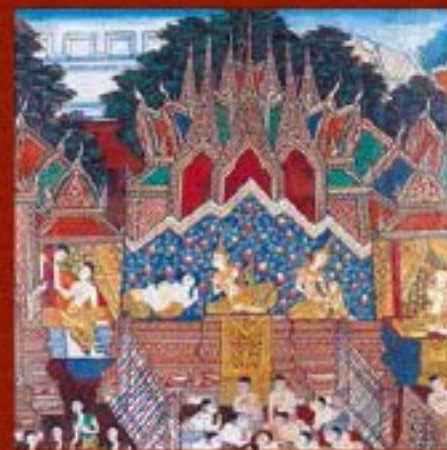




Ministry of Culture

Introducing Cultural Thailand in Outline

THAI CULTURE SERIES No. 1



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INTRODUCING CULTURAL THAILAND IN OUTLINE

BY
PHYA ANUMAN RAJADHON



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Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai Historical Park.



Message

from

His Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.)
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

Thailand's unique cultural heritage has flourished from our rich national history that began almost 800 years ago as the Kingdom of Sukhothai. Thai people are proud to be able to say that what began eight centuries ago by courtiers, artists, scholars, and farmers, as the first Thai Kingdom has lasted until this very day, and that our performance drama, music, paintings, architecture and the Thai language attest to this noble ancestry. The preservation of Thailand's heritage has been a distinct quality of our people and part of the Thai way, and this can be credited to the benevolence of the Thai Monarchy through Royal Patronage of the arts and Thai culture. With this splendid lineage, the Thai people have thus enjoyed being gracious to our international friends by sharing our culture and traditions, and welcoming our guests to our country.

I wish to congratulate the Ministry of Culture on the publication of this book series called "Thai Culture Series". I hope that it will be enjoyed by all peoples as well as inspire future generations.

General

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Prayut Chan-o-cha'.

(Ret.)

(Prayut Chan-o-cha)

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand



Introduction

Arts and culture are priceless assets that reflect civilisation and prosperity of a nation which were created and passed on to the people by their forefathers.

The Ministry of Culture has played an active role in promoting and disseminating Thainess both domestically and internationally. In this regard, we have meticulously selected a book series of Thai art and culture consisting of 25 books such as Introducing Cultural Thailand in Outline, The Royal Palaces, Thai Music, The Khon, Contemporary Art in Thailand, and so on, which were written by experts in those fields and were published by the Fine Arts Department many times in the past. In this republication, this series of books are still full of knowledgeable content which will allow their readers to access the in-depth information about Thai arts and culture.

On behalf of the Ministry of Culture, I really hope that this book series will be useful and great sources of knowledge for the readers.

VIRA Rojpojchanarat

(Vira Rojpojchanarat)

Minister of Culture of the Kingdom of Thailand



Wat Traphang Ngoen, Sukhothai Historical Park.

PHYA ANUMAN RAJADHON

D.Litt. (Honoris Causa,) of Chulalongkorn University, was one of the greatest scholars and writers of Thailand. Not to be classified specifically as a historian, an ethnologist, a philologist or an archaeologist, he typifies that race of scholars with an unquenchable spirit of enquiry, and encyclopaedic range that is fast dying out. His writings, mostly under the pseudonym of “Sathira Koses” which has become a household word, amply reflect his catholic tastes and wide interests embracing the whole gamut of the humanities. He had a long and distinguished career of government service as Assistant Director-General of Customs, Director-General of the

Fine Arts Department, and Acting President of the Royal Institute. He taught Philology, Comparative Literature and Thai Customs and Tradition at Chulalongkorn University and Comparative Religions at Thammasat University. He served as vice-chairman of the Thai History Revision Committee, and was also head of the Thai Current Dictionary Committee, the Thai National Gazetteer, chief editor of Thai Encyclopaedia, and chief of the Philosophy Section, the National Research Bureau.



Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram (The Temple of the Emerald Buddha), located within the compound of the Grand Palace. King Rama I commanded to build this temple concomitant with the construction of the capital city, Bangkok in 1782 A.D.





INTRODUCING CULTURAL THAILAND IN OUTLINE

THE LAND

Thailand is a country on the mainland of Southeast Asia right in the middle of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. On the north and west she has Burma as her neighbour, and on the north and east she borders on the Kingdom of the Laos and Cambodia and on the south just deep into the Malay Peninsula between the China Sea and the Sea of Bengal touching Malaysia. The total area of Thailand is roughly 513,000 square kilometres; her greatest length is about 1,650 kilometres and her greatest breadth is about 770 kilometres. She has also, on the south, the Gulf of Thailand and the China Sea and to the west of the Malay Peninsula, the Bay of Bengal. Topographically, Thailand may be divided into four areas, the Central, the Northern, the North-Eastern and the Southern.

