

“SUBORDINATION” IN MODERN THAI ARCHITECTURE, 1960S-1980S: CASE STUDIES OF CRYPTO-COLONIALISM

Supasai Vongkulbhisal
University of Washington



Joseph P. Salerno's Design of Siam InterContinental Hotel on Rama I Road in Bangkok, Thailand (1966). Source: *Lexi Belle Racing, The United States*.

This paper offers an examination of crypto-colonial discourse in Modern Thai Architecture from the 1960s to the 1980s. It argues that the transplantation of western Modern architecture in Thailand initiated a neo-colonial cultural dynamic as the architects' creations were subtly subjected to an American Cold War agenda established in the Southeast Asia region since the 1950s. According to the recent scholarship of Thai postcolonial studies, the term *Crypto-colonialism* is applied to Thailand based on its unique form of political marginality. This theory characterizes Thailand's relation to the West as being a technically independent though essentially tributary nation-state because the country was materially dependent on western economic and political power (Herzfeld 2002, 900-901). This research thus looks at the "subordination" characteristics of Modern Thai architecture from the 1960s to the 1980s, when western powers, especially the United States, imposed their culture upon that of Thailand to undermine or deny its existence. Its analysis shows that, during these Cold War years, urban infrastructure and the hospitality industry in Bangkok and its suburbs grew rapidly due to American economic aid as well as to the need to provide accommodations for western tourists and the American military presence. The architectural design of this period was dominated by spatial concerns that reflected the new and powerful influence of the United States over traditional Thai architectural planning. By tracing the historical consolidation of Modern architectural consumerism in Thailand and the works of American architects who were working in Thailand during the 1960s and the 1980s, this research will challenge the idea that colonial discourses were only confined to countries or regions that were directly occupied by western nations.

Keywords: Crypto-colonialism, post-colonialism, Thailand, The United States, subordination.

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the Second World War, the United States had supplanted the European colonizers of the imperialist era as the dominant world power. U.S. policymakers were relatively inexperienced in Southeast Asian affairs, and the region posed a dilemma. American sympathy for the post-war nationalist movements in Asia was in direct opposition to the close diplomatic ties between the United States and the western colonial powers which still controlled much of the region, such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands. As relations deteriorated with the Soviet Union, the American government feared that the independence of former European colonies in Southeast Asia might create a power vacuum, which communists could exploit to their advantage (Norland and al et. 1997, 68). However, in the case of Thailand, the only independent state in the region, the U.S. took no risk in breaking with its European allies. From Washington's point of view, Thailand had only declared war on the western powers because of Japanese coercion, and therefore deserved to receive American assistance.

From the 1940s onwards, the United States became Thailand's new foreign patron, supporting the country with various kinds of aid, far greater than anything the country had received during the colonial era. While France and Britain had focused on their colonies and had never taken more than a peripheral interest in Thailand, the U.S. seized on Thailand as an ally and a base for countering the spread of communism in Asia (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 139). To retain Thailand as an American "free world" ally during the Cold War, the U.S. helped to revive and strengthen Thai military rule, promoted Thai development by boosting economic growth through private capitalism, and pushed the mechanisms of the nation-state more deeply into Thai society in order to assure that the country successfully set up its "national security." Under this regime, a new elite group emerged, consisting of ruling generals, senior bureaucrats, and the heads of new business conglomerates (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 139). Strengthened by the ideology of "development" and unconstrained by "democracy," American businesses were able to exploit both the Thai people and the country's natural resources on a new scale, leading to a significant and fundamental change in urban planning and Thai architectural form.

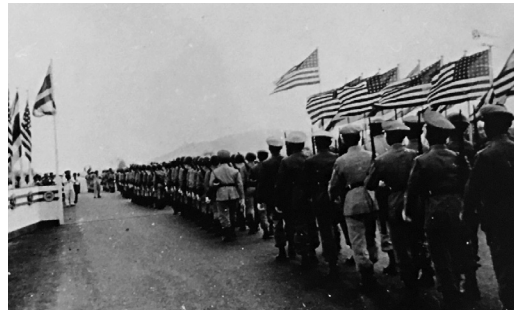


Figure 1 (left): Opening ceremony of the Pak Thong Chai-Kabinburi highway in December 1965, presided over by Prime Minister Thanom and U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin. Source: Warren 2007.

Figure 2 (right): A march by members of the U.S. construction battalion. Source: Warren 2007.

