

## REVIEWS

### **The Heritage of Thai Sculpture**

*Jean Boisselier; commentaries by Jean-Michel Beurdeley, photography by Hans Hinz*

*New York & Tokyo, Weatherhill, 1975; 269 pp., 145 pl.*

This volume was originally published in French in 1974 by Office du Livre, of Fribourg, Switzerland, under the title *La Sculpture en Thaïlande*. The English translation for the present edition is by James Emmons. It is very important for the study of sculpture in Thailand as Professor Boisselier is an important scholar on southeast Asian archaeology and history of art, and Mr. Hinz is a famous photographer. One cannot help, however, feeling somewhat disappointed after having read the book, as Professor Boisselier probably intends it for the general public and therefore does not delve deeply into the subject and does not use the evolution of motifs—of which the Professor is an expert—to date the sculpture. The book is divided into two parts, which again are subdivided into ten chapters and followed by appendices. They will be reviewed successively, supplemented with the personal opinion of the reviewer in some parts.

At the beginning the author dedicates his book to H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, to whom he gives the epithet of “founder of Thai archaeology”. In the foreword, he says that sculpture in Thailand should have been written about as a special subject. Then follows the introduction, which treats summarily of the history, geography and religions of Thailand. The author remarks in a rather surprising way that though Siva was also worshipped in Thailand, he remained much inferior to the 33 gods dwelling on Mount Meru (p. 22).

Part one, on the spirit and character of Thai sculpture, begins with the introduction. Chapter I, on the enduring characteristics, is divided under four headings, comprising unity and diversity, patronage and functions, aesthetic characteristics and the means of expression. Chapter II concerns techniques and their imperatives, which describes techniques of modeling and techniques of carving or cutting. In that chapter the author points out that limestone which was carved by

Dvāravatī sculptors had an influence on the iconography of Buddha images during that period.

Part two describes the schools of sculpture which are divided into eight chapters, from chapters III to X. The author stresses that he follows the various schools of art in Thailand already defined by Prince Damrong. It is, however, remarkable that the beginning of the school of Lopburi is raised from the usual eleventh century A.D. to about the seventh century, and the Chieng Sèn or Lan Na school dates from the thirteenth to twentieth centuries.

In chapter III on the early images (c. fourth to sixth centuries A.D.) the author describes the ancient objects before the Dvāravatī period, which can be divided into two groups. After those first two groups there is another one which comprises of Buddha images that may be related to the Andhra-Pallava school of Buddhapād in India.

Chapter IV belongs to Dvāravatī sculpture (c. seventh to eleventh centuries), where the author may overstress somewhat the influence of Śrīvijaya art from the south. According to him, the Dvāravatī Buddha image does not antedate the seventh century. It is, however, regrettable that the lower half of the stone standing image preserved in a monastery near Chainat mentioned by the author on page 76 has been totally restored into a completely new standing effigy of the Master. For Dvāravatī stucco sculpture, Professor Boisselier apparently overlooks current knowledge regarding the *stūpa* of Wat Chula Pathon (p. 86). As Dr. Piriya Krairiksh has already demonstrated in his study *Buddhist Folk Tales Depicted at Chula Pathon Cedi*, published in early 1974, there were no figures of Bodhisattvas; but Professor Boisselier still mentions in his book "associated with them were a few Bodhisattvas" (p. 86).

Chapter V deals with the Śrīvijaya school (c. eighth to thirteenth centuries), in which the author describes its connection with the central Javanese art (mid-eighth to late ninth century). He also mentions that "one group, characterized by a *paridhāna* forming a medium bunch of folds, with a small fan-shaped flap folded over the belt, is particularly interesting for its very wide diffusion; examples have been found from Indonesia to Yunnan in southwest China and in numerous sites in the Menam Plain, in southern Cambodia and in Champa" (p. 96).



The Professor has included the stone statues of Vishṇu wearing a cylindrical hat discovered in southern and eastern Thailand in the Śrīvijaya school. That group of sculptures has been classified by the late Professor Pierre Dupont as the Hindu aspect of Dvāravatī art, and the present reviewer has always set them apart as "ancient Hindu images discovered in Thailand". Professor Boisselier has to admit, however, that the influence of central Javanese art in that group of sculptures is less than that of the Indian Pallava style. He dates them from the mid-seventh to the mid-ninth centuries. As for the three famous stone images from the Khao Phra Narai hill at Takua Pa, which "resist positive identification and interpretation" (p. 101), one can be quite sure now that they represent a figure of standing Vishṇu wearing an ornamented cylindrical hat among two seated attendants, one male and one female.

It is surprising that the author also includes the school of Nakhon Si Thammarat classification in this chapter, though he dates some of the works to the mid-eighteenth century.

The school of Si Tep is again included in the fifth chapter as by the author's own words: "quite apart from its undeniable originality, the school of Si Tep achieved a kind of synthesis of the sculptural styles of Dvāravatī, Śrīvijaya, and Lopburi" (p. 104). He dates the statuary there on both stylistic and technical grounds not earlier than the eighth or ninth century (in the French version, the first date is the seventh century). The author expresses the opinion that "the Vishṇus of Si Tep wear a smooth cylindrical (or, occasionally, polygonal) miter, not unlike certain types of headpieces seen on the Vishṇu figures of the Peninsula and in pre-Angkorian statuary" (p. 105). The reviewer thinks this characteristic is probably the reverse.

Chapter VI concerns the Lopburi school (c. seventh to fourteenth centuries) which the author divides into three periods: sculpture of the seventh to ninth centuries, sculpture of the tenth to early thirteenth centuries, and Lopburi sculpture during the second quarter of the thirteenth century. For the first period it is surprising that the author

classifies the stone figure of Ardhanārī found at Ubon (which the reviewer has always identified with the group of "ancient Hindu images discovered in Thailand") into this period. For the second category it is doubtful whether a lintel recently discovered at Prasat Hin Wat Phanom Wan (p. 116) described in detail by the author should not be dated later than what the author has thought, say mid-tenth century. On the other hand, another beautiful lintel in green sandstone has also been found at the same sanctuary, depicting the Khmer design of the late ninth century. Probably it was discovered after the Professor had written his book and therefore it was not mentioned.

