Development Challenges for Religious Arts on the Thonburi Bank of the Chao Phraya River

Nattawut Palakavongsa na Ayudhya

Silpakorn University

Email: coolnatt@hotmail.co.uk

Abstract

From long-term observation of the riverfront communities of Thonburi and of their apparent success, the following research question was derived, both motivating and guiding the present project: Does the Thonburi community manifest significant key values that might explain its historical success in multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious tolerance and co-habitation, and thence to reveal if there are lessons to be drawn from this success regarding ways of living together, also to become integrated into existing community structures? There has been a further, underlying question: do the lessons to be drawn from Thonburi's historic tolerance and community peace have potential for translation to other levels where conflict prevails in Thailand's society? In pursuing this broad question, the following more specific objectives have been set: 1) To study cultural and social context influencing religious places on the Thonburi side of the Chao Phraya River, and 2) To study the features of artistic works in religious places of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in the communities on the Thonburi side of the Chao Phraya River area in relation to cultural and social context. One set of questionnaires and interviews was developed and used as a research instrument. Experts and elderly people living in the community participated in the in-depth interviews. The on-site observations and data collections were classified by content analyses and verified by data triangulation techniques. The results of the study can be presented in three parts: 1) Thonburi as emblem of Thai culture: tolerance, acceptance: a discussion on how Thonburi manifests a multicultural tolerance or sense of mutual accommodation running through the society, then 2) Thonburi as centre of creativity: a similar discussion on the richness and diversity of artistic inventiveness and production revealed through the present displays of Thonburi, and 3) Thonburi as living museum and the tourist experience: how Thonburi's richness is to be 'managed'. Finally there is a discussion to the broader question of key manifested values and to the project's transferability to other spheres of Thailand's life.

Keywords: Thonburi, Religious Arts, Culture, Development, Living Together

Introduction

Thonburi, a former capital city of Thailand (1767-1782), is commonly known as "Fang Thon" or the area on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. For more than four hundred years, this area has been inhabited by people of different ethnicities; i.e. Mon, Lao, Arab, Vietnamese, Indian, Malay and Chinese. Although Thonburi at present has become part of the larger Bangkok Metropolis, its core identity is based in the earlier Thai way of life along the canals, the orchards, temples, churches, mosques and other architectural and historical attractions and remains substantially unchanged. Thonburi is decidedly different from Bangkok which is crowded with tall buildings, business centers and government buildings. The arts and culture of Thonburi provide a great sense of pride and identity for its inhabitants. Also, though mostly ignored by present day tourists, the present tourism plan includes promoting it to the public and making it a lively and well-known place once more.

As a community inhabited by people of different races for more than 400 years and also a foreign trade centre, inhabitants of different ethnicities and religions built their own religious sites for their religious ceremonies. Moreover, most people followed religious beliefs which had been handed down from generation to generation so that building a religious centre would bring great merit to its builders.

Religious sites on the Thonburi riverbank of four major religions reflect the different faiths and beliefs of various ethnic groups in the Thonburi community. They have devoted their property, money and strength to build spiritual centers and sites for performing their religious ceremonies in accordance with their own beliefs. How the people over those four centuries have thus succeeded makes for an interesting case study. A study of social and cultural contexts that have influenced the construction of different religious sites may provide clarity as to how people in the past could show their faith freely and fully without disparaging others of different beliefs. Another point of this project is to find to what degree some religious beliefs and art styles might have affected the others.

The findings in overview

All religious places of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thonburi community located at the Chao Phraya riverside and on Khlong Bangkok Yai were entirely supported for construction, establishment, restoration and renovation by Thai kings in the period of Thonburi and the early period of Rattanakosin. In addition, noblemen with high influence and prosperous economic status in the early Rattanakosin era such as the Bunnag family, the Kalayanamitr family and the Sripen family built, restored and renovated several monasteries in Thonburi. The religious places of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in the Thonburi community for which the kings and the noblemen provided support for construction, establishment, restoration and renovation were as follows.

King Taksin Maharat renovated the monasteries in Thonburi including Wat Bang Yi Ruea or Wat Rajkrueh Worawiharn, Wat Hong AwasWiharn or Wat Hong Rattanaram Ratchaworawiharn, Wat Chaeng or Wat

Arun Ratchawararam Ratchawaramahawihan, and also conferred lands in the Thonburi community area to build Santa Cruz Church as the church of Roman Catholic Christianity in B.E. 2312 (A.D. 1769).

Somdet Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok, King Rama I, established and renovated ancient monasteries previously existent since Ayutthaya that were located in the Thonburi community area including Wat Tai Talad or Wat MoleeLokayaram, Wat Sala Sina or Wat Khuhasawan, Wat Chaeng or Wat Arun Ratchawararam Ratchawaramahawihan, and Wat Plab or Wat Ratchasittharam. Moreover, Phra Bat Somdet Phraphutthayotfa Chulalok also conferred 60 rais of lands near to Wangderm Palace to Luang Si Naowarat who was of the lineage of Tan Chek Ahmad (who later was Phraya Chula Ratchamontri 5), who socialized in this area and built a religious place for Shia Islam here called KudiLuang (KudiLuang was later moved to Soi KudiLuang, PhranNok Road, Ban Chang Lor Subdistrict since the Royal Thai Navy required this place and requested to exchange the area in 1947).

In addition, King Rama I also restored and renovated monasteries in Thonburi community such as Wat Sang Krajai, Wat Chinorasaram and Wat Hiran Ruchi.

In the period of Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai, King Rama II, the king followed his father in renovating Wat Arun Ratchawararam Waramahawihan and Wat Hong Rattanaram in Thonburi.

