Protection and Management of Archaeological Resources in Thailand: *Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*

Sawang Lertrit

It is generally accepted that cultural resources, both tangible and intangible, are important, and have potential value and meaning for human beings (e.g. see Lipe 1984, 1985). Because a great number of cultural resources, especially archaeological remains and historic sites, have been destroyed and the situation seems to continue, most nations of the world now have some policy of conservation of their cultural resources.

The basic conservation and protection problems most nations have encountered include looting (see Hutt, Jones and McAllister 1992, Pumathon 1994 for examples), smuggling, destructive development activities such as land alteration for agriculture, road construction, dam building, and apathetic public attitudes toward archaeological work.

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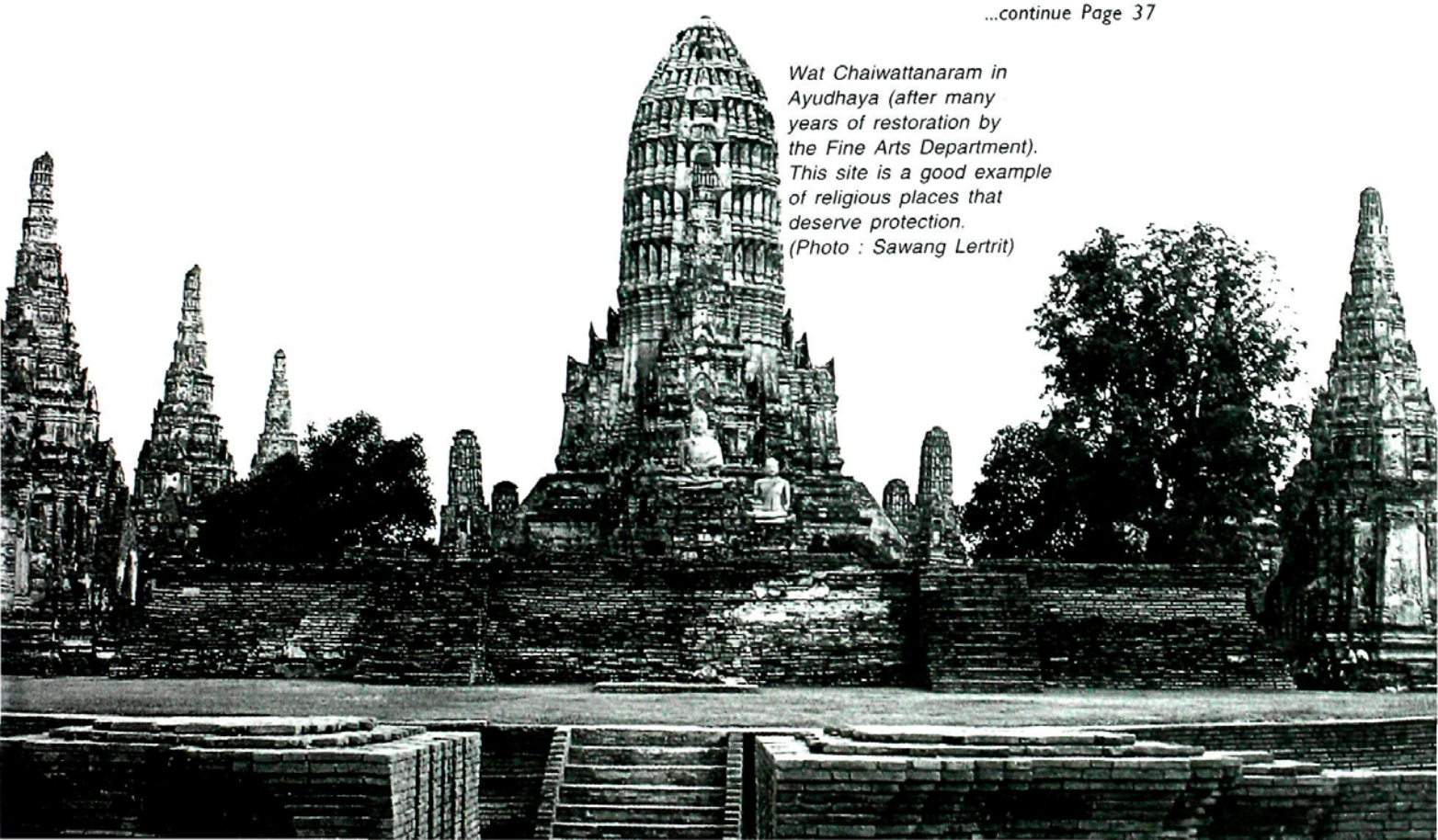
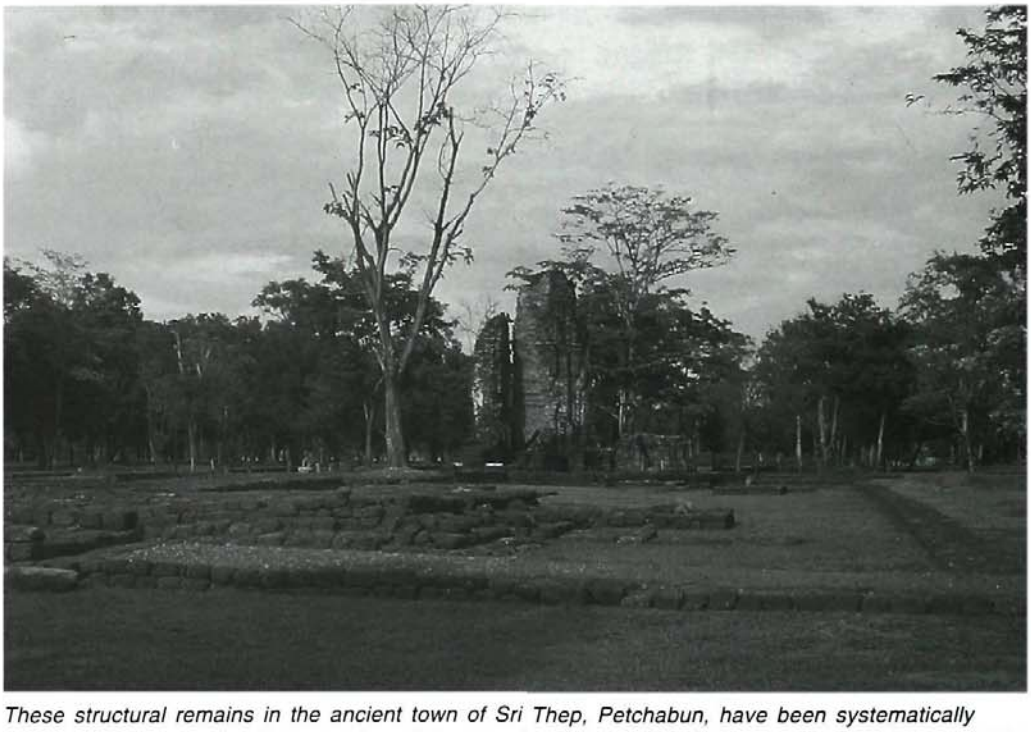