The most interesting part in this chapter VI probably belongs to Lopburi sculpture of the second quarter of the thirteenth century, where the author discusses two major tendencies: the first one a direct extension of the Bayon style, and the second type displaying its major innovation in the incorporation of Pāla-Sena iconography, which according to the author invites comparisons with the so-called "U Thong Style A". For the second category the author says that "represented by standing statuettes found both in the Menam Plain and in the region of Lamphun (Haripuñjaya), which are obviously imported though on occasion copied closely, this tradition is characterized by its high diadems with large rectangular fleurons and long pendants, which occur over an area extending from Bengal and Bihār to Pagan" (p. 124). One might argue with that statement by reasoning that Pāla-Sena art could have come to northern Thailand via Pagan in Burma in the eleventh century; if the Khmer influence of the Angkor Vat and Bayon styles could have gone up to Lamphun in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Haripuñjaya kingdom might have produced by itself such images as those bronze *repoussé* images discovered at Wieng Ta Kan near Chiang Mai. One wonders therefore whether the type of Buddha images displaying Pāla iconography could not spread from the northern part down to the centre of Thailand as "a new gesture apparently borrowed from the Haripuñjaya tradition" mentioned by the author (p. 125).



Chapter VII concerns the Sukhothai school (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries). The author says that "by about the beginning of the fifteenth century there appeared a new stylization in the representation of the Buddha's hands...all the fingers except the thumb were rendered nearly equal in length" (p. 132). Most Thai scholars believe that this characteristic might have occurred in the reign of King Lithai in the middle of the fourteenth century. Professor Boisselier again groups the Buddha Śrī Śākyamuni, now in the *vihāra* of Wat Suthat in Bangkok, during this period. This image again might have been cast by command of King Lithai (1347—c. 1368) as figures in the Sukhothai inscription no. 4. The author also believes that a high finial in the form of a flame (*rasmi*) evokes rather freely the iconography of Sinhalese Buddhism. On page 137 the author mentions "the iconography of Pagan" on Sukhothai art. This Burmese artistic influence on the school of Sukhothai should have been further explored, as can be seen from many examples, e.g. the motif of lotus petals on the lower part of a dome of a round *siūpa* and vertical, triangular motifs on the upper border of an arch. As for the costume of Sukhothai Hindu images that "vaguely recalls the costume of Sinhalese dancers in the Gampola period (1341-1415)" (p. 138), the reviewer is rather doubtful.

Chapter VIII deals with the school of Lan Na or Chieng Sèn (thirteenth to twentieth centuries), where the author describes first the school of Haripuñjaya (Lamphun) and then the school of Lan Na. He says that "it may also be inferred from this evidence [the Pāla-Sena influence in northern Thailand in the eleventh century], and from the fact that Mang Rai is said to have brought artists and craftsmen from Pagan in 1290, that the characteristic style of the school [early Chieng Sèn] had taken form by the time Wat Chieng Man was founded in 1292". That, it must be admitted, is contrary to the opinion of most Thai scholars. The author disagrees with Mr. A.B. Griswold in bringing down all the early Chieng Sèn Buddha images to the reign of Tilokaraja (1441-1487) when the late Chieng Sèn style or Chiang Mai was also flourishing, by saying that two different styles cannot coexist in the same place at the same time. He also explains that the early Chieng Sèn Buddha image does not receive only the Pāla influence but "furthermore,

characteristic figures of the Buddha subduing Māra, always shown with the right arm held out from the body and its hand on the knee or very near it, differ markedly from the corresponding attitude in Pāla statuary, where the right arm is in line with the body and the hand rests at the mid-point of the leg. The Lan Na attitude is rare and appears to have been found in India only in a few works from Sirpur in Madhya Pradesh and in works of the eighth or ninth century from Virat Cuttack in Orissa" (p. 152). That is new information which should be thoroughly supported by research. He also says that the early Chieng Sèn Buddha image might sit in *virāsana* (p. 152). If we believe that the early Chieng Sèn style started in 1292, that could have happened, because the Sinhalese influence might have already at that time appeared in northern Thailand. The reviewer, however, disagrees with Professor Boisselier when he seems to indicate that the seated posture in Lan Na might have derived from Haripuñjaya. According to the personal view of the author, the Buddha image of Haripuñjaya school is always seated in *vajrāsana*, as can be noticed from those on top of the octagonal *stūpa* at Wat Kukut, Lamphun, or from figure 110 in the book. As for Wat Pasak at Chieng Sèn which the author says was built in 1319 and displays the influences from Śrīvijaya, Sukhothai and Pagan (p. 153 and 156), this reviewer would like to add as well the lingering influence of Haripuñjaya, as can be witnessed from the bottom base containing three large niches and four small accessory bases containing stucco figures. It is also rather surprising that the author expresses the opinion that the so-called later Chieng Sèn Buddha image was not only influenced by Sukhothai but "even by Lao art" (p. 153). For Wat Chedi Chet Yot at Chiang Mai, though Professor Boisselier writes that it was built about 1455 at the behest of King Tiloka as a monument commemorating the second millenium of Buddhism (p. 157), the commentaries on the illustrations (which in the English text is followed by the name of Jean-Michel Beurdeley, but in the French text is left vacant as if to let the reader understand that it was composed by Professor Boisselier himself) explain that "the date of its construction is uncertain, possibly an already existing monastery was simply remodeled and embellished in the 15th century to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the Buddha" (p. 222).



Professor Boisselier also discusses late Lan Na sculptures in wood by saying that "quite often, the carvers seem to have contrived to remain relatively independent of Burmese models, even at Lampang, where Burmese influence was so strong" (p. 159). He then talks about the Emerald Buddha, the palladium of present-day Thailand, and offers the opinion that the image probably "comes from Ceylon, as one tradition would have it, or possibly from south India" (p. 160).

Chapter IX deals with the Ayudhya school (fourteenth to eighteenth centuries) in which Professor Boisselier says that he will follow the four subperiods that have already been laid down by Prince Damrong. The Professor, however, makes the strange remark that "during the year before his coronation, he [King Rāmādhīpati I, the founder of Ayudhya] had brought Sukhothai under his control" (p. 161), which cannot be verified in Thai history. He also explains that since the art of U Thong style had a lot of influence on Ayudhya art, he has included the former in chapter X. The Professor repeats again the similarity between the Haripuñjaya art and the U Thong Style A, which he dates by the latter half of the thirteenth century. The reviewer, however, is of the opinion that this date might be too late for the U Thong Style A in general, but might be correct for those images that received the Haripuñjaya influence. The reviewer prefers the date of about the twelfth century, since the U Thong Style A seems to demonstrate a mixture of late Dvāravatī art and the Lopburi school of the eleventh century. The Professor also gives a useful clue for the distinction between the Buddha image of the U Thong Style C and that of later Ayudhya by using the presence or absence of the band marking the hair-line as an identifying mark (p. 168).