In the period of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua, King Rama III, Thailand was secure politically and in government and economy, with more foreign trade with the countries in the Asia region and also western merchants entering to secure trade agreements. The foreign trade generated considerable additional income to the country, resulting in availability of much money for preserving religious buildings; monasteries were restored, renovated and newly built. Those in Thonburi community restored and renovated by Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua, King Rama III included Wat Arun Ratchawararam Ratchawaramahawihan, Wat MoleeLokayaram, and Wat Kruawan Worawiharn.

In the meantime, the noblemen in this period were also devout, turning to build, restore, and renovate the monasteries in Thonburi community area as follows.

The Bunnag family built Wat Buppharam, Wat Prayoon Wongsawas, Wat Phichai Yatikaram, Wat Anongkharam, Wat Nuannoradit, and Wat PradooChimplee. The Kalayanamitr family built Wat Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara, while the Sripen family restored and renovated Wat Intharam Worawiharn.

From field study of religious places of different religions in the Thonburi community area, in Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, it was found that the architecture, sculpture and paintings for religious places of all three religions were delicately crafted. At present, the precious heritage of Thonburi people and of the entire nation shows that the construction and/or the restoration and renovation of such religious places had required large budgets, indicating the faith of their sponsors. Now the religious places of the three religions in Thonburi

community are more than worship places for local people, as Thai and foreign tourists continually come for visits and worship every day.

Field study also revealed that the religious places of different religions were closely connected both geographically and in their community roles.

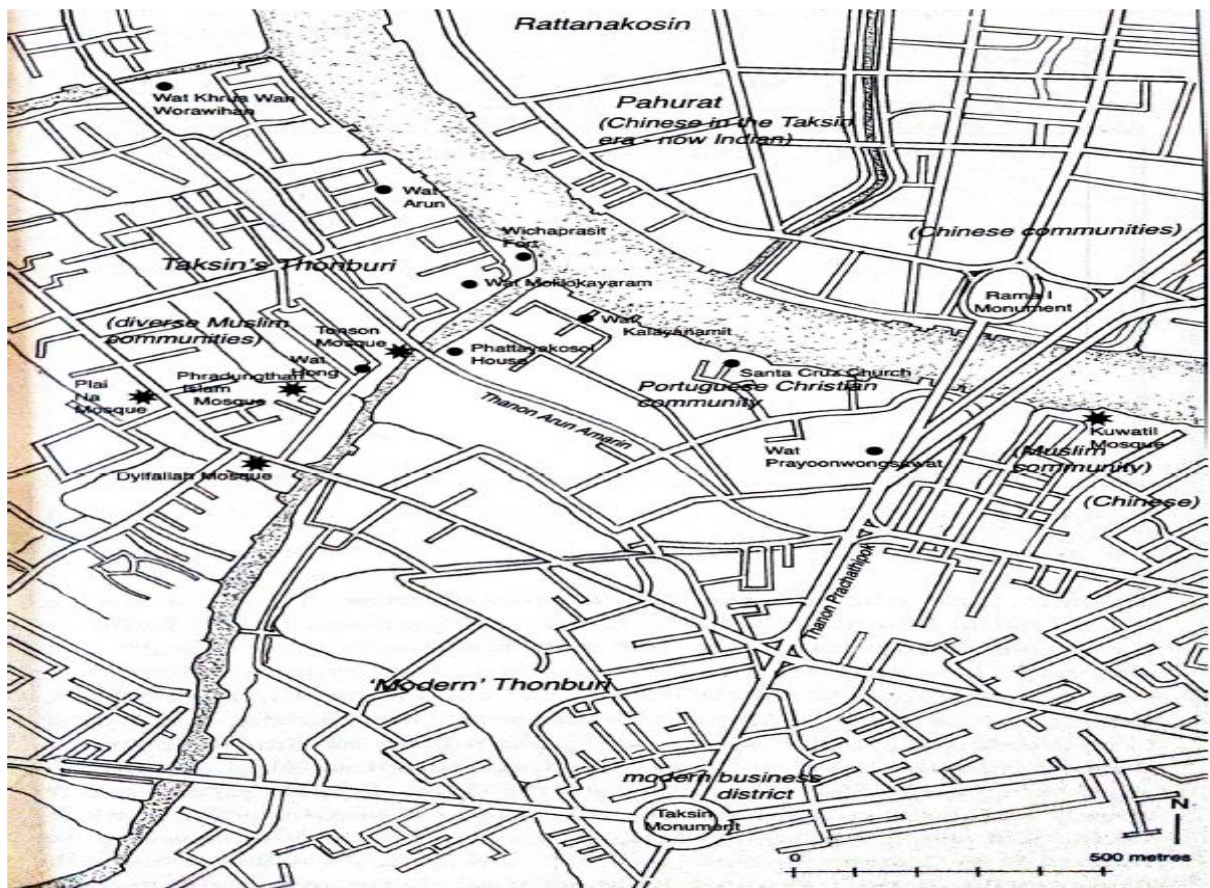**Layout of Religious Places Located Outside Thonburi Ancient City Wall**

Figure 1: Thonburi: traces from the King Taksin and early Rattakosin eras

Source: King, R. (2011)

Thonburi community has been revealed as a focus for different ethnic groups of Thai, Chinese, Western, Portugese, and Muslim backgrounds. These have lived together peacefully even though there would be dissimilar religions and beliefs, with their own different religious places, for several hundred years. Thonburi community has thus come to display diversity and dissimilarity of cultural and social contexts unlike other Thai communities.

