

# THE ROYAL INTENTION TO PRODUCE WORKS OF ART IN KING VAJIRAVUDH'S REIGN

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to study: 1) the influence of local and global contexts on artists' creations 2) artistic patterns created in the reign of King Vajiravudh 3) King Vajiravudh's own intentions. The research uses historical research approaches, which are as follow: 1) Study primary and secondary documents related to the context of art during the reign of King Vajiravudh, such as the writings involving royal histories and the analysis of royal art in both concept and style. 2) Select the works of art that were created according to His Majesty's wishes and the royal initiative of King Vajiravudh. 3) Analyze and synthesize information about the artistic architectures and objects with the information from documents. The research concludes that artists' creations during King Vajiravudh's period were impacted by the lack of solidarity among Thai citizens and globally by conflicts regarding the denial of monarchy, the dissemination of socialism and democracy, and the First World War. Artistic patterns preferred by King Vajiravudh included Thai traditional art, western art, and the combination of Thai and western art. King Vajiravudh's intentions in making art works were to conceptualize memories through the making of "Monuments", to conduct nationalism, and to preserve, direct and create a Thai identity. The conclusions were based on the context during King Vajiravudh's succession period when he confronted the lack of solidarity among people in the country. He used nationalism to encourage the people's spirit. He created national history and communal memories through memorial sites and monuments with the King at the center. He created art works, both traditional Thai and adaptations of contemporary western styles, as a selection to represent Siam's prosperity and civilization.

**Keywords:** Art; royal intention; King Vajiravudh reign

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## Introduction

One of the major texts used to study concepts in making art in King Vajiravudh's period is "Siamese Art," written by "Asvabhahu," a pen name of King Vajiravudh, or Rama VI of the Rattanakosin period, which was published in the Siam Observer on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1914.

*"...When "Young Siam" became obsessed with the idea of "Civilization-at-any-price! It was but natural for them to think that in order to become effectively civilized, they would have to turn back upon everything that belonged to the old order of things. It appeared that the most effective way to become civilized was to start with a clean slate..." (NAT Ror.6 Bor.1.7/4)*

Charnvit Kasetsiri and Phaothong Thongchue (1982) agreed that what Rama VI predicted in his article was true. What subsequently happened was the official establishment of the modern art movement in Thailand in his period, with some early preparation in the previous reigns of King Mongkut, or Rama IV, and King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V, his grandfather and his father, respectively. What King Vajiravudh did not realize was that the western culture that was being introduced into Thai society, which was meant to be a tool for modernizing Siam so as not to be seen as an uncivilized country, affected the Thai art tradition significantly. Imitation of western art and its techniques were celebrated among Thais and gradually replaced traditional ones. Unfortunately, many of the traditional Thai artists were neglected because they could not adapt to this new style of western modern taste. Their ignorance came from the traditional training of following the master, which placed limitations on the artist's own creativity.

Some explanations of the making of art in King Vajiravudh's period prioritize the importance of royal patronage through institutions. The establishment of the Fine Arts Department in King Vajiravudh's period was to preserve Thai arts and crafts and congregate minor divisions concerned with arts, some of which were in the Ministry of Public Works, the Department of Museums in the Ministry of Education. The newly established Department of Fine Arts was under the Ministry of Palaces so that the King himself had direct

control. Apart from starting a new department, King Vajiravudh also established the Fine Arts Academic School, later titled Pohchang Academy of Arts. He also started the annual arts and crafts exhibitions as events to promote awareness of Thai arts and crafts preservation.

An article “The important decorative arts in history to honor the Chakri Dynasty”, published by the Office of architecture, 2014, King Vajiravudh’s intentions were explained as follows:

*“King Vajiravudh...ordered western architects to design many palaces...his majesty himself planned and sketched Phimanchakri Throne-hall in Phayathai Palace as well as a landscape design addressed to the Department of Fine Arts...ordered to build Watchareeromya Throne-hall and Samakkeemukkharmart Throne-hall in the Sanamchan Palace in the Thai traditional style...His majesty has exceptional artistic skills in many branches. He also used arts as a medium to rule, administrate and educate.”*  
(Office of architecture, Fine Arts Department, 2014: 89)

In my opinion, the above official explanation of his exceptional skills and his benevolence to support Thai arts and crafts is an interesting point. If “arts” were used as a medium to rule and educate people, then there are many dimensions left to explore how King Vajiravudh attempted to make a Thai identity through making art.

