

# Nationalism and the Modernization of Thai Architectural Education at Chulalongkorn University in the 1920s and 1930s

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the modernization of Thai architecture through the establishment of Thailand's first architecture school, its curriculum, its architecture, and the pivotal role of the first generation of Thai architecture professors, who had been educated in England and France. It demonstrates how the establishment of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, stemmed from the Siamese government's growing nationalism that aimed to end foreign domination in both Siam's construction industry and international diplomacy. The process, however, involved the adoption of a western curriculum — which was considered modern — and adapting it to be more Thai for nationalist purposes. This also required support by employing a foreign professor in architecture: Lucien Coppé, a Belgian architect who was responsible for both upgrading the school's curriculum and the design of its first permanent building in 1938. Furthermore, some aspects of the western curriculum were not intended to be adapted but were hybridized due to the constraints of the modernizing nation. The establishment and construction of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, are examples of how art, science, and education were intertwined in both national and global politics in the 1930s.

**Keywords:** architectural education, Europe-Asia cultural transfers, Thailand, architecture and national identities.

## INTRODUCTION

Before World War II, there were only few architecture schools in Asia. Even though various modernizations, either from direct colonisation or pressure by Western powers, had taken place in every single Asian country since the nineteenth century, most modern buildings constructed in all those countries had been designed by architects and builders who had been trained abroad or learned from foreign professionals and on-site experience. As early as 1877, Japan, the first Asian imperial power competing with the West, established an architecture course, led by the British architect Josiah Conder, at its Imperial College of Engineering (Watanabe, 2006). Likewise, China, which had been severely interfered with by both Western powers and Japan, aimed to re-establish its national integrity and prominent position in the world stage after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. The first generation of Chinese architects, mostly educated in the United States, returned to practice and established modern architectural education in the country from the late 1920s (Wang, 2018).

In these local and global circumstances, architecture schools in the region were stimulated by rising nationalism and always contributed to the development of a modern architectural culture that engaged the interaction between modernity, perceived to be derived from the West, and the traditions of local cultures, derived from the study of historical monuments and vernacular architecture (Kusno, 2012). New architectural identities were stimulated by the curriculums of the schools and the students' projects, and materialized through built works by teachers and graduates.

Examples of buildings in modern-national styles, combining Beaux-Arts plans and indigenous roofs, range from the government and educational buildings of the Republic of China in Nanjing, Beijing, and Guangzhou (the 1920s–1930s) and the institutional buildings of the increasingly authoritarian Japan, such as the Tokyo National Museum (1937), to architectures in Bandung, which was planned to become the new capital of the Dutch East Indies (Cody, Steinhardt, & Atkin, 2011; Passchier, 2016, p. 101–115). As neither the rising imperial Asian power of Japan, nor the young Republic of China seeking to regain its position after the

humiliations of the late Qing Dynasty, Thailand offered a different, yet interrelated, account and a largely unknown example of how an increasing nationalist political context prioritized architectural education and identity.

The Kingdom of Thailand has a unique history in Southeast Asia since it succeeded in maintaining its national sovereignty while surrounded by British colonies (today Myanmar, Malaysia, and Singapore), French Indochina (today Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and Dutch East Indies (today Indonesia) (Reid, 2015). The modern concept of sovereignty and national identity of Siam — the former name of Thailand before 1940 — was gradually constructed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The royal family, wrestling with encroaching European empires, played a central role by reforming the systems of administration, education, jurisdiction, and economy to maintain its status quo. The royal family, however, had to cope with rising contestation from the 'educated class', as a result of the kingdom's own reforms that led to the 1932 Revolution, when a coup staged by the People's Party, a group of progressive mid-rank officials and officers, replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional one (Ferrara, 2012, p. 13).

Further modernizing the country, maintaining its economy despite the Great Depression, and strengthening a new national identity were major challenges for the People's Party's government in the 1930s, prior to the invasion of Thailand by Japan in December 1941. How and why, in such context, were architecture and architectural education considered as key to the construction of a modern national Thai/Siamese identity?

A number of treaties signed between Siam and Britain, other European countries, the United States, and Japan, opened up the country to global capitalism from the second half of the nineteenth century. Plans for formal architectural training started in the 1910s as part of the royal government's policies on defining modern Siam, and curbing economic problems involving immigration, as well as foreign domination in the construction industries. This movement continued in the 1930s, despite changes in the definition of modern Siam following the revolution of 1932. The need to establish formal architectural training in Siam resulted in the creation in 1933 of the Faculty of Architecture at

Chulalongkorn University (จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย), Bangkok, and the opening of its first permanent building in 1941. Existing studies pointed out purposes of and accounts on the establishment of the faculty. Horayangkura, Intharawichit, Chanthawilatwong, and Inphantang (1993) and Tiptus (1996) focused on the Siamese Government's aim to train Thai nationals in Architecture to replace European architects previously employed in the public sectors as the origin. These studies also provided a glimpse on the curriculum and how teaching was conducted at the faculty, as well as a brief analysis of the faculty's building, but did not analyze in detail how they responded to the purpose of the establishment. For a more critical analysis, Prakitnonthakan (2016) discussed the establishment of the faculty as cultural capital, supporting the newly established profession of architect in defining its high status in the modern construction industry and Thai society. What is still missing in the existing research is how the series of events in the establishment of the faculty unfold in the contexts intermingled between both local and global situations in politics, profession, and education.

This article discusses the Faculty of Architecture at Chulalongkorn University as both an institution and a building. Five main questions are addressed. Firstly, what socio-political and economic factors brought the Faculty of Architecture into being? Secondly, how did the first curriculum try to teach students how to materialize modern Siamese/Thai architecture? Thirdly, which specific foreign schools were taken as model, and who were the 'mediators' or 'agents' of transfers of knowledge? (Moyn & Sartori, 2015). Fourthly, how were Thai nationals who studied in Europe, and Europeans who came to Thailand, involved in the educational process? Finally, what does the design of the faculty building tell us about the understanding of modern Siamese/Thai architecture around 1940? These questions expand the research field about the establishment of modern architectural training

and practice in not only Thailand but other transnational contexts.

## THE THAI TRADITIONAL CONSTRUCTION SECTOR AND THE ENCROACHMENT OF FOREIGNERS

Despite a long tradition of Thai architecture, there was no architecture or crafts education in a formal school in Siam prior to 1910. Traditionally, the construction of large houses and more sophisticated structures, such as temples and palaces, was executed or supervised by a *chang* (ช่าง, craftsman, carpenter, builder), who was trained through an apprenticeship involving the oral knowledge transfer from their master(s). Moreover, there were no Thai words for 'architecture' and 'architect', as it is known today, because the terms were only translated to *sathapattayakam* (สถาปัตยกรรม) and *sathapanik* (สถาปนิก) in 1920. In Thai society, the house, Buddhist temple, palace, and other traditional building types had their own secular and sacred meanings (Aasen, 1998), which were not necessarily the same as today's understanding by Thai society. In sum, both the formal training of crafts and architecture in a school and the concept of *sathapattayakam* and *sathapanik* were modern in the 1920s.

From the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1920s, European-style buildings became much needed by the royal government, the royal family, noblemen, and international businessmen and merchants in Siam, due to both their functional practicality and symbolic affiliation of power and wealth after the opening of Siam to global trade and politics. Originally, only a few princes and Siamese *chang* were engaged in the transfer of modern knowledge and practice in construction from European architects who were employed by the royal government (Povatong, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The nationalities of European architects and builders included Italian, British, Austrian, and German in the mid-nineteenth century but became mainly Italian from Turin at the turn of the twentieth century due to direct cooperation between the Siamese and Italian governments in recruitment (Povatong, 2011).

In contact with these foreign architects, some Siamese learned modern methods of design and construction using architectural drawings, competition, estimation, and bidding as well as new technologies.

At the same time, Chinese immigrants, who worked as carpenters and builders, enthusiastically learned the foreign styles and new practices too, and gradually took over the jobs from the majority of Thai *chang*. Massive numbers of Chinese immigrants arrived in Siam after the Second Opium War (1856–60) that opened more treaty ports to Western trade, and the abolition of laws prohibiting Chinese citizens to travel abroad. This Chinese migration wave to Siam increased dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century with the expanding construction industry of buildings and infrastructure (canals, roads, and railways) as well as tin mining that needed more workforce (Mulder, 1996). No less than 448,300 Chinese arrived in Siam from 1882 to 1917 (Tan, 2006). They were paid-labourers and not included in the traditional *corvée* system that still persisted in the mid-nineteenth century. Chinese became increasingly popular as they were easier to control and many of them were capable of delicate craftsmanship. Simultaneously, as traditional practice and buildings became less popular, most of the Thai *chang* lost their grip on the market to the Chinese.

## THAI ARCHITECTS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AT CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

In this situation, the royal Siamese government realized the necessity of having a systematic training in modern construction practice for the Siamese. It started to establish a specialized school and sent Siamese students abroad in the 1910s. Sarot Sukkhyang (สาโรช สุขยางค์, 1895–1950), a scholarship student of the Ministry of Public Instruction, today Ministry of Education, studied architecture at the University of Liverpool from 1915 to 1920 in order to become a teacher in architecture (Carter, 1915). Nat Phothiprasat

(นารถ โพธิประสาท, 1901–1954), another scholarship student under the same ministry, studied at the same university from 1924 to 1929 (Carter & Stevenson, 1930).

