

Wat Chaiyaphrukmalā, Taling Chan, Bangkok

Known formerly as Wat Chaiyaphruk, this temple dates to the time of Ayutthaya but by the time of the first reign of the Bangkok era, Wat Chaiyaphruk had been abandoned. King Rama I ordered that the bricks remaining in the buildings be used in constructing the walls of Bangkok. His successor, King Rama II, however, ordered the temple reconstructed and provided building materials as well as some of his retainers to do the work. The continual warfare at the time impeded construction so that it could not be completed until later. King Rama III contributed to the rebuilding and also visited the temple. But it was not until 1851 when King Rama IV came to consecrate the temple with the new name of Wat Chaiyaphrukmalā as a royal temple second class that it was ready for use. The temple is located on the east bank of the Mahasawat Canal (also known as Khlong Kut) where it connects with Bangkok Noi Canal. The construction of other structures in the temple, including a school has continued until the present.

The name, Chaiyaphruk, literally means "Victorious Plant (or Tree)" is also known more commonly as *Khm* (*Cassia fistula*) and belongs to the *leguminosae* family. Why this name was given to the temple has been forgotten but the tree is considered one of nine auspicious trees in city building and the durable wood also used as house pillars or bridge supports. Thai City pillars, such as in Bangkok and Yala, have been made from the wood of this tree that is also

believed to bring good fortune. *Mala* means garland, so King Rama IV's renaming gave the temple the more auspicious title of "Victorious Tree Garland". In English the tree is known as Golden Shower because of its distinctive blooms and it was recently named Thailand's national tree.

Construction of the Mahasawat Canal commenced in the reign of King Rama III, the purpose of which was to provide a direct link with the Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom. Digging the canal was by manual labor and the use of hand tools available at the time, such as *pangki*,¹ mattocks, and spades. The canal reached 24 kilometers from its starting point on the Bangkok Noi Canal to the Nakhon Chaisi River (at a point close to the present-day Ngū Railway Station on line to Nakhon Pathom). Among the laborers were so-called *kha* from Cambodia, descendants of whom remained in the Taling Chan area, assimilating into the general population.² Supplementing them were 1,500 Chinese laborers hired during the reign of King Rama III. Longtime residents of the area recall hearing that the Chinese wore pigtails and trousers such as are seen in old pictures. The cost of hiring the Chinese totalled 25,550.25 baht. Originally, the canal was very narrow but the natural action of the water over the decades caused it to expand. Not considered finished until the reign of King Rama IV canal is still used today for transportation, shipping, and other purposes.

Notes

¹ A Chinese basket, usually made of bamboo, that was "clam-shaped" and attached perpendicularly to a pole and used for hauling dirt out of the canal.

² Probably brought back from areas now in the northwest of Cambodia, such as Stung Treng, which were seized by King Rama II in 1813.