MEMORY, HERITAGE AND NOSTALGIA
THE RAMA VI HOUSE

By
MISS Thanisda TIDANUN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Doctor of Philosophy Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism
(International Program) Plan 1.1
Silpakorn University
Academic Year 2024

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By	MISS Thanisda TIDANUN
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Advisor	Associate Professor Chotima Chaturawong, Ph.D.
Co advisor	Professor Emeritus Ross James KING

Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

.....Dean of Faculty of
(Associate Professor Apiradee Kasemsook, Ph.D.) Architecture

Approved by

.....Chair person
(Professor Dr. William Chapman)

.....Advisor
(Associate Professor Chotima Chaturawong, Ph.D.)

.....Co advisor
(Professor Emeritus Ross James KING)

.....Committee
(Associate Professor Kreangkrai Kirdsiri, Ph.D.)

.....Committee
(Pobsook Tadtong, Ph.D.)

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This study examines the intersection of memory, heritage, and architecture in Bangkok through the lens of Rama VI era houses, which emerged during a pivotal period of cultural transformation in Thailand. The narrative is grounded in the author's personal connection to a childhood home on Phaya Thai Road—an emotionally resonant site of family history that exemplifies how heritage shapes identity. The research redefines heritage not merely as a static inheritance from ancestors, but as an evolving narrative integral to generational identity and collective memory.

Focusing on the architectural developments during the reign of King Rama VI—characterized by a hybridization of traditional Thai and Western styles—the study situates these structures within their socio-political context. It explores how Rama VI houses manifest in contemporary Bangkok as surviving, borrowed, or re-created memories, and what these expressions reveal about the broader dynamics of history, memory, and heritage amid rapid urbanization.

The study pursues three key objectives: to identify the architectural characteristics of Rama VI houses; to locate surviving, repurposed, or reconstructed examples; and to examine their symbolic roles in articulating an idealized image of Bangkok’s past. Ethnographic case studies highlight how domestic architecture becomes a site of both personal nostalgia and institutionalized memory.

Ultimately, this research contributes to critical discourse on urban heritage, nostalgia, and cultural continuity. It demonstrates how memory and built form intersect to resist the homogenizing forces of modernization, while offering insight into the paradox of heritage as both a record of loss and a tool of reinvention in contemporary Bangkok.

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I am truly fortunate to have the enduring love, support, and understanding of my family and friends. Their presence lifted my spirits in times of doubt and reminded me of the importance of resilience and care.

Lastly, this dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my childhood home on Phaya Thai Road—to all my memories, and to all the love that still lingers in every corner of that home.

Thanisda TIDANUN

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Introduction

At its core, heritage is a “story” or a way of life learnt from the past; it is much more than simply a gift from the ancestors, since heritage is what we inherit from them as the identity of a generation.

Since my hometown is Bangkok, the massive transformations of the past few decades have had both a traumatic and a transformative effect of my family and we have had to relocate to a new place in a suburban area. I grew up in a house on Phaya Thai Road; it was a place filled with good memories of our ancestors who had settled in the Phaya Thai area because they had worked at the Bureau of the Royal Household and the Thai Customs Department since the King Rama V era. Among the best moments of my childhood were sitting beside my grandmother while reading traditional Thai novels or listening to her talking about stories of people’s ways of life in the past. Thus, I was immersed in Thai history and culture through the stories being told by her, and a love of reading has been instilled by the books that I had been reading since I was young. The Rama VI era house on Phaya Thai Road was a place that I considered my home because of an emotional attachment to it – because of still-abiding memories. This house was the first place where I learnt about being in the world and it was the place where I developed myself as a distinct person.

The celadon-green two-storey house with traditional Thai wood awnings over stained glass windows, and surrounded by various garden flowers and plants such as java apple, mango and cherry trees, was the place where I could connect with a peaceful environment and integrate myself into that small world around me. The house had also served for many important events of our family such as the wedding ceremony of my parents, the Buddhist ordination ceremonies of my uncles, the Buddhist merit ceremony for deceased ancestors and the place for family reunion during the Songkran festival. It is common wisdom that places of childhood experiences had influences on humans’ characteristics and behaviors. Hence, living in the Rama VI era house on Phaya Thai Road from the time I was born has shaped my identity hitherto. Further, the house was also valued as a heritage because it was a gift from the ancestors, passing on to the next generations. All spaces of the house were

full of memory and the family's story which, in turn, is linked with the broader context of Thai society and history.

That house has now gone, replaced by a world of concrete, steel, skytrain and congestion. However, its loss but also its still-abiding presence in memory presents as the motivation for engaging in the present thesis.

House, heritage, nostalgia

A house is an identifying ground for transmitting non-verbal messages and meanings of the dwellers' identities and is to be recognized as tangible heritage that encompasses various socio-political aspects of a specific time and is a reflection of the essential character of the dwellers and the place to which it belongs. Each society has developed its own distinctive styles of houses according to environment and culture.

The idea of home transcends the mere physicality of a building or a geographical location; it embodies a profound emotional and cultural significance. It is a sanctuary where we seek refuge, a space that nurtures our identities, and a place that holds our most cherished memories. The architecture and design of a home can evoke strong emotions and memories. Each corner of a home can tell a story, representing the experiences that have transpired within its walls.

Heritage is an old word drawn from the vocabulary of those old societies in which primary values derived from ancestral parents handed on to their children, although the word could be used to refer to an intellectual or spiritual legacy as well (Davidson and McConville, eds. 1991: 1). According to the Cambridge dictionary, heritage means "features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance". With respect to various international charters and conservation organizations, "heritage" is defined as a building or place that "has archaeological, architectural, historic or ethnographical interest". In Thailand, the terminology of "heritage" is always used to describe an object or an ownership passed from the ancestors to the next generation. Therefore, the meaning of "heritage" is clarified as a valuable object or cultural feature passed to the next generation and it is perceived as having a national or even an international interest.

Heritage and memory are two intertwined concepts that shape individual and collective identities, informing how we perceive our past and navigate our present. Heritage refers to the legacy of physical artifacts, traditions, languages, and values that are passed down through generations, while memory relates to the individual and collective recollections that influence our understanding of history. Together, they provide a framework within which societies remember their histories, honor their ancestors, and create a sense of belonging. Heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible elements. Tangible heritage includes historical sites, monuments, artworks and artifacts, also home as house. Intangible heritage, on the other hand, consists of traditions, oral histories, languages, and ceremonies that preserve the customs and practices of a community – home as idea, memory, life. There is also the heritage of the everyday- the shrine to an ancestor, a song remembered from one's childhood, the memory of one's past time, and quintessentially the home (King, 2017).

To repeat, the term "heritage" can be considered as a "story" or a way of life that one has learnt from the past and it is much more than simply a gift from the ancestors since "heritage" is what we inherit from them as the identity of a generation. The relationship between heritage, memory, and home creates a rich tapestry of identity and belonging. Heritage informs our understanding of home, providing the cultural context in which our memories are formed. Through the lens of our heritage, we interpret our experiences and create meaning in our lives.

Bangkok

Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, is a vibrant city characterized by its rich culture, historical significance, and the ever-changing dynamics of urban life. As one navigates through the bustling streets, they encounter a collage of experiences that form the city's distinct identity. The city's heritage, also its memories, dreams and identity, are constantly cross-cut by forces both intrusive and evolutionary.

Once Thailand had opened its doors to welcome the new civilization from Western societies in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the ways of the lives of Thai people had

changed in various aspects including in the architectural design of residential buildings. It was the building of the first modern road, Charoen Krung or New Road in 1861 (Y. Pimonsathean 2009: 27), that changed the mode of transportation in Thailand from waterway to roadway. Hence, there were new residential buildings which in part adopted colonial styles, as well as the western style buildings of European consuls and merchants who had settled along the new road. An extension of Thai-Western relationships through treaties and commerce influenced a crucial reformation in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910 A.D.) and this was subsequently inherited to the reign of King Rama VI. Thus Siam, presently known as Thailand, stepped into the age of modernization. M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (1985) saw King Rama VI as a bicultural monarch, existing simultaneously in two cultures (he had been educated in England) and accordingly encountering difficulties in creating a nationalistic sentiment and promoting a related revival of traditional arts.

In architecture, Rama VI believed there was a need to revive traditional forms and styles after the excessive embrace of Western motifs during the reign of his father. While there is no evidence that he believed in the traditional cosmology of the *Traibhum*, he certainly valued the idea of a civilized pedigree and this was to be expressed in architecture. His enthusiasm for the revival of cultural heritage led to a new aesthetic, focusing on traditional architecture and its intricate craftsmanship to signify a civilized history and national identity, reflecting the English Arts and Crafts movement most notably represented in the work and writings of William Morris (1834–96). Consequently, the present study chooses the houses built in the period of King Rama VI during 1910-1925 A.D., which is considered an age of formation of "Thainess" and a transitional period of the country from a traditional state to be a modern one (Koompong Noobanjong 2013: 120); the focus will be the significant roads of that era: Phaya Thai, Sukhumvit, Ploenchit, Wireless, Silom and Sathorn roads. The importance of the Rama VI house style is in the integration of Western principles and Thai local styles to produce the contemporary Thai house which reflects the intellectual positions of the people at that time (S. Palakavong Na Ayudhya: 1).

The typical Rama VI house constituted a Thai middle-class vernacular whose popularity persisted through succeeding reigns, until its replacement by more modernist Western styles in the 1950s and subsequently. Urban development associated with economic modernization since the 1960s has seen much of that earlier urban fabric swept away.

Gentrification in Bangkok has become a prominent issue over the past few decades, driven by rapid urbanization, foreign investment, and a booming tourism industry. Areas that once thrived with local culture are being transformed into chic enclaves catering to affluent residents and tourists. While gentrification can lead to economic development and improved infrastructure, it often comes at the expense of displacing long-time residents and eroding local culture. The impact of gentrification on community identity in Bangkok is profound. As long-time residents are pushed out, their memories and heritage are frequently overlooked or erased and Pierre Nora has noted that "There are *lieux de mémoire*, site of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory (Norra, 1989).

In simply physical terms, a notable effect of gentrification has been the sweeping away of that old, identifying fabric from the Rama VI era (though, in its architecture, it has been an era that also stretched into the reign of Rama VII and even to the 1950s. The relatively few surviving remnants from that time and its architectural time are important as reminders – traces, memories – of that earlier time. They are also important in enlivening the city's urban landscape.

In the present time and especially since 2001, there has been a reviving nationalism in Thailand, with a re-embracing of Rama VI's ideology of "Nation-King-Religion". Architecture has been mobilized to serve this agenda – especially pertinent have been new national monuments: the Parliament building, the Supreme Court complex. Also, however, there has been a new interest in Rama VI era architecture as "authentically Thai" (certainly more so than the architecture of Rama V). Some old Rama VI domestic style buildings – commercial, institutional and residential – have been restored and given new lives. The style has also been revived in new construction where it seems to be linked to icon-seeking and modern marketing. In that sense it remains very much a "live" style.

Research Question

It is the memory of displacement from home and reminiscences of an earlier Bangkok, albeit from only a few decades ago, that has inspired the researcher to trace the remnants of Rama VI era houses in the business areas in Bangkok and to question their current contexts. It is these issues of displacement, loss and recall, at both

individual and societal scales, that constitute the problem to be investigated here – the problem statement. The question guiding the research, then, is:

How does the Rama VI style house manifest in present inner Bangkok, variously as surviving memory, borrowed memory, and re-created memory, and what do these manifestations reveal about the links between history, memory and heritage in contemporary Bangkok?

There is then something of a subsidiary question: ***How is the revival of interest in the Rama VI house style to be seen variously in contexts of nationalism, nostalgia and historic conservation?***

Objectives

Investigation of the above research question was broken down into three, more specific tasks or objectives:

1. To identify characteristics of Rama VI houses in the context of the architecture and economy of the King's own time.
2. To locate present instances of Rama VI houses, variously as survival, re-use and re-construction and to investigate their present roles.
3. To explore the role of such houses as expressions of an image of an ideal Bangkok past. Accordingly, to reflect on these expressions in relation to links of history, memory, heritage and nostalgia in the present time.

Scope and Method of Study

Geographic scope

The area initially under study encompassed the roads constructed before or during the reign of King Rama VI in Bangkok: Phaya Thai, Sukhumvit, Ploenchit, Wireless, Silom and Sathorn. Rama VI houses along these roads and their immediate *soi* could be either houses of the wealthy or of ordinary persons.

Figures 1 to 3 illustrate historical maps of Bangkok, highlighting the city's development from its early stages.

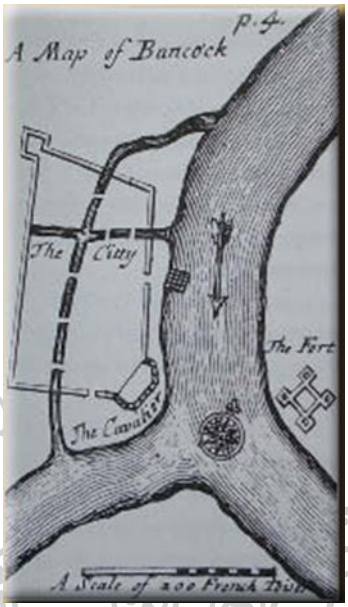


Figure 1 The map of Bangkok was created in 1687 (B.E. 2230) by de La Loubère. The rectangular outline on the left represents the wall of Thonburi City, while the river in the center of the image is the Chao Phraya River.
Source: https://catholichaab.com/main/index.php/research-and-study/research-and-study/1189-2016-05-13-02-28-08

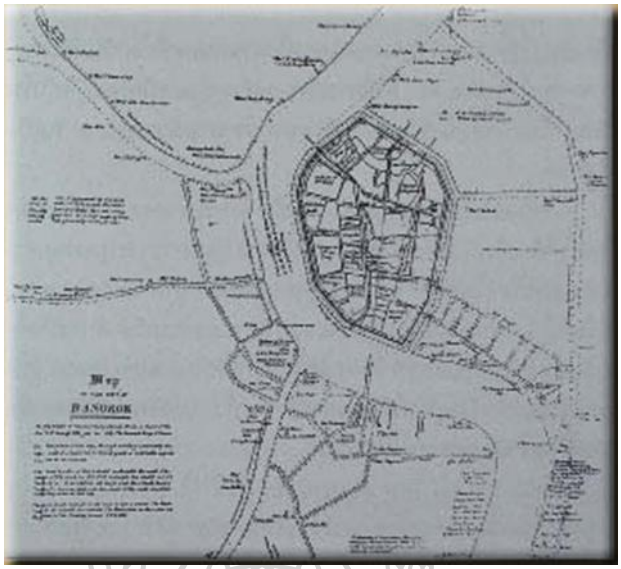


Figure 2 The 1870 (B.E.2413) map of Bangkok depicts the Rattanakosin Island area, including Ong Ang Canal, Phadung Krung Kasem Canal, and Mahanak Canal, as well as the newly constructed section of Charoen Krung Road, extending from the city wall to Thanon Tok.
Source: https://catholichaab.com/main/index.php/research-and-study/research-and-study/1189-2016-05-13-02-28-08

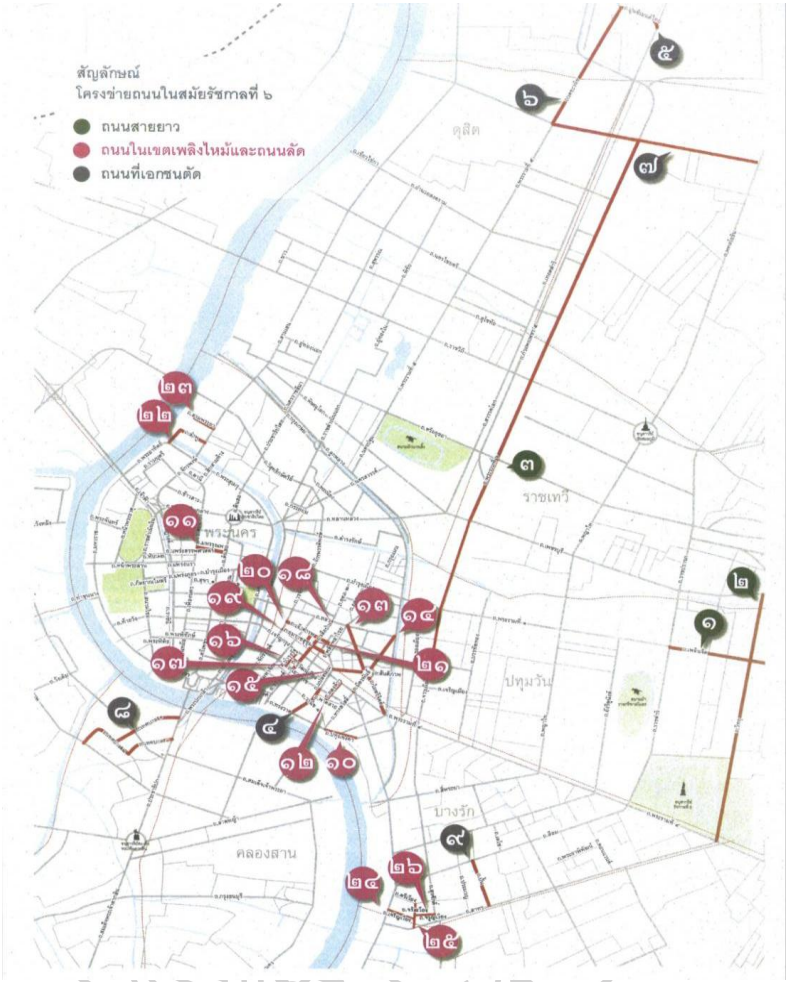
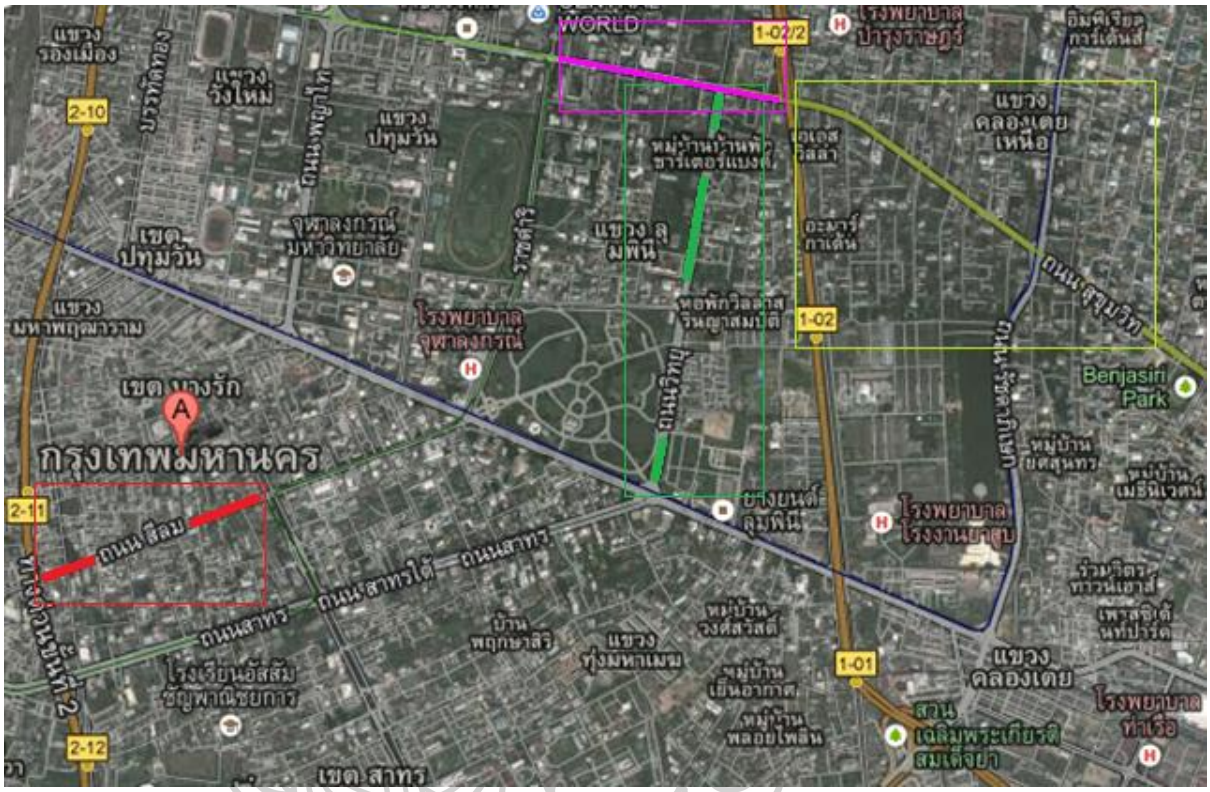


Figure 3 The Road Network during the Reign of King Rama VI

Figures 4 to 6 illustrate various segments of the study area in the context of present day Bangkok.