For the Ayudhya school the Professor explains that "its ideal was distinction rather than spirituality and its sources lay more in a vast literary culture than in religious meditation" (p. 170). As for the illustration of the 550 Jātakas by King Borom Trailokanath (p. 176), in Luang Prasert's historical version only 500 Jātakas are mentioned. Also, on the same page for the quotation "in 820 [of the Chulaśakarāj Era, i.e. 1458], the Year of the Tiger, religious festivities were held..." in

Luang Prasert's version the Thai description could be literally translated as "in 820, the Year of the Tiger, during that period the religion was restored to its completion..." The Professor also notes that in the eighteenth century some Buddhist disciple figures were wearing a monastic dress like some present Thai Buddhist monks, and in that period bronze Hindu divinities were cast after the Indian Dravidian style. He also mentions that the figure of Kaccāyana (the fat Buddhist disciple) existed already during the Dvāravatī period.

Chapter X deals with the school of Thonburi and Bangkok (late eighteenth century to the present), and the writer divides the Bangkok epoch into two subperiods: the first from the reign of King Rāma I to that of Rāma III, which is characterized by its fidelity to the lessons of Ayudhya; and the second period from the reign of King Mongkut or Rāma IV to the present day, being marked by the increasing influence upon Thai art of Western aesthetic conceptions. In discussing the gathering up of 1,200 statues from the north in the reign of King Rāma I, the author writes "moreover, by calling for the transfer to the capital of venerated images and relics, King Rāma I was consciously repeating the gesture attempted many centuries earlier by Rāma Kamhèng, a gesture intended to demonstrate the ruler's legitimacy as an authentic, universal monarch. In the Buddhist tradition, based on the legends of the emperor Aśoka, a universal ruler alone has the power to extend his conquests peacefully and to move and distribute relics" (pp. 181-182). The Thai chronicle of the reign of King Rāma I, however, mentions the removal of 1,248 Buddha images from the north, and only the enshrinement of the Buddha's relics in Bangkok without information on the latter's provenance. The writer also says that iconography of Thai sculpture developed greatly in the reign of King Rāma III (1824-1851).

The author then discusses the Gandhārarattha Buddha image in the attitude of calling down the rain, cast by command of King Rāma I (1782-1809). Here he observes "the attire, with its complicated drapery and the evident emphasis laid on the pleating, looks like a deliberate attempt to evoke the art of Gandhāra, although such an attempt is most unexpected at that early date" (p. 184). The reviewer would like to



think that the monastic dress of this seated Buddha image probably copies that of the Chinese style, which is the reason why it looks like the Gandhāra drapery, from where the Chinese Buddha image originated. As for the two (not three, as in the book) Rāmāyaṇa marble slabs found at Ayudhya (pp. 188-190), the reviewer is quite sure that they were both carved in the reign of King Rāma III at the same time as those at Wat Po in Bangkok, and were presumably given by the king to the governor of Ayudhya when the latter was restoring Wat Na Pra Men in that town. The two slabs had been discovered at that Buddhist monastery, before they were transferred to the Ayudhya Museum.

Then come the conclusions and the appendices, which are divided into two small chapters. The first one concerns the Buddha image with its characteristics, monastic attire, royal adornments, gestures and attitudes. The second chapter deals with the Wheels of the Law, including the new information that "the only example of a free-standing Wheel of about the same date [with the Dvāravati period] seems to be the one discovered some twenty years ago at Lingarajupalem, east of the Godavari Delta" (p. 206). On the same page, "a clay votive tablet from Ku Bua (site No. 1)" is in reality a small carved stone tablet. The two chapters are illustrated with many drawings.

"Advice to collectors" by Jean-Michel Beurdeley follows, dealing with guidelines regarding the sculpture of Thailand in order to spare the collector some disappointments and useless regrets. The writer then speaks of bronzes, the thermoluminescence dating process, patina, bronze diseases, stone, agglomerated stone, stucco and terracotta, ivory, wood, gold, silver, hard stones; and then conclusions.

The subsequent part is "Notes", which are very useful for further research on sculpture in Thailand. The writer has made a mistake on page 216 in using the name *M.C. Yachai Diskul* instead of *M.C. Yachai Chitrabongs* (No. 2). He has given some interesting opinions such as identifying the bronze image of Śrīvijaya style from Kosum Pisai, Mahasarakham, northeastern Thailand, as the teaching Buddha, instead of Maitreya as formerly supposed by Professor George Coedès (No. 17); the large pendant hanging from the necklace does not seem to appear,

before the reign of King Prasat Thong (1630-1656; No. 45) and the connection between the name Gandhāra and the Gandhārarattha Buddha image (No. 70). In no. 44, however, the word "*Chao Ma*" should have been "*Chao Mae*".

"Commentaries on the illustrations" by Jean-Michel Beurdeley, as mentioned above, has been omitted in the French text. Here only the major points of interest will be raised briefly. In figure 1 of the text the author admits that the Emerald Buddha was discovered in a ruined *chedi* at Chiang Rai in northern Thailand in 1434, taken to Laos in 1551 and brought back to Thailand again by King Rāma I in 1780. For figure 21 the reviewer wonders whether it should be attributed to the ninth or tenth century rather than around the eighth. In figure 30, as far as the reviewer knows, most of them were discovered in the *prang* of Wat Phra Si Ratana Mahathat, Supanburi, and probably represent the Buddha descending from Tavatimsa Heaven, as can be observed from the two parasols still above the head of the Master. Figure 50 might be later than the seventh or eighth century, as the Buddha is wearing the monastic dress after the Pāla fashion. Figures 54 and 55 might both belong to the seventh century, as their resemblance to the Indian Gupta and post-Gupta prototypes is still very strong. As for figure 59, would it not be better to classify the image in the U Thong Style A in the twelfth century, as it shows a mixture of many influences especially that of Lopburi art? Figure 68 is surely Śiva, and his upper left hand is holding a fly-whisk like the image of the same god at Prambanan in Java. Figure 70, in the opinion of the reviewer, is probably older than figure 69, the back part of the hat and the ears of which are very much stylized. Figure 69 might be attributed to the ninth century instead of the eighth. Could Maitreya of figure 73 be compared to the Khmer Prei Kmeng style (drawing fig. 56e in *Le Cambodge, manuel d'archéologie* by J. Boisselier), and therefore dated to the early eighth century rather than late eighth or early ninth? As for figure 97, could the column beside the elephant support a lamp instead of a roof, as some of them still have a few steps attached behind? Figure 98 still wears the earrings of typical Khmer style, though the author says that "the garment and adornments of this statue, more or less influenced by Sinhalese antecedents, show



how complex were the traditions of Thai art, which here departs deliberately from Khmer models". The bronze female divinity from Kampheng Phet (fig. 104) should be attributed, according to the opinion of the reviewer, to the Ayudhya style of the early sixteenth century, as the bronze standing Śiva from the same town (fig. 134). Figure 122, representing a gold image of the Buddha subduing Māra, was probably discovered in the crypt of Wat Mahathat, Ayudhya, instead of that of Wat Rājapūrana.

