meaning to societies evaluated. Nonetheless, some museums might also indulge in their own reasons of existence and outcast themselves from the changing time and space. The main controversial issue on the role of a museum is in the way they interpret their meaning to the society. Museologists tend to group those museums that put emphasis on preserving the physical value of objects under the term “traditional museology”, while term those museums that emphasise on the functions of a museum “new

museology”. The International Councils of Museums was formed in 1946 and gave a new definition of the role of museum that was “for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, collections of objects of cultural or scientific significance” (cited in Yupho, 1968, p. 16). In 1974, the ICOM defined a museum is for the service and the development of society. In 2008, the theme of the ICOM was “Museums as Agents of Social Change and Development” (cited in Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2008, p. 7). Thailand is represented in the ICOM since 1947 (Yupho, 1968). Since then, the National Museum, Bangkok adopts the ICOM’s definition of a museum as its guiding principles (ASEAN-COCI, 1997). The historic development of museums forms a looking glass through which the National Museum, Bangkok is able to question its reasons for existence.

- a. How does the National Museum, Bangkok see its role as a socially based museum responsible for the development and responsible to the change of the society?
- b. To what extent does the National Museum, Bangkok need to reshape its meanings in terms of its discourse, consumable nature and interpretation?

Objectives of the research

This dissertation is not to justify the current frameworks of the National Museum, Bangkok or to navigate the National Museum, Bangkok to a correct track. There is no right or wrong for the meaning and contribution of a national museum to a society. What seems to be right from one person’s perspective might be inappropriate from that of the other. What seems to be meaningful from one’s perspective might turn out to be infeasible. The objectives of this dissertation are:

- a. To define the elements that are essential for the future development of the National Museum, Bangkok
- b. To trigger the awareness of Thai museums, particularly national museum lovers, administrators and stakeholders, to introspect the future development of Thai museums, and
- c. To give insight to Thai museum administrators, particularly national museum administrators, those main factors that they need to consider further develop their museums.

Methodology

Museums are different in their profiles. Despite risking being inappropriate and unfair to compare the frameworks of the National Museum, Bangkok to those of other national museums, this dissertation aims to trace out these frameworks. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the gaps inside these frameworks and to look into ways to fill in those gaps in order to strengthen the current frameworks of the National Museum, Bangkok.

To achieve this purpose, primary and secondary data were collected from the following:

1. Primary date: On-the-site visits

Fourteen museums (six national museums and eight non-national museums) and the L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Oriental (The School of the Far East Studies) were being visited.

a. The National Museum, Bangkok

Several visits were made. The aims of the visits were to understand the discourse, the consumable nature and the interpretation of the National Museum, Bangkok. These three aspects form the foundation of this writing.

b. The British Museum (U.K.) on 13th March, 2008 and the Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.) on 11th March, 2008

The British Museum is a landmark, a tourist magnet and a resource for the United Kingdom (Smith, 2007). The Victoria and Albert Museum is credited with the nurturing creative people who get inspiration from the contents of the museum. The visits were to see in what ways the frameworks of discourse, consumable nature and interpretation contribute to the charisma of these two museums?

c. The Asian Civilisation Museum (Singapore) and the National Museum of Singapore on 13th February, 2008

The Asian Civilisation Museum and the National Museum of Singapore are two of the three national museums of Singapore. These two museums look at Singapore from different perspectives. The former takes a cultural mix approach while the latter takes a historic approach. The visits were to know how the Asian Civilisation Museum addresses its multi-race society and how the National Museum of Singapore presents its long colonial rule history.

d. The National Museum, Malaysia on 12th February, 2008

Thailand and Malaysia share some similar cultural backgrounds. Both regions were a part of the Srivijaya culture. Malaysia and the southern part of Thailand were a part of the Patani Kingdom where Islam is the dominating and official religion. Both places were under colonial threats during the middle of the 19th century. The difference is that Malaysia was colonised by the British while Thailand is able to retain its independence. Both regions are inhabited by different races. The main races of Malaysia are Malays, Chinese, and Indians while those of Thailand are Thais, Chinese, Malays and Indians. The visit was to understand how the National Museum, Malaysia addresses all these issues.

e. The Louvre (France), the Musee Guimet (France) and the Musee du Quai Branly (France) between 14th March and 15th March, 2008 and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.) on 11th June, 2008

The visits were to see the way how these museums interpret Thai culture from an occidental perspective.

f. The Hong Kong Museum of History on 2nd May 2008 and the Hong Kong Museum of Art on 27th June 2008

Hong Kong was under colonial British rule for 150 years. It was only in 1997 that the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China. The purpose of visiting these museums was to know how the Hong Kong Museum of History sees its history in the crossroad between colonial rule and central governmental rule and how the Hong Kong Museum of Art presents Chinese art from a perspective that was once foreign influenced.

g. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia on 11th February 2008

The visit to the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia was to observe the way a Muslim country interprets Islamic culture.

h. The Osaka History Museum on 7th December, 2008

The visit was to see the presentation of a society from a city's perspective.

i. The L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Oriental (The School of the Far East Studies) in Paris on 14th March, 2008

The visit was to retrieve those archive writings written by Professor George Coedes on the National Museum, Bangkok.

2. Primary data: Interviews

a. The interviews with the following seven personnel from national museums were to collect primary data on how these national museums see their contributions their societies in terms of their discourse, consumable nature and interpretation:

- John Clark, Curator, Himalayan Collection, Asian Department, the Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.), interviewed on 11th March, 2008
- Helen Jones, Planning Manager, the Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.), interviewed on 11th March, 2008
- Gauri Krishnan, Senior Curator of the Asian Civilisation Museum, Singapore, interviewed on 13th February, 2008
- Justin Morris, Head of Strategic Planning and Collections Services, the British Museum (U.K.), interviewed on 13th March, 2008
- Somchai Na Nakhonphanom, former Director of the National Museum, Bangkok, interviewed on 26th February, 2008
- Mr. Osman, Registrar/Director of Management, Development and Information Technology, Department of Museums Malaysia, interviewed on 12th February, 2008 and

- Mr. Yusof, Director of the National Museum, Malaysia, interviewed on 12th February, 2008

b. The interviews with the following five people from non-national museums were to understand their opinion on the role of a national museum:

- Esa Leung, Chief Curator, the Hong Kong Museum of History, interviewed on 2nd May, 2008
- Ahmad Mashadi, Head of the National University of Singapore, Museum, interviewed on 14th February, 2008
- Ann Matson, Senior Coordinator for Administration Communication Department, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.), interviewed on 11th June, 2008
- Jeff Daly, Senior Design Advisor for Capital and Special Projects, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.), interviewed on 11th June, 2008 and
- H.C. Tang, Chief Curator, the Hong Kong Museum of Art, interviewed on 27th June, 2008

c. The interviews with the following two people from the University of

Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (U.S.A.) were to understand the role of the University of Pennsylvania in the excavation of the Ban Chiang site and their opinion of the ancient cultures of Thailand:

- Alessandro Pezzati, Archivist, interviewed on 12th June, 2008 and
- Joyce White, Director of the Ban Chiang Project, Asian Section (Southeast Asia), interviewed on 12th June, 2008

3. Secondary data: Publications and websites

The secondary data was collected through reading published materials and browsing websites. They are as follows:

- The research reports commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (U.K.) and the National Museum's Directors' Conference (U.K.)
- The Funding Agreement of the Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.)
- The annual report of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.)
- The Fact Sheet of the Hong Kong Science Museum
- The writing of Professor George Coedes on the restructuring of the National Museum, Bangkok.
- Some books, literature, museums' guidebooks and orientation pamphlets, papers, journals, newspapers, unpublished dissertations, unpublished teaching guides and websites on the history of Thailand, the nature of Thai society and Thai identity, the ethnics of Thailand, the nature and the

development of Thai art, the history, the nature and the development of Buddhism and Hinduism, the history of museums, the meaning of museums to society, museology and social science that are able to provide information to support the argument and the rationale of this dissertation.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three parts. They are written to answer the research questions mentioned previously.

Part one includes two chapters: The evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok and the National Museum, Bangkok today. This part answers the question on the introduction of the museum concept and the solidification of the National Museum, Bangkok in relation to its time and space of existence.

The second part includes three chapters: The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum, the National Museum, Bangkok as a national archaeology museum and the National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum. These chapters address to the way the National Museum, Bangkok utilises its objects to engineer its role, to make it meaningful to the society and to respond to the adoption of the guiding principles of the ICOM and the changing times.

The last part includes three chapters: A national museum for Thailand as a place of discourse, a national museum for Thailand as a place of consumption and a national museum for Thailand as a place of interpretation. This part answers the question on the necessity and the way of layering the National Museum, Bangkok with new meanings.

A conclusion was written to summarise the dissertation, particularly on the social role of a national museum for Thailand. The shortcomings of this piece of dissertation were also commented in the conclusion.

Statement of significance

The intention of this dissertation is to enable readers to understand the importance of the National Museum, Bangkok to update its context in terms of its discourse, its consumable nature and its interpretation so as to make itself meaningful to its current time and space and to act as an agent of social change and social development eventually.

Significance of the dissertation

A national museum is always at a crossroad between time and space. The relationship between a national museum and its current time and space is very fluid and fragile indeed. Those frameworks that fit a national museum best into a certain time and space might become futile or outdated from another spot of time and another space. Having undergone all these years of political, social and cultural changes since the introduction of the museum concept, the National Museum, Bangkok today is still upholding the old political framework of

stabilising and integrating the country. Should Siam never been threatened by the colonial powers or forced to open to the west, will a museum be ever introduced into the country? Should the idea of a museum that was introduced to Thailand at a stage earlier or far later than the period of King Mongkut, will the frameworks of the National Museum, Bangkok vary in accordance to the time it falls into?

To set up a framework for the new development of a national museum for Thailand is in fact to link and to update the museum with its current time and space. This piece of dissertation is not an end to itself but just the beginning of an eternal end.

Part 1

Evolution of the National Museum Bangkok and the National Museum, Bangkok today

The museum concept was introduced to Siam by King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.-1868A.D.). It was King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.) who solidified this concept to a museum. Facing potential threats of the colonial powers to Siam, both King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn saw the importance of importing this “foreign” concept and product into Siam. During the Age of Enlightenment, museums were sites for national prestige (Sola, 1997). Museums were devices to demarcate the civilised from the barbarian. Under the threats of the colonial powers, Siam needed a museum to present the uniqueness and superiority of Siam civilisation so as to demarcate a civilised Siam from those uncivilised. For King Mongkut, a museum for Siam was a sign of sovereignty. For King Chulalongkorn, a museum for Siam was a means to make Siam a part of the west where museums were ubiquitously presented.

The complicated and complex social-political situation and the increasing threat of western values to the Thai society fostered King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.-1925A.D.) to restore the trinity concept of “nation, religion and king”. His aim was to promote a unique Thai and to place Thai kingship on top of Theravada Buddhism that is the dominant religion of Thailand and the Thai nation in order to sustain and to secure his rule. King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.-1935A.D.) asked Prince Damrong (1862A.D.-1943A.D.) and Professor George Coedes (1886A.D.-1969A.D.) to restructure the Royal Museum in accordance to their political definitions of Buddhist arts history. During the Phibunsongkhram (former Prime Minister of Thailand 1938A.D.-1944A.D. and 1948A.D.-1957A.D.) period, despite Phibunsongkhram fully committed to westernising the country, he also saw the necessity of upkeep and supporting unique Thai values in order to stabilise his rule and to make a balance between the old and new values. Different from Phibunsongkhram who supported to rule a country with military power, Sarit Thanarat (former Prime Minister of Thailand 1958A.D.-1963A.D.) strongly supported the Thai kingship. He saw the value of this kingship as a means to legitimise his rule. Since then, the Thai kings have become important spiritual means to integrate the Thai society. The Gallery of Thai History was open in conjunction with the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Chakri dynasty.

The evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok tells how the past of Thailand and the identity of the Thai kings were being harnessed so as to bring a desirable social order and social integrity. Despite the fact that the Thai historic and cultural chronologies that were defined by Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes are not free from criticisms, these chronologies still form the basic

guidelines of the National Museum, Bangkok today. The National Museum, Bangkok is a national art, a national archaeology and a national history museum. The objectives of the museum are to disseminate the knowledge of art, archaeology and history of Thailand based on the chronologies that were defined by Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes.

Chapter 2

Evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok

King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.– 1868A.D.)

“The first museum in Thailand was established in the reign of King Monkut...was in fact the King’s private museum” (Yupho, 1968, p.3).

To bring progress to Siam

King Mongkut came to the throne at the time when contact with the west was very sensitive. Colonialism was at its pinnacle in Southeast Asia. Chunks and chunks of Southeast Asian were nibbled by the colonial powers. The neighbourhood of Siam: Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia were either colonised by or under the custody of the colonial powers. Burma was under the British rule in 1862 and Malaysia in 1874; Cambodia was under the French protectorate in 1863; Annam (Central Vietnam) and Tonkin (Northern Vietnam) became part of the French Indochina in 1885.

Colonialism was associated with trade. Following the Portuguese who came to Asia for trade in the 16th century, the colonial powers penetrated into South, East, and Southeast Asia in the 18th century. They came to Asia mainly for trade or for protecting trade. The colonial powers traded in Asia under the name of trading companies: The East India Company, which was the trading base for Britain in India, China and Malaysia; and the East Indies Company was the trading base for the Dutch. Wars were made for trade or for the protection of trade. One of the most notorious trade wars in Asia was the First Opium War (1839-1842) between Britain and China. The defeat of China in the war inaugurated a full penetration of the colonial powers into China and marked the weakening of the Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. The defeat of China in the war was also a catalyst of the signing of the Anglo-Siam Bowring Treaty (1855) which pivoted Siam from China to the west. The Bowring Treaty opened Siam to the west. It linked Siam to free trade, led Siam to market economy and opened Siamese society to the influence of western values. After the Bowring Treaty, treaties of similar capacities were concluded with other western countries: France, Prussia, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Portugal.

Colonialism was associated with enlightenment. During the Age of Enlightenment, it was a common mission for the colonial powers to use their own standard of “advanced civilisation” as a yardstick to measure the social and cultural standard of the “lesser” countries. The higher powers then tended to conquer the lesser ones under the mission to enlighten and to raise the civilisation of the lesser ones. In his book, *Siam: The land of the white elephant* (2000),

George Bacon had compiled several reports, accounts and memoirs that were written by J. Bowring, H. Mouhot, F. Vincent and J. Anderson, for example. These writings were to record their first hand impression and experience of 19th century Siam. In an article written by an American official (anonymous) who was sent to Siam for the presentation of the ratifications of the treaty made between Siam and United States of America, he recorded his meeting with King Pinklao, the Uparaja (the second king), a title given to a designated heir to the throne of ancient Buddhist dynasties mainly in Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and Laos (*Uparaja*, n.d.), of King Mongkut. In the article, he mentioned his concerns for the barbarianism of Siam. When he met Prince Wichaichan, the son of King Pinklao, he was very impressed with the pose of the young prince. Nonetheless, he could not help expressing his astonishment when he saw the way the young prince paid respect to King Pinklao, his father. He remarked: “What change had come over him! The man has been transformed into a reptile. The tall and graceful youth...down on all his marrowbones...crawling slowly toward the door...strange conflict between old barbarism and the new enlightenment...” (cited in Bacon, 2000, pp. 91-92). He was very annoyed to see “men and women degraded literally to a level with the beasts...sad by the contrast with the civilization which was shown in the conversation and manners of the king...” (cited in Bacon, 2000, pp. 98-99). Despite these annoyances, he was very impressed with the progress which Siam made towards the road to civilisation (western civilisation). He wrote:

Both men (King Mongkut and King Pinklao) of noteworthy ability, and deserve to be know and honored for their personal attainments in civilization...lift their kingdom out of degradation and barbarism...significant of great process already achieved toward Christian civilization, and prophetic of yet greater things to come. (cited in Bacon, 2000, pp.88-91)

He was especially pleased with the “civilized” hospitality that he received from King Pinklao. He was served with some “civilized” cakes and some “civilized” tea and coffee. To him, the cakes and the beverages were “good index of civilization” (cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 97). In another piece of writing, the author (anonymous) condemned the cruelties that the Siamese king (mostly King Rama III who reigned 1824A.D.-1851A.D.) took to penalise the king of Laos in 1828. He referred to the penalties as “the greatest cruelties barbarians could invent” (cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 67).

The colonial powers bore a mission to civilise the uncivilised. In the same piece of writing that was written by the American official, he accused China of standing “for centuries, resisting stubbornly the entrance of all light and civilization from without” (cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 114).

To maintain independence, King Mongkut either had to bend to the colonial powers or to lead Siam to the progress of civilisation. Throughout the reign of King Mongkut, his ruling principle was to bring progress to Siam in order to diminish the colonial threats. King Mongkut admitted that Siam was “half-

civilized and half barbarous, being very ignorant of civilized and enlightened customs and usages” (cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 114). In 1861, he pledged to the President of the United States of America to transform Siam from a half civilised to a truly civilised country (Wyatt, 2003). In the 1850s, there were no roads, no electricity, no telephones, no railways and no banks in Siam (Jumsai, 2000). The foreigners were shocked “almost beyond endurance at the nudity of the people” (anonymous cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 240).

Basically King Mongkut was quite traditional and conservative. He alienated the court from the public. He adopted *rachasap*, a Khmer-derived language as the royal language. This made the royal language very different from that of the public. He excluded commoners from becoming royal consorts. He created a court pedigree that was based on the royal family and the noble elites. Nonetheless, to prove to the colonial powers that Siam was progressing to the western civilisation, King Mongkut had to show to the foreigners that Siam was westernised socially, economically and religiously. King Mongkut hired westerners as government advisers. Western subjects, such as public administration and archaeology were taught in the court education. He hired foreign tutors: Dr. Bradley, Mrs. Stephen Matton and Mrs. Jones to teach the young princes and princesses in the court. The most well-known governess was Anna Leonowens who apart from tutoring in the court also introduced the definition of western civilisation to King Mongkut (Peleggi, 2007). King Mongkut sent some of his sons and some young Thai overseas for training and studying. He set up the Thammayut sect, “meaning order of the adherents to the doctrine or *dhamma*” (Amnuay-ngertra, 2006, p. 18), to replenish Theravada Buddhism. While King Mongkut was in his monkhood, Buddhism was commonly associated with superstition and folk religion. The writings on Buddhism were inaccurate. The code of conduct of the Buddhist monks was loose: Smoking opium and gambling were commonly practiced by the monks (Jumsai, 2000). King Mongkut believed that the Ceylon context of Theravada Buddhism was most complete and orthodox. The Thammayut sect was to restore Thai Buddhism back to the context of Ceylon. This religious act was to prove to those Christian missionaries in Siam that Buddhism was “a rational belief and there is nothing in Buddhism that opposes the scientific views” (Amnuay-ngertra, 2006, p. 20). Canals were constructed. Currency notes were issued. The court costume for males was westernised: males had to wear tailored suit, trousers, hose, shoes, longer hair and moustaches (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

The power of art, culture and ancient civilisation

King Mongkut saw the status and importance of art and culture in the western societies. Art and culture were means “to serve the nation...to correspond to the Western image of a modern state civilized nation” (Amnuay-ngertra, 2006, p. 25). King Mongkut looked at the importance of art and culture not from the aesthetic or physical value of the objects; but from the power that they generated. The power of art and culture was in their capability to entertain, to educate and to ennoble (Cary, 1994). In the old western societies, in conjunction with the continuous growth of wealth, people began to look for something secular,

practical and down to earth (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004). They looked for something that could reveal their wealth and “taste”. This was the gap where art and culture filled in. One of the missions of the newly found National Gallery in the United Kingdom in 1824 was to civilise people and to let them “get a taste when exposed to art” (cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 2004, p. 189). In the same piece of article that was written by the American official mentioned previously, he was very delighted that King Mongkut recognised “our superiority” and showed “a readiness to adopt our arts” (cited in Bacon, 2000, pp. 87-88).

In 1860, Henri Mouhot discovered or popularised (as argued by some scholars) the site of Angkor Wat. Angkor Wat was referred to by Henri Mouhot as a world’s monumental wonder in parallel to the Parthenon of Greece and the Pyramids of Egypt (Peleggi, 2007). It was regarded an earmark of the civilisation of Indochina (Peleggi, 2002). Ancient civilisations then became the world’s focus and diplomatic instruments among nations. They were treated “as lost wonders and romantic Eden” (Cary, 1994, p. 65) and were claims “for respect in the new theatre of international relations” (Cary, 1994, p. 65). Obsessed by the fame, the historical value and most importantly the claim of the legitimacy of Siamese civilisation to the pre-Sukhothai epoch (Peleggi, 2007), King Mongkut tried to dismantle one of the temples of the Angkor Wat and to have it re-assembled in Bangkok.

Before King Mongkut ascended to the throne, the then Prince Mongkut had already started his search for historic relics. He had traced the ruins of Phra Pathom Chedi at Nakorn Pathom through where Buddhism entered Siam two thousands years ago. He had also traced a stone slab that was used by King Ramkhamhaeng (reigned 1279?-1298), the third reign of the Sukhothai epoch, for jurisdiction. Nonetheless, the most controversial issue was his claim for the discovery of an inscribed stone stele. Professor George Coedes traced the history of the stone back to 1292 during the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng. The stele traced the anterior of Siam back to the 13th century Sukhothai. King Mongkut also revived the court fashion of Ayutthaya, the *khon* (masked drama) of Ramakian, the court culture of the late Ayutthaya epoch and the old Pali or Sanskrit to renamed places (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

The power of exhibition

Among the gifts that he gave to Queen Victoria during the visit of the Siam Ambassador to Britain in 1857, King Mongkut had included two royal daguerreotype portraits. One was his image in royal robe and the other was himself with his wife and two children. On the letter from King Mongkut to Queen Victoria, he wrote,

Entrusted to the hands of the Siamese embassy...Two Royal Daguerreotypes one of which is a likeness of His Majesty The First King of Siam dressed in full Royal Robes and decorations seated on his Throne of State.

The other is the Daguerreotype of His Majesty with the Royal Consort and

two children seated on their Majesty's knees. (cited in Jumsai, 2000, pp103 - 104)

Amnuay-ngertra (2006) in his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation stated that the Siamese kings of the Chakri dynasty prior to King Mongkut avoided exposing royal images publicly. They considered it was a taboo to have their images exposed. In contradiction to this tradition, King Mongkut sent images of himself and the royal family not only to Queen Victoria but to Napoleon III and Pope Pius IX. King Mongkut was well aware of the implication of royal portraits in the western context: A presentation of sovereignty (Amnuay-ngertra, 2006). It was an endorsement of "a sovereign's power and vehicles of diplomatic exchanges" (Amnuay-ngertra, 2006, p. 34). To further push forward this diplomatic exchange, Siam presented itself at the Paris Exposition in 1867. King Mongkut was well aware that exhibitions were able to promote and to endorse his sovereignty over Siam.

The power of museums

During the Age of Enlightenment, museums were commonly used by the colonial powers as institutions to repose art, artifacts and antiquities of their colonies. Museums were to present and to legitimise the power and the claim of sovereignty of the colonial powers over their colonies (Cary, 1994). On 10th February, 1870, an article on *Siam Weekly Advertiser* urged for a national museum for Siam (Cary, 1994). Despite the concern was more on generating economic benefits, a national museum for Siam was regarded as "part of the complement of the institutions of civilization" (Cary, 1994, p.11). King Mongkut saw the usefulness of having a museum to exhibit the art, the culture and the ancient civilisation of Siam. It was an evidence of Siam progressing to western civilisation.

The introduction of the museum concept to Siam

The Prabas Phiphitaphan Hall (*phiphitaphan*, a term that means various objects and becomes the Thai word for "museum"), the present site of Sivalai Mahaprasad Hall, was built to exhibit the art, the culture and the ancient civilisation of Siam. The collections exhibited were mainly relics of the past and icons of identity (Cary, 1994). They were to echo the colonial museum concept of proclaiming sovereignty. Instead of being opened to the public, the collection was restricted to a selective group of ambassadors, diplomats and elites. King Mongkut aimed at constructing and showing the civilisation, the glory and the legitimacy of Siam's tradition and rule to the west. The museum concept of King Mongkut was a private one but bore strong political and patriotic implications.

King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.)

"The first public museum in Thailand was founded in 1874 by King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, 1868-1910) and was located in the compound of the Grand Palace"

(Chongkol, 1999, pp. 7-8).

Giving Siam a space

The old political geography of Siam was based on the relationship among *mueangs* (towns or provinces). Siam in the 19th century did not have any physical boundary, only clusters of *mueangs* whose relationship was based on personal ties (Englehart, 2001) between *nai* (leader) and *phrai* (follower). Each *nai* had handfuls of *phrai* who were registered under him by means of tattooing. The geographical coverage of a *nai* could scatter sparsely around. The main tasks of the *nai* were to keep track of his *phrai* and to act as a middle man between the court and his *phrai* at the local level. The *nai* had to ensure a swift and sufficient supply of labour for *corvee*, a kind of taxation by means of unpaid labour (Englehart, 2001), for military or for general purposes. The *nai* looked after his *phrai* while the *phrai* looked to the *nai* for protection. A *mueang* was considered to be deserted when there was no *nai* linking this personal relationship (Englehart, 2001). Based on this system, the court did not have any direct contact to or control of the *phrai* at the local level. Without the *nai*, the court would have lost track and control on the politics (Englehart, 2001), labour supply and taxation at local level. The labour supply system was further complicated with the *that* (slavery) system. Under the system, people could sell themselves to household heads.

In fact, Siam in the 19th century did not have any official counting on the number of inhabitants living in these *mueangs*. It was estimated by European visitors that the population of Siam ranged between six and 12 million (Bacon, 2000). As a response to the increasing ambition of the colonial powers, particularly Britain and France, to advance their colonial frontier and their commercial activities to the undefined geographical boundary of Siam, King Chulalongkorn saw the necessity of having a physical border for controlling and defending purposes. In 1880, James McCarthy, a British surveyor, was hired by King Chulalongkorn to map out the frontier of Siam. To facilitate the work, a survey school was set up in 1882 and the Royal Survey Department was set up in 1885. After seven years of surveying, James McCarthy eventually demarcated the boundary of Siam. Between 1894 and 1900, Prince Damrong carried out the *thesaphiban* (provincial reform) and initialised an administration system of subdividing the region into a hierarchy of *mueang*, *amphur* (district), *tambon* (communities) and *moo baan* (village). Siam was given a defined space eventually.

Nevertheless, the defined space had to have a civilised identity that had to be under the administration of the court. A bureaucracy that was based on the European model was set up. Twelve ministries were assigned to this bureaucracy. To ensure a direct control of the bureaucracy and a transfer of power from the nobles, nine out of the 12 ministries were headed by the royal family and were appointed by King Chulalongkorn. The civil servants were known as *kha ratchakan*, the servants of the crown (Peleggi, 2007). A commissioner was sent to each *mueang* to contact and control the *mueang*. The commissioner was to oversee the administration, to update manpower rolls and to introduce new policy to the *mueang*. A centralised fiscal reform was introduced to tighten tax control.

The Finance Office was set up to centralise the administration of tax. The Royal Audit Office was to oversee the income and expenditure of the local tax farm. The Privy Council and Council of State were set up in 1874 to abolish the *corvee* and slavery system.

With respect to education, since the 13th century, *wats* (a collection of buildings for the practice of religion), played the role of a school where education was associated with the teachings of the Buddha. To the westerners, this educational system only produced a group of idle and useless race (Bacon, 2000). With the creation of a new country, King Chulalongkorn sensed the need to have more educated people to help to transform the kingdom into a modern country. The Provincial Education Act of 1898 initiated the setting up of schools inside the monasteries. Apart from Buddhism, History, Science and Geography were introduced to the curriculum. They were to give the concept of country and kingdom to the Siamese people and to replace the traditional Buddhist cosmology (Peleggi, 2007). The *Phumisat Sayam (Geography of Siam)* in 1900 and the *Phumisat (Geography)* in 1902 were used as school textbooks. The most influential book was the *Thammachariya* that introduced the concept of Siam as a kingdom to the Siamese. The first atlas of Siam was printed in 1874. School subjects were taught in central Thai language. Various schools were set up: The Suan Anan School (1879), the Suan Kulap School (1880), the King's School (1897), the Royal Page School in 1899 (later renamed Civil Service College) and the Military Academy (1897). The new education system gradually nourished a group of intellectuals who came from commoner families. These intellectuals perceived the idea that common people was also able to progress the country (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). The popularisation of education had an immense impact on the political development of Siam. This will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

To conform to the western concept of having a standing army to guard the court, King Chulalongkorn modernised the First Foot Guards (Mead, 2004). The guards were trained under the English infantry regiment. They were equipped with western weapons, and wore European uniforms. In 1887, the Royal Cadet Academy that based on the Prussia military school model was set up. Military expenditure rose from THB one million in 1893 to THB13 million in 1909 (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

After the 1893 Franco-Siam Paknam Incident, a dispute on the territory on the east bank of the Mekong southward from the Chinese borders, King Chulalongkorn increased the number of foreign advisors tremendously: Belgian lawyers for international treaties negotiation; German Engineers for railways building; British for finance control and Italian for architectural design (Peleggi, 2007). They were employed in accordance to their expertise in international finances and international affairs.

The Ananta Samakhom and the Chakri Maha Prasat were constructed based on western architectural concepts. The Rachademnoen Road was based on

the French Champs Elysees. The statue of King Chulalongkorn was made with King Chulalongkorn riding on a horse instead of on an elephant. The ancient custom of prostration in the presence of the king was abolished. King Chulalongkorn finally assimilated this newly defined space into the western context.

Giving Siam a timeframe

In a speech made by King Chulalongkorn at the Antiquarian Society, King Chulalongkorn stressed the importance to uphold the history of a country. He said, The history of one's nation and country is an important matter to be known clearly and accurately through study and teaching. It is a discipline for evaluating ideas and actions as right or wrong, good or bad, as a means to inculcate love of one's nation and land. (cited in Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005, p.72)

Siam needed a defined timeframe. Based on the investigation of Prince Damrong (1862 – 1943), King Chulalongkorn's younger brother, and Prince Vajiravudh, King Chulalongkorn's son, Sukhothai was regarded as the first capital of the Siam Kingdom. The capital of Siam was then succeeded by Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin. The timeframe of Siam was dated back 400 years.

King Chulalongkorn was well aware that civilised countries tended to have a long history. Their history could be as old as one thousand years ago (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). King Chulalongkorn believed that Siam's civilisation had a far outreaching history. To confirm and to verify his belief, he set up and supported the setting up of several institutions to compile the ancient civilisation of Siam. The Siam Society was founded in 1904 by 37 individuals who were employed by the Siamese government. The Siam Society aimed at investigating and promoting the art, the literature and the science of Siam and those of its neighbours. The Royal Library (renamed National Library after 1932) was set up in 1905 and the Archaeology Society in 1907. They were set up for the purpose of compiling the history of Siam and verifying the authenticity of Siam's civilisation.

The power of exhibition

Under King Chulalongkorn, Siam was now a kingdom that had a well defined westernised space and a well defined ancient timeframe. Nonetheless, Siam needed to tell to the outside world this achievement. King Chulalongkorn believed in exhibitions. It all started in 1871 when King Chulalongkorn visited Java and India. He was shown to a number of "civilized" institutions and museums (Peleggi, 2007 and Cary, 1994). He visited the Great Exhibition in Australia and the Industrial Exhibition in Berlin in 1879. During his visit to Europe, he saw several great museums. The visits gave him an impression that museums indicated "power, empire and civilization" (Cary, 1994, p. 70). King Chulalongkorn linked Siam with the outside world through exhibitions. The museum in Singapore in the 1870s exhibited a collection of commercial products and antiquities of Siam (Cary, 1994). The 1876 Centennial Exposition in

Philadelphia allocated a space for the Siamese products. More than seven hundred pieces of Siamese artifacts and every day life products (Esterik, 2000) were exhibited in the exposition. These exhibitions were to exhibit the achievements of Siam that had evolved from ignorance to modernity and from savage to civilisation.

In 1882, in conjunction with the centennial of the Rattanakosin epoch and the establishment of Bangkok as the capital of Rattanakosin, a grand exhibition was launched in Bangkok to promote a new Siam. In accordance with the royal announcement edited by an anonymous writer, the exhibition was to tell visitors,

The difference between the methods used to earn a living one hundred years ago and those now used, and see what progress has been made, and note the plants and fruits useful for trade and improved means of living. We believe that this exhibition will be beneficial to the country. (cited in Bacon, 2000, p. 292)

The exhibits comprehended from art to science and from commerce to education. Mary Hartwell, an American missionary in Bangkok at that time, praised the significance of this exhibition. She wrote,

Nothing there was more significant than its school exhibit. The Royal College was solicited to make an exhibit representing the work done in the school... This consisted chiefly of specimens of writing in Siamese and English... arithmetic, the school furniture, the text-books in use, and the various helps employed in teaching, such as the microscope, magnets, electric batteries, etc. The Siamese mind is peculiarly adapted to picking up information by looking at things and asking questions... the exhibit will not only enhance the reputation of the college, but give the Siamese some new ideas on the subject of education. (cited in Bacon, 2000, p.292)

The Royal Museum, the first public museum in Siam

The 1882 exhibition was very successful. It had changed the mindset of the foreigners towards Siam. A critique commented the 1882 exhibition on the *Saturday Review*, a Siamese publication. On the review it was written: “The king of this country...is no doubt one of the monarchs whom it is the fashion to call enlightened” (cited in Bacon, 2000, p.294). King Chulalongkorn realised that Siam had to continue demonstrating the superiority of Siam’s culture.

In 1874, King Chula used the Concordia Hall, the present Sala Sahathai Samakhom, to exhibit the private collections of King Mongkut. He used the English word “museum” to name this hall (Yupho, 1968). In conjunction with his birthday, he exhibited the collections to a selective group of guests, particularly the European. The hall was a princely gallery that exhibited the wealth and power of a king: Crowns, jewellery, royal scepters, sparkling water goblets, fabulous teapots and water pots (Cary, 1994).

In 1874, King Wichaichan, the Uparaja (the second king) of King Chulalongkorn, saw the consolidation of power of King Chulalongkorn as a threat

to his position. He led a futile confrontation against King Chulalongkorn, a confrontation commonly known as the Front Palace Crisis. In 1887, after the death of King Wichaichan, King Chulalongkorn abolished the rank of Uparaja. He changed the Wang Na (the Front Palace), residence of the Uparaja, into a museum. On the 4th of December, 1889 the museum was named “The Royal Museum”. It was placed under the administration of the Department of Education and then under the Ministry of Education. The first public museum of Thailand was founded. The exhibits inside the Concordia Hall were moved into three core buildings of the Wang Na: The Sivamokkhabhiman Hall, the Buddhaisawan Chapel and the Issarawinitchai Hall. The Sivamokkhabhiman Hall mainly exhibited the zoological collections; the Buddhaisawan exhibited the religious statues and religious related objects and the Issarawinitchai Hall became a warehouse (Coedes, 1928). The museum was open to the public twice a week. These three buildings are the main buildings of the National Museum, Bangkok today.

King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.-1925A.D.) and King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D. – 1935A.D.)

“H.M. Rama VII and H.M. Queen Rambhai Bharni graciously presided over the opening ceremony of the Capital Museum on November 19th 1926”
(Chadavij, Jirawattana, Pothisoonthorn, Pumpongpaet & Silpanon, 2002, p. 5).

Social and political changes in the 1920s and 1930s

The time and space development of Siam were getting quite complex after the death of King Chulalongkorn. The fall of old monarchies: Ottoman in 1908, China in 1911 and Russia in 1917, and the formation of new republics in Europe and in China shook the faith of the Siamese people towards monarchical rule. The linking of Siam with the world economy had fostered the growth of an urban business sector. The popularisation of education had nurtured a group of intellectuals coming from commoner families. Those Thai students who studied overseas were deeply impressed with the western political system. Western values and idea influenced the Siamese society tremendously.

The growing new urban business sector became very conscious and concerned with their vested interest. The Siamese market was dominated by western products. The economic policy of the government was in favour of foreign industries and products. Local industries and local products hardly found any surviving space in the market. The business sector criticised the Siamese government for sacrificing national interests for the sake of foreign interest. The economy was very weak: The price of rice, which was Siam's main export, slumped, the national debt increased tremendously, added to these was the profligacy of royal expenditure that shared nearly 10% of the state budget. The Siamese people blamed the absolute monarchy for not able to solve the economic problems and to improve the situation. They associated absolutism with corruption, inefficiency and injustice. To them, the solution to these problems was the removal of the absolute monarchy.

The popularisation of education had nourished a group of intellectuals coming from commoner families. These intellectuals believed in the capability of common people to participate and to contribute to the progress of Siam. Kulap Saipradit, Thianwan Wannapho and Thim Sukkhayang spread the idea of humanitarianism, social justice and equality. People began to be aware of human rights. With the popularity of education, people coming from commoner families found their way up the bureaucracy. Common people began to ask for *lak wicha* (the principle of law and rationality) instead of *lak ratchakan* (the principle of service to the king) (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). The old social hierarchy structure and concept of loyalty to the traditional ruling class loosened.

The leaders of the 1932 *coup d'état* were all educated in the west and were very fond of western political systems. Two prominent figures were Pridi Banomyong (1900A.D.-1983A.D.) and Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1897A.D.-1964A.D.). Pridi was educated in the Suan Kulap School and the Justice Ministry's Law School. He then received a ministry scholarship to study in France where he finished his doctorate at the Sorbonne. Pridi saw the importance of binding the absolute rights of the king by a constitution. To him, the *coup d'état* was to justify liberty and equality and the rule of law. In his writing, *Pridi: Selected writings on life, politics and economy*, Pridi wrote,

The King maintains his power above the law...he elevates those of royal blood (*phuak jao*) to have special rights more than the people. He governs without principle...The government of the King above the law is unable to find solutions and bring about recovery...The government of the King has treated the people as slaves...and as animals. (cited in Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005, p. 119)

Plaek Phibunsongkhram entered the Chulachomkhalo Royal Military Academy and won a scholarship to continue his study at the French Military Academy in France. He saw the importance of military rule. To Phibunsongkhram, without military support Siam would be effaced from the world (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

Pridi and Phibunsongkhram envisioned the future of Siam from different spectrums. Pridi believed in the power of the people; while Phibunsongkhram believed in the power of the military. Nonetheless, they shared one common believe: The future of Siam could not rely on absolute monarchy.

As a result of the popularity of mass media, western ideas and western social and national values flooded Siam through different means: Journals, newspapers, literatures, novels and films. These western influences permeated to the farthest end of Siamese society. Newspapers began to criticise the profligacy, the lavish spending and the preoccupation with games and plays of King Vajiravudh (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005 and Peleggi, 2007). Novels such as *Lakhorn Haeng Chiwit (The circus of life, 1929)* written by Prince Akat Damkoeng who committed suicide at the age of 26 as a result of gambling debts, criticised class and gender inequality (Peleggi, 2007). Movies such as *Nangsao Suwan (The*

heavenly maiden) in 1922 or 1923 raised the question of class barriers (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). King Vajiravudh raised his deepest concern that the Siamese people were too infatuated with western new things that they were destroying the old Siamese values (Mead, 2004). In 1923, the Book, Documents and Newspaper Act was passed to suppress the press. The purpose of the act was to forbid the continuous spreading of these western influences. Altogether, 18 printing presses were seized and 17 papers were ordered closed (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.– 1925A.D.)

The fall of many monarchies in Europe and Asia, the emergence of new forms of nationalism in Germany and Italy, the widespread of communism in Russia and China and the successful transformation of Japan into a world power under a constitutional monarchy shook the faith of the Siamese people towards absolute monarchical rule. The Siamese people were inspired by new social and political values. Facing these threats and two futile military *coups d'état* in 1912 and 1917, King Vajiravudh became very concerned for the security and the stability of his rule. The aggravating situation became more complex with the huge population of Chinese in the Siamese society. The Chinese were the largest ethnic group in the society. They were very influential not only in their domination of the Siamese trade and business but also in their involvement in the national movement in China. The Chinese enjoyed special privileges in Siam. As an aftermath of their protest and riot against a law that required them to pay tax on equal base in 1909, the economy of Siam was totally paralysed for three days (Amnuay-ngerntra, 2006). At the political level, national movement was at its height in China after the 1911 nationalistic revolution that overthrew the Qing Dynasty, the last dynasty of China. The Siamese newspapers asked the Chinese to remit money to support the national movement in China. The plotters of the 1912 *coup d'état* were suspected to be descendants of Chinese (Wyatt, 2003). Their motivation was widely believed to be driven by the 1911 revolution in China.

King Vajiravudh was very concerned with the over-evident presence of the Chinese in the Siamese economy and the influence of the Chinese in the stability of Siam. In an article under the pen-name of Asavbahu, King Vajiravudh referred the Chinese as “The Jew of the East” (Amnuay-ngerntra, 2006). In his description, the Chinese were disloyal, handicapped morally and ethically, snobbish and selfish. Despite having more Chinese blood than Thai blood (Amnuay-ngerntra 2006), King Vajiravudh regarded the Chinese as the major threat to the monarchical rule and the security of Siam.

To arouse the nationalism of the Siamese people towards monarchical rule, King Vajiravudh began to look into various means to restore the importance of the Siamese king. In order to unite the society, to detour the cult towards western products and to revive old Thai values, he alerted the Siamese people to the uniqueness and greatness of the Siamese race.

