

CHAPTER 4

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF ART IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

In the early 1980s as Thailand faced a major recession, there was little indication that the country was about to embark on an unprecedented growth boom and a roller-coaster ride of economic and social upheaval. The rapid and complete changes in almost every sector of society were to have a significant impact on Thailand's modern development and identity.

As a consequence of the boom, the art market in Thailand became more buoyant with patronage and commoditisation of art increasing. Corporate institutions and banks became more active in terms of sponsoring art competitions, purchasing artworks for collections and commissioning pieces which appeared in new spaces. Newly-affluent customers joined the scene, investing their wealth in art and supporting art events and galleries. The media took a new interest in art with increased coverage in print, and artists were invited to appear on television shows. The glaring negative effects of the boom such as social problems and environmental degradation also provided some artists with pressing subjects to address in their art. Increased global interaction through telecommunications and travel has introduced Thailand to new visitors during this period. Tourism's growth in earnings, supported by government

policies and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), has encouraged commoditisation of culture and the presentation of a form of traditional culture and art to represent the country and meet the demand for souvenirs. One reaction to globalisation and homogenisation of culture has been a more active assertion of a 'Thai' national identity.

Booming/Busting Thailand

Thailand's unplanned boom is linked to the signing of the Plaza Accord in 1985 and the subsequent appreciation of the Japanese Yen. As it became more expensive to export from Japan, many Japanese companies invested funds and set up companies in Thailand, attracted by its regional access and favourably priced labour market. The U.S., European and other East Asian countries followed Japan's lead. However, the authors of the book Thailand's Boom suggest that it is a myth to say that the boom was caused by foreign investment. It may have been a trigger, but at its peak foreign investment accounted for only one eighth of local corporate investment (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 4). This enthusiastic domestic investment was largely aimed at turning Thailand into a "tiger", a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC), like Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. (Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia are second-generation NICs).

* Some US\$15 billion in Japanese direct investment flowed in between 1986 and 1990 (Walden Bello "Addicted to Foreign Capital", The Nation, 3 December, 1997).

Foreign and domestic investment between 1987-90 was more than the previous 30 years and Thailand became the world's fastest growing economy, with double-digit growth statistics at the end of the decade.

The process of modernisation in Thailand has since 1960 been directed by national economic development policy planners, who moved focus from agricultural production to industrialisation and the service sector.* Policy-makers supported import substitution and then moved towards encouraging export-oriented production and commercialisation of agriculture.**

In 1960, annual per capita income was not higher than \$US130, but during 1960-85 income grew at an annual rate of 4.6 per cent.*** At the same time annual inflation remained around 5.6 per cent 1961-1991, far below the average of middle-income developing countries.

With an annual growth rate of 9.4 per cent between 1985-1996, and the phenomenal growth in GDP of more than 10 per cent for 1989-91 (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 3), social and human factors of development such as

* Agriculture's share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reduced from 31.5 percent in 1975 to 12.4 percent in 1990 (Thailand Research Development Fund).

** In ten years, manufactured exports multiplied twelve times and drove up total exports seven times (Pasuk and Baker, 1996:25).

*** This was more than the 2.7 percent average of OECD countries, the 0.8 percent of Latin American countries, and the 1.7 percent of South Asian countries. Even more than the Southeast Asian average of 3.8 percent (Asian Development Bank, 1997:2).

literacy*, life expectancy, infant mortality, nutrition, number of latrines and availability of clean drinking water progressed** and the population of Thailand, now 61 million, underwent rapid fertility decline.*** However, this new face of economic development which led to rapid and complete change within one decade, created huge tears in the Thai social fabric and substantially altered the country's national identity. The effects of migration and urbanisation, inevitable in industrialisation and the sectoral change from primary to secondary activities, have had severe and far-reaching impacts on both rural and urban life.

The increase in the share of urban population in the total population in Thailand has not been extraordinary in Thailand**** but in 1990 more than half of the Thai urban population lived in cities with more than 750,000 inhabitants. This is above average while investment in infrastructure was considered by some World Bank estimates to be insufficient.***** Unplanned growth

* Thailand belongs to the ten developing countries with the largest reduction in adult literacy between 1970 and 1995 (by 70 percent) (Human Development Research, 1997: 4).

** By mid-1990 Thailand ranked 59 in the UNDP Human Development Index, one rank ahead of Malaysia and far better than Indonesia and the Philippines (UNDP, 1997).

*** Down to 2.4 (about replacement) in 1993, down from 6.4 (rapid growth) just thirty years earlier. (East-West Center Program on Population, Sept 1994, No. 30).

**** From 13 percent in 1960 to 20 percent in 1994 and estimated 22 percent in 2000 (HDR, 1997: 192).

***** At an average 3.5 percent of GDP 1986-96 (World Bank, East Asia and the Pacific Regional Development Review, 1993: 20-21).

combined with increased concentration of the population in mega-cities and underinvestment in infrastructure and human resources^{*} has led to congestion and great pressure.

The displacement of balance from the movements of rural to urban, natural to scientific, and spiritual to technological, has had a destabilising effect on Thai people's lives. Environmental problems such as air and water pollution have been aggravated and the family unit has been fragmented.^{**} Long hours of commuting, low-paid repetitive factory work and stressful city-life, push migrants towards drugs and crime (Sunitsuda, 1991).

As the Thai agricultural capital became industrial capital, banking and finance became increasingly powerful economically. This dominance has impacted the sponsorship of art as the empirical data in Chapter 5 reveals. Thai capitalism is largely based on Chinese family businesses which have dominated the economy since the 1940s, when the war cancelled most foreign business and local entrepreneurs became tycoons filling the gaps. The Bangkok Bank owned by Chin Sophonpanich dominated both trading and remittances back to China, while the Lamsam family's Thai Farmers Bank, the Techaphaibun family's Bangkok Metropolitan Bank and the Rattanak family's Bank of Ayudhya managed most of the rest. By 1979, these banks had founded 295 companies

* Investment in education is less than other East and Southeast Asian countries except Indonesia (World Bank, 1993:198)

** As rural parents travel to seek employment in industrial areas, children are left behind in villages to be cared for by grandparents.

spread across finance, trade and manufacturing (Pasuk and Baker: 1996, 20). Conglomerates* grew by cooperating and by the late 1970s there were around thirty which had interests in over 800 companies (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 20-25). Through connections with generals,** a politico-financial axis dominated until the 1970s.

