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No. 1

# INTRODUCING CULTURAL THAILAND IN OUTLINE

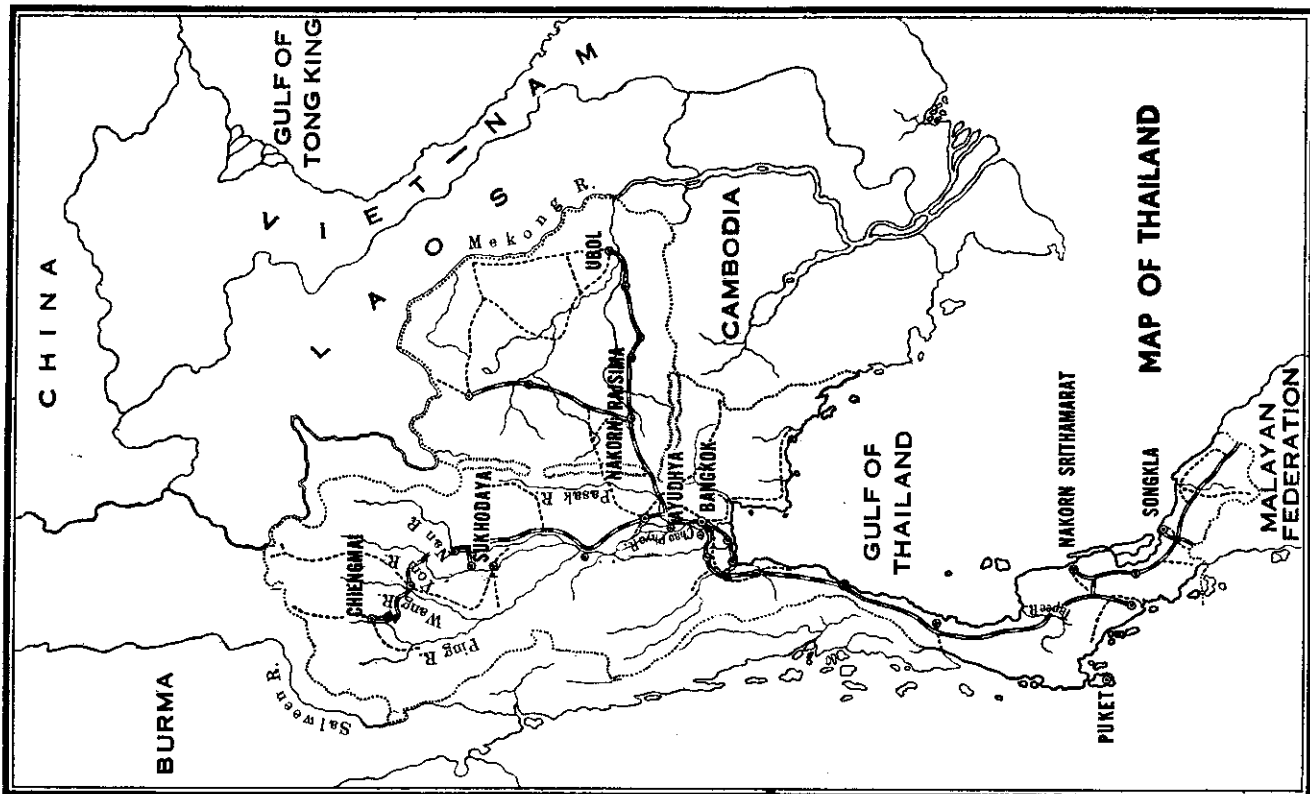
BY  
PHYA ANUMAN RAJADHON



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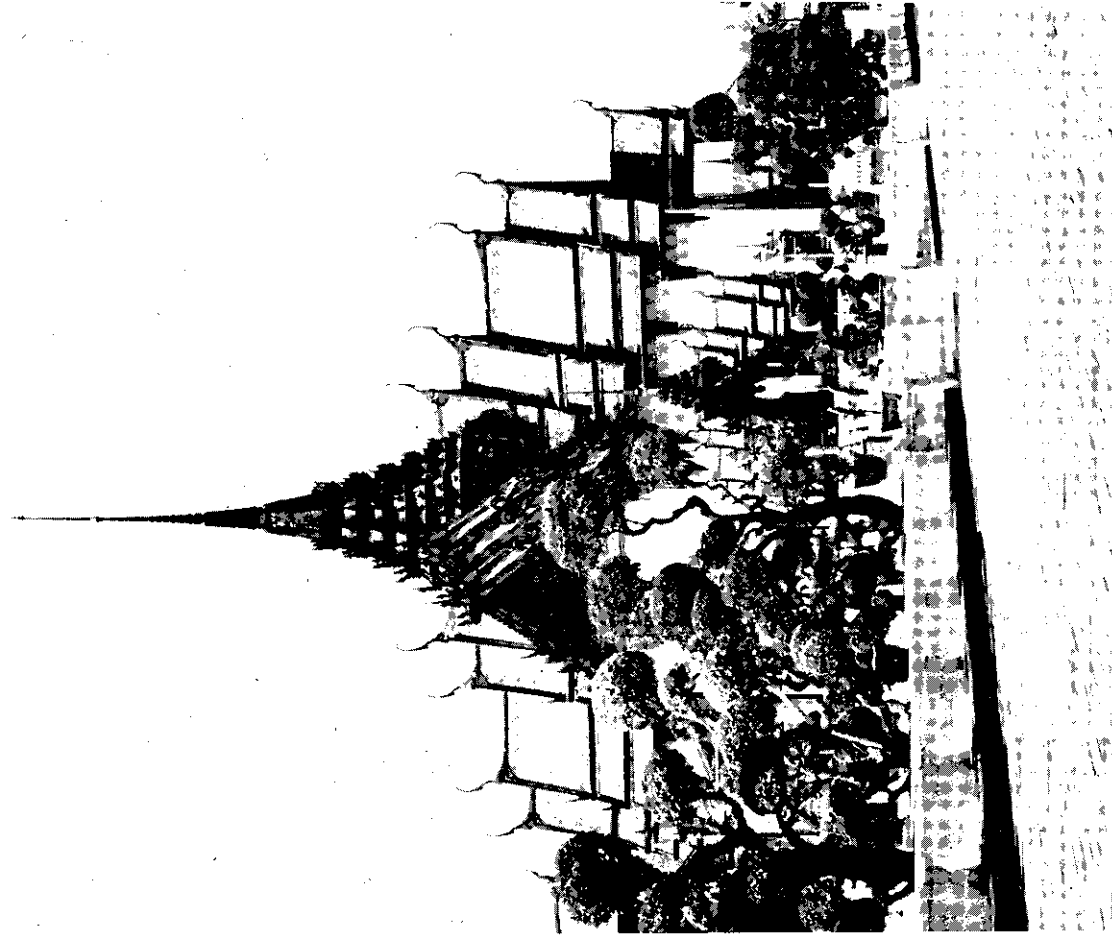
BANGKOK, THAILAND

B. E. 2500



**Phya Anuman Rajadhon**, D. Litt. (Honoris Causa), Chulalongkorn University, is one of the greatest living scholars and writers of Thailand. Not to be classified specifically as an historian, an ethnologist, a philologist or an archaeologist, he typifies that race of scholars with an unquenchable spirit of enquiry and encyclopaedic range that is fast dying out. His writings, mostly under the pseudonym of "**Sathira Koses**" which has become a household word, amply reflect his catholic tastes and wide and varied interests embracing the whole gamut of the humanities. He has had a long and distinguished career of government service as Assistant Director-General of Customs, Vice-Chairman of the Royal Institute, Director-General of the Fine Arts Department. At present he teaches philology, Comparative Literature and Thai customs and tradition at Chulalongkorn University, heads the Thai History Revision Committee and also serves on the National Culture Institute Committee.

*First Published, 1957.*



*The Royal Palace Dusit Maha Prasart, Bangkok.*

## INTRODUCING CULTURAL THAILAND IN OUTLINE

**THE LAND.** Thailand is a country on the mainland of South-East Asia right in the middle of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. On the north and west she has Burma as her neighbour, and on the north and east she borders on the Kingdoms of the Laos and Cambodia and on the south juts deep into the Malay Peninsula between