Inspired by the British emblem of the trinity of “god, king and country”, King Vajiravudh modified this trinity to the Siamese version of *chat* (nation),

satsana (religion) and *phra mahakasat* (king) and introduced this concept to the Siamese people. The Siamese king headed and represented the nation. The traditional role of the Siamese king was to protect Theravada Buddhism, the main religion of Siam. To be a Siamese, people had to attach to Theravada Buddhism. To build a strong nation, Siamese people had to adhere to the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes a close link between the Siamese king and the Sangha (the Buddhist community). To be loyal to Theravada Buddhism, Siamese people had to be loyal to the Siamese king. The Siamese king was a political embodiment of the nation and Theravada Buddhism. In 1917, he introduced the new tri-colour flag with white stands for Theravada Buddhism, blue for the monarchy and red for the blood which the Siamese have to shed for the nation (Appendix A) (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). His aim was to foster his “elite nationalism”. He aimed to impose a “standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high culture (Bangkok, central Thai culture) on its subjects” (Barne, 1993 cited in Esterik, 2000, p. 98).

To further enlist the nationalistic sentiment of the Siamese people to the Siamese king and to the Siamese monarchy, he instituted the 23rd Oct and the 6th April national holidays to honour King Chulalongkorn and the Chakri dynasty.

King Vajiravudh utilised literature, arts and history to emphasis the importance of the Siamese king whose role was to unify the nation, and to protect the Siamese people and the great Siamese identity.

King Vajiravudh was a patriotic writer. The short stories and poems that he wrote were to glorify the role of the ancient Siamese kings in major historic events. His choice of the ancient Siamese kings were those who fostered national movement and protected the Siamese from external threats: King Sri Indraditya (reigned 1239?A.D.-1259?A.D.), the founder of the Sukhothai epoch, who fought against Khmer, and King Naresuan (reigned 1590A.D.-1605A.D.) who fought against Burma. King Vajiravudh said that these kings succeeded in securing “our (the Thai race) national freedom and made our nation respected by the Burmese and the Talengs (Mons)” (cited in Peleggi, 2007, p. 195). In his writings, the Siamese kings were national heroes, and without a Siamese king, Siam could not survive.

King Vajiravudh was a dramatist. He was very fond of performing arts. His works such as *Huachai Nakrop* (*The soul of a warrior*) and *Phra Ruang* (*King Sri Indraditya*) were about the Siamese people’s love towards the Siamese king (Peleggi, 2007). Altogether, he wrote approximately 180 plays. Many of the plays were about the outstanding quality and superiority of the Siamese people, the greatness and readiness of the Siamese people to sacrifice their lives for their country and for their monarchy, and after all, the greatness of the Siamese king to protect their people (Peliggi, 2007 and Annuy-ngertra 2006).

King Vajiravudh was a historian. He was very involved in the restoration of the history of Siam while he was Prince Vajiravudh. The then Prince Vajiravudh

visited Sukhothai together with Prince Damrong. They studied and matched the monuments against those texts that were inscribed on the Ramkhamhaeng stele. They then established that Sukhothai was the first capital of Siam. To King Vajiravudh, Sukhothai was the ideal. The people of Sukhothai were happy and the kingdom was self-sufficient. The form of paternalistic kingship of Sukhothai catered for the happiness of the people and the self-sufficiency of the kingdom. King Vajiravudh saw the utilisation of historic context an effective means to stimulate the nationalism of the Siamese people. He realised the necessity to preserve historic artifacts and archaeological sites so as to remind the Siamese people the glory and contributions of monarchical rule to Siam. In 1912 and 1923 he set up the Department of Fine Arts and the Arts and Crafts School to promote and to preserve court craftsmanship (Peleggi, 2007 and Amnuay-ngertra, 2006). The Royal Library and the Archaeological Service were to study and to preserve the historic documents and monuments of ancient Siam (Peleggi, 2007). His royal decree in 1924 stated the importance of preserving those monuments and artifacts that were created by the Siamese kings and the Siamese artists. In the decree, it was written that these sites and objects had “an important historical value and can contribute to increase knowledge of the past for the country’s benefit and glory” (cited in Peleggi, 2007, p.158).

King Vajiravudh believed in the influence of exhibitions. Ever since 1911, the Siamese government had sponsored a number of art fairs and international fairs in Berlin and Dresden (1912), Leipzig (1914) and San Francisco (Apinan, 1992, cited in Amnuay-ngertra, 2006). These fairs were designed to exhibit the uniqueness and the superiority of Thai culture. Caverlee Cary (1994) said that before the death of King Vajiravudh in 1925, he planned to hold the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition, a three-month exhibition at the Lumpini Park in Bangkok to glorify the civilisation of Siam.

King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.–1935A.D.)

King Prajadhipok inherited a country that was very shaky politically, economically and socially. The Siamese people looked at the kingdom, the society and the progress from their own perspective. King Chulalongkorn upheld himself as the sole navigator who pivoted the progress of Siam. King Vajiravudh introduced the trinity concept of “nation, religion and king” to restore the value of the Siamese king to the society. Nevertheless, this idea collided with the new thinking and new social values the Siamese people saw themselves as the main navigators of the progress, the society and even the kingdom. Instead of “nation, religion and king”, they looked for “nation, religion and people” (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005, P. 112).

The 1932 *coup d’etat* was inaugurated by a small group of civil servants and military officers. They called themselves Khana Ratsadon (the People’s Party). They were determined to place King Prajadhipok under law and change Siam into a constitutional monarchy. In 1934, King Prajadhipok went for ophthalmic treatment in England where he abdicated his throne. For nearly 15 years there was no resident king in Siam.

The Bangkok Museum

It was under these complex and complicated political and social changes that Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes restructured the Royal Museum into the Bangkok Museum.

Prince Damrong (1862A.D.–1943A.D.) was the younger brother of King Chulalongkorn. He was the fifty-seventh son of King Mongkut. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Prince Damrong was designated as the Minister of Interior (1897A.D.-1915A.D.). He travelled throughout the country and engaged in research into the historical development of Siam and Buddha-images. Based on the information that he discovered, he narrated the historic chronology of Siam in the following order: Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin. During King Prajadhipok's reign, Prince Damrong was in charge of all the arts and culture of Siam. Nevertheless, after the 1932 *coup d'état*, he was forced into exile to Penang. Phibun Songkhram once said that if the old prince (Prince Damrong) set foot in Thailand (Siam was changed into the name of Thailand in 1939), he would be arrested immediately.

Professor George Coedes (1886A.D.-1969A.D.) was a French scholar. He specialised in Southeast Asian archaeology and history. He is accredited with initiating the concept of Indianised kingdom and the discovery of Srivijaya civilisation in Indonesia. He was the Director of the L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Oriental (The School of the Far East Studies) in 1929. In 1918, Prince Damrong invited him to be the Director of the Royal Library. Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes then worked hand in hand to outline the historic chronology and the cultural chronology of Proto-historic Siam. They concluded that Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, Chiang Sean, Sukhothai, U-thong, Ayutthaya, Rattanakosin were the eight cultural epochs of Proto-historic Siam while the history of Siam traced its origin to the Sukhothai epoch.

In January 1926, King Prajadhipok decided to restructure the Royal Museum (Coedes, 1927). He set up the Royal Institute of Literature, Archaeology and Fine Arts. He placed the Royal Museum and the Royal Library under its administration. Prince Damrong was the President and Professor George Coedes was the Secretary General of the Institute. They began to restructure the Royal Museum based on the historic and cultural chronology of proto-historic Siam that was defined by them. These form the basic chronologies that the National Museum, Bangkok follows today (Chongkol, 1984).

In conjunction with the birthday of King Prajadhipok on November 10, 1926, King Prajadhipok inaugurated the opening of the newly structured Royal Museum. The Royal Museum was renamed the Bangkok Museum. The museum was basically a decorative art and archaeology museum. The contents of the museum were mainly ancient sculptures. The museum grouped the objects in accordance with their material: The Issarawinitchai Hall exhibited mainly bronze and some stone objects; the Muk Krasan Room (the Hall for Precious Material today) that is in between the Issarawinitchai Hall and the royal residence exhibited

stone objects and the room near the stairs of Wasantaphiman Hall (the Hall for Ceramics today) exhibited mainly stucco objects. The museum also exhibited some objects in accordance to their functions: Musical instruments, costumes and regalia (Yupho, 1968). The museum was open to public on Sundays and on special occasions (Cary, 1994).

The National Museum, Bangkok

After the *coup d'état* in 1932, the Bangkok Museum was administered by the Fine Arts Department that was led by Luang Wichit Wathakan (1898A.D.-1962A.D.) in 1933. The Bangkok Museum was then re-named the National Museum, Bangkok in January, 1934.

Deeply impressed by republicanism during his study in France, Phibunsongkhram envisaged the future of Siam from a republican point of view. With the help of Wichit Wathakan to navigate the cultural policy of Siam and later Thailand, Phibunsongkhram continued to foster the work of King Vajiravudh to mould a unique Thai (Siamese) identity. Nonetheless, different from King Vajiravudh's unique Siamese identity that was based on elite nationalism and the importance of the Siamese king to the Siamese people, Phibunsongkhram's view was a mass nationalism but without the Siamese king. Phibunsongkhram had to break Siam from its royal tradition: Prince Damrong was forced into exile, King Prajadhipok went to England where he abdicated his throne, many members of the royal family were put into prison, royal institutes became "national" and the country was named Thailand in 1939. The Royal Library was changed to the National Library while the Bangkok Museum to the National Museum, Bangkok.

The mission of Phibunsongkhram was not only to transform the old Siam into a modern and civilised country; but to change the uncivilised behaviour of the Siamese to proper "social etiquette and mannerisms" (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995 cited in Esterik, 2000, p.38 and Peleggi, 2007). His twelve *ratthaniyoms* (cultural mandates) between 1939 and 1942 were to achieve these missions. The Thai people had to eat with forks and knives; they had to greet each other using the Thai greeting word "*sawatdi*" that was an analogy to the English greeting word "hello"; husbands had to kiss wives before leaving home for work and women had to wear hat, gloves and stockings. The country had entered into a new epoch. Only with such an etiquette and mannerism, would Thailand gain respect and be renowned worldwide (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995 cited in Esterik, 2000).

Nonetheless, the new country and the new government were still quite unstable. The society was still diversified with ethnic minorities in the northeast and southern parts of the country and the Thai-Chinese bourgeoisie still had a strong influence in the society. Internally, there were conflicts among factions of the party: The conservative civilian faction led by Phraya Manopakorn Nititada; the military faction led by Phraya Phahol, the junior army and navy faction led by Phibunsongkhram and the young civilian faction led by Pridi Banomyong. The most notable conflict was between Phibunsongkhram and Pridi. The co-operation between Phibunsongkhram and Pridi finally dissolved in 1938. All in all,

communism had penetrated into the neighbourhood of Thailand. To unite the Thai people against communism, Phibunsongkhram and Wichit Watthakan realised the importance of continuing the work of King Vajiravudh who was keen in sculpturing and promoting a great Siamese identity. To alert the superiority and uniqueness of Thai culture, they had to re-utilise the ancient civilisation and history of Siam to outcast those “non-Thai” culture and undesirable foreign influence: Mainly communism (Esterik, 2000). To shape this identity, the distinctive scripts and literatures of Isan and Lanna had to be destroyed (Esterik, 2000); Thai-Chinese had to change their names into Thai (Reynolds, 1991); the ancient civilisation of the Sukhothai epoch had to be further endorsed to be the origin of Thai civilisation, and the fall of Sukhothai Kingdom was associated with the adoption of a non-Thai Khmer’s divine kingship and slavery system (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). The cultural works of Wichit Watthakan, *Lueat Suphan (Blood of Suphanburi)* in 1936, *Suk Thailand (Battle of Thalang)* and *Phra Naresuan Prakat Issaraphap (King Naresuan declares independence)* in 1934 were to glorify the martial and freedom-loving nature of the Thai people against external threats. However, instead of centering on the deeds of the ancient Siamese kings, the credits went to the bravery of the common people and that of women. The history of Siam was frequently related to a common non-Thai enemy: Burma. Phibunsongkhram and Wichit Watthakan aimed at building a “Great Thai” tradition. The purpose was to drive away any undesirable non-Thai influences.

The importance of having a resident king for Siam was finally revived in the 1940s. Despite being one of the inaugurators of the 1932 *coup d’etat*, Pridi ironically supported King Ananda Mahidol in the 1940s. In the 1950s, Sarit Thanarat (former Prime Minister of Thailand 1958-1963) upheld that “the King (the Thai king) and the Nation (the Thai nation) are one and indivisible” (cited in Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005, p. 177). Pridi and Sarit echoed King Vajiravudh who stressed the importance of Siam to have a king. Pridi’s aim was to counterbalance his rival, Phibunsongkhram, and Sarit’s intention was to legitimise his political rule for social support and integrity. Since 1980 events related to the Thai king were widely promoted to upkeep the value of the Thai king who brought integrity to Thailand and to promote tourism: The celebration of Rama IX’s 60th birthday in 1987, the celebration of the Thai (Siamese) monarchy as the longest reign monarch worldwide in 1988, the celebration of Rama IX’s Golden Jubilee in 1996, Rama IX’s 70th birthday in 1997, the beginning of the Rama IX’s sixth cycle of reign in 1998 and Rama IX’s 60th years accession to the throne in 2006.

The National Museum, Bangkok after 1934

Based on the historic and cultural chronologies that were defined by Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes, the National Museum, Bangkok continued to function. In 1957, the Fine Arts Department started to further develop the National Museum, Bangkok. The front gate was moved from the front of the Sivamokkhabhiman Hall to its present site; the pavilions and the Buddhaisawan Chapel were repaired; two new wings, the north and the south

were constructed; the Tamnek Daeng (the Red House) was moved from its north west position of the Wang Na (the Front Palace) to its present site and a brick wall was built to separate the museum with the Thammasat University (Yupho, 1968). With the support of the investigation of University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (U.S.A.) into the Ban Chiang site, the exhibits of Ban Chiang relics were further expanded (Pezzati, personal communication, June 12, 2008). The Gallery of Prehistory and the Gallery of Thai History were introduced to the museum in 1967 and 1982 respectively (Chongkol, 1999).

On 25th May, 1967, His Majesty King Bhumibol inaugurated the opening of the two wings and the Gallery of Prehistory. In conjunction with the Bangkok Bicentennial Celebration in 1982, the Gallery of Thai History was opened.

The National Museum, Bangkok, which has occupied the core buildings of the old Wang Na for over 100 years and follows Prince Damrong's and Professor George Coedes' historic and cultural chronology of proto-historic Siam, still functions today. Today, the objectives of the National Museum, Bangkok are:

- a. To disseminate the knowledge of art and archaeology of Thailand through the collections and
- b. To introduce the history of Thailand through its arts and archaeology collections (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008)

The National Museum, Bangkok is a national art, a national archaeology and a national history museum.

Chapter 3

The National Museum, Bangkok today

Owing to the lack of documents, it is difficult to trace the exact coverage of the Wang Na (the Front Palace). Today, the original site of the Wang Na is shared by the National Museum, Bangkok, Thammasat University, the National Theatre and Sanam Luang. The National Museum, Bangkok shares the three core buildings of the Wang Na: The Sivamokkhabhiman Hall, the Buddhaisawan Chapel and the old palace behind the Issarawinitchai Hall (the Throne Hall).

Facing the Thanon Na Phra That is two of the three remaining buildings of the Wang Na. On the left hand side is the Sivamokkhabhiman Hall, which was the audience hall of the Wang Na. On the right hand side is the Buddhaisawan Chapel. This was the private chapel of the Uparaja. Today, the former is transformed into the Gallery of Thai History. The gallery is divided into two main sections. The front section is the Gallery of Prehistoric Thailand and the hall behind is the Hall of Thai History (Proto-history). The Buddhaisawan Chapel still remains a chapel but is open to the passers-by. Behind the Buddhaisawan Chapel is the old palace building. The palace is connected to the Issarawinitchai Hall (the Throne Hall) that is in the front of the palace. Today, the old palace is divided into 13 rooms. The Issarawinitchai Hall is left vacant for temporary or special exhibitions while the 13 rooms are galleries for Thai minor arts objects.

Flanking the old palace are the north and south wings, which were opened in 1966. The two wings mainly exhibit Thai classical art objects that are well-represented by sculptures. The sculptures are basically grouped in accordance with the cultural epochs that were defined by Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes. Today, the National Museum, Bangkok slightly modifies these epochs to the followings periods: Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, Lanna, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin. On the south wing, there is one gallery that groups various Asian Buddha-images together and a gallery that exhibits the relics of the Ban Chiang site and a gallery for Hindu images. On the north wing, there is one gallery that exhibits some commonly used old Thai coins and old Thai banknotes and one gallery for the decorative art objects.

Spread through the site are the Tamnak Daeng (the Red House), the Issaretrachanusorn Hall, the Gallery for the Royal Funeral Chariots and four *salas* (pavilions). The Tamnak Daeng was the living quarter of Princess Sri Sudarak, the elder sister of Rama I. The Issaretrachanusorn Hall was the residence of King Pinklao, the Uparaja of King Mongkut. It was in this hall where he received the American official who was mentioned in the previous chapter. The chariots in the Gallery of the Royal Funeral Chariots are the transportation devices for the funerals of the members of the royal family. The four royal *salas* are: The

Mangkhalaphisek Pavilion, which was originally a part of the palace; the Patihantasanai Pavilion and the Sala Longsong Pavilion, which were moved from the palace of King Varijavudh in Nakhon Pathom Province; and the Samranmukhamat Pavilion, which was a part of the Dusit Palace. At the back of all these buildings is the office building where the office and the library of the museum are (Appendix B).

The history galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok

In 1982, to commemorate the Bangkok Bicentennial Anniversary, the Sivamokkhabhiman Hall was renovated and was transformed into the Gallery of Thai History (Chadavij et al, 2002). The gallery traces the past of Thailand back to the Pleiocene epoch (2,000,000 – 10,000 years ago). Although that there were no evidences of any human relics, ancient tools made of stones were found in several excavation sites in Thailand: Mae Ta at Lampang, Tham Lang and Tham Mor Keaw at Krabi and Spirit Cave at Mae Hong Son (Chadavij et al, 2002). Among all the archaeological sites, the most notable one is the agricultural community at Ban Chiang, Udon Thani (4,300 – 1,800 years ago). Objects of different kinds, particularly the clay pots (figure 2), are exhibited in the Gallery of the Ban Chiang in the south wing to echo the prehistoric development of Thailand.



Figure 2 (Left): The site Ban Chiang is famous for its pottery vessel.

Figure 3 (Middle): The coloured stone beads from the site of Baan Don Ta Phet.

Figure 4 (Right): The metal bracelets and bangles from the site of Baan Don Ta Phet.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The Gallery of Thai History then leads visitors to the origin of the Thai people, who are defined as a group of people “sharing the same culture and language of Thai-Dai” (Chadavij et al, 2002, p. 11). Although the origin of indigenous Thai people is still under research, there is evidence of human activities which scatter all over Thailand since time “immemorial” (Chadavij et al, 2002).

The timeframe of Thailand stretches to the Pleiocene epoch and the time of the origin of the Thai race is not clear. The culture and civilisation of Thailand grew with time. The Gallery of Thai History then brings visitors from the prehistoric to the proto-historic Thailand.

The first proto-historic civilisation that dominated ancient Thailand was the Dvaravati civilisation (7th – 12th century A.D.). The Dvaravati civilisation was then succeeded by the Srivijaya civilisation (8th – 13th century A.D.) and the

Khmer influenced Lopburi civilisation (7th – 13th century A.D.) respectively. Lopburi was one of the provincial capitals of the Khmer kingdom between 7th and 13th century. The term Lopburi civilisation is used to designate Khmer-inspired civilisation in ancient Thailand. Around the 14th century, a group of Thai people under the leadership of Por Khun Pha Muang and Por Khun Bang Klang Hao (later King Sri Indraditya) established the kingdom of Sukhothai. Starting from the Sukhothai epoch, the development of the history of Thailand follows the chronology (Appendix C) and the contributions of some of the Thai kings: King Ramkhamhaeng (reigned 1279?A.D.-1298A.D.) of the Sukhothai epoch invented the Thai writing system; King U-Thong (reigned 1351A.D.-1369A.D.) founded the Ayutthaya Kingdom; King Naresuan (reigned 1590A.D.-1605A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch freed Siam from the Burmese; King Narai (reigned 1656A.D.–1688A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch inaugurated the glory of foreign relation and King Taksin (reigned 1767A.D.–1782A.D.) fought against Burma after the fall of the Ayutthaya epoch.



Figure 5 (Left): The Ramkhamhaeng stele was found at Sukhothai by the then Prince Mongkut.

Figure 6 (Middle): King Naresuan freed the Thai from the Burmese.

Figure 7 (Right): King Narai inaugurated “the glory of foreign relations”.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 8 (Left): Rama I, the founder of the Rattanakosin epoch.

Figure 9 (Middle): King Chulalongkorn, one of the most reputable kings of the Rattanakosin epoch.

Figure 10 (Right): His Majesty King Bhumibol, the reigning king of Thailand.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The gallery then leads visitors to the Chakri kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. The Chakri kings share most of the content of proto-historic Thailand. Among the Chakri kings, considerable spaces are given to illustrate the works of King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh. The proto-historic time of the history of Thailand stops at the reigning king, His Majesty King Bhumibol.

The art galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok

Two types of Thai art are exhibited in the National Museum, Bangkok. The north and south wings flanking the old palace exhibit Thai classical art, and the 13 galleries inside the old palace exhibit mostly Thai minor art.

The classical art in the north and south wing

The Thai classical art in the north and south wings is grouped in accordance with seven cultural epochs and includes the Javanese objects that were gifts to King Chulalongkorn during his visit to Java in 1896. The Hindu art, the Dvaravati art, the Srivijaya art, the Javanese art and the Lopburi art are assigned to the south wing while the Sukhothai art, the Ayutthaya art, the Lanna art and the Rattanakosin art occupy the north wing. The two wings are positioned with the sculptures of the Buddha and Buddhist deities and to a lesser extent Hindu deities.

The *dharmachakra* (the Wheel of Law) of the Dvaravati epoch (figure 11); the bronze Avalokitesvara of the Srivijaya epoch (figure 12); the Vishnu (figure 13) and Shiva of the Lopburi epoch; the Walking Buddha of the Sukhothai epoch (figure 14); the crowned Buddha of the Ayutthaya epoch (figure 15); and the heavily attired Buddha and Brahma of the Rattanakosin epoch (figure 16) symbolise specific handwriting of each cultural epoch.



Figure 11 (Left): The *dharmachakra* was popular among the Mon artists.

Figure 12 (Middle): The sculpture of Srivijayan Avalokitesvara reflects the highly skilled craftsmanship of the Srivijayan artists.

Figure 13 (Right): The sturdy look of the Lopburi's Vishnu contrasts the graceful look of the Srivijayan Avalokitesvara (figure 12).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

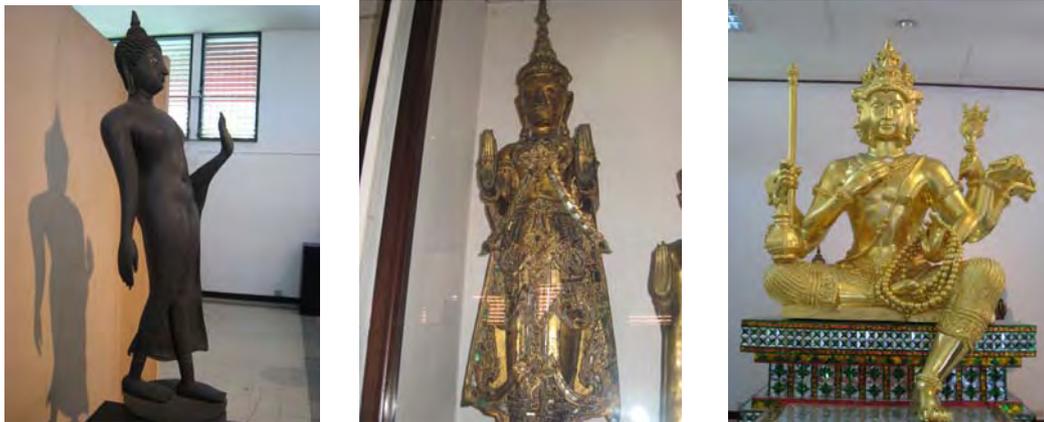


Figure 14 (Left): The Sukhothai Walking Buddha is said to be an innovation of the Sukhothai artists.

Figure 15 (Middle): The Ayutthayan Buddha-image was generally heavily decorated.

Figure 16 (Right): The fully attired Brahma of the Rattanakosin epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The minor art in the central palace building

When comparing with the form of Thai classical art in the south and north wings, the form of Thai minor arts in the 13 galleries of the central palace buildings appear to be far more comprehensive.

a. Muk Krasan Hall (The Hall for Precious objects)

The exit of the Issarawinitchai Hall leads visitors to the Muk Krasan Hall where precious objects made of gems, silver and, particularly gold are exhibited.

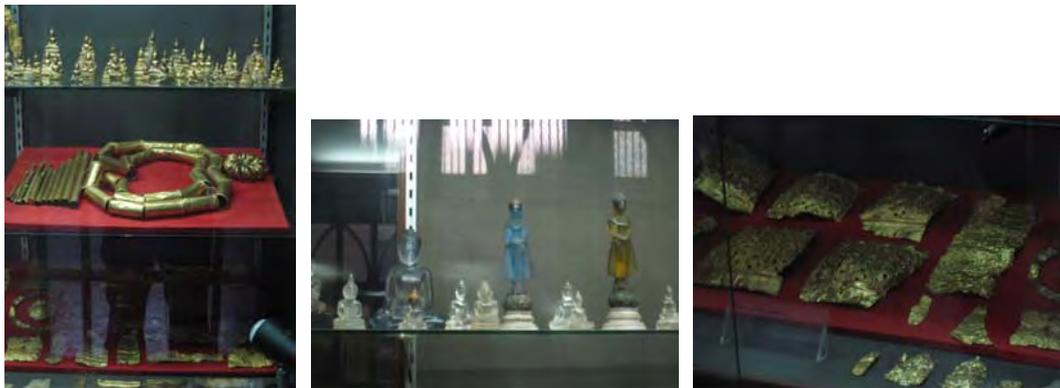


Figure 17 - 19: The precious objects exhibited in the Muk Krasan Hall.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

b. Bhimuk Monthian Hall (The Hall for Old Transportation)

The exit of the Muk Krasan Hall is the entrance of the Bhimuk Monthian Hall, which is the hall for old transportation devices. The hall is occupied with a series of spectacular royal throne, howdah and palanquin.



Figure 20: The Rajenthryan in the Bhimuk Monthian Hall.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The most eye catching pieces are the Rajenthryan (the royal state palanquin) (figure 20), the ivory howdah (figure 21) that was presented to King Chulalongkorn by the Prince of Chiang Mai and the Sawetra Chatra throne (figure 22) that was the throne of King Pinklao.



Figure 21 (Left): The precious ivory howdah.
Figure 22 (Right): The spectacular Sawetra Chatra throne of King Pinklao.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

c. Thaksina Bhimuk Hall (The Hall for Theatre Arts and Games)

On the left hand side of the Bhimuk Monthian Hall is the Thaksina Bhimuk Hall. The hall exhibits a series of theatrical arts. The main objects are puppets: the *nang yai* (shadow puppets) (figure 23), the *hoon luang* (royal puppet), the *hoon lek* (a smaller version of the *hoon luang*) and the *hoon krabork* (rod puppet) (figure 24).



Figure 23 (Left): The *nang yai* showing a female playing the *sor sam sai*, a three-string musical instrument.

Figure 24 (Middle): The *hoon krabork* puppetry show was popular during the King Chulalongkorn period.

Figure 25 (Right): Phra Prot, the leading male character of the *hoon luang*.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

d. Wasantaphiman Hall (The Hall for Ceramics and the Hall for Ivory Products)

Following the exit of the Thaksina Bhimuk Hall, visitors tour the central palace from a loose anticlockwise direction. The hall behind the Thaksina Bhimuk Hall is the Wasantaphiman Hall, a considerably large hall for ceramics. Three most representative Siamese ceramics are the Sangalok (figure 26), the Celadon and the Lai Nam Thong (figure 28). Occasionally, visitor finds old ceramics that were imported from China and Japan (figure 29). On the upper floor of the Hall is the hall for the ivory products (figures 30-32).



Figure 26 (Left): The Sangalok in the Wasantaphiman Hall.

Figure 27 (Right): The Sino-Thai Bencharong.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 28 (Left): The golden background of the Sino-Thai Lai Nam Thong is made of real gold.

Figure 29 (Right): The ancient Chinese ceramics, one of the few Chinese arts in the National Museum, Bangkok.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 30 – 32: The ivory products reflect the skillful craftsmanship.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

e. Pachima Bhimuk Hall (The Hall for Products made of Mother-of-pearl Inlay)

Behind the Wasantaphiman Hall is the Pachima Bhimuk Hall. The products in the hall are mainly receptacles and cabinets. The most fascinating piece is the pulpit presented by the relative of Phrya Vichavichit in 1960 (figure 33).



Figure 33 (Left): The pulpit in mother-of-pearl inlay in the Pachima Bhimuk Hall.

Figure 34 (Right): Mother-of-pearl inlay is commonly used for receptacles.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

f. The Western Mukdet Hall (The Hall for Wood Carvings)

This hall is at the furthest end of the palace. The hall exhibits wooden handicraft objects. Finely crafted wooden products in the form of Kinaree (a mythological bird), sculptures, door panels and pulpits are exhibited in this hall. The most amazing pieces that are highlighted by the *Guidebook of the National Museum Bangkok* are the door panels from Wat Suthat (figure 35) and the circular based pulpit from Wat Khang Khao (figure 36).



Figure 35: The door panels from Wat Suthat. Some of the design was crafted by Rama II. Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 36: The circular base pulpit from Wat Khang Khao in Nonthaburi Province. Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

g. Phrommet Thada Hall (The Hall for Costumes and Textiles)

Passing the Prasadang Bhimuk Hall (the Hall for Old Weapons) that is in front of the Western Mukdet Hall is the Phrommet Thada Hall. Nevertheless, in most of the months in 2008, the hall was closed because the objects were loaned for an exchange exhibition. In accordance with the *Guidebook of the National Museum* and other publications of the museum, the objects are mainly court textiles. They include imported silk from China and India and Sompak (Cambodia silk *ikat*) that were used for the uniforms of the officials. The upper floor is the hall for Buddhist religious articles.



Figure 37 – 38: Precious textiles that were mainly for the royalty.
Source: Chongkol, C. (1999). *Guide to the National Museum Bangkok* (4th ed.).
Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department.

h. Wayusathan Amares Hall (The Hall for Royal Emblems and Insignia)

Going out of the Phrommet Thada Hall, visitors enter the Burapha Bhimuk Hall where a series of traditional Thai musical instrument are exhibited. From the Burapha Bhimuk Hall, visitors then return to the Bhimuk Monthian Hall. Opposite to the Bhimuk Monthian Hall is the Wayusathan Amares Hall. Visitors have to climb several steps and to take off their shoes before entering the hall. These indicate the sacredness of this hall, which exhibits the royal emblems and insignia. These objects are mostly royal treasures. The treasures are mainly those excavated objects from Wat Rachaburana and Wat Si Samphet in Ayutthaya. Apart from gold Buddha-images and gold plaques, many of these treasures are royal ornaments and accessories: rings, bracelets, armlets and necklaces.



Figure 39 (Left) and Figure 40 (Middle): The gold objects at the Wayusathan Amares Hall.

Figure 41 (Right): The seven tiered royal umbrella for the queens.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

i. The gallery for decorative art in the north wing

In one corner of the North Wing is a gallery where a series of minor arts in Lai Nam Rot (lacquer) products, nielloware, silverware and mother-of-pearl are exhibited.



Figure 42 (Left): Nielloware is a common diplomatic gift of the Thai royalty.

Figure 43 (Middle): The fully decorated Buddha is considered a piece of decorative art by the National Museum, Bangkok.

Figure 44 (Right): A gold-gilded Lai Nam Rot cabinet.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Gallery for the Royal Funeral Chariots

Located on a separate building that is behind the Buddhaisawan Chapel is the Gallery for the Royal Funeral Chariots. The chariots are to carry the remains of the deceased member of the royal family and the Supreme Patriarch. These chariots are normally heavily carved with figures from the Hindu mythology. These figures are to protect the occupant from harm and to symbolise their semi-divine status (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). Among all the chariots, the most famous one is the Phra Maha Phichairotcharot (the Royal Great Victory Chariot) which was built under the command of Rama I for his deceased father (figure 45).



Figure 45: The fully decorated Phra Maha Phichairotcharot.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 46 (Left): The sandalwood urn of Her Royal Highness, the Princess Mother.
 Figure 47 (Right): The sandalwood urn of Queen Rambhai Bharni of King Prajadhipok.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The Buddhaisawan Chapel

The Buddhaisawan Chapel was built in 1795 (Lyons, n.d.) or in 1787 (Cary, 1994). It was a private chapel for the second king. The most amazing features of the temple are the Buddha Sihing image and the mural that are drawn on the inner walls of the temple (figure 48 – 50). The Buddha Sihing image was originated from Ceylon and reached Nakhon Sri Thammarat in the 13th century (Lyons, n.d. and McGill, 2005). After years of travelling around the cities of Ayutthaya, Kampengpet, Chiang Rai, Chieng Saen and Chiang Mai, the image was brought to Bangkok. The Buddhaisawan Chapel was built to house the image (Lyons, n.d.).

The mural was executed between 1795 and 1797 (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The panels between the windows tell the Jatarka of Buddha. Above the windows are rows of celestial deities and celestial beings. The celestial beings on the very top are chasing each other (Lyons, n.d.) while those deities below them are kneeling and paying respect to the Buddha Sihing image (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The mural is highly praised for its artistic achievements in the use of delicate lines, the minute details, the space and the lush of colours (Lyons, n.d.). The mural is said to set the “standard for future works, few of which surpassed their model” (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000, p. 186).



Figure 48: Rows of celestial deities and celestial beings on the mural inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon



Figure 49 – 50: Murals inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel illustrate the Jatarka of the Buddha.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The archaeology galleries of the National Museum, Bangkok

The sculptures in the two wings, the Prehistoric Gallery of Thai History and the Ban Chiang Gallery in the south wing tell the prehistoric and proto-historic archaeology of the Thailand.

The main archaeological objects are sculptures of the Buddha. Nonetheless, the outlook of the Buddha has undergone severe changes throughout all these cultural epochs.

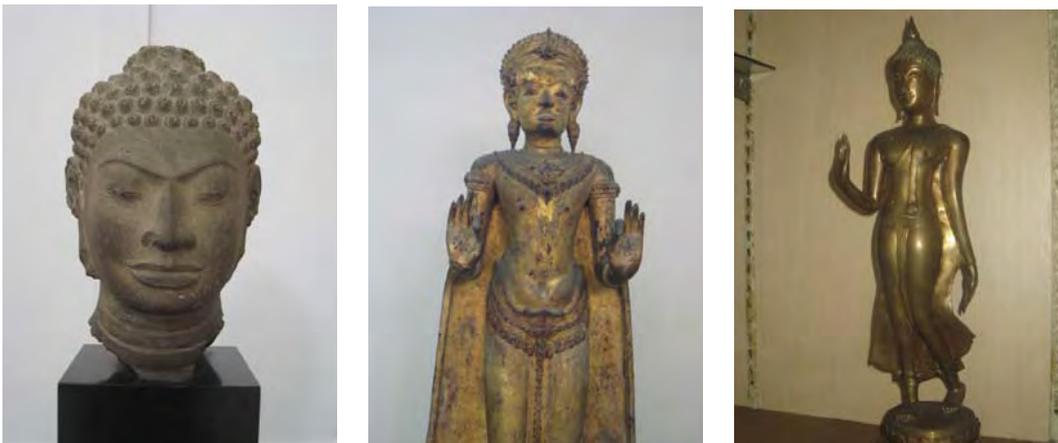


Figure 51 (Left): The look of Dvaravati epoch's Buddha was influenced by Gupta art.

Figure 52 (Middle): The Buddha looks very guarded during the Lopburi epoch.

Figure 53 (Right): The body shape of the Buddha became supernatural during the Sukhothai epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

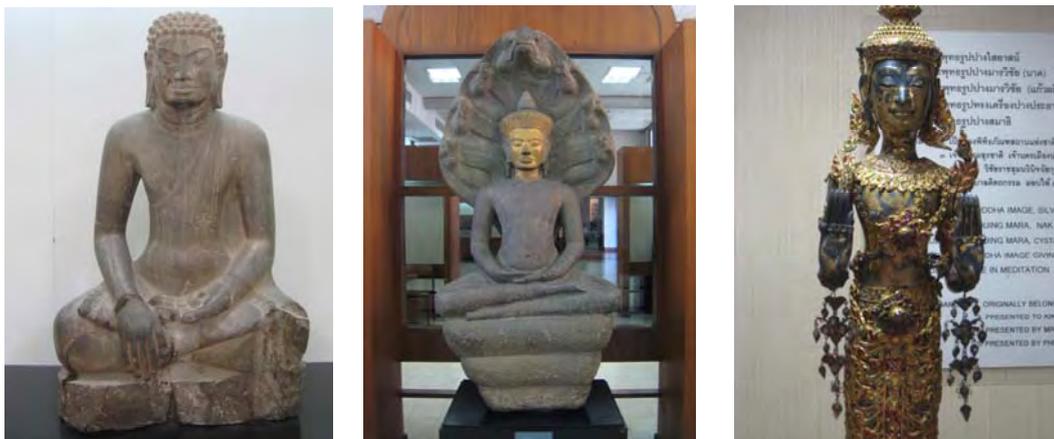


Figure 54 (Left): The Buddha was a preacher in the Dvaravati epoch.
 Figure 55 (Middle): The Buddha became a king in the Lopburi epoch.
 Figure 56 (Right): The Buddha was bejeweled during the Rattanakosin epoch.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Throughout these cultural epochs, the Buddha bears different face and body features: The Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch bears a very strong Indian Gupta influence (figure 51); the Buddha looks very guarded during the Lopburi epoch (figure 52); the Buddha has a supernatural body shape in the Sukhothai epoch (figure 53). Apart from bearing different face and body features, the Buddha is dressed in the different attires throughout these cultural epochs: The Buddha-image in the Dvaravati epoch was plainly dressed (figure 54); the Buddha in the Lopburi epoch was crowned (figure 55) and the Buddha in the Rattanakosin epoch was bejeweled (figure 56). Buddha-images are mixed with Hindu deities and Hindu creatures. These sculptures are not purely sculptures. They bear different philosophical meanings. This philosophical implication will be discussed in the chapter of the National Museum, Bangkok as a national archaeology museum.

The National Museum, Bangkok Today

Since the introduction of the museum concept to Thailand to the renaming of the Bangkok Museum to the National Museum, Bangkok, the evolution of the National Museum, Bangkok bore a very strong patriotic and political implications. Between 1917 and 1921, based on the geo-political boundaries of those civilisations that once dominated proto-historic Thailand, Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes outlined the cultural chronology of proto-historic Thailand into seven epochs: Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, Chiang Saen, Sukhothai, U-Thong and Ayutthaya (Peleggi, 2002 and 2007 and Cary, 1994). Prince Damrong further added Rattanakosin into this chronology making a total of eight epochs. The Sukhothai epoch was regarded as the emanation of Thai history. Despite being accused of attempting to build a Thai Empire by some scholars, the National Museum, Bangkok inherited these cultural and historic demarcations as the basic principles that guide the array of its contents.

The objectives of the National Museum, Bangkok today are to disseminate the knowledge of art, archaeology and history of Thailand to visitors. To echo the comments of Peleggi (2007) on the political implication of Thai museums, does

the National Museum, Bangkok still bear this political burden? What types of Thai art, Thai archaeology and Thai history knowledge does the National Museum, Bangkok try to disseminate to visitors? Do these knowledge reflect the current time and space of Thailand? To what extent does the museum need to strengthen or re-design the contents? Part Two of this dissertation will unfold these questions by analysing the exhibition contents of the National Museum, Bangkok.

Part 2

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum, a national archaeology museum and a national history museum

Art is a process and the use of techniques to achieve a standard of excellence (Boas, 1927, cited in the Musee du Quai Branly). Archaeology is the study of prehistoric and historic culture that is reflected in the relics (*What is Archaeology?* n.d.). From the relics, we are able to understand or to infer ancient practices. History is to study the relationship of time to space or vice versa.

The National Museum, Bangkok exhibits two main types of Thai art: classical art and minor art. Thai classical art is religious art. In the National Museum, Bangkok, Thai classical art is mostly limited to a series of splendid religious sculptures, while Thai minor art is a range of objects mainly related to delicate craftsmanship and precious material. Art is an expression of excellence. It can be related to aestheticism, emotional appeal and diverse ranges of human activities. Although there are other major forms of Thai classical art that are able to express this standard of excellence, the museum limits the classical art form mainly to sculptures. Thai minor art is associated with the Thai society and is able to reflect the cultural legacy of the time (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Nonetheless, the minor art objects at the museum only illustrate the standard of excellence that is related to the court. They are not for the consumption of common people. They are to arouse the admiration of the Thai people to the Thai kings.