During 1980-88, General Prem Tinsulanonda was Prime Minister, with the backing of the military, palace and bureaucracy. Three business-dominated parties (Chart Thai, Social Action and Democrat) won the majority of the seats in the elections in 1979, 1983 and 1986, and a market-driven cultural policy was supported during this period (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 176). The government created an environment that allowed businessmen to flourish, including incentives such as devaluing the baht, cheap loans and closing down agricultural expansion to force labour into industry. When Prem stood down in the 1988 elections, retired General Chatchai Choonhavan came to the premiership with a policy to 'change battlefields to marketplaces,' further encouraging regional trading. Exports of increasingly industrial and manufactured goods soared. By 1990, the onset of the Gulf War caused the economy to slow down slightly, but between

* Including Siam Cement, the Bangkok Bank group, the Chiaravanont family's Charoen Pokpand (CP), the Chirathiwats of Central Department Stores, Srifuengfung in chemicals, glass and engineering, Sahaviriya in steel, Sukree and Saha-Union in textiles, Phonprapha's Japanese vehicle importing and Techaphaibun in banking, insurance and liquor (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 23)

** In 1953 Chin Sophonpanich persuaded the generals to transfer 30 million baht to the Bank's capital account (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 25).

1990-95 growth still averaged a high 7 per cent per annum and an atmosphere of optimism and confidence continued in Thailand. The government went ahead with big public projects of transport, communications, power generation and port facilities, which involved 'tea money' paid under the table in the system of bidding to obtain contracts and licenses. Nepotism and kin networks operated, and while corruption was not new, the sums became larger (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 180). Provincial businessmen dealing in a range of activities have become powerful tycoons and godfathers (*jao por*), supported by their own networks of gangsters (*nak leng*). Researchers at Chulalongkorn University Economics Department have estimated that illegal businesses such as gambling, drug smuggling, prostitution, smuggling of illegal labour, oil smuggling and sales of illegal weapons account for a rising 11-20% (289-457 billion baht) of Thailand's GDP. The study shows that these various illegal businesses are closely linked, would be difficult to eradicate since many are owned by politicians, and exist under the patronage of the police who take systematic and large payments. It described Thailand as a regional and international centre for illegal businesses due to lax law enforcement and the absence of free and fair courts. Illegal logging, which was not included in the Chula study, and the damming of rivers to generate energy to support the growing industrial sector have caused serious environmental damage in Thailand. Major problems of water and air pollution are reported as toxic waste from industry and hotels flows into the Gulf of Thailand and

residents near industrial estates suffer from the effects of fumes. Leaks of toxic chemicals, accidents and fires, are some of the heavy costs of unregulated industrialisation.

Investment in industry does not favour farmers and has resulted in exploitation of natural and human resources. As scarce land is appropriated for industrial projects, new settlements push into poorly-protected national forests.** While many have left villages to live and work in industrial areas servicing big cities, still 50-60 per cent of the population today are farmers and huge economic inequalities exist between Bangkok and the provinces.***

From the statistics in table 4.1, we can note the per capita income discrepancies between residents in Bangkok and other regions. The most extreme gap is seen between residents in Bangkok and those of the northeast, with the former receiving about ten times the income of the latter. This clearly shows the core-periphery development model outlined in Chapter 2 in operation on a national level. We may also ask how Bourdieu's theory of

* Such as the Kader doll factory in 1993 which killed 183 locked-in workers.

** Protests such as the Forum of the Poor over land rights have increased in number and strength, to the extent that the Chuan government was brought down over a land misappropriation issue

*** In 1981, the top ten percent of households earned seventeen times as much as the bottom ten percent. By 1992, the multiple was thirty-eight times (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 204).

reproduction of power via economic and cultural capital can be interpreted in the light of this Thai data.

Table 4.1

Per Capita Income of Residents (in Baht)

REGION/YEAR	1992	1996
Northeast	16,277	21,435
North	24,680	33,677
South	30,885	43,116
West	35,270	46,292
Central	39,490	57,772
East	70,775	108,241
Bangkok	161,895	270,293

Source: National Statistics Bureau

New wealth brought about the rise of an assertive middle class with different life expectations and behaviour. Consumerism and materialism became widespread, encouraging desires for luxurious and extravagant lifestyles.* Social critic Sulak Srivaraksa coined the phrase 'I buy therefore I am' to describe the new boom philosophy. Land prices multiplied and the stock market took off, with quick fortunes to be made. Excessive investment in unproductive sectors including property,

* In early 1997, Thai consumers spent nearly 70 percent of their income in only six luxury areas: clothing (13.4%), eating out (10%), furniture and appliances (6.6%), health and cosmetics (9.2%), recreation (14.4%), and communications and transport (15.3%). The study revealed Thais like to have their own car and mobile

the stockmarket and cars followed. In these new and changing times, fringe religious movements sprang from the public's desire for more direct and personal involvement in religious practice, good fortune and protection against insecurity. The Dhammagaya Buddhist sect became popular with the middle class for its convenient, modern atmosphere. Charismatic monks including Luang Por Koon, from Korat, gained a reputation for accurate predictions and became especially popular with politicians. The sale of amulets boomed, along with fortune telling. Phra Payom, an innovative monk at Wat Suan Kaew in Nontaburi began employing high-tech facilities for alms-giving (via credit cards) and message dissemination. Chinese mother goddess, Kuan In, became popular with traders and Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, became a cult figure with weekly gatherings of followers around his statue in front of parliament.

International travel and improved communication and media, along with Thai students returning from studying in the U.S. during 1960s-1980, exposed Thai artists to a wide range of art forms and new ideas. Groups of artists such as the White Group also began to organise themselves. Art patronage by the commercial world actively increased, with participation from the major banks; Bangkok Bank, Thai Farmers Bank and Siam Commercial Bank. Private galleries also increased in influence during the 1980s. Visual Dhamma gallery, started by Alfred Pawlin in 1981, is one of the oldest

phone, to dress fashionably, buy brand name imports and eat out at expensive restaurants and hotels.

now still running. Pawlin initially focused on neo-traditional Thai art and encouraged young Thai artists to develop their international skills and portfolio presentations, introducing them to valuable foreign connections. The growing number of galleries mediated between the artists and the increasingly-interested Thai and foreign public, stimulating the flow, exchange and commoditisation of art. Issues of taste, authenticity and knowledge supported the role of the gallery owner/trader and art expert. Though dependent on the galleries for promotion, publicity and the facilitating of sales and exhibitions, artists sought their own independence in the individualistic capitalist system. A trading of interests, as outlined by Williams' patronage theory in Chapter 2, continued to be negotiated. It is ironic that in these boom times the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA), the most active centre of art events at that time, folded. It had always struggled to cover operational costs, relying on the generosity of a royal patron.