In this research I have studied primary documents about King Vajiravudh’s making of arts and found some interesting aspects that need further exploration, including: local and global contexts, which affected art creation in King Vajiravudh’s period; The revival of Thai traditional styles in painting, sculpture and architecture; King Vajiravudh’s determination in making public utilities such as a series of making bridges and monuments; King Vajiravudh’s own interest in Hindu gods and mythology as shown in the making of Hindu sculptures; and King Vajiravudh’s casual style of caricature which was never found in previous times. This research is intended to understand more dimensions of arts creation in this period, especially the hidden messages in his commissioned art pieces.

## Area Descriptions

My research is based on only what has been documented in chronicles and contemporary papers of art pieces made from King Vajiravudh's commissions. The categories are as follows:

**Architecture** 1) throne-halls and palaces including Sanamchandra Palace, Phra Ram Ratchaniwet, Mrigadayavan Palace, Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, Phayathai Palace, Rachareudee Hall, Patiharmtassanai Hall, 2) temples including Wat Phra Pathom Chedi, 3) educational institutions including the Royal Pages School (now Vajiravudh College) and the Commander's Building in Chulalongkorn University (now the Faculty of Arts' building), 4) monuments including World War I Volunteer Monument, Don Chedi Monument (Yuthahatti Monument), and 5) bridges including the Chareon bridges series and Rama VI Bridge.

**Sculptures** 1) Buddha images including Phra Chaiwat, Buddha images celebrating the anniversary of his birthday, Phra Nirokantrai, Phra Kaewmorakotnoi and Phra Ruang Rojnarit, and 2) other sculptures including Ganesha image at Sanamchandra Palace, Thao Hirunphanasun (The Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle) at Phayathai Palace and Mae Phra Thoranee Beeb Muay Phom image (the Goddess of Earth squeezed water from her hair) at Sanam Luang

**Paintings** 1) Mural paintings in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, 2) murals in the main Vihara in Wat Phra Pathom Chedi, and 3) his paintings.

## Results and Discussion

**First Objective: To study local and global contexts related to the making of art in King Vajiravudh's period.**

The research found that the influence affecting Rama VI's making of arts came earlier from his childhood. Prince Vajiravudh was the 29<sup>th</sup> son of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, and was sent to live and study in England from an early age. He was promoted unexpectedly to be the crown prince of Siam, replacing the Crown Prince Maha Vajirunhis who passed away abruptly. The country's burden caused him to switch his study from Arts to military subjects

and state administration. It took him nine years before returning from England to Siam.

His long stay in a foreign country made him estranged to his older relatives and senior courtiers. After the coronation, he felt his regal status was challenged even more by different groups, especially a young military group conspiring to make a coup in 1912. He was disappointed in these young military men who were close and supposed to be loyal to their king. The global context also stirred resentment among well-educated citizens and progressive minds in Thai society. Amidst the current denial of Monarchy around the world, some of the Thai people started being displeased with the absolute monarchy. The ongoing troubles caused by immigrant Chinese as well as the threatening feelings towards privileged, colonizer westerners also made Thai people mistrust the government. King Vajiravudh believed that the unsettling situations in Thai society were based on the lack of the people's solidarity. King Vajiravudh used several methods to raise the mutual spirits of the nation. Through his writings in various media, he held on to Buddhist ideology and used Buddhist analogies to elevate his status as a virtuous king while strongly denying western ideology such as socialism and democracy. (Mongkut Klao Chao Yu Hua, 1961). Although King Vajiravudh proclaimed himself as a Buddhist he also shared beliefs in superstitions and spiritual power, as well as Brahman and Hindu beliefs. He created the motto "Nation, Religion, Monarchy" to support a mutual ideology for nationalism (Greene, 1970) in which he put the king on the highest level.

## **Second Objective: To study patterns of the arts that were made in King Vajiravudh's period**

### **1) Architecture**

#### **Architecture - Halls and Palaces**

The research categorizes these architectural styles as 1) traditional Thai architecture, 2) western-influenced architecture and 3) mixes of Thai and western architecture. The distinctiveness of architecture in this period was the integration of Thai and western styles in various layers including layout, pattern, function, techniques and materials. Cloisters were clearly the most noticeable architecture of this mixed style.

Sanamchandra Palace has halls with all three categories of styles. One with traditional Thai style mainly decorated with Sukhothai and Ayutthaya art and Khmer-influenced art pieces. Vajiravudh's royal seals and symbols were visible on Vatchareeromya Hall (Figure 1) and Patiharntassanai Hall (Figure 2). The appreciation of decorating royal seals or symbols of architecture can be traced back to the time of Rama IV.