The excavation of pre-historic Ban Chiang artifacts evidences the presence of an age-old civilisation in ancient Thailand. The National Museum, Bangkok traces the history of the Thai race that inhabited in the Thai soil to “the time of immemorial” (Chadavij et al, 2002, p. 24). The museum refers the Sukhothai epoch of the 14th century as the first kingdom of the Thai people. Infilling this big gap of time between immemorial and the Sukhothai epoch, various civilisations emerged and submerged. Despite the fact that these cultures mixed and influenced one another till today, they are referred to as “foreign cultures” by the museum (Chadavij et al, 2002). The National Museum, Bangkok as an archaeology museum evokes a time and space for the moulding of a unique Thai.

One of the missions of the Thai Ministry of Culture is “to promote national religions, art and culture and serves the requirement for major tasks of the country, religion and the monarchy, fostering sustainable propagation and development” (Chitrabongs, 2004). The trinity concept of “nation, religion and king” forms the basic institution to understand Thai identity and the Thai society. To understand the history of Thailand is to understand the contexts of these elements. Nonetheless, the National Museum, Bangkok as a history museum is to

honour the Thai kings. The museum presents the history of Thailand that focuses mainly on the context of the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. It is a national history museum dedicated to the kings, mainly the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch.

Chapter 4

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum

Thai classical art

Thai classical art is associated with religion. This is Buddhist art. This art was made for three-fold purposes.

- a. To represent great calm and spirit (Pemberton, 2002), and are the medium for meditation through which Buddhists reach the realm of *nirvana* (the realm of truth, of absolute freedom or liberation) (Hemenway, 2003).
- b. To serve as the teachings of the Buddha and objects of devotion (Pemberton, 2002) and
- c. To be the means through which the authors, the makers or the donors of the art accumulate merits (Michaelson and Portal, 2006).

Owing to the fact that the Buddha's disapproval of image worship, Buddhist art first appeared in symbolic forms that represent the Buddha and his activities, particularly his teachings. The *dhammachakra* (the Wheel of Law) (figure 57) symbolises the teachings of the Buddha and his first sermon in Sarnath, and the footprint of the Buddha symbolises his presence in a particular spot. These are the most common symbols that bridge the Buddha with his followers.

Buddhism in Asia flourishes both in space and time. Countries where Theravada Buddhism flourished emphasise on the life and deeds of Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha, while those countries where Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism dominated nourish the Avalokitesvara, the five Dhyana (mediating) Buddha and Adibuddha, the Supreme Buddha. Countries that are influenced or once influenced by Hinduism mix Buddhism and Hinduism together. Throughout the path of time, Buddha-images have undergone several transformations: From symbols into the Buddha as a preacher and from the preacher into the Buddha as a sacred lord. The first Buddha-image was said to be created in India 2000 years ago (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000) on the coins of King Kanishka who reigned between 78A.D.–144 A.D. (Sashibala, 2003).

3.2 Main form of classical art in the National Museum, Bangkok

The form of classical art exhibited in the National Museum, Bangkok is sculpture. The galleries of the north and south wings are positioned with statues, bas-reliefs, busts and votive tablets of various sizes and in various materials. Sculptures in bronze, clay, terra cotta or stone, dominate the exhibitions of the National Museum, Bangkok. From the western art perspective, sculptures are considered an elite form of art (Michaelson and Portal, 2006). From the French art perspective, sculptures are a yardstick to measure the cultural achievement of a country (Peliggi, 2007 and Cary, 1994). It was based on these preconception and

perception that Professor George Coedes, the French archaeologist and historian who worked together with Prince Damrong to restructure the Royal Museum in 1926, evaluated the art of Siam. He considered sculptures as the pre-eminent artifacts for the museum. Although the National Museum, Bangkok has stopped collecting sculptures since the period of Rama VIII, sculptures still remain the main exhibits of the museum (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008).

Specific features of the sculptures in the National Museum, Bangkok

Under the classification of Professor George Coedes and Prince Damrong, the classical art history of Thailand was divided into eight cultural epochs: Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, U-Thong, Chiang Saen, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin. The National Museum, Bangkok today slightly modified the chronology into seven epochs by combining the U-Thong and epoch with the Ayutthaya epoch and added the Javanese sculptures into the exhibits. Although the handwriting of these sculptures being influenced and mixed with one another, sculptures of different epochs bear specific features.

Dvaravati Art

The *dharmachakra* is the most popular theme for the Mon artists (figure 57). The Mon artists were the first artists in the region to create the image of “the Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (a serpent deity)”. Instead of following traditional Indian Buddha-images of having one hand to perform the *vitarka* (preaching) *mudra*, the Mon artists created a standing Buddha-image with both hands performing the *vitarka mudra* (figure 58) (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000, National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987 and Lyons, n.d.). Under the imagination of the Dvaravati artists, the Buddha had a wide face, a flat nose, a thick and bulged lips and a pair of eyebrow connected at the ridge (figure 59) (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000, National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987 and Lyons, n.d.).

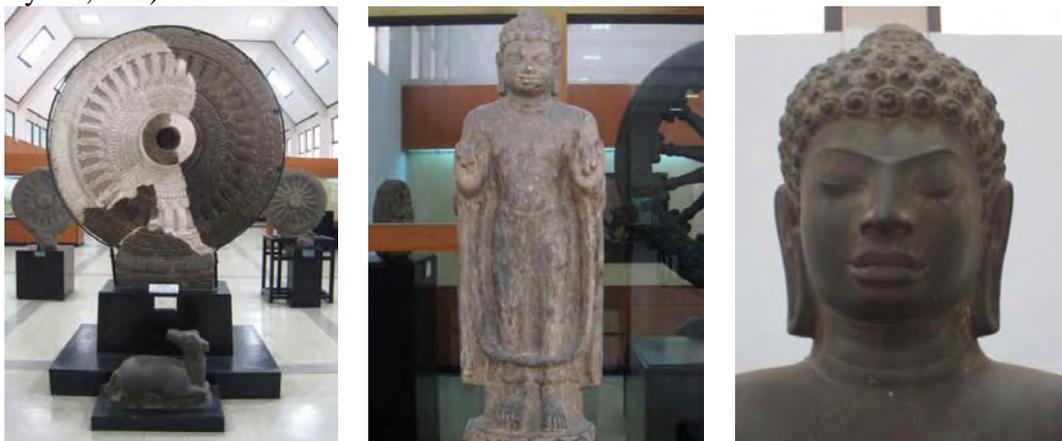


Figure 57 (Left): The *dharmachakra* was the most popular theme of the Mon artists.

Figure 58 (Middle): The standing Buddha with two hands performing the *vitarka mudra* was a creation of the Mon artists.

Figure 59 (Right): The face features of the Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Srivijaya Art

Srivijaya art was originated from the Indonesia (Lyons, n.d., National Museum Volunteer Group, 1987 and Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The Srivijayan artists were particularly fond of sculpturing Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. They were extremely good with bronze and stone material. The bronze sculptures of the Srivijaya epoch marked an era of new height for bronze sculptures in the region. The stone sculptures of the Srivijaya epoch was regarded as the finest stone sculptures the region ever produced (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).



Figure 60 (Left): The graceful Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara of the Srivijaya epoch.

Figure 61 (Right): The Srivijaya's Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara bears a full cheek and a fully decorated body.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Lopburi Art

The Khmer artists were adept at making big and tall bronze sculptures with height up to 3.3 meters tall. Buddha-images and Hindu images frequently co-existed. Buddha-images had undergone obvious changes in the Lopburi epoch.



Figure 62 (Left): The Khmer style Shiva appears very sturdy and guarded.

Figure 63 (Middle): Under the Khmer artists, the Buddha had become a king.

Figure 64 (Right): Towards the end of the Lopburi epoch the Buddha was a preacher again.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Under the Angorian influence the Lopburi artists the Buddha a king. Towards the end of the Khmer influenced Lopburi epoch, the Buddha became very subtle. Despite the changes of the attire of Buddha-images in the Lopburi period, these images share some similar features: the thin band along the hairline, the prominent *ushnisha* (the cranial protuberance) and the almond shaped eyes.

Sukhothai Art

Buddha-images had a new outlook during the Sukhothai epoch. The face of the Buddha was elongated and become oval. The hair line along his forehead formed a widow's peak (figure 65). His nose was slightly hooked. The Buddha had a surrealistic figure. He had very wide shoulders, a pair of extremely long arms that end at the knee level and is as thick as the trunk of an elephant. A flame projected out from his *ushnisha* (the cranial protuberance) (figure 66). Instead of sitting, standing or reclining, the Buddha walked while preaching. The line of the Buddha body flows so gracefully and rhythmically that the sculptures of Sukhothai are considered an apogee of Thai art (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).



Figure 65: The face of the Buddha was oval during the Sukhothai epoch.

Figure 66: The “Sukhothai” flame protrudes from the *ushnisha* of the Buddha.

Figure 67: The famous Sukhothai Walking Buddha.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Lanna Art

Lanna art is an integration of the art of India, Khmer and Sukhothai. The Indian Pala influence is expressed in its arched eyebrow, contour lips and exalted expression (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The Khmer influence is in its almond-shaped eyes (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The Sukhothai flame still burns on top of the *ushnisha* of the Buddha. All in all, under the imagination of the Lanna artists, the Buddha wore thick curly spiky hair, had an extremely wide shoulder and a very slim waist (figure 68, 69 and 70).

Ayutthaya Art

The Ayutthaya artists were particularly interested in sculpturing the footprints of the Buddha. The footprints symbolise the presence of the Buddha in ancient Thailand. It is said that the Buddha left his footprint at Saraburi in Thailand (Reynolds, 1991). The main characteristic of the footprint is the

inscription of a wheel where the 108 auspicious signs rest. The art of early Ayutthaya is influenced by the U-Thong art (National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). Even though the U-Thong art is normally divided into three phases with period A between 12th and 13th centuries, period B between 13th and 14th centuries and C between 13th and 15th centuries, Buddha-images in these three periods share common features that are well expressed in the Khmer influenced thin headband, the small spiky curly hair and the seated *asana*.

Following the remote nature of Buddha-images of the Khmer epoch, Buddha-images of the Ayutthaya period became even more remote. The images were very heavily decorated, particularly during the late Ayutthaya period. The Buddha was crowned and was adorned with jewels, bracelets, armlets, anklets and rings. The robe of the Buddha was heavily embroidered and bedecked with jewels (figure 71). The Buddha had transformed into a divine king in the Ayutthaya epoch (figure 72).



Figure 68 (Left): The Buddha's face of the Lanna epoch reflects Indian Pala art influence. Figure 69 (Middle): The flame that protrudes from the *ushnisha* reflects Sukhothai art influence.

Figure 70 (Right): The Lanna's Buddha bears a very wide shoulder and a tiny waist.



Figure 71 (Left): Buddha-image was heavily decorated during the Ayutthaya epoch.

Figure 72 (Right): The Buddha became a divine king in the Ayutthaya epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Rattanakosin Art

During the early Rattanakosin epoch, Rama I (1782A.D.-1809A.D.) and Rama II (1809A.D.-1824A.D.) intended to re-install the essence of Ayutthaya to Bangkok. Altogether 1200 Buddha-images were installed in Bangkok from Ayutthaya (National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). Buddha-images of the early Rattanakosin epoch were even more elaborated than the already exaggerated Ayutthaya style. They were so heavily ornamented that the motivation of making the images was not for the sake of religion anymore (National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). King Mongkut (1851A.D.-1868A.D.) purified and rationalised Theravada Buddhism. He asked artists to take away those unnecessary ornamentations and surrealistic elements of Buddha-images. The westernisation programmes of King Chulalongkorn had installed some western elements into Buddha-images. The Buddha wore western hairstyle and a Roman toga (figure 73).



Figure 73 (Left): The western look of the Buddha during the King Chulalongkorn period. Figure 74 (Right): This heavily decorated Buddha is exhibited in the gallery of decorative art instead.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Common features of these Buddha-images

The appeal and the outlook of the Buddha has undergone several changes in different epochs, nevertheless, Buddha-images still bear some common characteristics:

a. Physicality of the Buddha

The body of the Buddha is always very fluid, round and without any indication of bone and muscle (Kossack & Lerner 2004). In fact, the physicality of the Buddha is fixed by the Pala *lakshana* that indicates the Buddha as a Great Being. The *lakshana* mentions 32 major and 80 minor features of the Buddha (Kossack & Learner, 2004). The most common features are the *ushnisha* that indicates his wisdom and intellect, the short curly hair that indicates his renunciation of worldliness and the long ear lobes that mark his nobleness (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000 and Pemberton, 2002).

b. *Asanas* of the Buddha

The meditating Buddha in full lotus or half lotus *asana* indicates his stillness and great calm. The standing Buddha indicates that the Buddha is in action and the reclining Buddha signifies his death to *nirvana* (Pemberton, 2002).

c. *Mudras* (hand gestures)

The *vitarka mudra* is the gesture for preaching or argument. The *varada mudra* is the gesture for bestowing charity. The *bhumispara mudra* is the gesture asking the earth to be his witness. The *dhammachakra mudra* sets the wheel of law in action. The *dhyani* or *samadhi mudra* is the gesture for meditation and the *abhaya mudra* is for dispelling fear (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000) (Appendix D).

d. Facial expression

The Buddha's facial expression is always calm and peaceful. His eyes are either closed or half-closed. He always wears a faint smile (Pemberton, 2002 and National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987).

Other forms of Thai classical art

Thai classical art is visual *dhamma* (Shashibala, 2003). In the British Museum (U.K.) and the Musee Guimet (France), Buddhist art is the main range of Asian arts exhibited. The Buddhist art collections of these two museums are considered the most reputable and diversified in the world. Nonetheless, these collections are exhibited not purely for the appreciation of their aestheticism. For the British Museum, they are for the appreciation of the philosophy of Buddhism (Pemberton, 2002). For the Musee Guimet, the arts are for the appreciation and understanding of the cultural diversities in Asia (Prigent, 2004). Aestheticism is merely a side product of the art. Owing to the personal preferences of Professor George Coedes and Prince Damrong and the difficulty of moving other forms of Thai classical art, sculptures hence become the represented classical art in the National Museum, Bangkok. Nonetheless, Thai classical art is expressed in several forms that are commonly found in Thailand.

Wats

A *wat* is a collection of buildings for the practice of religion. A *wat* is mainly composed of six buildings, which consist of a *bot* (a building for ordination), a *ho trai* (a library), a *vihan* (a general assembly hall that houses the main image), a *sala* (a pavilion), a *kuti* (the monk's dormitory), and a *ho rakang* (the bell tower) (Lyons, n.d.). Very seldom is the interior of these buildings heavily decorated. The internal arrangement of these buildings normally follows the traditional textural source or ritual needs (Shashibala, 2003). The interior decoration of these buildings, particularly the *bot* and the *vihan* are normally restricted to murals and painted pillars. The area where extensive work of art lays is mainly on the exterior of the *bot* and the *vihan*: The window shutter and the door, the *naa baan* (pediment) and the *chofa* (finial).

a. Window shutter and door

The finely decorated door of the *bot* and *vihan* separates the sacred world from the secular world (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The decorative works on the door are expressed in the form of relief or carving, inset with mirror tiles or mother-of-pearl, or covered with gold leaf or gilded lacquer. The themes of the decoration vary from guarding *devas*, angels or even *farangs* (foreigners) to mythical creatures, flora and the Jatarka of the Buddha. The use of celestial guardians was popular in the Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya epoch. In the middle of the Ayutthaya epoch, mythical animals were commonly used for the decoration of the doors and window shutters.

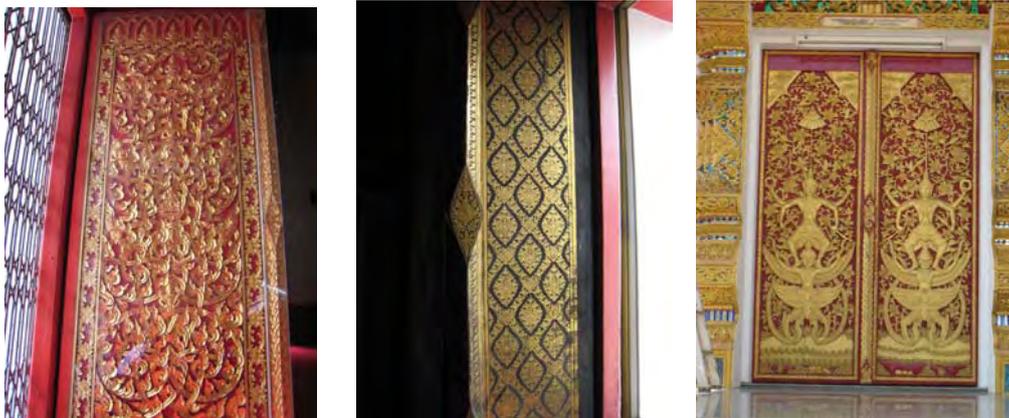


Figure 75 (Left): The carved door panel of Wat Mongkhon Bophit, Ayutthaya.

Figure 76 (Middle): The gilded lacquer window shutter of Wat Panan Choeng, Ayutthaya.

Figure 77 (Right): The carved door panel of Wat Doi Khem, Chiang Mai.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

b. *Naa Baan*

The *naa baan* of the *bot* and *vihan* bears the most elaborate art work. The *naa baan* of the Buddhaisawan Chapel illustrates three golden Brahmas against a cobalt blue background (figure 83). This *naa baan* design is just a drop of the very rich and diversified themes of the *naa baan* in Thailand. The themes can be a mixture of various religious figures. It can also be floral themes or it can be the story of the Ramakian.



Figure 78: The highly decorated *naa baan* of a building of Wat Na Phramane, Ayutthaya.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon



Figure 79 (Left): The *naa baan* of a building of Wat Panan Choeng, Ayutthaya.
 Figure 80 (Right): The very rich and eye catching *naa baan* of a building of Wat Don Jan, Chiang Mai.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

c. *Chofa*

The decoration on the *chofa* is one of the most distinctive features of royal and religious buildings (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The most common figure is either the Garuda (the travelling device of Vishnu) or the Hamsa (the travelling device of Brahma) resting and waiting for their masters on the *chofa*. On some rare occasions, the image of Naga (a serpent deity) occupies the *chofa* as well.

The Buddhaisawan Chapel inside the National Museum, Bangkok is a fine piece of example that illustrates these dedicated craftsmanship and fabulous design. The window shutters are wooden panels of gold gilded Lai Nam Rot (laquer) (figure 81). The theme of the design is nature: flora and birds. The inner doors of the chapel depict two guarding angles standing against a crimson red Lai Nam Rot (figure 82). The pediments on both front and back of the chapel feature three images of Brahma. Hamsa, his travelling device is resting on the *chofa* waiting for the call of his master.



Figure 81 (Left): The gold gilded Lai Nam Rot window shutter.
 Figure 82 (Middle): The paintings on the back door of the Buddhaisawan Chapel.
 Figure 83 (Right): The *naa baan* of the Buddhaisawan Chapel.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Stupas

The word *stupa* originates from Sanskrit (Lyons and Peters, 1985). *Stupas* trace its origin to pre-Buddhist India where they were built for the Chakravatin (the universal monarch) (Shashibala, 2003). The first known *stupa* was built by Trapusha and Bhalika. Trapusha and Bhalika requested the Buddha to give them some relics to worship in his absence. The Buddha cut his nails and some of his hair. He passed the nails and hair to them and asked them to build *stupas* to enshrine them. Trapusha and Bhalika then built a *stupa* at Keshasthalin for the hair and at Valuksha for the nails (Shashibala, 2003).

Basically, there are three main types of *stupa*:

a. Reliquary *stupa*

After the conversion of the Indian King Ashoka (reigned 273B.C.-232B.C.) into Buddhism, he recovered the relics of the Buddha. He sent the relics to 84,000 sacred places and built *stupas* to enshrine them (Shashibala, 2003). One of the earliest records of *stupa* in Thailand is found on the stone stele of King Ramkhamhaeng (1279?-1298). The stele recorded King Ramkhamhaeng holding a ceremony to commemorate the enshrining of the relic of the Buddha in a *stupa* that was located in Si Sarchanalai (McGill, 2005). *Stupas* of this nature also enshrine the ashes of the enlightened one (Shashibala, 2003).

b. Memorial *stupa*

The memorial *stupa* was built in specific spots to commemorate those important events of the Buddha: In Bodhagaya where the Buddha was enlightened; in Sarnath where the Buddha delivered his first sermon and in Vaishali where he was offered a bowl of honey by a monkey (Shashibala, 2003).

c. Votive *stupa*

Votive *stupas* are built with donations of donors. The purpose of the donors is to accumulate merits (Shilashibala, 2003).

Apart from these three types, Prince Damrong added another type of *stupa*: *Stupa* to store the relics of the Siamese king and his family. In accordance to Prince Damrong, owing to the divine nature of the Siamese king as a Boddhisattva or a Buddha-to-be, the relics of the king and his family had to be stored in a *stupa*. This practice is said to have started since the Sukhothai epoch (McGill, 2005). The *stupa* in Wat Phra Si Sanphet was said to store the relics of King Boromtrailokkanat and his son (McGill, 2005).

The form of the *stupa* varies from place to place. It might be in the form of a dome, a tower, a pyramid or a bell (Shalabala, 2003, Pemberton, 2002 and McGill, 2005). Bell-shaped *stupas* are widely found in Thailand. Although the origin of the bell shaped *stupa* is still debatable, it is believed that the bell-shaped *stupa* was adopted mostly from Burma during the Sukhothai epoch (McGill, 2005). *Stupas* bear different names in different places. In Burma and Thailand, *stupas* are called *chedi*, in China *stupas* are named pagoda, and in Tibet *stupas* are referred as *chorten* (Pemberton, 2002).

A *stupa* mainly consists of four main components: A body, a *harmika*, a central axis and a pinnacle.

a. The body

The body of a *stupa* can be in various shapes: A dome, a grain, an egg or a bell (Shashibala, 2003 and McGill, 2005). It is a mediator between the base and the crown and is the most important constituent of a *stupa* (Shashibala, 2003).

b. The *harmika*

It is an altar that summits the top of the body. It symbolises a sanctuary beyond death and rebirth. The *harmika* in Tibet and Nepal is often painted with eyes that resemble the Buddha meditating.

c. The central axis

The central axis is mostly made of wood. It represents stability (Shashibala, 2003). In most part of Asia, the axis often supports a parasol that resembles royalty (Shashibala, 2003). A *stupa* with a parasol on top of it implies the royal nature of the *stupa* (Shashibala, 2003).

d. The pinnacle

The pinnacle is often topped with a vase that symbolises “the plentitude of an enlightened mind” or a jewel that signifies “the elemental ether” (Shashibala, 2003, p. 22).

The base of the bell-shaped *stupa* varies in shape. Some are built on high tiered octagonal base while some on a square base. Some square bases have indentations or multi-indentations at the corners. Some are relatively small and bear elaborated decoration.



Figure 84 (Left): Chedi Phu Khao Thong, Ayutthaya.

Figure 85 (Middle): Chedi Si Suriyothai, Ayutthaya.

Figure 86 (Right): *Chedi* at Wat Chaiyamongkhon, Ayutthaya.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Murals

The *Vinaya Pitake* of the *Tripitaka* narrates an incident that the Buddha rebuked the monks of the Jetavana, a nine-story monastery constructed by

Anathapindada, for not taking good care of the murals inside the monastery (Shashibala, 2003). Hence, taking care of murals becomes one of the monastic disciplines. Unfortunately, today many murals in Thailand are destroyed. Only a few of the murals from the Ayutthaya and the Rattanakosin epoch still survive. The dampness of the air in Thailand makes it difficult for the tempera paint that is commonly used for painting murals to adhere to the wall, the penetration of the rain water from roofs and walls gradually dissolve and wash off the water-soluble paint. Over years, some of the murals were repainted and renovated to such an extent that the original context of the work becomes quite blur.

Murals are mainly related to Buddhist teachings and merit making. The excavation of a mural inside the tower of a small crypt of Wat Ratchaburana, Ayutthaya in 1957 added another function of this form of Buddhist art. As this mural is deliberately hidden from the access of people, some scholars inferred that one additional function of murals is to enhance the sacredness of the site (McGill, 2005).

Different from western art, Thai mural painting is essentially in two dimensions. The murals are painted without any perspective or light and shadow effect. The themes of the murals are often associated with the teachings of the Buddha (Lyons, n.d.). They are to instruct and guide the viewers of religious lessons. Through the lessons on the murals, viewers are able to tread through the entrance of *dhamma* (Shashibala, 2003). Hence, murals have to be easily understood by viewers of all levels. The themes of the murals are mainly about the Jatarka (the previous lives of the Buddha), the Buddhist cosmology (heaven, earth and hell), the Tosachat (the story of the Buddha), the Lokyasanthan (the stories of the Buddhist world) and Ramakian (Lyons, n.d.). Occasionally several themes occur on the same mural simultaneously; but they are not in consecutive sequences. Hence a house or a river might serve as the background for several themes.

The earliest mural in Thailand is believed to be the mural that illustrates a fading Buddha in Yala during the Srivijaya epoch between 10th and 13th centuries (Lyons, n.d.). As of today, very few murals from the Sukhothai epoch survived. The mural inside the *chedi* of Wat Chedi Jet Thaew in Si Satchanaai is believed to be the earliest mural of the Sukhothai epoch (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000 and Lyons, n.d.). Compared with the mural of the Ayutthaya epoch, the Sukhothai mural appears to be quite simple. The figure mostly drawn is the Buddha or the Buddha accompanied by a group of disciples or deities. The open space between the figures is either left empty or specked with lotus or floral motif (Lyons, n.d.).

Despite the devastating war between Siam and Burma during the Ayutthaya epoch, some of the murals during the Ayutthaya epoch still survive today. Different from murals of the Lanna epoch that use strong bright colours for the figures, the figures of the Ayutthaya murals are normally painted with colours in light hue. Contradict to the motionless figures of the Sukhothai murals, the figures of the Ayutthaya murals depict movements. Elizabeth Lyons (n.d.)

explained that the reason that these figures were drawn with movement was mostly influenced by the *nang* (the shadow play) that was popular during the Ayutthaya epoch. The *nang* was marked with its rich prop backgrounds of palace, forests and mountains, and sumptuous poses of the *nang* figures (Lyons, n.d.).

The relatively long span of peace of the Rattanakosin epoch enabled the Bangkok artists to look for new themes for the paintings. Religious stories still remain the main theme for the murals but only to be added with celestial beings and demons, the mythical creatures of the cosmology of Buddhism, and even *nang* and the *khon* (the masked play). Despite the murals still being drawn on two perspectives, the new varieties of paints that were imported from China enabled these artists to use more vibrant colours, particularly gold for the body of the Buddha and red for his robe. These colours stand outstandingly on a relatively dark background. It was only during the King Mongkut period that murals began to adapt light and shade effects.

Many murals of the Rattanakosin epoch still survive today. The murals inside the Ratchakoramanson Pavilion and the Ratchaphongsanuson Pavilion of Wat Phra Kaew and the murals inside the buildings of Wat Benjamabopit and Wat Raja Oros in Thonburi are still in good conditions. Nonetheless, the mural of the Buddhaisawai Chapel of the National Museum, Bangkok is considered a masterpiece which no other murals could surpass (figures 48-50 in chapter two) (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).



Figure 87 (Left): The Chinese theme of a mural inside a building of Wat Panan Cheong, Ayutthaya.



Figure 88 (Right): A traditional Buddhist theme that is drawn on the mural inside a building of Wat Don Jan, Chiang Mai.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Thai classical art is for the unity of faith (Peliggi, 2007). Sculptures are one type of classical art to achieve this unity. Apart from sculptures there exist several forms of classical art that are able to achieve this unity of faith. They are to express the devotion and attachment of people towards religion. Despite the purpose of making these arts being not for aestheticism, these arts witnessed the best use of techniques by the lay followers to achieve a standard of excellence.

Thai minor art

The Wayusathan Amares Hall (the Hall of Royal Emblems and Insignia) is glittered with gold plaques, gold images and royal gold accessories. The Muk Krasan Hall (the Hall of Precious Objects) and the Gallery of Decorative Art are positioned with gemstones, silver ware, nielloware and Lai Nam Rot (lacquer) products. The Lai Nam Thong and the precious Bencharong at the Wasantaphiman Hall (the Hall for Ceramics) echo the Bencharong inside the Hall of Decorative Art. The Bhimuk Monthian Hall (the Hall for Old Transportation) is filled with richly decorated royal palanquins and howdahs. The Phrommet Thada Hall (the Hall for Costumes and Textiles) is spread with high quality textiles. The Pachima Bhimuk Hall (the Hall for Mother-of-pearl), the Western Mukdet Hall (the Hall for Wood Carving) and the Wasantaphiman Hall (the Hall for Ivory) are aligned with products that require skillful and delicate craftsmanship.

These objects are considered by the Fine Art Department as minor arts (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Minor arts are products related to skillful craftsmanship and are able to reflect the cultural legacy of the time (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Based on this definition, the royal funeral chariots and the puppets at the Thaksina Bhimuk Hall (the Hall for Theatre Arts and Games) can also be enlisted as minor art as well.

In Thailand, craftsmanship is highly related to wealth and social status. Traditionally, wealthy families in ancient Thailand housed their own group of craftsmen. They worked on products made of precious materials (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). These craftsmen competed with each other on their skills and they took it as an honour to work for these families (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). Up to a point, the esteem and the wealth of a family were reflected on the craftsmanship of the objects that the family possessed. Despite the esteem and wealth, these families were not allowed to use certain material or employ certain craftsmanship. Some precious materials and products were also reserved only or particularly, for the Thai king. Some craftsmanship was reserved solely for the Thai king and the royal family. The craftsmanship, the value of the material, the nature of the material and the product itself possess specific implications that symbolise their association with the king.

The cultural legacy that the minor art in the National Museum, Bangkok reflects

The objects of the minor art at the National Museum, Bangkok reflects the cultural legacy of the Thai king. They were for the consumption of the royal stratum. These arts were instruments entailing the wealth, rank, status and the might of the Thai king.

Craftsmanship for the Thai king

a. Buildings

The royal buildings of the Ayutthaya epoch were very luxurious and decorative. These elaborative details were employed mainly to emphasise the

heavenly status of the Thai king (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). This perception and the ornamentation were further elaborated at the Rattanakosin epoch. The Buddhaisawan Chapel and the Issarawinitchai Hall in the National Museum, Bangkok are good examples to illustrate this high level of craftsmanship that are reserved for the king. The finest craftsmanship is always reserved exclusively for religious or the royal use. The buildings of the common people and wealthy families were not allowed to possess some of these highly decorative details (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).



Figure 89 (Left): A fully decorated *naa baan* of the old palace building at the National Museum, Bangkok.

Figure 90 (Right): The symbol of Vishnu standing on Garuda on the *naa baan* of the Sivamokkabhiman Hall symbolises the special status of King Pinklao.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 91: The rich design of the *naa baan* of a *sala* in the National Museum, Bangkok.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

b. Lai Nam Rot (lacquer) products

The technique of making Lai Nam Rot products was imported from China (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). It was in the Ayuthaya epoch that the first piece of Lai Nam Rot product was known (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). Lai Nam Rot products were associated with religion or the Thai royal family. The products were frequently painted with figures gilded with gold leaf on a black or red background. The act of gilding gold is an act of accumulating merit (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The theme of the painting on the Lai Nam Rot products was often associated with story of the Tosachat and the Ramakian. The manuscript cabinets, particularly those inside the Buddhaisawan Chapel, are referred to as prime examples of Lai Nam Rot art (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).

c. Products inlaid with mother-of-pearl

Traditionally, most objects that are inlaid with mother-of-pearl were reserved for *wats* (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). The use of mother-of-pearl as decoration for *wats* could be traced back to the Dvaravati epoch in Ku Bua where a temple was found using mother-of-pearl as stucco embellishment (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001 and National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). Nevertheless, the Thai king is the patron of Buddhism. He often orders the use of mother-of-pearl for restoring and building of *wats*. The most common application of mother-of-pearl inlay is on the wooden doors and window panels of *wats*.

Mother-of-pearl inlay was commonly applied to royal receptacles such as food containers or containers for storing clothes. These royal receptacles were presented to the noble families by the king (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

Materials for the Thai king

a. Gold

In ancient Thailand, gold was a precious material reserved mainly for the court and high ranking noblemen (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Literature written in the Ayutthaya epoch revealed that gold was a popular material used for ornaments for the upper class (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). The noble families used gold products to indicate their social ranks (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The goldsmiths were given the title Suwannakit to specify their special status working for the royal commission (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The huge collections of the gold treasures exhibited at the Wayusathan Amares Hall are evidences of the popularity of gold among the members of the royal family in Ayutthaya.

During the Rattanakosin epoch prior to King Chulalongkorn, in accordance with the Royal Family Law, the production of gold products was exclusive to the royal family (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). The works of gold were in honour of the royalty.

b. Gemstones

In accordance with Hinduism, nine gems that include diamond, ruby, emerald, yellow sapphire, blue sapphire, garnet, moonstone (sometimes pearl), zircon and cat's eye were reserved exclusively for the king (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). It is believed that these stones symbolise the universe and embraced special powers (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). Some kings in the Ayutthaya epoch wore rings of different gemstone for every finger (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

c. Nielloware

In Thailand, the first nielloware appeared in Nakhon Si Thammarat before the 12th century. They were known as *liqor* in those days (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000 and Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The technique of making nielloware is said to be inherited from the Portuguese or the Persian (Tettoni and Warren, 1994 and Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Nielloware was commonly

used for utensils for the Thai royal family and to decorate royal thrones (Tettoni and Warren, 1994 and Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Nielloware is a common diplomatic gift presented by the Thai royal family to foreign dignitaries (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). This tradition was inaugurated by King Narai (1656–1688) of the Ayutthaya epoch, and is still practiced by the royal family today (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

d. Ivory

King Rakhamaeng (1279?-1298) in his stone stele mentioned the free trading of elephants in Sukhothai. On the stele, it is inscribed that those who would like to trade elephants are free to trade (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). Although the trading of elephants was customary among the commoners, products made from tusks such as howdahs, walking sticks, knife handles and ornaments were mainly for the consumption of the Thai royal family (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001). The popularity and adoration of ivory products among the Thai royal family reached to such an extent that they had become items of special prestige. King Chulalongkorn was so fond of ivory products that he initiated copyright for ivory containers with special design. It is said that King Chulalongkorn had registered 17 ivory containers while his wife, Queen Sri Bajarindra had registered one ivory container of her own design (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001).

e. Textiles

Those textiles exhibited at the Phrommet Thada Hall are mainly silk and gold threaded textiles. The *pha krong thong* (a gold woven textile), the *pha yok thong* (a gold brocade cloth), the *pha yok mai* (the silk brocade cloth) and the *pha khem khab* (a mixed silk cloth) were textiles mainly for the royal court while not for the common people (National Museum Division, 1993). Among these textiles, the silk received special royal attention. King Chulalongkorn formed a silk section under the Ministry of Agriculture in 1902. The section worked with Japanese silk experts to investigate the best way of sericulture (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). This section finally evolved into today's Department of Silk Craftsman (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

Products for the Thai king

a. Thai ceramics

Thai ceramics is most famous for its Bencharong and Lai Nam Thong pieces. The Bencharong is a five coloured ceramic ware. It was popular in the Ayutthaya epoch. The Lai Nam Thong is golden overglazed porcelains topped with several colours. The special feature of the Lai Nam Thong is that the gold background is made of genuine gold (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

In ancient Thailand, even though many designs of the Bencharong and Lai Nam Thong were from Thailand, many of them were imported from China. They were mainly reserved for the king (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). Florence Caddy, a British lady who accompanied the Duke of Sutherland to the Grand Palace in

1889, adored the Bencharong that she possibly had seen during her visit to King Chulalongkorn; but only to be disappointed that she was not able to find them in the local market (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The Lai Nam Thong was reserved mainly for the Thai royalty and the noblemen (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The product was so popular among the Thai royal family members that King Wichaichan, the Uparaja, constructed a kiln in the Wang Na (the Front Palace). He attempted to make his own Lai Nam Thong (Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2001).

b. Palanquins and ivory howdahs

In the old days, the cities Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin were interlinked mainly by canals. There were few properly made roads. To travel by road, elephants were the main means of transport. For the nobles and the royalty, the main mode of road transportation was by means of the palanquin (Tettoni and Warren, 1994). The Thai Royal Family Law of Ayutthaya had already mentioned that the palanquin was restricted to the use of the nobles and royalty (National Museum Division, 1993). The palanquin that was used by the royalty was mostly gilded with gold, crafted and decorated lavishly. It might require up to 60 people to carry a palanquin for special occasions. Royalty of different ranks are assigned to different palanquins. In accordance with the law, the Rachentarayan and Ratchayan were for the king; the Ratchayan Meechamlong for the queen, the Theveeyan Meemakornchu for the consort, the Thippayan Thong for the children of the queen and the Yannumas Kipbua for the prince (National Museum Division, 1993).

With respect to travelling by elephants, a howdah is a device specially made for sitting on elephants. Howdahs reflected ranks and status. The one for the commoners was the *sapakhab* that is plain and simple while the *phra thinang praphasthong*, a heavily decorated howdah made of expensive wood and ivory was mainly restricted to the Thai royalty (Warren and Tettoni, 1994). The howdahs that the National Museum, Bangkok exhibits are those mainly reserved for the royalty. They represented the rank and status of the royalty.

c. Masks and puppets

The *hoon krabork*, the *nang talung* and *nang sot* or *khon sot* (live masked play) are classical folk entertainments. Nonetheless, those puppets and masks in the Thaksina Bhimuk Hall (the Hall for Theatre Arts and Games) were associated with the skills and talents of some of the Thai kings and their families. Some of the *khon* masks were made by Prince Worawatsuphakorn and Chao Phraya Mahintarasakthamrong (National Museum Division, 1993). Majority of the *khon* masks and the Thai and the Chinese marionettes were made for the plays of King Vajiravudh. Many of them were designed by and made under the command of King Vajiravudh (Chongkol, 1999).

d. Royal chariots

In Thailand, the royal chariot is a symbolic representation of the Thai king (National Museum Division, 1993). The chariot represents the divinity, the rank

and the might of the king. The chariot is carved with numerous features from the Hindu mythology to emphasize the almighty of the king, to instill a sense of divinity and respect to the king, and to protect the king from harm. The traditional usages of the chariots showed that their function is beyond funeral. King Boromtrailokkanat (reigned 1448–1488) of the Ayutthaya epoch used the chariot for his coronations. King Narai (reigned 1656-1688) of the Ayutthaya epoch used the chariot to carry the imperial letter that was brought from France by De Chaumont, the envoy of Louis XIV (National Museum Division, 1993).

Other types of Thai minor arts

Thai minor art is associated with social hierarchy. It acts as a yardstick to measure the status of different Thai social stratum. Nonetheless, social hierarchy composes of different spectrums both vertically and horizontally: From village at local level to the top of the hierarchy, from old to modern and from ethnics to ethnics. The Thai minor arts that are exhibited at the National Museum, Bangkok restrict the social hierarchy to the level of the king and the time of the past.

Village crafts

There are many types of village crafts in Thailand: The cotton weaving of Ratchaburi, the basketry of Narathiwat and the brick miniatures of Angthong are minor arts for the masses. Different from the court minor arts, the material and the skills used for making local craft are indigenous. They represent local wisdom. The skill of making these products is inherited from generation to generation. The materials used are locally found or grown material: Wood, bamboo, reeds and clay. The products made vary from bucket to soft mat and from cooking devices to grater. The SUPPORT project initiated by Her Majesty, Queen Sirikit and the OTOP programme are mainly to preserve and to promote this local folk culture.

Modern Art

The introduction of modern art to Siam was initiated by King Mongkut. King Mongkut rationalised the Sangha by introducing the Thammayut sect. Under this new sect, traditional Buddha-images had to shed all superfluous design details. King Chulalongkorn entrusted the project of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall to Annibale Rigotti, the Italian Architect, Carlo Allegri, the Italian Engineer and Galileo Chini, the Italian painter. Corrada Feroci, the Italian sculptor, was hired by King Vajiravudh in 1924 to cast bronze statues for the past heroes of Thailand. In 1933, Corrada Feroci was appointed by the Fine Arts Department. He was responsible for the School of Fine Arts, the later Silpakorn University. His duty was to train a new generation of modern art sculptors and painters for Thailand. This appointment signified the commitment of the Thai government to modern art. The obligation to this commitment became very obvious when Phibunsongkhram initiated the 11th cultural mandate. The mandate encouraged the Thai people to attend art exhibitions (Reynolds, 1991).

Under the influence of art movements both internationally and nationally, Buddhism finds new expression in Thai classical art. Thai minor arts get new

inspiration and new forms. Thai modern art has shed the traditional forms and functions of both the Thai classical and minor arts.

On the pamphlet of “Passion of Thai Modern Art”, an exhibition of modern art held between 10th and 20th July 2008 at the Siam Paragon, the introduction writes,

Thai arts has stepped into its modernity amidst the world’s practice of modern ideology...aid the turn of Thai art into its contemporariness where multitudes of form and content are presented; this also leads to the national level of distinguishness at present.

The mission of the exhibition is: “Hope that Thai art advances into the global art scene” (Bangkok Sculpture Center, n.d.). It is to find a new meaning to Thai modern arts.



Figure 92 (Left): Buddhism finds new expression in the art of Thawan Duchanee.