Silom Road
Phloenchit Road
Sukhumvit Road
Wireless or Witthayu Road

Figure 4 Map of study area in Bangkok

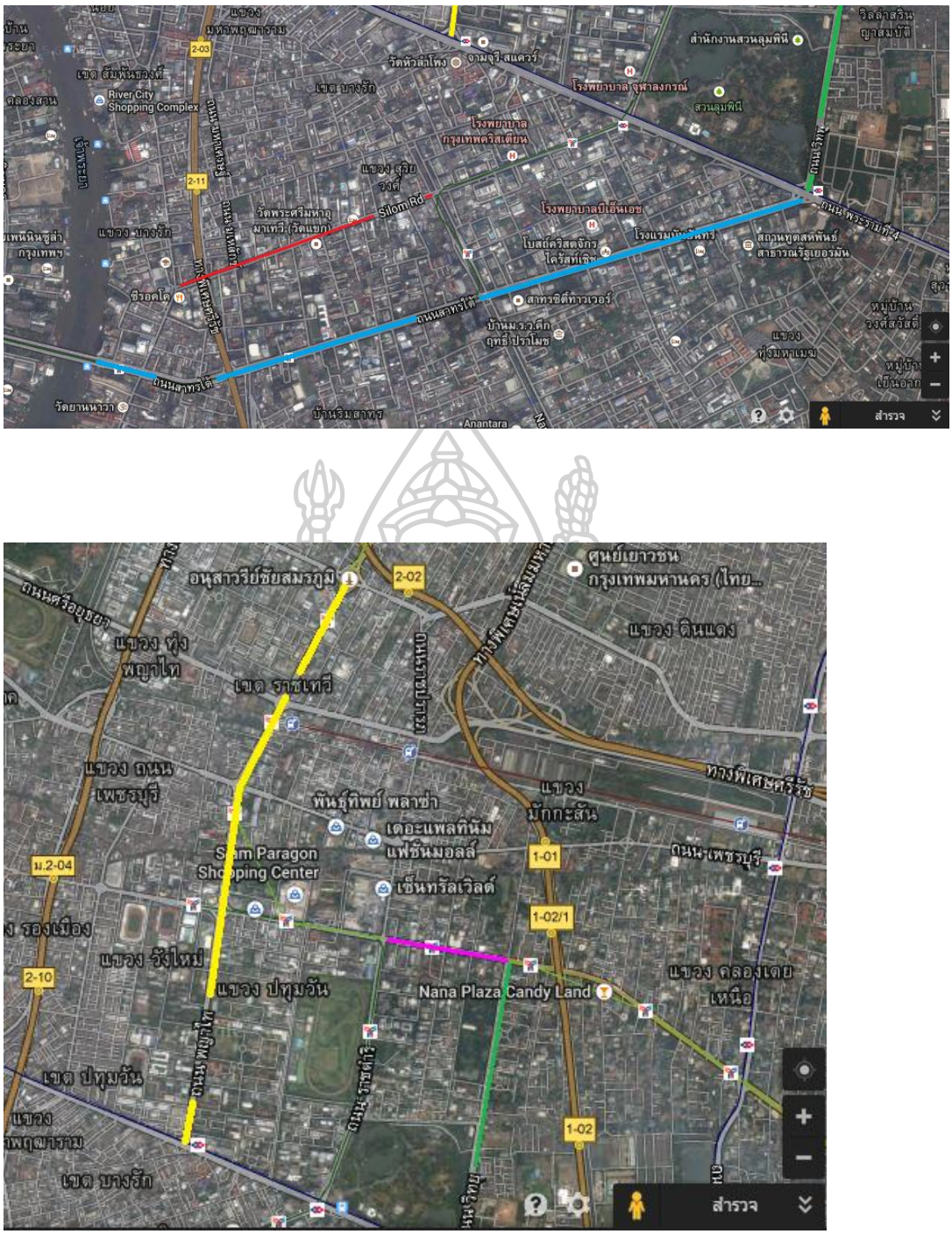


Figure 5 Maps of study area in Bangkok

While the first focus was on the corridors as designated above, it is recognized that housing during the early development period expanded from the principal street fronts into the immediate *soi* (laneways) and resifential compounds branching from them. Accordingly, the search for cases also extended opportunistically beyond the main road fronts.

Subsequently, in considering the third objective above, this scope was broadened to encompass selected Rama VI era places in Rattanakosin and new projects illustrating the more recent return to a Rama VI architectural aesthetic.

Content scope

The research endeavored to examine the houses built between 1910-1925 A.D. under the reign of King Vajiravudh or King Rama VI. It discusses the architecture of the Rama VI house style and the concept of memory, collective memory and nostalgia. An issue for this study is a difficulty of acquiring data since many people will not know the history of their houses. A more likely source of information might be businesses and institutions that have acquired and preserved such houses, which means that the institutions that own them may have information on their lineage.

Because there is typically an absence of documentary evidence on individual buildngs, data can be indeterminate; further, as the style continued into later reigns, there will be buildings in the Rama VI style that could be as late as the 1950s. To complicate the study content further, there is also an interest in the modern revival of the Rama VI style in accordance with the study's third objective above. It needs to be emphasized that the focus is on the *style* rather then on the reign, and on its place in a contemporary nostalgic turn that is both political and embedded in popular imagining in an uncertain age.

Method of Study

A qualitative research method was adopted; methodology will be a hybrid of historiography, ethnography, a narrative approach and architectural critique. The method using in this research is based on diverse data sources. The study focuses on both primary and secondary sources such as photography, the interview and memoirs or diaries of the houses' owners and all dissertations and other previous research related to the study. To accomplish the study, the process is as follows:

All related documents were compiled, including city maps, aerial photographs, archives, both monographs and journal articles, dissertations and conference proceedings that focus on the theory and concept of heritage, memory and nostalgia, also the development of architectural styles of Thai residential buildings and the Western influences on Thai architectural styles.

Site observations were conducted to examine the houses built during the reign of Rama VI along the Phaya Thai, Sukhumvit, Ploenchit, Wireless Silom and Sathorn corridoes. The observation included where possible an interview with a house's owner or occupier to get general information on the house, its history and present use.

The data collection was be completed by compiling documents, site survey and analysis. Since the research is based on diverse data sources, compiling and analyzing primary and secondary sources constituted the key process.

Structure of the thesis

The present **Chapter 1** has introduced the topic and broad study design; from a consideration of the problem of house as heritage and its loss, it has developed a research question to be investigated. Three objectives have been identified for the study. **Chapter 2** reviews literature relevant to the topic. Specific attention is directed to questions of memory, heritage and nostalgia, also to Rama VI and his era and especially to his uses of architecture in his endeavours to represent an idea of a nationalistic modernity, most notably in his palaces.

Chapter 3 extends this review of literature to the evolution of the Thai house and especially of the middle-class house form and style of the Rama VI period, which will be identified as a distinctive Thai vernacular. In order to better understand this vernacular, examples will be observed of domestic-scaled buildings from Bangkok and other provinces more generally. This process of defining the style constitutes a first stage of field observation, and addresses the project's first objective.

Field observation then continues into **Chapter 4** which comprises an extension of the fieldwork, specifically to the study of reminiscences of the Rama VI period houses along the Phaya Thai, Silom, Sathorn, Sukhumvit, Phloenchit and Wireless corridors, to explore the role of such houses as expressions of an image of an idealized Bangkok past. This addresses the project's second objective.

In **Chapter 5** the task is in part to reflect on these expressions in relation to links to history, memory, heritage and nostalgia and the survival of Rama VI houses as *milieux de mémoire*. The chapter also observes the nostalgic, public turn to a Rama VI aesthetic ideal in the present age. This chapter is also based on extensive fieldwork observation, and addresses the third objective.

The brief **Chapter 6** returns to the research question and objectives established in Chapter 1, elaborating the extent to which the objectives have been met and the research question answered. The chapter constitutes to conclusion to be drawn from the research. It returns to the themes of heritage, memory, loss and nostalgia. Brief recommendations are suggested.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

Literature relevant to the project is reviewed following, under three categories: *memory and heritage*; then *nostalgia*, which can be seen as a subset of the discussion of memory; and finally the *Rama VI era and architecture*, which establishes a context for the chapter that follows.

Memory, heritage

French historian Ernest Renan's lecture, "What is a nation", was given at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1882. He argued that a nation is an idea based on compelled forgetting and compelled remembering (imagining). A nation is "a daily referendum", just as the continuing existence of an individual is a perpetual affirmation of life. Nations are based as much on what people jointly forget as on what they remember (Renan, 1947–61 [1882]). Thus the idea of a nation is based on politically distorted memory.

The identity of the individual, as of the home and the family, is also based on what is to be forgotten and what is to be remembered. These identities are also subject to distortion, and the idea of distorted memory is central to any consideration of nostalgia. Distorted memory in this sense is especially central to the work of Michel Foucault (see for example Foucault, 1973; 1983). Foucault writes of memory in relation to power (and thereby to distortion), specifically to the pervading , subliminal power of custom and self-discipline that is produced and reinforced through social institutions, including the family. The present significance is that "the home" (house plus family) is such an institution in Foucault's sense, both creating and altering memories.

Benedict Anderson (1991 [1983]) was especially influenced by the Renan 1882 lecture. He describes the major factors contributing to the emergence of nationalism – a nation is an "imagined community, imagined as being both inherently limited and sovereign." On Rama VI in Anderson, see pp. 100-101. Anderson argues that especially important to the emergence of nationalism has been new media – *print* media in the case of the modern nation state. There is especially interest in the role of present media in the portrayal of Rama VI and his era – pre-revolutionary values are re-created and extolled.

Also on this question of memory, there is Maurice Halbwachs, writing in 1925, who also argued that memory is socially produced: social institutions and contexts (the state, the clan, the family) make possible certain memories, encouraging (or actively constructing) certain recollections while

discouraging (suppressing) others. He principally developed the idea of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Russell (2006) presents a critical analysis of Halbwachs, in part challenging

the notion of collective memory. Russell especially questions the novelty of Halbwachs' work, arguing that the concept has arisen in western literature over millenia. [There is a very extensive critical literature on collective memory, not reviewed here.]

Nora, and Les Lieux de Memoire

French historian Pierre Nora's magisterial, seven-volume collaborative project on "France" and "memory" sought to define, variously, the French Republic, the French nation, and finally France as an idea. It is an exploration of *lieux de mémoire,* which might be translated as "realms of memory", or perhaps as "sites" or "places" of memory. *Lieux de mémoire* will cover the range of spaces, both physical and intellectual, wherein the memories of "a nation" might be constructed, contained and contested – or, by extension, the memories of the village or the home. They are not necessarily sites in the geographical sense, as they can also include the flag, anthems, celebrations and festivals, a name, an event, a photograph, a letter. Central to Nora's argument is the idea of sites of memory (heritage?) *as compensation for a profound loss*: because most people no longer live in *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memory, where memory remains alive and ever-present), *lieux de mémoire* are invoked as compensation (Nora, 1986; 1989; 1996-98).

Nora is also concerned with the link between history and memory, therefore with heritage. History attaches to time, whereas memory (and thereby heritage) attaches to space or place. The tone of the argument can be gauged from an extended quote:

Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates

only those facts that suit it. It thrives on vague, telescoping reminiscences, on hazy general impressions or specific, symbolic details. It is vulnerable to transferences, screen memories, censorings, and projections of all kinds. History, being an intellectual, nonreligious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse… Memory wells up from groups that it welds together, which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs observed, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple yet specific; collective and plural yet individual. By contrast, history belongs to everyone and to no one and therefore has a universal vocation. (Nora, 1996: 3)

Pierre Nora's work has been immensely influential in studies of memory and heritage and has attracted a substantial critical literature. Steven Legg (2005) has provided a good critical analysis of Nora's project, seeing its connection to Halbwachs, also stressing the distinction between *lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire*. The link between memory and nostalgia is examined. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (2001) is another critical analysis of Nora. There is an emphasis on the links between memory and history.

Vattimo and the end of collective memory

A very different take on memory is implied in the work of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (1985). Vattimo has argued that the individual now has access to information universally and will accordingly construct their own individual account of memory and history. Accordingly there is no longer the possibility of collective memory or collectively agreed history. Hence we are at "the end of history". The implication, accordingly, is that Renan's observation would no longer hold: the manipulation of collective memory in the construction of a nation is now undermined by the ubiquitous power of modern media.

While in present Bangkok *milieux de mémoire* – places where memories of old memories are still vibrantly alive – have overwhelmingly been crushed under the weight of multiple waves of urban development, modernization has also brought the manipulations of modern media and the constructions of new "memories" and an imagined past. More specifically, there is a re-imagining of the age of Siam's absolutist monarchy. In architecture, this nostalgic turn has tended especially to focus on the era of Rama VI, and on the ideas and values that he promulgated – present media would seek to portray espoused values as an actual achieved social reality.

Nostalgia

In essence, nostalgia is a yearning for the past – a wistful or overly sentimental yearning for a return to some place or past time or irrecoverable condition. It is a sentimentality for the past, typically for a period or place with happy associations, but also sometimes for the past in general – it can be crosscut by pain, by a sense of loss, a form of melancholy (Boym, 2002: xiii-xiv). There can be a longing for the past – for its personalities, possibilities and events – for the "good old days", for dreams of one's childhood. There can be a sense of rosy retrospection, from which the past is felt more positively and the future more negatively. Nostalgia presents as an emotional strategy, something comforting when the present seems intolerably bleak; it can combine the sadness of loss with the joy or consolation that the loss is not complete, nor can it ever be. There remains the consolation of memory.

Nostalgia serves as a motivator for the preservation of one's cultural heritage: people seek to preserve buildings, landscapes and other objects of historical-cultural significance (*lieux de mémoire* in Nora's terms), from a desire to connect with their heritage from past generations. Such, indeed, is part of the motivation of the present author.

Peter Brooks argues that nostalgia is typically coloured by a melodramatic imagination, that would seek hidden moral values in a world in which values are being destroyed. By contrast, an ironic imagination and view of history builds on ambiguity of meaning. Rather than look for hidden meanings in history, irony points to the uncertainty of history by showing that positive truth is not possible. It is a melodramatic imagination that underpins the nostalgic return to a pre-revolutionary era and its values in the present time.

King (2017) draws on the Brooks (1976) argument in the context of a discussion of authenticity. Nostalgia is hypothesised as an escape from the demand of authenticity. A distinction is then made between scholarly nostalgia (the academic search for "true origins") and popular nostalgia (yearning for a past that is caught in distorted memory or imagination – a wistful yearning for "the good old days"). As an illustration of scholarly nostalgia, King cites Sumet Jumsai (1988), where the commonly accepted accounts of Siamese origins (Tai, Dvaravati-Mon, etc.) are challenged, with a Pacific origin suggested.

A study that addresses broader issues of nostalgia in the face of cultural loss is reported in King and Winita Kongpradit (2017). The paper discusses how modernization brings about the decline of traditional crafts and practices, linked in turn to the decline of old communities in Thailand. Wat Koh in Petchaburi can be viewed as a *milieu de mémoire* that is now fading away into an increasingly remote past consequent on modernization. A present dilemma is whether to conserve communities and their craft as "living museums"; or as a museum more conventionally understood, as a *lieux de mémoire* in Pierre Nora's term; or to accept the ephemerality of culture and its metamorphosis. A concluding comment is that there is no resolution to these dilemmas. The root cause of the dilemma is to be confronted and the craft communities must be recognised for what they are, namely the carriers of the memory and identity of the culture itself as well as the identity of nation and monarchy. In similar vein was the work of Pensiri Chartniyorm on the (barely) surviving craft communities of Bangkok (King and Persiri Chartniyom, 2017).

A related dilemma arises in relation to the old house-building crafts associated with the surviving Rama VI era housing stock of Bangkok. It is an issue for Chapter 3 following.

Rama VI and architecture

In present times, notably since 2001, there have been frequent expressions of a nostalgia for an earlier Siam of royal-assured certainties, mostly with references to the Rama V and Rama VI era, with an official architecture mobilised to express that nostalgia, for example in projects such as the replacement Supreme Court complex and Parliament building (Sidh Sintusingha and King, 2021; King, 2023). This would-be architectural return to that earlier time and its architecture is explored following in Chapter 5.

Siam/Thailand and architecture

In providing a context in which to consider the city's urban fabric, Marc Askew (1994) discusses the development of the urban areas in Bangkok since the early Rattanakosin

period to the approach of modernization in the twentieth century due to the forces of economic development, which brings about the changing of the urban space of Bangkok. While the inner area of old Rattanakosin is still effectively preserved, in the areas beyond this space especially the remnants of the old communities have been swept away as the city has been continually growing. Only the strong resilience of the dwellers could create a sense of meaning in their environment that will withstand some of the destructive and fragmenting forces of current change.

At a broad level on the history of architecture in Siam, there is Clarence Aasen (1998). Aasen explores the special and identifying role architecture has played over the last 15 centuries in the construction of the highly diverse and complex culture of Siam. The term architecture used in this book encompasses the wide range of individual buildings, while art objects and vernacular forms are also equally included as an important fundamental in forming Siam. The explanation of Architecture of Modernism and Nationalism during 1767-1932 A.D. in chapter six assists towards the understanding of the evolution of architectural design in the beginning of the Rattanakosin era, including the reign of King Rama VI.