Back in Siam, Sarot Sukkhyang (later assumed the title Phra Sarot Rattanimman พระสาโรชรัตนนิมมานก์) worked as the “expert/teacher of design/construction calculation” (*achan chang khamnuan baeb* อาจารย์ช่างคำนวณแบบ) at the Department of Architecture (*Kong Sathapattayakam* กองสถาปัตยกรรม) in the Ministry of Education, which had been responsible for modernizing Siam’s religious affairs, education (including medical education), and museums. The translation of his position and the responsibility of the Ministry of Education implied that Sarot Sukkhyang would engage in both teaching and practice. In the 1920s, the need of modern buildings for modern teaching was as urgent as the need for modern teachers.

It happened that Sarot Sukkhyang mostly designed a great number of the Ministry of Education’s modern buildings for education and health care, including the new masterplan of Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok and its sixteen buildings, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and erected between 1923 and 1935 (Phra Sarot Rattanimman, 1976). He became the Director of the Department of Architecture, Ministry of Education, in 1925. He only started to teach architectural drawing (*wicha paenbaeb sathapat* วิชาแผนแบบสถาปัตย์) and building construction (*wicha kosang akhan* วิชาก่อสร้างอาคาร) in 1931 to the fourth year class of the Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University (Ladawan, 1961, p. 138).

The early career of Nat Phothiprasat was more directly engaged in architectural education than that of Sarot Sukkhyang. He returned to Siam in 1930 and immediately became Head of the newly established Department of Architecture at Poh Chang School (โรงเรียนเพาะช่าง), where students were trained in both Siamese and Western crafts and carpentry since 1910. The school was expected to train students in Thai and other crafts that were correlated to the market’s demand. These Thai craftsmen would gradually take over the jobs from the foreigners, especially the Chinese migrants (Seidenfaden, 1927).

The Department of Architecture at Poh Chang School was developed out of the Department of Construction Design, which had taught sketching, Thai ornaments, Western ornaments, drawing, brush painting, architectural drawing, and geometry since 1912 (*Rong rian poh chang*, n.d.). Considering that these aforementioned courses focused mainly on draughtsmanship, Nat Phothiprasat's main task in 1930 was to upgrade the curriculum in terms of both the theoretical and technical aspects.

Nat Phothiprasat's first two years at Poh Chang School coincided with three major events in the modernization of Siam's education, construction, and politics. First, a proposal to expand the curriculums of Chulalongkorn University to Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Forestry, Mining, Law, Archaeology, Fine Arts, and Music was discussed in 1928 and 1931. This first higher educational institution in Siam had been founded in 1917 by King Vajiravudh (พระบาทสมเด็จพระมงกุฎเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, reigned 1910-1925) by upgrading the Civil Service College, founded in 1899 by his father King Chulalongkorn (พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, reigned 1868-1910). The university had four founding faculties: Science and Arts, Engineering, Medicine, and Public Administration. Second, the Ministry of Education seriously initiated a plan in early 1932 to promote construction education at all levels in order to stimulate the Siamese to completely take over the low and middle level jobs from the Chinese, as well as the high level governmental positions related to construction industry that were mostly held by Europeans (*Khana kammakan borihan chulalongkorn mahawitthayalai pho so 2475*, 1932).

Neither of these aims had been achieved when the 1932 Revolution replaced the absolute monarchy by a constitutional one. The People's Party (คณะราษฎร) accused King Prajadhipok (พระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, reigned 1925-35) and his royal government of corruption, incompetence, and the cause of widespread

economic recession, inadequate education, and inequality. The new constitutional monarchy gave citizens the right to participate in the country's administration that, as the People's Party argued, would eventually bring development and prosperity (Banomyong, Phongpaichit, & Baker, 2000).<sup>2</sup> However, even though the revolution was bloodless, the newly established government was far from stable. An attempt by royalists to overthrow the People's Party resulted in a military confrontation in October 1933. Despite his denial of any support for the rebels, the government's distrust and subsequent conflicts with King Prajadhipok contributed to his abdication in 1935. King Ananda Mahidol (สมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวอานันทมหิดล, reigned 1935-46), a nine-year-old nephew of the abdicated king who had no son, in turn, ascended to the throne.<sup>3</sup> Having a child king allowed members of the People's Party to play the main roles in the country and overshadow the monarchy for the next decade.

The Department of Architecture was finally established in the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University, in 1933. It received 11 students from Poh Chang School's Department of Architecture to continue their studies as second year students, and accepted 11 new students (of the 25 originally expected) (*Khana kammakan borihan borihan chulalongkorn mahawitthayalai pho so 2475*, 1932). Its curriculum was a three-year diploma. Nat Phothiprasat was transferred from Poh Chang to be the head of the department with the assistance of Siwawong Kunchon Na Ayutthaya (ศิววงศ์ คุญชร ณ อุตทยา) as lecturer and studio tutor, and Bunchuai Utcharat (บุญชาย อุจรัตน์) as a secretary and drawing tutor

<sup>2</sup> On Revolution Day, six principles were announced by the People's Party: independence, security, economy, equality, liberty, and education.

<sup>3</sup> King Ananda spent most of his time in Switzerland and paid visits to Thailand twice after ascending the throne. In June 1946, he was assassinated in the Royal Palace, Bangkok. The assassin was never found, but the incident was used by political opponents to accuse the prime minister, Pridi Banomyong (ปรีดี พนมยงค์, 1900-1983), a liberal leader of the People's Party, who finally was toppled by a coup d'état in November 1947.

(*Khana sathapattayakammasat*, Ch 10, Box 1, Folder 4, n.d.).<sup>4</sup>

How should art and science be balanced in architectural education? This was the main challenge Nat Phothisprasat faced in his mission to deliver both theoretical and technical aspects in the new three-year curriculum. The decision of placing architectural education within the university was similar to the situation at the School of Architecture of Liverpool University (created in 1901), where Nat Phothisprasat and Sarot Sukkhyang had studied. The action aimed to give prestige to architects, grant them an intellectual position, and place them at the top of the construction team, completely differentiated from craftsmen, builders, and even engineers (Saint, 2007).

However, contemporary engineers tended to perceive architects as a sort of artist interested only in artistic matters rather than in construction and technology (Tiptus, 1996). The majority of the university's senior staff who attended the meeting to establish the Department of Architecture actually commented that the curriculum draft proposed by Nat Phothisprasat was too much oriented towards art (*Khana sathapattayakammasat*, Ch 10, Box 1, Folder 1, n.d.). Furthermore, the fact that the Department of Architecture was placed within the Faculty of Engineering also drew criticism from M.C. Itthitthesan Kridakorn (ม.จ.อิทธิเทพสรรค์ กฤดากร, 1889-1934), another modern Siamese architect who had graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the late 1910s. He argued that the training of architectural students within the Faculty of Engineering would produce no real architects, but only civil engineers equipped with some sort of basic architectural contents. Instead, he suggested that architectural students should be trained among other crafts students, so they could gain a balance of skills in sculpture, carving, and engineering (Kridakorn, 1935). These debates show various concerns that at the end of the day Siamese graduates would neither be able to compete with Chinese builders, who had gained technical experience from real jobs,

nor be able to convince clients to hire them because of their limited level of artistic achievement.

Amidst the debates, the Department of Architecture was finally established as an independent department outside the Faculty of Engineering in March 1935 (*Ratchakitchanubaksa*, 1935). However, Charoen Chenakun (Phra Charoen Witsawakam) (เจริญ ชื่นกุล [พระเจริญวิสากรรม], 1895-1987), the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, remained the acting director. Amidst the urgent need for knowledgeable and experienced architects, following the policies of the People's Party's government to accelerate modernization, Nat Phothisprasat was transferred to become Director of the Architecture Division at the Department of Municipal Works, Ministry of the Interior. Siwawong Kunchon Na Ayutthaya, whose degree was not architecture but decorative arts, was, therefore, the only full-time staff member with assistance of Bunchuai Utcharat. After his move to the busy job at the Department of Municipal Works, Nat Phothisprasat served only as a part-time studio tutor at the Department of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University

## NATIONALISM AND A THAI VERSION OF BRITISH CURRICULUM

Despite the removal of Nat Phothisprasat from his position at the Department of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, the curriculum remained what he had laid down. The three-year course was oriented towards the artistic side rather than the engineering side of architecture, with a special emphasis on Western classical architecture. Most of the subjects followed the curriculum of Liverpool University's School of Architecture and used English textbooks. The first version of the document reporting the curriculum in 1934 submitted to the Ministry of Education had been written in English, but was

<sup>4</sup> Bunchuai Utcharat studied drawing at Poh Chang School for four years and studied architecture with Nat Phothisprasat for three years at that school. Then he worked as painter and draughtsman at the Department of Outer Palace. He participated in Sala Chaloemkrung Theatre project, which was designed by M. C. Samaichaloem Kridakorn (ม.จ.สมัยเฉลิม กฤดากร, 1895-1967) and Nat Phothisprasat.

then requested to be translated into Thai (*Khana sathapattayakammasat*, 1934). The final version submitted in the same year was written mostly in Thai, but some descriptions were still in English or directly transliterated from English to Thai, as many technical terms did not have Thai terminology.

It also happened that Thai architecture was a minor subject. History of Architecture was all about Western architecture, starting with Egypt and Greece, obviously new subjects to Siam. Architecture, like other modern subjects, fell into the process of catching up with advanced nations. The curriculum, however, was not intentionally designed to follow Liverpool University's curriculum completely. Moreover, it does not mean that the People's Party's government lead the nation towards the complete import of Western modernization. A closer look at Siamese nationalism helps understand the situation.