Source: Tettoni, I and Warren, W (1994). *Arts and Crafts of Thailand*. Thames and Hudson: London

Figure 93 (Middle): The oil canvas by Sawasdi Tantisuk.

Source: Bangkok Sculpture Center (n.d.). *Passion of Thai modern art @ Siam Paragon* [Brochure]. Bangkok: Bangkok Sculpture Center.

Figure 94 (Right): Victory over the Mara by Panya Vijinthanasarn.

Source: Bangkok Sculpture Center (n.d.). *Passion of Thai modern art @ Siam Paragon* [Brochure]. Bangkok: Bangkok Sculpture Center.

Chinese Art

Chinese had a long history in ancient Thailand. The artifacts excavated from the Wat Ratchaburana, Ayutthaya in 1957 proved the presence of Chinese during Ayutthaya epoch. Votive tablets that bear Chinese inscriptions and a mural painting that depicts Chinese figures were among the artifacts found (McGill, 2005). In the 1850s, the number of Chinese living in Ayutthaya reached 330,000 (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

The relationship between the Chinese and the Thai society is intricate. King Chulalongkorn on one occasion credited the Chinese’s contributions to Siam. He regarded them as a part of the society (Peleggi, 2007). Nonetheless, in the 1920s and 1930s, King Vajiravudh referred to the Chinese as the Jews of the East. He

accused the Chinese of smothering the wealth of Siam. King Prajadhipok regarded the Chinese as one of the nine problems of Siam. Under the cultural mandates manipulated by Phibunsongkhram, the Chinese were deprived of their cultural identity and political rights.

In 2000, Chinese shared 14% of the total population in Thailand (Gilquin, 2005). The ambiguity of this percentage is that whether it refers to those who bear pure Chinese origin or those who are mixed with the Thai. If it is the former then the percentage might go far beyond this 14% percent.

Many political figures and kings in Thailand were suspected of bearing Chinese blood. King U-Thong of Ayutthaya might be the son of a Chinese merchant (Peleggi, 2007). King Taksin was mostly from Teochiu, a city in southeast China. Rama I's mother was likely to be a Chinese (Chris and Phongpaichit, 2003). Wichit Wathakan was suspected to be the son of a Chinese petty trader. His Chinese name was Kim Liang (*Luang Witchit Wathakan*, n.d.).

There are different ways to look at Chinese art. The exhibition of Chinese art and culture in the British Museum is based on the historic chronology of Chinese dynasties. Guided by the activities of trade and religion, the art and culture of China branched into various kinds of sculptures and arts. Nonetheless, Chinese art and culture can be appreciated from different perspectives as well. They can be appreciated in accordance with materials and forms, functions and themes, for example (Appendix E).

The Hong Kong Museum on Art focuses on those arts that China is most famous for. The exhibition of Chinese ceramics is one its main permanent exhibitions. The gallery for Chinese ceramics gives the visitors a clear picture of the evolution and development of ceramics in various dynasties of China (Appendix F).

Despite the huge share of the Chinese in the Thai population and the intricate relationship between the Chinese and the Thai, there are few traces of Chinese art in the National Museum, Bangkok.

Islamic Art

Majority of the Muslims in Thailand live in the southern provinces of Thailand: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla. It is estimated that the number of Muslims in Thailand is around five million. This shares about 8% of the total population. However, unofficially, the population of Muslims is estimated around seven million. Six million of them live in the southern part of Thailand (Gilquin, 2005).

The southern provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat were part of the Patani kingdom, a Malay Kingdom (1350 – 1909). In 1457, Patani became Islamic. Shortly after the founding of the Patani kingdom, it became a vessel state of Ayutthaya. Once every three years, the Patani kingdom had to send

tributes (in the form of golden and silver flowers) to the Ayutthayan court (Gilquin, 2005 and Grabowsky, 1995). The Anglo-Siamese Agreement (1909) put Patani under the sovereignty of Siam.

The relationship between the southern Muslims and the Thai is uneasy. The Muslims practice Islam, follow the Islamic rituals, speak the Malay language, call themselves Melayu people and dress in the Malay and the Islamic way. Under several occasions the Thai government used different measures to assimilate them. King Chulalongkorn replaced local officials with Siamese officials. Phibunsongkhram forbade the Malay and Islamic dress code, the speaking of the Yawi language and the celebration of Muslims festivals and the Muslims had to adopt Thai names. The Sarit's government initiated a Self-Help Settlement Project to dilute the Muslims population by increasing the number of the Thai race in these provinces. In 1988, the University of Pattani of the College of Islamic Studies was founded. In 1977 Surin Pitsuwan, a Muslim Democrat became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Today, Thailand is an observer of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (Gilquin, 2005).

The old Patani kingdom was not the only emanation of the Muslims in Thailand. During the Ayutthaya epoch, Persian merchants came to Ayutthaya for trade. During the reign of King Naresuan (1590 – 1605), two Persian brothers, Sheikh Ahmad and Muhamad Said came to Ayutthaya. Sheik Ahmad then became the advisor of King Song Tham (1610 – 1628) (Gilquin, 2005). They did not stay there for long, although they left behind servants and collaborators. A Muslim community was formed. The Krajan canal and the Golden Mosque were then constructed. The Muslim community began to grow in the central part of Thailand. In the northern part of Thailand, another group of Muslims came from China and Burma. They were evacuees from the 1911 revolution and the two world wars in China, and the Japanese suppression of the Chinese Muslims in Burma (Gilquin, 2005).

The Thai king is the patron of all religions of the country. The king is also the spiritual leader of Islam. The king's advisor for the Islamic affairs, the Chularachamontri represents all the Muslims in the country and presides over a National Council of Islamic Affairs that looks after the religion's activities (Gilquin, 2005).

Islamic art is not all about religion. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, one of the best know museums on Islamic culture, introduces Islamic art to visitors from various perspectives. Islamic art is about architecture. The Architecture Gallery of the museum exhibits miniature replicas of world famous or historic important Muslim architecture. Islamic art is about craftsmanship. The Metalwork Gallery, the Coin and Seal Gallery, the Arms and Armour Gallery, and the Living with Wood Gallery present a series of objects that reflect the skillful and delicate craftsmanship of the Muslims. Islamic Art is about calligraphy. The Qu'ran and Manuscript Gallery presents both secular and religious documents that were written in various styles of scripts (Appendix G).

The Victoria and Albert Museum sees Islamic art as a way of living. Muslims come across these arts in their daily life: The utensils, the costumes, the *Qu'ran*, the writing boxes, the carpets, the architecture and the daily prayers (Appendix H). Islamic art is art for the masses.

The Muslims have lived in Thailand for a long time. They share a big portion of the Thai population. Their cultural legacy is a legacy of Thailand as well. Nonetheless, there is no trace of any Islamic art in the National Museum, Bangkok.

Art is an expression of excellence

Art is to express a standard of excellence. The excellence of Thai arts can be looked at and appreciated from different perspectives. It can be appreciated from its link with the context of Buddhism. It can be appreciated from its association with the Thai society. It can be admired as a way of living. It can also be admired for its aestheticism. Instead of embracing the enthusiasm of the Thai people towards Buddhism, the National Museum, Bangkok introduces the preconceived standard of excellence of Thai arts that was defined by Professor George Coedes. Instead of associating Thai minor arts to the Thai social hierarchy, the National Museum, Bangkok associates Thai minor arts to the hierarchy of the Thai royalty. The National Museum, Bangkok as a national art museum limits the scope of excellence of Thai art to sculptures and to the court. It is a museum of personal preference and a courtly art museum.

Chapter 5

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national archaeology museum

The cultural chronology of Thailand

The study of archaeology is to reconstruct ancient practices. To study the ancient practices of Thailand is by no means easy owing to the lack of authentic documentation. The ample destruction of monuments and documents in the Burmese-Siamese war that led to the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 aggravated this difficulty. Up to a point, the compilation of the ancient practices of Thailand has to depend on foreign sources. To derive the practices from indigenous Thai sources, one has to depend on the rather scarce inscriptions and the inferences drawn from local artifacts and monuments.

Between 1917 and 1921, by giving geo-political boundaries to Buddhist art history, Professor George Coedes demarcated the cultural development of proto-historic Siam into seven epochs: Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, Chiang Saen, Sukhothai, U-Thong and Ayutthaya. Prince Damrong further added the Rattanakosin epoch into this chronology (Peleggi, 2002 and Cary, 1994). Despite some scholars criticising the intention of Prince Damrong and Professors George Coedes was to build a Thai empire, this chronology forms the basic proto-historic timeline of Thailand that the National Museum, Bangkok presents today.

In accordance with the timeline and based on the objects (mainly sculptures) of the museum, visitors are able to derive some of the ancient practices of ancient Thailand.

An ancient and diversified civilisation

Some literatures regard the findings of those relics, in particular those of the Ban Chiang period, reflect not only an unexpected highly affluent, artistic and technologically advanced pre-historic Thai society, they also changed the preconceptions of the emanation of ancient global civilisation. They said that ancient Thailand might be one of the cradles of world civilisation. This civilisation bears evidence of a Bronze Age, which is 700 years older than the Mesopotamia (Van Beek and Tettono, 2004). This civilisation might also influence the cultural development of China as well (National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). Some say that the excavation at the Ban Chiang was too small to infer any meaningful social interpretation, and these scholars even have doubts on the exact age of the Ban Chiang civilisation (Higham, 2002). Some say that ancient Thailand has long been conceived of bearing an ancient civilisation and an early human settlement, the excavation of the artifacts only verified and confirmed this belief (Joyce White, personal communication, June 12, 2008). Joyce White says that the importance of these excavations was to provide an additional valve for archaeologists and

historians to understand the development of mankind in Asia and in the world (personal communication, June 12, 2008). After the Ban Chiang civilisation, several civilisations dominated proto-historic Thailand simultaneously or consecutively. They merged, modified and influenced the culture and cultural development of each other.

Located in the midway of Southeast Asia, ancient Thailand was a crossroad bridging Southeast Asia to South Asia and China, and even as far as Africa. The National Museum, Bangkok exhibits a Roman lamp that was excavated at Pongtuk, Kanchanaburi. It is believed that the lamp was cast in Alexandria, Egypt (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000) between first and second century. The geographical importance of ancient Thailand was able to bridge and to amalgamate various cultures into one spot.

The sculptures of the Dvaravati epoch, the first civilisation of ancient Thailand, were strongly influenced by India. After the Dvaravati epoch, the Sailendra controlled Indonesia (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000) in the south-east and the Khmer in the east of ancient Thailand extended their influence to the region. The Sukhothai civilisation was claimed to be the emanation of the Thai civilisation. The Sukhothai Walking Buddha was regarded an innovation of the Sukhothai artists (National Museum Volunteers Group, 1987). Nonetheless, the form of the Sukhothai Walking Buddha and the inspiration behind were in fact a further elaboration of those Buddha-images whose nature had started to change in those cultural epochs before the Sukhothai epoch.

The physical shape of the Sukhothai Walking Buddha is out of proportion. His shoulder and hip are exceptionally broad; his chest is prominent and his pair of arms is extraordinarily long and thick (figure 95). The physique of Vishnu of the Srivijaya epoch is also out of proportion. The shoulder and hip of Srivijayan Vishnu are very broad and wide. The hands of the Srivijayan Vishnu reach knee level and his pair of arm is as thick as an elephant trunk (figure 96).

The Sukhothai flame projects from the *ushnisha* (the cranial protuberance) of Sukhothai Walking Buddha. Flames also project from the diadems of Buddha-images of the Lopburi epoch. These flames are so prominent that they resemble “fire” licking at the hair of the Buddha (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).

These unusual features of the Sukhothai Walking Buddha indicate that the Buddha is not a human anymore. The Buddha is from another world: a surrealistic world. The Buddha bears supernatural physiques and power, and the Buddha is a god. Nonetheless, the Buddha started to change his identity centuries before the Sukhothai epoch. The changing of the Buddha to a god was just a continuation of the changing identities of the Buddha. The evolution of Buddha-images since the Srivijaya epoch had already indicated the gradual change of the nature of the Buddha. The Buddha of the Srivijaya epoch is bedecked with elaborated jewelries and is dressed in a richly arranged robe. The Srivijayan Buddha was a noble (figure 97). Many of the Buddha-images of the Lopburi

epoch were crowned and wore a royal outfit. The Buddha of the Lopburi epoch was a king (figure 98). The Sukhothai artists further elevated the Buddha to the status of a god.



Figure 95 (Left): The unnatural body shape of the Sukhothai Walking Buddha.

Figure 96(Right): The surrealistic physique of the Srivijayan Vishnu.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 97 (Left): The Buddha was a noble in the Srivijaya epoch.

Figure 98 (Right): The Buddha was a king in the Lopburi epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Through the Sukhothai Walking Buddha, we are able to infer that the Sukhothai artists were influenced by artists of those cultural epochs before the

Sukhothai epoch. The innovative form and identity of the Buddha of the Sukhothai epoch are a reflection of an ancient and a diversified cultural influence in ancient Thailand.

Influences of Hinduism, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism on Thai Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism (the teachings/doctrines of the Elders) is the official religion of Thailand. Theravada Buddhism was introduced to ancient Thailand in the sixth century. It was in the Sukhothai epoch that Theravada Buddhism became the dominating religion. Under the rule of King U-Thong (1351A.D.-1369A.D.), the founder of Ayutthaya, Theravada Buddhism became the official religion of Siam (*Uthong*, n.d.). Nonetheless, Thai Theravada Buddhism is strongly influenced by Hinduism, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Hinduism

There is no record of the exact time when Hinduism was introduced to ancient Thailand. Hinduism is an ancient spiritual belief system of archaic India. It is a collection of ancient wisdoms and insight. Its philosophy is about the continuous transformation of the soul to reach *nirvana* (Hemenway, 2003).

The deities of the Hindu mythologies are gifts from *nirvana*. It was thought by the devout that there are over 300 million Hindu deities in the Hindu pantheon (Hemenway, 2003). Mankind will reach divinity by worshipping these deities. These deities exist in various forms and identities and in every aspect of the daily life of mankind. In this way, life in itself is holy and the linkage with the Hindu deities is part of daily life of mankind. Hinduism, therefore, is a way of life (Hemenway, 2003).

The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana (the Ramakian) and the Mahabharata are the four major written texts of Hinduism (Hemenway, 2003 and Kossack & Lerner, 1994). The Vedas is the earliest written Hindu scripture. It is a compilation of old sacred teachings that were taught in the forms of hymns and chants (Hemenway, 2003 and Kossack & Lerner, 1994). The Upanishads is a piece of philosophical document. It is about the nature of a soul. The Upanishads was composed between 700 B.C. and 500 B.C. The Ramayana tells the story of Rama triumphed over Ravana, the demon-king. The Mahabharata depicts the struggle between good and evil of two families. They were composed between 400 B.C. and 600 B.C..

Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism was developed in the northern and western parts of India between 2nd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. (Lyons and Peters, 1985). Mahayana Buddhism is also known as Buddhayana (the Buddha path) or Bodhisattayana (the Bodhisattva path) (Trainor, 2004). The main differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism are the path to reach enlightenment and the nature of the deities. Theravada Buddhism's concept of self-enlightenment is considered to be egoistic by the Mahayanists. The Mahayanists

see the importance of helping other human mankind to release sufferings. Instead of yearning to become the Arhat (the worthy one) of Theravada Buddhism, the Mahayanists value Bodhisattvas who postponed reaching *nirvana* for the sake of emancipating mankind. Among the Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara is most popular. To be able to emancipate mankind, the deities of Mahayana Buddhism are equipped with supernatural power. In accordance with Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha is no longer a normal human being. He is a powerful spiritual entity. The divinity of Mahayana Buddha contradicts the secular entity of Theravada Buddha who is a preacher.

Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana Buddhism is also known as the Mantrayana or Tantrayana Buddhism (Trainor, 2004). Vajrayana Buddhism entered ancient Thailand mostly in the 10th century A.D.. The emergence of Vajrayana Buddhism was a result of some Siddhas (saints) who opposed to the over hierarchical and scholastic nature of the Sangha (Trainor, 2004). According to the doctrines of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, mankind can only reach *nirvana* after various life cycles. However, according to Vajrayana Buddhism, under personal training or with the empowerment of a Siddha, mankind can reach *nirvana* in a single life time (Krishnan, 2008 and Trainor, 2004).

The concept of the Buddha in Vajrayana Buddhism is branched into five Dhyani (meditating) Buddhas, namely: Vairochana, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and Akshobhya. They represent five elements of *rupa* (form), *vedana* (feeling), *samjna* (perception), *samskara* (impression) and *vijnana* (ego-consciousness) respectively (Krishnan, 2008). These Buddhas also represent the eternal qualities of the Buddha: the *kaya* (body), *vacha* (speech) and *chitta* (mind of the eternal qualities) (Krishnan, 2008). The Dhyani Buddhas have five “disciples”. The most well-known “disciple” is Avalokitesvara. He is the “disciple” of Amitabha, and has the image of Amitabha in his hairdo.

There are many deities in Vajrayana Buddhism. These deities were originated from Mahayana Buddhism. In spite of that, Vajrayanist deities are equipped with supernatural power to disperse or to destroy evils. These deities are to be worshipped by means of *mudras*, mantras and meditation. A *mandala* (a visual diagram that symbolises the celestial dominion of the deities and the Buddhas) is required for meditation. A *vajra* (a thunderbolt) and a *ghanta* (a bell) are required for the rituals. The *vajra* and the *ghanta* represent the human qualities of compassion and wisdom. To achieve enlightenment, these two qualities have to be cultivated (Pemberton, 2002).

Sculptures that reflect these influences

These religions flourished and co-existed in ancient Thailand. They influenced and mixed with each other. As a result of these mixing and matching, the identity and outlook of the deities and the Buddha also changed accordingly.

The most important Hindu deities are the eternal triads of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. They possess the energies that are essential for the basic process of life: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer. Based on the eternal triads, myriads of deities come into existence. They are to support the progressing and the processing of life. The origin of the concept of Chakravatin (the universal monarch) was from ancient India. Owing to the accumulation of *karmas* in his previous lives, Chakarvatin was divine (Englehart, 2001 and Kossack & Lerner, 1994). In India and those Indian influenced regions, a king is associated with the principle of the *deva-raj*a (god-king). The king is the secular form of either one of the eternal triads secularly. The Cambodian king is the secular Shiva while the Thai king is the secular Vishnu.

Among these three deities of the eternal triads, Vishnu is the most popular. The identity of Vishnu as the deity of preserving and his avatar, Rama, who was the hero of the age-old and prevailing Indian story, the Ramakian, contributed to the popularity of Vishnu (Hemenway, 2003). During the Rattanakosin period, Narayana, another avatar of Vishnu, became another popular character in the Thai society (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000). The first Vishnu image of ancient Thailand was made in Nakhon Si Thammarat (Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).

The sculptures in the National Museum, Bangkok strongly tell the influence of Hinduism in ancient Thailand. The National Museum, Bangkok exhibits several Vishnu images (figures 100-101). Nonetheless, the outlook of these Vishnus appears differently in different cultural epochs of ancient Thailand. The body shape of Vishnu of the Srivijaya epoch is unnatural and totally out of proportion (figure 100), while Vishnu of the Lopburi epoch appears more naturalistic and very sturdy (figure 101).



Figure 99 (Left): Shiva image was popular in the 12th century. The Shiva image in the Gallery of Lopburi epoch looks very guarded.

Figure 100 (Middle): The body shape of Vishnu of the Srivijaya epoch is totally out of proportion.

Figure 101 (Right): Vishnu of the Lopburi epoch appears more naturalistic when compared to the one of the Srivijaya epoch (figure 100).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Hinduism together with Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism co-existed in ancient Thailand. The Dvaravati epoch was considered the foundation of Theravada Buddhism in ancient Thailand (Chutintaranond, 2005). The Gallery of the Dvaravati Art in the National Museum, Bangkok exhibits a number of sculptures that illustrate the co-existence of Hindu and Buddhist deities. On the series of bas relief of the “Buddha on Panaspati”, the Buddha stands on top of a creature that is believed to be a mixture of Nandi and Garuda, the travelling device of Shiva and Vishnu respectively (figure 102).

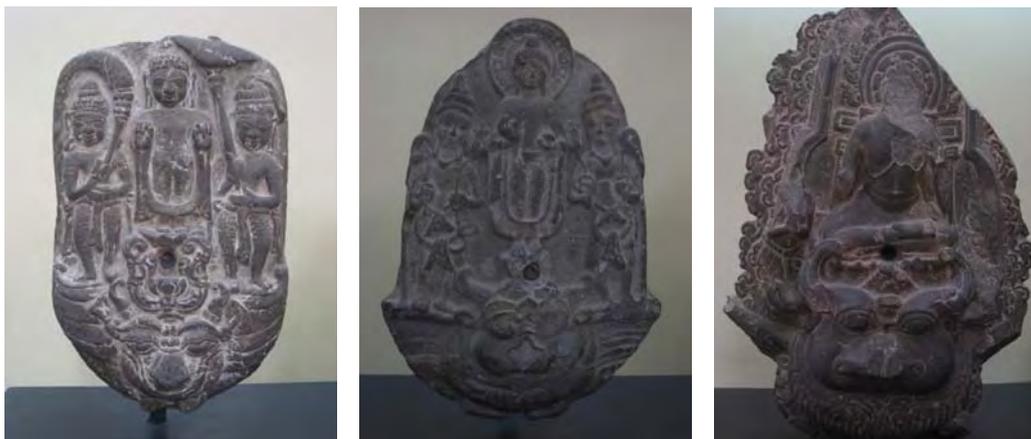


Figure 102: The “Buddha on Panaspati” on the left clearly shows the two Boddhisattvas on the two sides of the Buddha. The “Buddha on Panaspati” on the right clearly shows the Hindu creature.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

In the Sukhothai epoch, Theravada Buddhism was the dominant religion. Hindu rituals were still popular at the Sukhothai court. Hindu deities were still popular themes among the Sukhothai artists. Nevertheless, the outlook of Hindu images in the Sukhothai epoch is quite different from those in the Lopburi or the Srivijaya epochs. Figure 103 and figure 104 show a Vishnu-image of the Lopburi and the Sukhothai epoch. The image of Vishnu of the Sukhothai epoch inherits the sturdiness of that of the Lopburi epoch; but instead of wearing a cylindrical *mitre* (figure 103), Vishnu of the Sukhothai epoch wears a crown. He is a royalty (figure 104).

Hindu deities found new looks in the Rattanakosin epoch. The images of the Vishnu were so heavily ornamented that the motivation of casting the images was more likely for the sake of ornamentation (figure 105). In fact, the world famous sacred image next to the Erawan Hyatt Hotel, Chid Lom, Bangkok is Brahma of the Hindu eternal triads. Figure 106 shows a Brahma-image in the National Museum, Bangkok. This image resembles the one next to the Erawan Hotel, Chid Lom.

Hinduism continued to flourish at the Ayutthaya court, particularly during the end of the Ayutthaya epoch. The fall of the Ayutthaya court was associated with the practice of the alien “Khmer religion” by some of the Thai rulers (Reynolds, 1991).



Figure 103 (Left): Vishnu of the Lopburi epoch wears a cylindrical *mitre*.
 Figure 104 (Right): The royal look of Vishnu of the Sukhothai epoch.



Figure 105 (Left): A very heavily decorated Vishnu of the Rattanakosin epoch.
 Figure 106 (Right): The Brahma-image of the Rattanakosin epoch.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Hindu deities are normally associated with supernatural powers. These deities are often depicted in surrealistic forms to express these powers. This expression of surrealistic power also extends to those deities' images of the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism of ancient Thailand. These deities' images normally bear multi-arms or multi-heads that enable them to enforce these powers (figure 107 and figure 108).



Figure 107 (Left): Despite the hands were broken, Avalokitesvara of the Srivijaya epoch was originally cast with four arms.

Figure 108 (Right): The Maitreya of the Lopburi epoch also bears four arms.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Cross over influences of the cultural epochs

In the chapter of the National Museum, Bangkok today, sculptures of different cultural epochs bear different handwritings. Nonetheless, it is common to find cross over influences of the handwritings of these epochs on one another.



Figure 109 (Left): The look of the Buddha of the Lopburi epoch resembles the look of Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch (figure 110).

Figure 110 (Right): The broad face and contoured lips of the Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The facial features of the “Buddha in meditation” of the Lopburi epoch at the 12th century (figure 109) does not vary too much from his counterpart of the Dvaravati epoch (figure 110). Both share a broad face, a well contoured lip, half closed eyes and the same facial expression.

The civilisation of Srivijaya was originated from Indonesia, nevertheless, the look of some of its Buddha-images bear some Khmer handwritings (figure 111 and figure 112).



Figure 111 (Left): Some Buddha images of the Srivijaya epoch bear Lopuburi art’s handwriting.

Figure 112 (Right): The resemblance of the Buddha of the Srivijaya epoch and Avalokitesvara of the Lopburi epoch lays in the mouth and the moustache.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Ancient Thailand evidences the existence of an age-old civilisation that provides valuable information in the studying of mankind and their activities in pre-historic and proto-historic period both locally and globally. It was also a region where diversified ancient cultures stayed and met. Despite the cultures came and went, their cultural influences splashed in, retreated and re-cycled without any defined timeline.

No uniformity of art style

McGill (2005) mentioned an incident that King Boromtrailokkanat (reigned 1448A.D.-1488A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch was commissioned to make a group of busts of the Buddha. Altogether more than 500 busts were made. Nevertheless, the looks of some Buddhas appeared differently. Some bore faces with full cheeks, some with elongated faces while some with faces like an inverted triangle. The eyebrows of some were joined at the forehead while the eyebrows of others were divided. The headgears varied as well, some wore crowns while some wore helmets. Mostly these busts were made in various workshops

separately. These vast differences inferred that no national style was ever developed or required in the Ayutthaya epoch (McGill, 2005).

The sculptures in the National Museum, Bangkok proves this lacking of a uniformed national art style exists long before the Ayutthaya epoch.

One of the specific face features of Buddha-images of the Srivijaya epoch is that the Buddha bears a full cheek. Nonetheless, in the National Museum, Bangkok, Buddha-images of the Srivijaya epoch bear different shapes (figure 113, 114 and 115). The Buddha on the left (figure 113) bears a round face while the shape of the face of the Buddha in the right (figure 114) and that on figure 115 are different. On top of the difference in the shape of the face of the Buddha, the face features of these Buddha-images different from each other in many aspects.

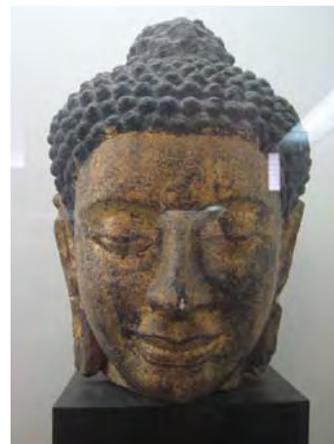


Figure 113 (Left): The Buddha bears a Khmer look.

Figure 114 (Right): The Buddha bears an oval face that was quite unusual in the Srivijaya epoch.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 115: The look of the Buddha is not as refined as the one on figure 113 and figure 114.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

This lacking in a uniformed national art style continued to the Lopburi epoch. The similarities of the facial features and the facial expression of the Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch (9th-10th century) (figure 116) and the Buddha of the Lopburi epoch (12th-13th century) (figure 117) might indicate an early departure of Lopburi art from the Khmer influence. Nevertheless, 12th century was the peak of Angkor Khmer and was one century before the weakening of the Khmer Empire. This similarity of facial features between the two Buddha-images might suggest the existence of a strong local influence and preference in Lopburi or a loose measure of the Khmer Empire to achieve this uniformity.



Figure 116 (Left): The Buddha of the Dvaravati epoch in *bhumispara mudra* (9th – 10th century).

Figure 117 (Right): The Buddha of the Lopburi epoch in *samadhi mudra* (12th – 13th century).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 118 (Left): The Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (Ayutthaya, 13th century).

Figure 119 (Right): The Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (Nakhon Ratchasima, 13th century).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Figure 118 and figure 119 show two Buddha-images of the “Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga”. They were cast in the 13th century Lopburi epoch; but they bear different handwritings: The headgear, the face features, the facial expression and the body shape. Lopburi was at the rear of the Khmer Empire, this geographical location might affect the tight grip of the empire to Lopburi; but this might also suggest a consistent competition between the Khmer-oriented art and the Mon-oriented art during the Lopburi epoch.

The question of the necessity to achieve a uniform national art style stretches its timeline to early proto-historic Thailand. There might be reasons cater to this scenario. Nonetheless, it might also suggest that there was not any need or urge to achieve such uniformity (McGill, 2005).

Reflection of political and socio-economical preferences

The religious beliefs and practices of ancient Thailand were by no means simple and unitary. Nonetheless this religious scenario became complex when the deities, ritual and practices of these religions mixed with one another. The identity of the Buddha changes throughout these epochs. The mixture of religious elements and the change of the identity of the Buddha not only reflect the change of the theological belief and value system of the people they also reflect the change of the political and socio-economical values.

Varied from the image of the deities of the Dvaravati and Srivijaya epochs, the image of the deities of the Lopburi epoch gained weight and appeared very masculine, powerful, guarded and sturdy. This might be related to the consecration of Jayavarman II as the Chakravatin (the universal monarch). Chakravatin implied a powerful and morally superior king (Wong, 2001, p. 25). The king was a *deva-raja* whose legitimacy and authority were divinely sanctioned (Friends of Khmer Culture Orientation, 2006). The image of the deities of the Lopburi epoch then had to express the powerful and strong disposition of the Chakravatin so as to gain the respect of the commoners.

The wealth and prosperity of the Ayutthaya epoch grew in accordance with its increasing trading activities. The attire of the image of the deities reflected the ample richness of the Ayutthaya kingdom. The robes of the deities were heavily ornamented, the headgears were elaborated and the bodies were heavily adorned with accessories. Gold was commonly used for making or plating the images (figure 120).

In the Rattanakosin epoch, under the rule of Rama II (reigned 1809A.D.–1824A.D.) and Rama III (reigned 1824A.D.-1851A.D.), Siam was very prosperous and wealthy. To express this richness, the Rattanakosin’s artists tried to outdo each other by making the images of the deities as decorative and elaborative as possible (figure 121). Nevertheless, facing the threat of the colonial powers and seeing the necessity to prove Siam a civilised state to the powers, King Mongkut shed away all those unnecessary decorations and features of the

Buddha while King Chulalongkorn even westernised the outlook of the Buddha (figure 122).



Figure 120 (Left): A highly decorated Buddha of the Ayutthaya epoch.

Figure 121 (Middle): Buddha-image of the Rattanakosin epoch follows the tradition of the Ayutthaya epoch.

Figure 122 (Right): The Buddha was given a westernised look during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

A unique Thai culture

The objects of the National Museum, Bangkok reflect an ancient, a prosperous, and a technologically advanced pre-historic and proto-historic Thai civilisation. This civilisation was influenced by and mixed with various cultures. The India influenced Mon Dvaravati culture, the Indonesian influenced Srivijaya culture and the Khmer influenced Lopburi culture flourished in ancient Thailand. They intermixed and influenced the cultural development of the epochs that followed. Nonetheless, these pre-Sukhothai cultural epochs that once flourished in ancient Thailand before 13th century were referred to as “foreign cultures” in the *Guidebook of the National Museum, Bangkok*. The guidebook writes,

The original civilization in Thailand was the assimilation of foreign cultures and the domestic traditions of the late prehistoric Thailand from about the 7th – 8th Buddhist centuries. Thus became the earliest civilization in the history of Thailand. (p.49)

On the one hand, the National Museum, Bangkok tries to promote a unique Thai culture. On the other hand, the Khmer built Prasat Phimai in the 10th century and the Prasat Phanom Rung Hindu temple in the 12th century were enlisted historic parks by the Fine Art Department, Thailand (Peleggi, 2007). In the middle of 2008, the Thai media was very concerned with the destruction of the ancient sculptures in the Prasat Phanom Rung. Recently, the Thai and the Cambodian governments disputed over the ownership of Preah Vihear, a Khmer temple in Burinam. The claim of the Thai cultural identity between the museum and that of the Thai society contradicts with one another. On the one hand the museum tries to distant these foreign cultures from the Thai culture. On the other hand, the Thai society tries to associate these foreign cultures with the Thai culture. The

National Museum, Bangkok as a national archaeology museum tries to make a demarcation between “Thai” and “non-Thai” culture. It is still a continuous job for those kings and political figures who try to promote a unique Thai race.

Chapter 6

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum

The trinity concept of *chat*, *satsana* and *phra mahakasat*

As a response to social and political changes, King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.–1925A.D.) introduced the Thai trinity of *chat*, *satsana* and *phra mahakasat* (nation, religion and king) to the Thai society. During the reign of King Vajiravudh, the absolute monarchy rule of the Chakri dynasty faced an unprecedented shakiness. His aim was to make use of this trinity concept to restore the value of the king and the loyalty of the people to the king. King Vajiravudh was not the inaugurator of this trinity concept. He revised this concept by placing the king on top of the Theravada Buddhism and the Thai nation, and put it into a virtual national emblem. In fact, King Lithai (reigned 1298A.D.–1346/47A.D.?), the fourth reign of the Sukhothai epoch, had already make use of this trinity concept to stabilise his rule and the status of the Sukhothai kingdom. The intention of King Lithai to compile the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* (*The three worlds cosmography of Phra Ruang*) was said to make use of the Buddhist cosmology to justify the political and social structure of Sukhothai so as to establish himself as the Chakravatin (the universal monarch) and the authority of Sukhothai over its neighbour (Reynold, 1991). The social and political structure of the Sukhothai kingdom was considered ideal by King Mongkut and Prince Damrong. To install the Sukhothai's political and social structure into Siam, King Mongkut further referred the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* to Siam. To further endorse the orthodoxy of the socio-political structure of Sukhothai, Prince Damrong referred the fall of Ayutthaya to the adoption of Khmer kingship, a non-Thai kingship.

To secure their rule, some political figures in Thailand, such as Phibunsongkhram saw the necessity to endorse the ancient civilisation of Sukhothai. His purpose was to indulge a great Thai identity both nationally and internationally.

Throughout the history of Thailand, some Thai kings such as King Naresuan (reigned 1590A.D.–1605A.D.) and King Taksin (reigned 1767A.D.–1782A.D.) were glorified for their victory over a common non-Thai enemy: Burma. Some Thai kings such as King U-thong (1351A.D.–1369A.D.) and King Borommakot (reigned 1733A.D.–1758A.D.) of Ayutthaya were praised for their support of Theravada Buddhism. The inter-relationship of the concept of the nation, the religion and the king is so closely related to one another that it forms a looking glass to explore the history of Thailand.

5.2 *Chat* (Nation)

There are many ways to define a nation. The most commonly adopted definition is to associate a nation with its physical boundary or ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991). Nonetheless, Lefebvre (1991) further defines a nation in relation to the use of “violence”. A nation is a space where social, economical and political activities developed in accordance with time (Lefebvre, 1991). To Lefebvre (1991), “violence” is required for the survival and growth of this space. Based on this understanding, a nation is a space of economic activities, social hierarchies and political movements while violence is a means to exploit or to control the resources of this space and even those of other spaces. A nation under the concept of Lefebvre is quite aggressive. On the contrary, Renan (1882) defines a nation as a mental space for forward movement (*Ernest Renan*, n.d.) In his famous discourse *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (*What is a nation?*), Renan associates a nation to the desire of people to live together to do “great things” (*Ernest Renan*, n.d.).

Based on these definitions, a nation is a cross dimension of two elements: Time and space. It is a time of past and present. It is a space fostered by internal and external mechanisms and aspirations. These mechanisms and aspirations are required to cater to the future growth of this space. Two conditions are important for the existence of a nation: Its future and links to the outside world. A nation does not live in the past. A nation should aspire to grow. A nation does not live and grow by itself. It is a reaction and a correlation to its outside space.

The time of Thailand

The National Museum, Bangkok depicts the “time” of Thailand with a series of past events. Nevertheless, these events are mostly associated with the contributions and the aspirations of the Thai kings.

a. A time dedicated to the kings

Historic events are commonly used by national museums to introduce the development of a nation to visitors. The mosaic on the front wall of the National Museum, Malaysia uses historic events to summarise the timeline and the ups and downs of Malaysia: The confrontation with the western powers, the lost of sovereignty, the Japanese occupation and its final independence (figure 123).

The National Museum of Singapore traces the timeline of Singapore from Temasek (1300A.D.–1600A.D.) to the arrival of the British, the Japanese occupation and stops at its independence.

The National Museum, Bangkok also makes use of historic events to illustrate the timeline of proto-historic Siam and later Thailand. Nonetheless, instead of selecting events in accordance with their significances or chronology, the events selected are mainly associated with the works and contributions of the Thai kings to the nation. Events not related to the works and contributions of the kings are briefly narrated or excluded. Several major events that shaped the historic development of the nation, particularly the modern history of Siam and

Thailand are narrated briefly or simplified. Some important events such as the Siamese-Anglo Bowring Treaty (1855) that opened Siam to the western world and the 1932 *coup d'etat* that changed Siam into a constitutional monarchy are briefly narrated or slid across.



Figure 123: The historic events of Malaysia are illustrated on the mosaic hanging on the front wall of the National Museum, Malaysia
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The Bowring Treaty, an important treaty that inaugurated the western globalisation of Siam is briefly narrated as a treaty that ended the trade of royal monopoly. In the museum, the treaty is narrated as follows,

The Bowring Treaty and various treaties with western countries...ended the trade of royal monopoly...because of the desire of the Western Powers to expand their markets to the East.

The 1932 *coup d'etat* that pushed the Chakri monarchy to its lowest ebb is briefly narrated as follows,

The coup d'etat by military officers and civilians...revolted on 24 June 1932...the king did not ever try to protest. He agreed to sign the temporary constitution drafted by the Peoples' Party...and later on permanent constitution on 10 December 1932...as National Constitution Day.

In the National Museum, Bangkok, the timeline of Thailand is a broken one. Several events are left blank or undefined. The events of the 1912 plot that reflected the unpopularity and the disapproval of the rule of King Vajiravudh

(reigned 1910-1925), the dilemma of the political situation of Thailand during the Second World War between the Allied and the Axis Powers, the booming economy of Thailand during the American era, the various *coup d'etates* in the 1950s and 1960s, the Black May Crisis in 1992, the success of becoming an Asian economic power in early 1990s and the economic crisis in 1997 are all hidden in the timeline. Most surprisingly, the historic event of the first edict of Phibunsongkhram's *ratthaniyom* (cultural mandate) on 24th June, 1939 that changed the name of Siam into Thailand is completely absent from the narration of the museum.

Renan (1882) said that a nation has a desire to grow (*Ernest Renan*, n.d.). People possess different aspirations that they think will help a nation to grow. Nonetheless, the National Museum, Bangkok restricts these aspirations of growth to those of the kings: King Ramkhamhaeng (reigned 1279?A.D.-1298A.D.) of the Sukhothai epoch aspired to enlarge the territory of Sukhothai, King U-thong (reigned 1351A.D.-1369A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch aspired to get rid of the Khmer influence, King Taksin (reigned 1767A.D.-1782A.D.) of the Thonburi epoch aspired to continue the Siamese rule against Burma, Rama III (reigned 1824A.D.- 1851A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch aspired to boost the economy of Siam and the king of today's Thailand, His Majesty King Bhumibol (reigned 1946A.D.-), aspired to drive a self-sufficient and self-dependant Thailand. These kings possessed different aspirations to bring stability and growth to the country from different perspectives. Common people also possess aspirations that they think best fit into the profile of the country. Disregarding whether Pridi was a communist or Phibunsongkhram a fascist, they aspired to rule the country in accordance with their perceptions. Despite Buddhadasa and Dhammananda Bhikkuni not being accepted by the Thai Sangha Supreme Council, they aspired to interpret Buddhism from their perspectives. In Thailand today, groups that bear different ideologies still competes with each other for different aspirations that best fit into the Thai society.

b. A time that fails to link the present to the future

The timeline of many history museums stops at a particular point, nonetheless, these museums still try to continue the timeline that is beyond their reach. The history of Malaysia stops at present day Malaysia in the National Museum, Malaysia. Nonetheless, with the support of the Malaysian in the internal development of its industries and the external achievements of its sports, architects and cultural heritages, the link of today's Malaysia to the future is well summarised in the last plaque of the exhibition. On the plaque, it writes,

This is Malaysia today. Diverse yet integrated. Different yet ever so familiar. A vibrant nation based on a unique and sustainable platform that will allow it to meet any challenges ahead.

The Victoria and Albert Museum held the controversial exhibition of pop singer Kylie Minogue is a sign to confirm itself to the public that the Victoria and Albert Museum is a museum that is well versed with contemporary and future trend.

In the National Museum, Bangkok, the history of Thailand stops at the reign of the current king. The aspiration of His Majesty King Bhumibol is to build a self-sufficient and self-dependent Thailand. Shall this be the guiding principle of future Thailand or are there any principles that will steer future Thailand through the capricious national and international environment?