1. THAILAND IN THE COLD WAR

1.1. AMERICAN MILITARY AID TO THAILAND DURING THE COLD WAR

When Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed the presidency in 1953, he committed to a hard stance against communism in Asia and echoed the Thai government's dismay over French moves toward a negotiated settlement in 1954. He warned of a "domino effect" in Southeast Asia, predicting that if one nation fell to communism,

the others would surely fall in turn (Norland and al et. 1997, 95). In July 1953, the U.S. National Security Council pronounced Thailand an “anti-communist bastion,” from which to “extend U.S. influence—and local acceptance of it—throughout the whole of Southeast Asia” (Fineman 1997, 173) (Figure 1 and 2). The flow of U.S. aid to Thailand continued through the 1950s, especially in the form of funds for highway and airport construction (Figure 3 and 4). The U.S. began to fund \$13.6 million to build a highway project in 1954. This 400-kilometer highway was built in order to link Bangkok with Korat and the rest of Northeast Thailand. Successfully, completed on July 10, 1958, this “Mittraphap Road” or “Friendship Highway” shortened the drive from Bangkok to Korat by about 150 kilometers and helped improve communications with the Northeast (Norland and al et. 1997, 97). Moreover, the assistance in developing the Thai airports also began in 1954. Airfields at Korat, Takhli, Phisanuloke, Udon Thani, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Bangkok’s Don Mueang received new communication equipment, lighting, and navigational systems. In summary, approximately half of the U.S. technical aid between 1954 and 1960 was allocated for transportation projects. While the emphasis on building transportation facilities reflected the concerns for national security, particularly in the Northeast, the new roads and airports also stimulated economic development, a high priority for Sarit’s government.¹ Thailand had thus become a U.S. client-state under military rule, although this resulted in a severe division between the army and the police within Thailand’s ruling junta.

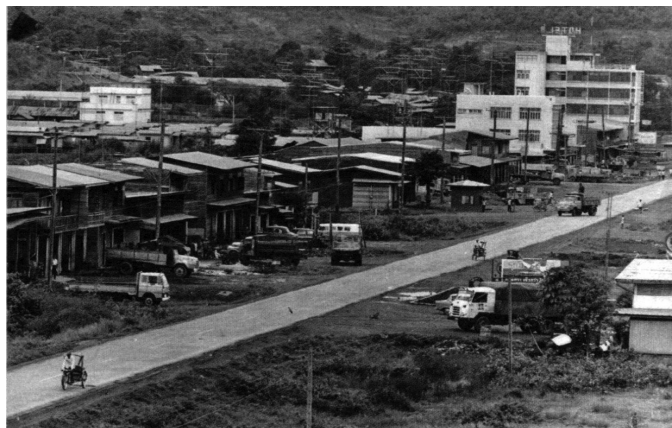


Figure 3 (left): Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn and U.S. Ambassador Graham A. Martin opened the Chachoengsao-Kabinburi Highway in February 1966. Source: Norland and et al. 1997.

Figure 4 (right): The city of Takhli near the American-built airbase in Nakhon Sawan province. The U.S. military presence transformed numerous upcountry towns and provinces. Source: Algje and et al. 2014.

1.2. AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL AIDS ON THAILAND DURING THE COLD WAR

Amid a crisis of cultural transition in the mid-fifties, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat seized power from the political experiments of Phibun forcible regime. The Thai commoners were caught between the old order of the royal ruling elite and this new Phibun regime, with its project to build Thai nationalism. Traditional societal bonds were loosening. The expected democratic institutions were developing unexpectedly slowly, while Phibun’s attempts to unite the country through a resurgence of Thai tradition were too weak to promote real nationalism. In these circumstances, Sarit chose an ideal moment to take power. His regime offered a clear way forward through the tangled questions of traditional values and national identity.

Earlier in 1947, President Truman introduced the word "development" in his first televised presidential speech, which Sarit Thanarat perceived and interpreted it as a key concept of the U.S. global mission. He adopted the term as a new, powerful justification for the power of the nation-state, and translated this American "progress" by coining a new Thai word, *phatthana*. He then positioned *phatthana* at the center of his policy objectives: "[O]ur important task in this revolutionary era is to *phatthana*, which includes economic development, educational development, administrative development, and everything else" (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 14). Based on this new concept of *phatthana* or progress, Thailand's economic program was permanently shifted from Phibun's nationalism to Sarit's private-sector capitalism in the 1950s.² Due to the government's policy of welcoming foreign investments, Thailand was drawn more deeply into a more complex geopolitical situation involving Japan, China, and the western powers; and because of Thai involvement in the Vietnam War, Thailand was often accused of having abandoned their traditional independence or neutrality in foreign policy in favor of close identification and involvement with a single great power, the United States (Wyatt 2003, 277). The more threatened the Thai felt by circumstances in Indochina, the more they turned to the United States, the only great power with both the strength and the will to assist them.

From the second World War onwards, the United States did not restrict its post-war involvement with Thailand to economic matters. U.S. policies also emphasized the importance of "national security," as they sought to further their national security ends by molding Thailand into a nation-state conducted upon American social principles. Educational aid, provided to modernize the population, also served as a means of acculturation. This American educational aid produced a set of paradigms of social life that distorted the fundamental fabric of Thai society and was used to manipulate the Thai people. These paradigms served to accelerate the extension of American academic values and programs within Thai universities, and at the same time, this "cultural imperialism" deterred the growth of indigenous scholarship (Bell 1980). According to Peter Bell, a specialist on economies of developing countries who have examined the character and purpose of American scholarship on Thailand after the Second World War, American influence has been the single most important element in the pattern of social change in Thailand. It has affected the evolution of the class structure, the economy, political institutions, and external relations (Bell 1980) (Figure 5 and 6). This attempted Americanization was at the core of the ideal of "Cold War cosmopolitanism," in which American aid was subtly used to cultivate a "cosmopolitan" ethos in artists, writers, filmmakers, and others involved in creating a nation's culture (Klein 2017, 281). Creating cosmopolitanism was a major objective for Americans waging the cultural Cold War in Asia, and the American foundations and scholarship opportunities set up by Washington were the primary instruments for doing so (Figure 7 and 8).