From documentary study, the interviews of the experts and the elders in the community and from field study and observation of cultural and social contexts influencing religious arts of different religious places on the

waterfront in the Thonburi area, the following sections set out the study's findings classified in terms of the individual religions.

Buddhism (Theravada Sect)

Wat Intharam Worawiharn

The former name of Wat Intharam Worawiharn was Wat Bang Yi Ruea Nuea or Bang Yi RueaNok. This monastery was an ancient monastery existent since the time of Ayutthaya. Two big renovations were done in the periods of Thonburi and King Rama III.

Wat Intharam Worawiharn continued as a royal monastery but its condition had much declined. In the reign of King Rama III, Phraya Srisahathep (Thongpeng Sripen) restored, renovated and newly built permanent structures and monks' dwellings, from Phra Ubosot (the hall of the temple), Phra Vihara (the Buddha image hall), sermon hall in the monastery, stupa, pagoda, Tripitaka hall, bell tower, and both small and large monks' houses, etc. After that, he presented it to Phra Bat Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua as the third-grade royal monastery to be named as Wat Intharam Worawiharn until the present.

Wat Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara

When Chao Phraya Nikorn Bodinthorn built Wat Kalayanamitr, Rama III contributed a royal Buddha image hall and gave aid to build "Phra Ruek and PhraTo" on May 18, 1837 as the principal Buddha image in the temple. This Buddha image was in Maravichai posture, 11.75 m. long, in the posture of meditation and 15.44 m. height. The king's intention was to simulate Ayutthaya so that PhraTo was available outside the city wall like in Wat Phananchoeng.

Wat Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara has been a monastery displaying magnificence of artistic work from the early Rattanakosin period. The diversity of the artistic works inside the monastery has manifested the integration of Thai traditional artistic work inherited since Ayutthaya times including the application of Chinese arts for decoration within the monastery, resulting in the diversity of its artistic works.

The cultural and social context influencing religious art at the Thonburi banks of the Chao Phraya River of Theravada Buddhism includes the following.

1. The kings and noblemen in the period of Thonburi and early Rattanakosin played important roles in establishment, building, restoration and renovation.

2. The economic status of the country promoted the establishment, building, restoration and renovation of Buddhist monasteries, particularly in the period of King Rama III when the country had better economic conditions due to the availability of more foreign trade. Wat Intharam Worawiharn and Wat Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara have been magnificent monasteries and elements of the cultural heritage of that time.

3. Earlier Ancient Tradition. For the kings, there were royal duties as the supporters of religion and artistic works as well as the religious belief of Buddhists that monastery construction is of great religious importance. In the period of Thonburi to early Rattanakosin, restoration and renovation of a monastery was very

popular. Wat Intharam Worawiharn and Wat Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara are models of this activity in that era.

Buddhism (Mahayana Sect)

Kian-Un-Keng Shrine

The present Kian Un Keng Shrine was built by overseas Chinese from Hokkien province and of the lineage of Simasathien (Sae-Sim) and Tantivejkul (Sae-Tan). There was no evidence of the commencement year for construction. However the crossbeam under the roof was inscribed in Chinese language to be completed for construction in spring, the 25th Year of the reign of Phra Cho Gu$\bar{a}$ngxù (the Emperor Guangju of the Qing Dynasty who held the throne during A.D. 1875-1908, thus corresponding with 1902 in the reign of King Rama V of Rattanakosin

The cultural and social context influencing the art of a religious place in Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism was as follows.

1. Formerly, Thonburi was the harbor location of the junk trade from China and the navigators invited the Taoist gods such as Ma Chow, Guan Yu God, and Chow Sue Kong God to be embarked. The shrine was built for worship. Later when Mahayana Buddhism was further propagated in China, Chinese people settled down in Thailand and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were accepted for respect. The principal god changed to be the god in Taoism, Bodhisattva Guan Yin, together with sculptures of sacred objects of 18 saints and other Bodhisattvas. Later, due to proximity to Theravada Buddhism, there was Theravada influence and the enshrinement of Buddha images.

2. The shrines were built by wealthy overseas Chinese who were close to the royal court and by several descendants who have served under the crown until the present.

3. The ceremony in the shrine is still performed as in other Chinese shrines, jointly with the Hokkien Chinese shrine at the Chao Phraya riverside, also Loy Krathong Festival together with Chow Sue Kong Shrine. However, the rites of the donors of both families have been performed according to Theravada tradition, since the male descendants went into priesthood in a Theravada Buddhism monastery.

Roman Catholic Christianity

Santa Cruz Church

Santa Cruz Church has been the only Roman Catholic Christian church and monastery in the Thonburi community area and was established in 1796. Politics and administration highly affected this monastery from its establishment in the Thonburi period to the early period of Rattanakosin.

The cultural and social contexts influencing religious art of Roman Catholic Christianity (Santa Cruz Church) included the following.

1. The King played a very important role in being the patron since giving the land and money for church construction (in the Thonburi period). Later when the Catholic community expanded, the King in the early period of Rattanakosin conferred additional lands on the Bangkok riverbank but two big conflicts on belief and practice

occurred in the periods of Thonburi and King Rama III, resulting in the exile of Catholic Fathers out of the country.

2. Religious art at Santa Cruz Church was completely influenced by western styles since the Abbots and Catholic Bishops in the era for construction of all three buildings of the Church were Europeans.

3. Since the period of Thonburi to the early period of Rattanakosin, KudiJeen area and Santa Cruz Church played a very important role in the national economy since they constituted the commercial region of the westerners. However when the missionary center was transferred from this Church to Assumption Cathedral with the construction of Charoen Krung Road, the role of Santa Cruz Church lessened.