Somchart Cheungsiriarak (2010) introduces the concept of the “ideology of the era” as a framework for understanding the emergence of Western architecture in Siam from the 19th century onward. This ideology reflects an acceptance of what was perceived as superior cultural values, which were then used to reshape the social structure. As a vital cultural product closely tied to ways of life, architecture underwent significant changes during this time. Western architectural styles were introduced not only as novel forms but also as symbols of cultural superiority.

Cheungsiriarak emphasizes that in order to study Western-style architecture in Siam—from the reign of King Rama IV to 1937—it is crucial to examine the broader historical context, including economic, social, political, and cultural developments that contributed to the formation of this “ideology of the era.” Moreover, he argues that architectural elements should be analyzed not only as reflections of the architects’

capabilities but also as indicators of the lifestyles and cultural values of the building's users.

Koompong Noobanjong has provided a more specified discussion of Siamese architecture focusing on its political dimensions. Koompong (2003) examines the adoption and evolution of Western and Modern architecture in Siam and Thailand. It illustrates how various architectural ideas have contributed to the physical design and spatial configuration of places associated with the negotiation and allocation of political power, which are throne halls, parliaments, and government and civic structures since in the middle of the nineteenth century. Hence, the buildings are investigated for their social, political, economic and cultural significance. Subsequently, Koompong (2013) examined the politics of representation in architecture and urban space from

1850 up to the present time by utilizing the built environment as a mode of problematizing for studying the Thai national and cultural identity. He investigates a number of buildings and public spaces that signify various types of power and function (in the Foucauldian sense) to explain "Thainess" as well as illustrating how Thais have appropriated modernity together with Western culture in creating their modern identity.

Rama VI

Although the architecture of present nostalgia is mostly focused on the Rama V (r.1868-1910) and Rama VI (r.1910-1925) era, the ideological focus is more on Rama VI and his nationalist agenda and its rhetoric of Nation–King–Religion. There is also a political program to attribute a Thai democracy to the "gift" of Rama VII (r.1925-1935) and to deny the agency of the People's Party. Both architectural discourse and practice are swept up in this contestation.

Ratana Tanadbanchee Tungasvadi (2004) has examined Rama VI's nation-building program, which functioned by promoting the three institutions of "nation, religion and monarchy" to bring about his idea of national prosperity. Due to the challenges from both external and internal problems, especially what he saw as the people's level of morality and lack of real understanding of the concept of nation, the king had applied

his own concept of nation-building policies which affected various aspects of the country. Hence, the declining social conditions of Siam as well as of other countries during the reign of King Rama VI are elucidated in Ratana's research.

Also on Rama VI's era and political program, there are Vella (1978) and Greene (1998). Though now more than 40 years old, Vella is a standard text on Rama VI, dealing especially with ideological and cultural aspects of the reign. On the wider context of the era and its culture, see Peleggi (2002; 2007).

M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (1985: 11-13) saw Rama VI as a bicultural monarch, existing simultaneously in two cultures and accordingly encountering difficulties in creating a nationalistic sentiment and in the related revival of traditional arts. His passion for English-style military grandeur contrasted with his revival of Siamese royal traditions and ceremonies; his manners of dress were similarly divided. Traditional arts might be advocated, yet after-dinner court entertainment would include recitals of his own most recent plays, games, rehearsals and music, all more Western than Siamese (Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra, 2007; King and Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra, 2017).

In architecture Rama VI believed there was a need to revive traditional forms and styles after the excessive embrace of Western motives in his father's era. While there is no evidence that he

believed in the traditional cosmology of the *Traibhum*, he certainly believed in the idea of a civilised pedigree and this was to be expressed in architecture. His enthusiasm for the revival of cultural heritage led to a new aesthetic, focusing on traditional architecture and its intricate craftsmanship to signify a civilised history and national identity, reflecting the English Arts and Crafts movement most notably represented in the work and writings of William Morris (1834–96).

His own bicultural eclecticism was especially expressed in the architecture of his own palaces. The Sanam Chandra Palace, a prominent country residence of King Rama VI in Nakhon Pathom province built from 1907 to 1911, brings together traditional forms, art deco, and English Arts and Crafts in a hybridised pastiche. According to the master plan, water was used as the main element to define the boundary of the palace and to

form the landscape of the palace. There is the wooden Thap Khwan residence in the form of connected, traditional pavilions, also the Watchari Romya residence in that traditional masonry style reserved for temples and royal palaces, but now suborned for both royal and middle-class residences. In some contrast, there is then the Chali Mongkhon-at residence in a curious hybrid of European styles, mostly referring to a German castle form but with a Siamese-style pediment over the central window. The overall complex is an assemblage of elements in the manner of Bang Pa-in or the earlier Phra Nakhon Kiri. Sanam Chandra Palace reflects the personal perspective of King Rama VI as well as the integration of western and traditional architectural principles that was taken further in the creation of the contemporary Thai house of his time (Sunon Palakavong Na Ayudhya, nd).

Rama VI's masterpiece was the Mrigadayavan Seaside Palace in Petchaburi, representing the search for a distinctively Thai (un-Chinese and un-Western) modernity. The Mrigadayavan consists of 16 teak pavilions raised on concrete pillars and linked together by a series of walkways. Construction was during 1923, overseen by Italian architect Ercole Manfredi. The great achievement of Vajiravudh's Mrigadayavan is in taking the idea of the traditional Siamese raised pavilion, opening it to the view and breeze, then translating it into modern materials and technology. Although there is a strong geometric order to the composition, the effect is an extraordinary openness, transparency and complexity. The common response from modern Thais is to describe it as "romantic"; it is also very theatrical, even baroque in its management of unfolding spaces and views as one moves through its sequences (King and Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra, 2017).

The palace is critically reviewed as one of three countryside palaces of three successive Siamese leaders: King Mongkut; King Chulalongkorn; and King Vajiravudh. The three palaces have value in apparently reflecting the three king's personalities, their policies and agendas on foreign relations, and their architectural aspirations as expressed through the diverse palaces in relation to

the transitional periods of Siamese modernization leading to the end of royal absolutism in 1932 (Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra, 2006; 2007).

Architectural Movements in the age of Rama VI

Prince Vajiravudh, later Rama VI, spent much of his formative years in England. He entered the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, in 1898 when he as age 17; in 1899 he moved to study law and history at Christ Church, Oxford, completing in 1901, then returning to Siam in 1903. He visited other European countries while living in England, most notably Belgium, also travelling to Berlin in May 1902 and Copenhagen in September 1902. During his return to Siam he also visited Japan and US.

Variravudh was an aesthete. His passions were in literature and the arts – notably, he translated Shakespeare into Thai. He also wrote his own plays in which he would frequently perform. He was among Thailand's most highly renowned artists, writing modern novels, short stories, newspaper articles, poems, plays and journals. As an aesthete with a voracious appetite for the most modern cultural movements, it is fair to assume that he was also deeply conscious of current ideas and movements in architecture. So, what might these ideas have embraced? What was the architectural discourse of the time?

There are many useful sources on these movements. Summaries are available in a diversity of general histories of architecture, including Kenneth Frampton (1985), Spiro Kostof (1995), Nicholas Pevsner (1936; 1963).

John Ruskin

Architectural debate in Britain in the nineteenth century was dominated by John Ruskin (1819-1900), polymath, art and social critic, political economist and prolific writer. Like Vajiravudh, he was associated with Christ Church, Oxford, and the wider Oxford Movement. It is inconceivable that voracious student of writing and the arts would not have been caught up in the wider discourse around the ideas of Ruskin at Christ Church. (And on Ruskin, Hewison, 2009).

Ruskin had published *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849, and then *The Stones of Venice* in three volumes from 1851 to 1853, profoundly affecting all

subsequent thinking on the moral and spiritual dimensions of architecture, conservation and wider culture. Notably, in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin turned away from classicism and thereby neo-classicism in architecture, arguing instead for an architecture linked to a culture's origins and a deep, authentic spirituality. It is equally notable that Vajiravudh's architecture was likewise a move away from the neo-classical styles that had been so enthusiastically embraced in the architecture of his father's reign. Vajiravudh would also seek an architecture that could address origins and a Thai authenticity. The connection would seem obvious.

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts

Also linked to Ruskin and Oxford University was English textile designer, poet, artist, writer, utopian and socialist activist William Morris (1834-1896). He was arguably the leading figure in the British Arts and Crafts movement. Just as one can readily hypothesise links between the spiritual proclivities in Ruskin's thought and the nationalism of Vajiravudh, so are affinities to be found between Morris's turn to originality in the arts and crafts and Vajiravudh's aesthetic turn.

In 1861, with colleagues Morris founded the renowned Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (later Morris & Co.), a decorative arts firm which profoundly influenced interior decoration throughout the Victorian period. While Vajiravudh would inevitably have experienced these Arts and Crafts interiors during his time in England, the influence of the movement on Thai interior design would have come more from professional architectural connections between England and Siam.

With Neo-Gothic and Ruskinesque architect Philip Webb (1831-1915), Morris designed the Red House from 1859 to 1860, in Bexleyheath, Kent. The house was deeply influenced by Morris' Medievalism and his ethos of craftsmanship and artisan skills, and is a seminal and deeply influential example of the Arts and Crafts movement in architecture.

Figure 6 The Red House, Bexleyheath, Kent, from 1859-1860. Architect Philip Webb, with William Morris

In the Red House, Morris and Webb turned to English vernacular forms and uses of material. There is a recall of the brick architecture of the late-Stuart reigns of William and Mary and of Queen Anne – indeed the style will sometimes be referred to as Queen Anne style, although there is also Dutch influence, especially in complex roof forms.

Importantly, the Arts and Crafts Movement, also the philosophical Oxford Movement to which Vejiravudh was inevitably exposed, were revolutionary socialist in their socio-political programs. While much of Vajiravudh's ethos shared the spiritual bases of those movements, there is certainly little evidence that he shared their socialist proclivities.

Other architects of the Arts and Crafts movement

Also significant was Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912). Shaw took up the picturesque possibilities of an assemblage of diverse motifs from different styles and times; he also turned to Tudor referencing, with elaborate chimneys and half-timbering. Thai houses of the Rama VI period would likewise take up picturesque assemblages of forms and details; examples of Tudor Revival are also to be found.

Figure 7 Cragside, Northumberland, 1869. Architect Richard Norman Shaw.

Charles Voysey (1857-1941) was another English architect of the Arts and Crafts, also a furniture and textile designer, like Morris. His influence has been considerable, as he is regarded as a major contributor to the English Art Nouveau, and thereby to modernism.

Figure 8 Walnut Tree Farm, Castlemorton near Malvern, Worcestershire. Architect C.F.A. Voysey, 1890.

Figure 9 Perrycroft, Colwall, Malvern. Architect C.F.A. Voysey, 1893.

Perrycroft exhibits the tapered masonry forms which also occur in Thai examples of the Rama VI period. The house is also clearly proto-Modern Movement.

Belgium

Vajiravudh may have confronted the Belgian Arts and Crafts movement while in that country in 1902. There the English style became significant around 1869, and inspired artists and architects including Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957). It is notable that the first Art Nouveau houses and decoration appeared in Brussels in the 1890s, in the architecture and interior design of houses by architects Paul Hankar, Henry Van de Velde, and especially Victor Horta (1861-1947).

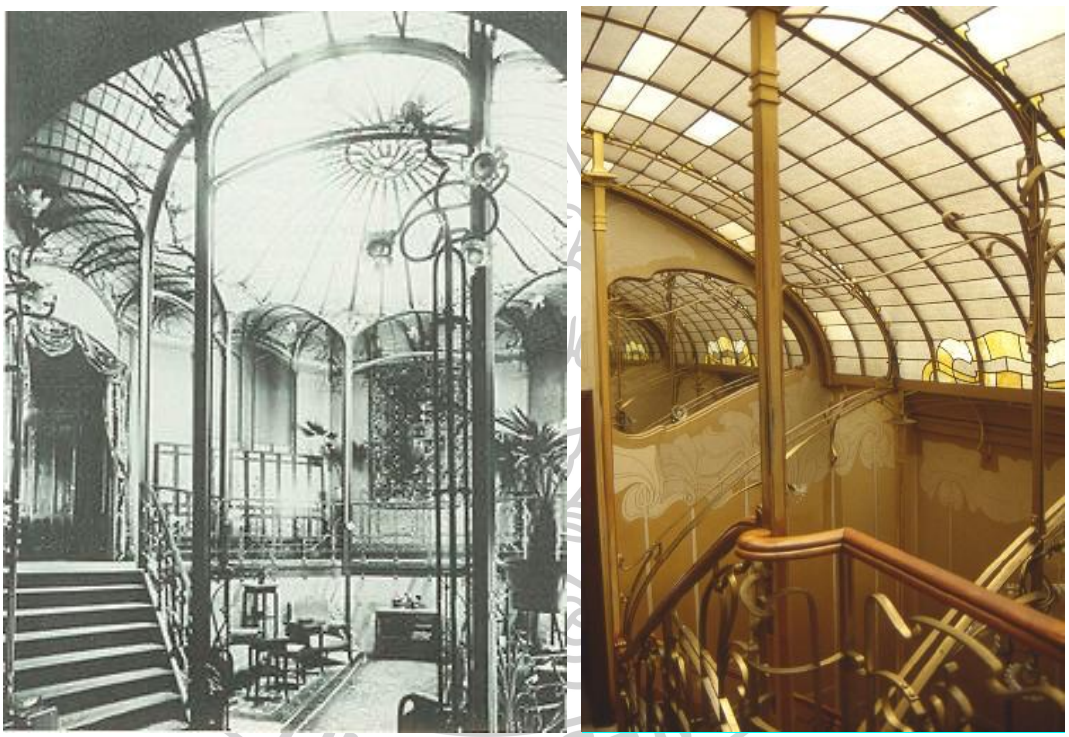


Figure 10 Two interiors by Victor Horta. (a) Winter Garden of the Hotel van Eelvelde (1895-1981); (b)Stairway and skylight of the Horta Museum (1898-1901)..

Art Nouveau

Arising in Europe variously from the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris, and also of historian Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was the Art Nouveau movement. The term first emerged in an1887 meeting of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, although the principles and style on which it as based had been developing in England for at least 20 years. While Art Nouveau can be seen as arising in part from the Arts and Crafts movement, the protagonists of that movement criticized Art Nouveau for its use

of industrial materials and for its acceptance of industrial capitalism (as opposed to the more socialist proclivities of Arts and Crafts).

The Art Nouveau movement was especially popular in the 1890 to 1910 period, thereby overlapping Vajiravudh's time in Europe. Art Nouveau was in large measure a reaction against the academicism, eclecticism and historicism of nineteenth century architecture and decorative art. It sought to break down the traditional distinction between fine arts (especially painting and sculpture) and applied arts. The movement was most typically characterised by flowing lines seemingly derived from nature, often intertwined in intricate patterns, often three-dimensionally, and illustrated in the Brussels examples from Victor Horta. It was most widely used in interior design, graphic arts, furniture, glass art, textiles, jewellery and metal work.

As well as spreading from Britain to Belgium (where the term was first used), it also migrated to Spain, most notably in the work of Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926), and also significantly to Germany as Jugendstil and to Austria as Secessionstil. In Germany the architect and designer Peter Behrens (1868-1940) in the Jugendstil and in the transition to modern architecture.

In Thailand, the most notable example of Jugendstil is arguably the Phra Ram Ratchanivej palace, designed by the German architect Karl Döhring (1870-1941). Though designed for Rama V, it was completed in the reign of Rama VI.

Art. Deco

By around 1910 the Art Nouveau movement was petering out, exhausted, with little new innovation. Art Deco, short for the French *Arts décoratifs*, emerged as a style in visual arts, architecture and product design in Paris in the 1910s; the term cam into use after the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*. While Vajiravudh would certainly have been exposed to the debates around the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau during his time in Europe, he missed the Art Deco movement – indeed, its emergence corresponded with the limits of his reign, 1910 to 1925. However, its influence was certainly communicated into Thai design and discourse during the reign via the fashion and architectural journals of the time.

It is worth noting that Art Deco became especially important in Siam after 1933, in the architecture of the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party). In the twenty-first century an official reaction against the heritage of the Khana Ratsadon and thereby its architecture was associated with a strong turn back to the heritage and ideology of Rama VI and to the architectural style of his era. This is an issue for Chapter 5, following.

Figure 11 Heavy-handed Art Deco (Khana Ratsadon style): General Post Office, Bangkok

Art Deco had its origins in the bold geometric forms of the Austrian Secessionstil (a variant of Art Nouveau) and Cubism (Picasso, Braque). It represented luxury, glamour, exuberance and faith in social and technological progress. There was a turn to bright colours and a preference for new and often expensive materials – ebony, chrome plating, stainless steel, plastic. It influenced the design of buildings (skyscrapers, cinemas, houses), bridges, dams, ocean liners, trains, cars, furniture, fashion, jewwellery and everyday objects such as radios and vacuum cleaners. The movement was international and certainly came to prevail in Siam. On its penetration into Thai culture, see for example Barmé (2006).

Frank Lloyd Wright

Vajravudh's life overlapped with that of architect, designer and writer Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), whose work can also be seen in the broader context of both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau. Wright early worked in the Chicago office of Art Nouveau

architect Louis Sullivan opened his own practice in 1893. Although he subsequently designed many large-scale projects, his early and arguably most distinguished work was largely residential – his own house in Oak Park, Chicago, of 1889 was strongly Arts and Crafts in its form and detail. Similar were other houses of that era.

By the early twentieth century, Wright was immensely influential in Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia), through the effect of architectural magazines but also through visits by local architects to the US. It is interesting to observe his Walter Gale House from 1893 – there are elements that will subsequently appear in houses in the Rama VI style.

Figure 12The Walter Gale house, Oak Park, Chicago, 1893. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright. It is Arts and Crafts (Queen Anne) in style but could aso be seen as proto-Rama VI in its roof forms, dormer and turret.

Frank Lloyd Wright was greatly influenced by Japanese architecture and design – he actually worked in Japan from 1917 to 1922. From around 1900 he had begun experimenting with emphases on horizontal lines, low and wide roofs, horizontally banded widows, in what he termed Prairie Houses, to reflect the horizontality of the mid-west US landscape ("the prairie"). The Japanese influence was increasingly detectable in these houses. The iconic Robie House of 1908 is typical of the genre.

The Prairie School (style) roofs were certainly translated to Siam, with their low profiles, cantilevers and wide overhanging eaves, and similarly the Arts and Crafts spirit of the houses. Also significant has been the broader ethos of Wright, where the main influences on his life, work and personality are often seen as 1) Art Nouveau architect Louis Sullivan whom he saw as his real master, 2) nature, especially plant forms (again the Art Nouveau heritage), 3) music, 4) Japanese art, prints and buildings, and 6) Froebel blocks, whereby as a chid he learnt the geometry of architecture in kindergarten play – the Robie House and much else of his architecture present as a play of blocks. Is Rama VI's Mrigadayavan to be seen as a play of (transparent) geometries in the Wright manner?