the China Sea and the Sea of Bengal touching the Federation of Malaya. The total area of Thailand is roughly 513,000 square kilometres; her greatest length is about 1,650 kilometres and her greatest breadth is about 770 kilometres. She has also, on the south, the Gulf of Thailand and the China Sea, and to the west of the Malay Peninsula, the Bay of Bengal. Topographically, Thailand may be divided into four areas, the Central, the Northern, the North-Eastern and the Southern.

The Central Area is a large alluvial plain called the Menam Basin which in most parts becomes inundated during the rainy season. The Basin is intersected by winding rivers and numerous canals and streams. Its principal and well-known river is the Menam Chao Phya or the river Menam as known commonly to the Western people. Menam means literally in Thai "Mother of Water" or river only. On the left bank of this river, some 40 kilometres from its mouth stands Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, while on its right bank stands the city of Dhonburi which for a short period of time was the capital city before it removed to the present one some 175 years ago. Bangkok and Dhonburi form the Greater City of Bangkok. Its official name in an abbreviated form is Krungdep which means the capital city of gods.

The Northern Area is a hilly or mountainous terrain divided by four rivers into four relatively large valleys, which flow to the south and join the river Menam. It has also as its western and northern boundaries parts of the rivers Salween and Mekong. The well known chief

*The Pagoda of Wat Arun or the Temple of Dawn, Bangkok.*

city of this Area is Chiengmai which is the second city of Thailand in the degree of its modern development.

