

SUKHOTHAI HISTORICAL PARK PROJECT

by Mr. Vira Rojpojchanarat
Architect, Archaeology Division,
Department of Fine Arts,
Thailand.

The word "Sukhothai" literally means "Dawn of Happiness"

The first Thai kingdom that can be recorded with certainty is the kingdom of Sukhothai which was founded in the middle of the 13th century A.D. in northern Thailand, about 500 kilometres northeast of Bangkok, the present capital. Early in the 15th century Sukhothai lost its autonomy and was appended to another Thai kingdom, Ayudhya, a young and rising power to the south along the Chao Phya Valley. The old city of Sukhothai was finally deserted in the 16th century and never again revived.

Though the Sukhothai kingdom lasted for only about 200 years, its sublime art has been reckoned as the best artistic expression of the Thai people and its influence over the following art styles in Thailand is also great and manifest.

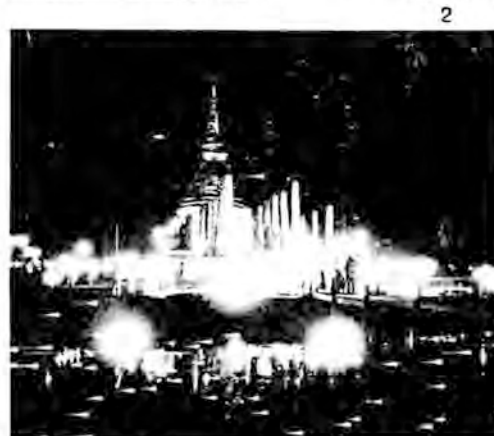
In 1976 the proposal of the Department of Fine Arts, Ministry of Education, to restore the ancient city of Sukhothai was approved by the Government of Thailand and in 1977 a committee was set up to draw up a masterplan composing of architects and archaeologists from the Department of Fine Arts and the universities in Thailand, as well as 3 experts from UNESCO.

The Sukhothai Historical Park Development Project formally approved by the Thai Government in 1978 is a 10-year project (1977-1986) with a total budget of US\$11 million. The Historical Park covers 70 square kilometres in the area generally known as "Muang Kao Sukhothai" (Old City of Sukhothai). The Project aims not only at restoring the ruins of ancient structure but also calls for the revival of the old abandoned city.

The Project is divided into 6 main plans: land use control plan, archaeological excavation and restoration plan, communities development plan, tourist promotion plan, and settlement facilities and utilities plan.

The Project was launched in 1977 by the Department of Fine Arts and from

1978 it has been working in close co-operation with UNESCO which is providing technical assistance as well as helping to raise international funds to supplement the budget allocations from the Thai Government. Since the Project came into operation 25 monuments, 50 ancient wells, 12 ancient ponds have been excavated and restored, 8 out of the 200 households planned for relocation have been resettled, 35 kilometres of existing roads improved and an area of 400 acres cleared. It is expected that by April 1982 excavation and restoration works within the city wall will have been completed.



1. Model of the Sukhothai Historical Park expected to be completed in 1986
2. & 3. The ancient city of Sukhothai illuminated by thousands of candel, oil lamps and torches during the annual Sukhothai Festival which is becoming one of the chief tourist attractions.
4. Open air performance of the Khone (masked dance) during the annual Sukhothai Festival.