Wat Chaiwattanaram in Ayudhaya (after many years of restoration by the Fine Arts Department). This site is a good example of religious places that deserve protection. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

Archaeological materials such as ceramics are considered an important cultural resource that yield valuable information. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)



These structural remains in the ancient town of Sri Thep, Petchabun, have been systematically excavated for years, but interpretation of the remains is not widely known, particularly for the public. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

With increasing concern about the existence and future of cultural resources, many countries in the world have been attempting to mitigate and solve these problems under the rubric of cultural resource management, archaeological heritage management, or archaeological resource management, which is a term commonly used in the United Kingdom, other European countries, Australia and New Zealand (see Cleere 1989; Hunter and Ralston 1993; McKinlay and Jones 1979).

The term "cultural resource management" or CRM, has been used in the United States for more than two decades. It usually refers to conservation, preservation, protection and research of archaeological sites and historic buildings (see Lipe and Lindsay 1974; Fowler 1982; Smith and Ehrenhard 1991; Kerber 1994). The concepts and practices of CRM have been developed from concerns over increasing destruction of archaeological sites.

Given that cultural resources yield significance for human society and are non-renewable, it is reasonable that they should be properly treated and managed. The management of cultural resources or properties focuses primarily on measures to maintain inventory, evaluate and protect archaeological resources from destruction by either human or natural phenomenon, or to rescue critical information before destruction.

In the following section I examine the historical background of preservation, administration, legislation as well as other aspects of the management of cultural resources in Thailand, with the focus on archaeological resources and current protection problems.

Historical, administrative, and legislative background

Thailand has a long history of cultural development, but the management of cultural resources under a protective framework did not begin until the 19th century. It is interesting to note that throughout its history of cultural development, perceptions of the past varied from place to place depending upon influences such as religions, beliefs, and political situations. For example, Thai people as Buddhists generally perceive the past as something that represents change and becoming. It may be abandoned quickly and easily. It is expected that new things can be created, invented or established. Thus, restoration or reconstruction of old pagodas or *stupas*, pavillions and other religious buildings is not culturally wrong. Byrne(1995) brilliantly discussed the use of *stupa* and conservation conflicts in Thailand. Strictly speaking, the past as interpreted by King Rama VI, during his reign, was a key tool in building nationalism. He convinced the people to be proud of their culture and past(Vella 1978).

A deep big hole dug by looters, in Chiang Saen
(Photo : Courtesy of Chiang Saen Historic Park Project)

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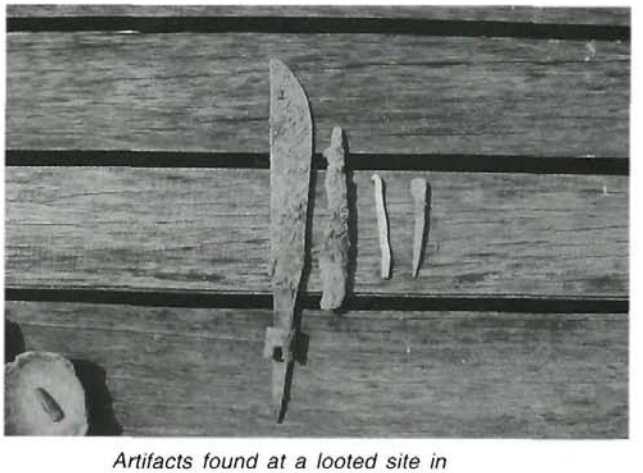
Temple Looters" was issued in 1851 during the reign of King Rama IV (Fine Arts Department 1968). The main objective of the law was to prevent temples from being looted.

It should be noted that during his reign (1851-1868), Thailand (or Siam, as it was known at that time) was in an early stage of its development of international relations. While the King wanted to open the country to forge relationships with developed countries such as the United States, England, France, etc. (for details see Syamanand 1993), he was aware of the negative side of co-lonisation. For this reason, he revived an awareness of the past as a way of supporting nation-building or developing a sense of national unity and pride (Syamananda 1993).



Artifacts found at a looted site in Chiang Saen
(Photo : Chiang Saen Historic Park Project)

Through his reign, a number of archaeological research projects, including the preparation of museum displays, were carried out. However, since the works were the result of the king's personal interests - not of government policies - they were conducted only by small groups of elites who worked only on royal projects. Nevertheless, the value and meaning of cultural resources were interpreted as important heritage of the nation, deserving protection.

The revival of the past was continued during the reign of King Rama V, (1868-1910). King Chulalongkorn, as he was also called, was not only a well-known reformer, but also a great scholar. He was interested in a variety of disciplines such as archaeology, ethnography, history; wrote a number of books concerning archaeology; set up a museum hall in his palace (1874); solicited the return of stolen objects from Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, Germany (1886); established the Museum Department (1888) which was a government agency; founded the Antiquity Club (1907), which promoted the study of archaeology, art, and history; and established the Literature Club (1914) (Fine Arts Department 1989; Sangruchi 1992; Charoenwongsa 1994; Ketudhat 1995). It should also be noted that the first scientific excavations that were conducted by Phraya Boranrajathanin in Ayutthaya were another important point that marks the progress in archaeological resource management.