Figure 5 (left): Image of the U.S. Trade Center in Bangkok taken in 1960. Source: Harrison Forman, UWM Libraries.

Figure 6 (right): Expat at work in Bangkok in the early 20th century. Source: Algje and et al. 2014.

However, this shift of scholarly paradigms could not have happened in Thailand had there been resistance from the locals, particularly in the ruling classes. Because this group was aligned with Sarit's belief in the value of technocrats, they actively endorsed the virtues of modernization and stability in Thailand and invited American specialists of all kinds to act as advisors of new governmental agencies created in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in order to rationalize capitalist development.³ It was certainly the case that the U.S. saw its role as "steering" Thailand's development, and it arrogantly attempted to influence the direction of policy in almost every area of social planning. Like the European "civilizing mission," American Cold War cosmopolitanism was able to manipulate foreign culture in desirable directions. However, it could not succeed without the help of the nation's rulers, who were responsible for imposing this broader cultural shift and acted as local agents to bring in foreign models imbued with civilizational importance to the country.

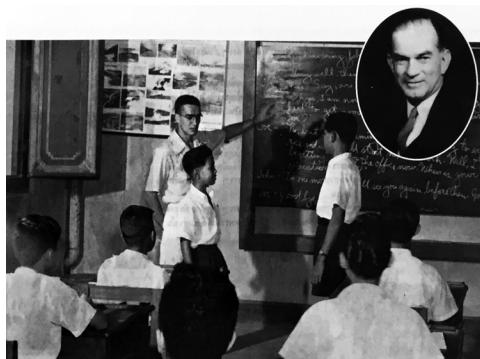


Figure 7 (left): Fulbright exchange student from the U.S. teaching English to Thai students. (Insert photo) Senator J. William Fulbright, the program founder. Source: Norland and et al. 1997.

Figure 8 (right): Krisda Arunvongse na Ayudhya's concrete-fin brise-soleil technique that was used in the design of the American University Alumni Language Center building (AUA building). Source: Warren 2007.

1.3. CULTURAL SHIFT DURING THE COLD WAR ERA

The effects of the Cold War extended through nearly every aspect of Thai national life. It brought large segments of the Thai population face to face with the outside world in unprecedented ways. The economy was pumped up with American dollars, and hundreds of thousands of Thais became dependent on the American presence for their livelihoods. Additionally, the Vietnam boom brought widespread corruption, and commercialized vice teemed in the hotels and honky-tonks clustered around the U.S. air bases both in Bangkok and Udon (Wyatt 2003, 279). New Phetchaburi Road became an "American strip" lined with bars, nightclubs, brothels, and massage parlors. Don Mueang airport added a new runway to accommodate jet planes to serve foreign visitors, which grew rapidly from only 40,000 in the late 1950s to over 600,000 by 1970 (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 148). As disruptive as these surface-level changes were, the effects of the American era in Thailand ran much deeper. The economic attraction of the city, particularly the service sector, changed the fundamental way Thai social relationships are constructed. Young women and men from farm families went to the city to learn English and work as waiters, bartenders and hotel desk clerks, prostitutes and masseuses, tour guides, and souvenir shop clerks. When there, they were exposed to a kind of rapid access to western culture, ideas, values, and fashions that had previously been limited to only the small group of Thai elites. With western tastes and fashions came new social ideologies, encompassing sexual morality, ideas of romantic love, and a cult of youth that supplanted the traditional respect for seniority.

2. THE GOLDEN ERA OF THAILAND'S TOURIST INDUSTRY AND BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Thailand's emergent tourist industry also took off during the 1960s, starting with the opening of the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 1960. This was intended to expand business sectors related to travel and tourism. Sarit hoped to make this a major focus of Thai efforts, urging the nation that "the promotion of tourism can be best achieved for the benefit of our people and our country only when every government office, individual enterprise, and the people themselves give their full co-operation and support" (Algie and el at. 2014, 187). By the mid-1960s, the Thai tourism industry was still supported by the American war effort, with somewhere between 11 to 16 percent of total visitors composed of U.S. soldiers on leave from Vietnam. This specific Rest and Recreation (R & R) demographic spent twice as much money as the average tourist—the liberal spending was fueling growth in many areas, particularly in the sex industry (Figure 9 and 10). The period from 1965 to 1969 was the golden era of building construction in Thailand, as the tourist boom created massive new demand for hotel rooms, with 14 luxury or international-class hotels in construction in Bangkok (Vimolsiddhi and el at. 1993, 99-101). In 1966 alone, 2,500 hotel rooms were added to a city with fewer than 800 a decade previously, along with roads, airstrips, coffee shops, and palatial dwellings for high-ranking foreigners and nouveau riche Thai.