Figure 13 The Robie House, Chicago, 1908. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The Prairie School in its full maturity.

The bungalow

Another clear influence in the Rama VI house tradition was the colonial bungalow from the Raj era of India colonisation. In their many variants, these became the common form of dwelling of European expatriates throughout South and Southeast Asia, distinctive for their adaption to climate in the use of verandas, openness to the cooling breeze and wooden shutters against both heat and glare. The colonial bungalow's essential contribution to the Rama VI house design was the wide veranda

Figure 14 A very traditional Indian-style bungalow, Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Summary

The above notes, drawn from a considerable diversity of sources, consider some of the social, artistic and social movements prevalent in Europe and America in the era of Rama VI. Much of this would have dominated intellectual discourse at Christ Church during Vajiravudh's there (in "the college of John Ruskin"). It may or may not have influenced his choices and actions; it is, however, likely to have informed his worldview and thereby his underlying ethos and values.

However, these are certainly movements and ideas that would have informed the actions and decisions of the architects and designers who served Siam's royal and upper middles classes of the time.

Questions

In the light of the above brief review of literature, the question raised in Chapter 1 needs to be considered further. That question asks: "How does the Rama VI style house manifest in present inner Bangkok, variously as surviving memory, borrowed memory, and re-created memory, and what do these manifestations reveal about the links between history, memory and heritage in contemporary Bangkok?"

In Nora's terms we are asking how environments of memory have declined, effectively to non-existence, and what night now remain as sites or objects of memory, triggering nostalgic yearning at both a personal the institutional level (Halbwachs and collective memory). Clearly the focus is to be on nostalgia – at the personal level in Chapter 4, and at the collective/institutional level in Chapter 5.

Before that, however, it is necessary to establish precisely what is meant by the Rama VI house form and, more significantly, by its *style*. This will be the task of Chapter 3, which will inevitably need to repeat some of the argument from the present chapter, especially in terms of the context of the style. Each of these following chapters (3, 4 and 5) will involve fieldwork – exploring the fabric of Bangkok to discern the characteristics of the style (in Chapter 3), its loss (in Chapter 4), and the nostalgic return to its memory (and indeed to the *style*) in the project of purging unwanted memories (of more recent political turmoil and more distantly of revolution) and unfavoured values, and reestablishing something from a "better" age.

Chapter 3
The style of the Rama VI house

What is meant by the Rama VI house style and how is it to be placed historically and in the heritage of Thailand? This chapter explicitly addresses the first objective emerging from Chapter 1, namely to identify the characteristics of the typical middle-class house of the Rama VI era (and its extension into the reign of Rama VII), in the context of the architecture and economy of the King's own time. It is based on new fieldwork as well as selected secondary sources.

The modern era of Siam in the nineteenth century began with the threat of colonization and imperialism, from Europe (notably France and England) and subsequently the United States, in the competition for the new trade and commerce through treaties. Consequently, to resist imperialist aggression Siam began to reform the country in terms of administrative, educational and economic aspects as well as to develop modern infrastructure for the country. As a result, new buildings had been built to support the new activities and institutions. These buildings and their architecture were both Western and in new, mostly hybrid styles that attempted to express a nation's identity, initially designed by foreign experts (especially in the reigns of Rama IV and Rama V) and later adopted by indigenous people. In order to study the national architectural development of this era, we cannot ignore as context the political and ethical ideals of the community as a social entity or the wider ideals of the era (S. Chungsiriarak 2020, 22).

Rama VI and his era

Benedict Anderson (1991: 101) has suggested that Thailand, as the only Southeast Asian country to maintain a form of independence from direct colonial rule, invented a particular form of official nationalism as a device whereby a ruling elite sought to retain their political sovereignty by integrating the people in the name of the nation under their leadership. Barmé (1993: 9) has commented that the Siamese ruling elite imposed a standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high culture on their subjects to create a modern nation. Such official nationalism was variously referred to

as elite nationalism and *sakdina* nationalism (Batson 1999: 289), initiated from the top down, from the monarchy to the mass of the people.

By the beginning of the 20th century the absolute monarchy and its linked *sakdina* nationalism were becoming shaky, in part due to two significant structural weaknesses. First was absolutism itself, which denied political participation to new coteries of Western-educated officials (Kullada 2004). With the rise of print media, the king became the principal target of political criticism. Second was the structure of the population. King Chulalongkorn's (Rama V) main models for modernization were British and Dutch colonial regimes, including their practices of importing labor for building port facilities, railway lines, digging canals and expanding commercial agriculture. Earlier in the 19th century prisoners of war, typically from the Muslim south, had sufficed, supplemented by Siam's various tributary states. Now, however, other sources needed to be found in southeastern China. A massive immigration of young, single, male Chinese was encouraged. As Anderson (1991: 100) notes, this made good short-term sense for a dynastic state, as it created an impotent working class "outside" Thai society and left that society largely undisturbed. With the rise of a middle-class political awareness among both Thai and Chinese, the social mess was left to King Chulalongkorn's successor (Sompong 2007; King and Sompong 2017: 61-62).

When King Rama VI ascended to the throne in October 23, 1910, the situation of the world had changed in a way that was completely unfavorable for the throne. This situation was not so much the threat of imperialism as it was in the previous reign, instead, it was the political change of the world against the idea of the absolute monarchy.

There had been an overthrow of the monarchy around the world, to change the regime to a democracy or a regime under other names but without the King as the head of the nation. Beginning with the revolution of the Young Turks in Turkey in 1908, to Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution that took place in China in 1911, and which brought great influence to Siam. In Japan, although there was still a monarch as head of state, the royal powers were not centered on him as he was subject to the modern constitution.

European countries had undergone a lot of changes as well. Royal families of countries close to Siam's royal family, such as Germany, were revolutionized by the military into republics in 1918. Earlier there was a major revolution in Russia by Bolshevik socialists that brought about the destruction of the Romanov dynasty, whose Tsar Nicholas II had been a close friend of King Chulalongkorn. There was also a revolution of the far-right who called themselves fascists, revolutionizing the reign of King Victor Emmanuel II of Italy in 1923. Therefore, it was said that the world situation during the reign of His Majesty King Rama VI had become one of political instability, so that the survival of the absolute monarchy had become one of the most important problems that he must fight in order to maintain the throne throughout his reign. To counter the threatening instability, he took the initiative to establish a new clear national ideology for all Thais to uphold and to reject other political ideologies that were not beneficial to the throne (S. Chungsiriarak 2020, 212). From his experience at Oxford, outlined in Chapter 2, he had been exposed to prevailing discourses of Ruskin's medievalism, originalism and ideas of authenticity, and to the utopianism and revolutionary socialism of the Arts and Crafts movement, and while he certainly took up ideas of nationalism and authentic origins, and the sort of utopianism implicit in the Arts and Crafts ideal, any thoughts of socialism proved anathema.

The personality of Rama VI

Prince Vajiravudh was reportedly shy, quiet and unassuming as a child. He faced a problem when he became crown prince, becoming dominant and insolent towards his siblings studying in Europe at the time (Kanphirom 1981: 30–1), egotistical and boastful and preoccupied with his title and exalted status. He shunned sport lest he be shown up as a loser. He tried to find something else at which he could excel and it seems that literature and drama became his world. As a prolific, gifted and accomplished writer, Vajiravudh composed a number of fine works in both prose and poetry; he translated three of Shakespeare's plays into Thai (Vella 1978).

Vajiravudh returned to Siam in 1902. In Bangkok he was given the insignificant post of inspector-general of the army as all the important positions were held by his uncles

and elder half-brothers. However, when his father departed for Europe in 1907, Vajiravudh was appointed Regent of Siam. King Chulalongkorn died in 1910 and Vajiravudh succeeded to the throne as Rama VI. From his experiences of England's imperial grandeur and his observation of Japan's 1904–05 defeat of Russia, he emerged deeply nationalistic—notably, he coined the phrase *Chat, Sasana, Kasat* (Nation, Religion, Monarch), the shibboleth of subsequent right-wing regimes in Siam (Anderson 1991: 101), all strongly akin to the Ruskin and Oxford Movement ethos.

King and Sompong (2017: 62-63) have argued that there seem to have been five critical factors influencing Vajiravudh's official nationalism: (1) his childhood and educational background, most notably at Oxford's Christ Church college; (2) his character and personality; (3) the emergence of the new middle class and their calls for a constitution and parliament; (4) an abortive coup in 1912 by a group of young military officers who sought to overthrow his monarchy; and (5) his anti-Chinese sentiment in response to the increasingly restive and separatist Chinese community in Siam. This last is especially interesting: the Chinese, seemingly spurred by a Confucian work ethic, were constituting the entrepreneurial and economically successful urban class; they were emboldened by the 1911 overthrow of the Qing dynasty by disparate groups that certainly included the merchant class like their own. The Qing overthrow and then the demise of European monarchies after 1918 boded ill for monarchical absolutism.

Rama VI and architecture: ambiguity and contradiction

Vajiravudh's seeming racism is a paradox. Due to the predilection of his ancestors in pre-nationalist times for Chinese girls as wives and concubines, he was ethnically more Chinese than Thai (Anderson 1991: 101). M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (1985: 11–3) saw King Vajiravudh as a bicultural monarch, existing simultaneously in two cultures and accordingly encountering difficulties in creating a nationalistic sentiment and the related revival of traditional arts. His passion for English-style military grandeur contrasted with his revival of Siamese royal traditions and ceremonies; his manners of dress were similarly divided. Traditional arts might be advocated, yet after-dinner

court entertainment would include recitals of his own most recent plays, games, rehearsals and music, all more Western than Siamese.

In architecture, he believed there was a need to revive traditional forms and styles after the excessive embrace of Western motifs – again the Ruskin ethos, albeit translated to a Thai episteme and worldview, and, as practice, a translation of Arts and Crafts. While there is no evidence that he believed in the traditional cosmology of the *Traibhum*, he certainly valued the idea of a civilized pedigree and this was to be expressed in architecture. Three intersecting threads can be detected in his official architecture, variously to be identified as eclecticism, new (nationalist) invention, and Thainess. All are consistent with the philosophical positions to which Vajiravudh was exposed in his Oxford experience between 1899 and 1902. Each is considered following.

Eclecticism

His enthusiasm for the revival of cultural heritage led to a new aesthetic, focusing on traditional architecture and its intricate craftsmanship to signify a civilized history and national identity, reflecting the English Arts and Crafts movement most notably represented in the work and writings of William Morris (1834–96) and outlined in Chapter 2 above. Thus, at his Sanam Chandra palace in Nakhon Pathom, built from 1907 to 1911, there is the wooden Thap Khwan residence in the form of connected, traditional pavilions, also the Watchari Romya residence in that traditional masonry style reserved for temples and royal palaces. In some contrast, there is then the Chali Mongkhon-at residence in a curious hybrid of European styles, mostly referring to a German castle form but with a Siamese-style pediment over the central window. The overall complex is an assemblage of elements in the manner of Bang Pa-in (Bama V) or the earlier Phra Nakhon Kiri (Rama IV).

Figure 15 The Charli Mongkhon-at pavilion of the Sanam Chandra Palace of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI: an example of the King's eclecticism, with elements from a diversity of sources.

The pepper-pot tower over the entrance may reference a German (or French or Czech) castle form, or it could be to a Scottish castle. In either case, however, its use would defy Ruskin's insistence on authenticity in referencing. See, however, the more original (more authentic) use of the pepper pot form in Frank Lloyd Wright's Walter Gale House (Figure 12 previously). The mock half-timbering to the window atop the entrance is simply Tudor Revival, also found in other Thai minor palaces and great houses of the period (see Figure 7 above). It is interesting to note the affinity of the upper-level balconies of the New Bangkok Supreme Court building with the similar balconies Charli Mongkhon-at pavilion.

New (nationalist) invention: Mrigadayavan

There is evidence that King Vajiravudh disliked the royal palace in Bangkok, sleeping there only twice: once during his coronation and again nearing his death when he

insisted on lying in the royal chamber in the tradition of his ancestors (Mattani 1996: 164). While Sanam Chandra was a principal residence, Vajiravudh adapted the traditionalist principle of connected pavilions in drafting designs for a seaside holiday villa at Cha Am in Phetchaburi Province. The Mrigadayavan consists of 16 teak pavilions raised on concrete pillars and linked together by a series of walkways. Construction was during 1923, overseen by Italian architect Ercole Manfredi.

Figure 16 Mrigadayavan, Seaside Palace of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI: the search for a distinctively Thai (and un-Chinese) modernity (source: Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra)

The great achievement of Vajiravudh's Mrigadayavan is in taking the idea of the traditional Siamese raised pavilion, opening it to the view and breeze, then translating it into modern materials and technology. Although there is a strong geometric order to the composition, the effect is an extraordinary openness, transparency and complexity. The common response from modern Thais is to describe it as "romantic"; it is also very theatrical, even baroque in its management of unfolding spaces and views as one moves through its sequences. It is both deeply original and truly authentic in its turn to origins; it can certainly be seen as a reflection of the values, practical ethics and spirituality espoused by John Ruskin. It is also true to principles of the Arts and Crafts.

In its strong horizontality, also the wide-eved, low-lying roof forms it is evocative of the Prairie style of Frank Lloyd Wright.

In stretching older Siamese forms into something completely new, one can see Vajiravudh seeking a new modernist but Siamese architecture, just as in his writing he was looking for a new Siamese literature and theatre. No European palace is like this; one suspects, however, that Vajiravudh is also powerfully distancing his composition from Chinese shrine and palace forms.

Thainess

The idea of Thainess had been created during the reign of King Rama VI. The construction of many government buildings with an appearance that is similar to a temple had been conducted throughout his reign, moving away from the more Western styles that had been favored in the reign of Rama V. The high gable roof, with a slope of no less than 45 degrees, was finally cemented in the concept of Thainess. and becomes the true manifestation of Thainess in architecture. This shift in architectural expression is easily demonstrated from a survey of buildings built using the concept of Thainess in the Rama VI reign and subsequently in that of Rama VII. This view was strongly instilled in the conservative social and political atmosphere that was largely dismantled after the 1933 coup that ended the age of absolute monarchy, through the construction of new government buildings in a new, distinctly modern style throughout the country. This post 1933 architecture of the People's Party has attracted a substantial literature; see especially Chatri Prakitnonthakan (2009); Chua (2010); Koompong Noobanjong (2017).

New government buildings in this essentially derivative style were especially constructed along the new administrative centre of Thanon Ratchadamnoen Nok. A notable example along the Chao Phraya River is the building of the Department of Law Enforcement. In more recent times there has been a revival of this style, albeit

transformed and ‘modernized’, notable in the rebuilt Supreme Court building, which will be considered in Chaptter 5 following (King, 2023).

Mrigadayavan pre-figured

It is useful to observe an apparent prefiguring of the architectural form of Mrigadayavan, in the previous Nonthaburi City Hall, as this links directly into the Rama VI house form that is of present interest. Directly facing the Nonthaburi Pier on the Chao Praya River, the City Hall of Nonthaburi was initiated late in the Rama V reign to serve as The King’s School, based on the English public school model that the king had closely observed during his time in England. It was built in 1910. The school faced financial difficulties in 1925, and the building became the Nonthaburi City Hall. It is now the Museum of Nonthaburi (Nagnam, 2007)

Figure 17 Previous Nonthaburi City Hall, central pavilion.

Pre-dating the Rama VI reign and Mrigadayavan, the previous city hall building shows that the transparently open forms of the palace had antecedents and can be traced back to the linked pavilion forms of indigenous Thai residential architecture (Aasen, 1998). The break from indigenous tradition expressed in this and similar buildings, however, is in materials and how they are used in construction.

Notable is the hybrid roof form, of a gable at the front elevation morphing into a half-hipped roof, and of clear Arts and Crafts derivation. Wood is used decoratively; horizontally slatted shades are applied to the verandas with decorative asterixes. Woodwork was painted, as was increasingly the case with the houses of the emerging middle class. The wrap-around verandas are in the tradition of the colonial bungalow and different from the more traditional use of openness in Mrigadayavan. See Figure 18 previously.

Rama VI and middle-class house styles

In the reign of King Rama VI, the popularity of traditional Thai houses had been declining. Many newly built wooden houses in this reign were not in the style of the traditional Thai houses, but they were in a newly modified form with western influences. This style had already existed for middle-class dwellings the reign of King Rama V, in some ways paralleling the more explicitly western-derived houses of the royals, and had then developed further in this reign. The appearance was usually a two-storey wooden house with both a low open basement, and the use of full space on both a first floor and sometimes a second floor. If it was an open basement house, the basement was not as high as the upper floor(s), and the supporting pillars were usually large, built in square brick masonry, while the upstairs part was of a frame construction of wooden poles. (P. Tiptus 1982, 203-204). Some houses have been modified from western-influenced buildings: on one hand there were rectangular rooms with gable roofs and on the other there would be pavilions with polygonal rooms with polygonal, pyramidal roofs. Most of the roofs were usually using manila and hip joints, and the floor plans were quite complicated. For the smaller houses with simple, straightforward floor plans, they may use hipped roofs or manila half-hipped

roofs in order to keep out the rain because the gable vents were often made of wood pellets that permitted water entry. So, the hipped and half-hipped roofs helped to solve the problem of rainwater seepage at the roof ridge, at the joint between the gable windshield and the roof frame (P. Tiptus 1982, 213).

Cases

To understand some of the variants of this style, it is useful to observe a range of cases and their characteristics. While these are mostly non-residential, they suffice to enable discussion of the style.

Figure 18 Two examples on the Chao Phraya riverbank: Timber frame construction, roof forms are hybrid hip-and-gable, dormer windows. Roof coverings are kite tiles.

Figure 19 Again timber frame construction. Complex roof forms, both gable and hybrid hip-and-gable, kite tiles. Complex use of decorative timber fretwork. Verandas are typical of the style.

Figure 20 A simpler example: timber frame, hybrid hip-and-gable roof, kite tiles, decorative timber fretwork.

Figure 21 Roofs and cantilevered window hoods are in hip form, again with kite tiles. Note the use of strutted eaves cantilevers on the upper storey.

All of these examples exhibit the horizontality of the Prairie style, also the Arts and Crafts roof forms of William Morris and Philip Webb's Red House. The style is also exhibited in buildings for public institutions. A notable example is the former Nonthaburi Civic Centre complex, also fronting on to the river, where the style is expanded to what might almost be deemed its limits. The Nonthaburi complex also displays affinities with the Mrigadayavan palace. There are also examples of the style in masonry construction, as in the example below.

Figure 22 Rama VI ‘domestic’ style in masonry and translated to a large institutional building: again there are complex roof forms, hybrid hip-and-gable, dormers in various forms.

In both the Rama VI and Rama VII periods, the style was also used in administration buildings and in provincial centers, for example Nakhon Phanom. More recently there has been a move back to the Rama VI domestic style, both in the up-market restoration of some older buildings from the era and in new construction. Part of this turn to Rama VI style has been linked to the wider cultural turn to a pre-1933 Siam culture – part nostalgia and part nationalism. In Silpakorn University, Narin Naratuschan presented a thesis in 2012 on “Heritage Hotels”, revealing establishments that were variously Rama VI era buildings recycled (in one case a former palace) and new constructions reminiscent of that era

Summary

Characteristics of the Rama VI domestic style can be summarized from the examples reviewed above.

