

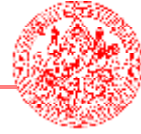


NEWS

Bangkok No. 1 January 2011

National Museum Volunteers





NATIONAL MUSEUM BANGKOK

National Museum Volunteers

The National Museum Volunteers (NMV), under the auspices of the Department of Fine Arts, is a recipient of the Thai National Heritage Preservation Award 1989, 2001 and 2004. The group is also a Member of the Council of the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

The National Museum Volunteers is an organization with Thai and international members whose purpose is to serve the National Museum Bangkok and the public through a variety of activities.

The NMV Newsletter

A monthly publication of the National Museum Volunteers, distributed free to members.

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Cover photo:

Painting of King Narai receiving the first French Embassy to Siam (1685)

Printed by TR Enterprise Bangkok

Hours of Operation

Wednesday to Sunday:

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Monday and Tuesday:

Closed, except on public holidays

Thai New Year and 1 January:

Closed

Entrance fee: baht 200

NMV Library

The library is located at the rear of the Museum grounds behind the Palace building.

Hours of opening:

Wednesdays: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Membership cards must be shown when borrowing books.

E-mail: nmvlibrary@gmail.com

Guided Tours

English: Thai Art, History and Buddhism
Wednesday & Thursday

French: Pre-Thai and Thai Art
Wednesday & Thursday

German: Thai Art and Culture
Wednesday & Thursday

**Japanese: Buddhaisawan Chapel
Buddhism and Thai Art**
Wednesday & Thursday

Time: 9:30 am

Meet at: Museum ticket office

Fee: Free (*Museum entrance fee must be paid.*)

For information call:

Guide Chairperson (*Guiding and Special tours*):

Berni Sabatini 083 302 5005

Tour Leaders:

English: Alan Needleman

French: Isabelle Depaty 02 261 1964

Jean-Pierre Joly 02 271 1249

German: Barbara Frank 080 088 3962

Japanese: Kumi Ishii 02 662 2179

Naomi Nomoto 02 664 3640

NMV Website address:

<http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net>



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This issue edited by:

Devin Brougham

CALENDAR & NOTICES



- Jan 10 Study Group Orientation – ***“Genghis Khan and His Legacies”***
- Jan 20 Special Event – ***“The Heart of Korean Tea”***
- Jan 23 At Home – ***“Korean and Japanese Ways of Tea”***
- Jan 27 Lecture – ***“The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen”***
- Feb 2 ***English Guiding Workshop Commences***
- Feb 7 Study Group – ***“Genghis Khan and His Legacies”***
- Feb 14 Study Group – ***“Genghis Khan and His Legacies”***
- Feb 15 At Home – ***“Thai Kanom”***
- Feb 21 Study Group – ***“Genghis Khan and His Legacies”***
- Feb 24 NMV Symposium – ***“500 Years: Europeans in Siam”***
- Feb 28 Study Group – ***“Genghis Khan and His Legacies”***

Guiding Workshop 2011



Explore the National Museum Bangkok

Learn more about Thai art, architecture history, religion
and culture and become a **GUIDE**

Schedule: February / March, Wednesdays & Fridays

**All lectures & Tours at the National Museum Bangkok,
from 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon**

Date	Topic
P A R T 1	
Feb 2	Introduction to the Guiding Workshop 2011 & Tour of the museum
Feb 4	General Thai History
Feb 9	Hinduism and the Great Gods
Feb 11	Life of Buddha, Evolution of Buddha images
Feb 16	Introduction to Buddhism
P A R T 2	
Feb 23	Guidelines for and from a guide History of Chakri Dynasty & visit of the Palace
Feb 25	Visit & In-Depth Studies of halls in the Palace
Mar 2	Visit & In-Depth Studies of halls in the Palace
Mar 4	Guides guide Guides
Mar 9	Guides guide Guides
Mar 11	1st Tour of new guides
Mar 16	1st Tour of new guides

Cost: 2,000 Baht, NMV members only

Contact: Bernadette Sabatini, NMVGuideChair@gmail.com, mob 083 302 5005

Note: Dates, venues or speakers may change due to unforeseen circumstances



NMV SYMPOSIUM

500 Years: Europeans in Siam

- Date:** Thursday, 24 February 2011
- Time:** 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- Venue:** National Theater Sanam Luang, Bangkok
- Donation:** 600 baht Members / 800 baht Non-members
- Registration:** TBA

The NMV will host a symposium to mark the 500th anniversary since the arrival of the first Europeans – the Portuguese – to Siam. The event will be presided over by our distinguished patron MR Chakrrot Chitrabongs.