Islam

Tonson Mosque

Tonson Mosque, KudiYai or Bangkok Yai Mosque, was the first important mosque of Thonburi community, built by the Muslim community who travelled to Thonburi following the Ayutthaya period. The political and administrative contexts in different periods then played crucial roles in ways of livelihood, mutual activities, particularly for Muslims of Sunni and Shia lineage. Tonson Mosque became a center. The religious activities performed at Tonson Mosque developed in different periods along with community prosperity. Tonson Mosque has been very important for the history, settlement, and significance of Muslim ethnic groups in Thonburi.

Social Context of Tonson Mosque. The Mosque has been very significant for Thonburi Muslims from birth until the point of death. Muslims not just utilize the Mosque for religious activity, as it is also significant as the vehicle for relationships and connections of Muslims. The utilization of the Mosque expresses coexistence in the society of Muslims. Everyone must give it priority and adhere to the mutual way of morality with consciously held norms.

Cultural Context. The crucial role of the Mosque in space utilization for religious activity has been divided into three main sections.

1. Altar, Mihrabor Mihrok which is the section for the imam to introduce the ritual.

2. Big hall space area for religious activity of Muslim men.

3. The surrounding area is used for women's worship and for catering for the religious ceremony on significant days.

Islam is a religion revealed to mankind with the intention of presenting a peaceful life where the infinite compassion and mercy of God manifests on earth. God calls all people to live by the moral values He sets so that compassion, mercy, peace and love can be experienced all over the world.

Bang Luang Mosque

The religious place for Kudi Khao Muslims is located at the waterside of Khlong Bang Luang or Bang Luang Village. The book of "physical composition" of Rattanakosin identified that Bang Luang Mosque was built in the period of King Rama I's succeeding to the throne, during 1782-1799. A Muslim millionaire merchant

descending from the Ayutthaya and Thonburi periods named Toe Yi gathered the Muslims to construct a Mosque in the village (Ministry of Education, 2001), as the result of higher density of Muslims at the Tonson Mosque area or KudiYai community. Tonson Mosque could not support the religious activity of all the Muslims who then broadened and established a new community on the opposite area of Khlong Bang Luang towards Wat Hong. The administrative and political context of Bang Luang Mosque was not as outstanding as that of Tonson Mosque since it was an extention from Tonson Mosque.

Social Context.Bang Luang Mosque or Kudi Khao community emerged due to the expansion of Muslims of KudiYai community or Tonson Mosque. Bang Luang Mosque was the mosque of a Muslim community who emigrated from Ayutthaya after being defeated and destroyed by Burma (Phiphit Phesat, Luang, 1949). Muslims who had depended on selling goods from rafts at Tambon Hua Laem, Hua Lor, and Khlong Ta Khian, and who accounted for hundreds of habitations, evacuated and withdrew their rafts and floated downstream to escape and dwell at Tambon Bang Luang from Tambon Bangkok Yai to Wat WeruRachin on both sides. When all of these Muslims congregated in Thonburi, Bangkok Yai Mosque was insufficient for their religious needs. Taan Toe Yi and his group accordingly built another Mosque at Tambon Khlong Bang Luang, opposite to Bangkok Yai Mosque (Forum Committee, 2001). One part of the raft Indians were eminent merchants who were the patrons of Bang Luang Mosque. Kudi Khao community was subsequently highly developed and prosperous. It was overcrowded, dense and tightly inhabited with all parts of the community area well used. There was generosity with mutual assistance and local peace. The community of Bang Luang Mosque had a good economic situation and life in the community, both on land and in the canals, and was mostly a commercial community including Thais, Chinese and Muslims trading peacefully.

Cultural Context.Bang Luang Mosque played a role and had practices similar to those of Tonson Mosque. However the utilization of interior space of the Mosque was slightly different, possibly owing to the features, style and space inside the building which was smaller than that of Tonson Mosque. Bang Luang Mosque has divided its interior space as follows.

1. Altar, Mihrab or Miah Rob are the section where the imam introduces the ritual.

2.The interior area is divided into two sections, the larger for men and a smaller curtained area for women.

3．An exterior balcony area at the facade of Mosque is the place for meeting and association of Muslims who travel to the Mosque.

The proximity of Bang Luang Mosque to Muslim habitations is close, and the Mosque has become a part of Muslims' living according to the mode of Islamic culture.

The following turns to the lessons to be drawn from this long excursion through the history, architecture and artistic expressions of the six cases explored here. These lessons will mostly relate to three themes: (1) Thonburi as demonstration of the cultural diversity, tolerance and accommodation that seemingly runs through Thai society, both of the past and present; (2) the richness and diversity of culture, arts and crafts manifested in the places of Thonburi and the genius of creativity that this would seem to manifest; and (3) the challenges that

all this presents to the present – how to protect the culture of Thonburi and to conserve (or otherwise) its physical heritage, and whether or not to 'market' it as either cultural display or tourist park.

It is worth commenting that the six cases addressed here are only six of many. There are numerous other wat, each with its own history and memories; there is also the Shi'a Phradungtham Islam Mosque expressing a very different image of Islam; there are survival ethnic communities–Portuguese also various Muslim from a variety of places and times. Thonburi can be seen as essentially a milieu for the bridging of multiple levels of difference. So there is always the question: how is this to be represented and thence presented to multiple audiences – the local Thonburi dweller, the gazing tourist, both the indigenous and the international scholar of Thonburi and of Thailand's genius of reconciling differences.