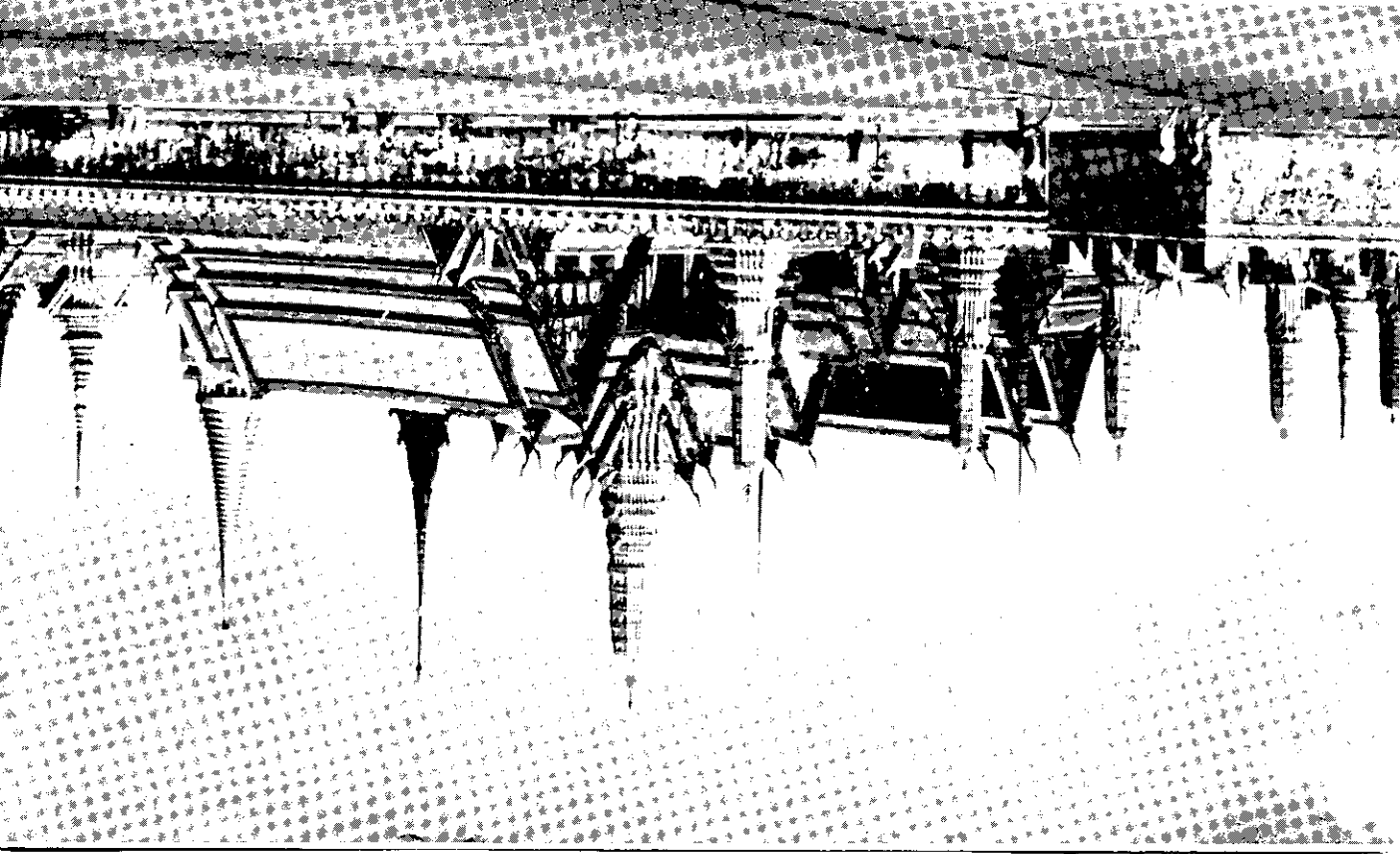
The North-Eastern Area is a saucer-shaped plateau with the great river Mekong as its eastern boundary. It is a poorly watered region known to Westerners as the Korat Plateau, and is the largest of the four areas of Thailand. Its chief cities are Korat (Nakorn Rajsima) and Ubol.

The Southern Area is made up of about two-thirds of the Malay Peninsula which has ranges of mountains as its back-bone, on either side of which are coastal plains.

**THE PEOPLE.** The people of Thailand are called the Thai, which is a generic name for a race of people including also the Shans of the many Shan States of Northern Burma, the Laos of the Lao Kingdom in former French Indo-China, and some tribes to be found in Southern China and Tongking of Northern Vietnam. Thai in the modern sense means free. The Thai of Thailand were known up to 1939 A.D. as the Siamese and their country was known as Siam.

On linguistic grounds it may be said that the inhabitants of Thailand are composed principally of three main ethnic groups of people, that is the Thai, the Austronesian or Indonesian, the Mon-Khmer which include principally the Mons and the Cambodians. Through the process of time and vicissitudes of history, these peoples and to a less extent the Southern Chinese who have migrated into the country, have intermingled to form the present population of Thailand.

**THE HISTORY.** Before they migrated into Thailand the Thai had lived within historical times in Southern China. Through pressures and other historical causes they migrated gradually and in different times and directions into the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. Some tribes of the Thai migrated into the present Thailand a thousand or more years ago. At first they settled themselves in what is now the Northern Area of Thailand, in many small independent