- Asymmetry generally prevails in planning, and with informality over formality. Elements will mainly be rectangular, though angled, hexagonal and octagonal elements will also be found. All this follows Arts and Crafts exemplars where the iconic case is William Morris and Philip Webb's Red House (Figure 6). The Red House, in particular, was widely disseminated and discussed in the latter half of the nineteenth century and would have been known to Thai architects and builders.
- Construction is typically in timber frame, usually teak, with vertical boards as cladding. More prestigious buildings may be in masonry construction.
- There will typically be a low under-storey, including in masonry buildings. The first floor will then be the main storey, with one or more storeys above that (Figure 21). The antecedents for this element are to be found in the Thai vernacular.
- Echoing the usual asymmetrical planning, roof forms may be complex, with irregularity celebrated. Dormer windows may augment the complexity of the roof form. Hip roofs prevail in contrast to the gable forms of traditional Thai architecture. However, hips will also be 'interrupted' by hybrid hip-and-gable elements, to enable ventilation of the roof space. Antecedents for these forms can be found in the Arts and Crafts (the Red House, again) and in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and the wider Prairie School.
- Roof covering is traditionally kite tiles.
- Window canopies may be used, repeating the detailing and materials of a building's roof design. While window canopies mat be Thai vernacular, the use of wooden window shutters is of broadly European derivation.
- Eaves struts, typical of traditional Thai architecture (most notable early Rattanakosin and Vientiane design), will occasionally be employed, as much for decoration as for structural support.
- Decoration will typically be in timber fretwork, sometimes with considerable

elaboration. Here the affinity is with later Arts and Crafts (the Queen Anne style, also identifies as ‘Edwardian’), and in some measure with Art Nouveau.

Assessment

Architecture is too rich in complex symbolism to be understood in a single universal manner. Importantly, each type of meaning will determine the behavior pattern, thoughts, and consciousness of a person, which will lead to them behaving in different ways when in that architectural space. Charles Jencks (1987) offers an interesting solution to reading architecture: Let us consider architecture as a kind of language (and on the issues of reading architectural forms in Bangkok more widely, see King, 2011). The various architectural elements are the "vocabulary". The design that combines various elements together is like the "grammar" of the language that allows us to understand the meaning. Architecture is not an object that is detached from its environment or its time. Therefore, any architecture has social, economic, and political dimensions involved in it deeply and tightly.

In the Rama VI and VII era, the domestic architectural style might be seen as expressing the Rama VI ideology of modernization and Anglophilia, more so than his nationalist preoccupations. The revival of the style in the present time presents as nostalgia, a turn to “heritage” (albeit fake heritage in the cases of new construction, although this issue will be addressed further in Chapter 5), as well as the nationalism turn of recent years as Rama VI’s ideology of Nation-Religion-King is adopted and a new-old vocabulary is embraced to “re-write” the city (King 2023) and thereby to express the concerns of the time.

In identifying the Rama VI domestic-scale style, this chapter has addressed the first objective established in Chapter 1. What we see in that style is an authentic Thai vernacular. While it brings traces from Western forms – the British colonial bungalow, the English Arts and Crafts Movement – it presents as an authentic and uniquely Thai vernacular.

Chapter 4
Destruction and survival

In chapter 4, the aim is to explore the survival of houses from the reign of King Rama VI on Silom, Sukhumvit, Sathorn, Ploenchit, Phaya Thai, and Wireless Roads in order to account for houses that still remain from that era, as places of memory – *lieux de mémoire* in the sense discussed in Chapter 2. It is directly relevant to the second objective of the present research, namely "To locate present instances of Rama VI houses, variously as survival, re-use and re-construction and to investigate their present roles."

The Bangkok streets of the 1950s

Anecdotal accounts of pre-1950s Bangkok refer to the city's expansion beyond Rattanakosin and its immediate neighbourhoods, as a landscape of main roads (Phaya Thai, Sukhumvit, Silom…) in part as corridors of the housing estates of the middle class. Inspection of maps from early and mid-twentieth century confirms the spread of this landscape of orchards, houses and more substantial residential estates – the realm of both wooden and masonry houses of the Rama VI (and Rama VII) style.

Marc Askew (2002) records that this landscape persisted into the 1950s and 1960s. English author W. Somerset Maugham visited Bangkok in 1923, and thought deeply about a lasting question: how can anyone truly describe a city? Each person experiences the city differently, making it hard to define. There are as many cities as there are people to dream of it. Bangkok, with its mix of modern and traditional elements—such as busy streets, European-style buildings, glittering temples, and canals—provoked Maugham's reflections. He captured in three sentences what many postmodern scholars have written about: the meanings of cities can vary. Great cities evoke strong reactions from visitors and locals; they serve as symbols of people, culture, and values. In this sense, Bangkok has inspired diverse responses and images from both insiders and outsiders (Askew, 2022: 1). From the early 1950s Bangkok's population grew at a strikingly faster rate than the countryside around it and other growing urban centres in Thailand (London, 1980: 32-35).

The key factors reinforcing Bangkok's role as Thailand's primary city were both demographic and economic in character (Askew, 2022: 56). The decade following World War II marked a significant period of reconstruction for Bangkok. The 1950s were characterized by an influx of people moving to the city in search of opportunities. As Thailand's economy began to grow, the 1960s and 1970s brought about urbanization and modernization. The inner city streets subsequently witnessed

significant infrastructural developments, including road expansions and the introduction of public transportation systems like buses and the skytrain. These changes facilitated mobility but also led to increased congestion. The vibrant street life, marked by traditional Thai shops and street food vendors, started to coexist with more modern establishments, such as banks and shopping malls. Cultural hotspots emerged, with art galleries and cinemas reflecting a growing appreciation for contemporary culture.

Especially in the 1970s and 1980s there were phrenetic waves of investment in commercial premises. Along a road like Sukhumvit, there would be rows upon rows of new shophouses creeping down a *soi*, whereupon the property developers would then move on to the next *soi* with further identical shophouse rows, then to the next, and the next after that. There would also be wave upon wave of shopping malls, condominium blocks, hotels, shopping malls in a frantic, exuberant but also herd-like, unreflective bonanza of over-development, for the most part funded by borrowing from equally exuberant and unreflective banks. In the absence of sophisticate analysis of the urban economy, supply vastly exceeded demand and the result was economic collapse – the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis. Buildings remained empty, and many unfinished. The other consequence of this was the destruction of that 1950s landscape.

What happened on Sukhumvit was repeated, with variations, along the other old roads of Bangkok – Phaya Thai, Silom, Sathorn, and the rest.

The Bangkok streets of the 2020s

By the 2000s, Bangkok faced challenges such as traffic congestion, pollution, and urban sprawl. In response, there was a growing awareness of the need for sustainable urban practices. Initiatives to revitalize inner city areas began to emerge, with a focus on preserving cultural heritage while promoting green spaces – a difficult enterprise in a heavily built-up city like Bangkok. Streets like Sukhumvit and Silom adapted to incorporate bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly areas. The traditional markets reemerged as popular attractions, blending nostalgia with modern consumer needs. Events celebrating Thai culture, such as street festivals, flourished, in part linked to tourism but also reinforcing the sense of community.

The period from 2010 to 2020 brought both opportunities and challenges. The political climate influenced inner Bangkok's streets, with demonstrations and movements shaping the urban experience. Events like the 2014 insurgency and coup especially transformed perceptions of roads like Sukhumvit, Silom and Phaya Thai. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a profound impact, leading to temporary street closures and a stark decline in street vendors due to

social distancing measures. However, this also sparked innovation; many vendors adapted by enhancing their delivery services. The resilience of Bangkok's street culture became evident as local businesses sought to survive and thrive amid adversity.

The contemporary landscape of Bangkok appears modern and influenced by current economic and consumer trends. The architecture and lifestyle reflect a focus on survival and status in today's globalized world. However, Bangkok’s historical influences are still present. Its past plays a crucial role in shaping its current state and transformation, indicating the extent to which history continues to impact the city's identity and dynamic despite the overwhelming impact of modernity.

Rattanakosin

Although Rattanakosin, the ancient core of old Bangkok, is not a direct focus of the present study, it will emerge as significant to the thesis's argument in Chapter 5. It therefore warrants mention in this discussion of the city's transformation.

Takeshi Tomosugi (1993) explores the landscapes of old town Rattanakosin in the twentieth century. He finds that these landscapes can be seen along Old Muang Nakhon Road and Bamrung Muang Road. Many of these areas are very old, reminding us of the time when they were built. The lives of the residents added personal touches, yielding feelings of closeness, like and dislike, age, and being outdated. This mix created well-known neighbourhoods over time. In the end, the roads and their surroundings became a living museum of Old Bangkok. He further argues that the suburbs are growing year by year to the city's exterior areas, where there were paddy lands and vegetable gardens generations ago. Big roads are constructed and modern shopping complexes are staged for displaying to today's consumers' tastes while the urban problems described above are worsening owing to unplanned developments. A number of places have suffered from demolition due to decay over time or rational calculation in terms of investment and profit under the market economy. The crisis of heritage and identity in society would come about when such sources for memories would be lost crucially in the course of the development (Tomosugi, 1993: 222).

Rattanakosin, however, has been spared the grossest of modern development – it is mostly protected by being under the control of the Crown Property Bureau. Its fate has been more the result of neglect than of development. It is more disheveled than "modern", with much of its historic fabric surviving. Since around 2010, however, its streets have become subject to programs of restoration, especially of Rama VI style buildings and streetscapes, and of new reconstructions in that style. This movement will be analyzed in Chapter 4.

Destruction and survival

The present fieldwork has rarely found traces of that landscape of orchards and houses or residential buildings of the middle class which were built in the age of Rama VI or even only a generation or so ago. The following describes the results of this fieldwork in each of the roads considered in the research.

Phaya Thai

The fieldwork began by exploring the landscape of **Phaya Thai** (or Phayathai) Road. Phaya Thai Road stands as one of the pivotal arteries in Bangkok, encapsulating the city's evolution over the last century. Its historical significance is intertwined with Bangkok's growth and modernization, making it a critical area for both residents and visitors. The roots of Phaya Thai Road can be traced back to the early 20th century, during the reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925). This era marked a significant transformation in Thailand, as the nation sought to modernize its infrastructure and adapt to contemporary challenges.

The establishment of Phaya Thai Road was part of this urban development initiative, aimed at enhancing connectivity within the city and promoting economic growth. The name "Phaya Thai" translates to "Thai King," reflecting the road's royal connections and historical importance. As Bangkok expanded in the 1930s, Phaya Thai Road evolved into a vital thoroughfare. It linked various neighbourhoods, serving as a corridor for residential and commercial activities, as well as government installations. This development not only increased urbanization but also contributed to the rise of a burgeoning middle class in Bangkok. In the following decades, Phayathai Road witnessed remarkable infrastructure growth.

The establishment of hospitals, schools, and shopping centers transformed the region into a bustling hub of activity. Notable landmarks, such as the Phyathai Palace, a former royal residence, added to the cultural richness of the area. The juxtaposition of historical sites against modern structures highlights the unique character of Phayathai Road, reflecting the blending of tradition with contemporary life.

From the survey of the landscape, houses, and lifestyle along Phayathai Road, there are buildings used as offices and residential buildings, with some new structures under construction, interspersed with congested communities of traditional residents. Most of these latter are simple wooden houses, with some from the era of King Rama VI tucked away near Chalermla Bridge. This area serves as both a residential community for original inhabitants and includes restaurants and pubs that open at night. Continuing along Phayathai Road in the Pathumwan area, there is The Royal Residence,

a wooden building among several constructed in the early days of Chulalongkorn University in 1917, meant to serve as a residence for administrators and foreign professors. Currently, only two units remain, and they received an award for outstanding preservation in 1997 from the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage. It is a rare instance of survival and of official recognition.

(It is worth commenting that, at the very beginning of this formal stage of the fieldwork, the author had intended to begin by returning to the celadon-green house referred to in Chapter 1. She entered the *soi* from Phaya Thai; the neighborhood was still surviving and the neighbors were warm in their greetings to a returning friend, albeit no longer a child. Further into the *soi* was the place of the old Rama VI-style, celadon-green house – it was now a vacant site. All had been demolished and the land now awaited its next occupant, presumably a condominium block! Though this "fieldwork observation" is merely an anecdote, there would be thousands of similar anecdotes describing thousands of sites along these road corridors.)

Silom

Silom Road is one of the most prominent streets in Bangkok, known for its bustling atmosphere, significant business district, and vibrant nightlife.

Historically, Silom began as a minor road in the late nineteenth century during the reign of King Rama V, when the area was primarily rural and largely used for agriculture. It started to develop and gain importance as Bangkok expanded. By the mid twentieth century, Silom transformed into a major commercial hub with the arrival of high-rise office buildings, hotels, and shopping centers.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Silom became known for its nightlife, particularly around the area of Patpong, which is famous for its night markets and entertainment. Today, Silom is a mix of corporate offices, cultural attractions, and nightlife establishments, attracting both locals and tourists alike. It is also well-connected by public transportation, with the BTS Skytrain, the MRT underground railway and several major roads intersecting in the area. Silom is not only a financial center but also a cultural hotspot, with temples, parks, and local markets that reflect the rich heritage of Bangkok.

From the landscape survey of Silom Road, it was found that the area is mostly filled with commercial buildings, high-rise office towers, pubs, and bars, alongside important religious sites of Buddhists, Christians, Chinese and Hindus. Many old shops have gradually closed down and disappeared from Silom Road. Houses from the era of King Rama VI have been transformed into restaurants and hotels, with only a few remaining in their original condition as residences for the next generation. Most of those houses are located further inside the smaller alleys (*soi*) off Silom Road.

Sathorn

Sathorn Road, a key artery in Bangkok's urban landscape, is emblematic of the city's rapid development and transformation over the decades. Nestled within the Central Business District (CBD), Sathorn has evolved from a quiet, residential area into one of Bangkok's busiest commercial hubs, teeming with skyscrapers, international businesses, and vibrant social life. The history of Sathorn Road dates back to the late 19th century, during the reign of King Rama V. At this time, the area was primarily rural and sparsely populated, characterized by traditional Thai houses and agricultural land. The road itself was developed as part of a broader initiative to modernize Bangkok, connecting the city centre to what were then peripheral areas and facilitating trade and transportation. By the mid-20th century, Sathorn Road began to flourish as Thailand underwent significant economic changes. The post-World War II era marked the beginning of rapid urbanization and industrial development, leading to an influx of businesses and expatriates. Large-scale investments in infrastructure and public transport spurred further growth, making Sathorn an attractive location for international corporations and financial institutions.

The late 1980s saw a construction boom along Sathorn Road, with the emergence of numerous high-rise buildings, luxury hotels, and commercial complexes. This transformation was driven by a growing economy and a burgeoning middle class, which increased demand for office space and modern amenities. Notable landmarks, such as the Sathorn Unique Tower (though incomplete), and the headquarters of various banks and multinational corporations, redefined the skyline, symbolizing the area's economic stature.

However, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis posed a significant challenge to Sathorn and the wider Thai economy. Many businesses struggled, and several construction projects were halted, causing a temporary slowdown in growth. Nonetheless, Sathorn demonstrated resilience as the economy gradually recovered in the early 2000s. In the 21st century, Sathorn Road has firmly established itself as a vital part of Bangkok's infrastructure, blending modernity with tradition. The area is home to both business districts and cultural sites, including embassies and art galleries. The coexistence of towering skyscrapers and historical landmarks reflects the city's dynamic evolution.

From the landscape survey of Sathorn Road, most of it consists of office buildings, embassies, hotels and schools. Houses built during the era of King Rama VI have been converted into embassy buildings, such as the Belgian Embassy, among others. Additionally, some have been transformed into restaurants and hotels, with only a few remaining in their original condition as residences for future generations.

Wireless

Wireless Road is a prominent thoroughfare in Bangkok, embodying the city's rich history and modern development. Stretching from the bustling heart of the capital to the serene areas that house many embassies and upscale residences, Wireless Road captures the essence of Bangkok's evolution over the last century. The origins of Wireless Road date back to the early 20th century, specifically to the reign of King Rama VI who, as previously observed, is often heralded as a modernizing monarch. During this period, Thailand saw significant advancements in technology and communication. The name

"Wireless" derives from the introduction of wireless telegraphy, which represented a leap forward in communication methods and showcased the nation’s efforts to embrace modernity. This innovative spirit permeated the development of the road, making it symbolic of the changing times.

As the city expanded, Wireless Road evolved into a vital link within Bangkok's infrastructure, facilitating movement and commerce. Over the decades, it became well-known for housing numerous foreign embassies, contributing to its international significance. Among these diplomatic missions are the United States and the United Kingdom embassies, which not only enhance the area's cosmopolitan atmosphere but also underscore Thailand's strategic importance in regional and global affairs. The character of Wireless Road has continued to shift as Bangkok underwent rapid urbanization and modernization. The late 20th century and early 21st century brought about extensive development, with new office buildings, luxury hotels, and shopping complexes emerging along the road. This transformation has made Wireless Road a bustling commercial center, attracting both multinational corporations and expatriates looking for a vibrant urban lifestyle. Despite its modernity, Wireless Road has managed to retain a sense of character and charm. The presence of green spaces, art galleries and cultural sites within the area serves as a reminder of the road's historical roots, especially as an up-market residential zone. It juxtaposes the sleek, contemporary architecture with pockets of cultural heritage, making it a unique blend of old and new.

From the fieldwork survey, Wireless Road is not only significant for its diplomatic and commercial aspects but also serves as a notable residential area. It is home to many affluent expatriates and locals who appreciate the blend of convenience and luxury within reach of Bangkok's major attractions. Wireless Road is a reflection of Thailand’s journey through modernization and growth. From its humble beginnings related to advancements in communication to becoming a cornerstone of diplomatic and commercial activities in Bangkok, Wireless Road embodies the city's spirit of resilience and adaptation. As Bangkok continues to evolve, Wireless Road will undoubtedly remain a significant part of this urban narrative, representing both the future and the legacy of a vibrant metropolis. In the old community area on Polo Alley, Wireless Road, there are houses from the era of King Rama VI hidden away, and it is still an area with residents, although the condition of

the houses is quite old and dilapidated. In addition, there is ‘Wang Witthayu’, the palace of His Serene Highness Prince Chai Nat Na Raendra, the founder of the Rangsit family. It was designed by Charles Beguelin, a Swiss-German architect, and is a two-storey building in the style of a German nobleman's house, as His Serene Highness Prince Chai Nat Na Raendra was an alumnus from Germany, and his consort, Princess Elizabeth, was also of German descent. Currently, this palace is a private residence of the family and is not easily open to the public for visits.

This inaccessibility issue is a recurring theme of heritage houses in inner Bangkok, and will be commented upon following. Where there are surviving houses of historical importance, there are usually also surrounding high walls, closed gates and surveillance cameras.