Discussion: Lessons from Thonburi

The present task is to consider what this extended travel through a few places of Thonburi can tell us about the cultures and arts of Thailand more generally and about the tasks presently before the society. What does it all really tell us? The following is in three parts: a discussion on how Thonburi manifests a multicultural tolerance or accommodation running through the society, then a similar discussion on the richness and diversity of artistic inventiveness and production revealed through the present displays of Thonburi, and finally consideration of how Thonburi's richness is to be 'managed'. This last theme turns the discussion to the always-vexed question of the intrusion of global tourism and media into local community and culture.

Thonburi as emblem of Thai culture: tolerance, acceptance

Ayutthaya, on the historical evidence, was mostly a society of the tolerance of diversity, seemingly unique in Asia (c.f. China, Japan in that era). There were Muslim communities; the French, Portuguese and Dutch had their trading communities and religious practices; relics of their settlements attest to their significance in the city and its empire.

Something of this Siamese tolerance and accommodation of diversity was lost, however, in the paranoia of the Thonburi era. King Taksin, it would seem, was initially tolerant, especially of the Portuguese Christian community that had fled Ayutthaya following the 1767 destruction, permitting them to settle in Kudi Jeen immediately adjoining the new royal capital; however, in an era of the constant threat of Burmese re-invasion and annihilation, the attitude turned reactionary. There was subsequently a level of tolerance with the early Chakri monarchs, although the real transformation came with the polymath Mongkut – his interaction with Monseigneur Pallegoix is an extraordinary incident in the intersections of cultures, though not unique in the context of nineteenth century Siam. There were similar intersections of Siamese monarchy with its Muslim collaborators, dating from the Ayutthaya monarchy's dependence on the Persian-Shia family of Bunnag (subsequently Buddhist). There was also always the Chinese intersection, dating from the Tai insertion into the previous Mon-Khmer world and expressed in the hybridity of Si Satchanali, subsequently Sukhothai and thence

Ayutthaya. With the early Chakri monarchs, the Chinese insertion came to effectively define both economy and society, perhaps most notably in the era of Rama III and his entanglement in the Chinese junk trade.

An earlier study of Thonburi (Srithammasak, 2011) has observed the diverse communities of KudiJeen, with special attention to the Portuguese-Eurasian settlement around Santa Cruz. Nana's focus was on the lifestyles and built fabrics of the Portuguese, Siamese, Chinese and Muslim communities, on the clear evidence of their peaceful co-existence and mutual accommodation to the present, also on the social processes that might seem to have enabled this benign outcome. The present study, by contrast, has focused on how this tolerance might be seen as reflected in the emblematic religious architecture and artistic representations of the communities.

The intersections and hybridities of diverse communities are brilliantly expressed in the built fabric of Thonburi, at both macro and micro scales. At the macro level, there is especially the evidence of juxtapositions: Theravada wat with Islamic masjid, then the seeming anomalies of the Mahayana Kian Un Keng Shrine and the Catholic Santa Cruz church. These instances of juxtaposition of the incongruous are not unique, however – there are other cases. In Dusit, just beyond the ancient city's third moat, there is St Francis Xavier church adjoining Wat Rachathiwas (also, not far beyond, the Dusit palace complex). Attention should also be drawn to Chiang Mai's Wat Ket community and its intersecting communities of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs, as well as a multi-ethnic population of Chinese, Thai, Indian, Westerners and aborigines. Here, however, real interest must focus on the political processes of negotiation that have underlain the Wat Ket reconciling of mutual interests that have brought the diverse communities together (Ungjitpisal, 2017). (On similar processes of reconciliation in Thonburi, there is the work of Srithammasak, 2011).

It is, however, at Thonburi's micro level that the extraordinary genius of Thai accommodation and hybridity seems to explode. As example, there are the intersecting threads of Khmer form, Thai-Theravada themes and symbolism, also Chinese porcelain decoration of Wat Arun, reflecting the eclecticism of Rama III's reign. At a smaller scale, there is the story from the description board of Wat Hongrattanaram Ratchaworawihan: "In 'Ubosot' there are the combination of Chinese and European style stucco reliefs adjoining the door and window arches of the Ubosot – some of the finest of their kind." Note also the synthesizing practices manifested in the Mahayana (Taoist) Kian Un Keng Shrine – bits of everything seem to be assembled, including Buddha images from Theravada. More widely, there is the infusion of Brahmin-Hindu ritual and practices into Theravada Buddhism, though this is certainly not exclusive to Thonburi but more of the broader culture itself.

The block to these flows of belief, ritual, practice and artistic expression, however, comes with the "religions of the book" – both Christianity and Islam are exclusive religions, excluding "alien" elements that might derive from other beliefs and faiths. Yet, in Thonburi, neither can escape the hybridizing power of the wider culture. So we note the extraordinary Bang Luang Mosque, a Theravada wat in all but its ritualistic accouterments; even the decoration to the Mihrab is distinctively Theravada and would not be out-of-place in Wat PhraKaeo. One can also observe the distinctive decoration on the old, Ayutthaya era Mihrab that is now in Tonson Mosque – also reflective of an older Theravada.

The exclusivity of Islam's practice in Thonburi may have been far from complete, however. Thonson Mosque in earlier times catered for both Sunni and Shi'a sects, effectively giving the lie to the great dividing rift of Islam. Subsequently, however, there was the building of the Shi'a Phradungtham Islam Mosque – its present building, dating from 1979, is distinctive in its styling, with references to Shi'a mosques in Baghdad. Although the divisions of the Muslim world can be read from the soi of Thonburi, all live in harmony (King, 2011).