As this unique event coincides with the 100-year anniversary of the Fine Arts Department (FAD), under whose auspices we operate, it was decided to present this symposium to the FAD as a centennial birthday gift, which has been graciously accepted.

The symposium will bring together distinguished experts who will speak to members as well as the interested public about the rich and multifaceted relationship that has developed between Europe and Siam over the past half-millennium.

The event comprises thought-provoking lectures, panel discussions and question and answer sessions that explore the impact that the arrival of the Europeans had on Siam in the areas of politics, history, arts and daily life. In preparation for the Q&A sessions you will have the opportunity to submit questions in writing in advance.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members,

Welcome to 2011! With the New Year, new days, new ideas and new challenges for NMV have just arrived in our lives. After the Christmas break we truly hope to find you in good health and ready to join in upcoming NMV activities with gusto.

The Steering Committee last met mid-December to lay plans for the first months of the New Year. January will offer a nice mix of activities for everyone: a Study Group for researchers, a Korean tea ceremony for gourmets and an Art Homes with the same topic for connoisseurs, a lecture for romantics and book lovers. And, as always, there will be more: please check our web site for the latest updates, as sometimes we are surprisingly bestowed with unexpected events. Please also be sure to take a look at the news from the broader community at Non-NMV cultural events.

If you have children and you would like to enjoy the Children's Day at the museum, please come on January 8th; join with the NMV Children's Project and Touching Thailand coordinators representing our organisation. It is a lot of fun and you can visit the museum's galleries as well. Bring the whole family! The museum curators have chosen 100 pieces from the displayed items at the NMB as a symbol for the 100 years since the founding of the Fine Arts Department. There will be a treasure hunt and different games to bring kids closer to these treasures. Our team will introduce *Ganesh* and *Hanuman*. Is there anyone who doesn't know both of them? With Nancy Chandler's kind permission we will be able to use her famous *Hanuman* mask to let kid's hearts

bid higher. And Patricia, our very own NMV designer designed a *Ganesha* image for colouring which you will love.

2011 is exactly 500 years after the first Europeans left their footprints on the land of Siam. As mentioned in my previous letters, the NMV is holding a whole day's symposium on this topic on February 24th. You can expect extremely interesting lectures given by experts and unforgettable presentations. The project team is working with dedication and enthusiasm to please our special guests from the Fine Arts Department and you, our members. Please follow the information in this issue of NMV News as well as on the web site and information sent by the NMV secretary with details regarding registration.

As always, we continue to search for more ideas and dreams: every member is welcome to give the input. Please come and bring your ideas, join the Steering Committee and support us to keep NMV going in its exciting, active way. Many thanks to all of you for supporting our functions – I would like to thank each of you for joining in NMV events and for being a part of our community.

I wish you a good and peaceful 2011, with wonderful days and a touch of NMV life.

Happy New Year!

Ein Glückliches Neues Jahr!

Bonne Année!

Shinnen Omedeto!

Sawadee Pii Mai Kha!

Yours,

Bo Mazur

500 YEARS: EUROPEANS IN SIAM



Introduction

2011 marks the 500th anniversary since the arrival of the first Europeans in Siam (the Portuguese). Throughout the year we will feature articles and events on this theme. The first big event is the NMV Symposium “500 Years: Europeans in Siam”, scheduled for Thursday, February 24th (announced under “Notices”). A number of experts have already been confirmed to speak and participate in panel discussions. It is shaping up to be another enriching, memorable NMV event.

As our introduction to this fascinating topic in the newsletter, we are fortunate to have an excellent article by former NMV President Janine Gray, providing a colorful description of the main contours of the story of Europeans in Siam, particularly during the period of King Narai. In fact, our cover photo in this issue of the newsletter is of a painting on display at the National Museum in Lopburi depicting King Narai receiving the first French Embassy along with the King’s foreign adviser, Constantine Phaulkon, described by Janine below.

EUROPEANS AT THE COURT OF SIAM

by Janine Gray

Although this article will focus on Europeans at the Court of Ayutthaya during the 16th and 17th centuries, other foreigners were present before, during and after this period, for various reasons. Trade was the most important motive, with the exception of the French who first arrived as Catholic missionaries. Foreigners were also employed in the service of the King, to defend him personally as bodyguards or to protect the country as mercenaries, going into battle with him. Others had fled their lands of origin and found asylum in Siam. We shall mention the Persians, Malays, Mons, Chams, and Japanese who were powerful in the

early 17th century, without forgetting the Chinese who were influential from early on and introduced Chinese women into the Court. Prominent foreigners were often given noble titles by the King and important positions within the government, up to the *Rattanakosin* period.