To mark significant civic events, such as the 1982 Bangkok Centennial, and special occasions in the life of the royal family, a range of activities and exhibitions are organised by government departments and increasingly banks, and corporate institutions became involved in sponsoring their own tributes. During the 1980s and 1990s, books of art were published and art competitions/exhibitions were held to honour H.M. the King and H.M. the Queen's 60th birthdays (fifth cycles) in 1987 and 1991 respectively, H.R.H. the Princess

Mother's 90th birthday, H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthorn's 36th birthday (third cycle) in 1991, and the Supreme Patriarch's 80th birthday in 1993. The Golden Jubilee of H.M. King Rama IX's reign in 1996 was celebrated widely during the year. Foreign embassies brought their top cultural performances and exhibitions to Thailand and the largest exhibition of Thai art was organised at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre in Bangkok. Entitled *Five Decades of Thai Art*, the exhibition was followed by an auction to raise money to build a new Rama IX Museum of Modern Art. A million baht was raised through auctioned sales mostly to members of the museum organising committee of bankers and businessmen adding to their private art collections in a display of status and prestige-seeking.

In 1991, Chatchai's government was eventually overthrown in a coup by military leaders citing excessive corruption as the grounds for the intervention. Many saw the army's reassertion of power as driven by a desire to participate in the corruption revenue. The eight subsequent governments in the last six years indicates a period of political instability, albeit one which has seen significant democratic developments including the ratifying of a more popular Constitution in 1997. The democratically-minded middle-class led by Chamlong Srimuang challenged unelected General Suchinda Krapayoon's commandeering of the premiership in 1992. After three days of violent demonstrations now known as Bloody May, H.M. the King summoned Suchinda and Chamlong

to the Dusit Palace and the fighting stopped. An interim government, led by Anand Panyarachun was installed.

In 1993, the first Thai Prime Minister without a military or bureaucratic background, Chuan Leekpai, promoted decentralisation but his government was brought down by protests over a controversial land deal. Following Chuan's tenure, Banharn Silpa-archa's term as premier accentuated a political divide between city and provinces.* A no-confidence vote led by General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth pushed Banharn aside and Chavalit became premier for a year before resigning during November 1997 in the midst of an economic nightmare. Chuan's resumption of the premiership has pulled together a government focused on dealing with the economic crisis first felt in Thailand and now echoing around the region and internationally.

Many critics attribute the current economic chaos to financial mismanagement over the past few years by the technocrats who manage Thai macro-economic policies; the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Bureau (in charge of the fiscal policy) and the Central Bank of Thailand (BOT) (responsible for the monetary policy). The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) works

* The Chart Thai, Social Action, Chart Pattana and New Aspiration parties representing provincial barons with old-style politics relying on vote-buying were found increasingly unacceptable by the growing middle class in Bangkok.

along-side these entities.' The structure, organisation and ethos of the BOT was established during the 1950s and 60s by then BOT governor, Dr Puey Ungpakorn, who is revered among Thailand's technocrats and academics for his fierce integrity and reputation of incorruptibility and prestige. Dedicated to human resource development, Dr Puey also enthusiastically supported art in Thailand by fundraising, urging corporate support in the form of competitions and collecting artworks privately. The management structure designed by Dr Puey, evidently no longer relevant today, led to governors of the BOT anticipating the Minister of Finance's desires, and following the current political line to minimise conflict. This reflects the deference to hierarchy and the Thai proverb 'the dog will not bite you if you follow in footsteps of the *phu yai*' (senior figure). When the time came to alter the pegged exchange-rate, fears of political repercussions stalled the decision (Ammar Siamwalla's *J. Douglas Gibson Lecture*, Bangkok, November, 1997). Misguided economic policies, particularly by the BOT, featured cheap loans from the Bangkok International Banking Facility (BIBF) which encouraged excessive borrowing by the private sector wanting to meet capital needs. Instead of reinvesting profits into upgrading technology and workforce skills, manufacturers

* The World Bank and IMF were not alarmed by the sky-rocketing foreign debt in 1995 when Thailand's short-term debt came to \$41 billion of the country's \$83 billion foreign debt, largely because it was not incurred and financed by the government but by the private sector and supposedly subject to the self-correcting mechanisms of the market.

joined others speculating in the stock market and real estate for quick turnaround and easy high profits, causing the construction frenzy and a massive oversupply.* The biggest banking scandal in Thai history was uncovered in 1995-6 when the Bangkok Bank of Commerce (BBC), owned by the Jalichandra and Diskul families with Rakesh Saxena as advisor, notched 79 billion baht of bad debts. Despite flagrant violations of banking laws, fraud and negligence, the culprits 'slipped' from the grasp of the BOT and police (i.e. mishandled as a result of patronage politics) and the case is expected to take years to settle.**

In 1996, along with a collapsing real estate market, exports dropped off dramatically.*** Also during this period Thailand began losing its advantage of cheap labour to Indonesia, China and Vietnam.

The Thai baht faced three major attacks by foreign currency speculators in November 1996, and in February and May of 1997. George Soros, the currency speculator who broke the Bank of England and made US\$1 billion in 1992, has been accused of fronting the attacks

* By the end of 1996, an estimated \$20 billion worth of new residential and commercial property in Bangkok remained unsold. Some estimates suggest 40 percent of total bank loans in 1996 related to real estate exposure, of which half were said to be 'non-performing' by early 1997. (Walden Bello "Southeast Asia's 'Fast Track' Capitalism," The Nation, 4 December, 1997).

** Saxena claimed he made a 300 million baht campaign contribution to then P.M. Banharn Silpa-archa's Chart Thai party, indicating the politico-financial axis continues beyond the 1970s.

*** The second half of 1996 reported a zero export growth rate, after 24% in 1995.

on Asian currencies.* The BOT spent 320 billion baht, an estimated one-third of Thailand's national budget, to keep ailing finance companies afloat during the period of intense speculation. Continued financial stop-gap measures caused the bank to eventually run out of reserves and confidence, despite being one of the country's most prestigious institutions. The Thai baht was eventually floated on July 2, 1997, causing an immediate 30 per cent devaluation and 58 finance houses were suspended and 52 ultimately closed down. Soon afterwards, Thailand applied to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a US\$17.5 billion bailout package, of which Japan provided US\$4 billion. The IMF loan comes with stiff conditions for repayment and requires controlled growth, reduced government spending, greater liberalisation, privatisation, accountability and transparency to be implemented.

