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WICHIAN WILAIKAEW : THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI MUSEUM : A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM. THESIS ADVISORS: SOLOT SIRISAI, M.A., APINYA BUASUANG, M.A. PATTIYA JIMREIVAT, M.A., Ph.D. 162 p. ISBN 974-664-378-9

This thesis is an integration of historical study and field research. It aims to look at the history of national museums and the reasons for their failures. It is found that at present there are 40 museums located in 29 provinces. Of these, 29 were initiated by the Department of Fine Art, and 11 are extensions of wat collections. Initially, national museums in Thailand developed from the royal private collections of King Rama IV. In the reign of King Rama V, museums became public and adopted the concept of museum, and management techniques from Europe, especially France and England. Foreign experts were hired and local staff were sent to be trained abroad. The turning point of museums occurred in the reign of King Rama VI. At that time King Rama VI introduced the ideology of nationalism to Thai people. As one of his strategies, the archives in the museum were praised as symbols of nationalism, and hence, the museum played an important role representing national identity in Thai history. Henceforth, the role of museums was static and the museum paradigm has never been shifted. As a result, the museum's role for the benefit of the public did not thrive, a fact indicated by the small number of visitors each year. This can be interpreted as follows: the presentations and display of the national museum can not meet the interest of the public while the Fine Art Department ignores the traditional institutions, particularly the role of the wats which traditionally function as a learning place for the communities. For the Fine Art Department, it is crucial to understand the traditional role of the wat, and its meaning for the people, in order to make the museum to be a place of informal education "for purposes of study, education and enjoyment".