

## Ajarn Chin You-di – a brief tribute

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### Abstract

My presentation is simply to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Ajarn Chin You-di to myself and teams of British and Thai archaeologists to resume the excavation of the important Iron Age, late-prehistoric site at Ban Don Ta Phet in Phanom Tuan District of Kanchanaburi Province which Ajarn Chin had undertaken in 1976. Ban Don Ta Phet is one of the earliest, if not the earliest site in Thailand to show clear connections with the early Buddhist civilizations of India in the last few centuries BCE. Research on the excavated finds has led to numerous dissertations and academic publications by Thai, British and international students and colleagues over the past forty years and have contributed to three Ph D theses, five Masters dissertations, two BA/BSc reports and thirty-two journal or conference publications.

Editor's note: This tribute to Ajarn Chin You-di was given at the ASEAN Archaeologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Symposium organized by Silpakorn University and held at the Royal River Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand 16-17 November 2016. Prof. Ian Glover has kindly allowed us to republish his tribute here.

Keywords: Thailand, Chin You-di, tribute, Ban Don Ta Phet



Ajarn Chin You-di and Professor Sood Sanwichin at Ban Don Ta Phet in 1981 (photo by author)

### **Introduction**

My presentation is simply to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Ajarn Chin You-di to myself and teams of British and Thai archaeologists to resume the excavation of the important Iron Age, late-prehistoric site at Ban Don Ta Phet (BDTP) in Phanom Tuan District, Kanchanaburi Province which Ajarn Chin had undertaken in 1976. Ban Don Ta Phet is, together with Khao Sam Kaeo in Chumphon Province, one of the earliest sites in Thailand to show clear connections with the early Buddhist civilizations of India in the last few centuries BCE.

Although I had heard of Ajarn Chin You-di from colleagues including Per Sørensen and William Watson who had excavated in Thailand in the 1960s I met him first in 1978 when I was considering changing the location of my archaeological research from Indonesia to the mainland of Southeast Asia and was also involved in the supervision of Waranghana Rajpitak, a Thai student who was studying for a Master's Degree in Conservation at the Institute of Archaeology in London and was analysing a series of unusual high-tin bronzes excavated by Ajarn Chin at Ban Don Ta Phet in 1975-76. (Rajpitak & Seeley 1979)

While I was in Thailand in 1978 Pisit Charoenwongsa, who had earlier studied with me in London, encouraged me to consider resuming the excavations at Ban Don Ta

Phet which had raised, but hardly answered many questions concerning the transition from the late prehistoric to the early historic period in Central Thailand and connections with India.

Khun Warangkhanana was also seeking more bronze samples from other excavated sites in Thailand in order to extend her research for a doctorate and was having some problem in getting permission to take samples to London. I made an appointment with the Director-General of the Fine Arts Department and discussed this problem with him and he offered a helpful solution. Of course applications had to be made, papers filled in and so on but in the meantime Khun Warangkhanana could take some samples back with her to London to work on.

I had become interested in the material and the site, visited Don Ta Phet with Dr van Liere and discussed it with Ajarn Chin who was most encouraging concerning the possibility of re-excavating the location in order to get better contexts for the finds report on the excavation and. In 1980 he gave me a copy of his 1976 report, showed me many of the photographs and plans made at the site and promised to make them available if I had permission to re-excavate at BDTP – which I obtained and returned the next year to start work. Ajarn Chin was again very helpful and said that he had sent all the plans and photographs to an office in the Division of Archaeology at the National Museum where they were to be available. This was confirmed by my allocated FAD field collaborator Khun Pisit Charoenwongsa – but unfortunately it seems that the plans had vanished – taken from the cupboard where they had been placed by someone unknown and I never saw them again.

This setback notwithstanding, we went back to BDTP, arranged a base in the National Museum at U Thong, accommodation in the village school thanks to the help of the Head Teacher Khun Krim Suksamai and started excavation in late November 1980 and worked through to early February 1981.

In late 1982-83 we had an extensive survey in west-central Thailand, specifically in Kanchanaburi and Suphanburi Provinces and had a second excavation season in December 1984 to early 1985. The FAD generously made it possible for us to take a selection of excavated materials to London for study.

The BDTP excavation project and subsequent analyses in London led to the completion of 3 PhD theses, 5 Master Degree theses and three reports for BA or BSc degrees and 32 publications, all in English, by myself and/or in cooperation with colleagues and students. Regrettably I have never completed a single volume report on our work at BDTP although I started on this, writing over 80,000 words plus tables and illustrations and perhaps it can still be achieved.

There was further excavation at the site by FAD archaeologists from Suphanburi National Museum led by Khun Khemmachart Dhepchai which led to a report in Thai and English in 2000 by Wasan Dhepsuriyanon.

### **Acknowledgements**

Firstly I must acknowledge the encouragement and support of Khun Chin You-di who visited at the site in 1981 The work at Ban Don Ta Phet was supported by various British

funds and I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Director-Generals of the Fine Arts and especially Pisit Charoenwongsa who was Co-director of the West Central Thailand Archaeological Project, Narawat M. Kamnouchet, Sayan Prishanchit, Khun Krim Suksamai, the headmaster of the village school, and the many students from Silpakorn and London Universities as well as the villagers from Ban Don Ta Phet who worked with us at the site.

**References**

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