Though explicit Buddhist representation will not be permitted to intrude into the spaces of Islam, the reverse will certainly occur. So there are the representations of raft Muslims from the past in the murals of PhraVihara Noi of Wat Kalayanamitr – scarcely exceptional, however, as the murals of Thai temples are so often outstanding for their depictions of everyday life of the past.

Where as the Islamic mosques will look to the long traditions of Sunni Egypt or Shi'a Baghdad, the Catholic churches of Thailand will turn to Europe, to some extent to Portugal but more notably to France. That said, the location of the Catholic community being in Siam was the inescapable reality, so the second building of Santa Cruz church was a curious blending of Chinese and Ubosot style, though also with its Western allusions. Subsequently, however, the Catholic churches in Siam turned unequivocally to European models, and accordingly the present Santa Cruz makes no reference to its Thonburi context – while distinctively Catholic, it could be anywhere. While Theravada, Mahayana and Islamic references are absent from Santa Cruz, there is evidence of a Thai aesthetic surfacing in the church complex. A Thai episteme can be characterized (caricatured?) as one of relatively indiscriminate collecting – the uncritical assembling of the often incongruous. A Theravada aesthetic can be characterized somewhat similarly – collecting, assembling but scarcely assimilating. It might be seen as a klepto-culture, on which more anon.

An aesthetic of collection and display also runs through Catholicism – statues of saints, relics, emblems and symbols abound. The Theravada and Catholic aesthetics would seem especially to collide in the wonderfully agglomerative grounds of Santa Cruz. Diverse groupings of sculptures depict beliefs and ideas from Catholic Christianity–the aesthetic could well be Theravada, though the images are Christian.

Thonburi as creativity

As well as lessons in fine arts and underlying aesthetic-ontologies, the extraordinary richness of Thonburi also presents lessons in architecture and its differences. Thonburi can be seen as a museum of architectural differences and their underlying epistemologies-ontologies. An example arises with the relatively unique feature of Wat Kalayanamitr in its parti (ground-plan schema) for the Phra Vihara, with the symmetry of the Three Balconies Pavilion maintained in the flanking Chinese style pavilions and the approach path. The symmetry has the effect of highlighting its more common opposite, whereby the elements of a temple complex will each maintain a symmetry in itself, though those elements will then be distributed randomly over the site – the classic case would be the Grand Palace complex, also within that complex the parti of the Wat PhraKaeo. However, this disordered distribution is equally manifested in the two Theravada complexes examined here (the symmetry of Wat Kalayanamitr's Phra Vihara not withstanding).

There is also a history lesson derivable from the European leanings of Santa Cruz. It is interesting to observe the early Catholic churches of Thonburi-Bangkok. In addition to Santa Cruz there is Saint Francis Xavier church on Soi11 of Thanon Samsen, also Kalawa church (Holy Rosary church) off Charoen Krung. While there are clear derivations from European architectural thought of the nineteenth century, specific models are elusive – simply, these priests and bishops and their architectural helpers were clearly of limited competence and one could say that their ventures into the architecture of the metropole lost something in translation. Simply, this is not "great architecture" – nor, for that matter, is most of the Western, Neo-classical architecture of the Rama V endeavors to signify a Siamese entry into the realm of (Western, imperialist) civilization. Again, much is lost in translation. However, there is both a positive and a negative spin to be placed on this appropriation of Europe into Siam. The positive is that Siamese culture was sufficiently open to ideas, cross-currents, diversity and "otherness" represented in these traces from European – there is the revelation that the openness and tolerance of Siamese minds and culture persisted. It is worth noting that this openness first really blossomed in the era of Mongkut, subsequently with his son Chulalongkorn. The negative spin relates to the manifest failure to seek any architectural synthesis of Europe and Siam. Certainly there is the bizarre architectural ambiguity and layered symbolism of the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall in the Grand Palace complex (1876-1882) of the English architect John Chinitz. More creative is the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (1907-1915) of Italian architects Annibale Rigotti and Mario Temagno, bringing neo-classical elements, each symmetrical in its own terms but assembled in the discordant, anti-symmetrical aesthetic of a Theravada temple complex (King, 2011). A more open approach to conflicting architectural visions had to await the architecture of the post-1933 Peoples' Party.

While Thonburi did not become central to the architectural and wider cultural experimentation of the post-1933 era, it nevertheless presents as an extraordinarily rich display of the nineteenth century and its unresolved dilemmas. Again, however, we lack both discursive academic engagement and critical popularinterpretation.

Thonburi as living museum and the tourist experience

Passengers on the Chao Phraya river tourist boats assiduously photograph the architectural sites on the Thonburi riverbank; they might also alight to visit Wat Arun, while some will take boat tours through the Thonburi khlongs. However, they are more likely to visit places on the opposite, Bangkok bank: River City, Wat Pho, the Grand Palace and Sanam-Luang, Khaosan, despite Thonburi's richer displays of diverse communities and lifestyles, similarly its diverse architectures and its artistic riches.

Thonburi can be viewed as lacking information-based marketing for cultural tourism – there is no over-arching, integrated, Internet-accessible source of information, nor an effective learning centre where one can find detailed information, guidance and ideas for walking tours of the area. This could be seen as a general complaint as the Rattanakosin bank is also lacking systematically presented and accessible information. One could reasonably suggest that the location for a learning centre could be Wat Arun, as the most visible, recognizable and presently accessible monument on the river's banks. There is the question of how the area

might be presented. It might first be seen as a tourist district, in the sense of the historic centres of European cities — of places like Florence, Dresden or Toulouse. The difficulty for Thonburi, however, is in its lack of local tourist accommodation and hence of tourist facilities — hotels, backpacker hostels, restaurants, souvenir shops. These things may be nearby, with the facilities of Khaosan Road, also hotels lining the river; however, these are not in the putative tourist district nor readily accessible to it — one cannot simply take a stroll to the places of cultural interest.