**Figure 1:** Vatchareeromya Hall, Sanamchandra Palace



**Figure 2:** Patiharntassanai Hall, Sanamchandra Palace

Western styles found in this place are varied, but the victorian style was the most prominent. Chalee Monkon-ard Hall (Figure 3) has a distinctive conical domed building, reminiscent of past beauty. On the other hand, Piman Pathom Hall tended to be simple and practical rather than built to glorify the regal status.



**Figure 3:** Chalee Monkon-ard Hall, Sanamchandra Palace

King Vajiravudh ordered Rachareudee Hall and Sitalaphirom Hall to be built in traditional Thai architecture, replacing the old hall, which had a mixed Chinese and western style. Rachareudee Hall held important ceremonies, such as the Royal ceremonial bath and purification for the annual birthday of the King. The ceremony functioned to assure the king's status, so it needed sacred surroundings. On the other hand, Sitalaphirom Hall's layout was more casual and open planned. This local design was more suited for everyday living than the Chinese style, as it was previously made in the time of Rama IV and Rama V.

Phayathai Palace was built as King Vajiravudh's residence, so it expressed his preferred tastes. The external design looks simply like a country manor in Europe. It has a rounded balcony covered by a conical rooftop that resembles a medieval castle. Phimanchakri Hall (Figure 4) has a structure of pillars and ferroconcrete beams which reduce the thickness of the walls and give a more airy, spacious environment. The interior design is distinguished by vibrant colors, art-nouveau style decoration of plants and geometric patterns.

The overall design fulfilled the purpose of a cozy accommodation rather than to be preserved as the sacred palace of the king.



**Figure 4:** Phimanchakri Hall, Phayathai Palace

Mrigadayavan Palace was built for the purpose of the King's recuperation in the latter years of his reign. The palace is outstanding with a combination of Thai and western styles. The palace's layout resembles a traditional Thai temple (Wat) for it has a central building surrounded by a four-sided cloister. The distinctively early Ayutthaya architecture is clearly visible in the layout, which places Samutphiman Hall at the center, and has a cloister on the north connecting to the front of the palace (Chungsiriarak, 2010). For the western style, the palace has a modular system of 3x3 in both axis lines so that it created an organized, measured pattern. A wide balcony with a rooftop cover was also another aspect that foreign architects preferred for tropical climate designs (Saksri, 1993).

Apart from building new palaces and halls dependent on his own tastes, King Vajiravudh also restored some buildings, which were constructed in Rama V's period, in new western styles. The choices of western styles were varied, such as Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (Figure 5) with neo Italian Renaissance and Phra Ram Ratchaniwet with German baroque (Chungsiriarak, 2010). Although these western-influenced buildings looked majestic King Vajiravudh was not greatly impressed because the styles did not represent the distinctiveness of Thai arts (Amorndarunnrak, 1969). Despite the fact that it



did not serve his own preference, Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which had been finished under King Vajiravudh's supervision, could fulfill his purposes, especially political ones. For local politics, the building was evidence of the people's solidarity, which he mentioned regularly. It was a prominent monument to remember Rama V. For global circumstances, this building was an example of Siam's glory, in many aspects. It showed the extensive labors, the wealth, as well as ability with challenging construction technology. It also showed how well the Siamese were adapting themselves to the modern western world.



**Figure 5:** Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall

### **Architecture - Monastery**

Wat Phra Pathom Chedi is an old monastery (Figure 6) and is restored in the Rattanakosin period from the reigns of Rama IV to Rama VI. The study showed it was built concurrently with Phrapathom Chedi so that it was an evidence to prove Siam's long and glorious past. Ancient artifacts were found around Phra Pathom Chedi's site, including plates and stone inscriptions, as well as imprinted Buddha-image amulets with Ye Dhamma spells. Rama V believed these artifacts, which were imprinted ancient Buddhist characters as well as the standing stupa, could be traced back to King Asoka the Great (Srithammasokarat)'s time. Probably, King Asoka sent his royal group of monks to spread Buddhism in this land, carrying Buddhist relics and building this stupa for worship (Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, 1926).