Due to Thailand's size, its role in the world economy is more regional than global. However, the 1997 economic crash of the Thai financial markets has had worldwide repercussions. More significantly in the Asean region, Indonesia and South Korea have also been pushed to request record-breaking loans from the IMF (US\$20 billion and US\$60 billion respectively). Regional

* Using money markets to raise funds to fight battles for human rights and individual freedom through educational and cultural foundations, Soros tests his theory of reflexivity (that thinking and reality interact) on financial markets and finds the concepts of rational expectations and efficient markets highly misleading. Soros believes the boom-bust style is inherent in global

(Japanese) banks have been unable to lend support, due to their own financial constraints and the collapse of large Japanese finance houses in November 1997.

In a complete turnaround from the booming late eighties and early nineties, Thailand now faces cut-backs and increased unemployment. This crisis in the economy is undoubtedly having major repercussions throughout society, not only affecting the well-known, socially-positioned families owning closed finance houses who also took an interest in art, including the Sophonpanichs, Lamsams, Yipintsois, Chakkaphaks, Srivikorns, Bhirombhakdis, Leeswastrakuls, Pornpraphas, Osathanugrahs, and Watanavekhins. The large numbers of migrants returning to the village face difficulties finding work and strained family and community ties due to long periods in the city. Spending on overseas travel and luxury imports has been reduced, and 'Buy-Thai' campaigns, exports and tourism have been encouraged.

After enjoying a correspondingly active and profitable boom period, with works of art selling easily at high prices fast and frequently, the art market has similarly been hit by the economic crisis. Collectors from the troubled finance and real estate sectors are no longer purchasing and have been forced to liquidate their

capitalism and that the laissez-faire market ideology is proving dangerously deficient.

Pratuang Emjaroen is quoted, "Many buyers speculate on my art, thinking they can make a profit for the pictures. They drive up the prices, My pictures worth tens of thousands of baht are now worth millions" (The Nation, 6 February, 1996).

assets, including their art collections'. An *Art Market of the Formerly Rich* held at the Bangkok Gallery owned by painter Hongjorn Sanae-ngamcharoen on January 20-26, 1998, ironically turned out to be a very successful event with the gallery owner making three million baht from sales of heavily discounted artworks from private collections. This caused complaints from lecturers and artists regarding the devaluation of the art, but the dealer defended the action as an attempt to revive the flagging local art business. The Financial Sector Restructuring Authority (FRA) is in March 1998 preparing to auction works of art estimated to be worth over 30 billion baht belonging to the 56 closed finance houses, among the largest art collectors was SITCA Investment & Securities which also supported art competitions, art publications and young artists. Fears have been expressed that the works by famous dead people will be bought by foreigners and end up in museums abroad.

The boom/bust phenomenon and present economic crisis raises many questions regarding the effect the implementation of a national austerity policy will have on art in Thailand? How will production and demand (projects, commissions, sales) be affected? How will a reassessment of national and individual strengths and resources, in relation to new urban-rural roles in the survival and development of the country, alter perceptions of Thai identity and values? What new forms

* A successful stock market investor a few years earlier, Song Watchasriroj (alias Sia Song) built up an art collection of over 600 pieces and has now been forced to sell some of his the works (The Nation, 7 March, 1998).

and philosophies will emerge? What themes will be employed in exhibitions and by artists as the recession progresses? What impact will a reassertion of rural cultural roots have on art? And what role will foreign visitors play in the Thai art world?

Amazing Thailand: tourism, culture and identity

Tourism has been actively supported as a Thai government policy and heavily promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) over the last ten years, with the aim of bringing foreign funds into the country. Tourism is currently Thailand's number one income earner bringing 219,364 million baht (approximately \$10,000 million) in 1996. Table 4.2 below shows 1996 tourism revenue is significantly greater than other major exports, including electronic parts, textiles and rubber.

Table 4.2

1996 Tourism Income Compared to Exports (in million Baht)

TOURISM	219,364
Computer and parts	165,240
Textile production	118,521
Electrical appliances	106,569
Rubber	68,370
Integrated circuits	58,483
Precious stones & jewellery	51,494
Rice	50,737
Prawns	43,400
Canned seafood	38,697

Source: Bank of Thailand

Increasing numbers of tourists are staying longer and spending more, as the following table shows:

Table 4.3

Average Tourist Length of Stay and Spending

YEAR	NUMBER OF TOURISTS	AVERAGE STAY IN DAYS	REVENUE IN MILLION BAHT	REVENUE IN MILLION \$US
1960	81,340	3.0	196	10
1970	628,671	4.8	2,175	105
1980	1,858,801	4.9	17,765	867
1990	5,298,860	7.0	110,572	4,326
1996	7 192,145	8.2	219,364	8,664

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand

In 1996, the average tourist daily spending was 3,706 baht and almost half of this sum was spent on shopping including souvenirs, a table shows:

Table 4.4

1996 Tourist Expenditure

TYPE OF EXPENSE	PERCENTAGE	BAHT
shopping	38.14	1,413
accommodation	20.10	745
food and beverage	14.94	554
entertainment	9.56	354
local transport	5.96	221
sightseeing	5.83	216
miscellaneous	5.45	202
TOTAL	100.00	3,706

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand

The first major tourism campaign, *Visit Thailand Year 1987*, saw the country promoted as an 'exotic'

destination and produced a significant increase in tourist numbers. Cultural programmes in the nineties have included the 1994 *Thai Culture Year*, the *Thai Cultural Heritage Programme* (1994 campaign extended three more years), the 1995 *Programme for Culture and Development*, the 1996 *Culture and Tourism programme*, the 1997 *Culture and Mass Media programme*, and the most recent and extensive *Amazing Thailand 1998-99* campaign.

In the midst of post-boom hard times, various government departments, TAT and the private sector are involved in the *Amazing Thailand 1998-99* campaign launched in December 1997 in a 37 million baht nine-day celebration with a light and sound show at the Grand Palace including parades, cultural shows and special exhibitions. The campaign is "targeted to promote Thailand's uniqueness, such as food, shopping, cultural attractions and much more" (TAT *Amazing Thailand 1998-99* promotion pack, October 8 1997). It aims to attract 17.18 million tourists during 1988-99 and to boost foreign exchange income of at least 600 billion baht (approx. \$US2 billion).