There is also the model of the accidental theme park. The historic centre of Rattanakosin, comprising Wat Pho, the Grand Palace and nearby markets might be seen as such. King (2017) has identified the lower Sukhumvit area from around Soi 3 to Soi 11 as an accidental theme park where the "theme" relates to cultural and ethnic diversity and to the same issues of diversity and tolerance that have been identified as defining characteristics of the Thonburi-KudiJeen district. So, if the KudiJeen district is to be marketed as an accidental theme park, what might be the "themes"? At one level it might be seen as an architectural theme park. It might also be promoted as a great, albeit informal art gallery, where it presents the advantage of the diverse art being presented in situ-context is uncompromised. At the deeply anthropological level, there is the issue of ethnic, religious and community diversity, also the history of the tolerance and mutual accommodation that has enabled the peaceful coexistence that so characterizes Thonburi. At an even deeper level, there is the more philosophical question of a Siamese (or is it Theravada?) ontology-world view-that has enabled this acceptance of difference. (It is interesting that present Thai culture can accommodate differences in beliefs, ideas and religion, also in ethnicity, but not in political aspirations and underlying material interests. KudiJeen offers no insights on this dilemma, nor does lower Sukhumvit.)

A third model is that of a living museum — that is, a place and its community that invites the visitor to enter, to observe the community's ongoing life and to contemplate the lessons that the visitor might draw from their experience. It is a dangerous model, with its tendency to veer into a sort of anthropological Disneyland. It is also hard to find exemplars in the context of Siam-Thailand, though there are rural villages that lead to insights. King & Dinkoksung (2014) recount the case of Ubon Ratchathani province's Ban Pa-Ao village and its successful promotion as a craft tourism village; this, however, is able to thrive on the commercial benefits of its brass and silk crafts but also on its isolation — its tourist numbers are sufficient to advance its reputation but not enough to swamp it.

The living museum model does not sit well with the present Bangkok authorities and their national government. There has been the long-running saga of the Pom Mahakan community's resistance to the city's dream to evict this community nestled against the city's ancient wall and the Pom (fort) Mahakan in order to clear away an informal (disordered, arguably illegal) community to make way for a landscaped park as expression of the city authority's idea of a well ordered, Western-style park to attract some imagined tourists, albeit with no evidence of what such tourists might seek. The Pom Mahakan debacle has simply revealed the inability of government in Thailand to comprehend both the cultural conservation task, the linked task of tourism promotion, and the wider issue of the city's advancement and development (Herzfeld, 2016).

It is unfortunate that the living museum idea would seem to offer the most appropriate approach for the presentation of Thonburi-KudiJeen to a wider audience of both passing-by and scholarly tourists, yet it clearly stands against the agendas of both city and national governments.

The interrogation of Thonburi sites has revealed no task of architectural conservation, nor of preservation or restoration or rebuilding. These ideas are seemingly alien to Thai culture-temples are "ongoing", surviving, evolving, constantly being re-made. Extraordinarily, as the case of such a place as Si Satchanalai reveals, its evolution can even encompass a fluidity between religions and world views – from Khmer to Mon (or is it Tai?) to Theravada Buddhist. As Thonburi reveals so clearly, if a temple (or church) becomes decrepit, it will simply be replaced. Memories of the past might persist, perhaps in some written form, and a (Buddhist) image might be treasured (or else simply remembered and replicated), but the built fabric will simply pass away – there will be no sentiment and very little memory. The Thai urban world simply evolves – moves on.

Conclusion

From the introductory discussion, the following question was derived, both motivating and guiding the present project: does the Thonburi community manifest significant key values that might explain its historical success in multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious tolerance and co-habitation, thence to reveal if there are lessons to be drawn from this success regarding ways of living together, also to become integrated into existing community structures?

It would seem reasonable to assert that these objectives have been met in the present project. Far more difficult, however, is the project's underlying question, with its interrogation of underlying values and of their potential for translation to other levels where conflict prevails in Thailand's society.

Values

The encouraging message from the present study is that there would seem to be a value of acceptance and tolerance of difference underlying the peaceful coexistence evidenced in the Thonburi-KudiJeen communities. An initial suspicion might be that this is linked in some way with the meditative, contemplative nature of Theravada Buddhism, although this may be a somewhat romantic delusion as a predominance of Theravada has not ensured similar cultures of tolerance in either Myanmar or Sri Lanka. One factor may have been the pathway for Theravada's entry into Siam: whereas the religion came to Myanmar and Sri Lanka in part through missionary conversion, in Siam it was more through infiltration via Mon, Tai (via Chiang Saen) and Khmer, which may in part have accounted for the assimilating character of Thai Theravada. This argument, however, could reasonably be seen as simplistic and drawing a very long bow. Certainly Thai Theravada has been assimilating, as well revealed in the fluidity of the arts of Thonburi, although this could have much to do with the region's pre-Buddhist animism.