These greatly increased public awareness of the significance of cultural resources, and eventually led to the development of cultural resource management in the country. It should be stated that in the King's sense, cultural resources referred to everything that was old. Thus, it is not surprising that, even at the present time, there is no clear and specific definition of cultural resources used in the legislative context. The commonly used references are *ancient monuments, ancient objects, art objects.*

In 1926, six years after the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign, the Bangkok Museum Act was enacted. This brought about the establishment of Thailand's first public museum, the Bangkok Museum. In addition, the regulations concerning 'Transportation of Ancient Objects and Art Objects' was pro-

mulgated in response to the immense trafficking and smuggling of antiquities (Sangruchi 1992:5). It should be noted that the management of cultural resources mainly involved the protection of archaeological remains.

A remarkable change occurred in the time of Prime Minister Field-Marshal Pibunsonggram (1897-1964). Pibunsonggram clarified his role in the government, and tried to use elements of culture as tools to cultivate nationalism and patriotism. For example, he encouraged the people to use and buy only Thai products, and required them to be in - what he called "civilised" - dressing, i.e. coats, trousers, blouses, shirts, hats, gloves, and ties (Wyatt 1984: 255; Suwannathat-Pian 1995:135-151).

Furthermore, Luang Wichitwathakan(1898-1962), a prominent scholar and prolific history writer in this period, asserted in one of his studies on the ethnic history of the Tai people, that the Thais were the most ancient race, instead of "one of the most ancient" (Charoenwongsa 1994:1). Kasetsiri (1979: 166-168) interpreted Luang Wichitwathakan's history as an ideological weapon of the new ruling elite, particularly the military which sought justification for ruling the country.

During Phibunsonggram's Government, a large number of acts, regulations, and laws that applied to cultural heritage were passed; the most effective ones were the *National Culture Act of 1940*, the *1940 Council of Culture*, and the *1945 Act of the Ministry of Culture*. In 1979 when General Kriangsak Chamananda was the Prime Minister, the Office of the National Culture Commission was established. Later, Prime Minister General Prem Tinnasulanonda announced the national culture policy. Most recently, under the administration of Chuan Leekphai's cabinet, the government declared the year 1994 as the Thai Culture Promotion Year to promote public awareness of the value of Thai traditions and customs. This nationwide campaign dealt mostly with non-material aspects of the culture such as beliefs, ideologies, religions, and folklore. In regard to the management of archaeological resources, the Fine Arts Department's Division of Archaeology, Ministry of Education, has taken responsibility since 1926.

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The administration of archaeological resources

The management of archaeological resources in Thailand is a government monopoly administered by the Division of Archaeology, Fine Arts Department. Under the law, the Division of Archaeology is:

"the key agency working on the restoration of ancient monuments and archaeological sites. It is also responsible for the preservation and investigation of archaeological remains for the benefit of the nation, for the sake of the study of the nation's history, and for the perpetuation of the cultural heritage of the nation" (Fine Arts Department 1990: 24).

Administratively, the Division of Archaeology is one of ten agencies of the Fine Arts Department in the Ministry of Education, which is the only organisation

responsible for the management of cultural resources in the country. The Division was first formed as a club in 1908 - the Antiquity Club. It was gradually reformed and its status was later changed from a private club to a government agency. In its administrative structure, the Division of Archaeology is divided into 7 sections; General Affairs, Planning and Evaluation, Research, Restoration and Preservation of Ancient Monuments, Preservation and Restoration of Mural Paintings and Non-removable Sculptures, Control and Maintenance, and Historical Park Projects.

Furthermore, according to the law, the Division of Archaeology is given full authority to grant permission or reject proposals for undertaking archaeological investigations on public land. In recent administrative changes that took place in 1995 (and was announced in the Royal Gazette on August 14, 1995), the Division of Archaeology was merged with the Division of National Museums into the *Office of Archaeology and National Museums*, but its role and policy remain the same.

