Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Western Architectural Influences in the Court of Siam 1851-1925

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design

Massey University, Wellington
NEW ZEALAND

Eakawin Khwanphulsri
2001
Abstract

This thesis examines the use of Western architecture in the design of the permanent and summer palaces of King Rama IV, King Rama V and King Rama VI of Thailand. It is a study of the use of interior spaces, and how the Kings and their families responded to their adapted Western interior environments, and how they maintained traditional ideas and practices in their daily lifestyles between 1851 and 1925.

The story by Anna Leonowens – *The King and I*; is a popular account of how The Court of Siam responded to Western influences. In the novel, the story (although particular contents were fabricated) explained that King Rama IV took on the fundamental concepts of Western lifestyle and etiquette, and emphasised these with the use of Western architecture. He built a summer palace with interiors based on traditional and Western styles. The palace was used for relaxation and for accommodating foreign diplomats. His acceptance of Western ideals later influenced his children’s lifestyles, particularly that of King Rama V.

King Rama V maintained the significance of Western ideals in his palaces, and was even more enthusiastic than his father about Western influences. King Rama VI’s personal lifestyle, however, was based on traditional ideals rather than Western rituals. His residences were designed in a different manner from his father’s palaces. These differences indicate that each King had their own approaches on the maintenance of Western ideas and practices.

The thesis focuses on the relationships between the use of different architectural styles for the interior design of individual palaces, and the adaptation and utilisation of interior space by the residents in order to fulfil social and political events, as well as their daily domestic rituals.
Acknowledgements

Great contributions were made by people interested in this thesis. The research methods involved participation from a variety of individuals. Captain Arvot Urn-chukin of the National Department of Arts and Assistant Professor Ardisort Mockpeenmai from the Department of Arts and Humanities of Thammasat University provided useful information and personal comments on Siamese architecture, Western influences and common difficulties on the lifestyle of the royal families. The researcher wishes to thank Mrs. Nongluck Srivipatana, a teacher from Thailand who provided a great selection of books and documents on the palaces. The researcher also wishes to thank palace officials and staff of Phra Nakhorn Khiri, Vimanmek Palace, Phra Ram Ratchawet, Marugadhaiwan Villa and Bangkhunprom Palace for providing a helpful guide to these palaces. Thanks also to Joe Brooks for always giving the researcher friendly advice. Most of all, thanks to the researcher’s family for making everything possible.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 1 : Introduction**  
Page 14

**Chapter 2 : Background**  
Page 22

Illustrations for Chapter 2  
Page 44

Illustration Credits  
Page 57

**Chapter 3 : Phra Nakhorn Khiri**  
Phra Ram Ratchaniwet  
Marugadhaiwan Villa  
Page 59

**Introduction**  
Page 66

Illustrations for Chapter 3 : Introduction  
Page 69

Illustration Credits  
Page 70

**Phra Nakhorn Khiri**  
Page 70

Phra Nakhorn Khiri In General  
Page 70

Western, or not Western?  
Page 76

The Use of Interior Spaces by the Royal Family  
Page 82
| Illustrations for Chapter 3 : Phra Nakhorn Khiri | 91 |
| Illustration Credits | 106 |
| Phra Ram Ratchaniwet | 108 |
| Phra Ram Ratchaniwet In General | 108 |
| Western, or not Western? | 115 |
| The Use of Interior Spaces by the Royal Family | 121 |
| Illustrations for Chapter 3 : Phra Ram Ratchaniwet | 128 |
| Illustration Credits | 137 |
| Marugadhaiwan Villa | 139 |
| Marugadhaiwan Villa In General | 139 |
| Western, or not Western? | 145 |
| The Use of Interior Spaces by the Royal Family | 151 |
| Illustration for Chapter 3 : Marugadhaiwan Villa | 158 |
| Illustration Credits | 167 |
| Conclusion | 169 |

**Chapter 4 : Vimanmek Palace**

**Bangkhunprom Palace**

| Introduction | 177 |
| Vimanmek Palace | 182 |
| Vimanmek In General | 182 |
| Western, or not Western? | 190 |
| The Use of Interior Spaces by the Royal Family | 202 |
| Illustrations for Chapter 4 : Vimanmek Palace | 218 |
| Illustration Credits | 245 |
Bangkhunprom Palace