The first Europeans to appear in Ayutthaya in 1511 were the Portuguese. Albuquerque contacted the Siamese Authorities from Goa, India, and Antonio de Miranda was the first envoy to have an audience with King Rama Thibodi II. The King understood that foreign trade could benefit his mainly agricultural country, and

European firearms were particularly important to him. He employed Portuguese soldiers as his bodyguards, and his army was trained to use and manufacture firearms. However, towards the end of the 16th century, Portugal was losing its influence within Europe, and by 1580 had become part of the Kingdom of Spain.

The Dutch arrived in 1601, and were the first to exchange embassies with the Kingdom of Siam in 1607, under King Ekathotsarot. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) which was established in 1602 to coordinate all Dutch trade with Asia, set up an agency in Ayutthaya in 1608. It quickly succeeded in ousting the Portuguese traders. Trade in Siam was particularly worthwhile because of its geographical position and its liberal atmosphere. Many products were traded within Asia, and with these profits, Europeans bought ceramics and silks from China, copper and lacquer from Japan, and spices which were all much sought after in Europe.

The English followed the Dutch, establishing the East India Company in Ayutthaya in 1612. King Songtam allotted them an area outside the city, between the Dutch and the Japanese cantonments. He also decreed that all trade should be carried through his Treasury Agency. The English had fewer privileges than the Dutch, and fewer ships, since their energies were more directed to India. After several scuffles between

Dutch and English boats, the English closed their agency in 1622.

The Dutch were left with practically the sole rights to the Siamese trade, as their other main competitors, Portugal and Japan, had withdrawn. By 1642, during the reign of King Prasat Thong, after establishing their power over Malacca and Java, the Dutch controlled the western approaches to the Gulf of Siam. In 1659, soon after his accession to the throne, King Narai asked the English East India Company to reopen their agency in order to counter the aggressiveness of the Dutch.

In 1662, the French, who became the best known foreigners in the history of Ayutthaya, were the last to arrive. They were not traders like most of their European predecessors, but religious men from the Foreign Catholic Mission. Their destination was not Siam but China, having received from the Pope the titles of Vicars Apostolic for China, Tonkin and Annam.

When Bishop of Heliopolis, known as Monsignor Pallu, arrived in Ayutthaya in 1664, he decided that it was an ideal location for the headquarters of the Mission in the Far East.

The priests devoted their time to teaching and giving medical care, but there were very few conversions. The Catholics in Ayutthaya were mostly refugees from Annam and

Japan, and descendants of the first Portuguese traders who had married Siamese women. However, the French missionaries sent home glowing accounts of their success in Siam, and in 1673 the powerful clerics at the French court asked Louis XIV to send a personal letter to King Narai, to thank him for the protection he had granted the French missionaries. This happened to be an opportune time for King Narai to open diplomatic relations with France, since he was looking for an ally against the Dutch who were then at war in Europe against Louis XIV.

The first French ship to arrive in Siam, the *Vautour*, came as late as 1680. The first Siamese embassy to France boarded the *Vautour* in December 1680, with splendid presents for Louis XIV, including two elephants and two rhinoceroses. However, from Bantam, Java, they transferred to the *Soleil d'Orient* in August 1681, never to be heard of again. The ship probably sank near the Cape of Good Hope.

Meanwhile, in 1675 the notorious Greek adventurer Constantine Phaulkon had arrived in Ayutthaya as a trading agent for the English East India Company. By 1683 he had reached an important and lucrative position in the Ministry of Treasury and succeeded in having his previous employers expelled from Siam by January 1684.

In that same month a second Siamese embassy left Ayutthaya for

France on a British ship, carrying many presents to Louis XIV of France and Charles II of England, probably on Phaulkon's advice, because he wished to get recognition from the Court of England to overrule the East India Company. Detailed accounts of that embassy's journey to Versailles, through the English ports, and the English court at Windsor, have been recorded by two French missionaries who accompanied them as interpreters and protocol advisers.