Broadly speaking, there are two major groups of archaeologists in Thailand. One group, whose work is mostly concentrated on restoration, preservation and inventory of archaeological sites, districts, and ancient cities, is associated with the Fine Arts Department (FAD), while the other is associated with academic institutions such as universities and colleges. In response to the Historical Park Projects, a great number of surveys of archaeological sites and monuments by FAD's archaeologists during the past ten years were primarily and specifically designed to rescue major archaeological sites, and then develop them into "historical parks". Charoenwongsa (1994:2) remarks: "administrators/managers enjoy themselves more towards restoration of ancient monuments. The situation has not changed very much..." This seems ironical because Musigakama (1995: 38), a former director of the Division of Archaeology, stated that the Division of Archaeology is not only responsible for survey, maintenance, restoration and preservation of archaeological heritage, but also for scientific study of archaeological records.

A looted ruin at the ancient town Chiang Saen. A hole was dug by looters into the base of the ruin to collect buddha images. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

After joint expedition projects with foreign counterparts during the 1960's, the Thailand's Fine Arts Department initiated many mobile-projects to counter looting activities in the 1970's. Under the direction of Pisit Charoenwongsa, the Northeast Thailand Archaeological Project was established in 1975 out of its predecessor, the Ban Chiang Excavation Project (a joint effort between the Fine Arts Department and the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania which was carried out under the co-ordination of Pisit Charoenwongsa and the late Dr. Chester F. Gorman). With the success of the Northeast Thailand Archaeological Project, the Archaeology Division created another three regional - North-

ern, Central and Southern Thailand - archaeological projects.

Following that, regional field projects were brought under the central administration of Thailand Archaeological Project (TAP). As Director of TAP and the Research Section of Archaeology Division, Pisit advised his younger colleagues to choose among themselves their own project directors. In 1980's, Khemchart Thepchai, Tarapong Srisuchart, Bovornvate Rungruchee, Amphan Kijngam, Sathaporn Khanyuen, Sayan Pricharnchit and Niti Saengwan, etc. were directors of these regional projects. To enrich their experiences, some of them moved or rotated from one project to another.

In the 1980's, the Thailand Archaeological Projects and its regional field projects produced several hundred site survey reports for the first time and with that came a large data collection which resulted in about 50 publications in book form during the late 1980's and beginning of 1990s.

I am not going into the details in discussing the outcome of joint research projects with foreign colleagues. There are both pros and cons in the cooperation between western and Thai archaeologists. Many good elements brought by Western colleagues include the concept of multi-discipline/problem-oriented research programmes, etc.. However, some projects caused misunderstandings and negative feelings between participants, due largely to differences in culture/traditions and the self-centredness of certain individuals.

Legislation relating to the protection of archaeological resources

As mentioned earlier, the first protection law issued in the reign of King Rama IV was short-lived, and was limited to the protection of royal temples. In 1934, the first comprehensive legislation was drafted, and was later amended three times - in 1943, 1961, and 1992. The last amendment was announced in the Royal Gazette on March 29, 1992 in the reign of the present king. This has been called *Ancient Monuments, Ancient Objects, Art Objects, and National Museum Act of 1961*. In addition, a number of separate regulations such as the *Act of the Ministry of Education*, and the *Announcement of the Fine Arts Department* have been occasionally issued in line with the Act of 1961(for details see Wichailak 1992).

The 1961 Act, together with additional amendments and regulations, has broad coverage; it includes definitions of specific terms, regulations, permit applications, ownership, lists of endangered sites, national museum, and illegal trafficking, transportation of ancient objects, and penalties.

Unlike such other countries as the United States and Australia, Thailand has no particular law on burial sites and properties belonging to particular ethnic or indigenous peoples. According to the Act, any objects buried or left on public land belong to the nation.

Public education

Public interest in cultural resources is powerful, as the public becomes the driving force behind efforts to conserve the past. In Thailand, the first formal centre for public education in archaeology is the Faculty of

An old reservoir at Sri Thep Historic Park, Petchabun. It can be used at the present time as a water resource. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

An ancient chedi located in the heart of Chiang Mai. Note that various kinds of refuse have been discarded close to the chedi. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

Prehistoric human skeleton remains discovered at Sri Thep, Petchabun. This type of archaeological materials is very fragile and, to some degree, it deteriorates very quickly. Thus, it deserves serious attention and careful curation. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

Archaeology, Silpakorn University. This institution has the only centre of training and recruitment of archaeologists for over 40 years. Most Thai archaeologists have been trained at this institution. The courses focus mainly on Thai archaeology and a basic understanding of archaeological practices, and the degrees offered are B.A. and M.A.