To understand Siamese nationalism, we should first understand King Chulalongkorn's introduction of absolute monarchy by the centralization and reforms of the kingdom's administrative power in the 1890s. Chulalongkorn's reforms, however, increased the number of the educated middle class, as well as Sino-Siamese descendants whose parents were Chinese migrants previously deemed by the government to be politically inactive. Some of these social groups had liberal ideas that might threaten the absolute monarchy. Aware of the threat of the global fall of empires — China (1912), Russia (1917), Germany and Austria-Hungary (1918), Ottoman Empire (1922) —, King Vajiravudh, who had studied at Sandhurst and Oxford, in addition to pursuing further reforms, ran a royal nationalist policy to ensure the survival of absolute monarchy in Siam. He created a sense of national pride by stimulating the study of national history and reviving Siamese arts, both old and new, ranging from literature to crafts. He promoted nation, religion, and monarchy as the three pillars of Siamese culture. This combination of nationalist and imperialist ideas aimed at encouraging the king's

subjects to recognize the kingdom's unity under the absolute monarchy (Anderson, 1991). Both Vajiravudh and his nationalism, however, faced decreasing popularity and criticisms at the latter period of his reign, due to economic difficulty and luxurious court affairs. The situation started to improve at the beginning of King Prajadhipok's reign (1925-35), only to worsen again with the Great Depression that followed the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and forced the royal government to impose new taxes, decrease government officials' salaries, and even lay off some of them, both civilian and military. All these formed discontents that partially lead to the 1932 Revolution.

A new kind of nationalism was introduced by the People's Party after the 1932 Revolution. It became crucial towards the end of the decade. This did not happen in isolation but was part of the global politics that went through a traumatic circumstance, mainly because of World War I, that finally led to World War II. Outside Siam — whose name was changed by a now-racial-based nationalist policy to Thailand in 1940 —, nationalism and its fascist excesses caused major conflicts, such as the Turkish War of Independence, the Italian colonisation of Ethiopia, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the Spanish Civil War, and the German annexation of Austria and Bohemia, all of which challenged the early establishment of internationalism, mainly represented by the ill-fated League of Nations. Uncertainty and doubts in international relations, especially those between Siam and great powers, conventionally Europeans but now including Japan, together with unsettled conflicts in domestic politics gave rise to a paramilitary nationalist regime under Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram (แปลก พิบูลสงคราม, 1897-1964) from 1938 to 1944.

Plaek Phibunsongkhram's nationalism was different from King Vajiravudh's, for it had stemmed from a popular movement rather than from the monarchy (Peleggi, 2007). It was inspired by fascism (Terwiel, 1980).<sup>5</sup> However, despite their different origins and purposes, an important similarity laid in the cultural aspect of

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<sup>5</sup> Plaek Phibunsongkhram was originally titled Luang Phibunsongkhram and later assumed the rank of Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram in 1940.

their processes. The new regime was culturally a continuation of Vajiravudh's nationalism and strengthened the idea of the nation-state by glorifying race and genealogical bravery in order to unify the citizens. The shared mobilising force that entailed the similarity in both nationalisms culturally was still the quest for a modernity that would not be a complete import from the West but would integrate with a particular nation's, or, more accurately, race's glorious civilisation inherited from ancient time (Peleggi, 2007).

Given that this nationalism was supported by a popular movement and that the newly established architectural profession and education in Siam/Thailand were supported by the government, the curriculum of the Department of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, was expected to support the national path to achieve such modernity. The attempt to include Thai architecture in the curriculum, however, faced obstacles because only a few experts were available to teach it, not to mention the absence of a specific textbook. Thai art and architecture were originally instructed only in the first two years as tertiary and secondary subjects respectively. It happened that this limitation was also considered the other way around: as there were limited teaching materials and few instructors, the classes of Thai architecture became the producers of teaching materials for future classes.

This situation also demonstrates how some subjects at Chulalongkorn University functioned in a different way from their original moulds at Liverpool. The best example is Measured Drawing. At Liverpool, professors normally assigned the students to accomplish Measured Drawing during the long vacation at the end of the second academic year (Reilly, 1906). Because measured work at Chulalongkorn University was not conducted by measuring Western classic architecture, like in Liverpool, but ancient Thai architecture, the course did not make students more familiar with Western classic building design, which their studio classes focused on, but instead compensated for the lack of textbooks on Thai architecture.

Groups of students went to measure a wide range of ancient architecture, both surviving buildings and ruins, using their skill from the surveying class to measure, sketch, and then come back to make the drawings. In the case of

ruins or partly demolished buildings, the students needed to research the contemporary style by comparison with other historic edifices and apply it to their drawings. Therefore, measured works at the Department of Architecture of Chulalongkorn University also provided an exercise for students to reconstruct the lost architecture of the kingdom. This must have been perceived as a good support for building up missing knowledge and texts about traditional architecture, especially when the main part of the curriculum followed a Western model. A comparison between a student's measured work and the work from a studio class can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

One of the most fruitful results of Measured Drawing was Nat Phothisprasat's book on architecture in Thailand (*Sathapattayakam Nai Prathet Thai*, สถาบันศิลปกรรมในประเทศไทย), published in 1944, that included many measured drawings by students. The preface of this first comprehensive book on Thai architecture clearly expresses a nationalist idea of architecture as national art and pride:

Architecture of the Thai nation has been "developed and glorious" (*charoen rungrot*, เจริญรุ่งโรจน์) for ages and periods. It is highly valuable and comparable to those of other nations and its architectural character has been clearly visible until the present day. It is something we can be highly proud of. But the history [of the historic sites] has not been well known so their value and significance have not been acknowledged. [...] These historic sites have been always covered with jungle, deteriorating because of age [...]  
(Phothisprasat, 1944, p. *Kho* [ข]).

Measured Drawing classes and Nat Phothisprasat's book were aimed to support the newly-established architectural profession of Thailand to develop in an "appropriate way", as seen from a nationalist point of view. This is clarified in *Which direction will our architectural work progress towards?*, an article written by Nat Phothisprasat and published by the Royal Institute in 1943 (Phothisprasat, 1943, p. 394). The author enounces three possible directions: "1. Sticking with ancient principles and improving them; 2. Following international style but adapting it to suit our ideas; 3. Inventing a brand new style." Apart from the fact that Thailand still needed to catch



up with advanced nations while differentiating and glorifying its own history, technological and economic constraints made the author conclude that the last direction seemed to be out of reach. Instead, he argued for integration between the first and the second directions. An examination of

the upgrade of the curriculum at the Department of Architecture and the design of its first permanent buildings, in both of which a foreigner played an important role, will give a clearer example of what Nat Phothisprasad promoted.

### Figure 1

*An example of a student's measured work*

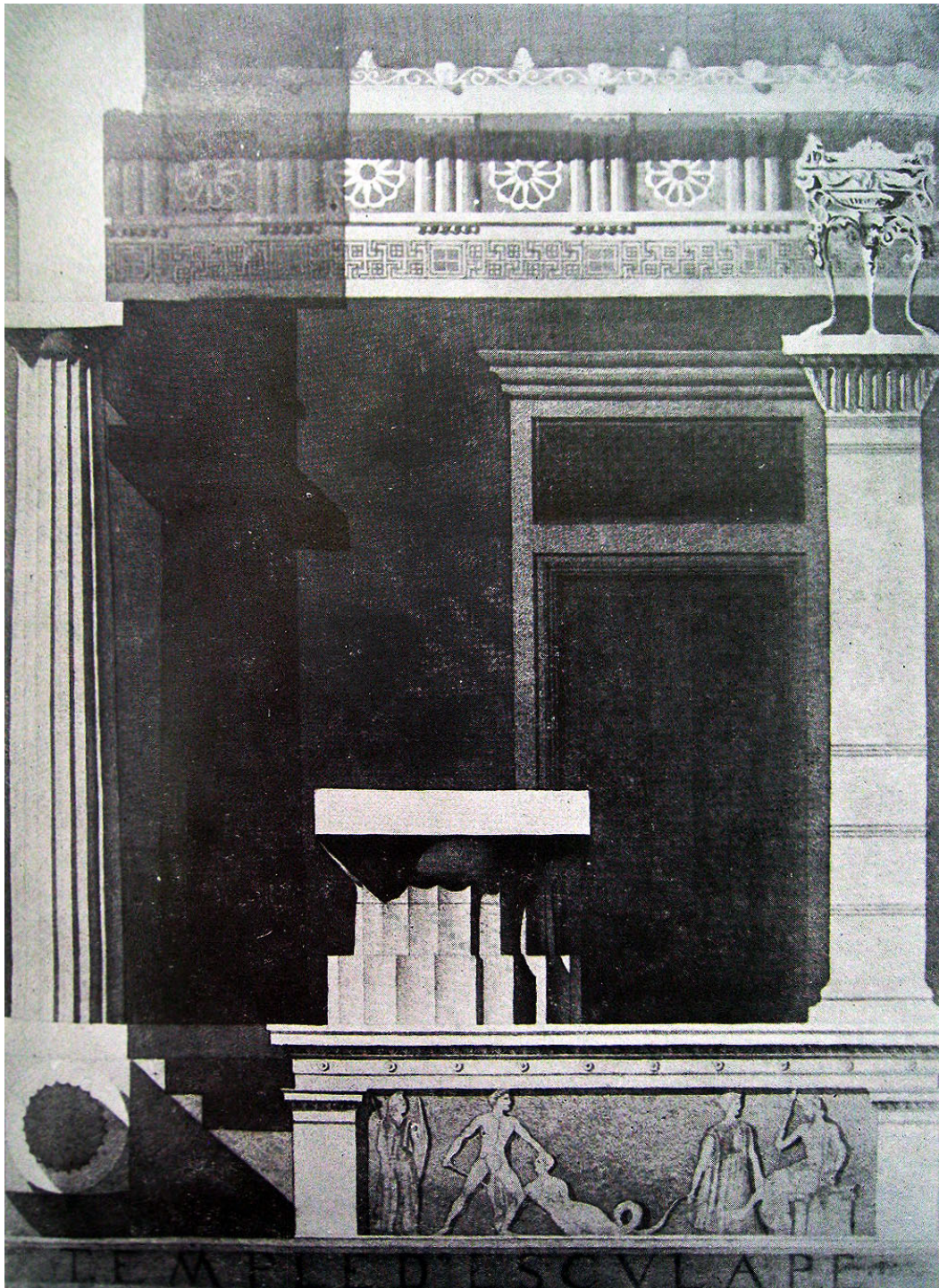


*Note.* This drawing shows the result of a student's both measurement and reconstruction of Phra Prang Wat Phra Ram in the historic city Ayutthaya (Pluk ban phid kid chon ban thalai, 1942).