According to the campaign promotion pack, Silpakorn University and TAT are collaborating to run an *Amazing Art of Thailand* series with more than 17 art programmes such as *Art and Culture in the Sea* in Phuket and an *Art and Light* festival. Highlighted as two of 13 special events are the April 2-6, 1999, *Lanna Arts and Culture* show in Chiang Mai and the *ASEAN Arts Festival*, December 1998 in Bangkok.

Discussing tourism and contemporary art, Robert Peters from the Art Institute of Chicago suggests that in this era of collapsed time and space, increased technology and multiple choices, people live in a condition of objectification and detachment. This leads to an assumption that everyday life is inauthentic, so in their search to discover wholeness and unity (truth and reality), western travellers use primitive cultures as models for authenticity. Traditional culture consequently becomes part of a nostalgic past, saved, codified and displayed. This museumisation of tradition, the artificial preservation and reconstruction of it as entertainment for modern society (for example, tourist sites such as Muang Boran Park and the Floating Market), reflects the measure of modernity's incorporation into the fabric of a culture (Peters, Siam Society lecture, 21 August 1997).

Continued commercialisation of traditional arts has resulted in new versions of traditional culture in distorted forms and content. A photo in The Nation newspaper taken during the Vegetarian Week Festival in Phuket (October, 1997) showed a devotee piercing his cheeks with a TV antenna, raising questions about the role of the media and the concept of 'modern traditions' in relation to tourism. Hill-tribes in the north and west of Thailand, largely ignored by the Thai government development policies in the past, have more recently been conveniently exploited by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) which popularises Thai culture to satisfy the substantial tourist market. The novelty of quaint and

primitive hill-tribe cultures, their traditional dance, arts and handicrafts are projected as 'quintessentially Thai' and are eagerly appreciated by foreign travellers. Busloads of tourists invade these hill-tribe villages and sea gypsy villages in the south, stopping briefly to photograph the 'human zoos' without fostering any real cross-cultural exchange or meaningful interaction. Some of Thailand's most beautiful areas have been devastated by poorly managed tourism, especially since the 1987 thrust by TAT. Environmental disasters, such as the tourist town of Pattaya on the eastern coast, are a result of rampant land speculation, over-construction and insufficiently developed waste systems. The present-day reality is an oversupply of empty, aesthetically-challenged high-rise condominiums, polluted water, and destroyed coral. Crowds of international visitors, combined with lax law enforcement, have exacerbated social problems of crime, drugs and prostitution. Development of tourism in Thailand has also meant the exploitation of forests, with resorts and golf courses encroaching on national parks, threatening wildlife and destroying flora.

From this section it is apparent that while tourism is encouraged by the Thai government as an important source of income, particularly during difficult economic times, the management and monitoring of this large and growing industry requires more attention and training to handle the seriously threatening activities. Arts and culture are major elements used by the government in its tourism marketing strategy, while

negative impacts are largely disregarded. As tourists seeking 'authentic', 'exotic' experiences spend time and money taking photographs and shopping for souvenirs to obtain visual records of that experience, the commoditisation of Thai culture and art, supported by government policy, results in an inverse phenomenon whereby culture authenticates itself through acts of tourism. Repackaged for the international market, Thai culture takes new forms; in some cases more accessible, universal forms, or alternatively highlighted 'Thai' projections. In this situation we must recognise 'authenticity' as 'the act of critical engagement', a process that is produced, not salvaged.

Culture and Identity

As contemporary societies face the challenges of globalisation and foreign influences through technology, communication and travel, they must reconcile their own civilisations/cultural identities with these new influences. Strategies for coping with change depend on circumstances, skills, cultural, political and economic resources and a proactive or defensive approach to adopting or adapting.

In Chapter 2, concepts of 'culture' were considered including that referring to a refining and elevating element, a society's best. It comes to be associated with the nation or state and a source of identity to differentiate 'us' from 'them', fostering some degree of xenophobia. Self definition is practised

by all, and we are all brought up to admire our traditions and our nations. However, Edward Said warns that recent 'returns' to culture and tradition have encouraged varieties of religious and nationalistic fundamentalism, and that this over-passionate 'tribalism' is fracturing societies (Said,1994: 54).

In describing the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world, Samuel Huntington refers to the domination of cultural divisions. Global conflict on competing ideologies (communism versus democracy) was dominant during the Cold-War era; now the conflict seems to have become based on cultural differences. Confucian and Islamic civilisations, inspired by faith in their religious values, have been identified by Huntington as the up-and-coming challengers to the West. Theocracy, supposedly knocked out by democracy, is making a comeback (Huntington,1993: 23). During the 1997 Asian currency speculation episode, Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia's labeling of George Soros as a Jew fueled Moslem-Jew hatred and reinforces the divisions based on religious-cultural definition which Huntington describes.

During the rapid growth and change of the eighties and nineties, conservative radicals in Asia have been shocked at the abandoning of traditional ways and values for 'new' ideas, seeing the adopting of 'global culture' as new-age western colonisation, dominated by large powerful multinational corporations and disseminated by strong brand-names like Coca-Cola. Many elites in Asia no longer makes excuses for rejecting Western ideals of governance as alien to their cultures.

Mahathir, the most vocal of Asian leaders in asserting Asian values as different from those of others, is critical of Western attempts to foist their ways on the developing world. But what are (traditional/modern) 'Asian values'? Who decides? What agendas are involved? Asian values promoted by authoritarian Asian leaders (in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Burma) emphasise family ties and collective duty, as opposed to the Western concern for individual human rights. By asserting these 'Asian values', it is argued these regimes are perpetrating their own positions of power and dominance. No doubt similar shocks went through Thailand a hundred years ago when King Chulalongkorn's modernisation policy invited a rush of western behaviour and technology. While the elite in those days travelled to the West and brought back modern ideas, imposing change on the masses who were still deeply entrenched in Thai indigenous tradition, many of today's elite (Sulak: 1990, Srisakara:1997) are lamenting the loss of rural ways and calling for a return to traditional community culture, while the masses prefer to be 'modern' (*than samay*) and comfortable with adopted styles and habits. From the theories presented in Chapter 2 we are prompted to question the roles of taste-makers and how the dominant group may employ culture to maintain power, wealth and ideology.

As 'Asian values' are much debated, so too is the concept of 'Thainess'. Two discourses which may usefully illustrate the differing views of Thai cultural identity are the 'monolithic' and the 'dynamic.' The monolithic approach takes certain factors (e.g. qualities of Thai,

tradition) to be unique and stable over a long period of time. In this light, certain behaviour, ideas, attitudes etc. may be viewed as 'for-or-against' Thai culture. This approach sees culture as a static entity and therefore only takes 'culture' in a partial sense. While this view may be right for describing a point in history, it doesn't account for evolution, and fails to represent social reality.