A more likely factor might be political. Sri Satchanalai-Sukhothai was not a great religious polity of an agrarian empire in the manner of China or Angkor, the centre of its world. Rather it was an entrepôt, on regional

trade routes; Ayutthaya was even more a cosmopolitan centre of trade and a port city, then Bangkok even more so again. To be tolerant of different races and their religions made good commercial sense. It is also worth noting the roles of key political leaders: Narai in Ayutthaya's great age of international contact, also Mongkut and Chulalongkorn in a similar era of Bangkok. Also significant is a relative absence of cases where political leaders have invoked religion to press claims against rivals or external enemies – certainly both Taksin and Rama I turned to religion for dynastic legitimation, as neither could mount any claim of royal descent or legitimacy nor legitimately muster religious argument against adversaries or to gather support against external threats.

These various arguments may have a slight claim to feasibility; however, they are also tenuous. Simply, Thonburi highlights characteristics in a Thai ontology or worldview that is significantly at variance from the cultures of other societies, including other Theravada Buddhist societies, so that it can reasonably be seen as a defining cultural value. To further speculate on the origins of this difference can be seen as a task for cultural anthropology.

Translation to other social plateaus

If we accept, as something of a working hypothesis, that there is some value of tolerance and the acceptance of difference running through a Thai worldview, then we might move to the second part of the present project's research question: is there any potential for the translation of the insights from Thonburi to other levels or plateaus of social life? To state the question differently: why do we have Thailand's modern history of bitter political contestation, violence and state-sanctioned murder and massacre, most notably in the post-1945 period – the violence variously of 1973, 1976, 1992, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014 …?

In one sense the answer to this question must be obvious: the modern contestations and their violence relate to issues of material interests and political power. The answer can be simplified: the battles of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were in some measure inter-generational (students and workers against a royalist-military elite – who is to "own" the state?) while those of more recent decades have been overwhelmingly about the material interests of the Bangkok elite against those of the regional provinces.

One can, for a moment, take an analytical framework from dialectical materialism, whereby the societal base is seen as the economy (material interests of rival classes in society), with the political and cultural realms (with religion located in the latter) as super-structural to the economic "structure". In such a view, the economic determines the political and the cultural (the religious); further, in that view the cultural cannot determine the economic. It is, however, a view that is open to challenge (King, 1996) – the realm of beliefs (values, religion) can undermine the base as so forcefully demonstrated in the troubles in Thailand's deep South.

Indeed, the troubles of Thailand's deep South draw attention to another lesson from Thonburi. In the southern provinces, the coexistence of Muslims and Buddhists is deeply troubled and marked by violence over decades; yet Thonburi is the exemplar for Muslim-Buddhist mutual accommodation in a culture of tolerance and respect. While the South may not manifest the determinative role of the economic sphere, it clearly reveals the political – the more recent deterioration of the South can reasonably be linked to the post-2002 campaign

against the Muslim South under the Thaksin Shinawatra regime, using the religion-dissidence argument to reinforce that regime's claimed championship of the Bangkok elite (contra its actual dependence on the provinces of the North and Northeast). So, again, it may be the economic that is ultimately determinative.

To return to the question: does the Thonburi revelation of the role of the cultural sphere suggest a pathway to addressing the rifts at deeper levels (plateaus) of present Thai society? The task in modern Thailand might therefore be to weave the sphere of cultural values into those of the economic and the political as violence. This cannot be a short-term project, but rather must proceed through both the formal (school and university) education systems a need for substantial reform but also through that more informal system of education that occurs through "theme parks" and the observation of real lives "living museums" in the sense advocated above.

One must ultimately place some hope on the tourism system, for both domestic and international "intruders" into the dilemmas and instabilities of Thailand. A constant complaint in the discussions above relates to the absence of discursive engagement in the tensions that Thonburi-KudiJeen reveals and in their manifest resolution. The task of the tourism enterprise can be seen as to reflect on the brilliance of KudiJeen (and elsewhere Chiang Mai's Wat Ket) as revelatory of a nobler realm of Thai values and their expression.

References

Herzfeld, M. (2016). *Siege of the Spirits: Communiy and Polity in Bangkok.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

King, R. (1996). *Emancipating Space: Geography, Architecture, and Urban Design.* New York: Guilford Press.

King, R. (2011). *Reading Bangkok.* Singapore: NUS Press.

King, R. (2017). An accidental Bangkok theme park. *Tourism Geographies An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 19(5), 717-733. [Doi:10.1080/14616688.2017.1320583]

King, R., & Dinkoksung, S. (2014). Ban Pa-Ao, pro-poor tourism and uneven development. *Tourism Geographies An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 16(4), 687-703. [DOI:10.1080/14616688.2013.865071]

Ministry of Education. (2001). *Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development.* Bangkok: Ministry of Education.

Phiphit Phesat, Luang. (1949). *History of Bang Luang Mosque (Kudi Khao).* Bangkok: n.p.

Santa Cruz Church. (1996a). *9 Decades of Santa Cruz Convent Book, A.D. 1906-1996.* Bangkok: AP Printing.

Santa Cruz Church. (1996b). *80 Years of Santa Cruz Church.* Bangkok: AP Printing.

Santa Cruz Church. (1996c). *Wat Santa Cruz, Wat KudiJeen.* Bangkok: AP Printing.

Sathiensut, L. (1986). *History of Chinese Culture.* Bangkok: Kor Kai Publisher.

Srithammasak, N. (2011). *Thonburi-KudiJeen as conciliatory communities.* (Ph.D Thesis), Silpakorn University, Bnagkok.

The Chronicle. Section 65, the Chronicle of Thonburi, Phan Chanthanumas (Cherm) Version (2480). Bangkok: Daily Mail Publisher.

Ungjitpisal, E. (2017). *Guidelines for community conservation and development: The traditional communities of Wat Ket, Chiang Mai Province.* (Ph.D Thesis), Silpakorn University, Bangkok.