Ploenchit

Ploenchit Road can be traced back to the late nineteenth century during the reign of King Rama V, an era marked by significant modernization and urban planning in Thailand. The road was initially developed as a connection between the city center and the outlying areas, facilitating trade and transportation. It earned its name from the Ploenchit canal, which once flowed in proximity, offering a waterway for travel and commerce. By the early twentieth century, Ploenchit Road began to grow in importance as Bangkok expanded. The area attracted numerous businesses and residents, reflecting the city’s burgeoning economy. Notably, it became home to several embassies, upscale hotels, and shopping facilities, enhancing its status as a key district within Bangkok.

From the survey, Ploenchit Road mirrors Thailand's rapid development and globalization. The construction of high-rise buildings and luxury condominiums began to define the skyline, making the area attractive to expatriates and affluent locals alike. The establishment of the BTS Skytrain system in the late 1990s further connected Ploenchit Road to other parts of Bangkok, increasing accessibility and encouraging urban growth. The road is perhaps best known as a commercial hub, with a mixture of high-end shopping centers, such as Central Embassy, and international dining options. This vibrant

atmosphere coexists alongside traditional elements, such as local markets and small businesses, creating a unique blend of old and new.

Though now effectively “city center”, Ploenchit still harbored walled housing estates as late as 2010. All is now high-rise, high-end commerce, or else vacant land awaiting such developments.

Sukhumvit

Sukhumvit Road was constructed in 1919 after 'Miss Cole', the headmistress of the Kulsatri Wang Lang School, requested royal permission from King Rama VI. Miss Cole observed that the area around the Saen Saep Canal lacked proper road transportation, making life very difficult. Consequently, King Rama VI graciously ordered the construction of Ploenchit Road, extending from Pathumwan (or Rama I Road) to intersect with Wireless Road, which leads to the telegraph station (Ploenchit Junction). Subsequently, Chao Phraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum) considered cutting a road in the area to connect to Samut Prakan. Unfortunately, the Department of Sanitation did not have enough funds to carry out the project. Ibrahim Nana, the third-generation heir of the Nana family, gathered landowners and contributed the funds to the Department of Sanitation to continue the road construction from Ploenchit Road’s junction with Wireless Road to the entrance of Watthanawit School (Sukhumvit Soi 19). In 1927, His Serene Highness Prince Yukol Thikhamphorn, the Minister of the Interior, requested royal permission from King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) to construct a road from the mouth of Soi Sukhumvit 19 to Samut Prakan province, resulting in the creation of the 'Bangkok-Samut Prakan Road', which was opened on September 8, 1936 (Padiwatlada Bowornsak, https://www.silpamag.com/history/article_104661:2024). In the 1930s, the road itself was established as part of a modernization effort aimed at improving infrastructure and connectivity in Thailand. This expansion facilitated access between Bangkok and the eastern provinces. With the post-World War II economic boom, Sukhumvit began to transform. The road attracted a growing number of businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues catering to both locals and the increasing expatriate population. By

the 1980s and 1990s, Sukhumvit evolved into a bustling commercial and residential district, marked by the development of high-rise condominiums, shopping malls, and international hotels. Of the houses observed in the landscape survey of Sukhumvit Road during the era of King Rama VI, it was found that almost none remain in the present time. Even the house from the era of King Rama VI belonging to Mom Rajawongse Rujisamorn Suksawad, which used to be located in Sukhumvit Soi 8, has recently been demolished after

the owner's passing. In the past, the owner of this house was the mother of a renowned literary figure during a significant period in Thai society.

The survey of the landscape in the areas of Phaya Thai, Silom, Sathorn, Wireless, Phloenchit, and Sukhumvit revealed that the original landscape, which consisted of orchards and the middle-class residences built around the era of King Rama VI, has almost completely disappeared. The old houses that have managed to maintain their original status, if not converted into hotels or restaurants, are mostly the homes of affluent individuals with heirs to take care of the houses. They are also mostly behind high protective walls and inaccessible. The remaining properties have often been demolished to make way for modern buildings, or they are left to deteriorate over time. While there is considerable archaeological interest in lost temples and palaces, especially in the Rattanakosin area, there is very little effort to trace remnants of Bangkok’s residential districts of the past. Nor have there been efforts to record the city’s residential architectural heritage before its loss – an issue for future public policy, which will be addressed in recommendations following, in Chapter 6.

Survival and nostalgia

Following are selected cases from the fieldwork described above. The subject Rama VI style houses are illustrated to tie them into the discussion of the style in Chapter 3. The focus is on heritage as memory and stories, as emphasized previously.

House at no. 19 on South Sathorn Road

An interview was conducted with the owners of a long-standing family house in Bangkok's Sathorn district. The female owner, who was born on Sathorn Road and later married into the household, has lived in the house for nearly seventy years. Her educational background—tracing through elite Catholic schools and a prestigious university—speaks to the complex layering of class, gender, and urban belonging within Bangkok's mid-20th-century landscape.

According to the family's oral history, the house was acquired in 1945 by the mother-in-law of the current owner. She had previously operated a cosmetics business in the Yaowarat area and moved to Sathorn after accumulating sufficient savings. Her product, a liquid face powder known under the brand name Pang Num Bayan, was widely popular at the time, partially due to its promotion by a prominent novelist. It is said that their personal friendship deeply influenced the writer's career, suggesting that the house's history is interwoven not only with commerce but also with networks of literary and cultural production.

Upon relocating, the family was informed that the house may have been used by Japanese forces during World War II—an anecdote that subtly inserts this domestic space into the broader geopolitical history of wartime Bangkok. These layers of memory—economic, cultural, and historical—are silently embedded in the materiality of the house.

Alterations to the house have been minimal. A corridor on the eastern side has been converted into a Buddhist prayer room, and a fence was constructed to divide the house from an adjacent luxury hotel. A family member reflected that this physical barrier marked a deeper transformation in social relations within the neighborhood. In the past, the surrounding houses were similar in style and ownership. One such neighboring house was demolished to make way for the hotel, which now towers over the heritage residence—symbolizing both the vertical development of the city and the fragmentation of historic communities.

The garden still retains a traditional canal drainage system connected to the larger Sathorn canal, serving not only as an ecological feature but as a living remnant of

Bangkok's water-based urbanism. The preservation of such features exemplifies how cultural memory is sustained through domestic infrastructure.

A family member emphasized the importance of heritage conservation as an intergenerational responsibility. They expressed resistance to converting the home into commercial property, believing that heritage should remain lived-in and morally grounded. In their view, the essence of this house is not simply architectural but ethical, built upon inherited values such as gratitude and obedience to elders. However, they also acknowledged that modern lifestyles have introduced challenges to this transmission. Younger family members increasingly choose to live separately, and government policies—such as rising inheritance taxes—further discourage the preservation of ancestral homes.

The owner has taken a particular interest in state-led conservation incentives and advocates for a more robust policy framework to protect historical residences in Thailand. They see academic work, such as this thesis, as playing a crucial role in making visible the decline of old houses in Bangkok's urban core. Moreover, the owner hopes for a comparative policy dialogue—asking what can be learned from international models of heritage conservation, such as those in Australia, and how such insights might be adapted to the Thai context.

In this narrative, the house emerges not merely as a physical structure but as a contested site of memory, identity, and resistance. It reflects the tensions between preservation and modernity, between state policy and personal values, and between the rootedness of the past and the uncertainties of the urban future.

Figure 23 The Rama VI style house at 19 South Sathorn Road. The garden space and its extent is as much part of the Rama VI aura as the house itself.

Figure 24 Inside the house. A function of a house is to hold and preserve family photographs, precious carriers of memory and anchors of identity. Photographs may be tangible, but it is intangible heritage, in the sense argued in Chapter 1 above, that they convey.

Figure 25 Elaborated woodwork, complexity of widow panes, are all typical of the style as discussed in Chapter 4.

Figure 26 The ubiquitous and auspicious use of potted plants in the traditional Thai home.

House at no. 33 Silom Soi 3, Silom Road

An in-depth interview with the owner of a traditional wooden house in Bangkok's Silom Soi 3 reveals the intricate interplay between space, memory, and cultural continuity. The family relocated to this residence in 1955, moving from Si Kuk Praya Sri due to the limited space of the previous dwelling, which could no longer accommodate the entire household. This move was not merely a spatial adjustment but also a reflection of the family's desire to maintain proximity and cohesion—an expression of kinship obligations inscribed in the domestic landscape.

Since the relocation, the house has undergone relatively minor modifications. These include the elevation of the house to prevent flooding and the installation of awnings over the window frames. The roof has been repaired using materials closely resembling the originals, and the house has been repainted in its original light green tone known locally as Si Kiaw Kai Ka. Such interventions illustrate an intentional effort to preserve the historical character and aesthetic integrity of the home amid an ever-transforming urban environment.

Notably, the garden has been maintained in its traditional form, including a drainage system that was once connected to the Sathorn canal. This system is more than a functional element—it represents a form of ecological memory that ties the house to the city's older infrastructure and water-based landscape, offering resistance to the standardization of modern urban development.

Upon their arrival, the family discovered remnants of the previous owner, a foreign national, including chemical bottles left inside the house. This discovery led to the assumption that the former occupant may have worked in the chemical or pharmaceutical industry. Years later, a visitor—claiming to be a friend of the previous owner—appeared at the house and explained that he had been asked to visit the new residents. Such encounters reflect the house's transnational past and the ways in which global flows intersect with local domesticities.

According to local narratives, the house originally belonged to a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Forests. The surrounding land in Silom Soi 3 had once been owned by a noble who had received it as a royal grant from King Rama VI before selling plots to affluent buyers. These origin stories situate the house within broader historical processes of land redistribution, aristocratic power, and the commodification of urban property.

What distinguishes this residence is its continued role as a site of cultural transmission. Each year, the family performs a merit-making ceremony in remembrance of the previous owner—a ritual that simultaneously affirms religious belief and enacts spatial memory. The owner continues to adhere to moral principles inherited from a maternal lineage, many of which derive from The Book of Decorum

(1912), written by Chaophraya Phrasadet Surentharathibodi. These values are not abstract; they manifest in everyday practices, household routines, and the spatial organization of the home.

The house has also served as the setting for significant familial events. During the interview, the owner recalled a wedding held in the garden, prompting a spontaneous decision to reconnect the old cupid fountain. As water began to flow again under the morning sun, the owner gazed quietly at the house—an intimate moment in which the materiality of the home revived emotional and intergenerational memories. As an ethnographer, witnessing this act underscored how built environments can become vessels of affective and mnemonic continuity.

Although several business offers have been made to purchase the property, the owner and family have consistently declined. Nevertheless, the future of the house remains uncertain, contingent on the decisions of the next generation. The interview concluded with the owner expressing concern about a high-rise development soon to be constructed on the vacant plot opposite the house. “What is the point of living in a heritage house,” the owner asked, “if I can no longer look up and see the sky?”

This final reflection encapsulates a broader anxiety concerning the erosion of heritage in rapidly transforming urban landscapes. The house thus stands not only as a physical structure but as a repository of cultural memory, ethical values, and spatial identity—now challenged by the encroaching forces of vertical development and real estate capital.

Figure 27 The house at 33 Silom Soi 3, Silom Road. A timber house, asymmetrical in plan and typically elaborate in roof forms. Note the incongruity of the house's surroundings, seemingly looming as a constant threat.

Figure 28 Detail of fine timber work. Note the elaborated window shutters.

Figure 29 Geometric complexity typical of the Rama VI house style.

Figure 30 A new extension to the house is designed to complement its form and architectural detailing, while adding to the role of climate protection.

Figure 31 The under-storey as a veranda. Note the complexity of glass panes on the upper store, revealing the affluence of the house's provision.

Figure 32 Further complication.

Figure 33A quaint outdoor space with a covered porch. The structure features pinkish-brown paneling with white and brown trim. The porch is accessible by a small set of steps and is enclosed by a railing.

Figure 34 A section of a building exterior with rectangular panels in a pinkish-brown color. The panels are framed by brown borders. Some panels exhibit visible wear, such as peeling or cracking surfaces.

Sukhumvit

The residence in this case is located on Sukhumvit Soi 8 and is owned by a female descendant of a noble lineage, now in her advanced age. The house, which also once served as the site of a private school, reflects the intersections of gender, memory, and social responsibility in urban domestic space.

The owner was born in 1920 during the reign of King Rama VI. Following the early death of her father, a naval officer of high rank, the family relocated from Ratchadamnoen Road to the current site on Sukhumvit Road. This spatial transition, from the political heart of Bangkok to a developing suburb, paralleled a shift in the family's orientation from elite public service to grassroots education. It was here that the owner's mother established a private school—later known as Wannawit School—on their residential compound. The institution quickly gained recognition for its affordability and accessibility, values rooted in the mother's vision of education as a civic duty rather than a commercial enterprise.

Now nearly a century old, the owner faces declining health yet retains vivid memories, particularly those associated with her mother's legacy. The house remains a living archive of intergenerational values, adorned with family heirlooms and portraits that silently narrate a history of resilience and moral commitment. In conversations, the owner often returned to the themes of diligence, integrity, and service to society—values she identified as central teachings from her mother, and which she has sought to embody throughout her life.

Drawing from theoretical perspectives on cultural memory (Assmann, 2011) and gendered heritage practices (González, 2016), this house may be read as a site where moral and maternal authority is spatialized. The household functions not merely as a container of memories, but as a site of ethical formation and lived pedagogy. The school, although no longer active, continues to resonate within the family narrative as an embodiment of social values transmitted through the female line. This aligns with scholarly work on how domestic and educational spaces become interlinked in women's heritage-making practices.

The continued presence of photographs and personal belongings within the home signifies not only remembrance but the active curation of familial identity through material culture. The owner's life story, intertwined with that of her mother and the school, provides insight into the role of women in shaping informal educational infrastructures in Bangkok during the mid-20th century—often under-recognized in formal historical accounts.

As urban landscapes in Sukhumvit shift rapidly under the pressures of commercialization and vertical development, this house remains a quiet site of resistance, preserving not only architectural continuity but also the moral and

affective fabric of a bygone era. The case illustrates how heritage is experienced not just through buildings, but through enduring ethical commitments and gendered responsibilities passed down within families.

Figure 35 Exterior view of the Sukhumvit house

This modest one-story wooden house, located in the Sukhumvit area, reflects the architectural style of middle-class urban homes in the late Rama VI era. Its symmetrical gabled roof, paired windows, and minimal decorative elements emphasize functionality and simplicity. Despite its age, the house has been maintained in its original form, symbolizing the owner's commitment to preserving family heritage in a rapidly transforming neighborhood

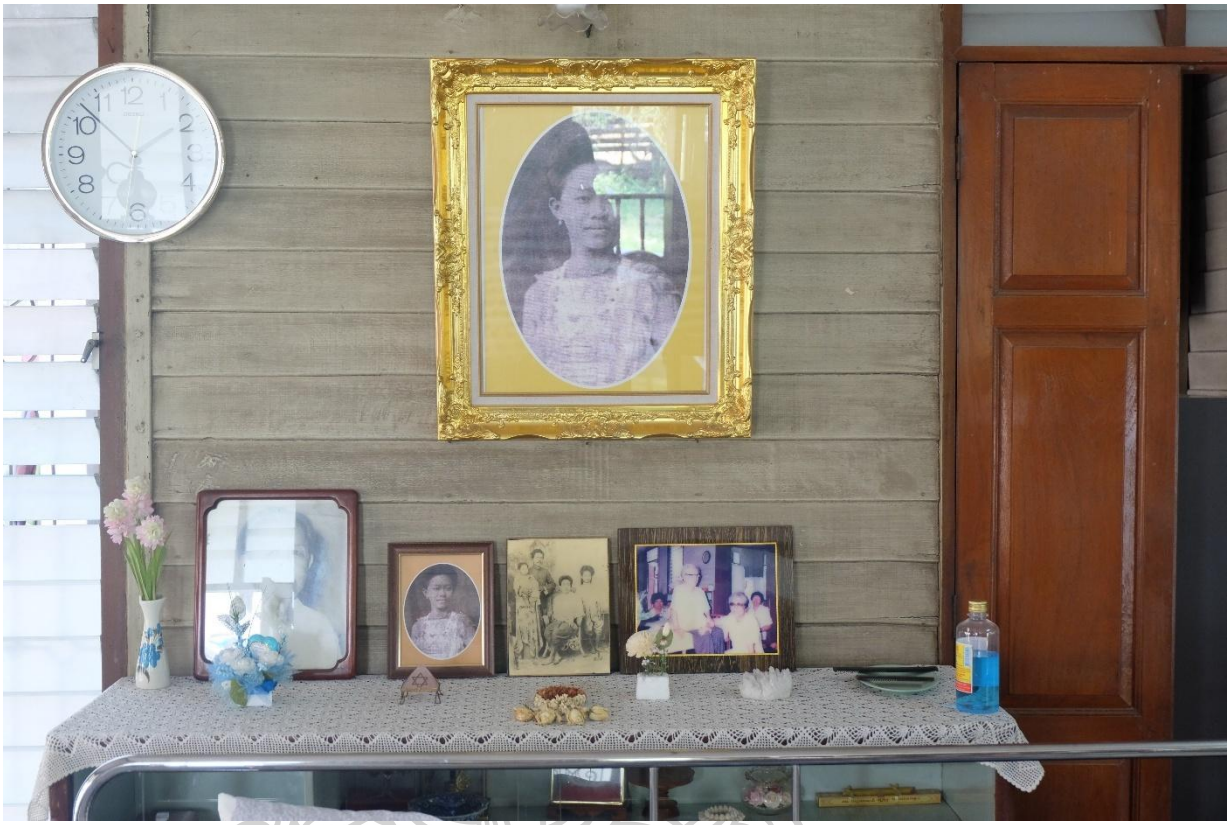


Figure 36 Interior wall with family photographs

Inside the house, a carefully arranged collection of ancestral photographs is displayed on a traditional sideboard, serving as a domestic shrine. At the center is a framed portrait of the owner's mother, a revered figure whose values and vision remain deeply embedded in the family's memory. This domestic display reflects the role of kinship, filial piety, and personal memory in sustaining the meaning of home across generations.

Ban Krua Nuea

In the Ban Krua Nuea community, located along the Khlong Saen Saep canal in the heart of Bangkok, the owner of a century-old wooden house provides a living testament to multi-generational memory and layered ethnic identity. The house, built by a Chinese craftsman and now estimated to be around 100 years old, has remained virtually unaltered since its construction during the early reign of King Rama VI. Its original orientation—facing the canal to the southwest—reflects both practical and cultural considerations embedded in vernacular urban design.

The owner, now 76 years old, was born in the house and represents the third generation to have resided within its walls. Her maternal lineage extends back to Cham communities that migrated from Cambodia and played a military role during Siam's historic "Nine Armies' Wars." A sword believed to have been used by an ancestor in this conflict is still kept in the home, symbolizing a form of embodied memory that connects kinship, ethnic identity, and national service. One great-grandfather served in the navy, while another male ancestor was a community imam—suggesting a convergence of religious, military, and civic leadership within the family's historical narrative.