Subsequently, there follow the glossary on the Khmer, Pāli, Sanskrit and Thai words used in the text, the bibliography on English, French and German books and articles concerning sculpture in Thailand, a map of Thailand, and plans of Ayudhya and Sukhothai.

At the end of the book are chronological tables describing briefly events and the arts in India, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), southeast Asia, Thailand and China from the *mahāparinirvāṇa* (death) of the Buddha down to 1910 A.D., finishing with an index.

As has been said at the beginning of the review, Professor Boisselier's volume is a very important document on sculpture in Thailand, therefore it should be read and consulted by everybody who is interested in the sculpture of Thailand and of southeast Asia in general. This reviewer has only pinpointed a very few errors of the learned author, as well as indicated some discrepancies in matters of opinion.

*M.C. Subhadradis Diskul*

*Silpakorn University  
Bangkok*

**Southeast Asian Ceramics, Ninth through Seventeenth Centuries**

*Dean F. Frasc  *

*New York, The Asia Society, 1976; 144 pp., 124 pl.*

The publication of Mr. Frasc  's brilliant and scholarly work was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for Arts, a U.S. Government agency at Washington, D.C., and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The unique book encompasses the wares of the Khm  r, the Thai, and the Vietnamese of Annam or Tonkin. It is thus a unique work for its coverage of the entire southeast Asian ceramic spectrum. It is specially valuable for the depth with which it analyzes those so little-known wares. Furthermore, Mr. Frasc   has utilized a unique source, which has heretofore been almost totally neglected from the ceramic standpoint: namely the lovely depictions of Khm  r-type ceramic wares on the ancient Javanese bas-reliefs of the Candi Lara Jongrang of the famous Prambanan in eastern Java, similar work on the spectacular monument of Borobodur, and on some of the Khm  r monuments in Cambodia and Thailand.

Mr. Frasc   has also assembled a collection of unusually fine photographs, including one colorplate of a large Khm  r storage jar. To my knowledge, no other writer has exploited so thoroughly the ancient stone monuments for such a ceramic purpose.

The Khm  r section of the book also has two helpful maps of archeological sites and monuments in southeast Asia, along with a similar map of the archeological monuments and the kiln sites in Thailand and Viet Nam, which represent meticulous research on Mr. Frasc  's part.

The section on Thailand deals, of course, with a much better-known and more frequently researched area. Yet even here Mr. Frasc   has also made some very valuable contributions, including sections on the little-known K  long, Sankamphaeng, Cham Pawai, Wan Nua, and B  n Thong Hua, and other more recently discovered kiln sites in Thailand.



This section of the book on Thailand and its ceramic wares also has two line drawings showing the unique methods used by the Thai in firing their wares by the use of tubular stands, or pontils, ceramic discs with five projecting legs, and the unique "firing boxes for bowls", technically known as saggars, that were used at the Sankamphaeng kilns, as well as in Viet Nam.

Like the preceding section, that on Viet Nam is also graced with some superb halftone plates, and one arresting colorplate of a large Thai fourteenth or fifteenth-century celadon bowl, and a colorplate illustration of one of the famous Sukhōthai "fish design" plates of painted stoneware. This section also discusses and illustrates some of the unique Thai potters' efforts in ceramic tiles and other architectural pieces, including an unusual example of an end-tile, and a monumental Thai architectural finial in the shape of a painted-ware *singha*; several illustrations of unusual *k'endi* water bottles; *phān*-type offering vessels; large storage jars; and examples of Thai covered bowls of various types and shapes.

The section on the Vietnamese wares is equally prolific for its illustrations of unusual pieces, including one fine colorplate of a large, brown-glazed storage jar, and two beautifully colored and decorated large Vietnamese-ware dishes, a colorplate of a large storage jar covered with dragon and floral designs, a *phān*-type pedestal dish with a lotus flower decoration in its center, and a series of typical Vietnamese-style lotus petal panels around its pedestal.

Parenthetically, I would like to note that the Vietnamese potters and artists had almost a mania for using the lotus petal panel-type of decoration, which frequently embellishes the sides of jars and the area above the footrim.

Mr. Frascché has also illustrated many of the small covered bowls that were produced in such vast numbers by the Vietnamese potters, which seemingly flooded the ceramic export trade to the Philippines and Indonesia where so many of these attractive little pieces have been found in recent years.

In plate 71, Mr. Frasc   has illustrated a fifteenth-century Vietnamese painted-ware dish. This piece, and many others like it that have been found in Indonesia, closely resemble some of the fourteenth or fifteenth-century Sukh  thai painted-ware plates with their striking medallion-like center figures, usually encircled with plain rings, and with a curious abstract leaf design usually running around the rim of the plate.

As this reviewer has suggested in a recent article\*, and as many of the illustrations in Mr. Frasc  's book make so clear, the Vietnamese potters had a real preference for use of lotus petal panels as decorative devices on their wares, especially around the lower sides of bowls and large jars. It should also be noted in passing, however, that the Vietnamese expression of this decorative device differs considerably from that of the Chinese, from whom the Vietnamese potters and artists undoubtedly borrowed. The Vietnamese lotus petal panels are generally found around the base of the large storage jars, around the upper inner surface of smaller bowls, and around the outer rim of large plates (see plates 115, 121, 122, 123, and 133, as well as plate 86, for conspicuous examples of such use of this decorative device). Moreover, the Vietnamese lotus petal panels employ more elongated forms of expression than their Chinese counterparts.

Finally, in conclusion, I should stress that Mr. Frasc   has made a real contribution to knowledge of the ceramic wares of southeast Asia. I am sure that this attractive and informative book will long remain the definitive work on this heretofore little-known subject.

C. Nelson Spinks

*St. Petersburg Beach,  
Florida*

---

\* C. Nelson Spinks, "A Reassessment of the Annamese Wares," *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 64, part 1, January, 1976, pp. 41-52, with 26 half-tone plates, five of which depict similarly decorated Sukh  thai plates. On pp. 51-52 the author advanced the view that some of the Chinese ceramic influences so evident in the work of the Thai potters and artists, especially those at the Sukh  thai kilns, may have reached that Thai Kingdom from Annam and   amp  , rather than through the Sukh  thai Kingdom's rather infrequent and tenuous diplomatic relations with China, first initiated by Sukh  thai's celebrated King Rama Kamhaeng around the end of the 13th century.



**Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy** *Benjamin A. Batson, comp. & ed.*

*Data Paper No. 96, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York; Cornell University, 1974; 102 pp.; US\$ 4.-*

Mr. Batson's work consists of a number of documents, originally in English or rendered into English, which date with one exception from the years between the beginning of the Seventh Reign in 1925 and the coup of 1932. Each document is preceded by an interpretative introduction, based on a range of Thai and English sources.

The documents include a piece entitled "Nationalism and change", published in *Samaggi Sara*, the journal of the association of Thai students in England in December 1928. There is also a more radical Marxist critique, dating from 1930. The editor does not tell us much about its origins—it was found in the government archives—but his introduction includes a most interesting *aperçu* on the necessarily ambivalent attitude of the Siamese Government to the neighbouring colonial governments, and to the nationalist movements opposed to them: as Prince Devawongs said, the Government could not help against insurrections, but it would not encourage them.

More interesting still, perhaps, are the pieces that relate to the end of the absolute monarchy. The volume begins with documents in which King Prajadhipok sought advice on what he saw as the main problems at the outset of his reign from F.B. Sayre, Adviser on Foreign Affairs during the previous reign, and from Prince Damrong. At that time the King, and still more his advisers, doubted the prospect of parliamentary government. The changes that had been made, including the creation of the Supreme Council and the reinstatement of princely power, were approved. Sayre thought there should be a prime minister, Prince Damrong did not. King and Prince favoured municipal councils: the plan (as in some British dependencies) was to develop representative government at the local level first.

The reestablishment of princely power no doubt contributed to the 1932 coup. So, of course, did the economic situation. During late 1931 and early 1932, as the economy deteriorated, members of the Government differed over the course to follow; the British Economic Adviser, E.L. Hall-Patch, advocated retention of the gold standard even after Britain had dropped it, while Prince Purachatra opposed it. Prince Purachatra won, but that did not stop the revolution. Mr. Batson reprints the King's famous speech to military officers of 5 February 1932. Prajadhipok's predecessor had published his views under a pseudonym. It was not wise to give so much publicity to a speech in which the monarch disarmingly admitted his inability to cope with overmastering economic problems.

The other famous document Mr. Batson reprints derives from the post-coup, not the absolutist, period: it is the King's striking abdication message, already reprinted, for example, in Landon's *Siam in Transition*. Before presenting that message, Mr. Batson gives us some documents relating to the reform contemplated immediately before the coup, but not carried out, apparently because of princely advice. The King clearly believed the time had come for a measure of representative government. Stevens, Sayre's successor, and Phya Wisarn Waja, submitted a scheme, though they did not recommend it. It included a plan for a legislative council, either appointed or half appointed by the King, and half elected indirectly.

As Mr. Batson points out, that was in some ways strikingly like the constitution adopted by the Promoters. But there were differences that—aside from personality clashes, mistrust and intrigue—help to account for the King's decision to break with the Promoters. The nature and extent of the King's power was one. But there was truth in Prajadhipok's assertion that he objected, not to making over power to the people, but to making it over to a small group. Once the Promoters had seized power, however, he had no effective means either of regaining it, or, as he wished, of making the new regime truly constitutional.



My own study of the period, much more limited than Mr. Batson's, suggests that the King was remarkably consistent in the period 1932-1935. He was not always right in his judgments. One must wonder, for example, whether he was not too free with his use of the "Communist" label, though his object may have been to elicit a moderate conservatism in political action.

Mr. Batson's little book is full of insight and interest. We must hope it is the forerunner of a substantial work from him on Thailand at a critical moment in its history, and on King Prajadhipok, not the least remarkable monarch in a remarkable dynasty: humane and perceptive, yet unsuccessful.

*Nicholas Tarling*

*University of Auckland*

แผนพัฒนาการเมืองไปสู่การปกครองระบอบประชาธิปไตยตามแนวพระราชดำริของ  
พระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว (พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๔-๒๔๗๕)

[The Plans of King Prajadhipok to Introduce a Democratic System in Siam,  
1926-1932]

*Sonthi Techanan, ed.*

*Bangkok, Kasetsart University, Dept. of Political Science &  
Administration, 1976, 170 pp.*

Sonthi Techanan's volume brings together a number of documents relating to political developments in the reign of Siam's last absolute ruler, taken primarily from the files of the National Archives at Bangkok. The documents are classified in three sections: the first concerns proposals for a limited measure of local self-government, the second concerns proposals for a constitution and some sort of representative assembly at the national level, and the third consists of some comments of King Prajadhipok on a statement by Mussolini regarding the relationship between political development and a national philosophy of education. The editor has provided a general introduction as well as a brief introduction for each of the three sections, and an appendix gives the King's 1927 memorandum "Democracy in Siam".

Most of the documents in the first section have not been published previously, while the entire contents of the second and third sections, as well as the appendix, are included in the volume of Seventh Reign documents edited by the present reviewer<sup>1</sup>. Documents are given in their original languages, which for about half of the total collection is English.

The organization is in some respects unsatisfactory. The three sections are by no means comparable in size and significance, the first running to 110 pages, the second to 44 pages, and the third a mere seven pages, of which only two pages are needed for the central document. While the King's comments on education in Italy, and the future of education and political development in Siam, are of interest (there is an English translation of the King's memorandum in *Siam's Political Future*,



p. 96), they would hardly seem to merit a separate section and might better have been incorporated in one of the other two sections (as could also be said of the appendix). Even the major division into 'democracy from below' and 'democracy from above' is to a degree artificial, and tends to give a contrasting or competing character to what were more nearly complementary aspects of a general scheme of political development.

The editing also raises certain problems. The brief introductions are largely limited to a summary inventory of contents and some general discussion of the "meaning" of the documents, while providing little of the historical context necessary to place the documents in perspective. This is particularly true in the case of "Democracy in Siam", where no information is provided on the genesis of that fascinating memorandum and its significance in the deliberations of the King and his advisers, surrounding the establishment of the Committee of the Privy Council. In a number of other cases as well, the reader will need a considerable knowledge of Seventh Reign events and personalities in order to understand and evaluate the documentary evidence.

