



The Universal Exhibition, Paris 1878

This exhibition was formally opened in May 1878, and open to the public from 20 May to 10 November, by which time it had been visited by just over 16 million visitors. Thirty-six countries participated, and the site, at the Trocadero and the Champ de Mars, covered 75 ha. Among the pavilions were those of Siam and China, and the curiosities on display included a square Japanese piano and a prototype of the Statue of Liberty by the French sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904). In the 1860s he conceived the idea of presenting the United States with a monument for its 1876 centennial; construction began in 1875 and was funded by a special lottery that brought in \$400,000. It was shipped to the United States in numerous crates, reassembled, and inaugurated in 1886.¹

Edoardo Sonzogni in Milan planned to publish *L'Esposizione i Parigi del 1878 illustrata* in two volumes (there is some doubt as to whether the second volume ever appeared). In the first volume, a collection of a series of weekly magazines all dedicated to the exhibition, appear a few lines of description and line drawings of the Siamese and Chinese pavilions at the Trocadero and of the general reception on their opening held on 5 May. In the illustration of the opening, in the front left foreground two Chinese envoys can be seen in traditional mandarin robes, together with a youngish, vaguely oriental person with long black hair and a significant lack of moustache and beard, unlike the surrounding Europeans, dressed in frock coat, white bow tie, and waistcoat, with a tricorne in his white-gloved left hand.

This is almost certainly Prince Prisdang (1852–1935), who, however, does not mention the event in his autobiography. But King Chulalongkorn's diary (*Chotmai het Phraratchakit raiwan phak* 8, Bangkok 1971) notes on 26 July 1878, that Gréhan, the Siamese Consul in Paris,² reported that Prince Prisdang had been to the exhibition and then returned to London. Again according to King Chulalongkorn's diary, Prince Prisdang, a grandson of King Rama III, was accompanied to Paris in 1878 by Nai Thuan Surawong, later Phra Phairatchaphak-phakdi, a son of 'Chaokhun Thahan' (Won Bunnag). Prince Prisdang had graduated brilliantly in engineering in 1876 from King's College, London and, as he says in his own words, 'By the middle of C.E. 1877 I had asked for royal permission to go

¹ We understand that a Thai translation of Etienne-Galloix, *Le Royaume de Siam au Champ de Mars en 1878 et à la Cour de Versailles en 1686 – Deux Rois de Siam* (Paris, Challamel Aîné, 1878) was published by the Fine Arts Department in 1971, but this information was only received when this note was in press.

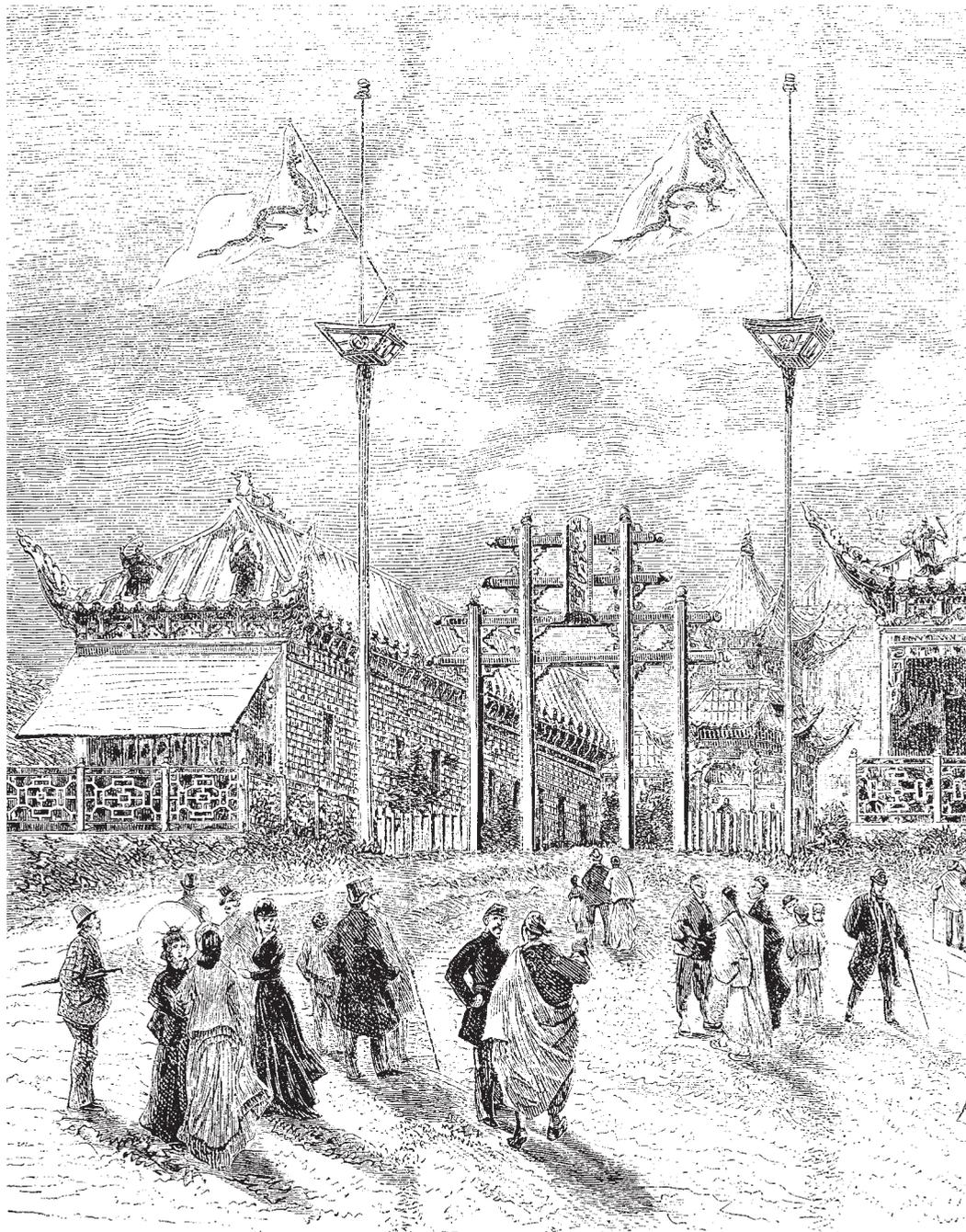
² Gréhan was given the title Phra Siam Dhuranuraks on 6 May 1863, probably the same day as his appointment as 'Consul de Sa Majesté le Suprême Roi de Siam'. He published *Le Royaume de Siam* in 1867, with many subsequent editions.