**Figure 2**

*An example of a student's work from a studio class*



*Note. This drawing shows the student's composition of Western classical elementss (Pluk ban phid kid chon ban thalai, 1942).*

## A BELGIAN ARCHITECT TO END ALL FOREIGN DOMINATIONS

The 1932 Revolution deeply affected the architectural profession in Siam. On the one hand, most European architects had left Siam after termination of their contracts due to the economic depression, even before the revolution. On the other hand, there were only a few Siamese architects that had graduated from abroad. So there was no more need to replace European architects in high positions, but an urgency to produce Siamese architects. To achieve the People's Party's modernization projects, the government decided in 1937 to appoint a European professor with a three-year contract as Head of the Department of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, with the task to develop the curriculum further and train Siamese students at advanced levels.

Thailand's position on the international political stage affected the recruiting process of a new professor. Referring to the government's policy, Pridi Banomyong (*Nai Lucien Cappe nai chang sathapattayakam achan nai krasuang thammakan*, n.d.), the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, specifically indicated that a Belgian with good knowledge of the English language should be recruited for this position. His decision involved rejections of an international open call plan for applicants, an offer from the Swiss Consulate to recruit a graduate from the Federal Polytechnic School in Zurich, and an endorsement of the Italian Consulate for Ercole Manfredi (1883-1973), a remaining Italian architect who was a long-term resident in Siam with a large architectural experience and had been guest lecturer at Chulalongkorn University. Even though the Swiss Consulate advertised that Swiss schools enjoyed worldwide fame in different walks of science and were well adapted to the requirements of modern life, and the Italian Consulate emphasized that Italian architects contributed to the modernization of Bangkok for decades due to their employment in the absolute monarchy's Department of Public Works, a closer look to Belgium's positions both in the world stage and with Siam in the past decades may help to explain the specification of a Belgian professor for the position.

At the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Belgium was not a colonial threat in Asia, especially for Siam, over which Britain and France wrangled for influence. Furthermore, the prominent Belgian attorney at law, diplomat, and politician, Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns (1835-1902), served the Siamese Government from 1892 to 1901 as a General Advisor to the kingdom in the modernization and codification of its law and giving advices regarding foreign affairs (Walraet, 1957; Walter, 1992). This helped Siam in resisting colonial threats from France and Britain that had frequently been grounded on accusations of Siam's backward and inferior jurisdiction system.

Despite its nominal independence, Siam could be considered as semi-colonial due to a decade-long acceptance of unequal treaties with foreign powers, mainly on import-export taxes and extraterritoriality (Lysa, 2004). Jurisdiction reforms, advised by Rolin-Jaequemyns, did not bear fruit until the mid-1920s, when Siam managed to amend great parts of the unequal treaties, including those with Belgium (Polain, 1926). This improved Siam's previous disadvantages on duties and jurisdictional rights, paving a way towards fully equal relations (Sayre, 1928).

In the context of global politics and foreign affairs approaching the eruption of World War II, Siam's neutrality seemed harmonious with that of Belgium (declared in 1936). The share of policy and trust regarding foreign and military affairs may also be observed by the fact that the Belgian Royal Military Academy had welcomed almost twenty students from Siam since 1929 (Sayre, 1928). In 1936, Belgium was the only country that had concluded a convention on the extradition of fugitive criminals with Siam (Limsira, 2010). When, in 1937, the Siamese government needed to appoint another foreigner, the long-term ties and trust with Belgium were decisive. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Pridi Banomyong even informed the Belgian ambassador about the government's preference to guarantee the Belgian government's complete abolition of extraterritoriality in Siam, which subsequently happened in late 1937, before the completion of the recruitment process (Boussard, 2004). Accordingly, the call for a fixed term Belgian professor of Architecture in 1937 in Siam was not only a response to the end of European

domination in high-position jobs, but also part of the process to put a definitive end to foreign interference.

This explains why three Belgian architects applied for the job (*Lucien Coppé*, 1938-1941).<sup>6</sup> One of them, Lucien Coppé, eventually took this position in 1938 with a three-year contract.<sup>7</sup>

Before focusing on his contribution to the Thai educational project, it is relevant to look at his background, skills, and teaching experience.

Born in the Flemish historic city of Bruges (on 7 October 1892), Lucien Coppé studied architecture at the Academy of Bruges, the Saint Luke's School in Ghent, and the Academy of Antwerp. During World War I, he continued his studies at the University of London under Sir Edwin Lutyens for one year (*Lucien Coppé*, 1938-1941). After the war, he contributed to the reconstruction of Diksmuide, a ravaged town in Flanders, built houses in Bruges and villas at the Belgian coast, sometimes together with the historicist and regionalist Catholic architect Joseph Viérin (Beernaert & Constandt, 1988; Coomans, 2011). The style of his brick buildings fitted in the general trend of Flemish Regionalism that combined Gothic revival and vernacular elements, such as basket-handle arches, stepped gables, and tiled saddle roofs (Meganck, Van Santvoort, & De Maeyer, 2013; Van Santvoort, De Maeyer, & Verschaffel, 2008). Contributing to the design and construction of "De Pluime" garden city in Diksmuide raised his interest in the functional and social dimensions of housing (Smets, 1977).

In 1928, Coppé moved to Brussels and his work evolved under the influence of both Art Deco and Modernism, two movements that gained in

popularity in the Belgian capital as in most European cities (Vandenbreen & Vanlaethem, 1996). In the late 1920s, Brussels was booming and the architectural avant-garde developed thanks to Henry van de Velde and a generation of modernist architects and urbanists who founded the Bauhaus-like school of La Cambre in 1927 and organized the CIAM III in Brussels in 1930. Coppé did not belong to this circle but benefited from the general dynamics by designing several modern reinforced concrete apartment buildings. In 1933, he participated in a competition for the Belgian National Institute of Radio in Brussels. His design was awarded ex-aequo second prize and was published in the Belgian top architectural journal *L'Émulation* (Le concours de l'I.N.R., 1934). Photographs of his drawings are kept at the Central Architecture Society of Belgium (SCAB) (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Despite the successful Brussels 1935 World Exhibition, the whole building sector crashed from the mid-1930s because of the Great Depression. Little is known about Coppé's work during the crisis years, except that he was mentally prepared to try his luck abroad and move with his family to Siam (Concours national des maîtres-carriers de Belgique, 1938; Coomans, 2014; Lagae, 2003).<sup>8</sup> After three years in Bangkok, Coppé could not go back to Belgium because of the German occupation, and consequently moved to England before returning to Brussels in 1945. When one of his former students from Chulalongkorn University, M.R. Mitrarun Kasemsri (ม.ร.ว.มิตรารุณ เกษมศรี, 1915-2003), built the Thai pavilion at the Brussels 1958 World Exhibition, Coppé facilitated the contracts. Lucien Coppé died in Brussels, aged 84 (15 September 1975).

<sup>6</sup> The candidates were Lucien Coppé, Alphonse Collard and Jasper Stienon.