'Thai culture' is sometimes described as a mix of royal and rural; the arts of the court and the folklore of the villages. Thais are evoked to 'hold onto Thai culture' by preserving traditions, glorifying the past. Sukhothai and Ayuthaya elite rituals are reenacted but are of questionable meaning in today's modern settings. This form of 'Thai culture' is found in the museum and is promoted by tourist agencies, but has limited relevance to Thai life in the 1990s. As a result of modernisation and economic development in Thailand, the educated urban Thai elite have begun to feel nostalgic about traditional culture and the lost rural ways. Local folk spirit is romanticised and cherished, and entrepreneurs profit from commoditising it.

In the search for the 'essence' of basic Thai values, beliefs and identity (*ekalak Thai*), numerous studies have been made of the village and Buddhism. American anthropologists such as Lucien Hanks and Herbert Phillips explored Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s, and promoted the concepts of cultural particularism, national culture, and identities (Hanks, 1962: Phillips, 1965). John Embree's disputed

'loosely-structured' theory of Thai society was based on comparison to a Japanese model and superficial observations, and gave credence to the Thai 'free' spirit characterised as national identity (Embree, 1950). Valuable work by Akin Rabibhadana on the organisation of Thai society during the early Bangkok period describes Thai society as more structured, finding vertical pyramid models based on patron-client relations in politics, economics, and the village. Akin says this is still powerful in explaining Thai rural society but perhaps not urban culture. Increasing urbanisation means new interpretations of identity and culture which revolve around the city. City dwellers are rejecting the traditional Buddhism which developed in a rural society and an authoritarian political order (Akin, 1969). Practices and concepts such as avoidance of confrontation, tolerance, compassion, gratitude to parents, respect for elders, emotional distance and hierarchy are often described as core elements of Thai culture. However, William Klausner suggests there is a growing willingness on the part of Thais to confront and question authority, and with this has come a willingness to become emotionally engaged. Klausner sees this as the passing of the non-confrontational approach and welcomes the real involvement, the interactions, of individuals and groups (Klausner, 1997).

Another typically 'Thai' characteristic often portrayed is adaptability (i.e. a capacity to encompass differences), including cultural assimilation and integration of ethnic groups. Territorial invasions over

the past centuries have supposedly created 'multiculturalism' within Thailand. Manpower to fight battles was a sought-after form of capital in the past, encouraging assimilation. Now, however, a shortage of land means this is a modern challenge in dealing with refugees from Burma and Cambodia seeking a less threatening existence. Racism towards the large number of Lao-speaking Thai nationals in Esarn who are frequently the brunt of jokes also indicates a lack of complete and comfortable assimilation. Max Weber's 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' compares religious values and economic values and in Thailand's case, many studies on attitudes towards innovation and technology have been made finding no 'spirit of capitalism' in Theravada Buddhism - that Buddhist values are not conducive to capitalistic development. Research by the Thailand Development Research Institute concludes that traditional Buddhist ideology, which eulogises harmony, adaptability and flexibility, is still adhered to by many villagers who find it difficult to accept or interpret the new competitive economic development (TDRI, 1994). This would seem to conflict with the meaning and interpretation of 'adaptable' as a description and perhaps underestimates the extent of this character. As most families in Thailand now have some Chinese background, second or third generation due to intermarriage, Confucian values have been incorporated to varying degrees. In the nineties in Thailand, it has become fashionable to take pride in one's Chinese heritage, a change from the persecution faced by Chinese immigrants

earlier. In this study of the social production of art, it is relevant to consider these various attempts to isolate distinct 'Thai' qualities in relation to the support given to neo-traditional Thai art which depicts Buddhist themes or rustic images of Thai life.

The conservative monolithic view is countered by the dynamic discourse which deconstructs the cultural process, asserting that Thai identity exists in continuity and is constructed at different times and different places out of different conditions. National characteristics are not seen as eternal ends in themselves. When conditions change, they change. More radical Thai intellectuals including Thongchai Winichakul, Theerayuth Boonmee and Kasian Techapira reject the idea of a single stable Thai identity, but find a more suitable answer in the plural, diverse and conflicting views of groups and individuals within Thai society. Theerayuth suggests each group in society has affinity with various forms of communication, and the combination of all modes of discourse (the various ironies, rhetoric, fashions, etc.) is what culture is about. The increasing global interaction and exchange of different cultures as a result of mobility, technology, communication and the world market is creating a mosaic, transnational culture; one which occurs and needs balancing between oppositions such as centre and periphery, western culture and other, male and female, and elders and youth. (Theerayuth, Chulalongkorn University lecture, 28 September, 1995). This hybrid view of culture is supported by Edward Said who uses the

term 'contrapuntal ensembles' to describe the array of opposites, rather than the notion of 'essentializations' (Said, 1994: 60). It is this concept of 'transnational' or universal values, which it is argued reflects modern aspects of society, that is rejected by some Asian leaders as 'western homogenisation' of culture and identity. The dynamic view recognises 'relatively persistent elements of culture' (such as hierarchy and religion), but considers they exist not because they are printed in the DNA of Thai people, but because they are engrained into cultural institutions. It considers the history of the wide selection of state-managed cultural identity agencies (the many boards, councils, commissions etc. headed alternatively by the Prime Minister, Ministry of Education, Health and Religious Affairs) and questions their influence in the creation of Thai culture and identity. Deconstructing the official view of Thainess, raises questions such as who constructs, disseminates and preserves Thai cultural identity, in what ways, towards what aim, and to what effect? The theories of world systems, cultural reproduction and hegemony explored in chapter 2 address this argument in terms of cultural and economic capital and this thesis extends these concepts into the realm of the social production of art.

When the National Identity Office revised its Thailand volume in the 1990s, it no longer described Thai culture in rural terms, but focused on the growing urban economy and modern society. The Thai government's Seventh National Plan (1992-1997) stated an aim "to campaign to engage organisations, institutions and communities in

activities relating to conservation and promotion of Thai arts and culture." However, when the 1994 Thai Culture Year was organised by the government, grants were given to each province to promote Thai culture, but the term itself was largely undefined. Some businesses have taken it upon themselves to defend the meaning of 'Thainess' in the modern world. For example Siam Cement, one of the oldest and most aristocratic companies, has ran corporate public relations campaigns defending Thai culture and highlighting what Siam Cement considers Thai, including concepts like discipline (*vinai*), and religious devotion. Newer companies have followed this example as 'defenders of Thai culture' with campaigns encouraging more modern concepts such as cooperation (*num jai*) (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 138).