The Space of Thailand

From its original space as clusters of *mueangs* to a space with a defined boundary and from a space without any “civilised” infrastructures to a space that is well-linked up by modern transportation systems, Thailand has undergone tremendous changes. In 2008, its population exceeds 63 million. Thailand is the 20th most populous country in the world (*Thailand*, n.d.). The economic structure of Thailand shifts from rural farming to urban entrepreneurship and from agrarian export to manufacturing export. Despite the share of the export of agricultural products dwindled from 50% in 1980 to 7% in 2000 (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005), rice export of Thailand still ranks number one worldwide. The export of rice reaches more than 6.5 million tons annually (*Thailand*, n.d.). The Baiyoke Tower in Pathunam district, Bangkok is the tallest building of Thailand, the tallest hotel in Southeast Asia and the third tallest hotel in the world (*Baiyoke Tower II*, n.d.). The role Thai female plays in the Thai society has changed. The number of Thai female university graduates outnumbered male in 1990s (Chris and Phongpaichit, 2005). The gender and the thinking of Dhammananda Bhikkuni are challenges to the Thai Sangha Supreme Council. Both internal and external factors contribute to these changes. Nonetheless, at the National Museum, Bangkok, nothing was mentioned on the physical and economic changes and achievements of Thailand. There is no trace of its landscape, trading activities, industries and main sources of foreign income of Thailand. In the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand is an indigenous and isolated space. The museum depicts the Thai monarchy as the main social mechanism and social group in Thailand.

a. A nation with no society

Many societies experience tremendous changes socially and physically. The Hong Kong Museum of History and the National Museum of Singapore depict these changes from the changing social facilities and changing lifestyles of the people. The photography gallery of the National Museum of Singapore explores several sociological themes of early 20th century Singapore. Some of these themes remain debatable topics in today’s world: interracial marriage, prostitution, polygamy and the changing old values. The Hong Kong Museum of History shows the changing of an old Hong Kong into a modern Hong Kong socially and economically (figure 124 – 127).

Nonetheless, the Thai society that is illustrated by the National Museum, Bangkok is a society with no social group, social class and social changes. The society is a series of political, social, economical and religious policies fostered by the Thai kings. All in all, the Thai society is a society moulded by the male. The only two females who are able to share some narrations in the National Museum, Bangkok are Queen Suriyothai who shed her life for the sake of her husband,

King Chakkraphat (reigned 1548A.D.–1569A.D.), during the war with Burma in 1548, and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit who set up the foundations for the promotion of Supplementary Occupations and related techniques.



Figure 124 (Left): Early Hong Kong was a fishing port.

Figure 125 (Right): Hong Kong began to develop its secondary industry in the 1950s.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

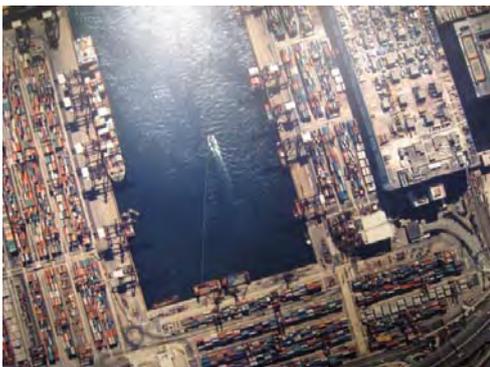


Figure 126 (Left): The container harbour of Hong Kong is one of the world's busiest container harbours.

Figure 127 (Right): The physical landscape of today's Hong Kong.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

b. A nation with no social movements

In the days of imperialism, Thailand was never colonised nor technically occupied by the Japanese during the Second World War. The modern history of Thailand is different from other Southeast Asian countries whose main concern was dominantly occupied with independent movements. The National Museum, Malaysia narrates those social ideologies that led Malaysia to the road of independence (figure 128-130).

After the Second World War, several indigenous social and political ideologies emerged in Thailand. These ideologies have great impact in the political development of Thailand: The military polity in the 1960s, the student movements in the 1970s and the provincial polity in the 1980s. Democracy remains a hot topic in today's Thailand. Nonetheless, the Thai society as illustrated by the National Museum, Bangkok is a society with no social

movements and ideologies. The only ideology which is narrated in the museum is democracy. One of the wall texts of the museum writes,

One of the contributions of King Vajiravudh was the introduction of democracy to the country and King Prajadhipok was one step late to introduce a democratic constitution to Thailand.

The Thai king is the main social and political mechanism that drives the Thai society. Apart from the works of the king, the National Museum, Bangkok does not mention the works of any Thai Prime Minister, the Thai government and the Thai cabinet towards the development of Thailand.



Figure 128 (Left): Some indigenous literature that aroused the social consciousness of the Malaysian after the Second World War.

Figure 129 (Middle): Examples of scholars who contributed to this social consciousness.

Figure 130 (Right): The National Museum, Malaysia exhibits some old newspapers that reported the progress of Malaysia towards the road to independence.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

c. A space with no economy

The Hong Kong Museum of History narrates the economic growth of Hong Kong from early 20th century to end of the century. The Osaka Museum of History narrates its economical growth in relation to its geographical location as a seaport and its trading activities. The National Museum, Malaysia exhibits its main industries since the 1950s: Rubber tree planting, tin mining, coffee and pepper plantation.

In the 1980s, the economy of Thailand bloomed with such a great leap that Thailand together with Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore were listed the “five little dragons” in Asia. Thai economy began to affect its political development. The notable examples were the stepping down of the former Prime Minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, amid the 1997 economic crisis in Thailand and the rise of Taksin Shiniwatra from a business man to the Prime Minister of Thailand in 2001. Today, the Gross Domestic Product (nominal) of Thailand reached an estimated value of USD250,000 billion and ranked 34th worldwide in 2007 (*Thailand*, n.d). Tourism is one main source of its foreign income that generated around USD550,000 million in 2007 (*Tourism statistics in Thailand 1998-2007*, 2008). Nonetheless, the Thai society in the National Museum,

Bangkok is a society with no economy. There are no traces of the threats, achievements and influences of the Thai economy to the Thai society.

d. Thailand as an indigenous space

The Asian Civilisation Museum depicts the main mechanism that keeps Singapore moving is the social harmony of the four main different races: Chinese, Malays, Indian and Muslims. Despite the Singaporean comes from different races, they are able to integrate with one another. They live on the same island and in the same country, and they are able to see their own root and those of each other. The National Museum of Singapore further fosters this multi-cultural mechanism concept to the post independent daily living of different races in relation to mass media, cuisines and fashion.

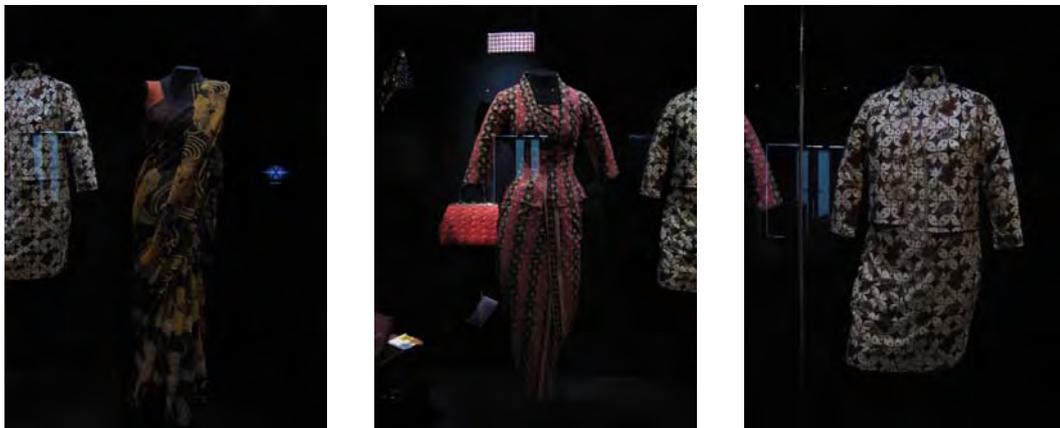


Figure 131: The Fashion Gallery of the National Museum of Singapore exhibits the early fashion of the main races of Singapore

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

On the final plaque of the National Museum of Singapore, it writes,

We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves a one united people, regardless of race, language and religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation” in four languages.

The National Museum, Bangkok also addresses those ethnic minorities who scatter mainly around the hillside of Thailand. Nonetheless, nothing was mentioned about the two biggest ethnic groups: The Chinese and the Muslims. The Chinese is closely related to the political, social and economical development of Thailand while the Muslims dominate the population in the four southern provinces. Neither does the museum address the Laotians who live in Isan, the northeast part of Thailand. Owing to the booming city economy, the influx of labour from Isan to Bangkok became so tremendous that the Lao language has become the second most spoken language in Bangkok (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

In the National Museum, Malaysia, the relationship of Malaysia with the world is not just a series of confrontations and conflicts with the colonial powers

and the Japanese. The international pride of today's Malaysia is expressed in its hosting of and participation in international forums, in the international recognition of its outstanding architectures, landscape and industry, in the achievement of Malaysia in its sports events and in its cultural heritage.



Figure 132 (Left): The Malaysian badminton team won gold medal in the Thomas Cup in 1992.



Figure 133 (Right): The Mak Yong Theatre is a UNESCO world heritage (2005 Proclamation).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Before the 19th century, Siam looked to India and China for reference. With the emergence of the colonial powers in Asia in the late 19th century, Siam veered the reference to the west in order to be civilised and to make progress. In the 1930s, under the *ratthaniyom* (the cultural mandates), western dress code and behaviour (mainly British) were the reference for the whole society. During the American era after the Second World War, “progress” was changed to “development” (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005); but the development of the Thai society was steered by the United States of America. The economic crisis in 1997 finally alerted the Thai people the danger and the risk of looking to the west for total reference. Nonetheless, tourism is still one of the main sources of foreign income of Thailand. The linkage of Thailand with the outside world is more than wars with Khmer and Burma, the praise of the foreign policy of King Narai (reigned 1656A.D.–1688A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch and the reforms carried out by King Mongkul (reigned 1851A.D.–1868A.D.) and King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.–1910A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch that are narrated in the National Museum, Bangkok. .

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “nation”

In the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand is a nation dedicated to the Thai kings. They are the motivators, the engines, and the engineers of the time. These kings are sculptors who shape the space of Thailand. The Thai kings are the only social mechanism and social group of the Thai society. The museum depicts Thailand as an egoistic nation. Despite the linkage of Thailand with the outside world was a mixture of intimation and alienation, and love and hatred, in the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand was on its own and by its own.

Satsana (Religion)

Theravada Buddhism (the teachings/doctrines of the Elders) is essential to mould the cultural and political identity of Thailand. The essentialness is not in the religious faith but in the social and political context of Theravada Buddhism. Socially, the Buddha's cosmology is closely associated with the daily life of the Thai Buddhists. Theravada Buddhism is to liberate mankind from human sufferings. To get liberated from the sufferings, mankind has to be enlightened to *nirvana* by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path and accumulating *karmas*. The Noble Eightfold Path is: The right speech, the right action, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right mindfulness, the right concentration, the right view and the right thought (Trainor, 2004). They are the moral code for social harmony, stability and peace (Lyons, n.d. and Gilquin, 2005). To accumulate *karmas*, Thai Buddhists have to make merits, to go to *wats*, to worship Buddha-images and to practice rituals. Politically, Theravada Buddhism is the instrument through which the Thai king gain legitimacy and divinity through the Sangha (the Buddhist community). On the political stratum, the Thai king and the Sangha are pegged with one another. The king gains his orthodoxy through the Sangha while the Sangha secures its existence and importance through the patronage of the king.

Origin of Theravada Buddhism

It is generally agreed among the Buddhist literatures that three Buddhist councils were held after the death of the Buddha. Owing to the Buddha preached orally, the purpose of these gatherings was to recollect the memory of the Buddhists on the preaching of the Buddha and to compile the memory into orthodox and legitimate doctrines. It was during the second Council at Vaishali that there were some disagreements on some disciplinary issues among the Buddhists (Krishnan, 2008 and Trainor, 2004). This resulted in the splitting of Buddhism into two streams: The Sthavira (Elders) and the Mahasanghika (Great Assembly). The Sthavira stream was further evolved into four tributaries. Theravada Buddhism was derived from the one of the tributaries, the Tamraparniya (the Sri Lanka lineage).

The holy documents of Theravada Buddhism and Thai Buddhist identity

a. The *Tripitaka* (The three baskets)

The *Tripitaka* is the holy document of Theravada Buddhism. This document compiles both *dhamma* (doctrines) and *vinaya* (disciplines) of the Buddha's teachings. The *Tripitaka* was believed to be compiled at the Third Buddhist Council in Pataliputra (Krishnan, 2008). Today, the *Tripitaka* of Theravada Buddhism is widely regarded as the oldest and the most complete canon of Buddhism.

The *Tripitaka* is composed of three baskets (three categories):

- i. *Vinaya Pitake* (The basket of monastic discipline)
 - The *Suttavibhanga* (Explanation of the *Patimokka*)

The *Suttavibhanga* listed the *Patimokka* (The code of conduct) for the monks and nuns. Altogether there are 27 rules for the monks and 311 for the nuns.

- *Kahdhaka (The multitude)*

It narrates the life of the Buddha from enlightenment till ordination, the rules for important rituals and the *Patimokka* recitation.

- *Parivara*

It summarises the *Suttavibhanga* and the *Kahdhaka*.

ii. *Sutra Pitake (The basket of teachings)*

This basket covers more than 30 volumes of the teachings of the Buddha. It is divided into five sections: The *Digha Mikaya (Long teachings)*, the *Majjhima Nikaya (Medium-Length teachings)*; the *Samyutta Nikaya (Connected teachings)*; the *Anguttara Nikaya (Teachings in ascending numeric order)* and *Khuddaka Nikaya (Miscellaneous)* (Trainor, 2004).

iii. *Adhidhamma Pitaka (The basket of scholastic doctrine)*

This last basket describes the visual world of the enlightened one.

b. *The Traiphuum Phra Ruang (The three worlds cosmography of Phra Ruang)*

The *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* describes the various realms of Buddhist cosmology: 11 *kamabhumi* (world of desire), 16 *rupabhumi* (world with little material qualities) and four *arupabhumi* (the world without material qualities) (Reynolds, 1991). The theme of the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* is about the Buddhist cosmology and the relationship between the Chakravatin (the universal monarch) and his subjects. The *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* was compiled by King Lithai (reigned 1298A.D.-1346/47?A.D.) of Sukhothai in 1345 A.D. (Reynolds, 1991). King Lithai's idea was to rule Sukhothai in accordance with the spirit of the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang*. Despite some scholars questioning the political intention of King Lithai, this cosmology justified the socio-political structure of Sukhothai and made Sukhothai an ideal kingdom for Siam and Thailand. Up till today, the *Traiphuum Phra Runag* is still closely associated with the political and cultural identity, the daily life and the universal truth of the Thai people (Reynolds, 1991 and Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005).

The context of Theravada Buddhism: Kingship

“Thai monarchy was born out of the political ideology of Theravada Buddhism” (Suwannathat-Pian, 2003, p. 24). In accordance with Theravada Buddhism, the king represents the people. To ensure his people live under the ideal moral and spiritual world of Buddhism, the king has to rule in accordance with *dhamma*. To be able to rule with *dhamma*, the king has to patronise Buddhism, to ensure Buddhism is well-protected and well-supported.

This context of Thai kingship emanates from a myth that the Buddha told Vasetha, his disciple. In accordance with the myth, the world was originally occupied by undifferentiated spirits who lived self-sufficiently. Driven by greed these spirits began to consume food not for necessity. The greed of the spirits continued to grow and the quality of the food began to decline and the supply

became less sufficient. The spirits started to differentiate each other in their looks. Finally they evolved into two genders. The insufficiency of food came to such an extent that the spirits had to grow their own crops. The world then entered a state of anarchy circumscribed by thefts, violence and greed. To cope with the chaotic situation, people began to look for a king, a capable one, who was able to censure and banish what was wrong, and to protect them. In return, the people would contribute a portion of their growing to the capable one (Englehart, 2001).

The king represents the people. He is chosen by the people as a result of his superiority. His role is to discipline the society to ensure that the people live harmoniously in the world of *dhamma* (Englehart, 2001). Under this context, the relationship between Buddhism, the king and the nation is well-defined and established.

King Ashoka (reigned 273B.C.-232B.C.), the Indian Buddhist king, was so devoted to Buddhism that he adopted the fable of this myth into practice. He ruled in accordance with principles of *dhamma*. He set up rock pillars that were inscribed with the teachings of the Buddha in various parts of his kingdom. On the famous Ashoka pillar in Sarnath, his ruling principles were well inscribed on the pillar: “To govern according to dharma, to administer justice according to dharma, to advance the people’s happiness according to dharma, and to protect them according to dharma” (cited in Trainor, 2004, pp50-51). King Ashoka purified the Sangha. He removed those monks who had violated the *dhamma* and the *vinaya*. He supported the Sangha. He donated generously to the Sangha and constructed monasteries and *stupas*. During his reign, King Ashoka had built more than 84,000 *stupas* (*Ashoka the Great*, n.d.). The relationship between the king and Buddhism is thus confirmed and tightly bonded.

The context of Theravada Buddhism: The Sangha

The first members of the Sangha were the first five disciples of the Buddha (Trainor, 2004). They travelled around as peripatetic ordained followers. As the Sangha wandered around and settled in different communal societies, they were well aware of the importance of keeping the relationship with the local communal authorities. They adapted themselves to the local traditions and laws, and were able to attract lay followers from various social strata ranging from rulers to common people (Trainor, 2004). The relationship between the Sangha and the society began to take root.

The lay followers began to offer residences and daily necessities to the Sangha. To the lay followers, these offerings were to accumulate merits. To the Sangha, the acceptance of these offerings enabled them to have a place where they could retreat during the heavy rainy seasons, and to provide a place where the lay followers were able to practice the religion and to receive education.

It was King Ashoka who solidified the close association of the Sangha with the nation. Prior to his death, the Buddha had not assigned any institution or person to centralise his teachings. He told his disciples that his teachings of

dhamma and *vinaya* would be their remembrance (Van Beek and Tettoni, 1999). The Sangha became the institution through which the teachings of the Buddha could be fulfilled. The Sangha represented the Buddha secularly. The relationship of the Sangha and the king was very sensitive. On the one hand, the Sangha had to look up to the king for protection and patronage; but on the other, the Sangha had to use the *dhamma* to measure the performance of the king.

The implication of Buddha-images

The worship of Buddha-images was first mentioned in the myth of *Ashokavadana*, (*The stories of ashoka*) (Trainor, 2004). In accordance with the myth, Monk Upagupta had solved some difficulties of Mara. Since Mara had confronted the Buddha amid the Buddha's road to enlightenment he knew the look of the Buddha. Monk Upagupta then requested Mara to transform himself into the image of the Buddha whom Monk Upagupta worshipped in front. Monk Upagupta made it very clear what he was worshipping was not the image but the personification of the philosophical preaching which the image embodied (Trainor, 2004 and Van Beek and Tettoni, 2000).

The first Buddha-image was made two hundred years after the death of the Buddha (Trainor, 2004). The earliest known Buddha-image was on the coins that were made during the reign of the Kushana king, Kanishka (78A.D. – 144A.D.). Buddha-images depicting his birth, his fasting, his achievement of enlightenment, his first teaching and his final *nirvana* were found vastly. This multiplication of Buddha-images was further complicated by Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. These two streams of Buddhism included deities of various natures onto the Buddhist pantheon. The Buddha began to exist with other Mahayana and Vajrayana deities: Boddhaisattvas, Maitreya, Avalokitesvara and demons. Nonetheless, these images were purposely made for religion. Lay followers worship these images. They offer the images with garlands and gild the images with gold leaves for merit accumulation. Buddhist images are to bridge the lay followers from the secular to the sacred world.

The context of Theravada Buddhism in the National Museum, Bangkok

a. Buddha-images are adorned with new implications in the museum

Many of the religious images at the National Museum, Bangkok were originated from different sacred religious sites. Prince Damrong brought a stele that was originated from the Angkor Wat, a lintel from Lolei and a statue of the "Buddha mediates sheltered by a Naga (a serpent deity)" from Pimai to the then Royal Museum (Coedes, 1927). The Javanese sculptures were from Borodubudur and Prambana (Coedes, 1927). Caverlee Cary (1994) said that majority of Buddha-images or religious images were originated from different notable *wats*.

Nonetheless, when these images were removed from their religious sites to the museum, the museum has, up to a point, redefined their meaning (Cary, 1994 and Newhouse, 2005). At the religious sites, people worship the images. People ask for blessing while worshipping. The sites are sacred places. The images are for contemplation and introspection. Nonetheless, the relationship between the

images and visitors changes in the museum. The Museum of Religion that was later renamed the Musée Guimet, is reputed for its rich storage of Southeast Asian religious images. Nonetheless, the images in the Musée Guimet are mainly for the appreciation of the cultural value and the grand ancient civilisations behind them. The religious images in the Musée Guimet are to enable visitors “to discover and appreciate the diverse cultures and civilizations of the continent of Asia” (Prigent, 2004, back cover). The exhibitions of the South and Southeast Asian Galleries of the British Museum use Buddhism as the main stream and then branch out to various forms of arts and Buddhist images. Nonetheless, these arts and images are mainly to serve “as objects of public and private devotion for followers of Buddhist path” (Pemberton, 2002, p.7). The temporary exhibition, *On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia*, an exhibition held by the Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore) brought various types of Buddhist arts from different countries together. The aim of the exhibition was to “explore the interactions between various regions in Asia that were touched by Buddhism, and how these interactions resulted in assimilation of ideas and the exchange of religious thoughts, philosophies, and objects of worship” (Krishnan, 2008, p. 17). They appeal to the passion of the visitors towards the philosophy and knowledge of Buddhism. Buddha-images lost its sacredness, mysterious and religious implication in the museum. For the purpose of worship, visitors can do so in front of the Buddha Sihing image at the Buddhaisawan Chapel instead of those religious sculptures inside the north and south wings of the National Museum, Bangkok

b. Omission of Thai political and Buddhist cultural identity and ideology

According to Jackson (Reynolds, 1991), the original version of the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* was destroyed during the fall of Ayutthaya in the late 18th century. King Taksin (reigned 1767A.D.–1782A.D.) of the Thonburi epoch asked Phra Maha Chuay to re-inscribe a new version of the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* in 1778. The re-inscribed *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* was a ten-volume palm leaf manuscript. After the death of King Taksin, the re-inscribed version was lost. Rama I (reigned 1782A.D.-1809A.D.) then asked Phra Maha Jan to compile another version of the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* that was known as *Traiphuumlokawinnitchai*. Following the recovery of the relics of Phra Maha Chuay’s version of *Traiphuum Phra Ruang*, Prince Damrong then re-compiled these relics into today’s version. This version is now stored at the National Library of Thailand

The *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* shaped the political and Buddhist cultural identity and ideology of Siam and later Thailand. It made Sukhothai an important and influential model that influenced the historic development of Siam and later Thailand. The concept of Thai Kingship originated from this manuscript (Suwannathat-Pian, 2004). It contributed to the context of Thai Theravada Buddhism. Nonetheless, it also embraces a new ideological perception of Thai identity that is “democratic, and that political authoritarianism” (Jackson, cited in Reynold, 1991, p. 225).

Nonetheless, the Thai political and cultural identity and ideology in relation to Theravada Buddhism are omitted in the National Museum, Bangkok.

c. Omission of the political potency of Theravada Buddhism

The context of Theravada Buddhism embraces strong political potency. It is a cohesive force that integrates the Thai society both politically and socially. On several occasions, Theravada Buddhism was utilised by several political leaders in Thailand to consolidate and to legitimise their rules.

To promote a pure Thai Buddhist society, Witchit Watthakan, the head of the Fine Arts Department during the rule of Phibunsongkhram, had included the Japanese Bushido spirit of bravery, honesty, compassion, politeness and self-control into the Buddhist *dhamma* (Reynolds, 1991 and Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005). Despite the anti-monarchy attitude of Phibunsongkhram, he remained to be a strong patron of Buddhism. Throughout his rule, he had restored over 5000 *wats*. He associated himself very closely with Buddhism. His political party's newspaper was called Dhammadhipataya (Reynolds, 1991). Phibunsongkhram tried to associate his newspaper with the *dhamma* of the Buddha. Sarit Thanarat amended the Sangha Act in 1962 and restored King Mongkut's Thammayut sect. The policy of the Government of Thaksin Shinawatra, the former Prime Minister, delivered to the National Assembly on Monday, 26th February, 2001, emphasised the importance of upholding religious teachings that are mainly Buddhist. Chitrabongs in his unpublished teaching material (2004) cited the policy. It reads,

Support and promote religion-affiliated educational institutions in promoting religious teachings and doctrines.

Encourage all religious establishments...benefit ... spiritual development. Encourage children and youth to study religious teachings ...Encourage people of different religions ...to promoting peace and harmony in the Thai society.

The National Museum, Bangkok tells a very close relationship between Buddhism and the kings of Rattanakosin epoch:

- Rama I (reigned 1782A.D.-1809A.D.) re-compiled the *Tripitaka*;
- Rama II (reigned 1809A.D.-1824A.D.) sent the Sangha to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism and the *Tripitaka*;
- Rama III (reigned 1824A.D.-1851A.D.) restored several *wats*;
- King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.-1868A.D.) introduced the Dhammayutika Nikaya;
- King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.) used *wats* as educational centres and King Vajiravudh wrote various religious books.

In the museum, Buddhism is mainly associated with the contributions of the kings.

d. Omission of the development of various kingships in relation to religion

Throughout the history of Thailand, Thai kingship fall mainly into three types (Englehart, 2001):

- i. Patriarchic kingship, the father king

ii. Brahminical kingship, the God-king and

iii. Thammasat kingship, the Buddhist king

These kingships influenced the historic development of Thailand.

i. The Patriarchic kingship, the father king

This was well-represented by the kingship of the Sukhothai epoch. The king was to rule in accordance with the *dhamma*. The king acted as a father and took care of his subjects as if they were his offspring. In accordance with the stone inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng's stone stele, anyone who had grievances could hit the gong that was placed in front of the king's palace. The king would bring justice and fairness to his subjects. Failing to care for his subjects would mean the king could face the risk of losing his throne. The later kings of Sukhothai were so strongly clung to this belief that they used Dhammaracha (ruled in accordance with *dhamma*) as the name of the dynasty.

ii. The Brahminical kingship, the God-king

During the late Ayutthaya epoch, Thai kingship was largely associated with the Brahminical Divine King. The king became very distant, imposed and mysterious (Englehart, 2001). The king became a god. He could not be accessed by common people even visually. The fall of Ayutthaya was related to the association of this "non-Thai" kingship by many political figures in the early Rattanakosin epoch.

iii. The Thammasat kingship, the Buddhist king

The association of the king with the teaching of the *dhamma* was restored in the early Rattanakosin epoch. Nonetheless, instead of being a father king, the king became a guardian of Buddhism. The king was to defend and to protect Buddhism against undesirable influence (Burma) and to save those (Laos and Khmer) from the lesser Buddhist governance (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). The king was to help those to reach the road of enlightenment by building *wats*, purifying the Sangha and undertaking royal duties (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). The re-compilation of the *Tripitaka*, the sending of the monks on a mission to Sri Lanka, the enormous building of *wats*, the purification of the Sangha and the writing of religious books were for the well-being of the people (Baker and Pongphaichit, 2005). The king had become a Buddhist king.

e. Omission of the Sangha in association with Theravada Buddhism

The Sangha is the centre of preserving and embodying *dhamma*. The legitimacy of the king depends on his support of the Sangha. King Mongkut's Thammayut sect; King Chulalongkorn's 1902 Sangha Act in centralisation the administration of Sangha; the favouring of Mahanikai in the 1930s, and the administrative separation of the Thammayut and Mahanikai in 1962 (Peleggi, 2007) were actions to ensure the well-being of the Sangha for the merit making of the lay followers (Englehart, 2001). Not only did the Sangha link the king with the monks, it linked lay followers with the monks. Nonetheless, the nature, the importance and the association of the Sangha with the Thai king and the nation were omitted in the National Museum, Bangkok.

f. Omission of the recent development of Thai Buddhism

- The changing role of female in Buddhism

Originally, the Sangha was opened to both genders. Traditionally, a nun could be ordained by a mixed ordain containing both *bhikkus* and *bhikkuni* (*The Nation*, 2006). Nevertheless, around 700 years ago, this tradition disappeared. It was only in 1996 that the tradition was restored in Sri Lanka. In 1988, full *bhikkuni* ordination was restored in Taiwan. Tibet has restored the ordination to female at novice level. In Thailand, never has there been any nun ordained. In 1928, the Supreme Patriarch even issued a decree that forbid monks to ordain nuns (*The Nation*, 2006). Even though *bhikkuni* is officially discriminated by the Thai Sangha, the *bhikkuni* community is very active inside and outside Thailand.

Inside Thailand, the most remarkable *bhikkunis* are Voramai Kabilsingh Shatsena and her daughter Dhammananda Bhikkuni, formerly Dr. Chatsuman Kabilsingh. Shatsena was ordained in Taiwan while Dhammananda was in Sri Lanka. Dhammanada currently edits the *Yasodhara*, a newsletter named after the wife of Buddha, which caters to international female Buddhists. She once questioned the Thai Sangha Supreme Council why the door for women to be ordained was locked while the door for women to go into prostitution was so widely open, and if the door for women to be ordained was opened, it would help uplift the status of women (*The Nation*, 2006).

- New Buddhist movements

Apart from the Bhikkuni Sangha, new Buddhist movements began to reshape the old Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. One of the most remarkable movements is the “Dhammic Socialism” initiated by Buddhadasa (1906A.D.-1993A.D.) (Trainor, 2004).

In 1932, one month before the 1932 *coup d’etat*, Buddhadasa retreated to a forest in Suan Mokkh, near his hometown Chaiya. He questioned the aged-old practice of Thai Buddhism and merits making, which to him were against the original Buddha’s teaching. To him, the Buddha’s teaching was not to link the present life with the future but for the sake of present life only. Buddhists thus has to engage in political and economical issues for social improvement. When being asked about his view on life by an elder monk, Buddhadasa’s reply was to live for the total benefits of humanity (Buddhadasa, 2006).

Apart from Buddhadasa, the 1970s also witnessed another religious movement under Phra Bodhiraksa. Phra Bodhiraksa fostered the Santi Asok movement that aimed at reforming the monastic discipline. He created a political party, the Phalang Tham, (the Force of Dhamma). Although Phra Bodhiraksa was dismissed by the Supreme Buddhist Council, the movement was able to attract more than 100,000 lay followers (Trainor, 2004 and Peleggi, 2007).

- The changing role of meditation

According to Theravada Buddhism, meditation is a means to develop both discipline and clarity in the mindset. It is a means to achieve enlightenment.

Nowadays meditation has already become a popular activity among non-lay followers, particularly those who live in the city. In Bangkok, there are a lot of meditation classes organised by health clubs and gymnasium. These classes are to help city people to release daily pressures and to search for internal peace and calmness. The nature of meditation has changed in accordance to time. Meditation has become a lifestyle.

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “religion”

In the National Museum, Bangkok, religion is mainly associated with religious images and the Thai kings. The kings support and patronise Buddhism. The kings purify and reform Buddhism. Religious images lost their religious significance in the museum. In fact, the history of Thailand can be appreciated from different perspectives of Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism as a religion and a philosophy evolves and influences the mindset and behaviour of the Thai people. Its religious images tell the art and cultural evolution of Thailand. Its religious context in terms of kingship and the Sangha shapes and navigates the historic development of Thailand. Its growth in accordance with the change and the changing needs of the Thai society gives new dimensions both to the religion itself and the Thai history.

Phra mahakasat (King)

The National Museum, Bangkok is a museum by the Thai kings, of the Thai kings and for the Thai kings. The museum was part of the palace of the Uparaja (the second king). The motivator to change this palace into a museum was King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868–1910). Many Thai kings contributed to the development of Thailand. The Thai kings are the main patrons of Theravada Buddhism. The minor arts inside the museum are to tell the wealth, power, status and interests of the Thai kings. It is a museum for paying respect to the kings. Nonetheless, instead of paying respect to all kings since the Sukhothai epoch, the National Museum, Bangkok pays respect to a selective group of kings: The kings of the Rattanakosin era.

By the Thai kings

Following the tradition of Ayutthaya of having an Uparaja as the king's successor, Rama I (reigned 1782A.D.-1809A.D.) appointed his younger brother, Maha Surasinghanada to the throne of the Uparaja (Yupho, 1968). The palace of the Uparaja was known as the Wang Na (the Front Palace). It was built in 1782, the year Bangkok was founded. As a tradition, the Wang Na had to be built in the front of the main entrance of the first king's palace. The main function of the Wang Na was to safeguard and to protect the king's palace against any attack. The main entrance of the Grand Palace, Bangkok faces north, the Front Palace was then built to the north of the palace. The original complex of the Wang Na was a combination of the throne hall, the audience hall, some residential buildings, some offices, some stables for elephants and horse, and the chapel for the private use of the Uparaja (Chongkol, 1999).

The Wang Na was the residence for the Uparajas for five reigns. The most notable one was King Pinklao, the Uparaja during the reign of King Mongkut (reigned 1851–1868). King Wichaichan was the last Uparaja ever lived in the Wang Na. After the death of King Wichaichan, King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868–1910) abolished the Uparaja tradition. The Wang Na then became a complex that was mixed with a museum, a barrack, some classrooms for the School of Dramatic Art (1934) and a temporary theatre simultaneously (Yupho, 1968).

As a palace of the Uparaja, the palace was praised by the American official who went to Bangkok for the ratifications of the treaty made between Siam and United States of America (please refer to chapter 2). He regarded the palace as a place with intelligent and cultivated taste: Maps, busts, statuettes, encyclopedia and scientific works and with a band of musicians playing European musical instruments (Bacon, 2000). As a complicated complex, the Wang Na was loosely guarded. People swarmed freely in and out the complex day and night.

The buildings of the National Museum, Bangkok carry a very strong monarchical implication. The Buddhaisawan Chapel was the private chapel of the Uparaja. The Sivamokkhabhiman Hall was an audience hall. They were built during the time of Maha Surasinghanada, the Uparaja of the first reign. The Issarawinitchai Hall was a throne hall built by the Maha Sakdi Balaseb, the Uparaja of the third reign (Yupho, 1968). The Issaretrachanusorn Hall was the residence of King Pinklao. The Mangkhalaphisek was the pavilion of King Pinklao. These were the Wang Na's original buildings that are parts of the present National Museum, Bangkok. The National Museum, Bangkok is in fact itself a palatial ground.

The introducer of the museum concept to Thailand and the solidifier of the concept to a public museum for Thailand were the kings. King Mongkut was the forerunner of the museum concept in Thailand. This museum concept finally evolved into a public museum by King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868–1910). The public museum was expanded by King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925–1935) who asked Prince Damrong and Professor George Coedes to re-structure the museum. The Royal Museum was re-organised in 1926 and became the Bangkok Museum. It was re-named the National Museum, Bangkok in 1934.

Of the Thai kings

The National Museum, Bangkok tells various aspects of the Thai kings. All these are derived from the belief, faith and love of the people towards the kings.

Minor arts reflect the hierarchy of the Thai society. The choice of material, the material itself, the products and the craftsmanship cater to this hierarchical demarcation. Certain materials and certain products were reserved for the Thai kings. Some of them were believed to bear certain power that was exclusively for the Thai kings. Objects made for the Thai kings deserved the finest craftsmanship. The painstaking care, the delicate work and immeasurable time spent on the

craftsmanship were catered to and for the sake of the Thai kings. Products made of certain materials represented the Thai kings and were diplomatic devices of the kings.

The status of the Thai kings was extraordinary. Products and residences for the kings had to be grand so as to represent this extraordinary status. The royal chariots and the travelling devices had to be fully elaborated, and the residences of the kings had to be fully decorated. Even the most prosperous families were not entitled for the fully elaborated *chofas*. They were reserved solely for the kings (Tettoni and Warren, 1994).

The kings were powerful. The ivory howdah at the Bhimuk Monthian Hall represented the power of the kings over his subjects. It was gift given to the king to confirm the authority of the kings on his subjects.

The kings were artistic and creative. Majority of the *khon* masks, and the Thai and Chinese marionettes at the Thaksina Bhimak Hall were made under the command of King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.–1925A.D.) and the Prince Successor of the fifth reign. The masks were for the plays of King Vajiravudh and the marionettes were designed by the Prince Successor respectively (Chongkol, 1999 and Chongkol 1984). The wooden door panels from the Wat Suthat at the Western Mukdet Hall were partly carved by Rama II (reigned 1809A.D.–1824A.D.) (please refer to chapter 3) (Chongkol, 1999, Chongkol, 1984 and Tettoni and Warren, 1994). They represent the talent, skill and craftsmanship of the kings.

In the National Museum, Bangkok, the development of the kingdom owed much to the contributions of the Thai kings.

- a. The kings helped to mould and preserve the culture of the kingdom:
 - King Ramkhamhaeng (reigned 1279?A.D.-1298A.D.) of the Sukhothai epoch invented the Thai script,
 - Rama II (reigned 1809A.D.–1824A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch inaugurated the golden age of Thai literature, art and culture and
 - King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.–1935A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch protected the cultural heritage and set up the Bangkok Museum.
- b. The kings fought against undesirable foreign invasions and built up external diplomatic relation:
 - King Naresuan (reigned 1590A.D.-1605A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch and King Taksin (reigned 1767A.D.–1782A.D.) of the Thonburi epoch fought against Burma for the independence of the kingdom and
 - King Narai's era (reigned 1656A.D.–1688A.D.) was regarded the glory of foreign relations of the Ayutthaya epoch.
- c. The kings brought prosperity to the kingdom:
 - The Ayutthayan kings supported trade, opened the country to the west and flourished the prosperity of Ayutthaya;

- Rama III (reigned 1824A.D.-1851A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch brought prosperity and stability to the kingdom;
- King Mongkut (reigned 1851A.D.-1868A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch modernised the country so as to be accepted by the other civilised nation;
- King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch reformed, developed and modernised the country in every aspects;
- King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910A.D.-1925A.D.) of the Rattanakosin epoch introduced democracy to the country, continued the judicial reform inaugurated by King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.), introduced modern weapons and improved the transportation network and
- His Majesty, King Bhumibol (1946A.D.-) initiated the project that aimed for a self-sufficient and self-dependent Thailand.

All in all, the collections of the museum were mainly private collections of the kings. King Mongkut's small museum was to exhibit his private collection mainly to those European who resided in Bangkok. His collections included some important and historical monuments of Siam such as the stone stele and the throne of King Ramkhamhaeng (1279?A.D.-1298A.D.), and the Khmer inscription of King Lithai (reigned 1298A.D.-1346/47?A.D.) (Coedes, 1927). King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868A.D.-1910A.D.) added his private collection to the public museum. The most notable one was the Javanese artifacts that were given to him during his trip to Java in 1896. The artifacts include the Great Ganesha from Singhasari, some *stupas* and some bas-reliefs from Borobudur, and four bas-reliefs from Prambana (Coedes, 1927). King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925A.D.-1935A.D.) enlarged the collection by donating 60 Buddha-images and relinquished all of the antiques that he received during his trip to the northern part of Siam (Coedes, 1927) and from King Maneewong of Cambodia (National Museum Division, 1993). All in all, Prince Damrong's "special collections" that he collected during his visits to various provinces was all added onto the exhibits. These included some Buddha sculptures from Sarnath and Buddhakaya, the stele that originated from Angkor Wat, a lintel from Lolei and some bas-reliefs from Phimai (Coedes, 1927).

For the Thai kings

Up to a point, the National Museum, Bangkok is for the Thai kings. It is a museum in honour of the kings of Thailand, and for the kings of Thailand. Nonetheless, instead of honouring all the kings since the Sukhothai epoch, the National Museum, Bangkok mainly honours the kings of the Rattanakosin period.

Ever since the Sukhothai epoch 54 kings (with the current king His Majesty Bhumibol inclusive) has ruled Siam and today's Thailand: Nine in the Sukhothai epoch, 35 in Ayuttaya the epoch (with Si Saowaphak inclusive), one in the Thonburi epoch and nine in the Rattanakosin epoch (Appendix C). Nonetheless,

the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch receive special attention in the National Museum, Bangkok.

The history of Thailand started from the Sukhothai epoch and succeeded by the Ayutthaya epoch, the Thonburi epoch and the Rattanakosin epoch. The kings of the Sukhothai and the Ayutthaya epoch, up to a point, influenced the rules of the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch and contributed to the historic development and the landscape of today's Thailand.

- a. King Ramkhamhaeng (reigned 1279?A.D.-1298A.D.) was regarded as a model king by King Mongkut and Prince Damrong. King Ramkhamhaeng was the father king. He cared for his subjects. King Mongkut's paternalist model was mostly inspired by King Ramkhamhaeng. King Ramkhamhaeng was a devoted Buddhist. He ruled in accordance to *dhamma*.

Some political leaders tried to link their rule with the image of King Ramkhamhaeng: Sarit Thanarat's *phor khun* (father) image and Phibunsongkhram's political party, the Manangasila Party, was named after King Ramkhamhaeng's throne, the Manangasila (Reynolds, 1991).