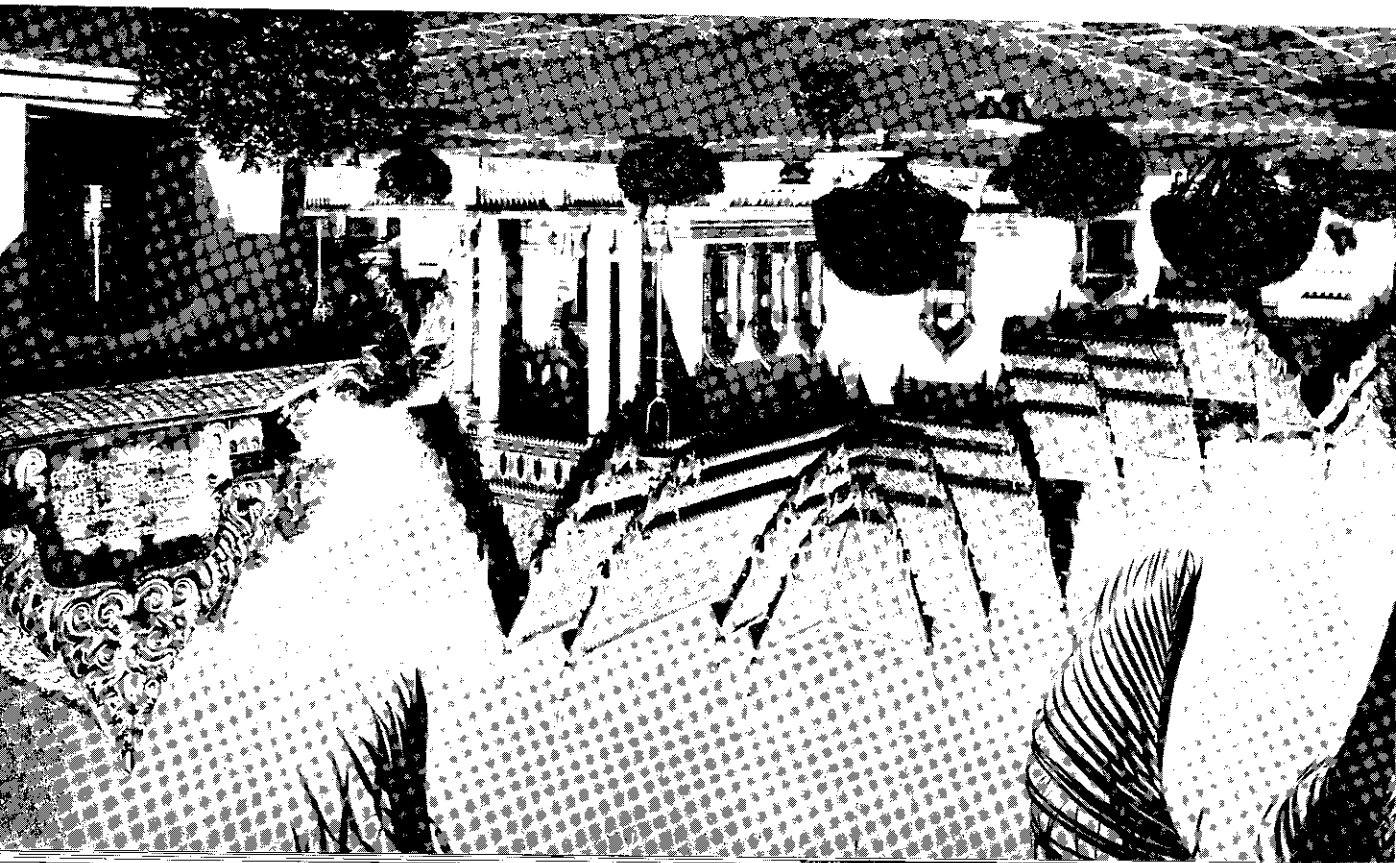


*The Royal Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok.*

states ruled by their own chiefs or kings. Not until the latter part of the 13th century A.D. did the Northern Area of Thailand with Chiengmai as its capital become a fair-sized Kingdom under its first King Mengrai.

Further south in what is now Central Thailand or the Menam Basin, long before the appearance of the Thai in or about the 5th to the 7th century A.D., there lived a people probably akin to the Mons of Lower Burma. They are known archaeologically by their Kingdom of Dvaravati. This Kingdom later in the 11th century A.D. was under the domination for a time being of the Javanese — Sumatran Empire of Sri Vijaya. It subsequently in the 12th century A.D. became part of the Khmer or Cambodian Empire. Evidently about this time the Thai infiltrated Central Thailand; at first as minority groups, which later on, formed themselves into several semi-independent principalities under the dominant rule of the Khmer Empire. Not until the 13th century A.D. did Central Thailand pass from the rule of the now decaying Khmer Empire to that of the Thai, which finally became the Thai Kingdom of Sukhodaya. Under the reign of its third King Ram Kamhang the Great, a contemporary and friend of King Mengrai of Northern Thailand, the Kingdom of Sukhodaya became a relatively large empire stretching southward through the whole length of the Malay Peninsula which was the last remnant of the once vast empire of Sri Vijaya. Northward, the Sukhodaya Empire touched that of Northern Thailand where reigned as already mentioned, King Mengrai. Westward, it included a part of Lower Burma. Eastward but in the northerly direction through the North-Eastern Area of Thailand, it reached further beyond the river Mekong. Ram Kamhang's outstanding achievements in the realm of culture which have endured to the present day are his invention of the Thai alphabet in 1283 A.D. and the adoption of Buddhism of the Ceylonese Sect. He also introduced the manufacture of glazed pottery by importing artisans from China.

*The Marble Temple of Wat Benchamabopit, Bangkok.*



In 1350 A.D. there rose a new Thai power in the south of Sukhodaya Proper, Ramadhibodi I, known vulgarly as King U-thong, the first King of Ayudhya. Some 90 years later Sukhodaya was politically incorporated with Ayudhya. Ethnologically and culturally by this time the Thai had mixed to an appreciable degree with the Mons and the Khmers. The Mons were Buddhist in culture, while the latter were more Hindu-ized. In the south, the Thai were influenced more or less in certain localities by the Malays.