Patronage through the sponsorship of art, or other events such as sports and music, enables sponsoring bodies to subtly and more directly disseminate messages, and create images with which they wish to be associated. As one channel in a repertoire of publicity/public relations/advertising exercises, art sponsorship can have a broad reach, and offers the added interest and power of visual impact. Concepts and themes of art exhibitions, competitions, and commissions can conveniently be created to support various aims and messages (e.g. cultural or environmental). By contributing to art production, individuals and corporate sponsors assist artists in earning a living, and at the same time they can be seen as supporting the country and culture.

This thesis is interested in how the sponsors of art, as agents in the network of art production, distribution and reception, see their role as cultural guardians and promoters. What is their vision and what channels do they employ to achieve these ends? What is the relationship between the parties involved and how is that relationship developed? How is the concept of 'Thainess' and Thai culture and identity reflected in art in Thailand?

Emergence of Neo-traditional Thai Art

During the 1980s and 1990s, neo-traditional Thai art has risen to high levels of popularity. By reinterpreting traditional myths, Buddhist themes and concepts, sometimes using innovative techniques, colours and approaches, neo-traditional art has appealed to a wide audience, including corporate and banking sponsors, decorators, tourists and the Thai public. Encapsulating images of 'Thainess', this art has come to be known as 'Thai art.'

Silpakorn University's Thai Art Theory instructor, Somporn Rodboon explains that since the first National Exhibition in 1949, there have been two main streams of Thai art; one which followed international styles and the other which continued to work more closely with traditional concepts (Somporn, Italian-Thai conference, 20 November, 1997). Italian Thai artist, Corrado Feroci (Silpa Bhirasri), invited to Thailand in 1922, spent 40 years teaching Thai students Western art,

while at the same time including in the curriculum recognition of the value of tradition and the aesthetic value of Buddha images and mural paintings. He encouraged students to look to traditional Buddhist culture for inspiration and he, himself, studied mural paintings both in Bangkok and in the provinces. In Chapter 3, the history influences and changes in Thai art is covered briefly and here were reinvestigate the neotraditional movement.

The flowing lines of traditional Sukhothai art can be seen in Khien Yimsiri's Magic Flute, (see Fig. 11) which was sculpted in the 1940s. Another early wooden sculpture by Chit Rienpracha entitled Rama also clearly shows modern influences combined with classical Thai images. Prasong Padmanuja's interest in the western forms of cubism is apparent in Wat Pho (1958) (see Fig. 16), yet the traditional Thai subject is maintained, while his work Moonlight (1959) shows a modernised version of a classical composition of mother and child. Chalood Nimsamer's sculpture Pensive (1955) displays the smooth and simple lines with no muscular detail, which are associated with traditional Thai art. Chalood's painting Songkran Festival, (1956) (see Fig. 14) which depicts a scene of the Thai traditional New Year water festival and accentuates the simplicity of life. Chapter 3 has outlined how Thai village life is the source of inspiration for many early neo-traditional Thai artists including Damrong Wong-Uparaj who choses to paint figureless scenes such as Fishing Village (1960) (see Fig. 17) and Manit Poo-Aree whose Takraw (1961) is

another good example of Thai daily life (in this case sport) providing subject material for art.

During the 1960s in Thailand, the international form of abstract art was particularly popular and there was a decline in support for traditional Thai art. In reaction, neo-traditionalists Angkarn Kalayapongse, Pratuang Emjaroen, Pichai Nirand, and Tawan Duchanee turned to Buddhism for inspiration while adopting international styles. This response, which could be considered in the light of a nationalistic response to the global art forces at work according to the World-systems theory presented in Chapter 2, met with great support from many parties, as the next chapter details. Traditional myths and fantasy dominate Angkarn's paintings (see Fig. 25), while self-taught artist Pratuang's famous pieces Dharma and Adharma (1973) (see Fig. 22) and Sacrifice (Fasting Buddha) (see Fig. 23), which have been referred to in Chapter 3, were created during the political conflicts of the 1970s and use emaciated Buddha images to express the suffering of the time, and to teach that Buddhism helps to understand nature and leads to truth. Pichai Nirand's Faith and Wall (1963) (see Fig. 26) shows the artist's use of Buddhist symbolism, in this case the Lord Buddha's footprint, to convey the message of religious conviction. Tawan incorporates various religious traditions, including animism in the forms of aggressive animal behaviour, to communicate his message that truth is portrayed in the Buddhist awareness of greed, lust, hatred and violence (see Fig. 24). Preecha Thaothong's Interior with

Light (1979) (see Fig. 25) won first prize in the first *Thai Farmers Bank Contemporary Art Exhibition*, and Preecha's distinctive and popular detailing of light and shade on temple walls has earned the artist many prizes and commissions from corporate patrons. Winning the gold medal in the 1981 27th *National Art Exhibition*, Prayat Pongdam's The Morning (see Fig. 28) depicts a cock crowing and follows the rural Thai lifestyle theme, like Damrong and Manit. In 1982, Night of the Full Moon (1982) by Somyot Traiseni (see Fig. 29) won the Bangkok Bank *Bua Luang* competition and the same year in the *Thai Farmer's Bank Contemporary Art Exhibition* Surasit Saowakong's Serenity 2 (1982) (see Fig. 30) pleased the judges. Also that year, the country celebrated the Bangkok (Rattanakosin) Bicentennial, prompting the Thai Farmers Bank to organise a special competition which awarded Palace Garden by Hatai Bunnag (see Fig. 29) the grand prix.

The establishment of the Traditional Thai Art department at Silpakorn University boosted the neo-traditional revival, and the 1984 exhibition entitled *Dhamma Vision* at the newly opened Visual Dhamma Gallery supported the careers of six key artists; Tawan Duchanee, Pichai Nirand, Pratuang Emjaroen, Chalermchai Kositpipat, Panya Vijnthanasarn and Surasit Saowakong.

A team of young neo-traditionalist artists from Silpakorn University, led by Panya Vijnthanasarn and Chalermchai Kositpipat, travelled to Wimbledon, London, in 1984 to paint Wat Buddhapadhipa, the centre of Buddhist teaching in Europe. The project took four years

and the artists used new techniques of spray-painting vividly-coloured acrylics instead of the traditional chalk. Panya's Defeat of Mara (see Fig. 32), (the scene painted on the east wall facing the main Buddha image in every temple) incorporates contemporary cultural and political elements and figures to suggest the modern relevance of Buddhism. Following this project, neo-traditional Thai art, and Chalermchai and Panya in particular, became very popular. Further ethnographic descriptions of these developments are given in the next chapter.