Figure 9 (left): American servicemen on R&R leap ashore into the arms of Pattaya's "Hawaiians." Source: Baker 2014.
Figure 10 (right): Tourists sunbathing at the pool of the Dusit Thani Hotel, opened in 1970. Source: Algie and et al. 2014.

Americans played a significant role in developing the Thai tourist industry. The first of a long list of American hotel chains arrived in Bangkok with the opening of the Siam InterContinental hotel, partly owned by Pan American World Airways (Figure 11).⁴ This striking building with multi-tiered tiled roofs rising to a central peak was located on 26 acres of land in the heart of Bangkok. Its form reminds some people of a volcano and others of a traditional hat worn by ancient Thai royalty. Tellingly, it was located on the part of a 43-acre site belonging to the royal family. This site also houses Wat Pathum Wanaram, built by King Rama VI in 1857. The hotel, offering 411 rooms and a variety of dining and conference facilities set in a lush tropical landscape, remained a distinctive landmark for nearly three decades before it was removed to make room for Siam Paragon shopping center, which opened in 2005. The government-owned Erawan Hotel (Figure 12), located a few blocks away, had been torn down several years before and was replaced by the Grand Hyatt, another American chain. Still, other noted names entered Thailand in the following years, including Hilton, Marriott, Sheraton, Regent, Holiday Inn, Westin, and Conrad (Warren 2006, 64).



Figure 11 (left): Joseph P. Salerno's design of Siam InterContinental Hotel on Rama I road (1966). Source: Lexi Belle Racing, The United States.

Figure 12 (right): The Erawan Hotel, in 1960, operated by the government-owned company The Syndicate of Thai Hotels and Tourists Enterprises. Source: The American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

2.1. A FLOURISHING IN THE CAREERS OF ARCHITECTS IN THAILAND

The building boom led to the flourishing of the architectural profession in Thailand. Due to the rising economy and the number of Thai architecture graduates who successfully completed a five-year bachelor's degree, newly hired personnel in Thai architectural firms increased by approximately 90 per year. These students were taught a Modern architectural curriculum by western-educated Thai architects, who themselves had directly received their education from Modernist masters such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Louis I. Khan, and others (Figure 13 and 14). As Vimolsiddhi remarks in *Development of Concepts and Architectural Patterns*, between 1958 and 1972 more than half of the Thai architecture professors went to study in the United States and obtained a master's degree (Vimolsiddhi and et al. 1993, 99-101). Not only did Thai architects benefit from this boom, but foreign architects, especially Americans, also received commissions in Thailand during this period.

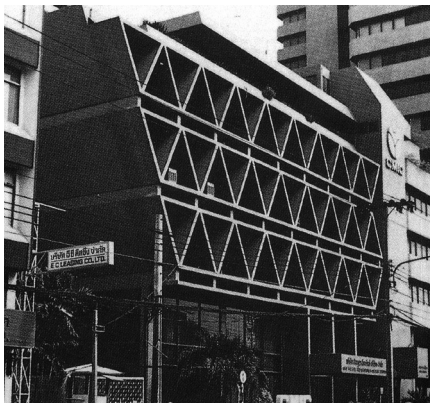


Figure 13 (left): CIMC building, designed by Cornell and UPenn graduate Dan Wongprasart, who was once Louis Khan's apprentice (1979). Source: Thailand Creative and Design Center 2008.

Figure 14 (right): House for Khun Tritip Telan in Hua Mak, Bangkok, designed by Dan Wongprasart (1972). Source: The Association of Siamese Architects.

3. MODERN THAI ARCHITECTURE IN 1960S-1980S

3.1. THE ERA OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTS IN THAILAND

The era of American architects in Thailand began with the opening of the architectural firm Bourne Associates International in Bangkok, led by the architect John W. Rifenburg who was later set up a new company with Rirk-rit Kaewwichien, registered under the name *Rifenburg and Rirk-rit Architects* (Tiptus 1996, 377). Rifenburg was renowned for his interior designs, including the Oriental Hotel (1876, renovated in the 1960s), the Siam InterContinental Hotel (1966), the Montien Hotel (1967) and for his architecture, as seen in the Fedders building (1976) (Figure 14), Siam Bayshore in Pattaya (1976) (Figure 15), and Baan Kai Mook Condominium in Hua Hin (1990). The Louise Berger Group, Inc. was another in the small group of American firms to receive commissions in Thailand prior to 1965 due to the US-Thai OICC military agreement.^{5 6}



Figure 15 (left): The Fedders building, designed by Rifenburg and Rirk-rit Architects, was already demolished (1976). Source: Architecture + Engineering + Construction magazine 1976.

Figure 16 (right): The design of Siam Bayshore hotel in Pattaya (1976). Source: Rerkdee Potiwanakul.