- b. The Buddhist identity of Thailand was shaped by the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* that was compiled by King Lithai (reigned 1298A.D.-1346/47A.D.). The largest Buddha image in the northern part of Siam, Phraputtachinnarat, was built under the order of King Lithai (*Lithai*, n.d.).
- c. King U-Thong (reigned 1351A.D.-1369A.D.), the founder of the Ayutthaya epoch, confirmed Theravada Buddhism as official religion of Siam (*Uthong*, n.d.). He then introduced the Sangha from Ceylon to Siam.
- d. The famous treasures excavated in 1957 inside the crypt of Wat Ratchaburana (1426) was built by King Borommaratcha II (1424A.D.-1448A.D.). His other name was Chao Sam Phraya. The present Chao Sam Phraya National Museum was named to commemorate King Borommaratcha II (Director of the Chao Sam Phraya Museum, personal communication, 2004). The precious objects that are exhibited at the National Museum, Bangkok today are mostly from these excavated treasures.
- e. King Borommatrailokanant (reigned 1448A.D.-1488A.D.) adopted the Uparaja (the second king) system to Siam (*Trailokanat*, n.d.). This tradition was re-adopted by Rama I.
- f. Chairacha (reigned 1534A.D.-1547A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch was credited with the improvement of the channels of the Chaophraya River. This contributed to the canal systems of Ayutthaya and Bangkok that these two cities were referred as the Venice of the East (Wyatt, 2003).
- g. King Borommakot (reigned 1733A.D.-1758A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch was a devoted Buddhist. Under him, Theravada Buddhism prospered, well-structured and disciplined. In 1751 the Kandyan king, King Kirti Sri Reja Sinha sent a mission from Ceylon to Ayutthaya. The mission was to ask King Borommakot to help restore Buddhism in Ceylon (Wyatt, 2003). Under the rule of King Borommakot, Ayutthaya became the pre-eminent centre of Buddhism.

The National Museum, Bangkok as a national history museum from the perspective of “king”

Many kings of the Sukhothai and the Ayutthaya epochs contributed to the development of Thailand. These previous kings set up examples, built foundations for and gave inspirations to the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. Nonetheless, the National Museum, Bangkok focuses mainly on the works of the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. The museum development connected the contributions of the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch to the development of Thailand politically, socially and culturally. As an absolute monarchy or as a constitutional monarchy, the kings integrated the political, social, cultural and religious development of Thailand. The National Museum, Bangkok tells the history of Thailand in relation to the kings. As a national museum, the National Museum, Bangkok is a museum by the kings, of the kings and for the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch. As a national history museum, the museum tells the history of Thailand that is mainly a history by the kings, of the kings and for the kings of the Rattanakosin epoch.

Part 3

A National Museum for Thailand as a place of discourse, a place of consumption and a place of interpretation

Being a part of the Theravada Buddhism societies, Thailand shares with its neighbours similar Buddhism principles, value and customs. Being a part of the Southeast Asia region, Thailand mixes with its neighbours similar cultural influences derived from the Indians, the Mons, the Javanese and the Khmers. On this end of the society, the National Museum, Bangkok tries to promote the uniqueness, indigenously, and originality of the Thai culture; but on the other end of the society, there were celebration, rejoicing and rivalry on monuments and artefacts that are “non-Thai”. The TAT celebrated the inauguration of the Muang Singh (Lion Town) in the north-east of Thailand to promote tourism in 1987. This Muang Singh has a strong Lao influence. The Thai government rejoiced the restitution of the lintel of “Vishnu Asleep on the Water” from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988 as national pride (Esterik, 2000). This lintel was originated from Prasat Phanom Rung, a Khmer temple dated before 890A.D. (Peleggi, 2007 and Esterik, 2000).

The Bowring Treaty had inaugurated the western globalisation of Siam. King Mongkut’s and King Chulalongkorn’s westernisation programmes resulted in the further penetration of western value and thinking into the Siamese society. Phibun Songkhram’s definition of a westernised Thailand finally materialised in today’s Thai society: The deluge of foreign commercial products into the Thai market, the influence of western lifestyle, the popularity of western cultural icons, the gradual obliterated traditional Thai cultural performances and products, and the commercialisation of Thai tradition for tourists’ consumption. The Thai society is westernised socially and culturally. More and more heritage are hidden behind high rise buildings. Facing such a cultural globalisation when the tradition value, customs, rites and rituals of the country are dwindling, the National Museum, Bangkok should not emphasis on the uniqueness of Thai as the only way to revive the cultural identity of Thai people. Facing such fluidity in its cultural identity, neither should the museum review nor depict the kings as the only element to bring stability and integrity to the nation.

Through all these years, the National Museum, Bangkok today is still unable to release its historic mission and burden. The historic development of museums tells us that a national museum has to be relevant to the space and time of its existence. A new national museum for Thailand has to be meaningful to its society. To be meaningful, this national museum has to look into its discourse, consumable nature and interpretation. Discourse means to embrace certain values, ideas, ideologies and truth. To know its consumable value, the new national museum for Thailand has to know the consumptive nature of its users.

Interpretations are to convey the discourse of a museum through tangible and intangible means. They are to ensure that the conveyance of the discourse to the correct “consumer” through correct means. Discourse, consumable value and interpretation form three basic frameworks onto which the new national museum has to work. What new frameworks are required for the development of a national museum for Thailand in order to make it relevant and meaningful to the Thai society? The following three chapters: A National Museum as a place of discourse, a national museum as a place of consumption and a national museum as a place of interpretation will unfold these questions.

Chapter 7

A national museum for Thailand as a place of discourse

“...collections are the essence of the contribution museums make to society”
(The Commission on Museums for a New Century, cited in Weil, 1990, p.28).

Relationship between the object and the discourse

Treading through the timeline of museum development, from museums as an ancient Greek inception to museums as a modern enterprise in today's world and from museums as a cabinet of curiosity catering to the connoisseurs during the Renaissance Period to the transformation of museums into a public institute today, the role and function of museums remain controversial. Despite the theme of the International Council of Museum in 2008 being to advocate museums to keep in pace with their societies and to act as “Agents of Social Change and Development” (cited in Hong Kong Art Museum, 2008, p. 7), some museums still prioritise collecting and preserving objects as their main tasks. Some museums regard themselves as social driven mechanisms for the sake of the public, while some see themselves as top-down authoritarian organisations. On the one end of the spectrum, some advocate the importance to respect and to associate with communities while on the other end some are busy in moulding cultural identities.

Museum studies tend to give a theoretical demarcation between traditional and new museum concept. The former emphasises on preserving the physical value of those objects inside a museum while the latter emphasises on the meaning and the influential value of these objects. Despite this difference, one common thread that these two concepts share and agree to is the potential powers of objects that are the principal resources of a museum. An object, as defined by the *Chamber Dictionary* embraces a three-fold meaning: It is a material thing that can be seen and touched; it is an aim or a purpose and it is related to the feeling or thoughts of people (cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Based on these definitions, the objects in a museum (in three dimensional or two dimensional forms) possess a potential that is able to trigger the conscious and unconscious mindset of visitors. In this case, the value of objects covers far beyond their physical values while those visitors who visit a museum are waiting to have their mindset triggered. Museums are far from being storage places for collecting and preserving objects. Exhibitions are neither space for the sake of exhibitions. Museums are places where objects are constituted in a manner to convey a discourse. This discourse is not only to fulfill but up to a point to sculpture the expectation of visitors. This discourse embraces a power to represent, to generate and to instill an inevitable and an indispensable common sense that is able to conceptualise the mindset of visitors. Through this discourse, visitors are able to understand the world. This discourse will become a perpetual universal truth and

will perpetuate from generation to generation. Museums as a place of discourse helps visitors conceptualise and understand the world at large. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states by bringing objects together a museum is able to present a rationale and build sensibility. As a place of discourse, museums are able to convey this rationale and sensibility to visitors. The structuring of a discourse is not restricted to texts. It can be constructed by series of interpretation techniques.

The importance of a discourse for a national museum

A discourse pivots the meaning of a museum

Museums are “impresarios of meaning performances” (Hein, 2000, p.65). It is the discourse of a museum that steers the direction of the meaning of a museum.

Museums of the same nature are able to convey a discourse that gives very different meanings to visitors. An art museum can convey a discourse that is to appreciate the aesthetic values, the techniques and the perception of different artists towards the world or it can simply be a noble house or palatial ground that shows the wealth or preferences of the elites or the court.

The status of the same object can bear different meanings in museums of the same nature. A tribute can be labelled a sign of friendship in a history museum of the offered country or a sign of insult and lost of dignity of the offering country. Nonetheless, some objects bear a very strong preconceived notion and value that made it difficult to change the mindset or perception of people towards the objects. For example, to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the independence of Cambodia from France, Norodom Sihanouk exhibited a large wood and a *papier-mache* replica of a Bayon temple of the Angkor Wat at a sports stadium in Phnom Penh. Nonetheless, the wood and *papier-mache* still bore such a preconceived “colonial-era logoization” that they were referred by Benedict Anderson (2002) as “a form of political museumizing” (p. 183).

Same object can refine with new meanings in museums of different natures. In an art museum, the terra-cotta warriors of the Qin dynasty, China, can be praised for their cultural and artistic greatness. In a history museum, the warriors can be instruments to evaluate the rule of the first emperor of China.

Museums exist not for the sake of the objects but for the meaning that museums can derive from the objects.

A discourse reflects the nature of time

During the Renaissance Period, museums revealed a time when people were in search of new meanings of life amid the fading influences of religions. Collectors collected with the quest for a better understanding of the secular world. The discourse of museums was to cater for the seeking for secular truth and leisure (Hein, 1998 and Marstine, 2006).

At the Age of Enlightenment when rationalism superseded the mindset of people, objects in museums were to edify people. During that time, it was

generally believed that people had to be enlightened rationally. Aestheticism became an independent science (Hein, 2000). Museums had to be publicly accessed so that the whole public could be enlightened. Those countries that bore a lesser civilisation had to be enlightened as well. Those countries that carried a higher civilisation bore a mission to uplift that of the lesser ones. Museums in general became a place of acquisition to evident the fulfillment of the task of homogeneity. The discourse of museums at the Age of Enlightenment was to glorify the greatness of this accomplishment. Museums were positioned with exotic and valuable objects that were “collected” from those countries with lesser civilisations.

Since the second half of the 20th century, people became more concerned with their livelihoods, their rights, their heritage, their environment and their mutual relationship. The discourses of museums began to steer to these concerns. In 1974, the International Council of Museums stated the importance of the public role of museums that was to serve and to develop societies (Weil, 1990). The Commission on Museums for a New Century of the American Association of Museums in 1984 commended “the proliferation of voices and pluralism of American society as primary forces of social change, which it applauds” (cited in Hein, 2000, p. 44). The summit in 1998 organised by the American Association of Museums in collaboration with some of the International Council of Museums’ members and committee proposed the protection and diffusion of the culture and natural heritage of the United States of America (Weil, 2002). The discourse of museums began to focus on affirming the cultural identity of different races and preserving national culture and natural heritage.

A discourse caters to the uniqueness of a museum

No two museums are the same. Museums vary in their histories, scales, disciplines, acquisition policies and governances. Undeniably, objects themselves cater for this distinction. Up to a point objects are able to speak for themselves (Weil, 1990). To see a specific object in a museum might constitute a reason for visitors to visit that museum. Nonetheless, not all museums possess precious, rare or famous objects. In fact, it is questionable whether objects alone cater for the main attractiveness of museums. A study made by Zahava Doering who directs the Office of Institutional Studies at the Smithsonian found out that the most satisfactory exhibitions were those that were able to resonate visitors “with their experience and provide new information in ways that confirm and enrich their view of the world” (cited in Weil, 2002, p. 206). Based on this finding, the main attraction of museums to visitors lay not in their objects, but in the discourse that these objects convey. This discourse is able to confirm, to reinforce, and to extend the beliefs of visitors (Weil, 2002).

Different museums garnish their objects with specific concepts and assumptions so as to facilitate the understanding of the “designed” discourse. These discourses might be in tune or in contradiction with the existing belief of visitors; they might reinforce or give new insight to visitors. The uniqueness of a museum lays in the interaction between visitors’ perceptions and preconceptions,

and the discourse of a museum. This interaction makes visits to different museums enjoyable and challenging. To understand museums is to understand the discourses of museums.

The discourse of the National Museum Bangkok

As a national art museum and an archaeology museum, the National Museum, Bangkok is to self-differentiate, to self-estrangle and to self-elevate the uniqueness and superiority of Thai culture at the expense of its neighbours and those cultures that influenced the evolution of Thai culture. As a national history museum, the National Museum, Bangkok aims at arousing the patriotism of the Thai people in the name of the Thai kings.

The National Museum, Bangkok manipulates the memory of visitors

Memory is “the capacity for conserving certain information” (Le Goff, 1992, p. 51). By itself, memory is neutral. It is simply a receptacle to store information; but the information itself and the source of information might not be neutral. Boncompagno da Signa in his writing, the *Rhetorica Novissima* (1235) remarked memory “is a glorious and an admirable gift of nature” (cited in Le Goff, 1992, p. 77), and a means “of which we recall past things, embrace present things, and contemplate future things, thanks to their resemblance with past things” (cited in Le Goff, 1992, p. 77). Based on this definition, memory is a trinity of time that links past to present and extending present to future. The way how we conceptualise and understand the present world is shaped by the nature, the content and the source of information that we gathered from the past. This forms the criteria that our judgement and evaluation of the world base. Eventually, this judgement and evaluation will become our universal truth(s) or common sense(s). Our present is the past of our future. Our perception of present will become the memory of our future. The way how we judge this “memory” is based on how the information is structured and presented at present.

The past is very fluid. They can be compiled to cater for the needs of different time and be presented in accordance with the needs of its “designers”. We do not live in the environment of the past. Our memory has to depend on what Pierra Nora (1989) refers as the “*lieux de memoire*” (mnemonic sites) in his famous writing *Les Lieux de Memoire* (cited in Peleggi, 2002). In his writing, Pierre Nora mentioned that mnemonic sites are crucial and critical because these sites compensate for the disappearance of the “*milieux de memoire*” (environment of memory) (cited in Peleggi, 2002). They are “catalysts for the collective act of remembrance” (Peleggi, 2002, p.4). These sites interact with visitors and form the basic relationship between visitors and the world. They guide visitors to understand the present through its past and the future through its present.

Museums are one of the mnemonic sites. They possess the power to make use of their objects to convey a discourse that is to sculpture the memory of the past and to compile the memory of the future. Our perception of the present

depends on the ways how the past is structured. The past can be constructed or remoulded to fit to the needs of the present.

People's memory can be manipulated. It could be manipulated in three ways: By collecting and abducing, by erasing and defacing and by re-inscribing and replacing (Yoffee, 2007). By collecting (selectively) and abducing, certain object or certain spot of time will become, particularly significant and representative. By erasing and defacing, certain fact or detail will be evaded from our memory. By re-inscribing and replacing, certain image or concept will dominate our memory.

By presenting selected past events based on the Thai kings, the National Museum, Bangkok structures a continuity of time of Thailand that was constructed by the Thai kings. By inscribing the contributions of the Thai kings to the development of Thailand and the appreciation of the arts for the court, the National Museum, Bangkok demonstrates the charisma of the kings and a social hierarchy that focuses on the Thai kings and their families. By replacing the Sukhothai epoch as the emanation of Thai culture, the National Museum, Bangkok estranges Thai culture from those "foreign" cultures and creates a specific and unique Thai culture. In the National Museum, Bangkok, the memory of visitors is being manipulated in such a way that the status of the Thai kings are indispensable and inevitable, that the unique Thai culture becomes a cultural reality and that a social order that emphasises on Thai monarchical hierarchy is legitimised.

The discourses of other national museums

The National Museum, Malaysia

During the time of the visit to the National Museum, Malaysia and the interview with the Director of the museum, the National Museum, Malaysia was under restructuring. Under the new structure, the museum is to narrate:

- a. The history of Malaysia: From the landing of the Portuguese to the independence of Malaysia and
- b. Today's Malaysia in relation to its multi-race communities, its architectural, industrial and sports developments and achievements, and its cultural heritage.

Through these narrations, the museum is to assert and to proclaim the sovereignty of Malaysia in relation to its time, space and people. Starting from the day of the arrival of the Portuguese, Malaysia was a battlefield among several colonial powers for their own interests: The Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the Japanese. Eventually Malaysia was able to claim its sovereignty and to achieve its independence. Mr. Yusof said that a national museum is obliged to serve and to contribute to its country (personal communication, February 12, 2008). One way that a national museum can serve and contribute to a country is to let young people know the main historic events of a country so as to generate a sense of their patriotism and love towards their countries (Mr. Yusof, personal communication, February 12, 2008). By enlisting main historic events, the

National Museum, Malaysia aims at arousing the patriotism of its people towards Malaysia.

Today's Malaysia is highly praised by the world for the excellence of its architecture and local industries, the achievement of its sports, the enlistment of its cultural heritage into world's heritage, and the hosting of several international conferences and forums. Nonetheless, all these were achieved by the mutual efforts, mutual understanding and mutual co-operation of the people of Malaysia.



Figure 134(Left): The signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20th January, 1874. Under this treaty, Malaya became a British colony.

Figure 135 (Right): The Malaysian flag and the Declaration of the independence of Malaysia.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 136: Photos that illustrate the achievements of Malaysia in the world.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

On the last plaque of the museum, it is written,
 Malaysia would not have enjoyed such success ...Whatever their race,
 Malaysians from all walks of life have worked together, fought and stood
 together, shared and respected each other's ways for generations
 now...racial harmony have indeed meld its many people into one.

The relation between Malaysia and its people is clearly proclaimed.

The National Museum of Singapore

Under the management of the National Heritage Board in 1991, the national museum of Singapore is devolved into three museums, among which the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisation Museum are two of them.

In late 2006, the National History Museum was renamed the National Museum of Singapore. The National Museum of Singapore continues to narrate the history of Singapore. Visitors are able to look at the history of Singapore through two paths:

- a. Events path: Visitors are able to understand the history of Singapore through the main historic events of Singapore and
- b. Personal path: Visitors are able to look into the history of Singapore through the living memory of those Singaporeans who were witnesses of some historic events of Singapore.

Furthermore, visitors can also further their knowledge of the history of Singapore with the help of an audio companion. This audio companion features interviews with academics on some topics that are relevant to some historic events of Singapore (Lenzi, 2007).

To enable visitors to understand the social changes of post-colonial Singapore, the Film Gallery, the Chinese Opera Gallery, the Photography Gallery and the Food Gallery of the museum illustrate to visitors social and economic development of the Singaporean society.

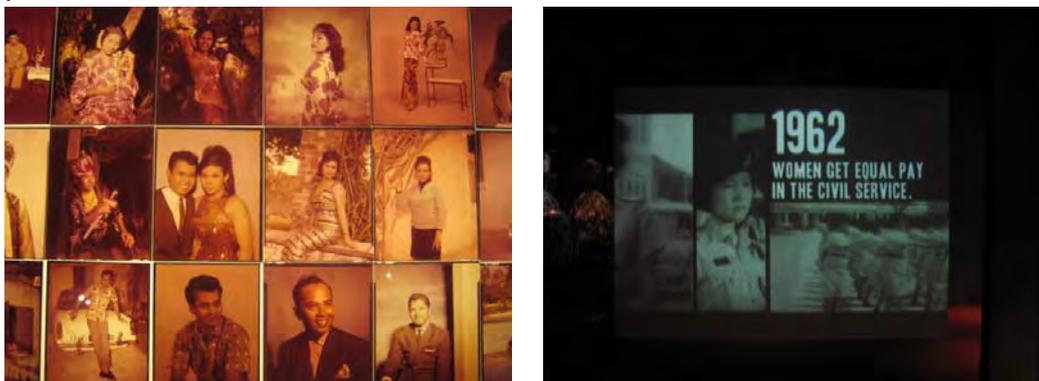


Figure 137 (Left): Photos of old Singaporean movie stars in the Film Gallery.

Figure 138 (Right): The National Museum of Singapore also addresses some social issues of old Singaporean society.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

The National Museum of Singapore illustrates the history of Singapore from a self-referential and self-evaluation manner. Visitors are invited to look at and to evaluate the history of Singapore from a conceptual framework, to make judgement and to draw conclusion of their own.

Asian Civilisation Museum (Singapore)

The National Museum of Singapore focuses on the past of Singapore. The Asian Civilisation Museum addresses the multi-race and civilisations of Singapore. By introducing to the Singaporean the roots of its multi-race, the museum aims at achieving a social harmony for the Singaporean society (Gauri Khrisnan, personal communication, February 13, 2008).

The four main races and civilisations that the museum addresses are: West Asia, China, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

a. Galleries of West Asia

The galleries of West Asia focus on Islamic culture that is one of the ancestral cultures of the Singaporean. Nonetheless, instead of depicting Islamic civilisation solely as a religion, the galleries explore the Islamic civilisation as a way of living.

b. Galleries of China

Instead of focusing on Chinese art or the chronology of Chinese history, the galleries of China focus on those Chinese tenets and principles that guide the Chinese behaviour and mould the Chinese social system.

c. Galleries of South Asia

The galleries of South Asia trace the micro and macro influences of Indian civilisation on an Indian small town and the South East Asian region.

d. Galleries of Southeast Asia

The galleries of Southeast Asia illustrate the mixed cultural influences and cultural development of the region, and the diverse tribal communities who inhabit in the region.

By addressing the multi-race aspect of Singapore, the discourse of the Asian Civilisation Museum is to define and to legitimate race pluralities, and to advocate race equality of Singapore.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (U.K.)

The Victoria and Albert Museum is one of the 20 national museums in the United Kingdom. Ever since the founding of the museum in the 19th century, the museum has focused on modern decorative arts. Covering the collections from Europe to Asia and focusing on Medieval to contemporary art, the Victoria and Albert Museum uses decorative arts to arouse the interests of visitors in their search for knowledge and to engage the daily life of visitors to their search for arts. (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008).

The museum categorises its themes into four main sections. They are as follows:

- a. Asia: Objects that illustrate the art of China, South and Southeast Asia, Islamic Middle East; Japan and Korea.

- b. Europe: Objects that illustrate the art of Medieval and Renaissance Period, particularly the arts of Britain between 1500 and 1900.
- c. Material & Techniques – Objects are arranged in accordance with their material content such as silver, ironwork and glass and type such as paintings, prints, drawings and fashion.
- d. Modern – Objects that illustrate mostly the works of today’s living artists and designers.

The Victoria and Albert Museum does not aim at making itself a place for the appreciation of arts; but a place for advocating people to express their opinion of arts, encouraging people to debate and arousing people to know more about arts (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). Visitors are encouraged to think innovatively and to share ideas openly (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008, and Galister & Travers, 2004). The discourse of the museum is provision. The museum acts as a cultural diplomacy that bridges different cultures and generates cultural exchange. Through the museum, visitors are able to link themselves with arts and broaden their perspective of the world through arts. The Victoria and Albert Museum is to promote and to solidify the status of London as a world city and the identity of the museum as an international organisation. The museum is to cater for excellence (Helen Jones, personal interview, March 11, 2008).

The British Museum (U.K.)

The British Museum was founded in 1753. Ever since its foundation, the British Museum has been adamantly upholding its mission that is “for the use and benefit of the public” (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). Different from the Victoria and Albert Museum that focuses on decorative arts, the British Museum focuses on world ancient cultures and history. The British Museum is a museum that tells and reflects the stories and cultures of mankind (Jeff Daly, personal communication, June 11, 2008). It is a museum of the world and for the world. The museum exhibits objects and information for visitors all over the world. These objects and information range from objects that were two million years old to information that happened recently. The British Museum is to reflect world interests (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). They are to let visitors understand their own cultural identities and their relations with the world.

Britain is a multi-culture country. To be British is to be multi-cultural” (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). The British Museum is a reflection of the population of the United Kingdom. (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). The population of the United Kingdom is culturally mixed. By visiting the museum, local visitors are able to understand that they are part of the world. They are able to know the latest world events that affect them directly or indirectly. Those foreign visitors who visit the museum are able to see the world and the United Kingdom as a reflection of world culture. The discourses of the British Museum are an extension of “Britishness” (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008) and the idea of Enlightenment.

“We maintain a collection of things from the whole world that will be freely accessible to the people of the whole world. We try to interpret those principles for each new generation, but however much the details change, we remain true to the basic Enlightenment ideals,” said Neil MacGregor, the Director of the British Museum (cited in Smith, 2007, p. 15).

The discourse of a national museum from the perspective of non-national museums

The National University of Singapore, Museum

Ahmad Mashadi sees a national museum is a place to encourage dialogues between individuals, and between the public and governments (personal communication, February 14, 2008). In the interview, Ahmad Mashadi said that a national museum has to reflect both compliances and resistances of the public to their countries. Ahmad Mashadi also sees that a national museum has to relate to communities. It has to address to issues and events that are related to those communities of a country (Ahmad Mashadi, personal communication, February 14, 2008). In this way, a national museum is able to enforce a common identity on them (Ahmad Mashadi, personal communication, February 14, 2008). Based on this understanding, a national museum is to arouse a country’s self-consciousness of the existence and different voices of its communities.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.)

Jeff Daly sees a national museum is to recognise, to respect and to represent a country’s multi-culture. A national museum has to regard these cultures as a common factor that threads the integrity of a nation (Jeff Daly, personal communication, June 11, 2008). To Jeff Daly, a discourse of a national museum is to treat multi-culture of a nation as a way of living (personal communication, June 11, 2008).

The discourse in common

Different national museums arrange the contents of their exhibitions differently so as to deliver their discourses. Some national museums aim at arousing the awareness of people towards their country by asking them to look into the main historic events of their country. Some aim at rationalising the mindset of people towards their country by encouraging them to look at the history of their country from different perspective. Some national museums use arts and civilisations of all times to reach out to the world. Some emphasise on cultural equality to integrate a country. Nonetheless, whatever the discourse is, there is one point in common among these discourses: The discourse of a national museum has to be relevant to the current time and space.

National museums store, care for and present their objects not for the sake of the objects, but for the sake of the people. These national museums provide information and knowledge to people, and foster mutual understanding and encourage mutual debates among people in order to link people with their societies, their countries and the world at large. They look into the past, contemplate the present and look forward to the future of their countries.

Although these museums convey their discourses in accordance with their own capacities; they bear one common care: Care for the people and the country at large. Based on these cares, these national museums structure their discourses to link the time of their countries from past to present and from present to future. They link their countries with the outside world.

The discourse of a new national museum for Thailand

A national museum stretches its arms out to reach both the public and the nation. The formation and the development of a society is the result of mutual interactions between the public and the nation. Based on this understanding, a national museum for Thailand has to be socially based. This national museum has to be relevant to the current time and space of the Thai society.

To consolidate the multi-race Thailand into one identity

The Thai society is multi-raced and multi-cultured. They form the basic identity of the Thai society. To know who they are and where they come from, Thai people have to know their roots. A national museum for Thailand has to introduce to the Thai people their origins and those cultures that shaped their social system and behaviour. In the report from the Commission on African and Asian Heritage, the preservation and the reflection of identities are for the sake of the integrity of a country (Sherman, 2008). The role of a national museum for Thailand is to let the Thai people be aware of their multi-roots for the sake of social integrity, stability and development. These are essential to protect the cultural identities of the Thai people against the tidal waves of cultural globalisation. A national museum for Thailand is to foster mutual understanding and mutual respect of different races of Thailand so as to consolidate them into one identity for the sake of the country.

To reflect the relationship between the Thai people and their living environment

Societies vary from one another because they respond to, interact with and manage their environments differently. A national museum for Thailand has to reflect the relationship between the Thai people their living environment. To understand the Thai society is not simply to know the history of Thailand but also to know the ways how the Thai people handled their past, handle their present and will handle their future. Through telling this relationship, a national museum for Thailand is able to give visitors an insight of the needs and aspirations of the Thai society in terms of its people, natural and artificial environments, heritage, economy, culture and politics.

Nonetheless, care has to be taken by a national museum for Thailand to depict this relationship, particularly the artificial environments. In some countries, some artificial monuments and customs are deliberately altered and fabricated for the sake of tourism. If a national museum is too concerned with tourism, it might find itself in an embarrassing position of supporting these suspicious fictional heritage sites and constructed tradition.

In a paper that H.T. Nguyen presented in the conference on Comparative Museology and Museography (ASEAN-COCI, 1997), he said that the survival and prosperity of a society do not rely only on its economy or national defense but in its national life as well. A national museum for Thailand is a window of the Thai society. It is through this window that visitors are able to see the life of the Thai society in the past, in the present and in the future. A national museum for Thailand that reflects the life of the Thai society is able to tell the problems, the needs and the potentials of this society for the sake of the future.

To understand the link of Thailand with the world

Thailand does not exist alone. It is affected by various influential issues and values nationally and internationally. Whatever the influential factors are, a national museum for Thailand has to enable visitors to understand these factors, and how the country has responded to these issues and values. The economic crisis in 1997, the 9/11 tragedy in 2001 and the SARS in 2003, for examples were beyond the control of Thailand but they caused serious effects on the social, economical and political development of Thailand. Under painstaking efforts of the Thai government, Thailand weathered these storms eventually. Through these experiences, Thailand will be able to develop appropriate strategies for the further development of their society.

A national museum for Thailand should be a museum of recognition and hope

The discourse of a new national museum for Thailand should enable visitors to evaluate the development of Thailand through the dimension of its time and space, and its relationship with the outside world. Through this museum, visitors are should be able to recognise the Thai identity, the Thai society, and the relationship between Thailand and the world. They should be able to know those factors that affect the development of Thailand. Thai visitors will then think of their roles to contribute to the development of Thailand while foreign visitors will eventually think of their roles to contribute to their own countries. A national museum for Thailand should be a national museum of recognition and hope.

Chapter 8

A national museum for Thailand as a place of consumption

Relationship between visitors and museums

Hooper-Greenhill's Holistic Approach to Museum Communication (1994) (Appendix I) (cited in Staiff, 2006) emphasised on the total experience of visitors while they visit a museum. This total experience is affected by various factors: objects, facilities, publications and programmes of a museum are some of them. This total experience of visitors affects the image of museums and the decision of people to visit a specific museum. The basic assumption of this model is that visitors are knowledgeable. They visit a museum with their own preconceived knowledge, perceptions and attitudes. As a response to this assumption, museums have to have "dialogue" with visitors and to intertwine with the preconceptions and perceptions and attitudes of visitors. The model is visitor based. In contrast to the Holistic Approach that emphasised on visitors, Knez & Wright's Communication Model (1970) (Appendix J) (cited in Staiff, 2006) emphasised on the importance of curators. Based on this model, curators are assumed to be very knowledgeable, and have strong influences on and control over the design and contents of museums' exhibitions. This model is purely curator based. Despite the difference in the emphases, both Hooper-Greenhill and Knez and Wrights see museums are places for consumption. Hooper-Greenhill sees the making up of a total visiting experience for museums' visitors is the consumable nature of a museum while Knez and Wrights see the delivery of the knowledge of curators to museums' visitors is the consumable nature of museums. All in all, museums are for the sake of visitors.

A discourse of a national museum for Thailand has to be relevant to the Thai society and so does its market positioning. A national museum for Thailand has to position itself relevantly in the market so as to "provide the most good in society" (Anderson, 2004, p.1). A national museum for Thailand has to focus on its market sector so as to gather resources and to work on details for the sake of maximizing the benefits of its main visitors.

A question of outcome or output

Should a national museum focus on its outcome or its output? Visitation rates are a commonly quoted figure in many museum annual reports or reports on museums' performances. "For the second year in a row, the museum (the Metropolitan Museum of Art) enjoyed near-record attendance during the week between Christmas and New Year's, with over 159,000 visitors for the week" writes the *Annual Report for Year 2006-2007* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) (U.S.A.) (p.5). This report regards the increase in the visitation rate of the Metropolitan Museum of Art as one of the achievements of the MET in that fiscal year. In examining the impacts of British galleries and British museums in the economic, social and creativity aspects of the United Kingdom, Tony Travers

(2006) has carried out a research to look into the impacts. One of the aspects that he looks into is the contribution of museums visitors who visit museums and galleries in the United Kingdom to the British economy. In the report, it writes: “The number of visits to major institutions (museums and galleries) examined in this report was over 42 million in 2005-6... These numbers suggest that Britain’s leading museums and galleries are part of the mass visitor attraction business” (2006, pp.34 - 35). “I still remember during the SARS period, the attendance rate of museum reached an historical low level...” writes a curator in the *Newsletter: Hong Kong Museum of Art* (2008, p. 7). One curator expresses her concern of the low visitation rate of the Hong Kong Museum of Art during the SARS incident in 2003.

Up to point, visitation rates of national museums are a yardstick to measure the popularity of national museums. To apply funds from governments and sponsorship from charity organisations or cooperates, national museums have to prove their popularity so as to cover their huge operation expenses. Government funds shares 60% to 70% of the annual budget of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). In the calendar year 2006-2007, the fund from the British government to the Victoria and Albert Museum was around 44 million British pounds (around USD63 million) (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). The 2005-2006 annual budgets of the Victoria and Albert Museum were around 65 million British pounds (around USD93 million) but the operating expense of the museum alone was around 52 million British pounds (around USD74 million) (Travers, 2006). The revenue of the Hong Kong Science Museum in the fiscal year of 2006 – 2007 was around HKD5 million (around USD650,000) but the expenditure was around HKD64 million (around USD8.2 million) (Hong Kong Science Museum, 2007). In the *Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012* of the Victoria and Albert Museum (2007), it writes,

Our challenge now is to sustain and consolidate this success. Fundamental to this is making the case to Government for public funding because without adequate core resources we will be unable to maintain even the current level of public benefit. (p.6)

This popularity claim became particularly sensitive and essential for national museums during the time when the economy of a country is weak. In Singapore, after the 1997 economic crisis, the Singaporean government became very cautious in allocating funds to museums in Singapore. The portion of funds that the Singaporean government allocated to museums had to depend on their visitation rates (Ahmad Mashadi, personal communication, February 14, 2008).

Visitation rates of national museums are also indices to national museums to plan their programmes and facilities. Seeing the increase in the visitation rate of Chinese coming mainly from Mainland China, the Metropolitan Museum of Art includes Chinese text on its orientation pamphlets and signage so that those Chinese who cannot speak and read English can access the amenities and exhibitions of the museum and understand the content of the exhibitions without

any difficulties (Ann Matson, personal communication, June 11, 2008). Although the MET is not a national museum, it sets an example for national museums how they can plan their facilities based on the history of their visitation rates.

To increase their visitation rates, national museums have to be aware of all possible potentials. Seeing the growing importance of the role of China and India in the world's finance and the increasing number of Chinese and Arabians in the British society, the British Museum will focus its exhibitions on the culture of China, India and the Middle East so as to increase the number of Chinese, Indian and Arabian to visit the British Museum (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008).

Despite the importance of visitation rates to national museums, all those national museums that were interviewed said that visitation rates of national museums are only quantitative and unreliable. They are quantitative because visitation rates emphasise on the outcome of national museums while not on the output of national museums. They are unreliable because some people visit national museums not for exhibitions but for car parking or detouring, for example. Moreover national museums that over-emphasise their visitation rates might neglect their missions and purposes. In order to increase their visitation rates, national museums might transform themselves into theme parks that national museums are supposed to compete with (Mr. Yusof, personal communication, February 12, 2008).

In fact, world important and famous national museums seldom consider increasing their visitation rates as the reason for their existence or their sole contribution to their society. The mission of the British Museum is "for the benefit of the publick" (Smith, 2007). Nonetheless, the British Museum is able to attract tourists from different sectors. Its average number of visitors reaches around five million annually (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008).

National museums are places for the consumption for output

Mr. Na Nakhonphanom (personal communication, February 26, 2008) said that the National Museum, Bangkok carried out surveys to collect data on those visitors who visit the museum. The survey was mainly to know the reasons which motivate visitors to visit the museum and the number of visitors who re-visit the museum. To Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, these data enable the museum to evaluate the attractiveness of the museum's exhibitions to its visitors. Justin Morris (personal communication, March 13, 2008) also sees the importance of the repeat visitation rate of the British Museum. He uses this repeat visitation rate to evaluate the possibility for the British Museum to hold exhibitions of higher risks. The Victoria and Albert Museum breakdown its visitation rates into several KPIs (Key Performance Indicators): Race, age, place of residence, for example. These data enables the museum to plan its future strategy and governance policy (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). Gauri Krishnan (personal communication, February 13, 2008) and Mr. Yusof (personal communication,

February 12, 2008) emphasise on feedbacks of visitors towards the museums' exhibitions. These feedbacks provide them guidance for future improvement.

The criteria that the Victoria and Albert Museum take to indicate its success are the way the museum is able to inspire those people from the creative industry, and the frequencies these people utilise the museum for their creativities (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). Mr. Osman (personal communication, February 12, 2008) says that it is ideal for the National Museum, Malaysia to become a tourist magnate; but to attract tourists is not the main idea of the museum.

The common concern of these people is the qualitative output of national museums.

The pedagogic context of some national museums

With respect to the relationship of a national museum with its visitors, all those people who were interviewed said that a national museum is to provide knowledge to visitors. They all said that the contribution of a national museum to a society is in the obligation of the museum to educate its visitors.

The National Museum, Malaysia

Mr. Yusof (personal communication, February 12, 2008) sees the National Museum, Malaysia is to provide supplementary nationalistic education to the young generation of Malaysian. The museum is to tell them the history of Malaysia. By understanding the history of Malaysia, they will know their roots, their country and their roles for the future development of themselves and Malaysia (Mr. Yusof, personal communication, February 12, 2008). Through the exhibitions of the museum, Mr. Yusof hopes that the young generation of Malaysian will be able "to know and to love" their country, Malaysia. Nonetheless, to Mr. Yusof, the museum is not a supplementary education to formal education. It is to provide experience to its visitors.

To outreach to more students, Mr. Yusof said that the National Museum, Malaysia has to arrange travelling exhibitions to schools, particularly those in the rural areas where the students are not able to visit the museum for whatever reasons. According to Mr. Yusof, the museum has to make the contents of its exhibitions simple, and in logical sequence. In the exhibition of the museum, the contents are arranged and labelled in accordance with those main historic events of Malaysia: The Portuguese in Melaka between 1511-1642, the Dutch between 1642-1824, the British between 1786-1941, the Japanese Occupation between 1941-1945, the Malayan Union between 1946-1948, the Independence of Malaysia in 1957, the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 and modern day's Malaysia. A 362 feet long mosaic mural on the upper part of the outer-wall of the museum summarises these events (figure 123, p. 91).

To ignite the mindsets of its visitors, Mr. Yusof sees the importance of a national museum to exhibit some objects that are unique and meaningful. To Mr.

Yusof, the table on which the Pangkor Treaty was signed (figure 134, p.119) and the first Malaysian flag are the most meaningful objects of the museum. The former signifies the “lost of dignity” of the Malay states to Britain and the latter signifies the “glory of Malaysia”.

Mr. Osman (personal communication, February 12, 2008) also sees the importance of educational role of the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur. To outreach to more students, Mr. Osman sees that the necessity of the museum to hold more off-the-site exhibitions. He also sees the importance of the museum to ask schools to arrange more students to visit the museum.

The Asian Civilisation Museum (Singapore)

The Asian Civilisation Museum uses two approaches to design the contents of its exhibitions: To contextualise and to interact. Among those 100,000 visitors who visit the Asian Civilisation Museum per year, students (mostly pupils) are its main visitors. They share round 60% of the total number of visitors (Gauri Krishnan, personal communication, February 13, 2008). Gauri Krishnan sees these two approaches are particular important to make the contents of its exhibition understandable and interesting to the students.

Visitors have to understand the original context of those objects in the Asian Civilisation Museum (Gauri Krishnan, personal communication, February 13, 2008). The museum has to bring its visitors “back to the space where these objects belong to” says Gauri Krishnan (personal communication, February 13, 2008). By telling its visitors the background, the meaning and the implication of these objects, visitors will understand the contents of exhibitions easily. (Gauri Krishnan, personal communication, February 13, 2008). To increase the credibility of its exhibitions to its visitors, the museum uses virtual local hosts to interact with visitors (figure 139). These virtual hosts introduce and explain a series of topics to visitors. Visitors are able to interact with these hosts by selecting any topics that they are interested in.

To make its exhibitions understandable, guidebooks and gallery guides (figure 140) are available in the Asian Civilisation Museum. These guidebook and gallery guides are to explain the context of the objects and themes of the museum’s exhibitions. *Highlights Map-Guides* (figure 141) are also available in the museum. Nevertheless, this *Highlights Map-Guide* is not to recommend any masterpieces of the museum to visitors. It is to recommend to visitors those objects that are important to understand the museum’s exhibitions. Resource kits that help visitors learn about the cultural history and derive information from the objects are also available in the museum.

To attract new visitors, to entice those who had visited the museum to re-visit the museum and to increase the knowledge of visitors, special exhibitions are occasionally held by the museum. The On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China & Southeast Asia, a special exhibition that was held between 2nd November, 2007 and 23rd March, 2008, was to bring visitors to follow the trail of

Buddhism from Nalanda (India) to China and Japan in the north, to Indonesia in the south and to the ancient kingdom of Gandhara in the west. Through this exhibition, the museum attempted to let visitors trace and experience the evolution of Buddha's philosophy, religious images and religious thinking along this trail (Krishnan, 2008).



Figure 139: A virtual local host to interact with visitors.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 140 (Left): A gallery guide that explains the context of the exhibitions of Chinese civilisation.

Source: Asian Civilisations Museum (n.d.) *China: Gallery 6* [Brochure]. Singapore: Asian Civilisation Museum.