The North Thailand where King Mengrai reigned as its first king in the 13th century A.D., was ruled by many succeeding kings; but later on in the latter part of the 16th century A.D. it became a part of Burma for more than a century. Under the latter's influence the Northern Thai acquired a certain characteristic of culture unlike that of the people in other parts of the country. Northern Thailand was finally relieved from its foreign hold and the country formed finally part of the present Kingdom of Thailand.

**THAILAND and BELGIUM.** Until the 16th century, foreign culture that came in contact with Thailand was predominantly Indian in origin. In the earlier part of this century came the Portuguese to establish friendly relations and obtain permission to trade in Thailand. After this, other western nations began to come to this country. Not until 1867 A.D. in the reign of King Mongkut did Thailand enter into friendly relations with Belgium, and twenty years later in 1888 A.D. Belgium sent her envoy, Leon Verhaeghe de Naeyer, as her first minister to Thailand. The friendly relations between the two nations have been uninterrupted and cordial. Foremost among the many distinguished sons of Belgium who assisted the Thai in their great reformation of modern Thailand during the glorious reign of King Chulalongkorn was M. Gustave Rolin-Jacquemyns who became the first general adviser to the government of Thailand. He is still noted for his

reorganization of the legal system of Thailand into its present form. In recognition of his great service King Chulalongkorn had bestowed upon him the rank of "chao phraya" with the full ennobled name Chao Phraya Abhai Raja. He was the first European, with the exception of Constantin Phaulkon of some 300 years ago, to receive such ennoblement, for the rank of state. In 1927 A.D. some 30 years ago, a plaque bearing a portrait of M. Rolin-Jacquemyns was ceremoniously unveiled at the Thai Law College as grateful memory to the man who had done a great service to the legal system of Thailand. The late H.R.H. Prince Danrong, the great statesman and historian of Thailand, eulogized M. Rolin-Jacquemyns thus: "This Belgian had done with love and loyalty a great service to the country. He has a genial disposition affiliated amicably with the Thai in every ministry. He is an elder mellowed with years of experience."

**THE GOVERNMENT.** Prior to 1932 A.D. the government of Thailand had been an unlimited monarchy. It was changed in King Prajadhipok's reign in 1932 A.D. into a constitutional monarchy; the Constitution was signed historically and ceremoniously on the 10th December. By virtue of this Constitution the supreme power rests with the nation, and the King at its head exercises the legislative power by and with the consent of Parliament, the executive power through the Council of from 15 to 28 ministers and not more than 28, and the judicial power through the Courts.

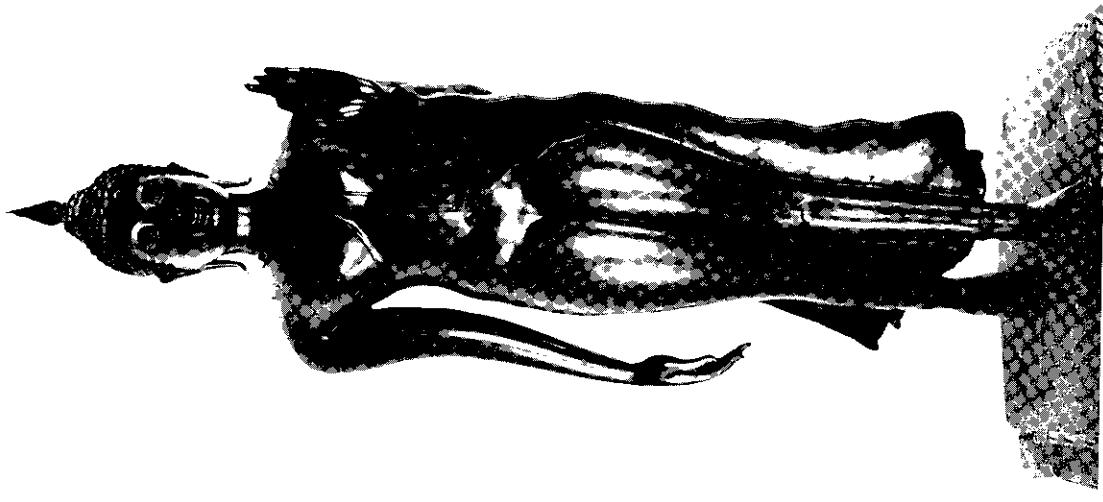
**THE LANGUAGE.** The Thai language or to be exact the Siamese, as spoken in Thailand, forms a sub-division of the linguistic group known as the Thai language. This group includes also the languages of the Shans of Northern Burma with its sub-groups in Assam and adjacent territories, the Lao of the Kingdom of the Laos, and the many isolated Thai groups in Tongking and Southern China. The Thai language, in so far as it is known factually, has words in

its original form of a monosyllabic type not unlike that of the Chinese. Each word is independent and complete by itself, and admits no modifications as do the inflectional languages. Such a feature is like that of the Chinese, but the arrangement of words in a sentence reveals a unity with that of most of the languages of South-East Asia. The Thai language as spoken in Central Thailand, has more words relatively than in other regions in its vocabulary of Cambodian, Pali and Sanskrit origins. This, of course, is due to the contact of cultures.