The majority of Louis Berger's construction activities in Thailand can be classified, in general, as being for the U.S. military purposes, including facilities constructed under the Military Assistance Program (MAP). Berger's civilian projects included facilities constructed for the Agency for International Development (AID) (The Comptroller General of the United States 1968). Because of the continuing interest of the U.S. Congress in their own activities in Southeast Asia, the U.S. supported substantial dollar expenditures for facilities in Thailand, which increased military construction activities in Thailand dramatically within a few years.⁷ In early 1966, in anticipation of large increases in construction work, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) mobilized two cost-reimbursable contractors from the United States to Thailand. By June 30, 1967, an estimated \$165 million worth of construction had been assigned to these contractors, including to Louis Berger firm.

Among more than 40 projects undertaken by Boughey and his firm, a number have become modern landmarks of Thailand. In undertaking an investigation of the Louis Berger Group and Boughey's works, Thai architectural trends from the American Era offer excellent examples of American cultural transplantation. Among them, Thai-government commissioned architecture provides several obvious cases in point, leading to an insight into the dynamism and mechanism of the period of Thai subordination to America. The previous portion of this chapter provides the political, economic, and cultural context which sets the stages for the following discussion of architecture, examined in detail through the following case study.

3.2. DON MUEANG AIRPORT: A CASE STUDY OF “SUBORDINATION” CHARACTERISTICS IN MODERN THAI ARCHITECTURE

Construction of *Don Mueang Airport* began in the reign of King Rama VI, a few years after aviation was introduced in Thailand, while the country was still called “Siam.” In 1948, the government elevated Don Mueang Airport to international status, but it was not until seven years later that the name was changed to Don Mueang International Airport. Since the very first day of its construction, Don Mueang International Airport has been famous as an important node of Southeast Asian air transportation, a strategic connecting point to all continents. The airport was also known for its standard and efficient management, which is trusted by all international airlines (Figure 17 and 18). It was overseen by the Airports Authority of Thailand or AAT, founded in 1979.⁸ Shortly after the AAT assumed responsibility over the three other regional airports, Chiang Mai, Hat Yai, and Phuket, the agency realized the urgent need for airport development to cope with the rapid growth of air traffic. They designed the Bangkok International Airport Development Plan in two phases, with phase I spanning 1980 to 1989 and phase II covering 1989 to 1990.⁹ The engineering-architectural firm of Louis Berger was hired to study, design, and supervise the construction of a new terminal, air cargo facilities, and a parking garage at Bangkok’s Don Mueang International Airport in September 1989 (Warren 2006, 65-66, and Airports of Thailand 1991, 2-3).



Figure 17: Don Mueang International Airport once named “Bangkok Airport” (1968-71). Source: Pantip.com.

Pursuant to the contract signed on January 24, 1990, the Louis Berger Group’s responsibilities included: generating medium-term and long-term master plans for all the four airports operating under the AAT; evaluating the current short-term plan for efficiency of integration into the new master plan; evaluating the ways in which the AAT could assist the new master plan; forecasting the importance, size, and timeframe for construction of the second international airport; training AAT officers in producing the airport master planning and airport future-development plans; and reporting the financial feasibility. The firm proposed three new directions for the master plan for Don Mueang Airport. The first was that the airport should be renovated to be able to serve the public until the year 2010, with allowances for some building removals and expansions. The second proposal was to improve the existing conditions of the airport so as to serve the public until the year 2000, without any demolition or new construction. The third plan was to enhance the abilities of the current airport to serve the public until the secondary international airport was done. The additional construction in

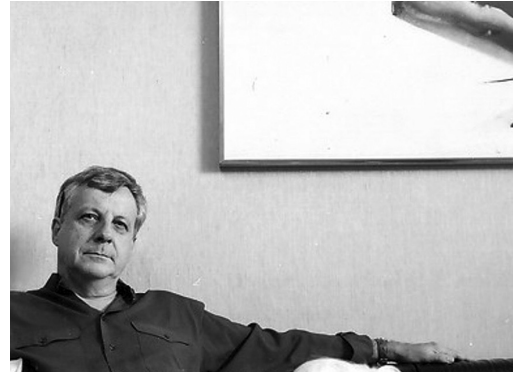


Figure 18 (left): *Don Mueang* International Airport's terminal, designed by Robert G. Boughey under Louis Berger Group. (1968-71). Source: Warren 2006.

Figure 19 (right): Robert G. Boughey, who came to Thailand in the late 1960s with Louis Berger Inc. and opened his own architectural firm in 1973. Source: Prabhakorn 2010.

this proposal would be arranged similarly to the first proposal (Airport of Thailand 1991, 2-6). The committee selected the second proposal for the project due to the lesser construction requirements.