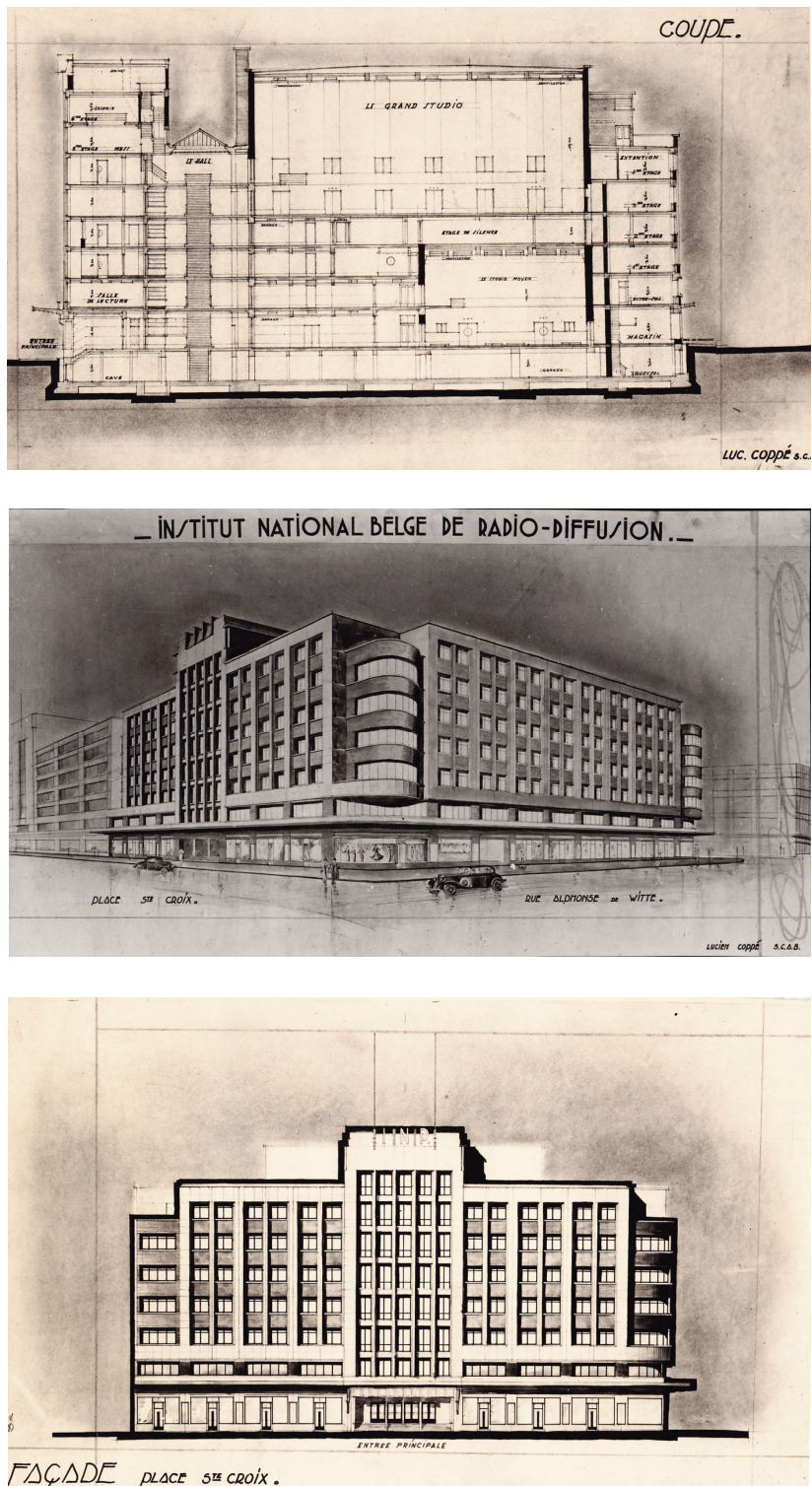
<sup>7</sup> Archives about Lucien Coppé are conserved in Bangkok (Chulalongkorn University Archives), Brussels (Archives d'architecture de l'Université libre de Bruxelles, Fonds SCAB), and New York (family archives Luc Demortier, photo albums of Coppé's works), as well as in the municipalities where he built (building permits' files). Biographical sketch: <https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/dibe/persoon/861>.

<sup>8</sup> More is known about Belgian architects who moved to Congo and China.



**Figure 3**

*Lucien Coppé's design for the architectural competition of the Belgian National Institute of Radio in Brussels*

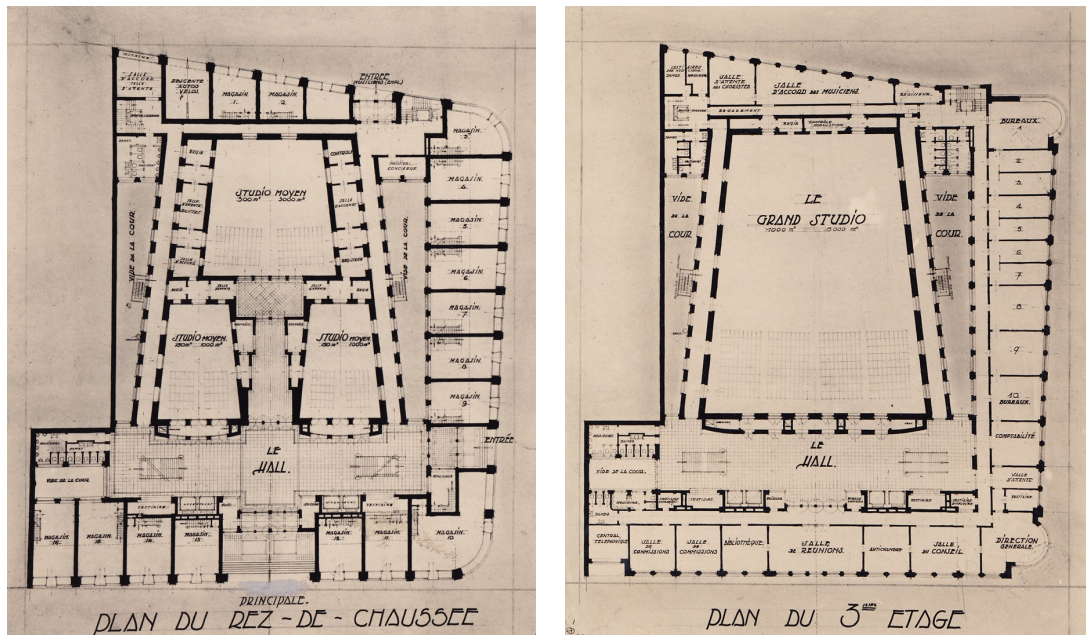


*Note.* A section, a perspective, and an elevation show the development of Coppé's work under the influence of both Art Deco and Modernism (Coppé, ca.1933).



**Figure 4**

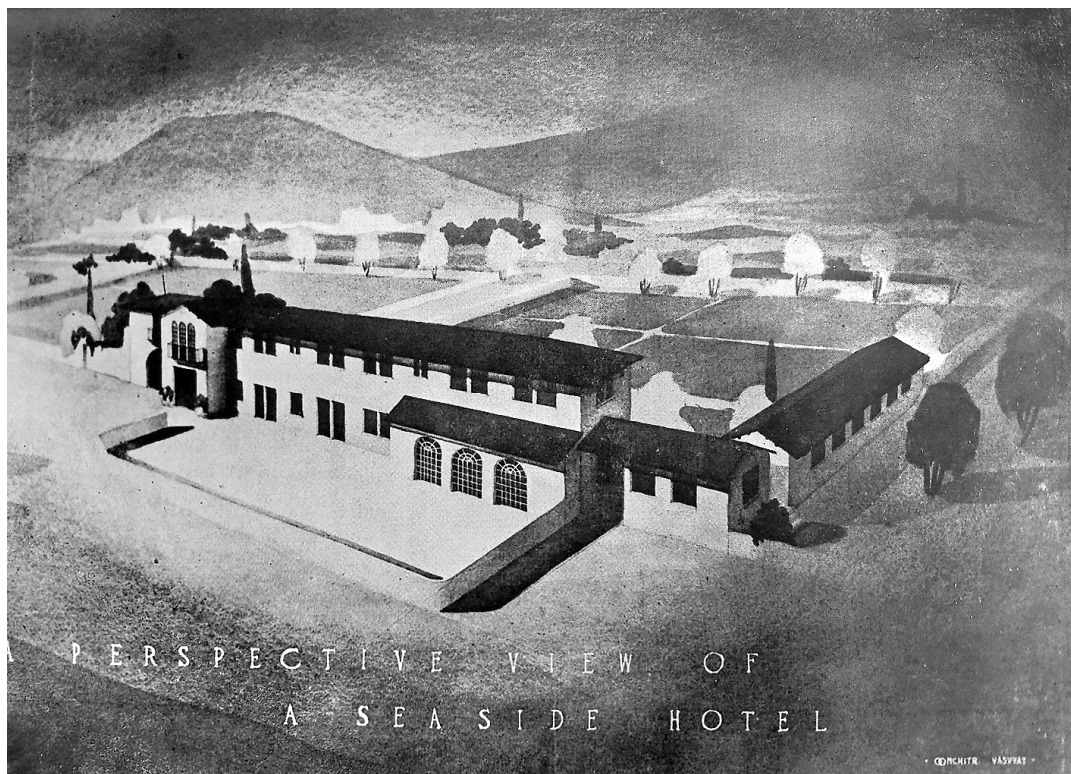
*Lucien Coppé's design for the architectural competition of the Belgian National Institute of Radio in Brussels*



*Note. The plans of the first and second floors show Coppé's version of modern planning (Coppé, ca.1933).*

**Figure 5**

*A perspective drawing from a studio work of a Thai student from 1939 to 1941*

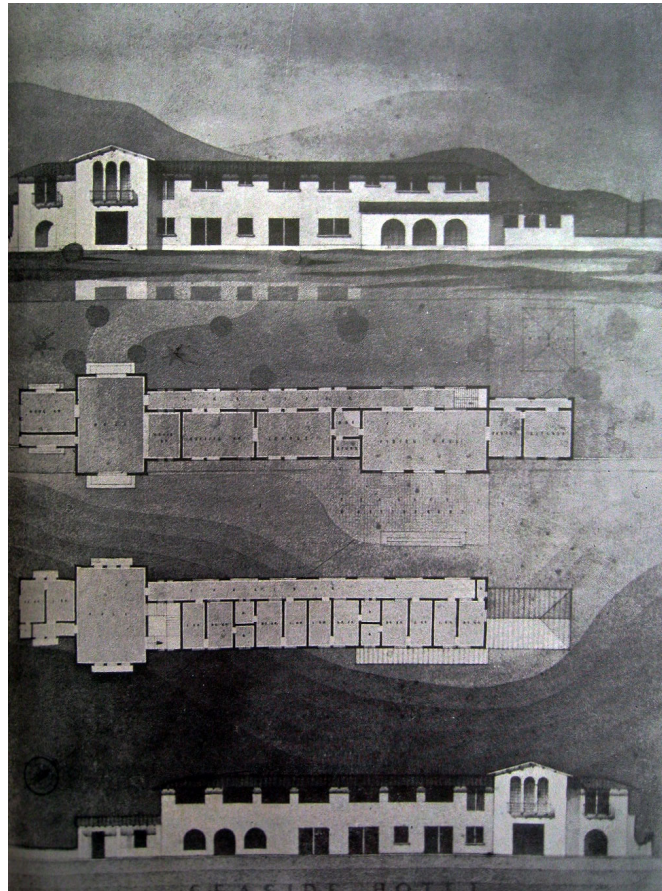


*Note. It shows a mixture between Classical and Modern designs, including the use of the arch and simplified and functional forms. (Pluk ban phid kid chon ban thalai, 1942).*



**Figure 6**

*Plans and elevations from a studio work of a Thai student from 1939 to 1941.*



*Note.* It shows a possible outcome of Lucien Coppé's supervision towards function, orientation, climate, and budget (*Pluk ban phid kid chon ban thalai*, 1942).