Interestingly, during the past decade, many other schools, colleges, and universities, for example, Thammasat University, Khon Kaen University, Chiang Mai University, Srinakharintharawirot University, and Chiang Rai Teachers' College have developed archaeology programmes and introduced archaeology courses in their curriculum, but none offers degrees in archaeology. Archaeology programmes have yet to be introduced to the elementary and secondary schools; school children, therefore, learn very little about Thai history and culture in school.

Besides formal education, knowledge about the past has been transmitted to the public through various kinds of non-formal educational mediums. Museums are one type of non-formal education centres; throughout the country, there are more than 30 public museums operated by the Office of Archaeology and National Museum. (I was surprised to learn that in 1995, the Thai Government granted a budget of about 2 billion baht (about $80 million) to build provincial museums throughout the country).

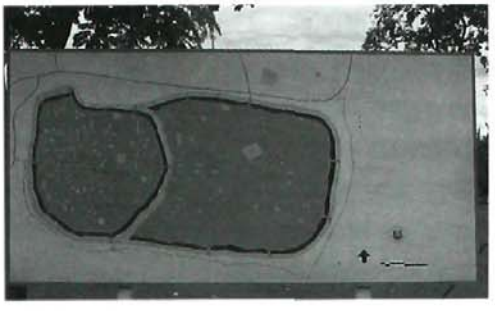
In addition to the government-owned museums, there are a number of private museums such as the Museum of the Siam Society, the Ancient City, the Jim Thompson House, and the Museum of Prehistory in Siriraj Hospital of Mahidol University. There are also groups of archaeological volunteers who occasionally organise field trips to archaeological and historic sites around Thailand, as well as neighbouring countries such as Laos, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam. It is an indication that archaeological study tours are now becoming popular in Thailand.

Major contemporary problems

Major problems concerning the management of archaeological resources in Thailand are basically similar to those found in other countries in the world.

Looting

Looting is an ever-increasing problem in Thailand. Through time, many archaeological sites have been illegally unearthed. In many cases, the looters are asked by middlemen who are merchants from Bangkok to hunt for antiquities. The ideal sites for looting are prehistoric sites in central and northeastern Thailand where they can easily gain access, and where the sites cover large areas. The artifacts hunted include pottery, stone bracelets, beads, and bronze weapons. Surprisingly, a man in a team of looters confessed, when arrested, that he learned how to dig by observing archaeologists while they were at work. Another woman in the same team said that they have no choice but to hunt for antiquities for money because they were poor, and did not own any land. (Pumathon 1994:28).



Information about the site is necessary for public interpretation and education. This information bay is at Sri Thep Historic Park, Petchabun. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

Government officials versus local people

This problem arises mostly in the context of restoration of monuments which are currently used as shrines or sacred sites. This may be due to different understanding of the value of archaeological resources between government officials and the local people. For example, most recently, there was a movement of people in Lopburi Province to protest the restoration of an ancient monument in the city. Archaeologists from the Division of Archaeology wanted to dissemble the monument and restore it by the so-called "Anastylosis" method, but the people in the province wanted to know why the monument had to be taken apart first. They were very concerned about the destruction of the monument, because it has great spiritual value for the people in the province (for details see Suncharoen 1995:8).

It should be remembered that the people who live near the sites are the best protectors of cultural resources

In another case, the Division of Archaeology reshaped a giant pagoda, *Wat Chedi Luang*, in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand without enough investigation and public hearings. The restoration resulted in the deformation of a pagoda which disappointed the locals and the scholars so much that they called a meeting to stop the work (see e.g., Suksawasdi 1993).

Careful excavation is an important part of archaeological resource management in terms of information treatment processes. Insufficiently trained workers should not be assigned to fulfill the work. (Photo : Sawang Lertrit)

There are few well-trained archaeologists working in government agencies, most of whom received only basic training, and have limited experience in archaeology. They often face problems because, many times, they are assigned to carry out work that they are not trained.