Bangkhunprom In General
Western, or not Western?
The Use of Interior Spaces by the Royal Family

Illustrations for Chapter 4: Bangkhunprom Palace
Illustration Credits

Comparison

Illustrations for Chapter 4: Comparison
Illustration Credits

Chapter 5
Summary of Comparison and Conclusion

Illustrations for Chapter 5
Illustration Credits

Appendix 1
Appendix 2
Appendix 3
Appendix 4
Appendix 5

Bibliography
List of Illustrations

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Background

Illustration No. 1
The picture of The Phra Thinang Apornphimok Prasat, its functional significance was to honour King Rama IV.

Illustration No. 2
One of King Rama IV's methods in showing the wealth and the capability of the Siamese royal family was to photograph them in Western styles.

Illustration No. 3
One of King Rama V's favourite pastimes was writing novels.

Illustration No. 4
The front porch of the Dusit Maha Prasat, an important structure that is situated in the Grand Palace's compound.

Illustration No. 5
Another view of the Dusit Maha Prasat.

Illustration No. 6
The interior of Wat Ratchatiwas. This religious building was constructed during King Rama VI's reign.

Illustration No. 7
Another example of spatial arrangements in a religious building, and is called Wat Phra Kaew Wang Na.

Illustration No. 8
The interior of The Phra Thinang Amarin Winichai.

Illustration No. 9
This is a very good example of a traditionally designed open-plan space. The interior of Ban Moh Palace allowed the occupants to use the space purely in a traditional fashion.

Illustration No. 10
Another example of an open-plan space.

Illustration No. 11
Ruins in the compound of King Narai's summer residence.

Illustration No. 12
The picture shows that the buildings are arranged in a group configuration.

Illustration No. 13
This building would have been used by King Narai as a main reception hall.

Chapter 3: Introduction

Illustration No. 1
A portrait of King Rama IV viewing an eclipse of the sun in 1868.

Illustration No. 2
Tuak Arsaityasathan, the building was constructed during King Rama IV’s reign, and was meant to be utilised mainly as a vacation house for Western government employees.

Illustration No. 3
A group photo taken during King Rama V’s reign of the Siamese royal family and their Western guests in front of the main residential building of Phra Nakhorn Khiri.

Chapter 3: Phra Nakhorn Khiri

Illustration No. 1
King Rama IV was often photographed sitting on chair.

Illustration No. 2
The Phra Thinang Chakraphat Phiman is in the Grand Palace’s compound.

Illustration No. 3
A view of the Phra Thinang Ratchathamsapha. Ionic columns used on the façades show a lack of three-dimensional design.

Illustration No. 4: Top
Façade details of Phra Thinang Ratchathamsapha.

Illustration No. 4: Above
Phra Thinang Ratchathamsapha, looking towards King Rama IV’s observation tower, Ho Chatthawanwiengchai.

Illustration No. 5
Ho Piman Phechtaramahawet, King Rama IV’s Buddhist and meditation shrines.

Illustration No. 6
Phra Thinang Sunthakarnsatharn. Many researchers believed that these buildings were used as guest accommodations.

Illustration No. 7
The Front Throne Room. During King Rama IV’s and Rama V’s reigns, the room was used for relaxing and socialising by the royal families.

Illustration No. 8
A space adjacent to “The Front Throne Room”.
Illustration No. 9
A view of the throne hall.

Illustration No. 10
The bathroom was built in King Rama IV’s reign.

Illustration No. 11
The ceilings in the throne hall were in a traditional style. Squared columns and exposed ceiling beams dominated the entire space.

Illustration No. 12
Different views of Western furniture and decorative objects.

Illustration No. 13
Different photos of Western cabinets in the throne hall.

Illustration No. 14
A ceramic hand basin was used by King Rama IV.

Illustration No. 15
A Western styled wooden bed belonged to King Rama IV, and is placed in King Rama IV’s personal section.