On another important point opinions may differ. The editor charges that previous writers on the last years of the absolute monarchy, including this reviewer, in their concentration on political change at the national level, have "totally" ignored the importance King Prajadhipok attached to local self-government as the best beginning point for experimentation with representative institutions in Siam. While denying that this point has been totally neglected, this reviewer would argue that the question is one of degree, and that the evidence is somewhat mixed. King Prajadhipok did on a number of occasions indicate that elected councils might best be experimented with first at the local rather than the national level. On the other hand, in the 1926 memorandum "Problems of Siam", in which he analyzed future political development at length, municipalities and local self-government are discussed in a single brief paragraph, and are not mentioned at all in the "nine questions" concerning which the King asked advisers for opinions. Furthermore, the only political innovations of the Reign actually implemented

prior to June 1932 were at the national level. And while the editor places considerable emphasis on the King's 1931 remarks to American journalists in which he again disclosed plans for introducing a limited franchise at the local level, the evidence clearly indicates that in the months following the King's return to Bangkok the main political proposal under active consideration was for a constitution and national assembly, while the draft 'municipalities act' continued to languish in the Law Drafting Department of the Ministry of Justice (where it had been since the beginning of 1931) with only an occasional sporadic inquiry as to what had become of it. (The editor raises the interesting question of the possible connection between Pridi's posting in that department and the slow progress of the draft municipalities act.)

The reasons for this rather ambivalent record and attitude toward local self-government are not difficult to find. It was widely considered in government circles in the last years of the absolute monarchy that Siam's experiments with appointed municipalities dating from the Fifth Reign had not been a success, and a number of influential advisers expressed doubts about their potential for development into more representative bodies. A special problem was that several of Siam's major urban areas, such as Bangkok and Phuket, were ethnically largely non-Thai, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs particularly expressed concern that the draft municipalities act, modelled on acts in neighboring colonial areas and specifying residency and property requirements for voting, but not Thai citizenship, could result in "Chinese" administrations in major Thai cities and towns. The economic crisis of 1931-1932 also tended to undermine proposals for experimenting with local self-government: on the one hand, in the crisis atmosphere many felt that the situation called for more drastic innovations than the relatively mild proposals for local councils, while at a time when the central government was having great difficulties collecting tax revenues it was feared that the proposed municipal governments would prove financially unviable.

It might be added that the post-1932 experience with elected municipal governments has not been such as to make them appear as a likely foundation for Thai democracy.



It is probably wrong to see, or even to expect to find, a consistency in views and policy over a period of years when Siam and the world were changing radically, and the statements and actions of the King and his advisers on the question of local self-government would seem to bear this out. It is certainly true that King Prajadhipok saw representative institutions at the local level as an important element in his attempts to lead Siam in gradual steps toward a democratic system of government; and it is perhaps true that that element has to a degree been neglected by previous writers on the last years of the absolute monarchy. In the work under review, the issue would seem to be somewhat overemphasized, at least in the relative quantity of documentation provided.

But by making the documents available in an attractive format, the editor and Kasetsart University have made it possible for the reader to judge for himself, and have provided an important addition to the limited but growing number of publications of primary source material on King Prajadhipok and his attempts to introduce a measure of representative rule from the throne of an absolute monarch. If, as the introductory material indicates, the volume is to be one of a series of documentary studies to be published by Kasetsart University, historians and others in the humanities and social sciences may look forward to further valuable contributions.

*Benjamin A. Batson*

*Cornell University*

---

1 *Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy*, Data Paper no. 96, (Ithaca, New York; Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program; 1974).

**Modern Thai Politics: From Village to Nation**

*Clark D. Neher, ed.*

*Cambridge, Massachusetts; Schenkman, 1976, 487 pp.*

Professor Neher's large volume brings together 22 articles and excerpts from larger works, all previously published, which span the years 1947-1973. They are divided by the editor into five sections: "Political background", "Political culture and environment", "Rural political process", "National political process", and "The study of Thai politics". All of the selections were written in English originally; it is unfortunate that it was not thought possible and/or desirable to include some translations from recent Thai-language scholarship or from other languages. Also, the collection is not only exclusively English-language scholarship, it is overwhelmingly American scholarship: of the 22 pieces, 16 are of American authorship, 4 are of Thai authorship (of which 3 are in the historical section), and 2 are by Europeans. In fact the final section of the book, "The study of Thai politics", is devoted largely to debating the impact that American scholars, their values, and their methods have had on contemporary Thai studies. A final feature of the composition worth noting is the relatively small representation of political science; only six of the authors are clearly identifiable as political scientists, while the great majority are sociologists or anthropologists. As might be predicted, much space is devoted to discussion of "patron-client relations", "loose structure", and other such concepts central to recent American sociological and anthropological research on Thailand.

It is impossible in the brief space of such a review to discuss, or even to describe, more than two-score separate contributions. Comments here will be largely limited to the selections in the first section, with a few observations on some of the later pieces.



In an introduction (there is one for each of the five sections, varying considerably in length, content and usefulness), the editor describes very briefly the traditional Thai polity, and then discusses at greater length Thai political history of the past century. On the whole it is a useful summary, notable particularly for its cautious hint of possible differences between Sukhothai political theory and Sukhothai political practice. Inevitably, in treating such a vast topic in a few pages there are some questionable assertions and generalizations (this reviewer would particularly take issue with the statement, on page 10, that "the coup d'état of 1932 was directed against the king's aggrandizement of power and his reluctance to further 'modernize' the government").

Prince Dhani's lecture on "The old Siamese conception of the monarchy", reprinted from this journal and predating any of the other selections by more than a decade, is a learned though rather personal and "loosely structured" exposition of traditional Thai kingship and the Indic norms upon which it rested.

The selection by Akin Rabibhadana is the concluding chapter from his master's degree thesis, published by Cornell University and widely recognized as one of the landmark works in Thai studies in recent years. Shorn of the empirical data which makes the whole so fascinating, the excerpt published here is considerably less effective. What is basically a very important but rather simple idea is stated and restated, although an occasional brilliant paragraph like that beginning "observed in this light, there appears to have been a cyclical development in the course of Thai history . . ." (p. 51) more than makes up for the redundancy and repetition in the pages which precede it.

David Wyatt's article (1968) on nineteenth-century Thai family politics, and particularly the emergence of the Bunnag family as wielders of power overshadowing even that of kings, is an important study which has long needed reprinting. It is only to be regretted that his appendix, which is not long but which contains the data which underlies the whole and makes it so valuable, is not published as well, and the more so as several of the other selections are followed by lengthy and nonessential

bibliographies. (Indeed, there seems to have been no consistent policy regarding references and bibliographies: in some cases they are included when they are not especially needed—e.g. Namsirichai and Vichit-Vadakan; in some cases they are left out when they are definitely needed—e.g. Scott; and in one case—Hanks—only the partial list of references which could fit on the last page of the text is given.)