**THE LITERATURE.** Thai traditional literature is essentially religious. Most of the literature in the old days consisted of works on Buddhism and Hinduism directly or indirectly. Whatever culture the Thai people brought with them from their homeland in Southern China where they had been in contact of culture with the Chinese for centuries was adapted to its later conception of Buddhism, their adopted religion. Traces of their original culture may be found here and there in a disguised and weakly form embedded in their literature. Most of the works of emotive literature were written in verse in various patterns. Five prominent examples of such works may be cited briefly.

1. The Romance of Khun Chang Khun Phaen, an indigenous story of love, pathos and at times humour of a triangular love of one heroine with two lovers. The story, apart from its beautiful expressions, contains a mine of informations on old beliefs and social customs of the Thai before the impact of Western culture. The story as is known has been translated into English and French.

2. Ramakian (or Ramakirti in transliteration) is the story based on the famous Indian epic, Ramayana. It is unique, containing many episodes and details which are not to be found in the original epic, but showing traces of contact with certain versions of the Ramayana in India, Malaya, Java and Cambodia. There is an English translation.



*An Image of Buddha in Walker Posture,  
Sukhodaya Type.*

3. The romance of Inao. This is a translation from the well-known story of adventures of the national Javanese hero prince. It is written in a refined and perfect style of the Thai language and meant for dramatic performance.

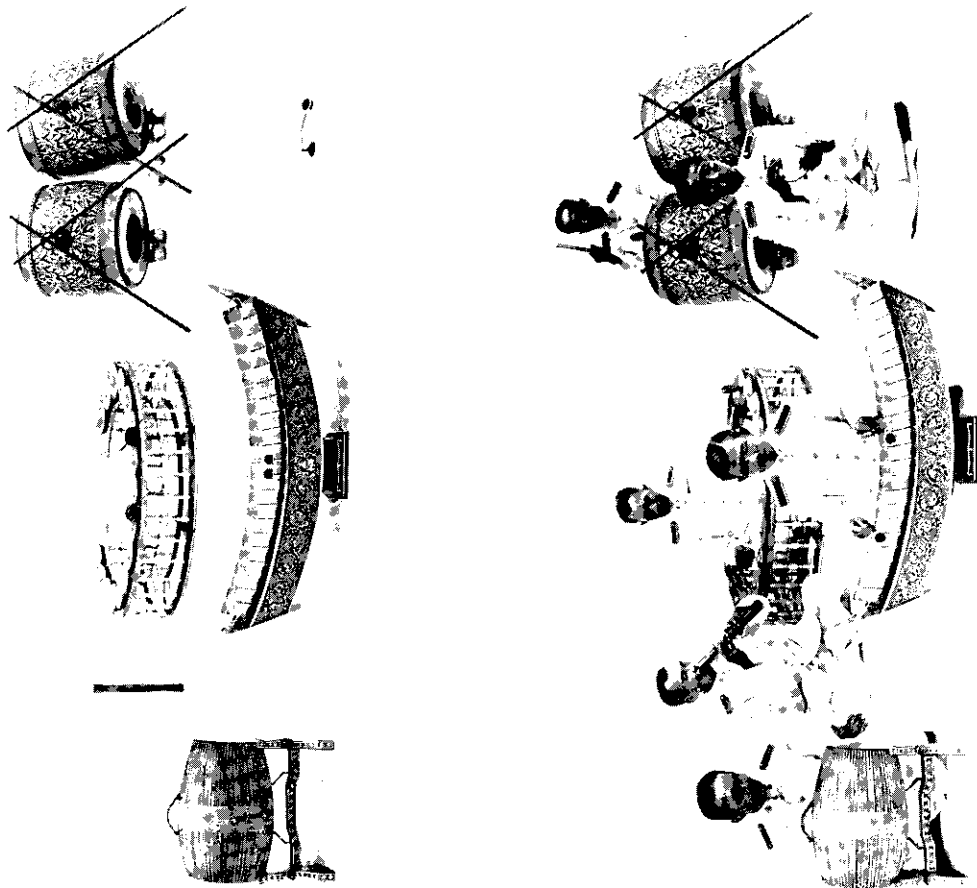
4. Sam Kok. This is a translation from San Kuo Chi, a Chinese historical romance of the Three Kingdoms. Unlike the three preceding ones, it is written in prose with perfect expressions of style of the language.

5. Phra Abhaimani. This is a romantic tale written in verse by one of the most famous and popular poets of Thailand. It is an imaginary tale of love, intrigues and adventures, and reflects some ideas of the people towards the Europeans of the last century. There is an English translation in concise form by one Prem Chaya.

The employment of prose in Thai emotive literature on the line of the Western style is of recent date due obviously to the influence of Western literature.

**THE ARTS.** The Thai means of subsistence for generations has always been an agricultural one. Such an occupation, though arduous at times, left the people ample time to confront life spiritually in contemplation of nature. Time belonged to them and they did not want to lose it in the modern hubbub of life. Now it is inevitably and gradually otherwise. The Thai are lovers and observers of nature, amiable, generous and mirthful to everyone with whom they come into contact, for their natural and pleasant surrounding makes them so. In Buddhism tinged with Hinduism and animistic ideas stemming from their long contact and free intermingling with the Mons and the Cambodians, Thai art has its birth and development. It has maintained, nevertheless, its own identity of racial character. Thai art in the old days served religion which formed the national ideal and conception of life. Modern Thai art with Western tendencies and conceptions is of a recent origin.