As the owner recounted, the house was built after her grandparents married, and her mother was also born there—marking the dwelling as a matrilineal anchor, both spatially and socially. Over the decades, the house has resisted the material transformations common in urban Bangkok, standing instead as a place where memory is preserved through continuity rather than renovation. The surrounding garden, once a vital part of the household economy, features old mango trees that served as a source of income when Chinese merchants from the neighborhood would purchase fruit directly from the family.

Women's labor has historically shaped the domestic rhythms of this home. In her youth, the owner witnessed her mother and female cousins engage in silk weaving—a skill that contributed both economically and symbolically to the family's livelihood. This aligns with anthropological studies on gendered labor within heritage households, where craft traditions often become forms of both resistance and resilience (cf. Herzfeld, 2004).

The family history is deeply rooted in both Muslim and Khmer cultural practices. While the owner has long followed Islamic traditions, she also described how Khmer

language, cuisine, and social customs have profoundly influenced her life. This hybridity illustrates the complex layering of ethnic pluralism in Bangkok's older neighborhoods—what Clifford Geertz might call "webs of significance" that shape lived experience through overlapping identities.

Despite changes in the surrounding area and increasing interest from real estate developers, the owner has consistently refused offers to sell the property. Proposals to convert the house into a boutique hotel or hostel have been declined in favor of preserving it as a space of familial remembrance. Today, only three individuals reside in the house: the owner, her niece, and her nephew. Photographs of family outings, including visits to Lumpini Park, continue to adorn the interior, turning the house into what Assmann (2011) would describe as a site of cultural memory.

This case exemplifies how heritage is not only preserved through physical structures, but through embodied narratives, daily rituals, and the conscious refusal to commodify memory. The owner's story challenges dominant narratives of urban progress by asserting the value of ancestral continuity over commercial reinvention. In doing so, this house becomes more than a building—it becomes a vessel for historical, cultural, and emotional inheritance passed through generations.

Figure 37 A traditional wooden house from the Rama VI era located in the Ban Krua Nuea community, Bangkok. The structure exemplifies key architectural features of the period, including a raised wooden platform, elaborately carved fretwork panels, and multicolored glass windows arranged in vertical strips. The external staircase and elevated design reflect vernacular adaptations to the tropical climate. This house serves as a living testament to early 20th-century middle-class domestic architecture and the persistence of cultural memory in a rapidly modernizing city.

Ratchathewi

Located in Phetchaburi Soi 20, within Bangkok's Ratchathewi district, this three-story residence—constructed nearly ninety years ago by a Thai architect—serves as a compelling example of how built space intersects with elite memory, political history, and everyday heritage. The owner, a former university lecturer, is a descendant of royal lineage and a custodian of one of Thailand's most quietly influential aristocratic homes.

According to the owner, the house was built during the reign of King Rama VII, shortly before the 1932 revolution that marked the end of absolute monarchy in Siam. The land was originally acquired by the owner's grandfather, a prominent prince and scholar who had worked closely with King Rama VI. As a grandson of King Rama IV, this ancestor occupied multiple roles: regent to King Bhumibol Adulyadej on three separate occasions, a senior statesman, and a leading intellectual in Thai historical and cultural studies. His academic influence extended into civil society through his long tenure as president of the Siam Society.

The house, while aristocratic in provenance, embodies the vernacular aesthetics of the early Rattanakosin revival style associated with the late-Rama VI period. One particularly distinctive architectural feature is the presence of a punkah—a large, manually-operated ceiling fan suspended from above, traditionally used in tropical and semi-tropical climates. Also known as a "pud chak" in Thai, the punkah functions through a system of ropes and pulleys, allowing the fan to swing gently and generate airflow throughout the space. In this house, the punkah is located above the dining area, signaling both the climatic adaptation and the social customs of an earlier era.

Despite its royal association, the house is not palatial; rather, it blends high-status symbolism with the modest spatial rhythms of family life. This convergence situates the residence as what scholars such as Michael Herzfeld would describe as the heritage of everyday life—where architecture quietly negotiates memory, ritual, and class identity.

After the political upheaval of 1932, the owner's grandfather was redirected from his official post at the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to more scholarly responsibilities. He was later appointed to the Privy Council, a shift that reflects broader patterns of

adaptation among the aristocracy during Thailand's transition to constitutional monarchy. These historical transitions are silently inscribed into the structure of the house itself—through its layout, its preserved objects, and its enduring sense of temporality.

The house remains in family ownership and continues to be inhabited, resisting the commercial transformations that have overtaken much of central Bangkok. It has withstood waves of modernization, political reform, and shifting urban priorities—not through resistance in the political sense, but through a quiet commitment to staying in place. It exemplifies how elite heritage can coexist with, and indeed blend into, the rhythms of ordinary domestic life.

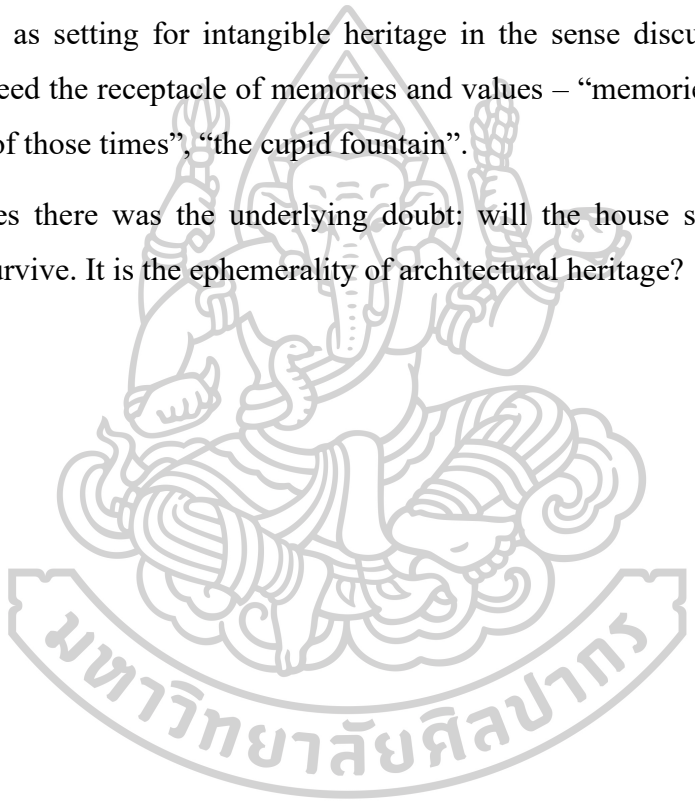
As such, this residence constitutes not only a private memoryscape, but a spatial archive of Thailand's early twentieth-century political and intellectual elite. Its continued presence amidst high-rise apartments and commercial development is a reminder that heritage can persist not only in monuments or museums, but in lived spaces where history, identity, and architecture converge.

Figure 38 A three-storey residence located at House No. 566, Petchaburi Soi 20, Ratchathewee District, Bangkok. Built during the reign of King Rama VI, the house showcases a masonry structure influenced by early 20th-century European styles, including arched windows, timber louvered shutters, and a recessed portico. This architectural hybrid reflects the socio-political aspirations of the period, blending Western forms with Siamese sensibilities. Still inhabited by descendants of the original noble family, the residence represents a rare surviving example of domestic architecture from the Rama VI era, standing as a site of living memory within a rapidly urbanizing environment.

Heritage and values

What especially emerges from these interviews is the salience of values. The owners expressed commitment to family values, so “the value placed on morality”, also “gratitude and obedience to the ancestors”, yet there is the precariousness of these values under the assault of the values of modernity. There is also the value placed on tradition. While they saw the importance of their houses as tangible heritage, they also dwelt on the house’s role as setting for intangible heritage in the sense discussed in Chapter 1; the house is indeed the receptacle of memories and values – “memories of important events”, “memories of those times”, “the cupid fountain”.

In both cases there was the underlying doubt: will the house survive – will even the memories survive. It is the ephemerality of architectural heritage?



Chapter 5
Discussion: the revival of the Rama VI style

The present chapter addresses the third of the study's objectives, namely to explore the role of the Rama VI and VII houses and their architectural style as expressions of an ideal Bangkok past, and thereby to reflect on these expressions and their effects in the present time. It thereby also addresses the project's "subsidiary question" from Chapter 1: "How is the revival of interest in the Rama VI house style to be seen variously in contexts of nationalism, nostalgia and historic conservation?"

The chapter first reflects on the findings emerging from the direct fieldwork research (that is, from Chapter 4 above), specifically on the disappearance of traces of the domestic architecture of the Rama VI and Rama VII era. It then returns to the question of nostalgia (from Chapter 2), first as human emotion in the sense of the loss of the past (the author's sense of personal loss, as recorded in Chapter 1 and through the fieldwork of Chapter 4), but second as "official" or mandated nostalgia as the state seeks to re-create a sense of the past, as part of a nationalistic/patriotic endeavour to institutionalise re-imagined values of the Rama VI and Rama VII era. Fieldwork for the chapter comprised observations in Bangkok and beyond over several years.

The question of nostalgia

The broad theme of this thesis has been loss and the sense of nostalgia. Modernisation of the economy has led to de-population of rural Thailand and massive rural-to-urban migration, especially to Bangkok. The consequent pressures of urbanisation have brought about the inevitable loss of the old, low-density, dispersed landscape of once-peripheral districts defined by arterial roads such a Sukhumvit, Phaya Thai, Sathorn and the like. Small orchards, middle-class houses from the Rama VI and VII era, housing compounds of the elite, are now mostly rows initially of shophouses, then in more favoured districts replaced by arrays of high-rise offices, hotels and condominium blocks.

What was once peripheral is now central Bangkok, caught up in the phenomenon of waves of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1942) – the annihilation of old investments to make way for new, more high yielding investments under capitalism.

Two forms of nostalgia come into play in present Bangkok (and arguably in Thailand more widely). First, for people with continuing emotional ties to those old districts, or perhaps simply retaining fond memories of having seen those old places, there can be the emotional sense of nostalgia – perhaps melancholia. It is akin to the loss of *milieux de mémoire* and the often vain search for compensating *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1986), reviewed in Chapter 1 above. In Bangkok as in other areas of Thailand, one confronts derelict buildings from earlier reigns that, in many minds, will refer to a more stable age and respect for tradition.

Figure 39 Forlorn traces of lost times (1). The loss of old places is not confined to Bangkok – this abandoned house from the Rama VI time is in Nakhon Phanom.

Figure 40 Forlorn traces of lost times (2). In large measure, the Chao Phraya riverbank is a landscape of ruins, with much from the time of Rama VI and Rama VII, like the building here. (However, by March 2017 it had been restored.)

The nostalgic (re-)turn to the age of Rama VI

While the ruined, forlorn traces of these lost times might evoke memory and the sense of loss, there is also the phenomenon of "new" Rama VI houses. These are variously old houses restored but also new constructions; they occur seemingly randomly, often hidden in a secluded *soi* or in an almost invisible elite housing compound. Following are a few examples of these claims of a Rama VI era authenticity.

Figure 41Though corporate/institutional rather than residential, this painstakingly restored Rama VI masonry style building is a rare survival on Charoen Krung Road.

Figure 42 A finely restored and well presented example, displaying many characteristics of the Rama VI masonry style. (b) A more secluded example, hidden between Sukhumvit sois 2 and 4. Both display the corner pepper-pot towers typical of the style, also asymmetry and informality of planning.

Valued cases of finely restored Rama VI style domestic scale buildings will also be found in relatively distant provinces, evidence of the expanse of both commercial development and central-government administration in the absolutist age. The example below is on the Mekong Riverbank in Nakhon Phanom.

Figure 43 An official residence, subsequently restored in Nakhon Phanom. Note the use of eves brackets typical of the style.

The nostalgic re-invention of the age of Rama VI

The second form of nostalgia is more general – for "the good old days" rather than for any specific place or environment. A time of uncertainty – of foreboding, of fear for the future – was especially noticeable during the final decade of the King Rama IX reign: politics from around 2001 were unsettling for many (and especially for elite sectors of society), and old certainties seem to have gone. Democracy seemed fraught and there was a highly selective recalling of the time of absolute monarchy, that is of the time of Ramas V, VI and VII.

No doubt sensing the mood of the time, some architects, entrepreneurs and property developers turned to the neo-classical styles of the European imperialist age that had been adopted by King Rama V as part of his own projection of a Siamese imperial-nationalist modernity. Especially prominent in this return to the Rama V signing of the city were the buildings of architect Rangsan Torsuwan – Amarin Plaza (from 1985) on Ploenchit Road, the Grand Hyatt Erewan Hotel (around 1990) on Ratchadamri Road, State Tower on Charoen Krung, the long-failed Sathorn Unique on Sathorn, and others (King, 2011: 190-

193). It is to be noted that much of this production was on the old main roads previously identified as the domain of Rama VI-style residential streetscapes – they were now the city's grand boulevards variously of commerce, diplomacy and tourism.

The neo-classical turn tended to end with the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, seemingly overtaken by the more nostalgic return to the absolutist age of Ramas VI and VII. The style of these later reigns is more favoured for finer scaled, less monumental projects – smaller offices, boutique hotels and similar. The style was seen as more authentically Thai than the essentially derivative neo-Classicism associated with the era of Rama V; it can also thereby indicate loyalty to Thai tradition.

Figure 44 Sathorn Road: The Rama VI domestic style utilised in a commercial project, to claim legitimacy as “authentically Thai”.

This Rama VI style “house” – in fact it is a corporate office – is nestled beneath corporate towers on Thanon Sathorn. It is more reconstruction than authentic, revealing the use of heritage imagery to make a claim on the past as status or prestige. The building behind it is the MahaNakhon tower, architect Ole Scheeren of OMA, and controversial for its denial of Thai participation in its design.

Following Susan Buck-Morss (1991), this might be termed a dialectical juxtaposition – both buildings serve to express modernity, one through a claim on royalist association, the other through a claim on technology, yet each calls the other into question. The Rama VI replica would define itself by reference to the corporate towers, as being a better representative of a Thai modernity – expressing "Thainess". It might therefore be seen in the context of the elitist movement for an authentic "Thainess" as counter to the more internationalist modernity associated variously with the West and with the memory of the 1932-1950s People's Party.

There is another dialectic suggested by the Sathorn "house": between heritage as a sense of loss, and heritage as marketing. In the first term of the dialectic, an old house marks a sense of distance from a lost past; it is akin to Proust's *A la recherche de temps perdue*, or to Nora's *milieu de memoire*; it is in the realm of affect, of human identity and nostalgia (a topic for Chapter 2). The second term sees heritage instrumentally, as something to be used. On Sathorn Road the house is used as a marketing ploy; more widely in Bangkok in the present time, and especially in Rattanakosin, heritage is being manipulated ("new heritage") in the cause of identity politics, to be seen as a political undertaking.

This case, and that following, highlight the issue of the *instrumental use* of the Rama VI style in commercial marketing (the claim for patriotic fervour or authentic Thainess). As will be discussed below, it is also used instrumentally in the political sphere to re-cast the national political agenda.

Figure 45 A modern boutique hotel in Rama VI styling. This example is on the Chao Phraya riverbank; there are similar examples to be found elsewhere in Bangkok.

Bangkok in the Rama VI image

Far more significant than these private-sector and commercial searches for legitimacy in a turn back to an absolutist age has been the elitist-nostalgic embrace of the architecture of the Rama VI and VII era to redefine both the city and the nation as the continuation of something more “truly Thai”.

National capitals typically inscribe their symbolic monuments with evocations of preferred histories, to be received subliminally by the distracted masses. In 1932 a mostly bloodless revolution ended the regime of absolutist monarchy most powerfully represented in the person and reign of King Rama V, expressed in the neo-Classical/neo-Renaissance monuments of his extensive public building program, and continued into the reigns of Rama VI and Rama VII. The revolutionary People’s Party had determined that the new institutions of a democratic polity were to be expressed in a new architecture, signifying a break from that past. This would be modernist, variously alluding to a European Art Deco and to the monumental classicism favoured

by the admired Mussolini (Barmé, 1993). The so-called People's Party style represented a radical break from the style prevailing at the time of the displaced Rama VII – simpler geometric forms, plain surfaces, mostly an absence of decoration.

As early as 1952, even as the construction of the People's Party monuments was proceeding, there was a gathering movement to cleanse the city of its traces of revolution and the shaming of the monarchy. Typically, there was advocacy to replace the Democracy Monument of the People's Party with a monument to King Rama VII. The city was to be re-signed to express the new "truth" that democracy did not emerge from the actions of the common people, but from the goodness of monarchy (Thanavi, 2016; 2018; Hewison and Kengkij, 2008). Thongchai Winichakul (2008; 2016) argues that the radical left, moving from positions of Marxist and political-economy critiques of a Thai social structure prevailing after 1973, have especially since the coup of 2006 shifted to a cultural-nationalist advocacy of a "genuine Thai essence". The cultural-nationalist ex-left rejected what it saw as a "bad" (Marxist, Communist Party of Thailand) nationalism and embraced a "good" one. A "good" nationalist architecture would therefore need to follow – Thongchai (2016) terms it "hyper-royalist".

Thanon Na Phra Lan

In the early 2000s a project was initiated to "restore" Rattanakosin. The shophouses along Na Phra Lan Road, immediately facing the wall and gates to the Grand Palace were early selected for restoration: street vendors, inappropriate tenancies and other accretions were removed, and the buildings were effectively reconstructed.

Figure 46 Na Phra Lan shophouses terraces after restoration.

The Na Phra Lan terraces had replaced two palaces from the Rama I period; they had been redeveloped for commercial premises in the Rama VI reign and were in an architectural style identifying that reign. Many of the Rattanakosin buildings similarly date from Rama VI's commercialisation of the old city and were in a Rama VI masonry style; their conservation in the present program of refashioning Rattanakosin have likewise followed the model of Thanon Na Phra Lan.

Pre-dating the conservation program for the Rattanakosin shophouses has been the 2010s redevelopment of the Pak Khlong Talat market. This immense, riverside complex is effectively a new construction in Rama VI masonry style, a stage set for the passing boats on the river.

Figure 47A modern world of Rama VI: the new Pak Khlong Talat market under construction.

Since 2014 the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has substantially advanced an ongoing program of a “perfect” Rattanakosin, what Herzfeld (2016; 2017) has called a royalist-Buddhist theme park, recalling the absolutist age of Rama VI and Rama VII. It is a landscape that would play with the popular memory, to evoke a sense of nostalgia for another, seemingly more stable age.

Figure 48 Pak Khlong Talat market in the present time – the age of Rama VI re-constructed.

The Supreme Court – constructing new memory

In this consideration of nostalgia and the seemingly wished-for return to a societal memory of the Rama VI age, it is appropriate to refer to what is arguably Thailand’s most purposive manipulation of the national memory, in the re-construction of the Supreme Court building.