Decades earlier, Pottsville Pennsylvania native Robert G. Boughey came to Thailand as the chief architect of the International Division of Louis Berger, Inc. (Figure 19). He had enumerated the specific challenges of designing an airport for a Southeast Asian setting. In the January-February issue of *T-AB* magazine in 1971, he explained,

[T]he usually large groups of non-passenger meeting and seeing off travelers at Asian air terminals, and the differences between Thai and Western customs and immigration procedures posed unique challenges for an American engineering firm. ... The response involved designing essentially two airports in one. A bi-level concept separates arriving and departing passengers, within a single building to alleviate congestion and allow rapid, one-way passenger flow. By means of a high-speed overpass from the adjacent highway, departing passengers arrive and remain on the second level from baggage check-in through aerobridge aircraft embarkation. Arriving passengers disembark on a second level concourse and proceed down ramps to retrieve baggage from giant carousels. ... Preliminary design began in December 1968. Then Pan American announced that Bangkok was on the itinerary of its new Boeing 747, and design had to be greatly accelerated. Although the scope of the project was amplified several times during this period, final design documents were completed and submitted within six months. The final estimate for construction exceeded five million U.S. dollars, more than double the original appropriation (Warren 2006, 65-66).

Though the Berger firm was asked to train Thai architects to design the future airports, and though their work came in at the double the original cost, the American firm was nonetheless hired to complete the master plan of Thailand's second international airport, Suvarnabhumi Airport, opened in 2006.¹⁰ Shortly after the opening of Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thai officials decided that Don Mueang would still need to handle domestic commercial flights due to faster-than-projected air traffic growth throughout Asia. AAT, later renamed Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited or AOT, determined that using the existing facilities at Don Mueang would increase the flexibility needed to handle the growing air traffic demands before Suvarnabhumi Airport could be expanded.¹¹

This project was one of the causes of the controversy among Thai architectural professionals who objected to hiring westerners as designers of Thai iconic buildings. Members of the Thai architectural society were separated into three groups according to their reactions to the project. The first group was able to accept the GATT free trade agreement, which allowed foreign architects

to come and work in Thailand without any restrictions.¹² They argued that certain complex buildings and advanced techniques required experts with specific knowledge and technical skills, and in these cases it could be vital to seek foreign technicians.¹³ Manoon Leewiraphan argued that “there are some building types that require western architects to handle, for example, the international airports, especially the Suvarnabhumi Airport. We have to admit that this category of buildings needs specialist services with experience and expertise, similar to meeting specialist doctors” (Pussadee 1996, 392). The second group did not object to having *farang* carry out certain Thai architectural works, but insisted that the designs needed to be controlled by Thai rules and regulations. On the opposite side, feelings of professional suppression ran deeply and brought the third group of Thai architects to advocate for an entire prohibition of foreign architects working in Thailand. Krisda Arunvongse explains that

this problem occurs because the commissioners do not give as many credits to the Thai architects as that they are giving to *farang* (westerners), and it is hard to change their thoughts to believe in us that “they will lose more money if hiring foreigners. Besides, those westerners are not familiar with our weather conditions, local materials, and quality controls of the Thai blue-collar workers.” ... Moreover, the fascination with *farang* reflects what Thai owners appraise as their social value to express themselves as having high-class taste and use it as a labelling to display their own manifesto. This kind of norm is really hard to change (Pussadee 1996, 398).



Figure 20 (left) and 21 (right): Samui International Airport, designed by Thai architectural firm named Habita (1989) Source: Habita Architects 1996.

In fact, some of the regional airports in Thailand were designed entirely by Thai architects and were much praised by foreigners who remarked that their planning and characteristics truly reflected the Thai identity and climate. Koh Samui Airport, which opened in 1989, the same year that the renovation of Don Mueang Airport was completed, is often described by visitors as “the most beautiful airport in the world” (Figure 20 and 21). The Samui Airport was designed by the Thai architectural firm Habita. It was intended to fit sensitively into its natural surroundings while being environmentally friendly by employing local materials such as palm, wood, and rattan, together with a largely open-plan layout negating the need for air conditioning. Its terminal combines the ambiance of a Polynesian resort with contemporary Thai design elements, impressing visitors with its minimalistic architecture (Airport Technology 2007). Koh Samui Airport has won several awards for its design, notably gaining first place in the Outstanding Architecture competition held by the Association of Siamese Architects in 1998 and a Board of National Environment Award for aviation environmental

protection and awareness in 1989. The reception of this project makes it clear that prejudice against Thai design and technical skill can be groundless and that Thai architectural patrons (especially government commissioners) have often simply been blinded by the allure of the West and *farang* goods.