The Central Area is a large alluvial plain called the Menam Basin which in most parts becomes inundated during the rainy season. The Basin is interested by winding rivers and numerous canals and streams. Its principal and well-known river is the Menam Chao Phraya or the river Menam as known commonly to the Western people. Menam means literally in Thai “Mother of Water” or river only. On the left bank of this river, some 40 kilometres from its mouth stands Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, while on its right bank stands the city of Thon Buri which for short period of time was the capital city before it removed to the present one some 186 years ago. Bangkok and Thon Buri form the Greater City of Bangkok, its official name in an abbreviated form is Krungthep which means the capital city of gods.





Bird's Eye View of Bangkok, the Chao Phraya River can be seen in the middle

The Northern Area is a hilly or mountainous terrain divided by four rivers into four relatively large valleys, which flow to the south and join the river Menam. It has also as its western and northern boundaries parts of the rivers Salween and Mekong. The wellknown chief city of this Area is Chiang Mai which is the second city of Thailand in the degree of its modern development

The North-Eastern Area is a saucer-shaped plateau with the great river Mekong as its eastern boundary. It is a poorly watered region known to westerners as the Korat Plateau, and is the largest of the four areas of Thailand. Its chief cities are Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima) and Ubon Ratchathani.

The Southern Area is made up of about two- thirds of the Malay Peninsula which has ranges of mountains as its back-bone, on either side of which are coastal plains.



Bird's Eye View of Phra Borommathat Chaiya, Surat Thani, one of the most important Chedi in the southern part of Thailand. The Chedi has been housing Buddha relics, Srivijaya's religious architecture.

The people of Thailand are called Thai. Before 1939 A.D. they were known politically as the Siamese and their country as Siam. The Thai belongs to the same ethnic group of as the Laos of the Lao kingdom to the North East Thailand and the Shans of Upper Burma. There are also certain Thai minor tribes to be found scattered here and there over a large area of Southern China, Tongking (Tonkin) of North Vietnam, and in Assam, the eastern most province of India. So far as they are known, most groups of these people called themselves Tai or Thai (in its aspirated form). There are many surmises as to the meaning of the word Tai or Thai; but its present meaning in its current use in Thai is “free” or “the free”.

Physically the Thai are primarily of Mongoloid type, but since they came down from Southern China into Thailand or the “Land of the Free”, they intermixed freely with their forerunners, i.e. the Mon- Khmer linguistic groups, particularly the Mon of Lower Burma and the Khmer of Cambodia; and the Indonesian linguistic groups, the Malays and the Cham—a people who survived weakly in certain parts of the South Vietnam and Cambodia.



Kui, an ethnic group (Mon-Khmer Language), found in the northeastern provinces of Thailand such as Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket and Surin (Source : www.isangate.com)

In the old days there were raids and wars, both local and extra-territorial. The mass of the defeated groups were moved or carried wholesale in captivity by families, and domiciled far from their old homes. These peoples in the course of time married into the local groups of people to an appreciable degree, and gradually became culturalized and identified themselves as one with the local people. With such admixtures there are of course, variable physical types of the Thai people, particular types in different areas according to whatever race is predominant. What is true ethnically is also true culturally. In fact the cultures of the people to be found in most parts of the mainland of Southeast Asia from one homogeneous whole with, of course, relative variations due to historical traditions and ecological surroundings. To add to such a pot-pourri of the Thai people, the influence of the Southern Chinese in this melting-pot of races in a later period of Thailand’s history is by no means of no consequence.



Sakai, an indigenous tribe in the southern provinces of Thailand. This photograph was taken in Yala in 1922 A.D. (Source : www.asura.in.th).

Before they migrated into Thailand the Thai lived with in historical times in Southern China. Reliable recorded history of the Thai people of Thailand begins sometime in or about the 13th century A.D. Beyond this period, though there are recorded histories, especially of the Thai of Northern Thailand and also of the Laos and the Shans, we enter comparatively into the realm of myths and legends with exaggerated dates for self-glorification—a thing to be found in many a nation's history. Even so, these are to be found surviving in a few authentic records only; no doubt due to the pillaging and destruction of many wars in the old days and also to the ravages of nature. For what was recorded of Thailand in the earlier days which we may deem comparatively reliable, our thanks are due to the laborious work of many orientalist and archaeologists.

Long before the advent of the Thai into Thailand, there lived in Central Thailand or the Menam Basin, in or about the 5th to the 7th century A.D., a people probably akin to the Mons of Lower Burma. They are known archaeologically by the name of their kingdom, the so-called Dvaravati. On epigraphic evidences and Chinese records it seems that the Dvaravati kingdom had split into probably two or more smaller kingdoms, but no doubt still under one of the kingdoms as a paramount state whose capital was evidently at the present town either of Lop Buri or Nakhon Pathom. We know very little of this Dvaravati kingdom, save that it was a Buddhist

kingdom of the Southern School or Hinayan, our knowledge being based on stone Buddha images and other archaeological remains found here and there mostly in Central Thailand. Later in the 11th century the Dvaravati kingdom was under the domination for the time being of the Javanese-Sumatran Empire of Sri Vijaya. This empire, a Buddhist state of the Northern Buddhist of Mahayan, later on degenerated in power and held on to a lingering life as a remnant in Southern Thailand and in the Malay Peninsula, and which two centuries later became part of modern Thailand. The Dvaravati kingdom in Central Thailand subsequently in the 12th century A.D. became part of the Khmer Empire and later on in the 13th century A.D. passed from the rule of the now decaying Khmer Empire to that of the Thai of Sukhothai* which finally became the nucleus of the present Thai kingdom. Such is the history in a nutshell of Thailand before the coming of the Thai as a dominant race. We now have to turn back in point of times to the Thai people in their earlier days.