Louis XIV agreed to send an embassy to Siam on the advice of his Jesuit confessor, Pere de la Chaise, and the mission arrived in Ayutthaya in September 1685, headed by Chevalier de Chaumont, a recently converted and pious Catholic who was accompanied by Abbe de Choisy. Their visit, from September to December 1685, is memorable, particularly among the Thais, because of the famous audience granted by King Narai, which took place on October 18, 1685, where Louis XIV's envoy objected to Siamese protocol. However, several treaties were signed, giving substantial privileges to the French missionaries and traders. The port of Songkla was granted to the Compagnie des Indes Orientales.

Phaulkon was instrumental in the negotiations between King Narai and the French envoys, who were disappointed to have failed in their mission to convert King Narai to the catholic religion! However, Phaulkon

needed them to succeed in his own objectives in Siam, and one of the Jesuits accompanying the mission, Pere Tachard, became a trustworthy ally. They conspired to have French governors installed in Siamese provinces with the help of French troops.

The French embassy left Ayutthaya in December 1685 with Pere Tachard and a new Siamese embassy to Versailles. The embassy was led by Kosapan, and was greeted in Versailles with great honour and admiration, due to the pleasant manners and qualities of its ambassador. The result of that mission was the departure of the last French embassy to be sent to Siam for the next 200 years. It was the mission led by Simon de la Loubere, who arrived in Ayutthaya in September 1687 with Pere Tachard, Kosapan and his entourage. They were accompanied by two ships, 636 soldiers and presents for King Narai and his minister, Phaulkon. The French envoy also brought Phaulkon what he most cherished : a title. He became Knight of the Order of St Michael.

A new treaty was signed, granting more privileges to the Compagnie des Indes Orientales, before La Loubere and Tachard left Ayutthaya in January 1688.

By then, Phaulkon's ambivalent attitude and unpopularity at the court would cause its demise. The Siamese resented the influence of all

foreigners, most of all that of Phaulkon. The forts were guarded by French soldiers, the most powerful Minister was Greek, and the Catholic priests had too many privileges. When King Narai became ill in March 1688, it did not take long before Phra Petraja, the general in command of the elephants, became Regent with the help of Kosapan. Phaulkon was arrested, tortured, and finally executed in June 1688. Phra Petraja was proclaimed King and named King Ramesuan.

The Dutch, who had left Ayutthaya in 1686 after several disputes with Phaulkon, were once again in favour. A new treaty was signed in 1688, confirming their previous treaty signed in 1664, and in addition to the monopoly of trade in hides granted by King Narai, a monopoly of tin was granted. They stayed in Ayutthaya until 1765. Ayutthaya fell to the Burmese in 1767, marking the end of the Ayutthaya period.

Phaulkon's ambitions had disastrous consequences for all foreigners, Europeans in particular, who were not welcome at the Court of Siam for more than a century afterwards. It was only under the reign of King Mongkut, Rama IV (1851-1868), that a new exchange of embassies with Europe took place.

By then the political scene in Asia had changed considerably, with neighbouring countries being colonised. King Mongkut, a great scholar

and visionary, interested in foreign languages, religion and sciences, was instrumental in preparing Siam to become a modern and independent kingdom. As is well known, he chose an English governess, Mrs Leonowens, to tutor his children. One of his sons, who was also tutored for a time by Mrs. Leonowens, became King Rama V (1868-1910), the first Siamese king to visit Europe and to send his own sons to study there. Today we can see the influ-

ence on architecture, administration, infrastructure resulting from these visits, and from that time also, the royal families of Europe have maintained constant links with the Thai royal family.

I hope this introduction will stimulate your interest in the Symposium on this fascinating subject, which will take place on Thursday February 24, 2010 at the Museum Auditorium.



1665 Map of Ayutthaya by Johannes Vingboons



SPECIAL EVENT

THE HEART OF KOREAN TEA: A Journey of Beauty and Enlightenment Through Zen Tea

- Date:** Thursday, 20 January 2011
- Time:** 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
- Location:** National Museum Auditorium
- Donation:** Members 300 baht / Non-members 400 baht
- Reservations:** nmvexcursions@gmail.com
- Deadline:** Tuesday, 11 January 2011 (or as soon as all places are filled)



*Zen Tea Painting by Ven. Suan
(photo by John Toomey)*

Leaving behind the “dust and cares of the world”, four guests pass through the garden gate into a rare realm, a unity of the spirit. In sharing a communal cup of tea, an ancient ritual exercise in Enlightenment becomes a fresh experience. The shar-

ing of tea as a Zen “Way”, by its very nature, is intimate; guests experience harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility.