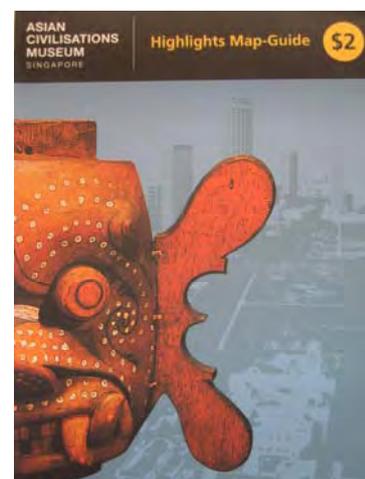


Figure 141 (Right): The highlights map that introduces the most interesting objects of the museum.

Source: Asian Civilisations Museum (2006) *Highlights Map-Guide*. Singapore: Asian Civilisation Museum.

The Victoria & Albert Museum (U.K.)

The Valuing Museum: Impact and innovation among National Museums (Galister & Travers, 2004), a report to assess the social and economic impact of national museums in the United Kingdom defines the roles of national museums in the United Kingdom “to be traditional museums or galleries but also to act as popular cultural attractions and, at the same time, as places of learning” (p. 12). The Victoria and Albert Museum commits its role as a place of learning and a place to connect art and culture with makers and designers (Helen Jones, personal communication, March 11, 2008). In the *DCMS/V&A Funding Agreement 2006/06 – 2007/08* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006), it writes: “The V&A is a source of learning, wonder and inspiration and a rich resource for creativity for individuals, the Creative Industries and the wider economy” (p.3).

The Victoria and Albert Museum has close links with six government departments, academic institutes, mass media and professional organizations such as the Sussex University, the BBC and the Institute of British Architects (Galister & Travers, 2004). Based on these networks, the Victoria and Albert Museum is able to “assist people from the creative industries in research that informs – directly and indirectly – products, artworks, or services” (Galister & Travers, 2004, p.30).

To strengthen and to solidify its educational role nationally and internationally, the Victoria and Albert Museum launches partnership programmes and collaborates with some regional museums and some international organisations. These programmes enable these museums and organisations to share their collections, expertise and skills. The most outstanding national partnership programme of the museum is the one with the Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust. This partnership programme is regarded by the Victoria and Albert Museum as a “key element of the city’s regeneration scheme and the continuing programme of exhibitions and museum-wide collaboration” (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006, p. 5).

The Victoria and Albert Museum commits its role as a learning institute for all children. By launching various workshops, learning programmes and activities for children, the museum was the only museum shortlist for the Guardian Kids in Museums award in 2004. The museum also outreaches to schools with a low record of visiting the museum.

Internationally, to outreach to the world, in 2005 the museum collaborated with the Cultural Academy of Fine Art, Beijing and the Shanghai Museum on two exhibitions: China Design Now and the History of Expo Movement to coincide the hosting of the World Expo (2010) in Shanghai (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006). In June 2008, the museum held a travelling exhibition “Medieval and Renaissance: Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum” in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The purpose of this exhibition is to foster a better international cultural understanding and a share of the concept of excellence.

The British Museum (U.K.)

The British Museum is a place of learning (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). Different from the Victoria and Albert Museum that sees itself as a place of learning by providing its visitors information and networks for research, the British Museum sees itself as a place of learning by encouraging its visitors to explore and to question the world and eventually to introspect their relationship with the world. “Exhibitions and galleries are not just collections of beautiful objects, they’re designed to get people thinking about all sorts of issues and, ultimately, thinking about their own lives” says Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum (cited in Smith, 2007, p128). Those facilities of the museum: Research and information centres, libraries and bookshops, and those materials published by the museum are to help its visitors understand the museum’s exhibitions and their relationship with the museum’s objects (Justin Morris, personal communication, 2008).

The pedagogic context of a national museum for Thailand

Some national museums see themselves as education institutes to transmit informal education. Some see themselves as research institutions to provide information and data to its visitors. To ignite the mindset of their visitors, some see the importance of having masterpieces that are unique and meaningful. Some see the importance of provoking the rationality and the logical thinking of its visitors. To be able to reach more visitors, particularly children, some hold different forms and types of exhibitions while some partner with some national and international organisations. National museums are places for the consumption of knowledge. Different national museums carry out this role differently.

A national museum for Thailand is to transmit knowledge. In order to fulfill its role as a knowledge transmitter, a national museum has to know its consumable nature and the nature of its main users.

A national museum for Thailand has to be a learning institute

A new national museum for Thailand can only act as supplement to school education. National museums’ visitors do not visit national museums daily. The most dedicated museum visitors might visit a national museum a few times a year. The nature of the visit is not only limited by the number of visits but the duration of the visit that is comparatively short and unpredictable. Even under governments’ encouragement, schools can only arrange students to visit a national museum a few times per year.

Based on these restrictions, a new national museum Thailand cannot perform formal and proper educational schooling job as the learning will be incomplete and interrupted. A national museum for Thailand is supposed not to be a place for traditional education. It should not and supposed not be a sub-set of school education, a place of scholarship or part of the educational policy of the government. It is not to repeat what has been taught in the school or to act as a virtual textbook for students or visitors. A national museum for Thailand has to be a learning institute. It has to introduce relevance to visitors: The relevance of a

national museum to its time and space of existence. Its main functions have to enable visitors to understand the Thai identity, the Thai society, Thailand, and the relationship between Thailand and the world. A national museum for Thailand has to encourage its visitors to think and to analysis those knowledge that they get from the museum. Eventually visitors will be able to understand themselves and their role in their societies.

A national museum for Thailand has to outreach to new visitors

A national museum for Thailand has to enable its visitors to learn at their own paces. It is not a part of school education. It is to provide a life-long learning. Its visitors are free to select the content that they are interested in. Owing to the lacking in regular and predicted base of visitors, a new national museum for Thailand has to in-reach and to outreach to its visitors actively. A national museum for Thailand is a national museum without any physical boundary. Apart from enriching the in-reaching programmes and activities, a new national museum has to outreach to those who are not able to visit the museum for whatever reasons. There are many ways to outreach to new visitors. Apart from the physical form of holding various types of exhibitions, this new national museum should be able to associate, to link or to partner itself with other institutions as well.

A national museum for Thailand has to interact with its visitors

George E. Hein (1998) in his book *Learning in museum* stresses the importance of museums to provide visitors “a degree of comfort”. This degree of comfort is mainly concerned with providing visitors clear orientations of museums, detail agenda of the activities and programmes of museums and clear indication of those facilities and location of those amenities available in museums. Nonetheless, the ultimate concern of George E. Hein is to maximise any possibility to interact with visitors (Hein, 1998). In 1936, in an exhibition on electricity, Melton found out that when those visitors who visit the exhibition were able to physically interact with the components of an exhibit, they lengthened their stay in front of that exhibit. Their average staying time increased by 10 seconds from 13.8 to 23.8 seconds (Hein, 1998).

To arouse the interest of its visitors and to motivate them to lengthen the stay in a museum, a new national museum for Thailand has to create an environment that its visitors can interact with. This environment can be an environment that is challengeable, communicative and enjoyable to visitors (Perry, 1992, cited in Hein, 1998). It can also be an environment that can arouse the curiosity of its visitors (Perry, 1992, cited in Hein, 1998). Hence, the nature of a national museum for Thailand is not purely a place for the consumption of knowledge but a place to activate and animate this consumption as well.

The content of its exhibitions has to be relevant

The communication and learning theory in the 19th century assumed learners were passive in nature (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). They learned in accordance with what was given to them. They were empty vases that received knowledge

and information without questioning. At that time, the relationship between museums and visitors was basically one way communication. Museums pivoted the direction and the whole learning process. This echoed Knez & Wright's Communication Model (1970) that was mentioned in the first part of this chapter. This model is basically a curator based model that stresses the importance of curators in deciding what has to be learned in a museum.

Nonetheless, in the past four decades, there has been a shift of the assumption of the learning capacity and capability of learners. In accordance with the opinion of psychologists such as Jean Piaget and L.V. Vigotsky, learning is "a self-directed activity of exploration and invention" (Hein, 2000, p. 117). Instead of being pivoted, learners are able to draw conclusion from what they have learned. Learners are no longer assumed to be passive and to consume what is given to them. Learners are considered to be knowledgeable. They justify information based on their histories, their experiences and their backgrounds (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Learners actively interact with the learning environment, and construct meaning from this interaction (Hein, 1998). Based on this concept, those visitors who visit national museums for learning are no longer passive in nature. They bring along with them their own knowledge and react with the learning environment of national museums. In this way, the relationship between national museums and visitors is more than a simply give and take communication model. This importance of interaction further confirmed Zahava Doering's finding that was mentioned in the previous chapter. In accordance with finding, Zahava Doering came to a conclusion that the most successful exhibition of a museum is the one that is able to produce resonance with the preconceptions and perceptions of visitors.

Based on this understanding, the content of a national museum for Thailand has to be relevant to its visitors. Those visitors who visit the museum are able to associate the contents of the museum with their daily life and daily contact (Hein, 2000).

A national museum for Thailand has to consider children to be its main user

Aplin (2002) sees the immeasurable potential of young people to protect and preserve heritage sites. Heritage sites have to be protected and maintained for the sake of the future. With respect to a national museum for Thailand, it also needs young people to convey and to preserve its discourse for the sake of the future. Children possess potentially long memory. They are able to recall what they have seen or done in a museum (Hein, 1998). Nonetheless, in a museum, children tend to follow their "personal and social agendas" (Hein, 1998, p. 142) while not in accordance with the agenda arranged by museums. Children need to visit a museum more than once in order to become oriented to a museum. Children in generally are curious. They like to engage in fantasy play, to investigate and to interact with objects (Hein, 1998). Therefore, the social settings of a national museum for Thailand are important for children. To trigger the potentially long term memory of children, to navigate the agenda of children, to entice children to re-visit the museum and to fulfill the curiosity of children, a national museum for

Thailand has to offer activities and to arrange programmes to cater for the learning characteristics of children.

The pedagogic context of the National Museum, Bangkok

The National Museum, Bangkok regards pupils and children as its most important visitors. To increase the number of Thai pupils to in-reach the museum, the National Museum, Bangkok has talked to the Ministry of Education about the possibilities to arrange more pupils to visit the museum (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008). During the visit of students to the museum, the orientation and the touring of the museum are mostly left to teachers who visit the museum together with students. To outreach to children, the museum arranges educational programmes and activities to those living in the slum area. The museum outreaches to the disabled as well. Under the endorsement of the Thai Blind Association and with the help of those volunteers of the museum, the museum arranged a blind access project in 2008.

The volunteers of the National Museum, Bangkok help the museum organise several educational activities. These activities include monthly lectures, study groups, workshops and excursion. They are listed in the bi-monthly publication of the *National Museum Volunteers: The News*. *The News* is available in a library of the museum. The library is inside an office building that is located at the furthest back of the National Museum, Bangkok. Apart from storing nearly 4000 books on art and culture, the library stores a number of research papers that were done by some overseas museums and around 17,000 pieces of slides. Some of the slides contain some sites and artifacts that no longer exist in Thailand. The library is divided into two sections. One section is for books that are written in the Thai language. The other section is for books that are written in the English language. The opening days and hours of the Thai books section follow those of the museum, while the English books section follows the working time of the volunteers. The English book section of the library opens twice per week (Wednesday and Thursday and from 1000 to 1300).

The museum organised two temporary exhibitions and one exchange exhibition per year. The temporary exhibitions are either held at the Issarawinitchai Hall or in the open air. The museum also loans objects to other institutes. The recent loaned objects are those costumes and textiles inside the Phrommet Thada Hall.

Symposiums are occasionally organised by the museum. Symposiums are normally held at the Auditorium Hall that is located next to the Hall of Thai History. The latest symposium was a symposium with the Kyushu National Museum and Osaka National Museum on topics concerning museums and heritage management. This symposium was conducted in the Thai and Japanese languages. The handouts were in the Thai and Japanese texts as well.

Objects of the museum are mostly exhibited inside glass cabinets (figure 142). They are labelled normally by small paper clips and occasionally small

metal plates. The descriptions of objects on the clips are very simple. They mainly mentioned the type of objects and the approximate year when those objects were made (figure 143). Wall texts are commonly used to narrate the contents of those exhibitions (figure 144) inside the galleries. Nevertheless, the contents of the wall texts are mainly an excerpt of the information in guidebooks.

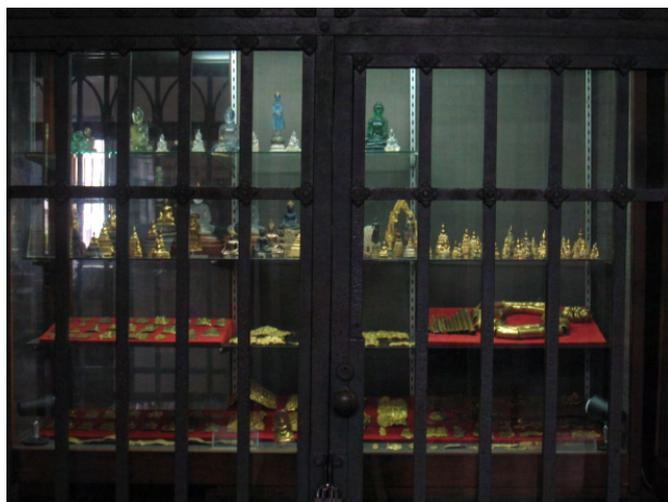


Figure 142: The precious objects in the Muk Krasan Hall are locked inside an iron gate.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 143 (Left): Labels mainly mentioned the type of objects and the approximate year when those objects were made.



Figure 144 (Right): An example of wall text.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Two guidebooks are available: *Guide to the National Museum, Bangkok* and *Guide to the Gallery of Thai History*. The *Guide to the National Museum, Bangkok* is mainly a brief introduction of the history of the museum and the themes of the galleries. It focuses on those sculptures that are exhibited in the galleries of the north and south wings. With respect to the *Guide to the Gallery of Thai History*, the focus is on the history of the Sukhothai epoch, the Ayutthaya epoch and the Rattanakosin epoch. The chapter on the Sukhothai epoch is about the art, the religion and the physical territory of the Sukhothai kingdom. The one on the Ayutthaya epoch focuses on the founding, the religion, the international

achievements and eventually the fall of the kingdom. The one on the Rattanakosin epoch follows the chronology of the Rattanakosin's kings. The museum provides pamphlets that are brief guides of the museum. The pamphlets provide a very brief introduction of the history of the museum, an orientation map of the museum and some general introduction of the galleries.

The museum uses very few dioramas and maps to interact with its visitors. They are installed in the Gallery of Thai History. This interaction is mainly restricted to audio narration of a few selected historic events relating to King Naresuan (reigned 1590A.D.-1605A.D.) of the Ayutthaya epoch and the visual illustration of the physical coverage of the Dvaravati epoch, the Srivijaya epoch and the Lopburi epoch.

Two bookshops are available in the museum. One is in the front of the Auditorium Hall and the other is inside the Hall of Thai History. The contents of the two bookshops are different. The former one mainly sells books on general art and culture subject and the latter mainly sells souvenirs.

The gaps of the pedagogic context of the National Museum, Bangkok

As a place for the consumption of knowledge, the National Museum, Bangkok is not free from shortcomings.

The National Museum, Bangkok is an educational institute. The relationship between the museum and its visitors is clearly defined. The museum is a knowledge disseminator and its visitors are knowledge receivers. Nonetheless, this relationship is a one-way linear communication. The museum promotes its well designed discourse that is under the shadow of an old political mission. The National Museum, Bangkok fails to introduce relevance to its visitors: The relevance to link its visitors with the current time and space of Thailand.

The National Museum, Bangkok avoids making itself a learning institute. The contents of the exhibitions, the guidebooks and the wall texts are in fact an echo of the discourse of the museum. The content of the exhibitions are not to interact with the visitors by associating, questioning or challenging the knowledge of its visitors. They are not designed to enable its visitors to think and to analysis the exhibitions.

The National Museum, Bangkok fails to make the best use of its sources and resources. To outreach to the public is not necessarily by means of physical exhibitions. To outreach to the public, the National Museum, Bangkok could also associate and widen its network with other museums or related institutions. The opening days and hour of the English section of the library has to follow those of the museum while not in accordance with the working days and working hours of the volunteers of the National Museum, Bangkok. The National Museum, Bangkok has to avoid making symposiums an internal function between museums. The bookshops should focus on selling those books that help visitors understand and make judgement on the context of the exhibitions and the objects.

Meechul (cited in Supachokeaueychai, 2007) says that Asian does not have a habit of visiting museums, and they have to be forced to visit museums. Children have to be motivated to visit national museums; children need guidance during the visit in order to have their mind map studied; children need something to interest them in order to make the visit memorable and children need to be evaluated in order to study the knowledge that they get from the visit. Nevertheless, the museum often leaves these jobs to those teachers who bring students to visit the museum. This might result in making the visit to the museum another formal lesson for the students.

A national museum for Thailand has to cater to the cognitive nature of its visitors

The *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, a report issued by the American Association of Museum in 1992, listed three major functions of a museum: Entertainment, education and experience. Among these three functions, the report confirmed the educational role is the central role of museums.

As a place of discourse, the discourse of a national museum for Thailand has to be relevant: The relevance of a national museum to its time and space of existence. As a place for the consumption for knowledge, the consumable nature of a national museum for Thailand has also to be relevant to its nature and the nature of learners. A national museum for Thailand is to cater for the cognitive nature of its visitors. Its main role is to supply informal education to the public. It has to interact with its visitors physically and to associate with the preconception and perception of its visitors simultaneously. Owing to children being its main user the pedagogic context of a national museum for Thailand has to cater for the learning characters of children so as to facilitate the conveyance and the understanding of its discourse. All in all, a national museum for Thailand has to provide equal learning opportunities to the public. It has to provide an intellectual experience to the public

Chapter 9

A national museum for Thailand as a place of interpretation

Tilden (1979) defines the aim of interpretation as to “reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather simply to communicate factual information” (p. 8). Two relationships are mentioned in this definition: the relationship between objects and meaning and the relationship between meanings and illustrative media. In accordance with Tilden, objects have to be original in order to have their meanings revealed while the use of media is to make meanings understandable. In the context of a museum, if we accept the definition of an object that is defined by the *Chamber Dictionary* (cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 2000) in the chapter of a national museum for Thailand as a place of discourse, an object does not need to be in three-dimensional forms and the value of an object does not lay in its physicality. Based on these understandings, objects in a museum do not need to be original. They could be in or expressed by two dimensional forms. The value of objects in a museum is in their capability to represent relevance while illustrative media is to present this relevance.

Content or presentation style

National museums group and classify their objects into different contents. The contents can be a simple and straightforward narration of the history of a country. They can be a series of oral history or living memory of people. The contents can also be a complex intricacy of chronology, religions and arts. These contents are to conceptualise or to contextualise the mindset of, or simply to relate facts to those who visit national museums. Contents are about concept and those underlying principles behind the concept.

To present its contents, the British Museum uses glass cabinets to display its objects, metal plates to label its objects and wall texts to further elaborate the content. While the British Museum still follows traditional and basic style to present its contents, the Asian Civilisation Museum uses more advanced video kiosks and big picture shows. The National Museum, Bangkok holds two temporary exhibitions per year, and seldom markets itself. The National Museum of Singapore ran a Barbie Doll dress-up competition and a tango dance performance to reach out to the public. National museums in accordance with their capacities and capabilities employ different presentation styles to make their contents interesting to their visitors. They employ different techniques, facilities and forms of exhibitions to facilitate the conveyance of their discourses to their visitors and to make their discourses easy to be understood.

Museums in general are in the trend of upgrading their amenities and facilities: Exterior and interior architecture, signage, lighting, sound, escalators,

handrails and hand knobs. The renovation and expansion project of the neo-Palladian buildings of the National Museum of Singapore costs the museum 132 million Singaporean dollars (around USD94 million) (Lenzi, 2007). The maintenance and operating services expenses of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the calendar year of 2006-2007 was around USD35 million, 18% out of the total operating expenses (excluding auxiliary activities) of USD192.7 million (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007). Nevertheless, not all national museums can afford such expenses. National museums are different in their scales, their sources of income, their expenditures and expenses, and their importance to their governments. To upgrade its facilities, the National Museum, Bangkok proposed a five-year development plan and a budget of THB300 million (around USD85 million) to the Thai government (Mr. Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008). Nevertheless, up till the moment of writing of this dissertation, it is still uncertain whether the Thai government will approve the proposal or not. Up to a point, national museums have to compromise their presentation styles with their monetary budgets.

In fact, exhibitions without the assistance of high technologies and advanced facilities are still able to win reputation and draw in visitors. In 2003, as part of the celebration of its 250th anniversary, the British Museum organised a “Living and Dying” permanent exhibition. This exhibition depicts the cross-cultural perspective of health, sickness, well-being and sorrow based on the cosmology of different cultures (Sherman, 2008). This exhibition does not employ any advanced techniques. It uses simple and basic ways of display, focuses on the meanings and the significances of its objects to conceptualise visitors. Eventually, the exhibition won the 2004 Museum and Heritage Award for Excellence for the Best Permanent Gallery in the U.K. (Sherman, 2008).

Based on these understandings, an attempt to compare the presentation styles of other national museums with those of the National Museum, Bangkok is considered inappropriate. An attempt to install in the National Museum, Bangkok similar facilities and technologies of other national museums is unnecessary. All in all, a national museum for Thailand as a place of interpretation is to in-reach and out reach to more visitors, to arouse the interest of its visitors to visit the museum and to ensure its contents are easily understood by its visitors

The contents of a national museum for Thailand

The discourse of a national museum for Thailand has to enable visitors to evaluate Thailand from different aspects: Its multi-race, its history, its cultural relationship with its neighbours and its relationships with the world. Through the contents, visitors are to be able to see Thailand as a world and Thailand as a part of the world. Visitors are also to be able to understand the ways how the Thais and international events affect and contribute to the development of Thailand. Eventually, visitors will be able to introspect and to evaluate their roles in and contributions to their own countries.

The contents of a new national museum for Thailand are to conceptualise and to contextualise the mindsets of its visitors with its contents. Based on this principle, this national museum does not need to exhibit objects that are original, valuable or tangible. These objects can be replicas or miniatures of the original. They can also be two-dimensional objects: Photos of original objects or articles from newspapers.

These contents can be divided into four permanent exhibitions.

Multi-faces of Thailand: The Communities Behind

A country seldom comprises of one single community or race. Singapore and the United Kingdom are examples of countries where several communities live together. These communities form the basic identity of Singapore and the United Kingdom. The Asian Civilisation Museum reflects those multi-communities who inhabit in Singapore by means of four main themes that are mentioned in the chapter of a national museum of Thailand as a place of discourse. To address the rich cultural mix of South Asia and Southeast Asia, the British Museum illustrates how different religions evolved in accordance with time and how these religions are represented by different forms of arts (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008). In the Victoria and Albert Museum, Islamic art is a way of living and Chinese arts is a cross dimension of social hierarchy (from the ruling class to the commoners) and time (from the old to the new) (John Clarke, personal communication, March 11, 2008).

The population of Thailand is comprised of several ethnic communities. Apart from the four main communities: Thai, Chinese, Muslims and Indian, a number of tribal groups, for example, Karen, Mao, Akha and Lisu gather mostly around the mountainous area of Thailand. Having a permanent exhibition, Multi-faces of Thailand: The Communities Behind, will let visitors understand the cultural differences of these communities by means of some common and important events. It is expected that this exhibition is to be able to foster mutual understanding, respect and appreciation among these communities. These are essential elements that constitute the integrity, the stability and the development of a country.

Lissant Bolton approached the “Living and Dying” exhibition of the British Museum by linking the cosmology of various communities to the shared problems of life such as sorrow, sickness and trouble. “People everywhere experience trouble, sorrow, need and sickness and develop skills and knowledge in response to these adversities” (Bolton, cited in Sherman, 2008, p.334). To echo the discourse of race equality of the Asian Civilisation Museum that was mentioned in the chapter of a national museum as a place of discourse, different races attach their own memory and religion, interpret their own cosmology and response to the living environment in their own ways. These attachments, interpretations and responses are often expressed in various rites and rituals. Apart from sharing same adversities, different communities celebrate and mourn common events as well. Marriage and death are two of these events. The permanent exhibition,

“Multi-faces of Thailand: the Communities Behind” is to illustrate the cultural differences of those main communities of Thailand through their rites and rituals of these two events.

In some regions of Thailand, one means of determining the suitability of a girl to get married is in her ability to weave a variety of textiles, which includes *pha-sin* (skirt), *pha-sabai* (sash), *pha-hom* (blanket), *pha-lop* (sheet), *maun* (pillow) and *pha-sarong* (Conway, 2001). Before marriage, the bride-to-be has to weave various types of textiles for her new home. During the wedding ceremony, the bride and bridegroom have to pay respect by presenting their parents with a piece of cloth called *pha-wai* (Ninnart, 2003).

With respect to the tradition of some Han Chinese, on the day of marriage, the bridegroom will send a palanquin to carry the bride all the way from her house to his house (figure 147). Many of these marriages are arranged marriage. Mostly it is in the marriage night that the couple sees each other for the first time.



Figure 145 (Left): A traditional wedding costume of the Han Chinese bride.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 146 (Right): An Indian bride in her wedding costume.
Source: *Brides of India* (n.d.)

In some part of Thailand, parents believe that they will be able to go to heaven after death by holding the yellow robe of their ordained-monk son (Conway, 2001). With respect to the Muslims, they prefer to bury the deceased body within 24 hours. The deceased body will be washed and wrapped in a shroud. The deceased has to be buried with its head facing the holy city of Mekkah (*Islamic funerals*, n.d.).



Figure 147: A diorama of the palanquin that carries the bride to the house of the bridegroom on the day of marriage.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon



Figure 148 (Left): A painting illustrates a simple Indian Muslim funeral in the late 19th century.

Source: *Muslim funeral* (n.d.)

Figure 149: A traditional Chinese funeral. A deceased was carried by a heavily decorated palanquin.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 150: A close look of a palanquin with a coffin inside.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

These are suggestions of the contents of this permanent exhibition. The objects used for this exhibition do not need to be those of precious values. They can be photos that illustrate rites and rituals of these events and can be real objects such as wedding costumes, palanquins and coffins. Wall texts are necessary to narrate these rites and rituals in details.

Mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual appreciation imply mutual recognition, mutual acceptance and equality. Based on these elements, these multi-communities in Thailand are able to amalgamate into one identity: Thainess. Thainess means to understand the Thai society is composed of different races. Thainess means all communities in the Thai society have to live harmoniously together for the stability of the society. Thainess means all communities have to work hand in hand for the development of Thailand. Through this Thainess, people are able to appreciate the cultural richness of the Thai society. They are able to look at Thailand from different cultural perspectives. They are able to realise the ancient civilisations of Thailand and the linkage of Thailand with other parts of Asia. "If we want to understand our society, we must reflect those cultural elements in the way we present the Museum's collection" says Neil Macgregor, Director of the British Museum (cited in Smith, 2007, p.167).

To create a sense of belonging and devotion of the communities to this exhibition, they have to be involved in this exhibition. They can loan their objects, share their information or help prepare this exhibition. In one exhibition of the British Museum, the British Museum asked a Bengali craftsman and the Bengali community in London to help to construct an image of "Durga (a Hindu goddess) killing the buffalo-head demon Mahisha". This involvement derived such a strong sense of devotion of the image among the community that after the exhibition, the image was worshipped at the Camden Centre and was taken to the banks of the River Thames at Putney where they immersed the image into the river (Smith, 2007). The community had taken this exhibition as a real rite for the goddess. "This was not just an exhibition or an art project – this was living devotion" says Sona Datta, a research assistant in the Department of Asia, the British Museum (cited in Smith, 2007, p 171). The concept of using virtual local hosts by the Asian Civilisation Museum to interact with visitors is another means of communities' involvement.

The Timeline of Thailand: The Artificial Landscapes Behind

There are many ways to tell the history of a country. History can be expressed by a series of events or in the narration of these events (Veyne, 1968, cited in Le Goff, 1992). This narration could be purely descriptive or contextual. Artificial landscapes of a country can also tell the history of a country. Visitors are able to understand the history of a country through the context of these landscapes: Motivation behind their construction, engagement of these landscapes with the historic development of a country and possible changes of this engagement in relation to the change of time.

A second permanent exhibition, *The Timeline of Thailand: The Artificial Landscapes Behind*, can tell the history of Thailand from the contexts of some of its artificial landscapes. These landscapes range from sculptures to heritage sites, from palaces to parks and from monuments to buildings. The existing site of the National Museum, Bangkok is a good site to depict its contextual relationship with history from its original role to protect the Grand Palace to its role as a national museum today.

History is contradictory. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (figure 151) that was constructed under the command of King Chulalongkorn marks the highest and the lowest ebb of the Chakri monarchy (figure 153 and figure 154).



Figure 151: The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall signifies the full westernisation of Siam under King Chulalongkorn.

Source: *Ananda Samakhom Throne Hall* (n.d.)

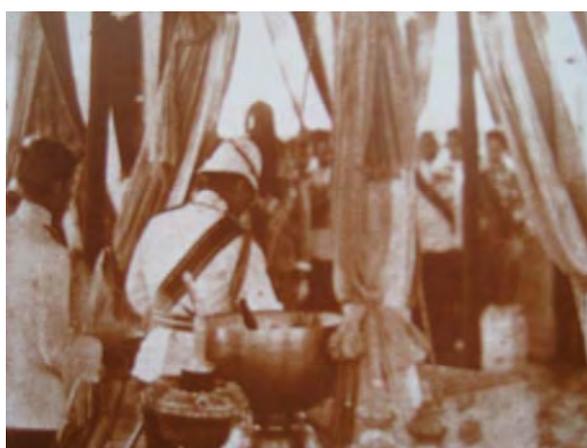


Figure 152 (Left): The construction of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall.

Figure 153 (Right): King Chulalongkorn laying the foundation stone of the Hall.

Source: Lohapon, N. (2008). *Galileo Chini: Painter of Two Kingdoms*. No publisher.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 154: Soldiers assembled in front of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on the day of the 1932 *coup d'état* on 24th June.

Source: *Siamese revolution of 1932* (n.d.)

History is controversial. The Sukhothai Historical Park is accused by some scholars as arbitrary reconstruction of monuments for the sake of tourism (Peleggi, 1994, cited in Esterik, 2000, p.85), while the Fine Arts Department defends that the park was restored in accordance with those inscriptions on the Ramkhamhaeng stone stele.

History repeats itself. In the past few decades many Thai political crises took place in front of the Thai Government House.



Figure 155 (Left): Soldiers stationed in front of the Government House during the *coup d'état* in 2006.

Source: *Clearblogs* (n.d.)



Figure 156 (Right) The PAD protestors settled in front of the Government House in 2008.
Source: The *Bangkok Post* issued on 1st January, 2009.

The main objects for this exhibition are to be miniatures and photos of these landscapes, old documents and old articles that tell visitors the contextual relationship of these landscapes with the history of Thailand. Wall texts are essential for visitors to understand this contextual relationship. Students from universities and art institutions are to be invited to make miniatures for this exhibition.

Through this exhibition, visitors are able to understand the history of Thailand from various perspectives. They have to make their own judgement to justify these events and to draw their own conclusions of the effects of these events to the development of Thailand. Eventually they are able to think of their roles in affecting the development of their countries.

A Shared Culture: Thailand and its Neighbours

“Visitors to the museum are now able to follow the diffusion of Indian civilization and its two great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, in Southeast Asia, and mostly particularly in Cambodia” writes Jean-Francois Jarrige, Director of the Guimet Museum at the preface of *Guimet, National Museum of Asian Arts: Visitor’s guide* (2004). When being asked the approach that the British Museum would take for the content of a separate gallery for Thai culture, Justin Morris said that this gallery would focus on Thai culture in relation to its neighbours, China and the Muslim countries, and particularly, religions that bridge Thailand and its neighbouring countries (personal communication, March 13, 2008). Thailand and its neighbouring countries are influenced by the Indian civilisation. They share similar religion and culture. Their religious similarity is in their devotion to Theravada Buddhism, while their cultural similarities are expressed in classical arts, visual arts, performing arts and literatures.

A third permanent exhibition, A Shared Culture: Thailand and its Neighbours, can illustrate the cultural similarities between Thailand and its neighbouring countries, and those cultures that once influenced or are still influencing the Thai culture. To bring out this context, this exhibition is to focus on the evolution of Thai art and the comparison of its art forms with those of its neighbouring countries. The changing nature of the Buddha from a preacher in the Dvaravati epoch to a divine king in the Ayutthaya epoch; the comparison of Buddha-images between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism; the illustration of different forms and shapes of *stupas* in different Asian Buddhist countries (figure 157 - 160), Thai-Sino ceramics and Indian influences in the design of Thai traditional textiles are examples that can bring out these cultural intimacy and influences.

The purpose of this exhibition is to use this contextual framework to go beyond the geographical space of Thailand so that visitors are able to understand the cultural context of Thai civilisation.

This exhibition uses real objects, photos and miniatures. Real objects can be obtained from those of the National Museum, Bangkok and loaned from other museums in Thailand. Wall texts are important in this exhibition to give visitors a contextual linkage of these objects.



Figure 157 (Left): A Thai *stupa* in Wat Doi Khem, Chiang Mai.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon



Figure 158 (Right): A Burmese *stupa* in Ragoon.

Source: Shashibala (2003). *Buddhist Art: In Praise of the Divine*. New Delhi: Roli & Jassen

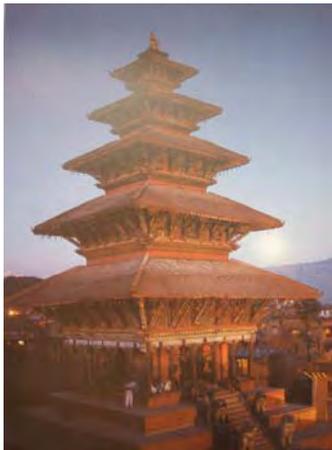


Figure 159 (Left): A *stupa* in the form of a pagoda.



Figure 160 (Right): A Nepalese *stupa*.

Source: Shashibala (2003). *Buddhist Art: In Praise of the Divine*. New Delhi: Roli & Jassen

Thailand: A Part of the World

A last permanent exhibition can be to illustrate a series of world events that Thailand is related to or being affected by. Thailand is a part of the world system. There are events from which Thailand gained international praise and pride while there are events by which Thailand was affected negatively. Take Hong Kong as an example of how a world event can be utilised. Horses have special meanings for the Chinese. Horses have always been a popular decorative motif for Chinese arts, and there are many Chinese idioms and blessings that use the word horse for expressions (Figure 161 and 162). Hong Kong people are particularly fond of gambling on horse racing. The Hong Kong Jockey Club that is responsible for horse racing events in Hong Kong generated an income of USD8300 million in the fiscal year 2006/2007 (Hong Kong Jockey Club, n.d.). In conjunction with the

hosting of the equestrian event of the 2008 Olympics in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Museum of Art organised a special exhibition: The Story of Horse, between July and October, 2008. This temporary exhibition was to illustrate the role and value of horses to Chinese through Chinese art and culture. This exhibition is an example of how a museum makes use of a world event to bring out a traditional value to visitors.



Figure 161 (Left): Horses are popular themes for Chinese paintings.

Figure 162 (Right): The use of horses on Chinese arts.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Thailand gains international fame and pride through its sports, for example, Thailand won a few gold medals in the recent two Olympic Games, Muay Thai (Thai Boxing) is an internationally well-known Thai sport and Thailand also hosted some important sports events, such as the 24th Southeast Asia Game (2007) in Nakhon Ratchasima and the 4th ASEAN Para Game in 2008 (figure 163). By telling visitors the achievements of Thailand in world's sports, it is able to motivate young visitors to engage in sports. Nevertheless, there are also some world events that Thailand was seriously affected. The dramatic devaluation of Thai Baht against USD during the 1997 economic crisis and the oil crisis in 2008 are examples of world events that affect the economy, the society and the politics of Thailand negatively. By linking Thailand with these negative events, visitors are able to get hindsight and not make the same mistakes, and to seek ways to contribute to Thailand amid the current economic crisis. These are examples of world events this exhibition can work on.

From the perspective of world events, visitors are able to understand how Thailand was affected by these events. From the perspective of Thailand, visitors are able to evaluate these world events. Through these perspectives, visitors are able to generate knowledge and wisdom for a better self, a better society and eventually a better world.



Figure 163 (Left): The theme of the 24th SEA Games was “Spirit, Friendship and Celebrations.

Source: *Southeast Asian Games* (n.d.)

Figure 164 (Right): Prapawadee Jaroenrattanakoon won the first weightlifting gold medal at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing for Thailand.

Source: The *Bangkok Post* issued on 1st January, 2009.

This exhibition is to conceptualise the mindset of visitors. It is to tell the story of the relationship of these events with Thailand. The main objects to be exhibited in this exhibition are mostly photos, articles from newspapers and published materials that depict this relationship. Wall texts have to be narrative. Visitors using their own judgments are to comment on and to evaluate the effects of these events on Thailand. One specific characteristic of this exhibition is that the content of this exhibition has to be updated continuously.

The presentation style of a national museum for Thailand

The presentation style of a national museum for Thailand is to activate and to facilitate the understandability and the consumable value of the museum. A new national museum for Thailand has to in-reach and to outreach to its potential visitors, to make its exhibitions understandable, to fit into the cognitive nature of its visitors, particularly children, and to fascinate its visitors.

To in-reach and to outreach to potential visitors

a. Temporary or special exhibitions

Temporary or special exhibitions are to provide new contents so as to arouse the interest of visitors to re-visit those museums that they have visited, and to attract new visitors. The average visitation rate of the British Museum is around five million visitors per year (Smith, 2007). In 2007, the temporary exhibition on the terra-cotta warriors of the Qin Dynasty, China, was able to attract an additional 830,000 visitors in the fiscal year 2007/ 2008. The total number of visitors who visited the British Museum in that fiscal year reached 5.7 million (Justin Morris, personal communication, March 13, 2008).

The contents of temporary or special exhibitions have to associate visitors with things that they are familiar with. They might be something that visitors

have come across or some events that have affected them directly or indirectly. The purpose of these exhibitions is to increase or to enrich the knowledge of visitors. The current dispute between Thailand and Cambodia on the ownership of Phreah Vihear can be a theme of a temporary exhibition of a national museum for Thailand. This dispute emanated from a complex historic political scenario that involved France, Cambodia and Siam in the 19th century. Through this exhibition, visitors are able to understand a contemporary issue from a historic context.

The themes of a special or temporary exhibition for a national museum for Thailand can also be something that the Thai is familiar with. Murals inside *wats* are a form of Buddhist classical art that Thai Buddhists commonly and easily come across during their daily life. Egyptian wall paintings are common features of Egyptian tombs and are well-known in the world. A temporary exhibition that compares the context of these two types of mural can also be one of the themes. Visitors are able to understand the context of these two murals from different cultural perspectives.

b. Travelling exhibition

Mr. Yusof (personal communication, February 12, 2008) sees the importance in outreaching to schools by means of travelling exhibitions. In 2004, the Victoria and Albert Museum organised a travelling exhibition of Vivienne Westwood, a famous British fashion designer, to outreach to the world. Between April and July 2004, this exhibition toured Canberra, Shanghai, Taipei, Tokyo, Dusseldorf and Bangkok. The purpose of travelling exhibitions is to outreach to those beyond the physical reach of a museum.

Between 10th and 20th July, 2008, an exhibition “The Passion of Thai Modern Art” was exhibited at the Siam Paragon, Bangkok. This exhibition was to depict the evolution of Thai art from its classical form to its modern form. The exhibition was organised by the Bangkok Sculpture Center. This exhibition did not but could travel inside and outside Thailand to let more people understand different forms of Thai art. The National Museum, Bangkok could have associated itself with this exhibition by contributing its knowledge on Thai classical art and experience in organising exhibitions. A new national museum for Thailand can outreach to those who are beyond its physical reach by contributing its knowledge, objects and know-how to those exhibitions that are not organised by the museum. The recent inauguration of the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Siam district, Bangkok provides a good opportunity and venue for the National Museum, Bangkok to associate itself with exhibitors so as to outreach to new visitors.

c. To collaborate with other local museums and institutes

“No single museum can respond to all social needs with equal effectiveness; for this reason alone we must have a variety of museums and museum styles, serving different purposes or tackling challenges from different approaches” (MacDonald, cited in Karp and et al, 1992, p. 159).

A national museum for Thailand can set up network with its neighbouring museums that are of different nature. For example, the National Museum, Bangkok can collaborate with the National Gallery, the Voradis Palace Museum and the National Museum Silp Bhirasri Memorial. Despite these gallery and museums vary in nature, owing to their geographical proximity, this collaboration can enable them to promote activities and share information mutually, and to avoid any overlapping of functions.

A national museum for Thailand can collaborate with those museums that tell the development of Thailand from different strata. A national museum for Thailand can collaborate with the National Educational Museum at the Suan Kularp Wittlayalai School that is located on Triphetch Road, and the Thai Labour Museum that is located on Makkasan Road. The National Education Museum enables visitors to understand the development of old Thai education and education policy. The Thai Labour Museum tells visitors the changing nature and the changing role of Thai labours.