Chapter 3: Phra Ram Ratchaniwet

Illustration No. 1
A view from the inner courtyard, looking towards the main dining chamber.

Illustration No. 2
Looking through the door that leads into the main dining room. The curving walls of French doors may be seen in the background, they are open onto the central courtyard.

Illustration No. 3
Façade, section and plan of Palazzo Porto, 1552.

Illustration No. 4
Palazzo Medici by Michelozzo in Florence: begun 1444 / Court. The basic shape of the building is a hollow square with a large, open, central court.

Illustration No. 5 and 6
A side view of the main dining room.

Illustration No. 7
Looking from the corridor in front of a queen’s bedchamber and towards the main foyer and the two staircases.

Illustration No. 8
The style of the twin staircases was based on Baroque architecture. The architect used Rhenish Romanesque trefoil layouts on both floors.

Illustration No. 9
The paired-columns supporting the dome are clad with Art Nouveau ceramic tiles and topped with bands of gold coloured metal.
Chapter 3: Marugadhaiwan Villa

Illustration No. 1
King Rama VI enjoyed performing and writing plays. He adapted and utilised the throne hall in Marugadhaiwan Villa as a stage.

Illustration No. 2
An Italian architect – Mario Tamagno and an engineer – Emilio Gollo, designed the reinforced concrete columns with an equal distance between each column, which were three metres apart.

Illustration No. 3
Verandas are connecting various parts of the buildings.

Illustration No. 4
Verandas in the female section.

Illustration No. 5
Different views of the main veranda connecting King Rama VI’s quarters with the female sections.

Illustration No. 6
Another view of the principal veranda.

Illustration No. 7
Another view of the throne hall.

Illustration No. 8
The picture shows the double-height bedchamber of King Rama VI.

Illustration No. 9
The name of this open platform is Phra Thinang Phisansakhon. It is an open space with no walls.

Chapter 4: Vimanmek Palace

Illustration No. 1
This study is in a traditional house “Ruen Ton”, which is situated across the pond and opposite Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 2
The design of the state-meeting room was principally in Western styles.

Illustration No. 3
Queen Saowabha conducting a state meeting in a Western manner, while standing in for King Rama V as Head of State.

Illustration No. 4
The pictures show that H.H. Princess Consort Saisavali Pirom and her assistants were cooking in a kitchen.
Illustration No. 5
The female participants were attending the completion ceremony of King Rama V’s Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 6
The picture shows Princess Nipanoppadon arranging flowers.

Illustration No. 7
The princess on the right used the room mainly in a Western fashion, whereas the princess on the left adjusted the space and utilised it purely in a traditional style.

Illustration No. 8
The photograph is taken in traditionally designed houses situated across the pond and opposite Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 9
The space in the photograph shows one of the galleries on the ground floor in the Octagonal Section, selected galleries were adapted and utilised as areas for royal monks to sit as a group and have lunch.

Illustration No. 10
The photograph was taken after a Buddhist ceremony.

Illustration No. 11
The pictured event is presumed to have been organised only for King Rama V’s family.

Illustration No. 12
Another interior space, which was designed specifically for King Rama V.

Illustration No. 13
In the picture, this sitting room was on the second floor of the Octagonal Section.

Illustration No. 14
The purpose of the room was for King Rama V to collect his decorative items.

Illustration No. 15
The throne hall was once used as the King’s bedroom while he was recuperating from his illness.

Illustration No. 16
The Piano Room is in a prominent position.

Illustration No. 17
The sitting room is on the second floor of the Octagonal Section in Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 18
The significance of this sitting room was to function as an area, where male government employees could relax and interact, presumably before and after the state meetings.

Illustration No. 19
King Rama V’s throne hall. Western chairs are arranged in a prominent position.

Illustration No. 20
The throne hall of Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 21
King Rama V’s bed chamber on the second floor of the Octagonal Section.
Chapter 4: Bangkhunprom Palace

Illustration No. 1
The photograph would have been taken before Prince Paribatra and his relatives were attending a social reception.