Reflecting the rise of influence of banking institutions in both the economic and art production realms during the eighties and nineties, for H.M. the King's sixtieth birthday in 1987, the Thai Farmers Bank held another special art exhibition and awarded Somyos Traisenee's The Radiance of Royal Charisma (see Fig. 33) and Surasit Saowakong's Our Great Royal Father (Fig. 34) first and second prizes, respectively. That same year, northern Thai artist Prasong Leumuang won top honours in the Bangkok Bank *Bua Luang* competition with Heaven's Decree, a modern folk-style rendition of Thai life (see Fig. 35) which challenges the barriers between 'high' and 'low' art. Prasong's work also addresses the issues of regionalism and ethnicity in Thailand. The auspicious third cycle (36th birthday) of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthorn in 1991 saw the Thai Farmers bank special exhibition award first prize to Theerawat Kanama's The Blessing (see Fig. 36). That same year Bangkok hosted the World Bank conference attended by international heads of

state and finance ministers. The Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre was erected and Chalood Nimsamer was commissioned to create a fitting sculpture. His golden Lokuttara (Beyond This Mundane World) employs a traditional *kanok* pattern and represents variously a *wai* (two hands joined to pay respect), a lotus bud or a flame (symbol of enlightenment) (see Fig. 37).

The Thai Art Group, established by Chalermchai Kositpipat in 1980 includes Surasit Saowakong, Prasong Leumuang, Tongchai Srisukprasert (see Fig. 38), along with Apichai Piromrat (see Fig. 39) and Alongkon Lorwattana who were involved with the London temple project. Also a member of this large, active group is Phaptawan Suwannakoot (see Fig. 40), daughter of a well-known traditional muralist Paiboon Suwannakoot and organiser of the Than Koot Group which undertakes commissions to paint traditional Thai murals in various locations, including Bangkok hotel lobbies and of course, temples. Special art competition winners in 1992 and 1993, Prayom Yoddee (see Fig. 41) and Teerawat Kanama (see Fig. 42) share this neo-traditional vision.

Adopting an abstract style with Buddhist themes, Prinya Tantisuk has been successful in winning the *Toshiba Brings Good Things to Life* competition with Dialogue of Wisdom (see Fig. 43) and the *Thai Farmers Bank Exhibition* in 1993 with Three Gems and Pilgrimage (see Fig. 44). The Buddhist theme of Defeating Mara (Overcoming Desire) has been interpreted by many Thai artists. In 1995, Kreangkrai Vongpitirat's version won first prize in the first *Panasonic Contemporary Painting*

Exhibition (see Fig. 46). Winning the gold prize in the National Art Exhibition that year was Khemrat Gongsuk's modern rendition of a traditional stupa (pagoda) entitled The Monument of Memories (see Fig. 46).

Applying traditional rural themes, Adul Booncham won the *TFB Contemporary Art Competition* in 1991 with Imagination from Rural Spirit (see Fig. 47) and Ariya Kitticharoenwiwat's Elephant Tusks (see Fig. 48) won the 42nd National Art Exhibition in 1996. However, the gold medal in the first *SVOA Contemporary Art Exhibition* in 1995 was awarded to Udom Chimpukdee for Symbol of the Growing of Technology (see Fig. 49), which indicates some interest in art which looks to the technological future rather than the rural past.

To commemorate the 50th year of H.M. King Bhumibol's ascension to the throne in 1996, the His Majesty wrote and translated the Buddhist legend Mahajanaka which highlights the moral of perseverance. In the publication, His Majesty requested his writings be illustrated by contemporary paintings that characterised Thai art of his reign. The eight artists selected for the project were Prayat Pongdam, Pichai Nirand, Preecha Thaothong, Chalermchai Kositpipat, Panya Vijnthanasarn, Teerawat Kanama, Netikorn Chinyo and Jintana Piamsiri. Also marking the special occasion, a Golden Jubilee art exhibition was organised and Wijit Apichatkriengkrai's sculpture Under His Majesty's Shelter (see Fig. 50) won first prize. The members of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts also produced a combined artwork entitled Work of Art in the Fiftieth Anniversary

Celebration of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne (Fig. 51) as a tribute. The *Thai Farmer's Bank Golden Jubilee Art* competition to honour the event awarded first prize to Pornchai Jaimar's 'Metal Shrine Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of H.M. King Bhumibol's Ascension to the Throne (see Fig. 52).

While Montien Boonma also explores Buddhist/spiritual issues, he chooses an international style of installations using local, natural materials such as medicinal herbs, earth, charcoal, ash, and traditional religious materials like gold leaf and candles, partly because they are appropriate to the issues and messages of his art and partly because they are affordable and accessible, as opposed to expensive imported paints, canvas etc. Though well-recognised abroad, Montien has had to continuously deal with the problem of funding his art works and supplements his art by teaching. His sculptures and installations such as Pagodas (1991) and Alms (1992) and Arokhayasala, Temple of Mind (see Fig. 53) have been disregarded by local corporate buyers and collectors seeking 'fine art', finding his work too obscure and difficult to display.

In 1998, it appears the two streams of art (traditional and universal) continue to flow. While change in Thailand brings technology and stimulates the exploration of contemporary issues such as political repression, social conflicts, and self-expression, themes of a 'Thai spirit' are also cultivated. Buddhist culture is still a source of inspiration which is supported by the Department of Traditional Thai Art at Silpakorn

University, major banks, hotels and large corporations via sponsorship including exhibitions and commissions.

This chapter has outlined the enormous changes in Thailand's economic and social conditions during the past two decades. The impact of increased tourism in the country has been presented, followed by a discussion of some approaches which have been taken towards defining Thai identity and culture. Religion is noted at the centre of recent attempts to isolate, define and promote features of a distinctive Thai identity (*ekalak Thai*). The brief overview of the neo-traditional art movement highlighted the Buddhist and rural themes employed by these Thai artists. Examples of prize-winning neo-traditional works in the National Art Exhibition and other specific bank and corporate-sponsored competitions are given to indicate the taste of these patrons and the growth in popularity of this neo-traditional art among dominant institutions during this period. Theories of cultural reproduction and hegemony presented in Chapter 2 are referred to in relation to this movement. We now move on to Chapter 5 which presents the detailed ethnographic data and investigates the specific ways in which art in Thailand, as a cultural phenomenon, is produced, distributed and received.