Problems of contract work

At present, the preservation and restoration of archaeological remains and historic buildings is in the hands of technicians, rather than archaeologists. Archaeologists should research essential information before the restoration begins, as a practical and academic approach, but often that task is left to the technicians. I could not find any sufficient evidence or obtain a clear explanation of why this problem occur. I think, it has to do mostly with ethics of practitioners. These technicians are lacking in basic archaeological knowledge, and they are even lacking in appreciation for the value of cultural resources. They just want to finish their work as soon as possible because of constraints of time and money. Thus, a lot of valuable information has been lost. For example, in the restoration of an ancient ruin in Ratchaburi, workers of a contract company reconstructed the ruin by first disassembling it and then reconstructing it. Unfortunately, the workers did not know what the original shape of the monument had been. The result of their work is archaeologically wrong and the monument looks very ugly.

The Philippine colonial milieu is distinct in many ways. Guerrero notes the absence of strong kingship mechanisms as well as the swift and easy collusion of the native elite with colonial forces in laying the groundwork of conquest. Guerrero, however, reminds us to carefully sift through the contradictions among the institutions of the Church, the State, the people, and the elite in divining the signposts of this milieu; and also through the spaces of colonial consolidation, that is, the settlement patterns or the configurations of State put in place by certain "kingdoms" in Manila and "sultanates" in the south at the time of colonisation.

The Real Sociedad Economica de los Amigos del Pais is a case in point: the Basco Reforms, which made it possible, must be situated in the context of an overdetermined historical break effected by the Tagalog agrarian uprisings of 1745, the rise of the mestizo Chinese entrepreneurial activity, and the assertion of the Spanish civil government's discourse of progress. The construction of the "Academia", therefore, is to play itself out across the competing social fields of colonialism. This is the province of colonial art history.

This history is to be thought of as politically potent in revising unjust practices in the production of culture through the bureaucracies of taste: the academe and its curriculum, the highly commercialised art market, the elitist museum system, and even the sometimes opportunistic governmental art institutions.

All this, however, must fall under the disciplinal prerogatives of art history which define not only apparatus, structure, surveillance, and governmentality, but also practice, human action, will, agency, the gestures and habits - the performances - of subjectivity and the body politic within the domains of culture. This kind of reflexive history, according to anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, is keenly sensitive to "historical processes, historicity, and historiography". He elaborates that:

Histories, structures, and meaning not only are all multiple but are also all contested by historical actors. The dynamics of historical practice become unveiled when histories are seen as processes and histories are seen as the lived experience of historical actors. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990, 23)

By way of closing, let me unnderpin this paper with notions of visuality that cut through colonial experience and the contemporary struggles which deal with its legacies:

Colonial cultural texts must be seen not as syncretic or embodiments of folksy mest*izaje elan* but as hybrid discourses through which colonial power relations are inscribed, transacted, and exchanged. They are not, as George Kubler might suggest, "modes of the survival of ancient forms" or "modes of extinction", (Kubler 1985, 68) but rather are specific forms of redefining colonial power in relation to the attempts to recover or recreate freedoms that had been lost, and so assume the broader political interests of the post-colonial vision of ending, once and for all, dominative systems. This is the point at which art history must burst the seams of the society it had repressed. An art historian in the Philippines has rightly warned her colleagues not to forget about the slippery "admixture" informing Philippine colonial art, asserting that "an active fusion of ... cultures in the arts failed. It was the colonial pattern of one people dominating another, an acculturation of a relatively unbalanced form". (Morillo 1993, 2) Discussing the retablos of Laguna, Frances Morillo is led to conclude that this hybrid art bears "features peculiar to it and foreign to its European counterparts", (Morillo 1993, 2) as if to say that colonial art is almost but not quite its native self nor its

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Sawang Lertrit *is an instructor at the Department of Archaeology, Silpakorn University in Bangkok, and is currently a graduate student in archaeology at the Department of Anthropology, Washington State University in Pullman, USA. His current research interests include cultural resource management, ethno-archaeology, and development of early historic societies, particularly in Thailand. He has participated in many archaeological research projects and has conducted archaeological surveys and excavations in southern Thailand for almost five years. Sawang has also written over 20 scholarly papers published in books, journals, magazines, newsletters, and encyclopedia.*