The final selection in the "Political background" section is chapter III, "The causes of the Revolution", from Thawatt Mokarapong's book, *History of the Thai Revolution: A Study in Political Behaviour* (1972). The present reviewer has already commented at length on that work in this journal (July 1973, pp. 186-196); suffice it to say that despite some confusion and misinformation, particularly regarding Thai students in France in the mid-1920s, the 'Bowaradej case', and the economic crisis of 1931-1932 and its effects, the selected chapter provides a useful discussion of the background of the 1932 coup.

Of the 18 selections in the other four sections, some are very good (e.g. by Hanks, Piker, Keyes, Scott, and the second Phillips contribution), most are at least useful, and several are decidedly bad.

Aside from the varying quality of the selections, and the rather unusual categories into which they are arranged, particularly the last, this reader was struck by the fact that the book seems to have been a long time in press. The most recent of the writings dates from 1973, and although the first introduction carries events down to April 1976 (a rather unfortunate place to have the narrative end) some of the other editorial material seems to have been written considerably earlier. Thawatt Mokarapong, for example, has not been the Deputy Governor of Chiang Rai for years, and there are other anachronisms.

If indeed the book was a long time in press, it is regrettable that more time was not devoted to the proofs, for the mechanical aspects of the editing are badly and carelessly done. Typographical errors abound, footnotes are missing, and the haphazard and illogical treatment of references and bibliographies has been mentioned above. The selection



by Riggs reaches the point where the editor apparently intended for it to terminate, then mysteriously skips the next five paragraphs of the original text before adding another two paragraphs, which are thus both misplaced and largely irrelevant to the preceding text. And the introductory material to Professor Sharp's concluding essay, which begins on page 467, is inexplicably found in the middle of the preceding selection, tucked between the text and footnotes on page 458.

Opinions may vary on the quality of the content of this collection of studies of Thai politics—this reviewer would settle for "uneven". But regarding the quality of production there can be no argument; it is bad, and the poor handling of the mechanical details inevitably detracts from the value of the work as a whole.

*Benjamin A. Batson*

*Cornell University*

### **The Religion of the Hmong Njua**

*Nusit Chindarsi*

*Bangkok, The Siam Society, 1976; 197 pp., ill., tables;*

*100 baht (US\$5.—)*

Fifteen years ago we still had rather fragmentary reports on the hill tribes which during the last eight decades or so have gradually intruded into the northern parts of Thailand. But since then more or less complete ethnographic and linguistic monographs have been published. One of the authors is Nusit Chindarsi, a pupil of Professor W.R. Geddes of the University of Sydney, Australia. He has done a thorough job, after a sojourn of three years in the region of Meto, Chiang Mai Province, on the Hmong Njua (literally 'Green Miao'), who are in literature mostly referred to as the 'Blue Miao'.

Of his rich material he has selected the highly interesting religious sphere with its wealth of rites and ceremonies. The same as other hill tribes, "the Hmong believe in many supernatural beings—gods, spirits of places, household spirits, malicious spirits, and spirits of the dead". Most of their "ritual activity is concerned with trying to determine the will of the spirits in order to prevent or cure illness" (p. 17). Although the consequent sacrifices are an impediment to becoming rich, they are a spur on increased work and efforts. Unique in the literature on the subject are the 15 drawings of domestic animals to explain the different kinds of repartition of meat by which the various clans and subclans recognize their members.

Important are the shamans, as they wield great influence upon the people. There are priests also, but they "cannot enter a trance or be a spirit medium" (p. 40). Their activity is restricted, compared to that of the shamans. Several house spirits live in a Hmong house; for example, the spirits of the 'middle post', of the 'two stoves' and of the 'door'. The last looks after people and animals in the household. "The souls of the dead must ask permission from the door spirit to go out from the house to the other world, otherwise they will be prevented from going" (p. 23). "Each Hmong village must have at least one death drum, which is very sacred and never beaten for pleasure" (p. 27).



Gods decide on the life of every individual and how he is to follow a cycle of reincarnation: alternately 12 times as a human, 12 times as an animal, and so forth endlessly. The god Nyawang lets souls draw a licence from a supply of licences which have different expiry dates. Thus is determined for every soul the length of time spent in the world of men.

"The souls of the recent dead can be harmful to the living, if they stay near the people and places they knew in this life. The Hmong go to a great deal of trouble to send them on their way, to prevent them from returning, to placate them, and to make sure the souls of the living stay at home." (p. 32)

A remarkable ritual is the building of one of five kinds of so-called 'silver and golden bridges', when the shaman divines that a person is sick because his souls have gone astray in the forest and that they must be helped to find the way home. This ritual reminds the reviewer of the construction of a bridge for a sick Lisu woman observed near Ban Tham Ngob, Chiang Mai Province.

A description of divination methods with divination horns, chicken bones or joss sticks is followed by a nearly endless series of ceremonies which the author has grouped as follows: (a) for birth and death, (b) for protection against misfortunes, (c) for curing illnesses, (d) for agricultural activities, and (e) for celebrations of thanksgiving to all kinds of gods and spirits, and of social community including the New Year festival.

Death rites and their preparation, as might easily be imagined, take the greatest part of the book. There are many regulations for every detail from death to burial and afterwards, differing according to age at death, wealth, prestige, and clan. A peculiar feature is that "a man of any clan, who has learned the long *tergee* prayer must be invited to say it, telling the dead man the way to go. The Hmong believe that if there is no saying of the *tergee* the deceased will not know that he has died" (p. 82). A translation of this *tergee* takes three and one half pages of the book, and nine pages are consumed for the *sersai* prayer spoken at the deathbed of an old man.

To appease gods or spirits in case of illness, there are no less than 23 rituals, mostly connected with animal sacrifices, to be executed by shamans or priests. One of those ceremonies, 'asking for a child', is interesting because a tray is used or "offering box, which was made of the stalks of the banana tree, skewered together with bamboo . . . filled with several extremely crude figurines of animals fashioned from clay. Pieces of coloured cloth were hung from the bamboo sticks which were stuck in the four corners of the offering box which was placed before the wall opposite the door" (p. 110). After a ritual the offering box was brought together with a chicken and a dog to a stream as offerings to the spirits of the forest, streams and mountain. The offering box, of course, is the well-known *satuang* used by some other people in case of sickness.

Apart from the death rituals, other ceremonies and beliefs surrounding the life cycle, such as birth, courting (including the famous ball game), and marriage, are also related in detail.

Very helpful are the many case studies following the general description of a rite or ceremony.

On the great difficulty of obtaining reliable information on religion and eschatology from tribal people, Professor Nusit makes a significant remark: "The inconsistency or even contradiction between two sets of beliefs does not give the Hmong any concern. They are interested in gaining practical benefits from the spirits, not in orthodoxy of belief" (p. 17).