Though there are many books written, both in Thai and other foreign languages, on the origin of the Thai race and of their earliest homes, the subject is so shadowy a field that we have to tread with wariness. The following are hard facts, not because they fit in with somebody's personal inclination but because I have been able to cull them.

* In the previous editions this word was written "Sukhodaya" which followed the spelling of the pronunciation in the Pali and Sanskrit languages. In this edition it is changed to "Sukhothai" according to the Royal Institute's Principles for the Romanization of the Thai Script which is more familiar and widely used today.

Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom. It is assumed that the original stupa was built in the Dvaravati Period (around the year 193 B.C.) and the present stupa was built to cover the former Chedi under King Rama IV's Command.





Sdok Kok Thom, a sanctuary of Shaivite Hinduism in Sa Kaeo, known as the original site of one of the most illuminating inscriptions left behind by the Khmer Empire, which ruled much of Southeast Asia from the end of the 9th century to the 15th century.

In recounting the early history of the Thai of Thailand we deal with the common history of all Thai-speaking people to an identical extent as with the history of Laos and Shans in particular. Nobody, I believe, knows for certain the earliest home of the ancestors of the Thai-speaking people. Some authorities believed that the Thai's first historical appearance was in China some three thousand years ago. There are certain surmises that their earliest home was somewhere in the vast tract of land in West China, and from that time onwards, they appeared frequently in the Chinese records as "the Barbarians" south of the Yang-tse Kiang river. Whether "the Barbarians", as recorded by the Chinese, were the ancestors of the Thai is a matter of conjecture. However we will pass over this until we reach more definite ground in the 7th century A.D., evidence of a kingdom known to the Chinese as Nan-chao. The name Nan-chao is a hybrid combination of two words. "Nan" means south in Chinese, and "Chao" is a Thai word meaning lord, or in its present day meaning, among the Thais, the Laos and the Shans, a prince.

Before the kingdom of Nan-chao came into being, the Thai people in Southern China, evidently, lived in more or less independent groups. They were called by their neighbours by various names, and chief among them was the Ai-Lao tribe. The present name of the Lao kingdom and her people is said to have derived from this ancient word Ai-Lao. There were before the 7th century A.D., according to the chronology of the Chinese, six chieftainships of the Ai-Lao people in Yunnan, and the southernmost of these six chieftainships, which were called by the Chinese "lok chao" or six lords, succeeded in unifying the other five chieftainships and the Thai kingdom of Nan-chao was born. There are challenges by some scholars that Nan-chao was probably a kingdom of Lolos, a tribe akin to the Tibetans who undoubtedly mixed freely with the Thai in Southern China. Here we enter into the realm of academic controversy which we had better leave forthwith.



Wat Chiang Man, Chiangmai, built by King Mengrai in the same year of the establishment of Chiangmai in 1296 A.D.

Judging from the description of the Nan-chao kingdom as chronicled by the Chinese, we can say that the Nan-chao kingdom was a comparatively powerful state with a high level of culture. It lasted for some seven centuries until it fell in 1253 A.D. to Kublai Khan, the great Mogul emperor of China. The Nan-chao kingdom during the zenith of her power, sometime in the 9th century A.D., might have extended her suzerainty southward to the sparsely populated territories in the North of Indo-China as hinted vaguely in the many earliest recorded histories and legends of the Thai, the Laos and the Shans. Hall* in his "A History of South-East Asia" says that the Tai (or Thai) never ceased to be on the move (*from the earlier days of Nan-chao*), and slowly they infiltrated along the rivers and down the valleys of Central Indochina. Small groups settled among the Khmers, the Mons and the Burmese, and, long before that, they had been crossing into the Menam valley (in Central Thailand) from the river Mekong and undoubtedly from the river Salween too.

Confining ourselves to the history of the Thai of Thailand, some tribes of the Thai migrated at different times and from different directions into present Thailand a thousand or more years ago. There are conjectural statements, compounded from inadequate evidence. At first they settled themselves in what is now the Northern Area of Thailand in many small independent states ruled by their own chiefs or kings. Not until the latter part of the 13th century A.D. did the Northern Area of Thailand, with Chiang Mai as its capital, become a relatively fair-sized kingdom under its first king Mengrai.

Further south, in which is now Central Thailand in the Menam valley or Chao Phraya Basin, there were evidently some settlements of the Thai people. At first they were minority-groups, which probably later on, formed themselves into semi-independent principalities under the dominant rule of the Khmer Empire in about the 12th century A.D. The Thai of Central Thailand are named Thai-Noi or Minor Thai

* Daniel George Edward Hall (D.G.E. Hall), a well known British expert on Southeast Asian History.



Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai.

in contradistinction to the Shans of Upper Burma who are named Tai Long or Thai-Yai, i.e. Major Thai. It is a traditional belief that the Thai-Noi or Minor Thai of Central Thailand came from the Thai of Northern Thailand and the Lao kingdom. This may be so; but on the other hand there are indications that the Shans of Upper Burma might have had a share, if not much, in making up the ingredients of the Thai-Noi too.

There arose in the earlier part of the 13th century A.D. two chiefs of the Thai-Noi who wrested from the Khmers the area of Central Thailand and one of them became the first Thai King of Sukhothai, a town some 250 kilometres as the crow flies northward from Bangkok. Under the reign of its third king, Ramkamhaeng the Great, a contemporary and friend of the aforesaid Thai King Mengrai of Northern Thailand, the kingdom of Sukhothai became a relatively large empire stretching southward through the length

of the Malay Peninsula which was the last remnant of the once Javanese-Sumatran Empire of Sri Vijaya. Northward, the Sukhothai Empire touched that of Northern Thailand where reigned, as already mentioned King Mengrai. Eastward but in a northern direction, through what now North-East Area of Thailand which was at that time partly under the spheres of influence of the now decaying Khmer Empire and of the Lao Kingdom, the Sukhothai Empire of King Ramkamhaeng reached further beyond the river Mekong. Westward it included a part of the Mon country of what is now Lower Burma. Ramkamhaeng's outstanding achievements in the realm of culture which have endured to the present day are his invention of the Thai alphabet in 1283 A.D., and the adoption of Buddhism of the Ceylonese Sect which has remained to this day. He also introduced the manufacture of glazed pottery by importing artisans, no doubt from China.



Wat Phra Si Sanphet, the most important temple in Ayutthaya province, located within the Royal Palace grounds, served as a model for the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.



In 1350 A.D. there rose a new Thai power in the south of Sukhothai proper, Ramadhibodi I, known vulgarly as King U-Thong, the first King of Ayudhya. Some 90 years later Sukhothai was politically incorporated with Ayudhya. Ethnologically and culturally by this time the Thai had mixed to a not less appreciable degree with the Mons and the Khmers, their fore-runners in this part of Thailand. The Mons were Southern Buddhistic in culture while the latter were more hindu-ized and at times Northern Buddhistic. In the south, the Thai were influenced in culture more or less in certain localities by the Malays.

Phra Ratchawang Doem (The Thonburi Palace), the royal residence of King Taksin the Great in the Thonburi period, nowadays it has been turned over to the Headquarters of the Thai Royal Navy.

Northern Thailand where King Mengrai reigned as its first king in the 13th century A.D. was ruled by many succeeding kings; but later on in the latter part of the 16th century A.D. it became a part of the Burmese Empire for some two centuries. Under Burmese influence Northern Thai acquired certain characteristics of culture unlike those of other parts of the country. Northern Thailand was finally relieved from the alien hold and formed part of the present kingdom of Thailand.

Thailand, with Ayudhya as its capital and its succession of kings both weak and strong, endured for 417 years came to an end in 1767 A.D. through a war with Burma. One of the generals of the last king of Ayudhya, known vulgarly as Phya Tak Sin, succeeded by an heroic effort in driving the enemies out of the country. He became a king of Thailand but moved his capital from Ayudhya, which by now was in ruins and depopulated, to Thonburi, a city on the right bank of River Menam (Chao Phraya) of the present Greater City of Bangkok. King Taksin was succeeded by King Rama I of the present Chakri dynasty in 1782 A.D. Not until the reign of King Mongkut, Rama IV (1851-1868 A.D.) and his great son King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1868-1910 A.D.) did Thailand pass from her medieval period and enter a new phase of progressive revolution following the Western trend which is a matter of modern history.

RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Not until the 16th century A.D. did Thailand come in contact with the Western nations. Before this period foreign culture that came in contact with Thailand and most of her neighbouring countries of South-east Asia, was in religion, arts, science and writing, predominantly Indian in origin. Chinese culture was another factor which formed the background, though feebly, in the life of the Thai. It was in the earlier part of the aforesaid century that the Portuguese came in contact with Thailand. They came to establish friendly relations and obtain permission to trade. Thereafter a large number of them followed and settled in Ayudhya, the then capital of Thailand. Later on the Portuguese were given permission by the then Thai king of Ayudhya to build a church there. It was the first Christian



The Painting (duplicate) of "Chevalier de Chaumont, the Ambassador of King Louis XIV of France Presenting a Royal Letter to King Narai at the Royal Palace in Ayudhya in 1685", Chantharaphisan Throne Hall, Lopburi.

Church in Thailand. H.R.H. Prince Damrong says in his paper "*The introduction of Western Culture in Siam (Journal of Siam Society Vol. XX pt. 2, 1926)*" that "during that period the Portuguese appear to have brought to the Siamese three things, namely, the art of making fire-arms, the way to use fire arms in warfare, and the adoption of fortifications against fire-arms....Perhaps there were other things that the Portuguese brought to the Siamese and that we do not know today".