*Siamese Traditional Orchestra.*



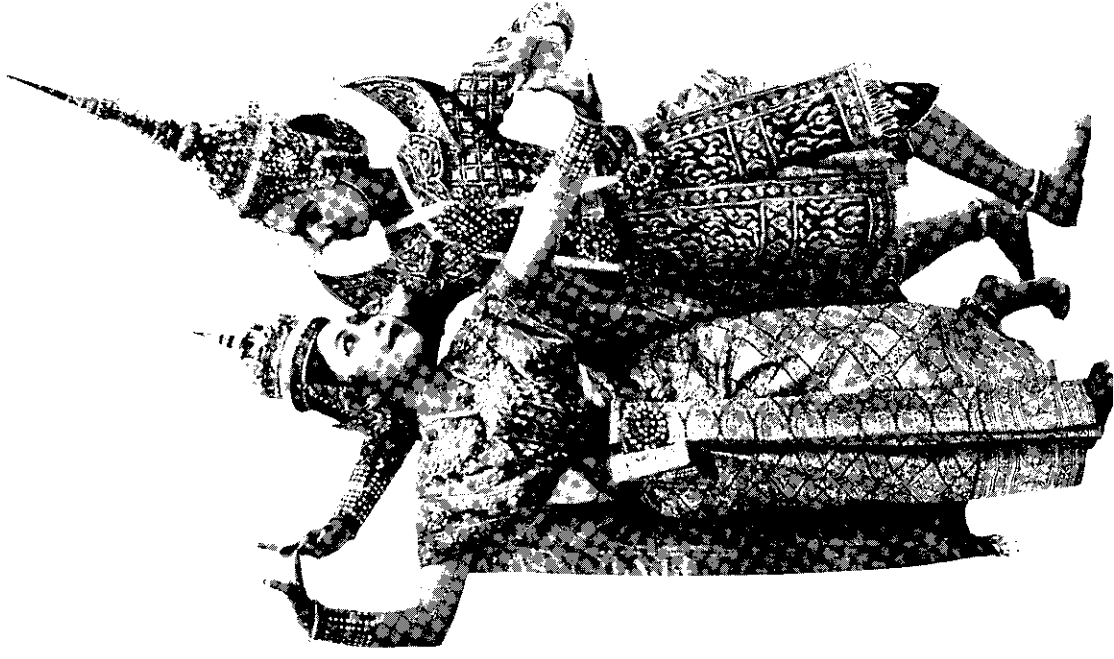


**ARCHITECTURE.** Thai classical architecture may be found in the building and structures of the temples and also of the royal palace buildings. There are two main types of such edifices. One of these is a building of bricks rectangular in plan and containing one large hall only. The roof is sloping superimposed and arranged in three or five tiers. The other type of building is somewhat like a Greek cross in plan and composed of a cubical hall with four porches of less projecting on each side. It also has superimposed roofs surmounted by a high pyramidal super-structure culminating either in a tapering slender needle-like spire or a corn-cob-like structure. The roof of both types has a terra-cotta glazed coloured tiles of various hues. The gables, stuccos and other decorations are gilded in gold or in coloured mosaic glass. Under a tropical sunlight these buildings give out a dazzling and harmonizing artistic effect. Examples of these classical architecture may be seen in Bangkok and are represented by pictures in this pamphlet of the Grand Palace, the Emerald Buddha Temple, the Marble Temple of Wat Benchama, and also of Wat Sudas and Wat Po.

**SCULPTURE** in Thailand was confined in the past to casting Buddha images. She carried this art to perfection both in technique and artistic expression. Some ancient specimen of this art can be compared favourably with other nation's classical arts.

**PAINTING** in Thailand was also in the past confined to mural tempera painting within the temple buildings. The style was more conventionalised and achieved some artistic manifestations to a high degree, but it cannot be compared to sculpture which was a perfect artistic achievement.

**MODERN ARCHITECTURE,** sculpture and painting of Thailand are of Western style. But in order to carry on her artistic traditions as peculiarly her own and enriching humanity, the problem is to preserve her own classical



*Siamese Actresses posed in Traditional Dresses  
as Female and Male in a Love Scene.*