Another remarkable story regarding the subordinate position of Thai professionals took place in 1975 when the Ministry of Education was searching for an expert to design the Science Center for Education Planetarium. The Ford Foundation, both the sponsor and consultant of the project, suggested a western-graduated Thai architect, Dr. Sumet Jumsai, and introduced him to the Thai educational authorities as a museum design specialist. The Thai ministers were surprised and they wished to know why a Thai expert had been proposed rather than a *farang*. In an interview in *Satapanik Siam*, Sumet expressed disappointment and sorrow for the Thai architectural profession, in that even the Thai authorities looked down on people from their own nation (Pussadee 2996, 383). These instances affirm Pattana's argument that the Siamese/Thai has consistently been active in seeking *farang* expertise and influence rather than purely receiving it passively. It also confirms that since the beginning of the quest for *siwilai*, Siamese/Thai agents have chosen to employ the discourse of *farang* as a tactical method for locating their cultural and national selves, alongside and against the historically interweaving western-initiated projects such as colonization, modernization, and globalization (Pattana 2002, 60). Beginning with Siam's royal elite in the nineteenth century, continued by military dictators and bureaucrats through the twentieth century, and now driven by middle-class consumers and the mass media, the consumption of *farang* goods aroused a sense of cosmopolitan pleasure, which marked emerging new cultural identities and confirmed social status (Pattana 2002, 68). However, this created an opposite pole for those Thai who were not selected to participate in the building of their own nation and culture too much—a feeling of disgrace, subordination, and inferiority for being less admirable or less "civilized." Ultimately, it confirms that the traditional forms of hierarchy continue to form an important part of the psychology of Thai peoples' minds, which would become a fundamental part of Thai statecraft and, in the end, its propaganda.

CONCLUSION

By the early 1960s, change was already in the air in Thailand on both the political and the economic fronts. Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram and his head of police, Phao Siyanon, had been deposed and sent into exile by General Sarit Thanarat. Thailand was under the firm control of the military, receiving United States aid to revive and strengthen its rule. Bangkok had begun to show some signs of its extraordinary future growth, and the American presence was more obvious than it had been in the pre-war days. In order to recruit more nations into the Free World camp during the Cold War, the U.S. became Thailand's new foreign patron, having seized on the nation as an ally and a base for opposing the spread of communism in Asia. The Euro-centric colonial concept of "*khwam charoen* (progress)" and its local interpretation, the cultivation of a new kind of national citizen, was thus replaced by the U.S.-derived concept of "*phattana* (development)" and its more precise focus on economic development through private enterprise (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 165). More and more Americans were coming to Thailand as tourists, members of groups like the Peace Corps, and military personnel based in the country or on rest and recreation leave from the Vietnam War. Greater numbers of young Thais were going to the U.S. for their studies. They returned with more than simply a degree in architecture, engineering, or science and a taste for such American fashions as blue jeans. (Warren 2006, 54). The Thai "development" hence was boosted mainly by money

flow, ideological commitment, bureaucratic infrastructure, and political links offered by U.S. patronage.

Among all the United States-funded projects, the commissions for new constructions in Thailand between the 1960s and the 1980s were one of the most evident, proving a long range of "subordination" discourse that never faded away from Thai governmentality. The Thais, no matter whether ruling elites or commoners, occupied a subordinate position relative to the West. This subordinate position is not only visible in economics and law, where so-called treaties of "free trade and friendship" such as the 1855 Bowring Treaty with Britain and the 1962 Rusk-Thanat Agreement imposed unequal trading relations and extraterritorial legal regimes on Thailand. It is also revealed in the government-commissioned construction projects assigned to American architects through the 1950s, the OICC military agreement, and the 1982 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It is in these domains of international politics and economics that Thailand's loss of autonomy vis-à-vis the West, particularly the United States, is most visible and where the country looks most like a colony.

The socio-political circumstances of the period between the 1960s and the 1980s certainly affirm the subordinate relations of Thailand to the West. This was particularly manifested in three ways. First, *farang* and *tawan-tok* were seen as indicators of "civilization" and became the bars of achievement of the elites' desire to be modern and civilized. All the instances shown in this research encompass the "westernization" of the image of the Thai ruling nobilities in linguistic and spatial terms, with the created western image serving the dual purpose of increasing Thailand's prestige in an international arena and the establishment of the government's authority over the domestic territory. The second manifestation was a direct result of the first: it became impossible to conceptualize Thai identity or Thainess separately from civilization and modernization in regard to *farang* and *tawan-tok*. This reverse orientalist, i.e., occidentalist, practice in the Thai case studies reveals ways in which an auto- or crypto-colonizing elite voluntarily adopted strategies of power from the West at a time when the latter was a dominant political and cultural force in the region; there were distinct gains to be made from doing so (Harrison 2010, 16). The third effect of this enforced self-modernization of Siam/Thailand to appease the West was of benefit to the ruling Bangkok elite in terms of the increased centralization of the state, which it implied. As a consequence, the institution of the Thai ruling elite shored up its strength under external imperial incentives, turning instead to an assumption of augmented "other" powers over its own selves in this imitation of colonial rule. As long as Thailand wished to play a part in the western-dominated world order, the country had no choice but to maintain its subordinate relation to the West.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat staged a coup in 1957, which replacing Plaek Phibunsongkhram as Thailand's prime minister until Sarit died in 1963.
- 2 Upon Sarit's return to Thailand on September 20, 1958, Sarit dissolved the parliamentary system, citing the threat of communism. This second attempt to seize power, he explained, was a revolution rather than a coup. At the same time, he announced his plans to improve Thailand's economic well-being. Sarit relied on American advice and strategy to implement his plans. The word "*phattana*" was increasingly preferentially used in all official documents, and further developed to be the terms like "*phaen phattana*" (Kullada 2003, 59).
- 3 The new governmental agencies that the American consultants assisted included National Economic Development Board, Board of Investment, Ministry of National Development, etc.
- 4 Along with tourists, many of Bangkok's new hotels catered directly to the U.S. military personnel working in Thailand. The May 1969 issue of *Investor* magazine noted that "the Chavalit, which opened in 1966 with 300 rooms, took the U.S. personnel in 1967 and has since turned itself into an apartment house for long-term lease ... the Chao Phraya [has] 230 rooms for sergeants." By 1972, three years after the U.S. began reducing both the military presence and aid spending in Thailand, the World Bank estimated that 20,000 Thais worked in the hotel industry alone (Jim Algie and et al. 2014, 187).