As mentioned earlier about the Italian Consulate's lobbying, the Italian architect Manfredi had more than ten years work experience in Thailand. His teaching of construction responded to the lack of text books, especially those written in Thai, by emphasizing the first-hand experience of students. Manfredi brought his students to the countryside to observe the origin of stones used in construction and decoration, and to visit his own built works, such as a house with a cavity-wall and paddy husk infill as insulation (Tiptus, 1996).

Given the above situations and hybridization, the 1940 annual report of the Faculty of Architecture reiterated its original vision in providing architectural training in Thailand and how the upgrade of the curriculum meant a positive development:

Before the establishment of architectural education in Thailand, the design and

construction of buildings and all their accompanying decoration needed foreign architects and Thai architects who had graduated from abroad. The number of such people was limited. Therefore, the majority of the construction was in the hands of contractors who worked following their familiar way or did it without academic principles (*Lhak Wichakan* หลักวิชาการ). Consequently, the aim of the Faculty is to promote this subject in Thailand. This will contribute to construction in the country according to up-to-date theory and the art that is suitable for our geography. And when there will be enough Thai architects, there will be no need of foreign architects. Furthermore, the architectural education will help Thais to research on existing Thai art, which is a good example, and to integrate it with modern knowledge in order to create an architecture that particularly belongs to Thailand as the everlasting culture of the

nation (*Khana sathapattayakammasat*, Box 2, Folder 28, n.d.).

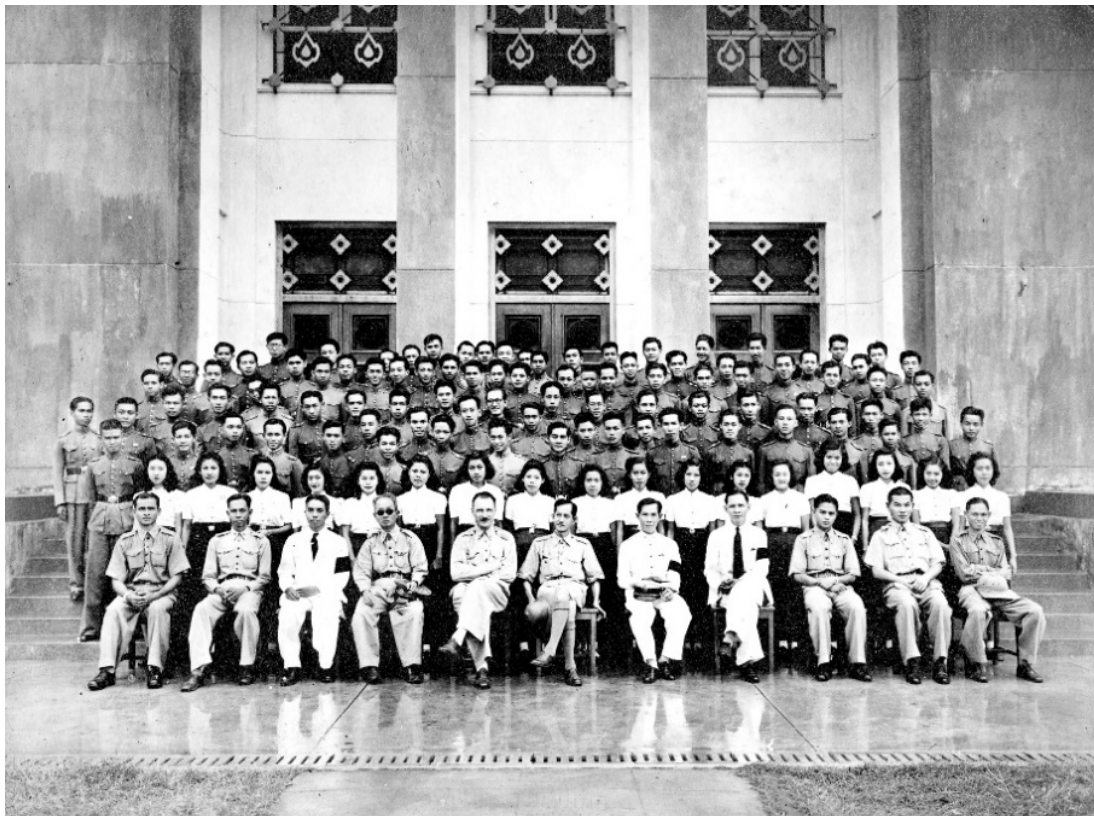
The government's aim, now under the paramilitary-nationalist Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram, who also served as the rector of Chulalongkorn University, was high. The intention to train Thais to take over design and construction industries from foreigners remained. It aimed to reorganize positions in both public and private sectors. This included a complete replacement of European architects by Thai architects in prestigious design jobs, as well as its insertion into less-prestigious construction projects, such as residential buildings, that otherwise would be taken for granted by Chinese contractors, who were alleged to worked without 'academic principles'. A new aim, correlating with

Nat Phothisprasat's three directions of designing modern Thai buildings, was that the government and the school should revive Thai art and architecture to strengthen the national identity, and to reassure the place of a modern and history-rich Thailand in the concert of civilized nations.

The Faculty of Architecture, for the first time after changing the curriculum to the Bachelor course, had students from year 1 to year 5 and awarded the degree of Bachelor of Architecture to five graduates in 1941 (Figure 7). The first permanent faculty building, designed by Lucien Coppé, was completed in the same year. The building was, therefore, a manifesto for the school's ethos regarding the modernization of Thai architecture.

**Figure 7**

*The 1941 Class of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* Professors on the front row. Key figures mentioned in this paper from the fourth from the left: Phra Phromphichit, Lucien Coppé, Runnachit Kanchanawanit (Phraya Prakrit Konlasat) (รุ่นชิต กาญจนะวณิชย์ [พระยาประทีปกลาสตร์]), M.C.Vodhyakara Varavarn, Nat Phothisprasat. And the second from the right is Siwawong Kunchon Na Ayutthaya ([Photograph of the 1941 Class of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University], 1941).



## A MODERN THAI ARCHITECTURE

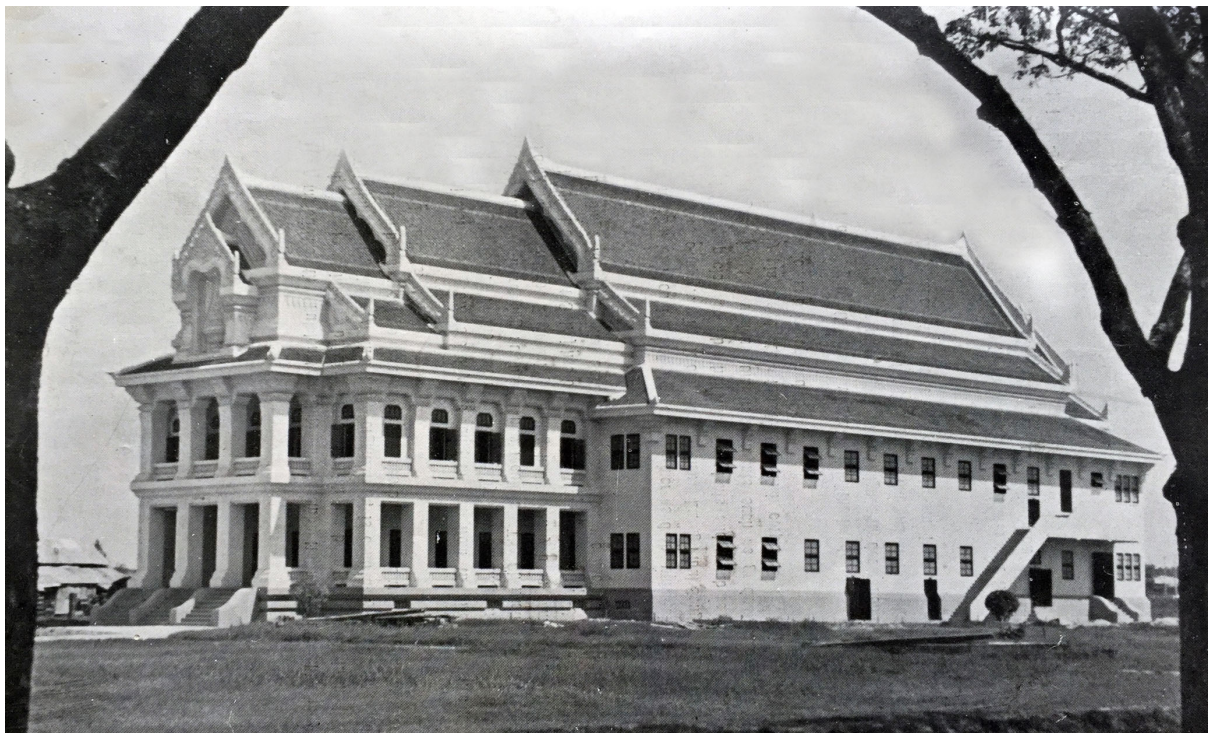
Considering Lucien Coppé's design approach and the ethos of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, the first permanent building of the faculty could be an example of what Nat Phothiprasat defined in 1943 as an appropriate "integration" between "sticking with ancient principles and improving them" and "following international style but adapting it to suit our ideas" (Phothiprasat, 1943, p. 394). Before analyzing the "integration" in the faculty's building, let us discuss two other buildings built by the People's Party's government on the

campus of Chulalongkorn University which illustrate the two different concepts.