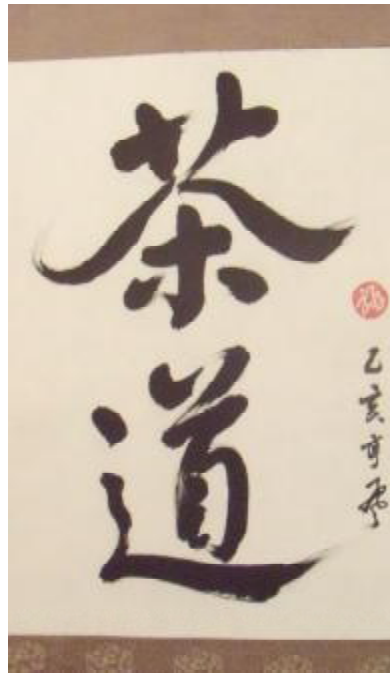
The demonstration of what is often awkwardly termed a “ceremony” can-



*The Korean Way of Tea
(photo by Tea Master Lee, Uk Hyung)*

not lead you to that rare experience. But, by showing you the outward form and discussing its inner meaning you will come to appreciate the beauty and harmony of the ancient Korean tradition of the "Way of Tea". Join us for this enlightening event and enjoy hand-made Korean teacakes and a cup of tea.

Mr. Lee, UkHyung, founding headmaster of the Choam Way of Korean Traditional Tea, will present the traditional ceremony for us to observe, along with some of his leading teachers and students, including John J. Toomey, an NMV member and the only foreigner ever to be appointed head of a tea school in the Far East.



*Chado Scroll "The Way of Tea"
by Gao Fei
(photo by John Toomey)*



STUDY GROUP

GENGHIS KHAN AND HIS LEGACIES

- Orientation:** January 10th at 9:30 a.m. sharp
- Dates:** Mondays: January 24th, 31st, February 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th
- Time:** 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon
- Place:** TBA
- Leaders:** Françoise Vincent
- Sign up:** Martine Mauffrey: mmauffrey@hotmail.com



Genghis Khan and the Mongols are invariably associated with terrible tales of conquest, destruction, and bloodshed. This famed clan leader and his immediate successors created the largest empire ever to exist, spanning the entire Asian continent from Korea to Hungary.

Yet, the legacy of Genghis Khan, his sons, and grandsons is also one of cultural development, artistic achievement, a courtly way of life, and an entire



continent united under the so-called PaxMongolica.

The Mongols were remarkably quick in transforming themselves from a purely nomadic tribal people into rulers of cities and states and in learning how to administer their vast empire. The political unification of Asia under the Mongols resulted in active trade and the transfer of artists along the main routes. New influences were thus integrated with established local artistic traditions. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Mongols had formed the largest contiguous empire in the world, uniting Chinese, Islamic, Iranian, Central Asian, and nomadic cultures within an overarching Mongol sensibility.

The aim of this Study Group is to rediscover the influences of this forgotten empire in terms of religions, arts, military skills..."



AT HOME

At Home with John Toomey

Korean and Japanese ways of Tea: Two beautiful Paths to Enlightenment in the Heart of Zen

- Date:** Sunday, 23 January 2010
- Time:** 1:30 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.
- Place:** Private home and garden in Patumthani (detailed directions will be sent)
- Limit:** 12 persons
- Donation:** Members 200 Baht / Non-members 400 Baht
- Contact:** NMVAtHomes@gmail.com
- Note:** Registrations for the event are limited. A wait list will be made and members contacted should a cancellation become available.



Host prepares thick tea to be shared by guests



Guests purify hand and heart

The guests leave behind “the cares of the world” and gather their thoughts as they sit waiting in the outer garden, tantalized by the tinkle of water they cannot see. At a signal from the host, all pass through the bamboo gate and cross the symbolic “Bridge of Dreams” into the paradise of the “Pure Land” of the inner garden. It is only when they humble themselves to bend down to wash off “the dust of the world” that they are treated to the best view of the waterfall and thus even their minds are purified before entering the Ten-

Foot Square Hut recommended by the Zen sage Vimalakirti. With its sparse decoration hinting at something “not of this world” the guests anticipate a special celebration of the year of the Rabbit through the performance of two national tea cultures, contrasting materially, but united by the same underlying “heart.”

John J Toomey, a long term active member and NMV lecturer is the only foreigner ever to be appointed head of a tea school in the Far East. John will host this event in his own home and present the Japanese tea ceremony. Mr Lee UkHyung, founding headmaster of the Choam Way of Korean Traditional Tea, will come from Korea, along with some of his leading teachers and students to present the traditional Korean tea ceremony.