**Figure 6:** Wat Phra Pathom Chedi

The expanse of western influence in Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not only for mercantilism, distribution of religion, arts and technology but also colonialism. The western countries assumed a superior position by studying the local knowledge, comparing between the two sets of knowledge, the ancient-religious and modern scientific, and then proclaiming western civilizations to be better and more progressive. This would be their reasoning to conquer the primitive ones (Pheuksom, 1997). The restoration of Phra Pathom Chedi would therefore prove important in supporting the old civilization of Siam.

### **Architecture - Educational buildings**

The Royal Pages School (Now Vajiravudh College) and The Commander's Building (Now the Maha Vajiravudh Building, Faculty of Arts) in Chulalongkorn University, are two of the most distinguished buildings constructed in King Vajiravudh's period. His initial custom to build educational buildings, rather than building monasteries, as happened in earlier times before his reign, came from the idea to elevate modern education as a tool for the nation's progress and survival (NAT Ror.6 Sor.4/59)

The layout of Vajiravudh College was designed to put buildings at each end of the four corners; these buildings, then enclosed the central auditorium which was used for assembling students in prayer rituals. King Vajiravudh intended to create a monastery-like atmosphere so that the four buildings on each side were like monks' cells, adapted to be teachers' dwellings, and the auditorium was the sermon hall in a monastery (Amorndarunnrak, 1970). The auditorium (Figure 7) was designed by the western architect, Edward Healey, who combined the Christian church and Thai church styles together. The outcome was astonishing, for the layout was a Roman cross. Doors and windows had pointy arch frames like the Gothic style, decorations were in Thai tradition and pediments were embellished with regal symbols.



**Figure 7:** The Auditorium, Vajiravudh College

The grand building of the Faculty of Arts was built with King Vajiravudh's intention for the preservation of traditional Thai architecture that would last for future generations (Amorndarunnrak, 1970). The building, also designed by Edward Healey, is a two storied building using ferro-concrete. Its layout was planned in the shape of the letter E, surrounded with connecting balconies for full capacity. Its pointy triangular rooftop is filled with traditional Thai architectural decorations such as pediments, Chofah, Bai raka, and Hang

hong, as well as mythical figures of Vishnu riding on a garuda, which is considered as a regal symbol, or the national coat of arms. These decorations are found in various ancient styles including Sukhothai and Khmer.

### **Architecture - Monument**

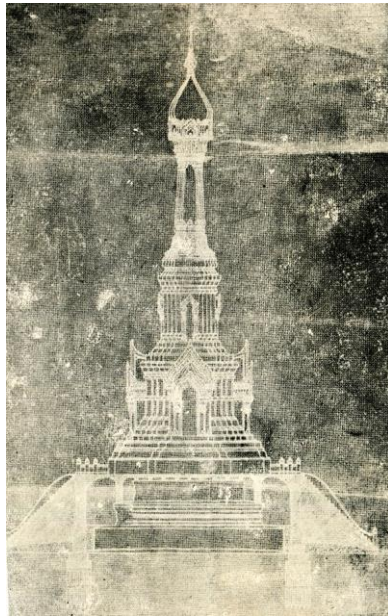
World War I Volunteer Monument (Figure 8) was built to commemorate Thai soldiers who joined the battles and died during World War I. Adapted from Sukhothai's stupas, the importance of this monument is not only its traditional Thai appearance, but the message that it conveys. In Thai tradition, building a stupa is a virtuous act to remember ancestors or special events. Generally, stupas are built in temples or sacred spaces, however, even though accepting the same ideal World War I Volunteer Monument was built in a public space. This brought a new meaning from "stupa" to "monument" because it stood in the public place that anyone could see and relate to.



**Figure 8:** World War I Volunteer Monument

Another example of a new concept of monument was Don Chedi Monument (Yuthahatti Monument) at Donchedi in Suphan Buri province.

King Vajiravudh's initial idea came from his study of Thai chronicles about King Naresuan's elephant battle against The Great Viceroy of Burma. King Vajiravudh ordered Suphan Buri's governor to find the historic site of this battle. The search found an old stupa at Dontamphra, which made King Vajiravudh believe that this was the spot where King Naresuan proclaimed his victory over the Burmese king and regained the nation's independence. (NAT Ror.6 Bor.16.6/4). The discovery of an ancient stupa, or Phrachedi, during his reign, in 1913, was considered to be a sign of his own merit. He ordered a new stupa be built to cover the old one. The new one was designed by officials from the Department of Fine Arts and adapted from Sukhothai's lotus-bud shape style (Figure 9). Unfortunately, there was no budget at that time. When analyzing the period when the Yuthahatti stupa was discovered, we see it occurred shortly after the incident of a military rebellion in 1912 and corresponded to when His Majesty's desired to create unity and solidarity in the nation, especially amongst the elites, who lacked confidence in him. (Boontanondha, 2016)