Then to Thailand came the Dutch in 1604 A.D., the English in 1612 A.D., and the French in 1662 A.D. We need not go into details as to the mission of Roman Catholics sent by Louis XIV of France to court of King Narai, the then reigning monarch of Ayudhya, and the failure of the French missionaries to proselytize Thailand into a Christian state. Whatever European cultures were introduced into Thailand during this period, there are few things only, as Prince Damrong said, survive to this day and they are the casting of cannon and the use of fire-arms in warfare for instance.

After the destruction of Ayudhya relations with the West were interrupted for a time owing to the fact that *"the Siamese were engaged in a war to regain their independence... This period coincided with that of the Great French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic war"*. Relations between Thailand and Western nations began to revive when in 1818 A.D. King Rama II of the present dynasty (Chakri Dynasty) granted the requests of the Portuguese governor of Macao to trade and to construct ships in Bangkok. Then came the British in 1822 A.D. and the Americans in 1828 A.D. There had been impediments and interruptions in the negotiations of a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between the Thai and the British during those days but happily it came to an amicable conclusion when King Mongkut made a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Sir John Bowring, an envoy of Queen Victoria. Subsequently, similar treaties were concluded with the United States of America and other European governments. I have been very brief in recounting this subject for the reason that I cannot do better in only a pamphlet which deals with such a large subject as culture.

THE GOVERNMENT

Prior to 1932 A.D. the government of Thailand had been an unlimited monarchy. It was changed in King Prajadhipok's reign in 1932 A.D. into a constitutional monarchy: the Constitution was signed historically and ceremoniously on the 10th December. By virtue of this Constitution the supreme power rests with the nation, and the King as its head exercises the legislative power by and with the consent of Parliament, the executive power through the Council of ministers, and the juridicial power through the Courts.



His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in the Coronation Ceremony.

THE LANGUAGE

The Thai language or to be exact the Siamese, as spoken in Thailand, forms a sub-division of the linguistic group known as the Thai language. This group includes also the languages of the Shans of Northern Burma with its sub-groups in Assam and adjacent territories, the Lao of the Kingdom of the Laos, and the many isolated Thai groups in Tongking and Southern China. The Thai language, in so far as it is known factually, has words in its original form of a monosyllabic type not unlike that of the Chinese. Each word is independent and complete by itself, and admits on modifications as do the inflectional languages. Such a feature is like that of the Chinese, but the arrangement of words in a sentence reveals a unity with that of most of the languages of Southeast Asia. The Thai language as spoken in Central Thailand, has more words relatively than in other regions in its vocabularies of Cambodian, Pali and Sanskrit origins. This, of course, is due to the contact of cultures.



Lakhon, a Thai classical dance drama, in the story of Phra Abhaimanee.

THE LITERATURE

Thai traditional literature is essentially religious. Most of the literature in the old days consisted of works on Buddhism and Hinduism directly or indirectly. Whatever culture the Thai people brought with them from their homeland in Southern China where they had been in contact of culture with the Chinese for centuries was adapted to its later conception of Buddhism, their adopted religion. Traces of their original culture may be found here and there in a disguised and weakly form embedded in their literature. Most of the works of emotive literature were written in verse in various patterns. Five prominent examples of such works may be cited briefly.

1. The Romance of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, an indigenous story of love, pathos and at times humorous of a triangular love plot of one heroine with two lovers. The story, apart from its beautiful expression, contains a mine of informations on old beliefs and social customs of the Thai before the impact of Western culture. The story as is known has been translated into English and French.

2. *Ramakian* (or *Ramakirit* in transliteration) is the story based on the famous Indian epic, *Ramayana*. It is unique, containing many episodes and details which are not to be found in the original epic,

but showing traces of contact with certain versions of the *Ramayana* in India, Malaysia, Java and Cambodia. There is an English translation.

3. The Romance of *Inao*. This is a translation from the well-known story of adventures of the national Javanese hero prince. It is written in a refined and perfect style of the Thai Language and means for dramatic performance.

4. *Sam Kok*. This is a translation from *San Kuo Chi*, a Chinese historical romance of the Three Kingdoms. Unlike the three preceding ones, it is written in prose with perfect expressions of style of the language.

5. *Phra Abhaimani*. This is a romantic tale written in verse by one of the most famous and popular poets of Thailand. It is an imaginary tale of love, intrigues and adventures, and reflects some ideas of the people towards the Europeans of the last century. There is an English translation in concise form by Prem Chaya. (H.H. Prince Prem Purachattra)