This is a unique opportunity for a small group of members to watch and participate in the age old cultural tradition of the Tea ceremony. This follows the lecture and demonstration given in the Auditorium of the National Museum a few days earlier.

(Photos by John Toomey)

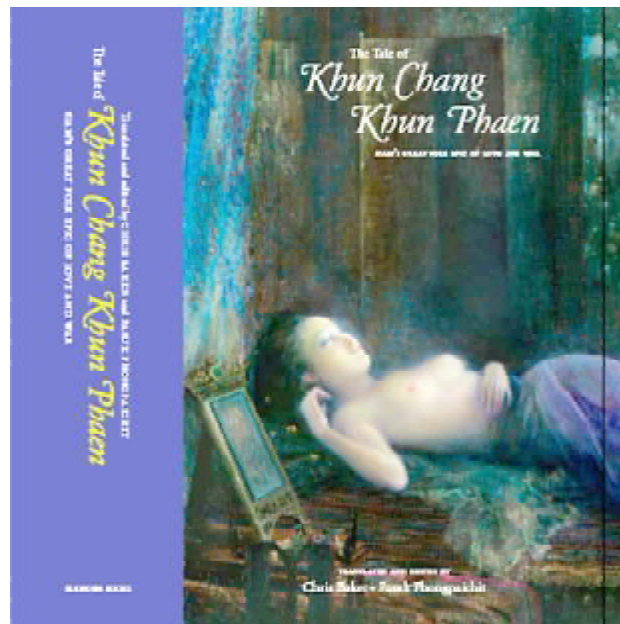


MONTHLY LECTURE

The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen Siam's great folk epic of love and war

Lecture by the translators Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit

- Date:** Thursday, 27th January 2011
- Time:** 10:00 a.m.
- Location:** National Museum Auditorium
- Donation:** Members 100 baht / Non-members 200



This lecture introduces the first ever translation of the most outstanding classic in the Thai language. A folk epic combining the social panorama of a nineteenth century novel with the grand storytelling of an ancient saga, The plot is a love triangle, ending with the tragic and enigmatic death of the heroine.

Possibly dating to 1600 and originally developed in an oral tradition of storytelling, the tale has a fast paced blend of romance, tragedy and farce spiced with sex, warring, adventure and the supernatural. The tale was written down, adapted, and extended at the nineteenth century Siamese court with two kings among the authors. The great Thai linguist William Geney believed that “if all other information on traditional Thai culture were to be lost, the whole complex could be reconstructed from this marvelous text.”

This translation is based on Prince Damron Rajanubhab's edition of 1917-18 with over a hundred passages restored from earlier versions. The edition is fully annotated, with four hundred original line drawings, ten maps, and an essay on the history and background of the tale. A companion volume includes alternative versions, additional episodes and other ancillary material. The translation has been published by Silkworm Books, Bangkok.

The lecturers:

- Chris Baker formerly taught Asian history at Cambridge University and has lived in Thailand for over thirty years.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit is professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. Together they have written several books including 'A History of Thailand', Thailand: Economy and Politics' and published several translations.

The illustration on this page and in the book was created by Muansing Janchai, a Thai painter who also studied in Tibet, India, Nepal, Burma, Laos and China. He has painted several temple murals, including a series on this tale at Wat Palelai, Suphanburi.



RECENT HAPPENINGS

THE WORLD'S ONLY LACQUER MUSEUM MÜNSTER'S MUSEUM FÜR LACKKUNST

by John J. Toomey



*Detail of 18th C Qing carved
red lacquer screen*



*Lacquered and embossed European
leather wall covering*

I arrived in Berlin more than a week earlier than the archaeology conference that I was to attend and, loving lacquer, I simply had to take the intercity train, expensive though that is in Germany, through the plain, flat countryside to the world's only lacquer museum, located in the very ancient and elegant medieval town of Münster. As the train approached this old imperial city, the countryside changed to a more "cultured" landscape, more cultivated and rolling. Here, in a noble, old two story mansion, fellow Sophia University (Tokyo) alumna and now director of the Museum für Lackkunst, Dr. Monika Kopplin, entertained me to herbal tisane and the hundreds of ancient and rare editions of her library, including many a 16th century manuscript and other old works in Chinese and Japanese and other world languages, and an original first edition (now in a fragile state) of the most exquisite book ever compiled

on Siamese lacquer arts Charles Doehring's famous over-sized 1915 two-volume *Art and Art-Industry in Siam*, one of the very first books in English on Thai art (the very last 1999 re-prints in honor of King Bhumibol's 6th Cycle are still available at the Siam Society). She then regaled me with the dazzling delights of both eastern (ground floor) and European (upper floor) lacquer of the museum, going so far as to open all the glass cabinets, so that I could photograph virtually the entire collection at will. Needless to say, the mother-of-pearl pieces from so many countries were enthralling.