**Figure 9:** Don Chedi Monument (Yuthahatti Monument) Designed by the Fine Arts Department

*Source:* (Amorndarunnrak, 1977: 93)



### Architecture - Bridge

King Vajiravudh commissioned six bridges with the names starting with “Charoen”. There were five bridges in Bangkok, Charoen Ratch 31 Charoen Raat 32, Charoen Pas 33, Charoen Sri 34, and Charoen Sawat 36, and one bridge in Nakhonpathom, Charoen Sattru. Later in his reign, he ordered another bridge be constructed called Phraramhok (“Rama VI bridge”).

The Charoen bridges are all made of a ferro-concrete structure with beautiful decoration. Some of these embellishments are King Vajiravudh's initials or symbols to commemorate important events. Charoen Ratch 31 (Figure 10), has the royal initials of Vor. Por. Ror. (from Vajiravudh Parama Rachathiratch) in the center of the bridge. This plate is set against a shield of a tiger carrying a sword, which is a symbol of “suapa” (wild tiger), his protector troop. This shield signifies the important event of establishing Suapa troop and the boy scouts in that year (Poonpait, n.d.: C7).



**Figure 10:** Charoen Ratch 31 Bridge

Charoen Rat 32 (Figure 11), a bridge across Mahanak canal, has a mythical great snake (“naga”) spreading its hood to cover the king's initials Vor. Por. Ror. at the end of the bridge.



**Figure 11:** Charoen Rat 32 Bridge

Aspiring to be like his father, Rama VI continued to build bridges across Bangkok and up-country. From 1895 onwards Rama V, his father, built new bridges every year for public benefit, as well as to adorn the city. These permanent constructions spread modernity from the center, around Rattanakosin island, to the outer area of Bangkok. Apart from its functional infrastructures purpose, building these bridges was considered to be a major donation for the public good, which was a benevolent act of a virtuous person (NAT Ror.6 Nor.7.7/5).

Rama VI Bridge, was built to connect the eastern rail line and southern rail line (NAT Ror.6 Bor.1.3/31). However, because of the different gauge between these two rail lines, the bridge had another function as a resting spot for maintaining the system. This bridge used the most updated technology, which was a cantilever construction and truss steel in its body. The construction began in December, 1922 but had to stop halfway during World War I, then continued to completion under Rama VII.

## **2) Sculpture**

### **Sculpture - Buddha Image**

As was the practice of the previous kings in the Chakri dynasty, King Vajiravudh continued the royal custom of making Buddha images. He commissioned Buddha images for blessings on his birthday over consecutive

years. Among this group, Phra Nirokantrai was the most significant. Phra Puttamaneeerattanapatimakorn or Little Emerald Buddha image, intended to duplicate the Emerald Buddha image, was made for conveying a blessing of fertility to the land.

King Vajiravudh's was interested in the ancient Siamese kingdom, so he brought ancient Buddha images from Sukhothai, the former capital of the northern kingdom, to Bangkok. King Vajiravudh named the Buddha Phra Ruang Rojnarit (Figure 12). His intention for collecting these Buddha images was to convey the glory of Siamese art from the past. Another purpose was to preserve and carry on the technical knowledge of molding ancient Buddha images (NAT Ror.6 Sor.9.1/81).



**Figure 12:** Phra Ruang Rojnarit, Wat Phra Pathom Chedi

### **Sculpture - Statues of deities**

King Vajiravudh expressed his multicultural beliefs indistinctively, like most Thai people. He commissioned a Hindu deity Ganesha statue, which had an uncommon combination of the styles of idealist Java and western realistic human figures. This Ganesha statue is worshipped as a regional protector and has its own shrine at Sanamchandra Palace. Thao Hirunphanasun was a deity that King Vajiravudh personally believed was his own protector for he had visions of this deity everywhere since he was appointed the Crown



Prince. When he succeeded to the throne, he ordered the Fine Art Department to mold a gold-bronze statue so that he could worship this deity (NAT Ror.6 Bor.12/26). Later in his reign, he ordered a new statue of Thao Hirunphanasun (Figure 13), this time with a combination of the styles of Khmer and Ayutthaya art. This statue was established at Phyathai Palace as a regional protector, the same purpose as the Ganesha image at Sanamchandra Palace.