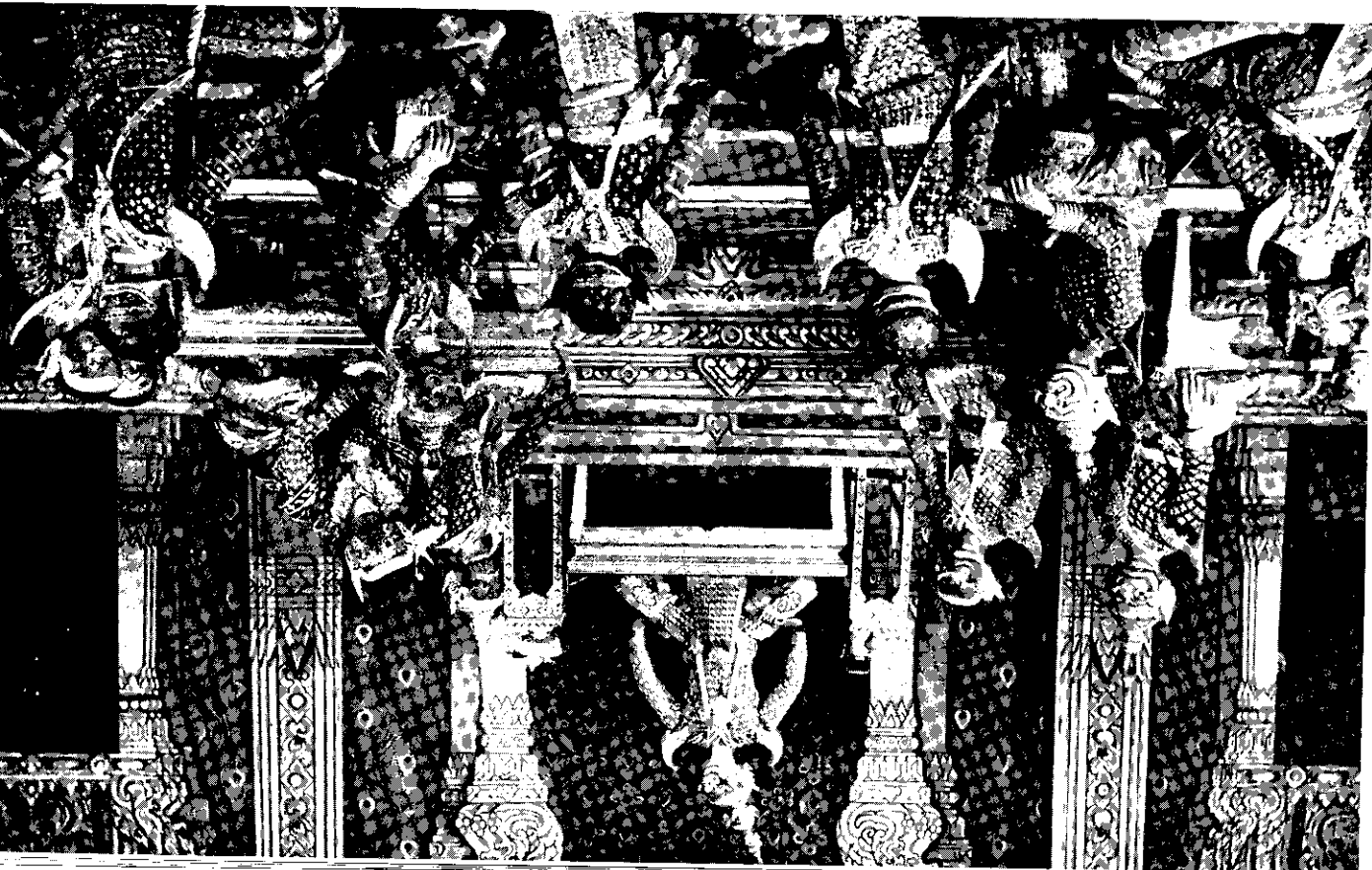
arts with the progress of the times in order to preserve her own identity of individual cultures suitably within the culture of a wider one, as a source of inspiration for evolving her own modern arts.

**THE MUSIC** of Thailand is akin to that of the Chinese. The Thai especially the scale of music is a diatonic one, with neither major nor minor in the sense of western music, but with a special diatonic scale characteristic of her own. Though music in the theoretical conception of Buddhism is not tolerated by the monks, by usage it is allowed in certain religious ceremonies, no doubt to promote religious emotions, and also on festive occasions.

**DRAMA** like her sister art, music, also served religion. Its technique was of Indian origin, but the Thai evolved the arts peculiar to their own. The actions are very graceful, slow in motion but not unpleasant to sensible minds. Thai dramatic performance is called lakhon, a word of Indonesian origin, and is well known to enthusiastic lovers of this art both inside and outside Thailand. In former days, the people could only witness such performances in the compound of the monastery on festive occasions only. Nowadays many new types of dramatic performance are usually adapted or copied from the West and the popularity of the cinema takes the place of the classical entertainment. The latter may be seen only occasionally as performed by the artistes of the Department of Fine Arts.

**MINOR ART.** The various branches of the decorative art may also be mentioned such as lacquer work, niello work, gold and silver work, and mother-of-pearl work. In all branches of the above art Thailand never lacks beautiful objects of high artistic value.

*A Masked Dramatic Performance.*



SANRASOEN PHRA BARAMI  
(The Royal Anthem of Thailand)

Andante maestoso

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The lower staff is in bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line in the upper staff and a supporting accompaniment in the lower staff. The system concludes with a *Red.* marking and an asterisk.

The second system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a *mf* dynamic marking. The lower staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The music continues with a melodic line in the upper staff and a supporting accompaniment in the lower staff. The system concludes with a *Red.* marking and an asterisk.

The third system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The lower staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The music continues with a melodic line in the upper staff and a supporting accompaniment in the lower staff. The system concludes with a *Red.* marking and an asterisk.

The fourth system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The lower staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The music continues with a melodic line in the upper staff and a supporting accompaniment in the lower staff. The system concludes with a *Red.* marking and an asterisk.