This book is testimony to the excellent results that can be obtained when a field worker stays long enough with the people he is studying. The only criticisms are that there is an excessive number of misprints (one of many: 42°F of course are not 55 but 5,5°C), and that for the ambiguous transcription of Hmong and Thai words the author would better have had a look at Mary R. Haas's system of transliteration.

*Hans E. Kauffmann*

*Munich*



**The Golden Peninsula : Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia**

*Charles F. Keyes*

*New York & London, Macmillan, 1977; 370 pp.*

Charles F. Keyes, one of America's well-regarded scholars on southeast Asia and in particular Thailand, has made a significant contribution to the literature on the peoples and cultures of mainland southeast Asia with the publication of *The Golden Peninsula*.

His major objective, as stated in the introduction, is "to provide a general survey...of the ways in which cultural traditions in mainland Southeast Asia have emerged from and have guided the experiences of peoples as they have adapted themselves to a variety of circumstances in the history of the region..." Keyes proceeds to describe and analyze the region in five well-defined and succinct chapters.

The introduction offers a systematic presentation of the various theoretical models that have been tested and applied in the area, both indigenous and foreign. The indigenous models stem essentially from myths, legends, and traditional histories of the peoples under investigation. The foreign models, however, generally emanate from colonial officials, missionaries, and anthropologists from the U.S.A. and Europe. To explain mainland southeast Asia's socio-cultural diversity, the author includes Western models based on cultural diffusion, social structure and adaptation, culture and personality, culture and adaptation, among others.

The first chapter describes the 'primitive' and tribal cultures that have been undergoing socio-cultural changes. Those groups include the Semang of the Malay Peninsula, the Chin of northern Burma, and the Karens of Burma and Thailand. Chapter 2 elaborates on two important categories of civilization: the Theravada Buddhist civilization of Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia; and the Sinitic civilization of Viet Nam. Keyes takes into account the historical backgrounds of those two types of civilization. Chapter 3 offers a profile of rural culture in Theravada

Buddhist communities, with focus on a comparative study of research carried out in the 1950s and 1960s in lower and upper Burma, central, northern, and northeastern Thailand, central Laos, and central Cambodia, in their appropriate historical contexts. In chapter 4, Keyes elucidates an important and controversial issue: tradition and revolution in Viet Nam. The fifth and final chapter is concerned with contemporary aspects of complex societies such as cities in mainland southeast Asia, a seminal topic for anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers.

It is difficult in a review to do justice to a book of this scope and magnitude. It is a very comprehensive, interesting, and well-written text for all scholars of mainland southeast Asia. The inclusion of theoretical models is commendable. Keyes's data and analysis on Thailand especially are useful and timely for observers of Thai society. The book is up-to-date and well illustrated, based on the author's own field work. For veterans of anthropological discourse on southeast Asia, this book displays impressive scholarship; but for initiates in southeast Asian studies, it may prove hard reading. The author and publisher are to be congratulated for a pace-setting publication.

*Mario D. Zamora*

*College of William & Mary  
Williamsburg, Virginia*



### **Gardening in Bangkok**

M.R. Pimsai Amranand; ill. M.R. Smansnid Svasti

2nd ed.; Bangkok, The Siam Society, 1976; 169 pp., 76 ill.;

100 baht (US\$ 5.-)

M.R. Pimsai Amranand's *Gardening in Bangkok*, now published in a second, enlarged edition, is the only book of its kind available in English in Thailand. That alone should assure it a place on the bookshelves of anyone embarking on the mysteries of garden cultivation in our sometimes inhospitable native soil, for besides practical advice it is also a source of such invaluable information as the Thai names for most ornamental shrubs and trees, and the places where various plants and tools may be bought in the capital.

But mere utility is not the only reason for owning a copy of M.R. Pimsai's attractively produced and illustrated book. Just as certain cookbooks can be recommended to people whose culinary interests end with making instant coffee, I can imagine a confirmed apartment dweller or even a reader in some distant temperate-zone country deriving both pleasure and instruction from her terse, no-nonsense prose.

Consider, for instance, the opening paragraph:

"Gardening in Bangkok can be very rewarding, but there are many problems that you may not have anticipated. You contend not only with climate and soil but also with superstitions, what Thai people like to grow, and the stupidity of your gardener.

Thus in a manner blunt and unmincing—more so, it might be added, than any foreign writer on the subject would dare be—is the tone established at the outset. This, it says, will be a sensible, unsentimental, down-to-earth book. It will deal with specifics. It will instruct.

And instruct it does, about its subject and also about local customs and traditions. It even offers such incidental bits of floral lore as the fact that the word "rose" comes from "rhod", meaning red, and that Cleopatra once "covered the floor of her banqueting hall to a depth of eighteen inches with rose petals for a feast in honor of Anthony". (There is also, of course, a practical chapter on how to grow roses in Bangkok, which tells you how to prepare the bed, how to prune, and where to buy duck droppings for manure.)

It tells you what kind of imported seeds do best here (*M.R. Pimsai* favors Burpee, but she admits that other gardeners of her acquaintance prefer Suttons), what kind of plants are believed to bring good luck in a Thai garden (fruit trees beginning with the syllable *ma*, such as *ma-muang*: "mango", and *ma-prow*: "coconut"), and what kind are anathema to the superstitious (frangipani, called *lantom* in Thai, "which has no meaning but which sounds like the word *ra-tom* which means sorrow"). You learn that some Thais shun the lovely Persian lilac tree (*Melia azadarach*) "because in Thai the name is *lian* or *krian*, and these mean 'to be lacking', and they assume that it means lacking in money"; but, characteristically, *M.R. Pimsai* has no time for such vague associations, commenting "a Persian lilac is a marvellous tree and because it grows so quickly and blooms when it is six inches high, I think people should change the meaning a little and make it mean lacking in sorrow or troubles, then the problem would be solved".

*M.R. Pimsai* tells you what to do about Bangkok's dismal soil ("so marvellous for growing rice" but "good for very little else"), how to achieve quick results on a bare plot of land, how to grow a lawn in sun or shade, and how to care for pot plants. She takes the mystery out of orchid cultivation (casually dropping, along the way, the information that "in Paris a face cream is made with orchid pollen which is very rich in proteins, amino acids, and vitamins which, all women know, are very good for ageing faces").

In brief, she tells you all you need to know and does so in a sprightly style that is highly personal. The only thing that one might wish for that is not included is a chapter on home vegetable gardening (there is, however, one on herbs), but perhaps this will be supplied in the third edition.

The book is illustrated with many excellent color and black-and-white photographs of plants and gardens, as well as clear, useful line drawings by *M.R. Smansnid Svasti*.

*William Warren*

*Chulalongkorn University  
Bangkok*