**Figure 13:** Thao Hirunphanasun, Phyathai Palace

Another outstanding statue built in his period was the Goddess of Earth squeezed water from her hair image (Figure 14). It began with the Queen Mother's idea of distributing drinking water to the public. To respond to her wish, King Vajiravudh made a permanent water supply for the public, which had the statue of the earth goddess wringing her hair in front of it (NAT Ror.6 Nor.1/37). At the beginning, the statue was designed in a western style but was re-designed to be a traditional Thai style by Prince Narit. The new design corresponded to the ideal of the Thai contributory goddess and the western, modern function of public works. Among elites, this statue also served the privileged purpose of making merit for common people. King Vajiravudh always expressed his wish for public benefits as seen in his writing “...*What is goodness, if it only shows its beauty without its function, so it should not count as goodness*” (NAT Ror.6 Nor.7.7/17). Thus, the importance of this statue was

to convey the characteristics of Thai identity in its appearance along with its functional message.



**Figure 14:** The Image of Goddess of Earth Squeezing Water from Her Hair, Sanam Luang

### 3) Painting

#### Painting - Anatasamakhon Hall

King Vajiravudh specified the content and position of paintings in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall himself. His order was to portray major duties of the kings of Chakri dynasty under the ceiling dome (NAT Ror.6 Nor.16/77). Paintings have a combination of western techniques including perspectives and realistic human figures as well as traditional Thai art embellishments such as kranok patterns and mythical creatures such as a garuda, the great naga, and Erawan the elephant (vehicle of the Hindu god Indra). The reason for portraying the kings' obligations was to emphasize the perseverance of the kings of the Chakri dynasty (Figure 15). The paintings in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall represent the stability and prosperity of the Kingdom of Siam under absolute monarchy. The paintings such as the portrayals of royalties, the royal servants and stewards, and western foreigners attending royal ceremonies recreated the reminiscent grandeur of the dynasty.



**Figure 15:** Painting, Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall

*Source:* Goal90antique.blogspot (2018)

### **Painting – The Main Vihara, Wat Phra Pathom Chedi**

King Vajiravudh ordered the renovation of the Main Vihara, removing the dividing wall and penetrating the wall at the end of the room to make a larger window, so that the view of Phrapathomchedi would be clearly visible. He appointed Luang Dechanaiwain (Chan Chitakorn) to be the chief painter supervising the drawing of Theppanom (“angels in a saluting position”, Figure 16). The outlines of the Theppanom were taken from sculptures that were found around Phrapathom chedi (Ram Vajiravudh, 2009).



**Figure 16:** Theppanom from Phrawiharnluang, Wat Phra Pathom Chedi

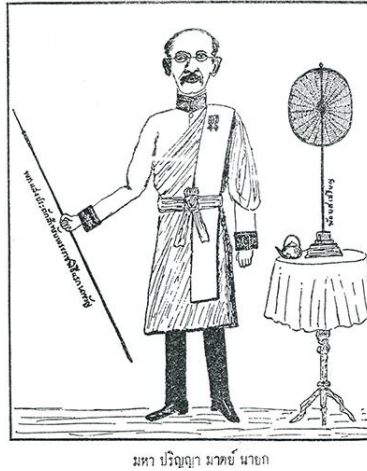
These Theppanom paintings were not directly imitating the ancient ones, instead, they were a combination of western and traditional Thai styles. The paintings contain western techniques such as grading tone of light and shadow, realistic facial features and human anatomy. The paintings also added the flavor of traditional Thai art as seen in the gathering of angels and mythical creatures such as garuda and naga. Another distinctive detail of the main Vihara is that the Buddha image was not placed at the back of the temple as it should be in a traditional Thai layout. Instead, Phra Phuttha Sihing (Buddha image) was placed at the end of the hall, along with the view of Phra Pathom Chedi at the back, so that people could appreciate the sacredness even inside the building. On the opposite side of the wall, there is a painting depicting the restoration of Phra Pathom Chedi from the past to contemporary times.

### **Painting - his own drawings**

King Vajiravudh drew both simple sketches and paintings. He publicized his early drawings when he moved to Bang Pa-In Palace, shortly after declaring war against Germany in World War I. Most of them were caricatures and cartoons. After that, exhibitions and contests of drawing and painting were held several times. King Vajiravudh was so enthusiastic that he sent his own works to participate, every time. Some of his drawings were published in Dusit Smith Journal as magazine illustrations. Some of his drawings were auctioned for money resulting in several donations such as buying Phraruang (a royal frigate) and firearms for Suapa troop.