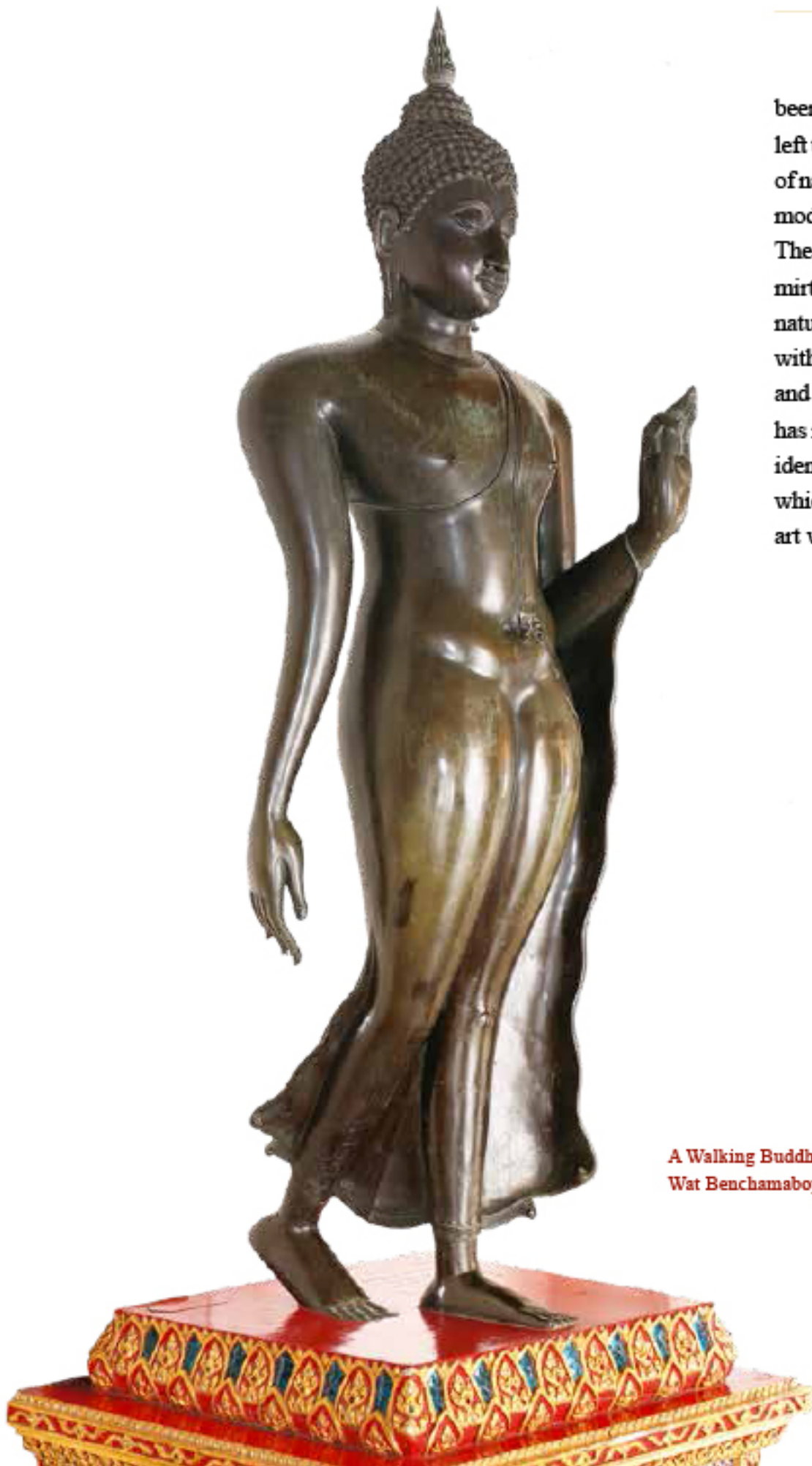
The employment of prose in Thai emotive literature on the line of the Western style is of recent date due obviously to the influence of western literature.



Wat Benchamabophit (The Marble Temple), built under the royal command of King Rama V. The Ordination Hall was designed by H.R.H. Prince Narissarunvatiwongse, inspired by the architecture of the Vihara of Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, Phitsanulok.



The Thai means of subsistence for generations has always been an agricultural one. Such an occupation, though arduous at times, left the people ample time to confront life spiritually in contemplation of nature. Time belonged to them and they did not want to lose it in the modern hubbub of life. Now it is inevitably and gradually otherwise. The Thai are lovers and observers of nature, amiable, generous and mirthful to everyone with whom they come into contact, for their natural and pleasant surrounding makes them so. In Buddhism tinged with Hinduism and animistic ideas stemming from their long contact and free intermingling with the Mons and the Cambodians, Thai art has its birth and development. It has maintained, nevertheless, its own identity of racial character. Thai art in the old days served religion which formed the national ideal and conception of life. Modern Thai art with Western tendencies and conceptions is of a recent origin.



A Walking Buddha Image, the unique style of Sukhothai Art, Wat Benchamabophit.



A Buddha Image at Wat Saphan Hin, Sukhothai.