back to train and gain knowledge in civil engineering...’ He arrived in London that winter and became a student apprentice in the civil engineering firm of Sir John Hawkshaw, working from 1877–79 as an engineer trainee in England and Holland. Unfortunately, there are no entries in Prince Prisdang’s autobiography for 1878. The prince appears to have been marked out early for a diplomatic career, which formally started in 1879 when he was recruited for special diplomatic missions; the following year he entered the Foreign Service.

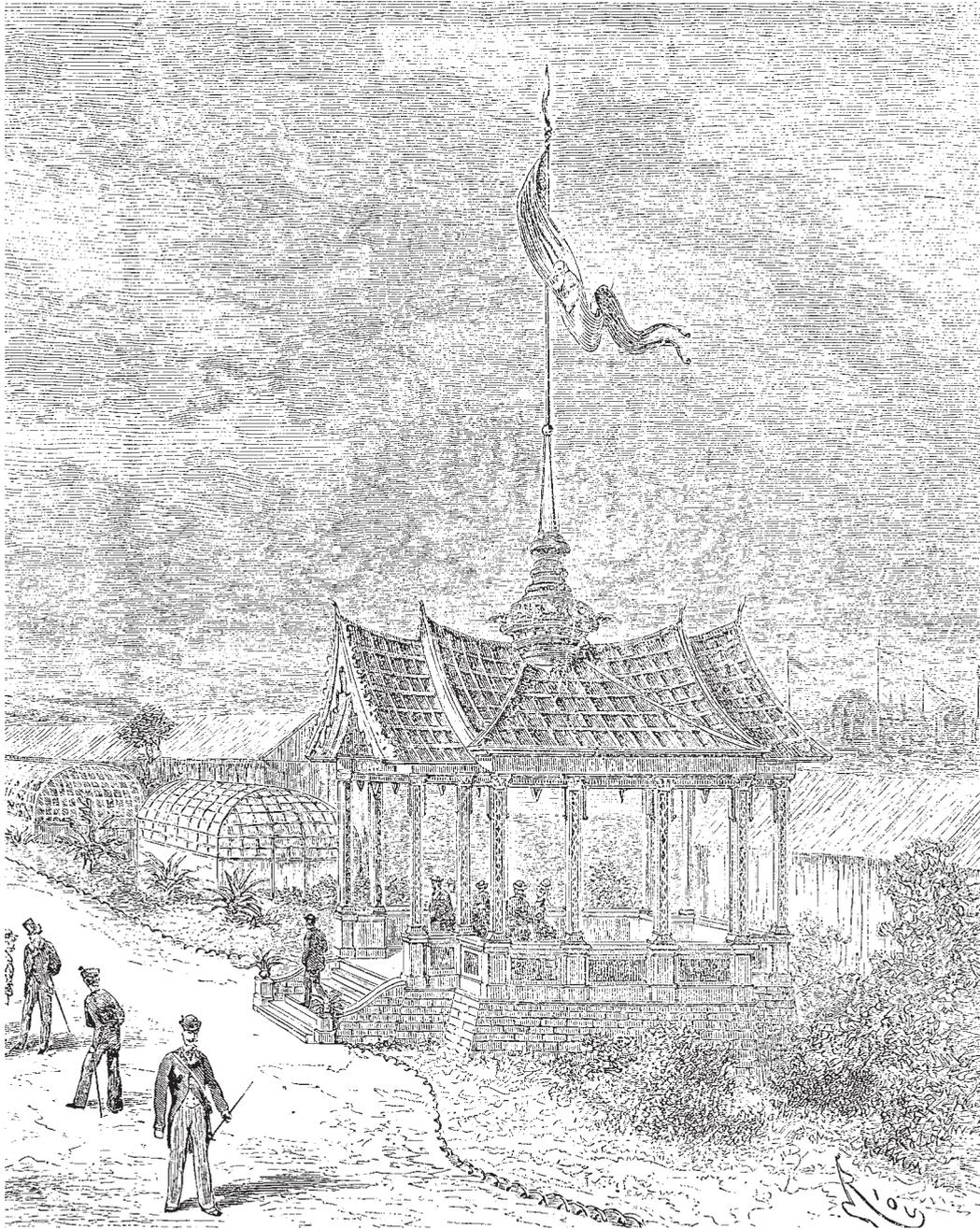
Siam took part in other international exhibitions, notably the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St Louis in 1904, when again a special pavilion was erected and filled with art and craft objects, while Siamese wares were distributed in other buildings constructed for the exhibition.