Mostly King Vajiravudh's drawings were caricatures of his close courtiers and were famous for their resemblances, so that it was easy to recognize who the model was. For example, the drawing of Maha Parinyamartnayok, or Chaophrayayommarat (Figure 17), the noble official whose real name was Pan. The drawing had clever details to indicate identity such as a ceremonial Buddha fan, with the letters endorsing the Buddhist title, which belonged to Pan in his early years. On the right hand, the model is holding a 'patak', a skewer, a staff, with the letters explaining "this royal staff is used for the Royal Ploughing Ceremony", indicating Pan's role that year (Meeshubot, 2012). His caricatures, which he trained himself in, since he studied abroad, were meant to make a close bond between himself and his

courtiers. Apart from caricatures of Thai courtiers, King Vajiravudh also drew cartoons about World War I and painted illustrations for the story of Shakuntala. His cartoons of World War I were intentionally used for expressing his political messages.



**Figure 17:** Maha Parinyamartnayok, King Vajiravudh's Famous Drawing  
*Source:* (Maha Makut Royal College Foundation, 1988)

**Third Objective: To study Rama VI's conception in making art works**

After studying art pieces that were documented as King Vajiravudh's commissions, I have these suggestions to support what was King Vajiravudh's conception in making art works. Rama VI encapsulated national memories through making monuments, taking from the western concept of public commemoration.

**1) King Vajiravudh ordered the construction of several buildings that conveyed symbols or notifications of the monarchy.**

The distinct example was Watchareeromya Hall in Sanamchandra Palace, which was thoroughly decorated with the royal seal. The main buildings of Vajiravudh College and the Faculty of Arts of Chulalongkorn University were all built to commemorate King Chulalongkorn and King

Vajiravudh, his father and himself. World War I Volunteer Monument was built on the occasion of Siam joining the allies in World War I. The series of Charoen bridges were built in consecutive years on the anniversary of King Vajiravudh's birthday. These bridges were also decorated with several symbols relating to the king and his affairs in each year. The portrayal of the Chakri Kings' obligations was highlighted in the dome of Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. These artifacts demonstrated King Vajiravudh's attempt to make communal memories for Thai people, to remember the importance of the nation as well as to instill gratitude for the monarchy.

## **2) King Vajiravudh supported nationalism through his selection of artifacts**

This suggestion is based on the comparison of architectural styles between King Chulalongkorn's time and King Vajiravudh's time. It was clear that King Vajiravudh preferred to adapt traditional Thai characteristics in the buildings rather than adopting the whole western style. Excellent examples are the main buildings of Vajiravudh College and the Faculty of Arts building in Chulalongkorn University; both have a combination of traditional Thai architectural appearance and western functional concepts. His interest in traditional Thai arts grew concurrently with his study of archeology and the history of the Siamese kingdoms, especially the Sukhothai kingdom. He shared his enthusiasm in his book, *Tiew Muang Phra Ruang* ("Travel in Sukhothai"), in which he noticed that ancient arts were evidence of the nation's glory in the past (Mongkut Klao Chao Yu Hua, 1983: C).

Due to his ideal of nationalism and pride of the long history of the Siamese kingdom, King Vajiravudh intended to use Sukhothai art with several artifacts. However, he did not adopt the old traditional style directly but tried to adapt the style to be compatible for modern usage. Pakitnontakarn (2007) pointed out that this was King Vajiravudh's intention to demonstrate Siam's civilization to the west. Siam was not a barbarian country. Thai arts verified the glory of the nation.

Shortly after King Vajiravudh's succession, there were social and political problems including economic decline, a military rebellion in 1912 and the middle class' resentment of the authoritarianism of the absolute monarchy

regime. King Vajiravudh tried to resolve these troubles by claiming his rightful authority. He emphasized nationalism to support his status as the leader of the country, and to raise national pride for Siam's long history and prosperity as a country. He made national memories through decisive artifacts. Traditional Thai arts and architecture, which were filled with national identity, needed to be recognized, studied and appreciated by its own people. These were evidence of the country's long history and civilization. He tried to preserve ancient arts as a principle to maintain solidarity, nationalism and pride for the nation.