ARCHITECTURE

Thai classical architecture may be found in the building and structure of the temples and also of the royal palace buildings. There are two main types of such edifices. One of this is a building of bricks rectangular in plan and containing one large hall only. The roof is sloping superimposed and arranged in three or five tiers. The other type of building is somewhat like a Greek cross in plan and composed of a cubical hall with four porches or less projecting on each side. It also has superimposed roofs surmounted by a high pyramidal superstructure culminating either in a tapering slender needle-like

spire or a corn-cob-like structure. The roof of both types has a terra-cotta glazed coloured tiles of various hues. The gables, stuccos, and other decorations are gilded in gold or in coloured mosaic glass. Under a tropical sunlight these buildings give out a dazzling and harmonizing artistic effect. Examples of these classical architecture may be seen in Bangkok and are represented by pictures in this pamphlet of the Grand Palace, the Emerald Buddha Temple, the Marble Temple of Wat Benchamabophit, and also of Wat Suthat Thepwararam and Wat Pho.



A Mural at Phutthaisawan Chapel, Palace to the Front, Bangkok.



A Mural at Wat Phra Sing, Chiang Mai.

SCULPTURE

Sculpture in Thailand was confined in the past to casting Buddha images. She carried this art to perfection both in technique and artistic expression. Some ancient specimen of this art can be compared favourably with other nation's classical arts.

PAINTING

Painting in Thailand was also in the past confined to mural tempera painting within the temple buildings. The style was more conventionalised and achieved some artistic manifestations to a high degree, but it cannot be compared to sculpture which was a perfect artistic achievement.



The Doubled-Piphat Band (Medium Band) of the Fine Arts Department during a royal ceremonial performance.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

These arts of Thailand are of Western style. But in order to carry on her artistic traditions as peculiarly her own and enriching humanity, the problem is to preserve her own classical arts with the progress of the times in order to preserve her own identity of individual cultures suitably within the culture of a wider one, as a source of inspiration for evolving her own modern arts.

MUSIC

The music of Thailand is akin to that of the Chinese. The Thai, especially the scale of music, is a diatonic one, with neither major nor minor in the sense of western music, but with a special diatonic scale characteristic of her own. Though music in the theoretical conception

of Buddhism is not tolerated by the monks, by usage it is allowed in certain religious ceremonies, no doubt to promote religious emotions, and also on festive occasions.

DRAMA

Drama, like her sister arts, music, also served religion. Its technique was of Indian origin, but the Thai evolved the arts peculiar to their own. The actions are very graceful, slow in motion but not unpleasant to sensible minds. Thai dramatic performance is called Lakhon, a word of Indonesian origin, and is well-known to enthusiastic lovers of this art both inside and outside Thailand. In former days, the people could only witness such performances in the compound of the monastery on festive occasions only. Nowadays many new types of dramatic performance are usually adapted or copied from the west and the popularity of the cinema takes the place of the classical entertainment. The latter may be seen only occasionally as performed by the artists of the Fine Arts Department.



Khon, a Thai classical masked dance, the “Yok Rop (Battle)” Episode.



A lacquer work, Bangkok art, 19th century, National Museum, Nakhon Si Thammarat.

MINOR ARTS

The various branches of the decorative art may also be mentioned such as lacquer work, niello work, gold and silver work, and mother-of-pearl work. In all branches of the above art Thailand never lacks beautiful objects of high artistic value.



Bowl, Silver and golden nielloware, Bangkok art, 19th Century, National Museum, Nakhon Si Thammarat