The grand monument of the “People’s Party style” was the Supreme Court complex, designed around 1939 and built in stages from 1939 to 1963. All historical referencing was eschewed, although there was still somewhat oblique referencing, most notably to

art deco and Mussolini fascism – two aspects of 1930s modernity. The building's location ensured that it confronted both the Wat Mahathat temple opposite it and Grand Palace to its immediate south. It was widely seen as the most symbolically charged building of the People's Party era and designed to express its ideology. So, for example, the six pillars at its entrance expressed the party's six principles: the supreme power of the Thai folk, national security, economic welfare, equality, people's rights and liberties, and public education. The monarchy is missing from the symbolism and had to be subsequently written-in with periodic portraits.

The brutal directness, geometric severity, even blandness of the Supreme Court building defied the glorious traditions expressed in the buildings surrounding it—*chedis* and spires of the Grand Palace, the glitter of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the traditional forms of Wat Mahathat and the City Pillar. The affront was also institutional—a law court intervening in the triad of Nation–Religion–King, yet it was also an affront of style. As military, monarchy and conservative elites melded in the 1970s into a "network monarchy" (McCargo, 2006), memory of the People's Party would be dismissed, suppressed, then finally in the 2010s its emblematic monuments removed. The Supreme Court building especially presented as provocation.

There was a proposal in 2010 to demolish the Supreme Court building as a major symbol of the People's Party. Despite opposition from architectural conservationists and the Department of Fine Arts, its demolition proceeded in 2013. It was replaced by a larger building on a floor plan that mirrors its predecessor – the difference is in a heightened grandeur (the courts are substantially taller) and especially in its curiously hybrid traditionalist-modernist styling.

Figure 49 The new Supreme Court building

The styling of the Supreme Court building can be characterised as a pastiche of disparate elements, mostly making some allusion to elements to be found in traditional Thai architecture of the absolutist period – curved gables and decorative bargeboards, eves struts, sculpted capitals (also found in the Pak Khlong Talat market), long verandas. It was described (by the President of the Association of Siamese Architects at that time) as “a building exulting Thainess” (Koompong, 2017). Above all, it exhibits the sort of eclecticism that is especially characteristic of the buildings most closely identified with King Rama VI, such a the Sanam Chandra Palace (especially the Charli Mongkhon-at pavilion) and Mrigadayavan.

In summary, since the 2010s there has been a concerted though sometimes inconsistent effort to re-imagine the nation, to counter the idea that democracy and the law flow from the actions of the 1932 revolutionaries and their People’s Party, but rather from the benevolence of an all-wise monarchy. Hence the city has increasingly been signed accordingly: the People’s Party monuments – most notably the Parliament (emblem of democracy) and the Supreme Court (emblem of law) – are removed, to be replaced with

more loyal, Buddhist-monarchical expressions (and on the new Parliament building, see Sidh Sintusingha and King, 2021). More widely, the old city of Rattanakosin is variously restored and re-fashioned to recall an imagined Rama VI urban world.

The intended effect of the pastiched landscape of these variously restored and re-imagined elements of Rattanakosin, especially when read against the surviving, less "perfect" landscape of shophouses, old communities and urban chaos on which it is layered, is to create a sense of nostalgia – to highlight what has been lost. It can be read as part of a royalist-junta agenda to offer the vision of an alternative, "better" modernity, the dream of *retrotopia*, the future as return to an undead past (Bauman, 2017), perhaps the restoration of old, "better" values in the sense observed in Chapter 4.

The decline of traditional craftsmanship

It is to be noted that the nostalgic turn to the old styles of the wider Rama VI era, whether in restoration of older houses or in new construction, is confronted by the modern decline of traditional craftsmanship and its practitioners. New materials and construction methods, and construction on an industrial scale, crowd out what are now more traditional and more expensive technologies. It is the same phenomenon of modernization eroding tradition that was observed by Winita Kongpradit in a different context, and discussed earlier (King and Winita Kongpradit, 2017).

The question of heritage

The return to a Rama VI iconography in recent decades raises the question: what is heritage? Elements like the new Parliament and the re-imagined Supreme Court enter into the identity of both the city and the nation – they become new memory. Likewise, though at perhaps a more subliminal level, there is the effect of the refashioning (re-discovery, re-presentation) of Rattanakosin. It is, in effect, the production of new heritage.

This chapter has reported fieldwork over an extended period related to the study's third objective. The point to be taken away from the chapter is that a nation's heritage is not unchanging; rather, heritage constantly evolves.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

In Chapter 1, the problem to be addressed in this thesis was stated in terms of heritage as loss, memory, nostalgia, and the will to recall that which has been lost. A research question was posed: *How does the Rama VI style house manifest in present inner Bangkok, variously as surviving memory, borrowed memory, and re-created memory, and what do these manifestations reveal about the links between history, memory and heritage in contemporary Bangkok?*

There was then something of a subsidiary question: *How is the revival of interest in the Rama VI house style to be seen variously in contexts of nationalism, nostalgia and historic conservation?*

Deriving from these questions were three objectives, guiding the reading, fieldwork and analysis that constituted the research:

1. To identify characteristics of Rama VI houses in the context of the architecture and economy of the King's own time.
2 To locate present instances of Rama VI houses, variously as survival, re-use and re-construction and to investigate their present roles.
3. To explore the role of such houses as expressions of an image of an ideal Bangkok past. Accordingly, to reflect on these expressions in relation to links of history, memory, heritage and nostalgia in the present time.

The first of these objectives was principally the task of Chapter 3, where it was determined that that the style was typically characterised by asymmetry, timber construction (though masonry might also be used), one or two storeys above a low understory, often complex roof forms with kite tiles, often window canopies and eaves struts, and decoration typically in timber fretwork, sometimes with considerable elaboration.

The second objective, sadly, proved elusive. Traversing the selected roads and entering their *soi* revealed only a transformed landscape, a product of five decades of urban development and economic growth – mostly high-rise offices, hotels, condominium blocks, shopping malls and other accoutrements of a modern economy.

This finding was counter intuitive, as the expectation had been that surviving fabric from the sixth and seventh reigns would still be abundant, albeit wedged between more modern establishment or semi-concealed behind them. (The author's own memory from childhood certainly referenced such survivals. It is worth noting that the cases referenced in meeting the first objective, above, were found in places other than the selected main roads.)

Among the few cases meeting the second objective are two houses on Sathorn and Silom Roads, presented in Chapter 4.

The third objective is mostly addressed in Chapter 5. Especially in the twenty-first century there appears to have been a mood of a national nostalgia reinforcing and reinforced by a turn in public policy towards increasing respect for the monarchy and its history, This might in part be see as a rehabilitation of Ramas VI and VII and the values that they represented. One aspect of this had been the turn to the architectural style expressed in that pre-revolutionary era, traced in Chapter 5.

The discussion of Chapter 5 also has the effect of returning attention to the research questions posed for this thesis: the recalling of that era from a century ago can be interpreted variously as surviving memory, borrowed memory, and re-created memory. We observe links, in part socially created, between history, memory and heritage. The paradox of this return through new architecture to "a better time" is that it can be see to be creating a *new* heritage – a reconstructed past.

Heritage and the place of nostalgia

Thus, the conclusion emerging from this research is one of loss – a Bangkok landscape from around a century ago, but which persisted well into the 1950s, has been swept away in the enthusiasm of modernisation, especially of the 1980s and 1990s – the era that led up to the so-called Asian Economic Crisis. In particular, the architectural landscape of Rama VI style middle-class housing has left very few relics.

Nostalgic for that past era and its architecture certainly persists, however, in two forms. There is first popular nostalgia, evidenced in the values and recollections of people reflecting on lost times and lost memories, and reported to the present author over many conversations both before and during this research. This level of nostalgia is in the realm of the heritage and identity of the individual – it is a personal and defining nostalgia, the dream of each person's lost past.

Then there is a more general, institutionalised nostalgia – social rather than personal and defining variously community and nation. It tends to be socially constructed, officially promoted; it takes the form of a longing for a past (though mostly imagined) "better time". There is a will – mostly elitist and advanced by the state – to express that "better time" in new *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) in the sense discussed in Chapter 1 – to emphasise court ceremonial, reconstructed architecture, memorials and trappings of state grandeur. It is interesting that the "official mind" seems mostly to turn to the era of Ramas VI and VII. Or, at least, it is the architecture of that time

that is mostly evoked. The two forms of nostalgia – personal and societal – would seem to be mutually reinforcing,

The most significant difficulty confronting this research has been simply the task of finding surviving Rama VI houses and acquiring some measure of access to them. Most, it seems, are behind high walls and closed gates. Owners proved reluctant to give access or even to talk; further, even when interviews were achieved, owners tended to have only limited knowledge of the histories of their houses.

Recommendations

What lessons, then, are to be drawn from this conclusion? In this regard three recommendations can be suggested.

1. In the interests of Thai heritage there needs to be an extensive and detailed survey of surviving Rama VI style houses in inner Bangkok. The survey

reported in the present document has been necessarily limited by the resources available, namely the author's own time. A study under the auspices of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) could muster greater resources and proceed with greater authority. Incidentally, it might also be able to overcome the problem of limited access, referenced above.

2. Consequent on this first recommendation, appropriate evaluation criteria should be applied to surveyed houses, to determine those that should be selected for both provincial and national heritage lists. A joint BMA-private sector program for architectural conservation should be initiated.
3. At the level of new construction of Rama VI style buildings (Na Pra Lan, Pak Khlong Talat, Supreme Court, Parliament, etc.), there needs to be critically informative signage to communicate both the history of the site and the history of the institution. The signing of Bangkok sites and buildings is generally very good – the BMA and other public agencies are mostly very effective. However, the inscribers of signs need to be cognisant of Somerset Maugham's injunction quoted earlier – each person experiences the city differently. So, one person's admired recall of a Rama VI glory is another person's loss of what may have been on that site before the reconstruction or re-invention. Signage should always tell the history – what was there in the past as well as the present.

Further research

Finally, there is a need for ongoing scholarly discussion of the paradox of "new heritage" and redefinition of identity constituted by such projects as Pak Khlong Talat, the new Parliament, the re-invented Supreme Court complex, and other re-constructions. The question of a Thai heritage and identity will inevitably be continuously negotiated.

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Appendix

Selected annotated references

The following are annotation to selected references produced in the process of preparing Chapter 2, Literature Review.

Aasen, Clarence. (1998). *Architecture of Siam: a cultural history interpretation*.
Aasen, Clarence. (1998) explores the special and identifying role architecture has played over the last 15 centuries in the construction of the highly diverse and complex culture of Siam. The term architecture using in this book encompasses the wide range of individual buildings, while art objects and vernacular forms are also equally included as an important fundamental in forming Siam. The explanation of Architecture of Modernism and Nationalism during 1767-1932 A.D. in chapter six assists towards the understanding of the evolution of architectural design in the beginning of the Rattanakosin era including the reign of King Rama VI.

Askew, Marc. (1994). "Bangkok: Transformation of the Thai City", in *Cultural Identity and Urban Change in Southeast Asia: Interpretative Essays*.
Askew, Marc. (1994) discusses the development of the urban areas in Bangkok since the early Rattanakosin period to the approach of modernization in the twentieth century due to the economic development, which brings about the changing of urban space of Bangkok. While the inner area of old Rattanakosin is still effectively preserved, in the areas beyond this space especially the remnants of the old communities have been swept away as the city has been continually growing. Only the strong resilience of the dwellers could create a sense of meaning in their environment that will withstand some of the destructive and fragmenting forces of current change.

Brooks, P. (1976). *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and Modes of Excess*
Brooks, P. (1976) argues that nostalgia is typically coloured by a melodramatic imagination that would seek hidden moral values in a world in which values are being destroyed. By contrast, an ironic imagination and view of history builds on ambiguity of meaning. Rather than look for hidden meanings in history, irony points to the uncertainty of history by showing that positive truth is not possible.

Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory*.
Halbwachs, M. (1992), writing in 1925, argued that memory is socially produced: social institutions and contexts (the state, the clan, the family) make possible certain memories, encouraging (or actively constructing) certain recollections while discouraging (suppressing) others. He principally developed the idea of collective memory.

Koompong Noobanjong. (2003). *Power, Identity, and the Rise of Modern Architecture: from Siam to Thailand.*

Koompong Noobanjong.(2003) examines the adoption and evolution of Western and Modern architecture in Siam and Thailand. It illustrates how various architectural ideas have contributed to the physical design and spatial configuration of places associated with negotiation and allocation of political power, which are throne halls, parliaments, and government and civic structures since in the middle of nineteenth century. Hence, the buildings are investigated for their social, political, economic and cultural significance.

Koompong Noobanjong. (2013). *The Aesthetic of Power: Architecture, Modernity, and Identity from Siam to Thailand*.
Koompong Noobanjong. (2013) examines the politics of representation in architecture and urban space from 1850 up to the present time by utilizing the built environment as a mode of

problematizing for studying the Thai national and cultural identity. It investigates a number of buildings and public spaces that signify various types of power and function to explain "Thainess" as well as illustrating how Thais have appropriated modernity together with Western culture in creating their modern identity.

Krisnaphol Wattanawanyoo. (2004). *Development of Contemporary Thai House*.
Krisnaphol Wattanawanyoo. (2004) studies the development of the contemporary Thai house from 1982 to 2004 A.D. Since the main objective is to investigate an application of traditional characteristics into contemporary house design and an understanding of development as a larger picture which connects to the previous period, the research presents the interrelation between the traditional characteristics of the Thai house as the fundamental element and the adaptation of external influences which also affect the development of the contemporary house. Therefore, the research comes up with the idea that the contemporary house is a dialogue between the contemporary life style and wider culture.

King, R.J. and Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra. (2017). "Heritage and Interpretation: A Tale of Three Palaces." In *Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand*.
King, R.J. and Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra . (2017). The main arguments of the Sompong dissertation are summarized in this book chapter. Especially important is the question of hybridity in Rama VI architecture that in some sense expressed the ambivalences in his personality, but also reflected the uncertainties of the time – between tradition and modernity. While the domestic architecture of the time may not have reflected Vajiravudh's personality, it is certainly a hybrid style, in between tradition and modernity.

King, R.J. and Winita Kongpradit. (2017). "Tourism to a realm of memory: the case of Thai royal craft." In *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*.
King, R.J. and Winita Kongpradit. (2017). The paper discusses about the modernization brings the decline of traditional crafts and practices which linked to the decline of old community in Thailand. Wat Koh, Petchaburi can be asserted as *milieux de mémoire* is now being faded away into an increasing remote past by the modernization. A present

dilemma is whether to conserve communities and their craft as “living museum”; as a museum more conventionally understood as *lieux de memoire* in Pierre Nora’s term; or accept the ephemerality of culture and its metamorphosis. A concluding comment is that there is no resolution to these dilemmas. The root cause of the dilemma is to be confronted and the craft communities must be recognised for what they are, namely the carriers of the memory and identity of the culture itself as well as the identity of nation and monarchy.

Nora, P. (1986). *Les Lieux de Memoire, Volume 2: La Nation*.

Nora, P. (1989). “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations* 26: 7–25.

Nora, P. (1996–98). *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*.

French historian Pierre Nora’s magisterial, seven-volume collaborative project sought to define, variously, the French Republic, the French nation, and finally France as an idea. It is an exploration of *lieux de mémoire*, which might be translated as “realms of memory,” or perhaps as “sites” or “places” of memory. *Lieux de mémoire* will cover the range of spaces, both physical and intellectual, wherein the memories of “a nation” might be constructed, contained and contested – or, by extension, the memories of the village or the home. They are not necessarily sites in the geographical sense, as they can also include the flag, anthems, celebrations and festivals, a name, an event, a photograph, a letter. Central to Nora’s argument is the idea of sites of memory (heritage?) as compensation for a profound *loss*: because most people no longer live in *milieux de mémoire* (environments or realms of memory), *lieux de mémoire* are invoked as compensation.

Nora is also concerned with the link between history and memory, therefore with heritage. History attaches to time, whereas memory attaches to space or place. Nora’s work has been immensely influential in studies of memory and heritage.

Pussadee Tiptus. (1982). *House in Bangkok: Character and Changes during last 200 Years (1782-1982)*

Pussadee Tiptus. (1982) studies the historical and physical outlook of residential buildings in Bangkok during the past 200 years by selecting a sample of the houses to analyze architectural styles and characteristics, building elements, physical structure and building materials as well as the influential factors in the construction of the building in these periods. Since the scope of the study also covers the living condition, settlement and general characteristics of houses in different periods in Rattanakosin, it illustrates the changes on the residential buildings in Bangkok due to various influences.

Ratana Tanadbanchee Tungasvadi. (2004). *King Vajiravudh’s Moral Concepts for Citizenship*.

Ratana Tanadbanchee Tungasvadi. (2004) examines the nation-building program by promoting the three institutions of “nation, religion and monarchy” to bring about the national prosperity under the reign of King Vajiravudh who ruled Siam during A.D. 1910-1925. Due to the challenges from both external and internal problems especially the people’s morality and lack of real understanding of the concept of nation, the king had applied nation-building policies which affected various aspects of the country.

Hence, the social conditions of Siam as well as of other countries during the reign of King Rama VI have been elucidated in this research.

Rapoport, Amos. (1969). *House form and culture*.
Rapoport, Amos. (1969) explores the relationship between house form and culture by studying the meaning and characteristics of folk, primitive, and vernacular buildings. It also considers the underlying theoretical constructs that have shaped the built environment as well as presenting cross-disciplinary studies of dwellings and settlements from architecture, planning and cultural geography perspectives.

Renan, E. (1947–61 [1882]). "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" In *Oeuvres Complètes, Vol 1*. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy) 887–906.
French historian Ernest Renan's lecture, "What is a nation", was given at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1882. He argues that a nation is an idea based on compelled forgetting and compelled remembering (imagining). A nation is "a daily referendum", just as the continuing existence of an individual is a perpetual affirmation of life. Nations are based as much on what people jointly forget as on what they remember [the identity of the individual, as of the home and the family, is also based on what is to be forgotten and what is to be remembered.

Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra (2007). "Interpretation of Siamese Modernity: Three Country Palaces in Phetchaburi," PhD dissertation, Silpakorn University.
Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra (2007) presents a comparative study of three countryside palaces of three successive Siamese leaders: King Mongkut; King Chulalongkorn; and King Vajiravudh. The three palaces have value in apparently reflecting the three king's personalities, their policies and agendas on foreign relations, and their architectural aspirations as expressed through the diverse palaces in relation to the transitional periods of Siamese modernization leading to the end of royal absolutism in 1932.

Sunon Palakavong Na Ayudhya, "*Sanam Chandra Palace*, pp.1-8. nd, ny.
The paper studies the architectural design and pattern of Sanam Chandra Palace, the prominent country residence of King Rama VI in Nakhon Pathom province. According to the master plan, water was used as the main element to define the boundary of the palace and to form the landscape of the palace. Sanam Chandra Palace reflects personal perspective of King Rama VI as well as the integration of western and tradition architectural principles in the creation of the contemporary Thai house.

VITA

NAME	Miss Thanisda Tidanun
INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED	Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Arts at Silpakorn University, with a major in English Language and a minor in History. She completed her Master's degree in Southeast Asian History at the Faculty of Arts.