Illustration No. 2
Two photographs show that the female occupants of Bangkhunprom Palace were allowed to participate in significant social events.

Illustration No. 3
The picture shows that Prince Paribatra and his five daughters enjoyed playing Siamese musical instruments.

Illustration No. 4
The picture shows that desks and chairs were used by King Rama V’s children as part of their activities.

Illustration No. 5
The Pink Room. The room had been adapted in order to be used for Buddhist ceremonies.

Illustration No. 6
The photograph was taken when the Blue Room was used for a funeral ceremony.
Prince Paribatra used this room as a library.

Illustration No. 8
The Marsornd Room. The room was used mainly by Prince Paribatra, he collected Chinese artefacts and porcelains as his pastime.

Illustration No. 9
The photograph shows that a dining table was arranged in a Western manner.

Illustration No. 10
Prince Paribatra selected a group of male attendants and trained them Western social etiquette.

Illustration No. 11
The photograph was taken from the main entrance, and looking up the marble staircase.

Illustration No. 12
Illustration No. 4
Another view of one of the reception rooms in the female section – Tamnak Somdaj, of Bangkhunprom Palace.

Chapter 5: Summary of Conclusion and Comparison

Illustration No. 1
The photograph was taken in a gallery around King Rama V’s personal unit in the Octagonal Section, and is presumed to have been taken before His Majesty was attending a social activity.

Illustration No. 2
Queen Sawang Waddhana. King Rama V granted the Queen the right to interact with significant foreign diplomats in a formal manner.

Illustration No. 3
The photograph shows Prince Vajiravudh, before he was crowned King Rama VI, is welcoming Western guests and guiding them through the interior spaces of Vimanmek Palace.

Illustration No. 4
During King Rama V’s first trip to Europe in 1897, the evidence suggests that he stayed in Hotel de Grammont in Paris.

Illustration No. 5
The pictures illustrate different areas that Duke of Scotland would have walked past when he was invited by King Rama V to meet Queen Sawang Waddhana.

Illustration No. 6
An exterior view of the female section – Tamnak Somdej, of Prince Paribatra’s Bangkhunprom Palace.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Man lives in a symbolic environment, as well as a physical environment.\textsuperscript{1}

Environments were important to the lifestyle of Siamese royal families during the middle of 19\textsuperscript{th} century to the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The influences of different ideas and social processes from Western countries allowed Siamese royal families of these periods to adopt such practices as part of their lifestyles. They considered these influences as new possibilities which could enable them to show Westerners their competence in living and socialising in their adopted Western environments.

In order to create Western environments, the utilisation of Western architecture on royal palaces of King Rama IV (1851-1868), King Rama V (1868-1910) and King Rama VI (1910-1925), was significant in terms of behavioural adaptations. These form a hypothesis, which states: the influences of Western European architecture were evident in the design of Siamese palaces, and these created an impact on the variation in traditional beliefs and lifestyles of the occupants during 1851-1925.

To study the relationship between the use of Western architecture on royal palaces and the lifestyle of the occupants, personal visits to King Rama V’s Phra Nakhorn Khiri, King Rama V’s Vimanmek Palace and Phra Ram Ratchaniwet, King Rama

VI's Marugadhaiwan Villa and the residence of Prince Paribatra – Bangkhunprom Palace were made to videotape, as well as to photograph, the interior spaces of the palaces. The study of the historical backgrounds was also carried out by consulting with palace officials and historians while visiting the palaces. The benefit of having the palace officials guide people to most of the interior spaces was that the functional nature of each space could be observed simultaneously while videotaping the space. This method helped to emphasise the relationship between spatial planning and interior decorations. The nature of interior settings as they were utilised by the occupants, illustrates the functions and indicates the status of occupants who would normally use the rooms.

General and specific information on the lifestyle of the royal occupants, as well as certain difficulties that influenced the utilisation of their adopted Western interior environments were gained by consulting with selected Thai educators. Captain Arvot Urn-chukin and Assistant Professor Ardisort Mockpeemai, were two of the educators whom provided their personal views on Siamese lifestyle, as well as the relationship between Western architecture and the methods used by the occupants when they were arranging interior spaces for their social and household activities. Specific issues, such as a lack of electricity when the occupants of Bangkhunprom Palace were using chandeliers as part of their daily aesthetic settings, seem irrelevant to theories of interior design and socio-spatial behaviours of the Siamese occupants. Nevertheless, these were used as background information in terms of spatial usage and adaptations.