### **3) King Vajiravudh created Thai identity through his direction, selection and preservation of artifacts**

King Vajiravudh realized that tastes among Thai people were changing from Chinese styles to western styles, as described in his writing:

*"...Previously Thais preferred Chinese styles...seen from old buildings since Rama I, Rama II, Rama III. Even furniture, cabinets, tables or miscellaneous equipment were made in a Chinese style. Since Rama IV we started making business with the Westerners...he also encouraged foreign commerce...then the western style arrived, so is as with the buildings. These days everything is in a western style."* (NAT Ror.6 Bor.16.6/6)

The preference for western styles devalued traditional Thai arts so that the local arts were seen as inferior to the western style. Traditional Thai arts were neglected and not popular among Thai people. The intention in writing the article, "Siamese Art", was to encourage Thai people to be aware of the aesthetic value of Thai arts. Whether they were tangible artifacts or intangible such as performance, Thai arts were a representation of national identity (NAT Ror.6Bor.1.7/4).

King Vajiravudh paved the way for the Thai arts to be outstanding, whether in a traditional form or a contemporary adaptation. He preferred architecture that combined western functionalism and traditional Thai patterns, as seen in the main building of Vajiravudh College. He once mentioned that

the buildings should have *“Thai exquisiteness for admiration that will last over time”*. His intention was reaffirmed in the constructing of the main building in the Faculty of Fine Arts in Chulalongkorn University that *“will continue to preserve Thai architecture as a legacy to later generations”*.

My noting that King Vajiravudh's attempts to promote the Thai arts signified his view that Thai arts were representative of a Thai identity, thus his selection of any traditional Thai style was very important. Thai styles from any period that he selected were a stamp of Thai identity. However, there were other local Thai styles that were neglected. In this way, what King Vajiravudh had done in re-establishing authentic Thai art was, actually, to establish his criterion of Thai art. In fact, there were no authentic Thai arts; even the most distinguished buildings in his period, Vajiravudh College and the Faculty of Arts, were mixed with different styles of Khmer, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin. So that, “Thai art” in King Vajiravudh's view was his own selective vision of the characteristics of Thai arts, and did not necessarily match general opinion.

King Vajiravudh also expressed his own descriptions of the Thai identity through a new concept of national exhibitions and museums. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, western countries established museums and collected things from around the world. Siam was invited to join in exhibitions by sending artifacts or merchandise. Not only were these artifacts representative of friendship between Siam and other countries, they were also manifestations of Siam's prosperity (NAT Ror.6 Tor.9/25), as well as demonstrating the Thai identity to the world. Art pieces and mercantile goods that Thai elites chose to exhibit were mostly exquisite art pieces, such as a model of Sutthaisawan pavilion, a model of the royal barge, marquetry, golden gilded black lacquer wares, nielloware. All made by courtesan craftsmen in the Fine Arts Department and Pohchang Academy of Arts, but not by commoners.

However, my three assertions are based on the context during King Vajiravudh's succession period in that the king confronted a lack of solidarity among people in the country. The king used nationalism to encourage Thai people's spirit. The king created a national history and communal memories through memorial sites and monuments with the king himself at the center.



The king promoted arts, both traditional and adaptive Thai, to mingle with contemporary western styles, as a selection to represent Siam's prosperity and civilization.

## **Postscript**

The main argument clarifies that the arts during King Vajiravudh's period served the king's intention to promote collective national history and memories which are exemplified clearly in permanent art pieces, like monuments.

"Monument" is taken from a Latin word *monumentum*, which was from *monere* meaning to warn or to recall. So, a monument is built upon the premise of a memory and how that memory acts on the history in that society. It mobilizes and mediates the past in the present's recollection. The very essence of the monument lies in its relationship to lived time and to memory. (Choay, 2001).

Monuments have been built for thousand years since pre-historical time, such as dolmen in France and many related constructions. In historical times, monuments were made mostly by a powerful, high status class of people and then accepted as a cultural heritage for later generations. Therefore, in a sense, monuments function as a bridge to transfer social memories and their legacies from the past to the present time.

"Memory" is what remains of the deceased to be eternally alive in the minds of people in the present time. Statues, monuments and tombs then are made for creating memories (Chotpradit, 2010). They are also representations of specific persons or events. In the period of absolute monarchy's and nation-state's ruling schemes, governments in both types tried to convey their definition of the past and emphasized their versions to be the general memories of their people. These recently constructed memories were embedded in state's informative process such as modern education, mass communication and so on. Monuments were also a tool among others so that the powerful ruling class conveyed their views of the past into a concrete, visible form. That is the

reason monuments must stand out in the public areas, so that people will access them easily and grasp their impression deeply (Eawsriwong, 2014).

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