One of the most interesting cases specialized in some Japanese lacquers that imitated the textural surface of other materials, such as metal, bamboo, wood, leather, sharkskin, etc. There were more displays of wonderful classic pieces of Japanese, Ryukyuan and Chinese lacquers, and

some of the most exquisite Korean pieces that I have seen outside of Korea, which showed Monika's untiring scholarship and good taste. Yes, Monika herself was responsible for building up the holdings for the BASF Coatings Company, which owns the museum and collection.

I had wondered how Europeans made lacquer since no lacquer trees grow in Europe. I was aware that they had made their own coatings using various oils and mineral pigments, painting lovely curio pieces and scenes in their baroque palaces, but I found it intriguing when Monika explained to me in more detail the processes of "japaning", varnishing, and "lackering", as it was called in a



Dr. Kopplin with Japanese lacquered Buddhist statue



Lacquer imitating the texture of a metal vase

1688 treatise (in the museum's library) by a certain John Stalker of Oxford, in which he explains how to "conterfeit" the art; and I was astounded with the beauty of the very high quality pieces in the museum's collection. The galleries also hold many works of Indian lacquer on *papier mâché* and metals, European lacquer chests, furniture, sewing kits, military decorations and awards of state, and personal items from the royal courts of Europe. There was also a strange corner of soviet propaganda lacquer, by icon artists who had lost their livelihood with the Communist Revolution. Most bizarre among these was a panel "Vision of Hitler's Invasion of the Soviet Union", by Pavel Bazhenov from 1935 showing German Chancellor Hitler mounted as a marauding aggressor



18th C Chinese mother-of-pearl inlay, plum and crescent



Black and gold lacquer mother-of-pearl inlay with bronze fittings in form of chest for European market, dated 1600, Momoyama period, Namban

knight in medieval armor, advancing on the planned tower of the Palace of the Soviets to be built above a clearly pictured underground Metro station, with airplanes flying around it, a prophecy that came true and halted the building in 1941. The only piece of Thai lacquer there is a

tall sutra cabinet with depictions of Prince Rama and Hanuman and there are several pieces of Burmese lacquer. Upon leaving the Museum für Lackkunst, Monika pointed out to me a young lacquer tree *Rhus verniciflua* which she had imported to grace the garden. What a fascinating day in a fascinating paradise!



Snuff box, black with engraved flowers in gold leaf, design of imbricated swirl rosette, papier mache, Paris, 1740



Lacquer potpourri, Paris, 1775

(All photos by John Toomey)



In Search of Kathina

by Mikki Kanatoko



Mikki experimenting on whether 100 baht will bring merit

I recently participated in a Study Group on festivals in Thailand, to learn more about Thai culture. One of the topics, *Kathin* caught my attention, as I did not know anything about it despite having lived in Bangkok before for five years. So, I chose the topic and began my research by first talking to Thai friends around me. To my surprise, most of them had never attended *Kathin* ceremonies and they knew little about the origin of the name. Most understand that *Kathin* is a merit making ceremony where people donate to temples and make offerings, such as food and robes to monks after the Rain Retreat or Buddhist Lent.

The word *Kathin* has taken on four different meanings but the original meaning of *Kathin*, or *Kathina* in Pali is a wooden frame on which cloth could be stretched for cutting or sewing. The story of how the *Kathin* ceremony came about is recorded in the *Mahavagga*. Very briefly, a group of 30 monks set out on a journey to be with the Buddha during the Rain Retreat. Unfortunately, they did not make it on time and had to stop their journey even though the Buddha was not so far away. They continued their journey only after the end of the Rain Retreat and finally met the Buddha. Upon hearing their plight, the Buddha

bestowed on them some privileges and also gave them a piece of cloth which was donated by a lay person to make a new robe. A *Kathina* was used to spread the cloth. According to the Buddha there was nothing as uplifting as generosity and sharing. So, the tradition of *Kathin* began. It should be noted that monks then used scraps of cloth to make robes. They even used cast away shrouds at cremation grounds. Their robes were pieces of cloths sewn together. It is interesting to note that to this day many of the individual cloths used by monks are made of strips of cloths sewn together.