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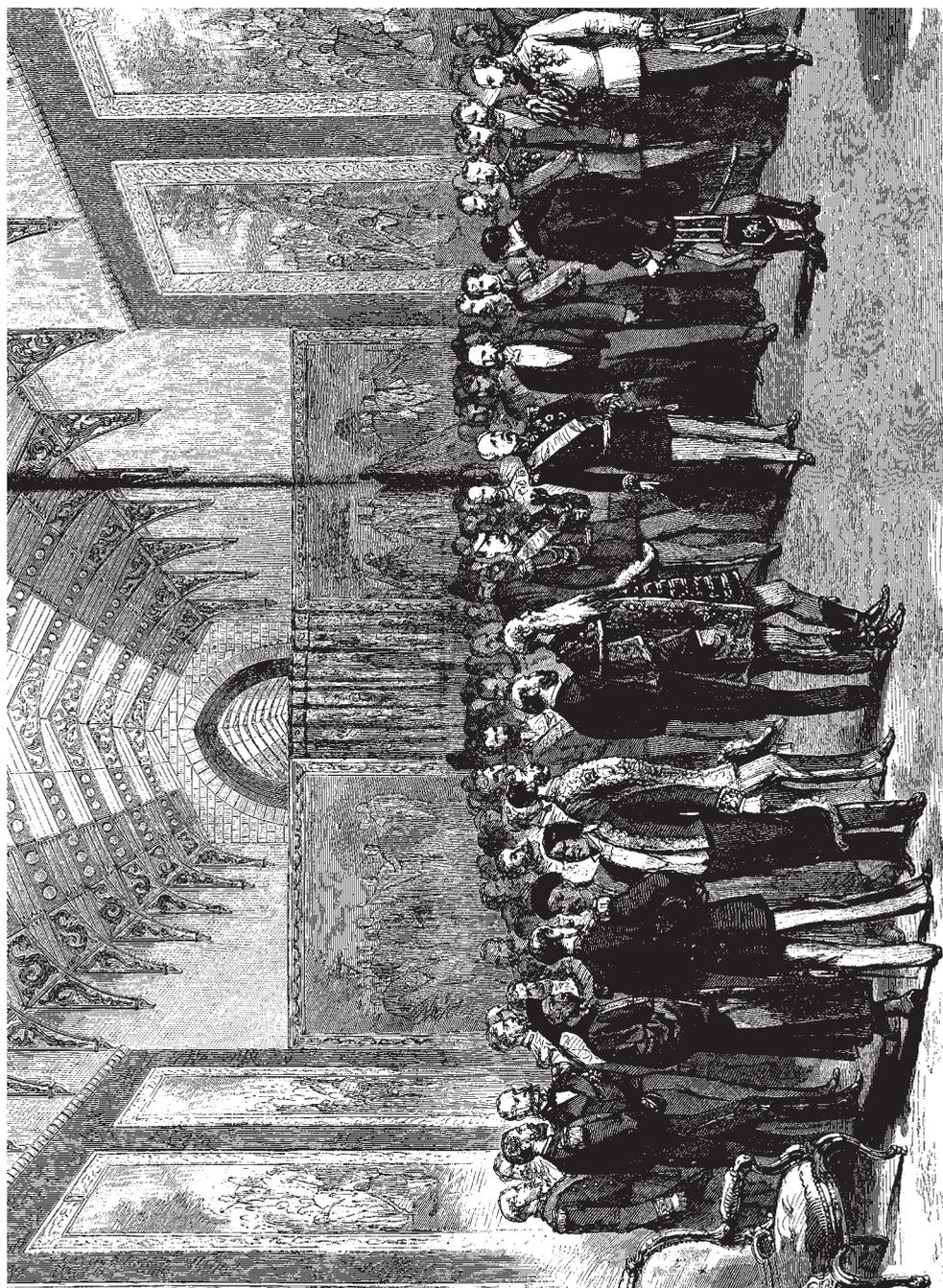
The Chinese pavilion





The Siamese pavilion





The formal opening of the exhibition, May 1878