THAI CULTURE SERIES



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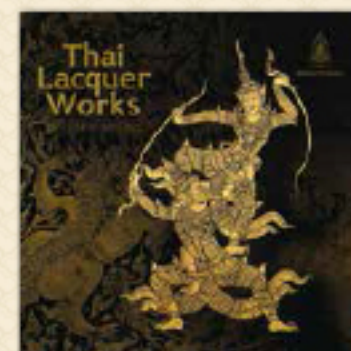
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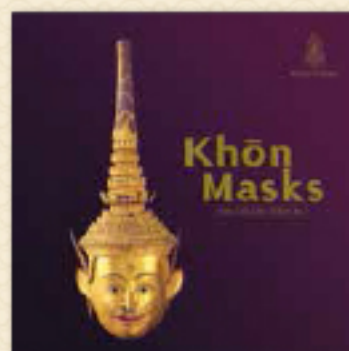
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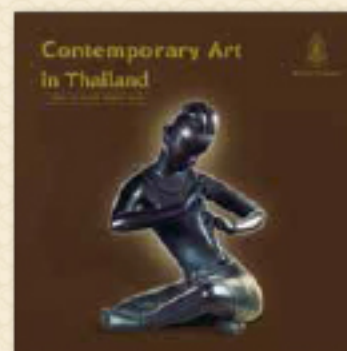
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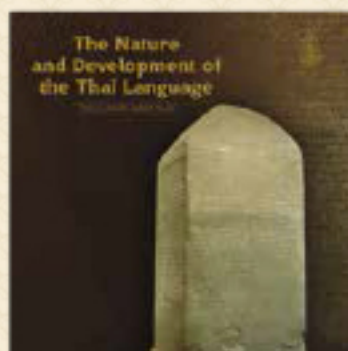
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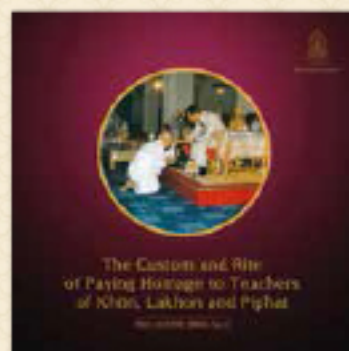
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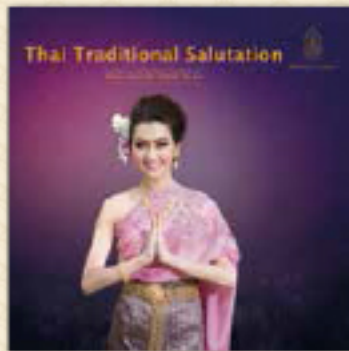
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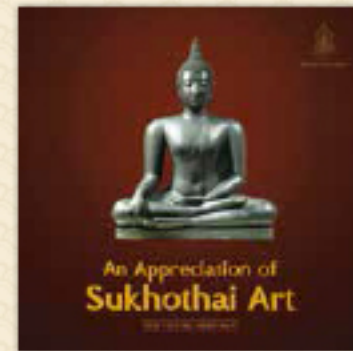
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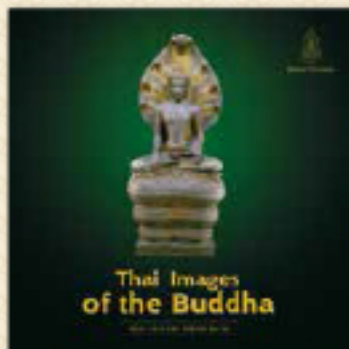
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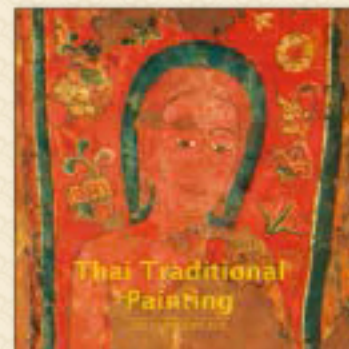
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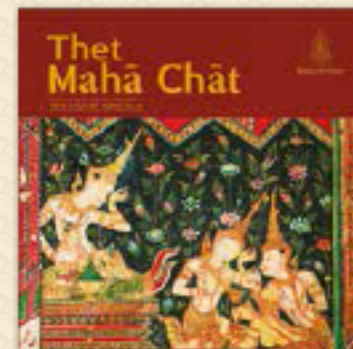
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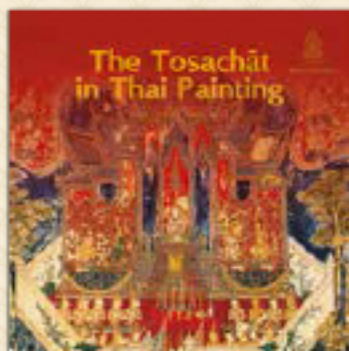
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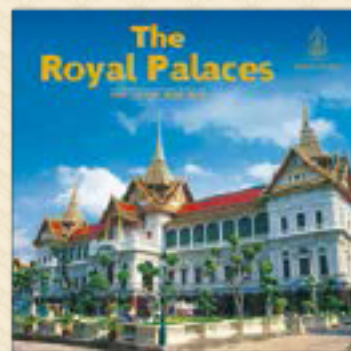
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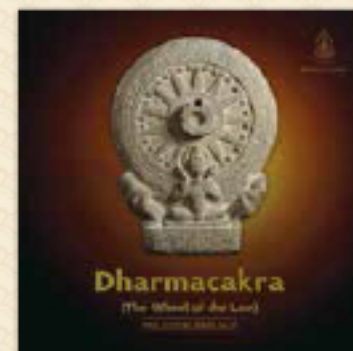
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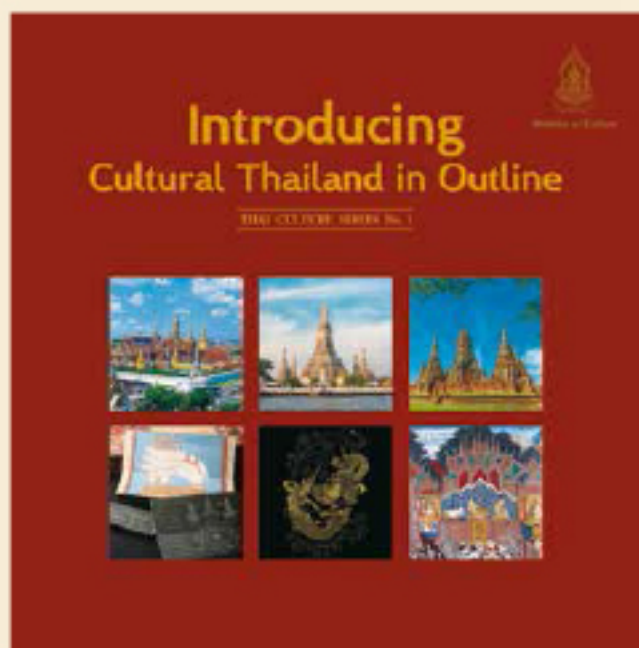
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