Apart from collaborating with local museums and institutes, a national museum for Thailand can collaborate with diplomatic institutes such as embassies and cultural centers such as the British Council and the Japan Information and Cultural Centre. This “political” and cultural collaboration facilitates the introduction of some major exhibitions to Thailand from some renowned museums in the world, and enhances the possibility of making this national museum a major cultural hub in Asia or in the world. The success of the British Museum in holding the temporary exhibition of the terra-cotta warriors from China was “a mixture of diplomacy and political strategy” (Smith, 2007, p. 155). After numerous discussions with different museums in China and the Ministry of Culture, China, the British Museum finally “signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in the presence of Tony Blair and the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao” (Smith, 2007, p. 155).

The partnership of the Victoria and Albert Museum with the NCH, a charity organisation for children in the United Kingdom, was able to bring in more children from different strata of the society to visit the Victoria and Albert Museum in the fiscal year 2005/2006 (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006). A national museum for Thailand has to collaborate with education institutes and charity organisations in Thailand. This collaboration can bring in the museum more potential visitors.

d. Exchange exhibitions

Exchange exhibitions can outreach to visitors outside Thailand and change the world’s preconception of Thai art and culture. In those overseas museums that exhibit Asian arts, seldom is there a separate or small gallery for Thai art. In many overseas museums, Thai art is mostly related to religious sculptures. The Victoria and Albert Museum is one the few museums that exhibit a few pieces of Thai decorative art (figures 168-169).



Figure 165 (Left): Thai art in the British Museum is mostly represented by religious images.

Figure 166 (Middle): Thai art mainly in the form of sculptures occupies a small space in the Musee Guimet (France).

Figure 167 (Right): Thai art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (U.S.A.).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



Figure 168 (Left): A gold belt that belonged to Queen Saowabha Pongsi, wife of King Chulalongkorn.

Figure 169 (Right): A diamond brooch that was wore by Queen Saowabha Pongsi on state occasions.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Surichai Wun-Gaeo in his paper presented at the conference on *Culture in ASEAN and the 21st century* (1996) said that there are two definitions of *wattanatham* (Thai culture). The first definition follows the definition of Phibun Songkhram's National Cultural Maintenance that culture is qualitative and comparable and the second definition is that culture is the way of life. Thai art is an expression of Thai culture. It is not just restricted to religious sculptures. Thai art is very comprehensive. It can be functional. It can be aesthetically appealing. It can reflect local wisdom.

A national museum for Thailand has to launch exchange exhibitions with overseas museums in order to change their preconception of Thai culture and art and to give a wider perspective to the outside world towards the Thai culture. Apart from being able to change the perception of majority of overseas museums

on Thai art, exchange exhibitions can also generate a sense of pride of people towards a country's national heritage (ASEAN-COCI, 1997).

To make exhibitions understandable

a. Orientation centre

“Advanced organizers can be useful aids to the informal leisure learning that takes place within exhibition environments...They provide a framework for deciding ahead of time where you are, what to see, how to get there, what is most important to focus on, and why something may be important, as well as for helping unguided visitors to pre-organise information” (Screven, 1986, pp. 123-4, cited in Hein, 1998, p.138). In accordance with George Hein, museums need to provide a clear orientation to visitors. This clear orientation is a pre-requisite to provide visitors “a degree of comfort” while they visit a museum (Hein, 1998).

The National Museum, Bangkok simply uses brief guides and maps to orientate visitors towards exhibitions or activities organised by the museum and the facilities of the museum. As visitors are assumed to visit national museums with the purpose of learning, orientation in the form of brief guides or maps are insufficient to cater for the needs of these visitors.



Figure 170: The orientation centre of Victoria and Albert Museum.
Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

To orientate its visitors, an orientation centre is required for a new national museum for Thailand. This orientation center is the first stop for all visitors who visit the museum. This centre is not to sell admission tickets or to provide brief guides or maps to visitors but to supply information to help visitors get familiar with the museum and understand the exhibitions of the museum. The orientation centre is to provide information to tell visitors the key concept of those exhibitions that they will visit in the museum, to update them those latest programmes and educational activities of the museum.

A series of materials have to be available at the centre: Brochures that introduce key concept of the museum's exhibitions, guidebooks that explain objects in the museum and leaflets that give brief introduction of activities of the museum or report those activities that were organised by the museum. With respect to group visits to the museum, trained staff has to be available at the centre to tell visitors the details of their visit, to give them relevant materials so as to help them understand those exhibitions that they are going to visit and to tell them what they can learn from their visit. The centre is to provide contextual orientation to its visitors so as to ensure they understand the museum and the theme of each of its exhibition before they start the tour.

If "providing visitors with lists of key concepts or unifying generalizations may prompt prior knowledge and increase interest and learning from an exhibit" writes Ellis (1993) in his unpublished doctoral dissertation that was cited in Koran and Koran in 1996 (Hein, 1998, p. 139), then providing visitors with contextualised information may prompt their resonance with those exhibitions of a national museum of Thailand.

b. Guidebooks

To enable visitors to understand the rationale of one of its objects, the Real Thing Cross by David Poston (figure 171), the *Victoria and Albert Museum Guidebook* writes:

This carefully crafted cross is made from Coca-cola bottle tops collected in a bar in Rwanda. Coca-Cola is a Christian company, Rwanda is a predominantly Christian country. Through it the maker, David Poston, poses a series of series of questions. What does Christianity imply? Should Coca-Cola be trading in a country as poor as Rwanda? What does "Coca-Colonisation" mean? Are Christianity and commerce compatible? Has Christianity now also become just a brand? Is there a real thing? These are challenges debates in a gallery devoted to one thousand years of Christian art. (p. 24)

The rationale of objects and exhibitions is quite clearly defined.

To help visitors understand the context of the Durga Mahishasuramardini image (figure 172) in the National Museum of Cambodia, the *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia* (2006), a publication that introduces the highlights of the museum, writes,

The full cheeks and firm rounded body of this image of Durga suggests a youthful model. As is often the case with Khmer representations of the buffalo demon slayer, the buffalo is not fully realised but merely indicated in low relief below her feet. Although many of the traits of pre-Angkorian sculpture derive from Indian precedents, even voluptuous feminine figures like this do not project the sensuality that characterizes the Indic models, a feature distinguishing Khmer art from Indian. This Durga wears a mitre indicating her connections to Vishnu. (p. 38)



Figure 171 (Left): The Real Thing Cross by David Poston.

Source: Victoria and Albert Museum (2005). *V & A: Guide book*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum.

Figure 172 (Middle and Right): The Durga Mahishasuramardini image.

Source: Friends of Khmer Culture Orientation. (2006). *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia*. Norfolk, CT: Friends of Khmer Culture Orientation.

A national museum for Thailand has to provide guidebooks to help its visitors understand those rationalities behind its objects and eventually its exhibitions. These guidebooks also help its visitors plan tours that best fit into their schedules and profiles. “There is no correct way to visit the British Museum,” writes the *Visitor’s Guide: 15 self-guided tours* of the museum (Reeve, 2006). There is no correct way to visit a national museum for Thailand as well. Those adult visitors who visit a national museum for Thailand are free to follow their own agenda in accordance with their time availability, interests or profiles. For those who are more interested in Thai classical art and Thai minor art, guidebooks can recommend them to visit the permanent exhibition “A Shared Culture: Thailand and its Neighbours” and some objects, for example the Sukhothai Historic Park and the Ayutthaya Historic Park in another permanent exhibition “The Time Line of Thailand: the Artificial Landscapes Behind”.

Guidebooks of a national museum for Thailand are to guide its visitors to look at its exhibitions from different perspectives. For those who are more interested in the historic development of Thailand, the guidebook can recommend a tour that links the permanent exhibition “The Timeline of Thailand: the Artificial Landscapes behind” and another permanent exhibition “Thailand: A Part of the World”, for example.

c. Leaflets

The four main themes of the Asian Civilisation Museum spread over 11 galleries of the museum. To introduce these themes to its visitors, leaflets are available at the entrance of each gallery. These leaflets are to guide its visitors the way to look at the contents of the exhibitions. For a national museum for Thailand, leaflets have to be available at the entrance of its permanent and temporary galleries. These leaflets are to give its visitors insight to the contents of different exhibitions in the museum and possibly, to slow them down so that visitors will take more time to look into the contents of different exhibitions.

d. Labeling and wall text

Visual narratives mostly in the form of wall text or text panel and label are commonly used for exhibitions. They are to provide intellectual content to support exhibitions and objects. Studies showed that intellectual content is able to attract visitors, to double their average time in the gallery and to lengthen their stay in a museum (Hein, 1998). Normally, wall texts are designed to provide a big picture of different exhibitions. It is common to find lengthy wall texts and briefed labels in museums. Nonetheless, according to a research reported by the British Museum, while visitors visit an exhibition they do not read texts as first priority (Smith, 2007). They look at objects first and then read a bit of texts. Seldom do they read wall texts at all. Based on this finding, the content of the wall text of a national museum for Thailand has to be comparatively short while that of the label is comparatively long.

Labels share part of the function of wall texts. The content of labels has to be instructive. In describing the criteria of defining an efficient educational museum, George Brown Goode, the third secretary of the Smithsonian Institution said: “an efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well selected specimen” (cited in Hein, 2000, p. 117). If we agree to this comment and based on the findings of the research reported by the British Museum, a national museum for Thailand have to make use of labels to tell the story of objects while wall texts are just to further elaborate the contents of the labels instead.

e. Library and bookshops

A national museum for Thailand is a learning institute. It caters for the learning interests and motivations of its visitors. A national museum should make the best use of its library to foster and to support the learning interests and behaviour of its visitors. Books that are available in the library are to help visitors associate themselves with exhibitions of the museum. They are to enrich their knowledge, to verify their beliefs and let them look for new information. The library of a national museum for Thailand should be located in one of the prime locations of the museum instead of locating at the furthest back of the museum, and inside the office building. The location of the library inside the office building gives visitors an impression that the library is for the internal use of the museum. Furthermore, the opening time and hours of both the English books and the Thai books sections of the library should be the same as those of the museum so that visitors are able to access the library at any time during of the museum. Many famous people such as Karl Marx and Oscar Wilde had read in the library of the British Museum, the Reading Room (Smith, 2007). The library of a national museum for Thailand can also be a reading place for a new generation of famous and important people both locally and internationally.

To cater to the learning nature of visitors, particularly children

“By definition, there can be no learning (or meaning making) if there’s been no interaction” (Hein, 1998, p.136). Adults and children learn differently. In the previous chapter, we were told that children tend to be passive. To visit and to re-

visit a national museum, children need to be motivated. To understand the contents of a national museum, they need to be guided. To remember the contents of the exhibitions of a national museum, they need something that can arouse their curiosities. Adults tend to associate the contents of national museums with their preconceived knowledge and experience.

Many national museums hold temporary or special exhibitions to attract new visitors and to entice their visitors to re-visit them. They also organise interactive programmes and activities such as workshops, lectures, study group, seminars or excursion. Nevertheless, with respect to children, a national museum for Thailand has to arrange tailor-made activities so as to care for their learning nature.

- a. A national museum for Thailand can arrange drawing or composition competition to children so as to arouse their eagerness to visit the museum.
- b. During the visit of children to a national museum for Thailand, before they start the tour, the museum can distribute a museum passport to them. After finished visiting one gallery, children can go to a counter at the end of the gallery to have their passport stamped with a specially designed seal. Each gallery is represented by a seal of different designs. Children then go from one gallery to another to have their passports stamped. This will make their visit more enjoyable.
- c. During the period of holding any temporary or special exhibition, a national museum for Thailand can distribute specially designed bookmarks to those who visit these exhibitions. The bookmarks will then become collectable items. This will motivate children to re-visit the museum more frequently.
- d. A national museum for Thailand can arrange workshops to ask those children who visit the museum to arrange some small scale exhibitions. These small scale exhibitions will then be exhibited at its orientation centre. These small scale exhibitions will become part of the exhibitions of the museum. In this way, children are able to have a sense of association with the museum.
- e. A national museum for Thailand can arrange a question and answer section to answer any query of those children who have finished the visit to the museum. This is to round up the visit for those children and to evaluate the knowledge that they get from the visit.

To fascinate visitors

To increase the visiting experience of visitors, national museums employ various interpretation techniques. These interpretation techniques can be high-tech devices such as light and sound system and big screen show or exotic interior architect so as to fascinate visitors. Nonetheless, some national museums might not be able to afford the necessary expenses for these facilities or design. In fact, visitors can also be fascinated by objects that are of high quality, rare, unusual history, and bear special meaning.

- a. Masterpieces

Some visit the British Museum and the Louvre mainly for the Elgin Marbles, the Egyptian mummies, the Mona Lisa or the Nike. Some national museums see the importance of having masterpieces. Nonetheless, these masterpieces do not necessarily have to be daunting pieces of work or of precious or rare value. They can be something that are unique and meaningful (Mr. Yusof, personal communication, February 12, 2008 and Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008).

The National Museum, Bangkok possesses several masterpieces such as the *dhammachakra* and the Ramkhamhaeng's stone stele. Nonetheless, among these masterpieces, the most notable one is the royal chariots (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008). These chariots are symbolic representations of the Thai king and his family (National Museum Division, 1993). The chariots are carved with numerous features from the Hindu mythology to emphasise the almighty of and to instill a sense of divinity and respect to the Thai king and his family, and to protect the Thai king and his family from harm.

In fact, Thailand is not the only country that possesses royal chariots. The *stupa* in Sanji (1st century B.C.) in India, some bas reliefs on the Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Borobudur in Indonesia show the popularity of the use of royal chariots among royal families in these countries (National Museum Division, 1993). A royal chariot of the same kind is exhibited at the Wat Xengthongrasavora Vihan in Luang Prabang, Laos (figure 173).



Figure 173: The Royal Chariot at the Wat Xengthongrasavora Vihan in Luang Prabang, Laos.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Yet, the royal chariots in the National Museum, Bangkok are unique. They are unique owing to the fact that they are the only living chariots today (Mr. Na Nakhonphanom, personal communication, February 26, 2008). They are used for funerals. They are to carry the remains of the royalties. The most recent use of

one of the chariots was at the funeral ceremony for Princess Galyani Vadhana who passed away in the beginning of 2008 (figure 174).



Figure 174: The remains of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana are carried in a royal chariot from the royal crematorium at Sanam Luang to the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in 2008.

Source: The *Bangkok Post* issued on 1st January, 2009

A special exhibition on these chariots could be held at the permanent exhibition of “A shared Culture: Thailand and its Neighbours”. They will be the most daunting pieces of a national museum for Thailand.

b. Architectures as objects of attraction

Another masterpiece of a national museum for Thailand is the buildings of the current National Museum, Bangkok. The National Museum, Bangkok occupies part of the original site of the Wang Na (the Front Palace). The three core buildings of the National Museum, Bangkok were part of the Wang Na. These three buildings bear a historic context that signifies the change of the Thai monarchical system.

Many premises where museums located nowadays are old palaces. The premise of the Patan Museum, Nepal is the former royal palace of Nepal and the State Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg was the official residence of the Russian Tzars. The most renowned example is the Louvre in Paris. The Louvre was the royal residence of some of the kings of France. Throughout the history of France, the Louvre had undergone several expansions and renovations. One of the most remarkable extension projects was the “Les Grands Travaux project” of Francois Mitterand (1916/8 – 1996), the former President of the Republic of France. The typical feature of the extended Louvre is the pyramid entrance that is designed by world famous architect, I.M. Pei. This pyramid entrance becomes a symbol of the Louvre. Today, the pyramid entrance and the Louvre’s buildings are themselves attractive spots that attract numerous tourists while they visit Paris.

With respect to the buildings of the National Museum, Bangkok, owing to the lack of maintenance, some parts of the buildings need intensive repairs. Seeing the uniqueness and the special meaning of the Wang Na to the Thai people, some scholars propose several ways to preserve these ageing buildings. Under proper preservation and together with the historic context of the Wang Na, the architecture of the former palace can be a potential landmark of a national museum for Thailand and of Thailand.

A national museum for Thailand has to be a place of truth and enrichment

Despite giving interpretation a definition, Tilden did it only for the purpose of giving a definition. Tilden is skeptical of the appropriateness of giving “interpretation” a fixed definition. To Tilden, to fix a definition for interpretation is in fact “fruitless” (1979, p. 3). Interpretation is about “truth and enrichment” (Tilden, 1979, p.3). The function of interpretation is not to tell what our visual sense tells us; but to present the true importance and significance of sites and the implication and relationship of sites to visitors. The role of interpretation is to preserve the status quo of a site, to enrich the experience, knowledge and feeling of visitors, and to convey the message of a site to visitors.

Nevertheless, instead of focusing on telling the truth and enriching the knowledge and experience of visitors, many national museums focus on installing extravagant and high-tech presenting forms and styles. They aim at enhancing the visual and audio excitement of visitors. They believe such excitements will ignite the memory of visitors towards their visit to national museums. A national museum for Thailand has to be conscious of falling into the trap of interpretation for the sake of interpretation. The interpretation of a new national museum for Thailand is supposed to reflect truths and to enrich the knowledge and experience of its visitors.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Throughout these 150 years, there had not been many changes in the content of the exhibitions of the National Museum, Bangkok. Ever since King Mongkut (reigned 1851-1868) introduced the museum concept to Siam, the National Museum, Bangkok has been adamantly upholding its political mission to safeguard Thailand against any non-Thai value and to integrate the Thai society based on the admiration of the Thai kings. The museum is to estrange the Thai culture from its neighbouring countries and to promote the value of the Thai kings. Nevertheless, facing the facts that:

- Thailand is a part of the Theravada Buddhism and Southeast Asia, and shares similar religious and cultural principles and customs with its neighbouring countries.
- Thai society is made up of several races
- The association of the Thai society with those pre-Sukhothai cultures and
- The dwindling of traditional values as a result of western globalisation

There is a need to design the museum with new frameworks so that it is able to reflect the current time and space of Thai society. Although there are various areas that the National Museum, Bangkok can work on to reflect this relevance, this dissertation focused on the area of discourse, consumable nature and interpretation of the museum. These three areas form the tripod for the museum to examine its role in the Thai society: To be responsible for the development of and responsible to the change of the society.

The discourse of a national museum is to associate visitors with its current time and space. A national museum has:

- To provide updated information to visitors
- To foster mutual understanding and mutual debates between visitors and between visitors and the government
- To link visitors with their societies, their countries and the world and
- To help visitors look into the past, contemplate the present and look forward to the future

The discourse has to enable visitors to understand the identity of Thai people, the mechanisms of the Thai society and the link of Thailand with the world.

Museums are for the consumption of visitors. The consumable nature of a national museum indicates the relationship of the museum with its users. The relationship between a national museum and its users lays in the pedagogic nature of the museum. A national museum has:

- To be a learning institute
- To outreach to new visitors

- To interact with its visitors by activating and animating its consumable nature
- To associate the content of its exhibitions to the histories, experiences and backgrounds of its visitors
- To regard children as its main users

The interpretation of a national museum is to convey its discourse and pedagogic nature through the contents and presentation style of its exhibitions. A national museum for Thailand has to know that the main functions of interpretation are to:

- To in-reach and to outreach to potential visitors
- To ensure its content are easily understood and
- To arouse the interest of its visitors and

The National Museum, Bangkok has to be a museum to tell the truth to and to enrich the experience of its visitors.

Controversies of this dissertation

National museums share different histories, different reasons for existence and different backgrounds. Even though facing similar historic factors, different national museums might respond to these factors differently. In spite of bearing same reasons for existence, different national museums might evolve and develop in different directions. Despite having same background, different national museums might express themselves differently. These differences are further complicated with the variables of national museums in terms of their scales, funding, structures, personnel, objects and architects, for example. After all, it is all these differences that make each national museum unique and special. Based on this understanding, to design new frameworks for a national museum for Thailand, it is inappropriate to echo the frameworks of other national museums.

This dissertation is not a benchmark study and is not to adopt the practices of other national museums. This dissertation is to examine and to understand the ideas, concepts and rationales behind these practices and to design a series of frameworks that best fit into the profile of a national museum for Thailand. After all, a good museum is to communicate, to inspire, to influence, to arrest and to persuade (ASEAN-COCI, 1997). Nonetheless, this dissertation is not free from controversies. They are as follows:

a. Omission of visitors' perspective

This dissertation is written from the perspective of a national museum. As a media linking visitors with nations, it is difficult for national museums to be purely market-driven. Visitors from different profiles tend to have very diversified preferences. If some visitors were to prefer visual and audio excitement, and national museums offer them light and sound systems; if they were to prefer animated features, and national museums offer them video kiosks and IMAX theatres; if they were to prefer something eerie, and national museums try to offer them rare objects, then this incessant fulfillment of the needs of visitors will only lead to the commercialisation of national museums. National

museums will then eventually become playgrounds or malls for leisure tourists. Furthermore, as a place of interpretation, national museums will have to make compromise with their budgets as well.

Children are the main users of a national museum for Thailand. Nonetheless, children are unreliable sources to collect data owing to the fact that the information they provide tends to be inaccurate and inconsistent (Solomon, 2004). Children are usually guided by their own interests and preferences while they visit museums. They need guidance during their visits. These concerns have already been discussed in the chapter of a national museum as a place of consumption.

b. The preconception and perception of the writer

On several occasions, the writer of this dissertation stressed the influence of preconception and perception of visitors while they visit a national museum. In truth, the writer could not exclude himself from these preconceptions and perceptions when writing this dissertation. National museums could be looked at from other perspectives. Should there be another writer delving into the same research question, the approach, the focus, the analysis and the recommendations will all vary greatly.

To dilute his preconceptions, the writer tried his best to consolidate and utilise those opinions gathered from his interviews with the personnel from museums and national museums, and gave references to the recommended frameworks wherever possible.

c. Impacts of the Thai government and the Thai royal family

Caverlee Cary (1994) in her unpublished dissertation raised her concern on the influence of the Thai government and the Thai royal family on the development of the National Museum, Bangkok: “The Museum (The National Museum, Bangkok) is part of the government bureaucracy. The state is now custodian of the crown” (Cary, 1994, p. 27). How far does the Thai government influence the governance policy of the National Museum, Bangkok? Is it just restricted to fund provision? “Members of the royal family have continued to exert influence either through respect for the legacy of their work, or directly through the continuity of continued involvement of members of the aristocracy, such as M.C. Subhadradis Diskul” (Cary, 1994, pp25-26). To what extent does the Thai royal family still influence the development of the National Museum, Bangkok? These remain unknown.

The future of the National Museum, Bangkok

National museums generate different meanings to different people. It can be places that encourage visitors to question both the past and the present or to look at different nations from different angles. It can be places for visitors to appreciate world cultures or to foster a better self and a better living.

The meanings and roles of national museums change as a response to the changing time and space. Four years after the French Revolution, the Louvre that

was the former residence of some kings of France was opened to the French public. Under Napoleon Bonaparte, the Louvre had become a place to show off the wealth and power of imperial France. Today, the Louvre has lost this political burden and has become one of the most visited museums in the world. Visitors visit the Louvre for its objects, its architects and its architecture.

National museums evolve and proceed differently in accordance with the changing time and space. The National Museum, Malaysia is still under restructuring from a national museum that illustrated the cultural differences of different races in Malaysia, to a national museum that tells the history of Malaysia. Instead of having one national museum for Singapore, in 1991, the National Heritage Board of Singapore split the national museum for Singapore into three museums. The intention of the National Heritage Board is to enable visitors to look at the time and space of Singapore from different perspectives.

Nonetheless, some national museums still sees the validity of their mission with respect to the changing time and space. Throughout all these years, the British Museum still upholds the principles of the Age of Enlightenment as its guiding principle. The Victoria and Albert Museum still keeps on bolstering the engagement of creativity to people's everyday live and living.

When being asked the future plan and strategy of the National Museum, Bangkok, apart from the five-year budget proposal and to improve the facilities and amenities of the museum, Mr. Na Nakhomphanom said that the future strategy of the museum is to strengthen its current royal collections by acquiring more objects that are related to Rama VIII and Rama IX, and to take care of national treasures and heritages (personal communication, February 26, 2008).

The National Museum, Bangkok reacts and responds to the flow of time and the evolution of space in its own way. Ever since the introduction of the museum concept to Siam by King Mongkut the National Museum, Bangkok has been layered with the same meanings. The museum will keep on layering itself with the same meanings. The Wang Na that was situated in front of the Grand Palace was to safeguard the palace and the country. The National Museum, Bangkok that occupies the same location of the Wang Na is also to safeguard the country but from another perspective.

To re-frame the palatial ground (the National Museum, Bangkok) is not to imitate other museums; but to cater to the interests of those visitors who enjoy interpretation with information. This new national museum has to arouse the curiosity and to encourage children to question the content of the exhibitions. Facing the change of time and space of its existence, the National Museum, Bangkok has to layer with new meanings inevitably.

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Appendices

Appendix A

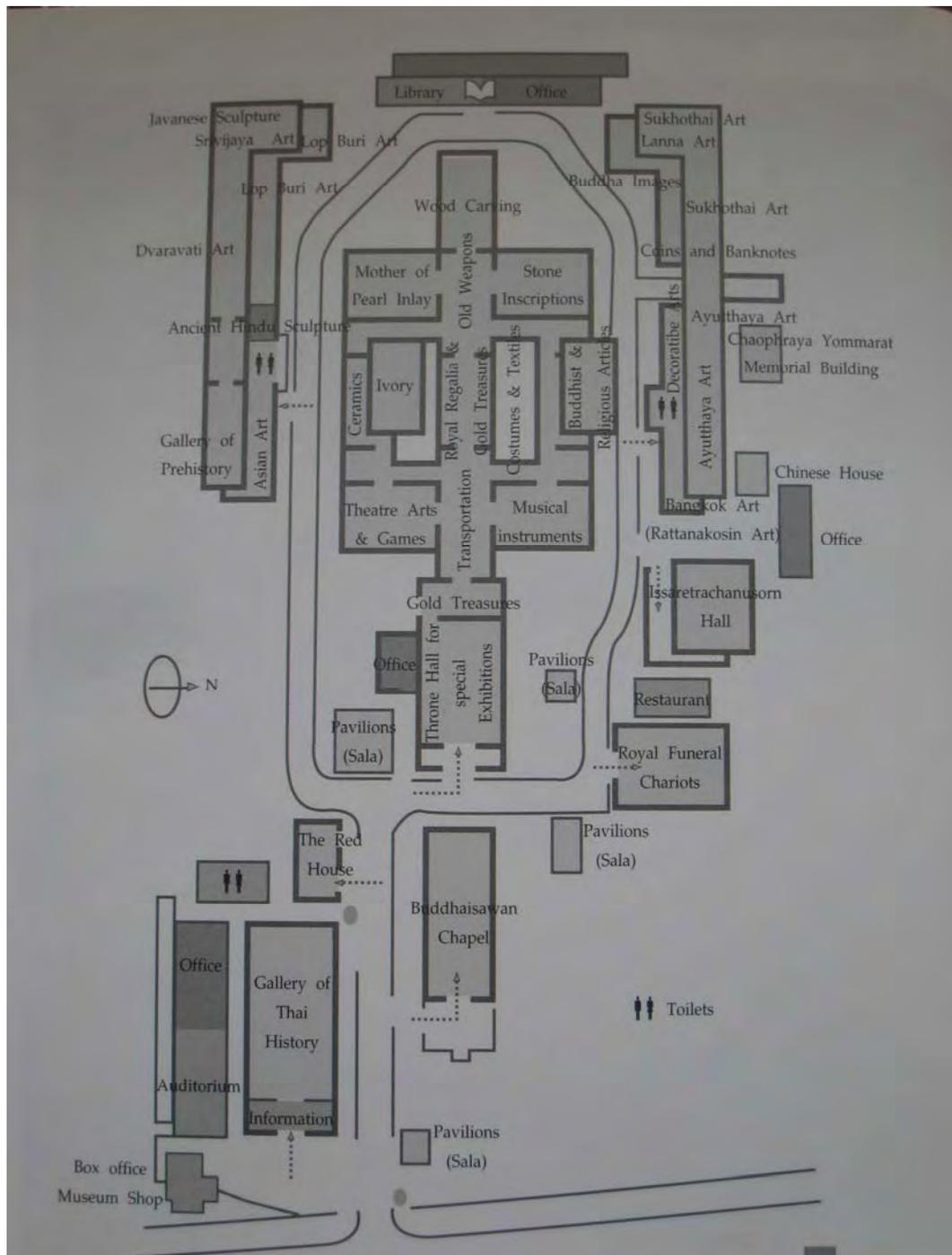
A Thai flag



The white colour stands for Buddhism
The blue colour stands for the Thai monarchy and
The red colour stands for the blood that the Siamese have to shed for the Thai nation
(Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005).

Appendix B

The orientation map of the National Museum, Bangkok



Source: Chadavij, N., Jirawattana, M., Pothisoonthorn, V., Pumphongpaet, P. & Silpanon, D. (2002). *Guide to the Gallery of Thai History, National Museum, Bangkok*. Bangkok: Office of Archaeology and National Museums.

Appendix C

Kings of the Sukhothai epoch, the Ayutthaya epoch, the Thonburi epoch and the Rattanakosin epoch

Kings of the Sukhothai epoch

	A.D.
1. Sri Indraditya (Phra Ruang)	1239?-1259?
2. Ban Mueang	1239?-1279?
3. Ramkhamhaeng	1279?-1298
4. Li Thai*	1298-1346/47?
5. Ngua Nam Thom	1346/7
6. Mahadhammaracha I*	1346/7 -1368/74?
7. Mahadhammaracha II*	1368/74-1398?
8. Mahadhammaracha III*	1398-1419
9. Mahadhammaracha IV*	1419-1438

Kings of the Ayutthaya epoch

1. Ramathibodi (U-Thong)*	1351-1369
2. Ramesuan	1369-1370
3. Borommaracha I	1370-1388
4. Thong Chan	1388
5. Ramesuan (second reign)	1388-1395
6. Ramaracha	1395-1409
7. Intharacha	1409-1424
8. Borommaracha II	
(also named Chao Sam Phraya)	1424-1488
9. Boromtrailokkanat *	
(ruling in Ayutthaya)	1448-1463
(ruling in Phitsanulok)	1463-1488
10. Borommaracha III	
(in Ayutthaya)	1463-1488
11. Intharacha II	1488-1491
(pos. 10 and 11 are the same person)	
12. Ramathibodi II	1491-1529
13. Borommaracha IV	1529-1533
14. Ratsada	1533-1534 (5 months)
15. Chairacha	1534-1547
16. Yot Fa	1547-June 1548
17. Khun Worawonsa	June-July 1548
18 Chakkraphat	July 1548-January 1569
19. Mahin	January-August 1569
20. Maha Dhammaracha*	August 1569-June 1590

21. Naresuan	June 1590- April 1605
22. Ekathotsarot	April 1605-October 1610/November 1611
23. (Si Saowaphak	1610-1611?)
24. Song Tham (Intharacha)	1610-1628
25. Chetta	1628-1629
26. Athittayawong	August-September 1629
27. Prasat Thong	September 1629 –August 1656
28. Chai	7-8 August 1656
29. Suthamaracha	8 August – October 1656
30. Narai	October 1656 – July 1688
31. Phra Phetracha	July 1688-1703
32. Suea	1703-1709
33. Phumintharacha (Thai Sa)	1709-January 1733
34. Borommakot	January 1733- April 1758
35. Uthumphon	April 1758 – May 1758
36. Suriyamarin	May 1758 – April 1767

King of the Thonburi epoch

Taksin	late 1767 – 1782
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Kings of the Rattanakosin epoch (Chakri Dynasty)

1. Phra Phutthayotfa (Rama I)	April 1782- September 1809
2. Phra Phutthaloetla (Rama II)	September 1809 – July 1824
3. Phra Nangklao (Rama III)	July 1824- April 1851
4. Mongkut (Rama IV)	April 1851 – October 1868
5. Chulalongkorn (Rama V)	October 1868 – October 1910
6. Vajiravudh (Rama VI)	October 1910 – November 1925
7. Prajadhipok (Rama VII)	November 1925 – March 1935
8. Ananda Mahidol	March 1935 – June 1946
9. Bhumibol Adulyadej	June 1946 -

*Adjustments were made on the spelling for the easy reference of readers while they read the texts and for the consistency in spelling of this dissertation.

Source: Wyatt, D.K. (2003). *Thailand: A short history* (2nd ed.) Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Appendix D

Different *mudras* of the Buddha



Left: The *dhyani* or *samadhi mudra* is the gesture for meditation.
 Right: The *vitarka mudra* is the gesture for preaching or argument.
 Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008



The *vajra mudra* is the gesture of knowledge
 Source: *Mudra* (n.d.)



Left: The *bhūmiśpara mudrā* is the gesture asking the earth to be his witness.

Right: The *abhaya mudrā* is for dispelling fear.

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Appendix E

The Chinese arts objects in the British Museum can be appreciated from different perspectives

In accordance to material: Different forms of China and lacquer products



Left: A lead-glazed ceramic figure of a camel (Tang dynasty, 8th century).
 Middle: Kraak porcelain dish (Ming dynasty, late 16th – early 17th century).
 Right: A famillerose figure of a Dutch lady (Qing dynasty, mid of 18th century).



Left: Ewers (Liao dynasty, 10th – 11th century).
 Middle: Vases (Song dynasty, 10th – 13th century).
 Right: A round red lacquer (Yuan dynasty, 14th century).



Left: A lacquer bracketed box (Yuan dynasty, 14th century).
 Right: A lacquer hexagonal tray (Ming dynasty, 16th century).

In accordance to function: Religion



Left: The Maitreya (the future Buddha) (Ming dynasty, 15th century).

Middle: A Daoist deity (Ming dynasty, 16th century).

Right: An Arhat (a wise man who had attained nirvana) (Liao Dynasty, 10th – 12th century).



Left: Guanyin, the female version of Avalokitesvara in China (Ming dynasty, late 16th – 17th century).

Middle: Two Incense burners for burning incense to the ancestors or deities (Ming dynasty, 17th – 18th century).

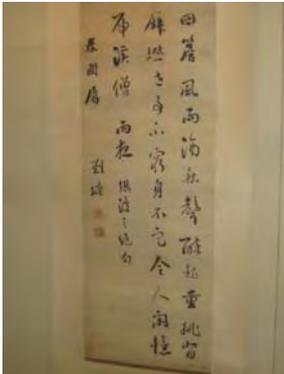
Right: An incense holder (Qing dynasty, 20th century).



Shoulao (Daoist God of Longevity).

In accordance to theme: Art for the elites

Skill of the elite



Left: The elite practiced calligraphy for pleasure and self improvement.

Right: The brush pots and brush washer for holding and washing the writing instruments.

Material for the elite

Jade products were restricted for royalty and the elite



The jade basin was for display rather than use on altars (Qing dynasty, 18th – 19th century).

Craftsmanship for the elite

Crafted objects were for the appreciation of aestheticism and craftsmanship



Left: A red lacquer dish (Ming dynasty, early 15th century).

Right: A vase in cloisonné enamel from the Ming dynasty (mid-16th century).

Photo by Chen Ka Tat, Nixon 2008

Appendix F

The permanent exhibition of Chinese ceramics in the Hong Kong Museum of Art

Shang (1500 – 1050 B.C.) and Zhou (1050 - 221 B.C.)



The pottery and proto-porcelain of the Shang and Zhou Dynasty

Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.)



The low-fired lead glazes of the Han Dynasty

Tang dynasty (618 – 906 A.D.)



The *san-cai* vessel of the Tang dynasty

Song dynasty (960 – 1279 A.D.)



The Jizhou ware of the Song Dynasty



The Ge ware of the Song Dynasty



Left: The Jun ware of the Song dynasty



Middle: The *yingqing* glaze of the Song Dynasty



Right: The *yingqing* glaze of the Song Dynasty

Yuan dynasty (1279 – 1368 A.D.)



The Longquan ware with celadon glaze



The Cizhou ware of the Yuan dynasty

Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644 A.D.)



The underglaze blue ware of the Ming Dynasty

Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 A.D.)



Left: The underglaze blue ware of the Qing dynasty

Middle: The *doucai* ware of the Qing Dynasty

Right: The *fencai* vase of the Qing dynasty

Porcelain sculptures of 20th century



The historic Buddha



Figurines of a Chinese novel



The Maitreya

Appendix G

The Islamic art Objects at the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia

Islamic Art is about architectures



Left: The Taj Mahal in Agra, India.



Middle: The Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo, Egypt.



Right: The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Israel.

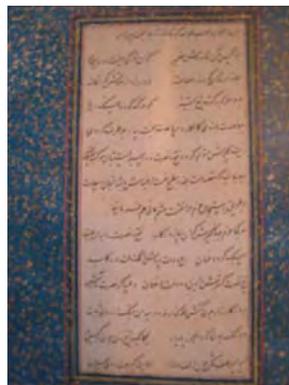
Islamic art is about *Qu'ran* and calligraphy



The Ottoman *Qu'ran*.



The Taliq script written by Ikhtlar Monshi, one of the renowned leaders of the Taliq style.



The Nastalia script.

Islamic art is about craftsmanship



Left: The turban (ornament for Mughal court headdresses).
 Middle: A table cabinet (Spain, 18th – 19th century).
 Right: A candle base stand (Syria or Egypt, 14th century).



Left: A Jambiya (dagger).
 Middle: A tea caddy (India, 19th century).
 Right: An incense burner (Turkey, 19th century).

Appendix H

The Islamic art in the Victoria and Albert Museum is to demonstrate the art as a way of living

Islamic art is about daily prayers, social gathering and the Qu'ran



The daily prayers.



Social gathering after the prayer.



Qu'ran.



Calligraphy
(Turkey, mostly Istanbul, 1725).



A lacquer book cover binding
(West Iran, 1550-1600).



Manuscript with lacquer
(Iran, 1557).

Islamic art is about utensils and device that people use daily



Urn made using luster Technique.



Ancient fritware from Iran.



Iznik ceramics before 1550.

Islamic art is about science



Compasses (Iran, 1800 – 1875).



Astronomical instruments (Isfahan, 17th century).



Islamic art is about dress code and textiles



Islamic art is about daily writing



Lacquer writing box
(Turkey, Istanbul or Edirne, 1747).



Silver pen case and ink pot
(Egypt, mostly Cairo, 1750 -1850).

Appendix I

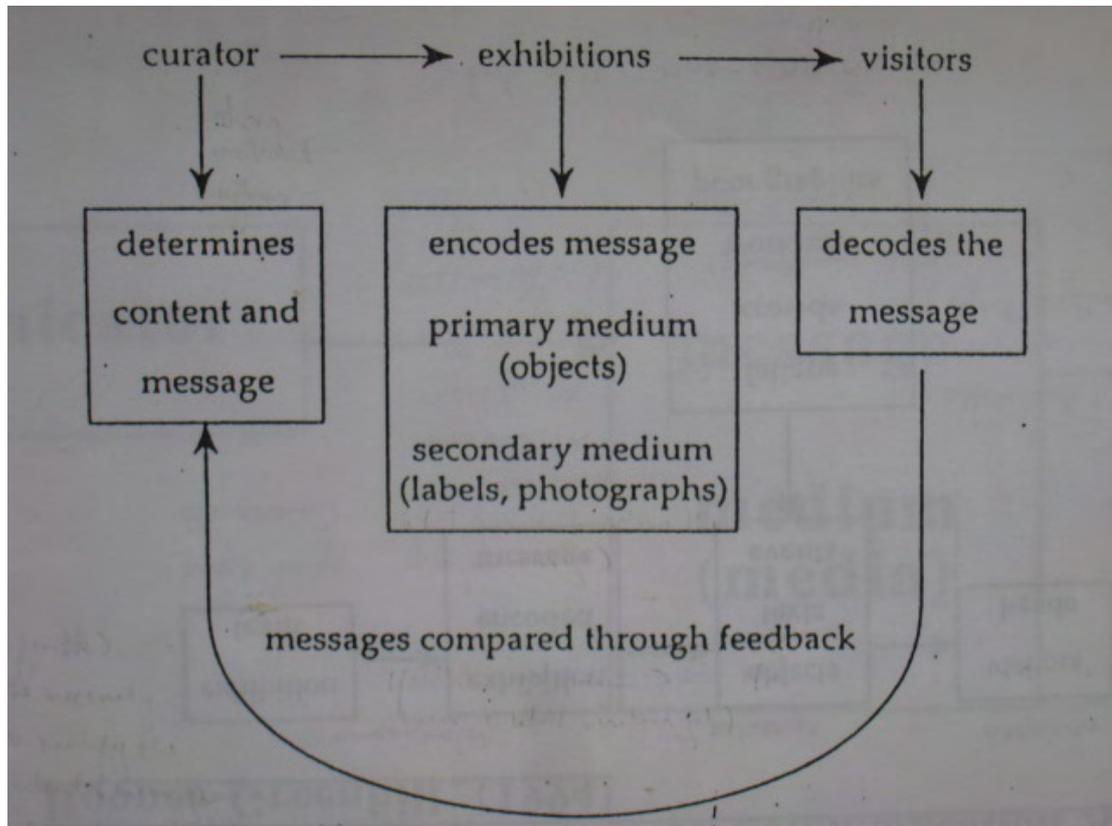
Hooper-Greenhill's Holistic Approach to Museum Communication (1994)



Source: Staiff, R. (2006). *Heritage and Tourism interpretation*. Unpublished teaching material.

Appendix J

Knez & Wright's Communication Model (1970)



Source: Staiff, R. (2006). *Heritage and Tourism interpretation*. Unpublished teaching material.

Autobiography

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Working Experiences:

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Area of responsibility:
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 Management and
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