On the one hand, the main assembly hall of Chulalongkorn University, completed 1939, was the best contemporary example of "sticking with ancient principles and improving them" (Figure 8). Sarot Sukkhayang, a Liverpool University graduate, accommodated plans and reinforced concrete structure within an unmistakably Thai form designed by the master builder Ou Laphanon (Phra Phromphichit) (ผู้สถาปนิก [พระพรหมพิจิตร], 1890-1965) (Fusinpaiboon, 2016b). By doing so, the ancient principles of form and ornaments were improved by modern design, materials, and construction system.

**Figure 8**

*Photo from the invitation card of the opening ceremony of Chulalongkorn University Assembly Hall*



*Note.* It was designed by Sarot Sukkhayang (Phra Sarot Rattananimmman) and Ou Laphanon (Phra Phromphichit) (1939) with modern reinforced concrete structure and a symmetrical Thai form (*Thi din sap sin kan ko sang*, n.d.).

On the other hand, the Faculty of Dentistry, completed in 1941, "follows international style but adapts it to suit our ideas" (Figure 9). It was designed by the Italian architect Ercole Manfredi, who taught construction at the Faculty of Architecture. The building is simple, long, and has a reinforced concrete structure. The plan

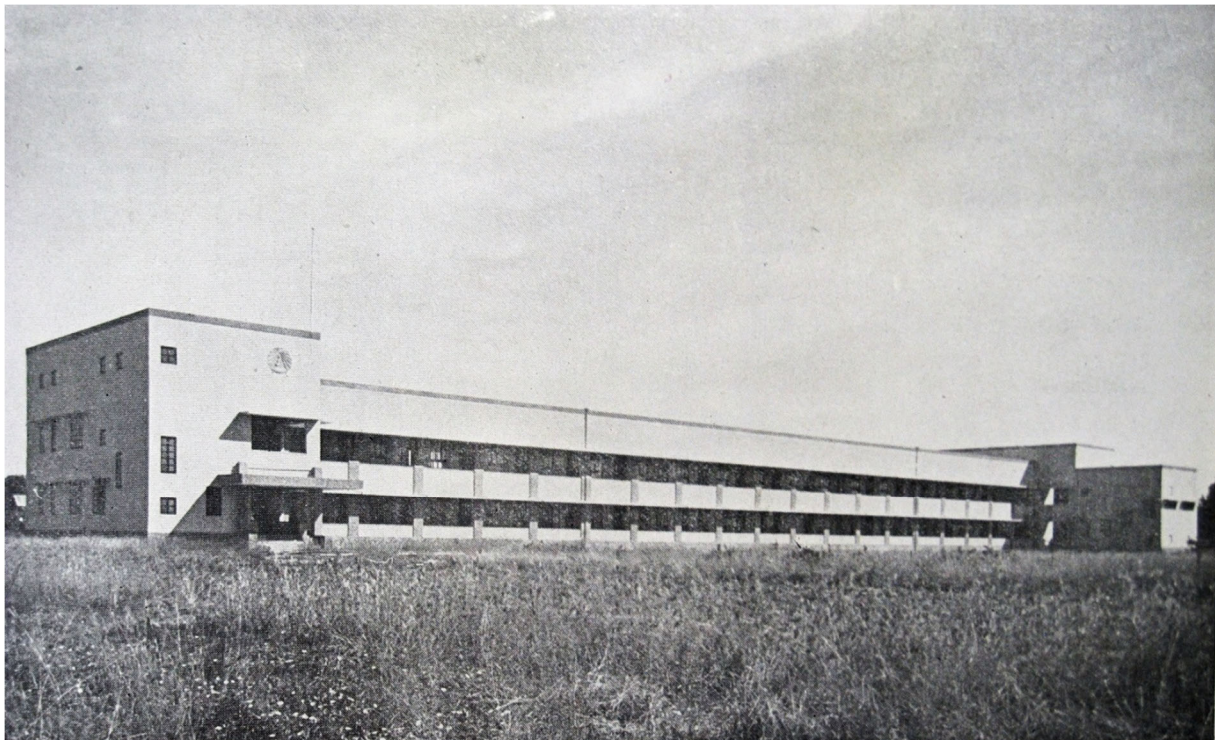
consists of a single loaded corridor and repetitive modules of rooms aligned on an east-west axis. Its overall dimension is 11 metres wide and 116 metres long. Its plan was made asymmetrical by the location of the main auditorium on one end adjacent to one of the main staircases placed at both ends. This Modernist design responded to

the local climate by receiving the prevailing wind from the south, while the 3-meters-wide corridor with cantilevered concrete eaves, placed on the same side, helped block strong sunshine from intruding into the classrooms. Archival photos also show how the airy and well-shaded wide corridor was used as a multi-purposed space, like how corridor space (*rabiang* ระเบียง) was used in traditional Thai architecture. In this case, tropical climate and a Thai concept of space were acknowledged in the otherwise seemingly international-styled architecture.

Lucien Coppé designed two buildings for Chulalongkorn University: the Secretariat Building (Figure 10 to Figure 12) and the Faculty of Architecture (Figure 13 to Figure 17). Both were completed in 1941 and belonged to neither of the above architectural trends. Together, they could be seen as a new experiment along a conservative line of Modernism adapted to suit the tropical context. While the new Secretariat Building still adopts neo-classical elements, the Faculty of Architecture explores an expression of a local character, with the latter building being the focus of this article.

**Figure 9**

*Faculty of Dentistry, designed by Ercole Manfredi*



*Note.* Its plan was made asymmetrical by the location of the main auditorium on one end adjacent to one of the main staircases placed at both ends (Khana thantaphaetsat chulalongkorn mahawitthayalai, 1941).



**Figure 10**

*Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University, designed by Lucien Coppé (1941) (photo © Povatong, 2019).

**Figure 11**

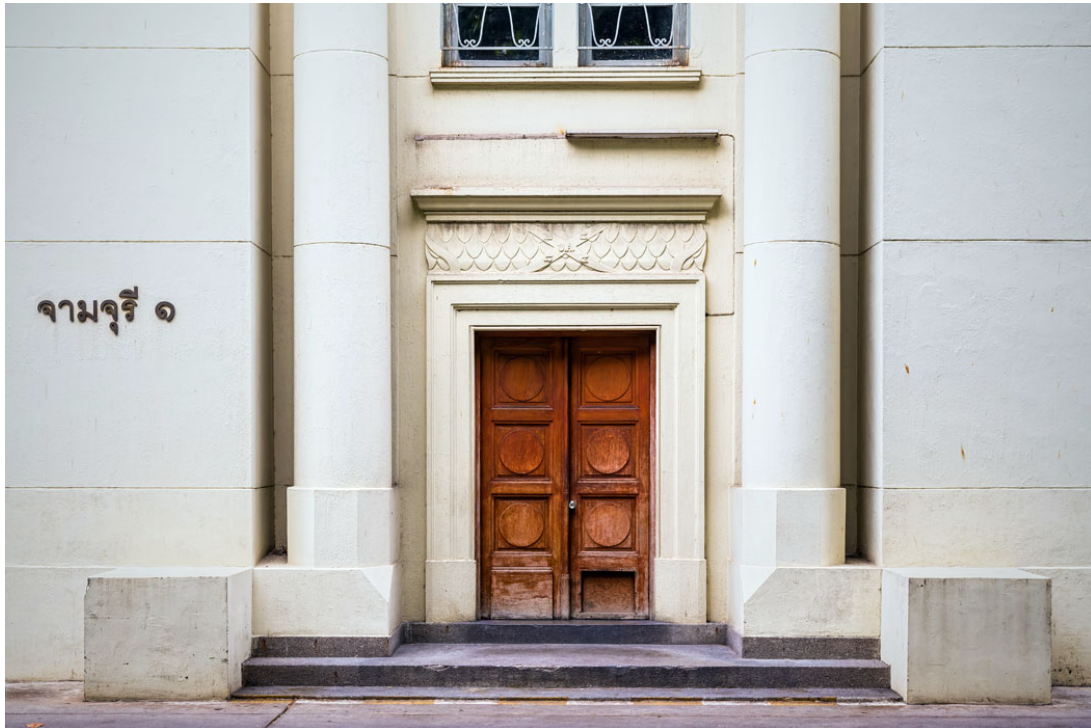
*The entrance to the south wing of the Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* The entrance to the south wing of the Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University, designed by Lucien Coppé (1941) (photo © Povatong, 2019).

**Figure 12**

*The close-up view of the entrance to the north wing of the Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* The close-up view of the entrance to the north wing of the Secretariat Building, Chulalongkorn University, designed by Lucien Coppé (1941) (photo © Povatong, 2019).