The description of socio-spatial functions of Siamese traditional and Western interior spaces was defined by the way the royal families utilised their space. The differences between the traditional and Western demarcated spaces are discussed throughout the thesis in a way that is related to the adaptation of spaces by the utilisation of Western

2 Assistant Professor Ardisort Mockpeemai. The Faculty of Arts and Humanities : Thammasat University, Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200 THAILAND.
furniture and objects. Typical examples of traditionally designed interior spaces were the throne halls and the open platforms of both King Rama IV’s Phra Nakhorn Khiri and King Rama VI’s Marugadhaiwan Villa. The prominence of such traditional spaces was emphasised by the height of the ceilings and the size of an open space that was utilised for only one or two functions. These spatial attributes, to a certain extent accentuated the role of the King who lived in the palace, because his audience could only behave by following certain etiquette as a single group since there was no distinct separation of space evident within the room. Thus, the evidence of traditional spaces in the palaces of King Rama IV and King Rama VI was a prominent feature of their spatial functions, whereas the significance of interior spaces in King Rama V’s palaces was defined by the size of the space, and the furniture utilised within the room rather than the physical nature of the building.

The role of the Kings also helped in defining the behaviour of their families and male entourage within the space. Traditionally designed interior spaces in King Rama IV’s Phra Nakhorn Khiri and King Rama VI’s Marugadhaiwan Villa enabled their family members and entourage to use the space primarily in a traditional fashion where they were allowed to sit around the Kings in a group configuration. This particular gesture imitated how Siamese laymen and noblemen were using their spaces when there was a person of high social status sharing the same area.

King Rama V utilised his interior spaces in a similar manner where the occupants were allowed to sit at the same level of seating as the King and in a group formation. However, the differences in terms of socio-spatial function were clearly defined by the evidence of furniture in a way, which was used to assist the occupants’ adapted Western etiquette. The functions of traditional spaces in the residences of King Rama IV and King Rama VI could be manipulated in the same manner depending on the circumstances. Therefore, the role of the Kings was emphasised by both the position of their occupants and the function of the interior space, because the Kings always acted as chief member of every social gathering that occurred within their palaces.
The study of design theories and human behaviours led to the subjects of personal and group behaviours, culture and communication, aesthetic values, role-distance, as well as the social and personal boundaries. Therefore, references consulted covered a variety of subjects relating to Siamese and Western architecture, human behaviours and lifestyles of the occupants of each palace. They also included studies of socio-spatial theories. These were applied in relation to the occupants' adopted Western ideas and practices, because the evidence shows that the interior spaces were used in accordance with Western etiquette and ideals in terms of gender, personal status and boundary, as well as back and front regions. Information from palace records on social and domestic activities led to the discussion of how the interior spaces of each palace were adapted and utilised in order to fulfil the occupants' requirements. This also involved understanding the significance of the royal events and rituals in terms of socio-spatial phenomena.

Bill Hillier, author of "Space Syntax" and Julienne Hanson, in their book "The Social Logic of Space" offer a broad discussion on socio-spatial phenomena, which is generally in accord with the findings of this thesis. Most of their examples are of exterior planning in primitive and ancient villages, so while it is interesting to note that similar phenomena can be seen in a wide variety of settings across different cultures, their work does not include the finer details of interior space arrangements and decoration, which is the focus of this study. Other works by Erving Goffman,

---

Clovis Heimsath⁵ and David Canter⁶ provide a more useful socio-spatial theory in which to consider this work on Siamese architectural space.