5 The Louis Berger Group was founded in the United States in 1950 as civil engineering consultancy. It expanded rapidly both in the United States and overseas. In 1959, an Architectural Division was established in Europe and subsequently extended to some fourteen foreign countries in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and the Far East. The work of the Architectural Division has been completely diversified, embracing the design of buildings of all types with particular emphasis on public buildings, auditoria, and buildings designed for exhibition purposes. It has attracted a number of international architects of repute as well as some brilliant young architects who have already demonstrated exceptional ability in the design of unique buildings. This included Robert G. Boughey, a chief architect of the Bangkok Office (Jewkes 1966).

6 In the 1950s, the United States Department of Defense assigned responsibility for contract construction in support of military assistance and military construction in regions around the world to the three major branches of defense: the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. The Navy was assigned as the Department of Defense contract construction agent in Southeast Asia, among other regions. The Navy, therefore, established its first contracting officer in Southeast Asia with the Officer in Charge of Construction (OICC), Thailand, located in Bangkok, in December 1955, and in 1958, the name was changed to OICC Southeast Asia in order to encompass the construction work undergoing in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Tregaskis 1975, 13, and Seuffer 1968).

7 The United States construction activities in Thailand began in 1956, consisted of the construction of facilities for joint use in the common defense of the United States and Thailand. The original construction was performed primarily by the use of local fixed-price contracts. The initial dollar input was relatively small. However, as of June 30, 1967, the U.S. construction program had increased to about \$337 million in construction projects, and the greater part of the work was being accomplished by U.S. military troop construction forces and civilian U.S. contractors (The Comptroller General of the United States 1968, 4).

8 The Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited, formerly a state enterprise, was founded on July 1, 1979, under the name "Airports Authority of Thailand—AAT." As a result of the government's privatization policy in 2002, AAT became a registered public entity and changed its name to "Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited or AOT" (Airports of Thailand under the Patronage 2011, 44-45).

9 The Phase I of Bangkok International Airport Development Project (1980-1989) placed emphasis on the upgrading and modernization of all facilities at the airport. This was to bring it up to international standards. A major long-term project was initiated with a capital investment of 5,074 million baht. After its completion, the airport was annually able to handle approximately 16 million international passengers, 2 million domestic passengers, and 532,000 metric tons of cargo. The above-mentioned development of the Bangkok International Airport resulted in greater efficiency and the raising of standards to those of other international airports. However, AAT was following the growth of air traffic closely, especially in 1987 (which was the Visit Thailand Year), and found out that further expansion was needed. As a consequence, Phase II of Bangkok International Airport Development Project (1989-1990) invested 637 million Baht in various projects. The first was the extension of the east runway for long-haul aircraft landing and taking off with the maximum load. The second was the expansion of cargo warehouses, and the third was the installation of a Y position boarding bridge. Phase III and IV followed. (Airports of Thailand 1991, 2-3; Airports of Thailand 1998, 171; and Warren 2006, 65-66).

10 The architectural part of the Suvarnabhumi Airport was designed by the Chicago-based architects, Murphy/Jahn, the winner of an invited international competition held in 1994 (Dixon 2007).

11 On behalf of AOT, the International Civil Aviation Organization contracted Louis Berger to prepare a traffic allocation strategy for the two airports and a plan for their future development. Louis Berger proceeded with a revised master plan that included: a statute review; inspection and appraisal of airside and landside facilities at both airports; passenger surveys; a strategic plan for air traffic allocation; comprehensive airport planning and design parameters; landside and airspace capacity analysis and planning, including simulations, a land-use and facility plan, an environmental impact study; and alternatives for airport development, including financial assessments (capital and operational expenditures) (WSP (former Louis Berger) 2021).

12 *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade*, or *GATT*, aims to liberalize and achieve greater security in world trade through reducing or eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers and provides a forum for negotiation over current international trade issues, thereby contributing to economic growth and development. The General Agreement has a number of provisions that deal particularly with the trade interests and needs of developing countries; some of these provisions were reinforced as a result of the Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations in GATT, which concluded in 1979. Thailand became the 88th Contracting Party to GATT on November 20, 1982 (Thailand Joins GATT, 1982).

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