The wooden frame that monks had used to stretch pieces of cloths must be long out of use. But I was curious to know whether Thais knew the etymology of the word *Kathin*. I decided to conduct a little survey. No one I asked knew the origin of the word but two knew that *Kathin* also meant a tool of some sort. Many have attended *Kathin* ceremonies but perhaps not regularly. But what was surprising to me is that some of those who have attended such ceremonies do not know the history and significance underlying the ceremony. Many perceive the ceremony as merit making for lay people and fund raising opportunity for temples.

In Thailand *Kathin* has been observed since the Sukhothai era in the 13th CE. The ceremony is described in the stone inscription of King Ramkamhaeng. I imagine that during the *Kathin* ceremony, the King was able to display his wealth and generosity with enormous offerings, such as food, flowers, pillows, and cloth to the temples and the monks. In the 19th CE, however, King Mongkut who had spent many years as a monk himself tried to change the concept of *Kathin* for the monks to be more self reliant rather than simply accepting gifts from lay people as it was closer to the original tradition when monks made robes by dying, cutting and sewing pieces of cloths together. So, monks were given white cloths for them to dye, cut and sew into robes. In the rural areas, there was the tradition of villagers getting together to make robes for monks leaving for their journey. They would weave, dye, cut and sew on a single day for *Kathin*. Everyone, including the oldest monk would pitch in to help in the race for time.

I went to the provinces just before my presentation for the Study Group to see for myself what happens during a *Kathin* ceremony. Unfortunately, there was no cutting or sewing of robes but just monks preaching and chanting and lay people making offerings and monetary contributions to the temples. I was very excited to learn subsequently from a Sri Lankan friend that the *Kathin* ceremony in Sri Lanka is still very much in the original tradition and spirit of communal participation where people come together to make robes for monks. Cloth is cut into pieces and sewn together. After a two week display, the robe is taken, sometimes on the back of an elephant to the temple. I was just as excited to learn that there is a village, Baan Pin in Amphur Long, Phrae

Province where the people still follow the tradition of making monk robes from scratch. Cotton is grown, harvested and spun into threads. Villagers take part in the dying, weaving, cutting and sewing process. Apparently, the process from harvesting the cotton to the final product takes place within 24 hours. It is a community effort and it is believed that the villagers, including neighbouring villagers who come to help, will receive much merit.

I am really curious as to what a *Kathina* looks like and how such an important Buddhist ceremony came to be named after a humble wooden frame. If you come across answers to these questions, do let me know.

References

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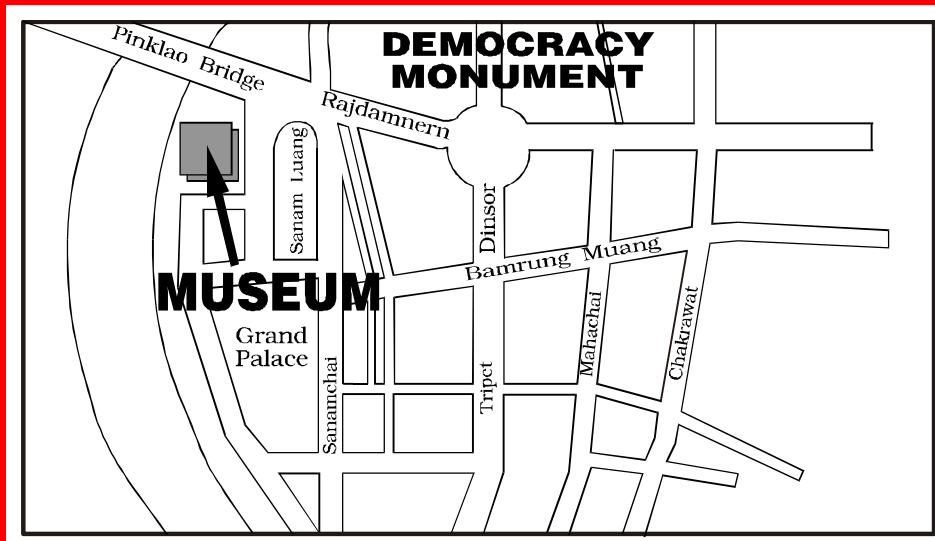
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P.O. Box 1305 Nana Post Office
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