Several publications on social and personal behaviours by Erving Goffman and Judy Gahagan were the main source on the discussion of how people reacted towards their living and social environments. Goffman made practical comments in his book – The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,⁷ which showed how individuals in social settings would react to their groups and their shared environments. Gahagan⁸ on the other hand, looked at how people would organise smaller social settings, such as living areas, in order to interpret the importance of social interactions and the way they were managed. Although Gahagan discussed the subject of social behaviours in a manner that had significant bearing on psychological functions, certain issues on the use of space for conducting social interactions were drawn in relation to socio-spatial arrangements.

Various articles on social behaviours by individual sociologists enabled the study of how people responded to their shared environments in terms of social etiquette, role-distance and aesthetic values, particularly in relation to domestic environments. Goffman’s articles on front and back regions⁹ were related to the characteristics of communal and personal spaces. The socio-spatial relationship between settings and their occupants was the key to the study of the royal families and their methods on the use of adapted Western spaces in this work.

---

It is important to acknowledge a recent publication on Thai architecture – Clarence Aasen's (1998) "Architecture of Siam: A Cultural History Interpretation". Aasen's study traces the development of Siamese architecture without particular reference to the relationships between the design of selected buildings, and the behaviour and the rituals of their occupants, and includes very little information on how the occupants of the examples he describes, used the buildings and interior spaces. His discussion of the influence of Western ideals on Siamese architecture is not related to socio-spatial aspects of architecture.

Aasen discussed the significance of Western political influences that made particular impacts on the lifestyle of the royal family during King Naria's reign, in a sense that was clearly contrary to the social and cultural etiquette practised during this reign. Aasen (1998) has pointed out that foreigners played a direct role in assisting the Monarch in controlling the political aspirations of members of the royal family – for example, the princes and princesses, and members of the noble families.

The evidence clearly shows that both King Naria and King Rama IV developed close political and social relationships with foreign diplomats. However, the contingency for noblewomen and their children to establish any social interaction with the diplomats was obviously limited (even though there was 200 a year interval between the two reigns). Such a restriction was made possible by the planning of the royal residences where the inner part of the palace was to be used exclusively by certain individuals. The record shows that the inner part of King Naria's summer palace was planned in a way that permitted only loyal Siamese noblemen to enter. Thus, Aasen

---


made an assumption that somewhat ignored the significance of traditional decorum practised by the royal families.

Aasen further emphasised the importance of Asian architecture, particularly Chinese, on religious buildings to an extent that appeared to overwhelm the study of Western influences on royal facilities built during the reigns of King Rama IV, King Rama V and King Rama VI. Numerous exterior plans of temples and religious buildings were evident in the book, yet none was related to the permanent and summer residences of King Rama IV, King Rama V and King Rama VI except for aerial plans and a cross-section of an observatory tower of King Rama IV’s Phra Nakhorn Khiri.¹⁴

Aasen overlooked the importance of the use of Western architecture on the design of royal palaces discussed in the thesis, apart from a brief discussion on the construction of King Rama IV’s observatory tower in terms of Western technology. The book by Aasen delivers information that emphasised primarily the issues of Asian influences on Siamese religious architecture and exterior plans that indicated no socio-spatial relationships between the building and its occupants. Therefore, an emphasis was focused on a broader-sense in terms of foreign influences on Thai architecture.

The outcomes of the research relate to the hypothesis that Western influences not only impacted on the architectural styles of the palaces, but also the lifestyle and formal etiquette of the Monarchs and their families. The analysis of both Thai records and English publications led to an understanding of the relationships between spatial planning and personal responses to the significant environmental adaptations. The evidence of furniture and personal possessions within communal and personal spaces of the royal occupants shows that objects had specific meanings to the

individuals who used them. This relates to Ian Craib’s idea (1984) that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.\textsuperscript{15}

The response of King Rama IV, King Rama V, King Rama VI and Prince Paribatra to Western ideals not only influenced their abilities to conduct personal and social rituals using Western methods, but also involved their families. Their competence in using Western interior settings and etiquette developed as a result of their enthusiasm in adopting a variety of Western influences, including the use of furniture and how it was arranged in order to suit the individuals.

\textsuperscript{15} Craib, Ian. \textit{Modern Social Theory (From Parsons to Habermas)}. Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1984. Page 73.