The Faculty of Architecture building has a symmetrical plan with the main porch and columns in the middle, turned to the south. It neither avoided all culturally specific forms, like the Faculty of Dentistry, nor adopted explicitly Thai forms, such as the large and steep roof of the assembly hall. Parapets were used to hide corrugated asbestos cement sheet roofing. Large glass windows were applied for classrooms and studios, making the most of natural light, but were also shaded by reinforced concrete eaves. Round windows, reminiscent of those of ocean liners, lit the stairs at both ends.

An excerpt from a short article published in 1954 in the Belgian construction journal *La technique des travaux* [The technique of the works], emphasized how the design adopted orientation, natural ventilation, reinforced concrete structure, and construction details to respond to local climate, geography, and the availability of local materials:

The poor quality of the soil led to the adoption of the wooden floating pile foundation system with reinforced concrete distribution slab. The

building has a reinforced concrete frame with brick masonry filling walls. The outer walls are double with an insulating air layer. The facades are plastered, stone imitation. In the humid tropics, large bays and transverse illumination are common because they are necessary for air movement and cross-sectional ventilation. The orientation of all the buildings is in the dominant direction of the wind, that is to say, towards the Gulf of Siam from where comes a light breeze. The openings are protected by canopies and galleries so that the windows can be opened when it rains. Ventilation is provided by a set of bricks at the height of the ceiling. The construction does not have more than one room in depth to avoid pockets of stagnant air and thus facilitate cross ventilation. Under the roof, a ventilation zone provides effective protection against almost vertical sunshine. The building is covered with a roof made of fiber cement slabs. The window frames, doors, and floors are teak wood (Coppé, 1954, column *Bâtir et équiper*).



**Figure 13**

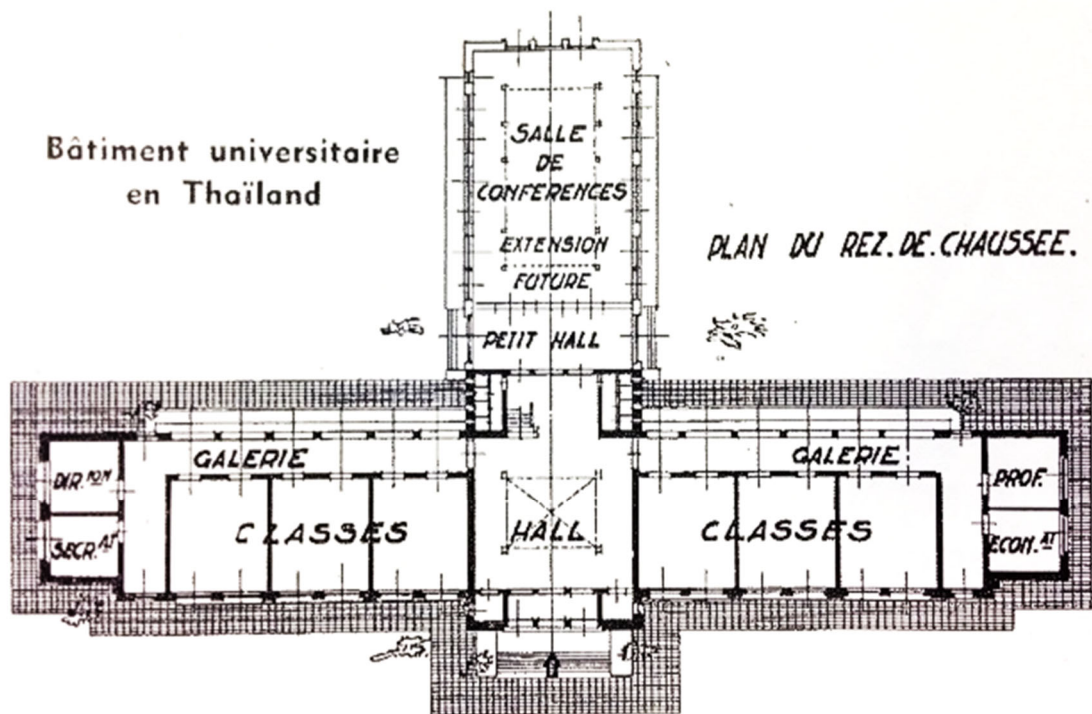
*A photo of the main façade of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* A photo of the main façade of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, designed by Lucien Coppé (1941) ([Photograph of the main façade of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University], 1941).

**Figure 14**

*The first-floor plan of the Faculty of Architecture*



*Note.* The first-floor plan of the Faculty of Architecture (1941), Chulalongkorn University. The plan is symmetrical. Classrooms occupy the main space facing south, receiving prevailing wind. A future extension to the north of the main hall as a conference room is shown. (Coppé, 1954).

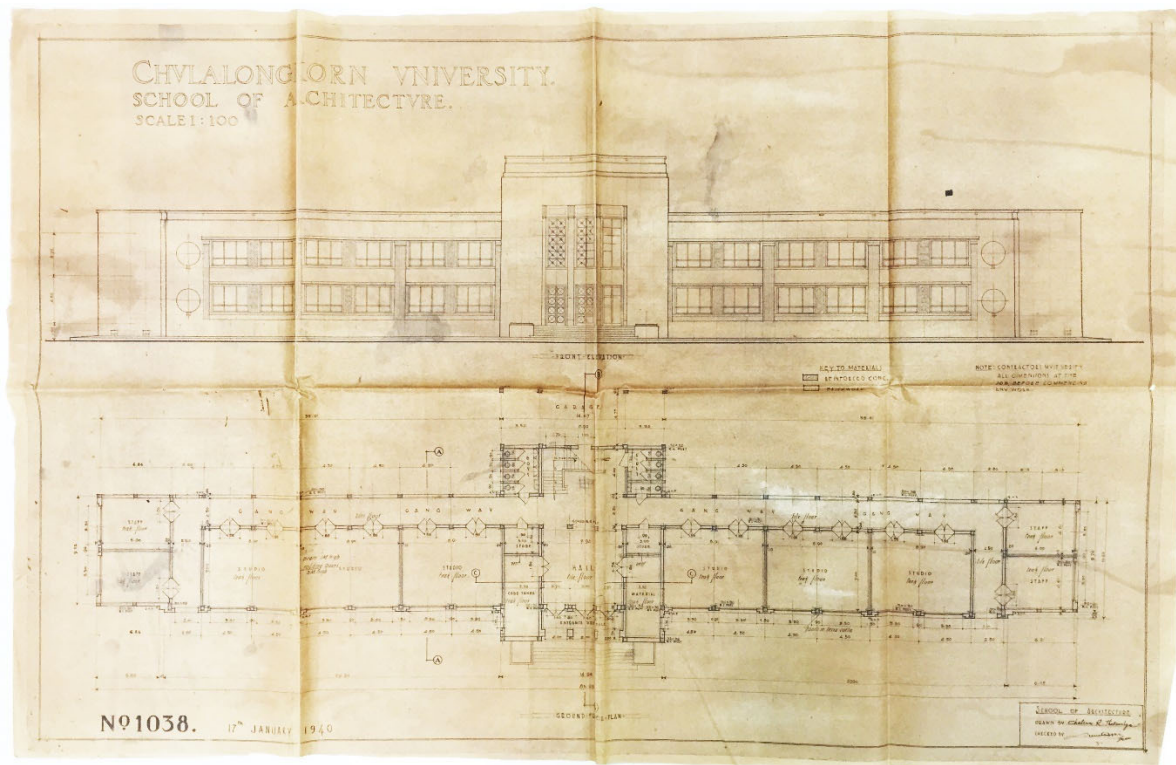
Instead of an outstandingly traditional form, like a big roof, Coppé placed a variety of geometric and abstract reliefs, some of which evoke simplified versions of traditional patterns, not seen in his previous work, between the large windows on the building's façade. Adapted Thai ornaments are also applied to the capitals and the decoration of the front doors. The first could be seen as a simplified version of the Thai-style capital of the old Secretariat Building completed in 1918 — itself an element of an earlier interpretation of modern Thai architecture (Figure 17). The description of these reliefs and capitals in the announcement of the opening ceremony reads:

Every column of the front façade has a particular pattern designed following architectural art. Especially at the entrance, Thai ornaments are used, such as for the capitals (*Kan poed tuek tang tang nai wan chat*, 1941, p. 22).

The building was constructed by Sanga Phanit, a Thai construction company instead of a Chinese contractor. The building was described with two other new buildings of Chulalongkorn University, the Department of Dentistry and the Department of Pharmacology, by the government press as “modern style buildings” (*akhan baeb thansamai*, อาคารแบบทันสมัย), in the sense of “up-to-date”. In other words, the Faculty of Architecture was modern but Thai: Thai art was applied in a modern way. The building was, therefore, a prototype for modern Thai architecture. Ironically, the only non-Thai was its Belgian architect, Professor Lucien Coppé, whose name does not appear in the announcement of the opening ceremony. There is no evidence of a renewal of his three-year contract with Chulalongkorn University after 1941.

**Figure 15**

*Ground floor plan and front elevation of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University*



*Note.* This drawing by Lucien Coppé shows the plan of the first floor and the front elevation of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University (1940) (*Baeb sathapattayakam khana sathapattayakammasat*, 1940).



**Figure 16**

*A close-up view of the front façade of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn*



*Note.* The photo shows an alternate order of fluted pilasters and geometric bas-reliefs. The designs are overall modern with some adapted from traditional Thai patterns (photo © Fusinpaiboon, 2020).

**Figure 17**

*Comparison between a capital of Chulalongkorn University's old Secretariat Building and the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University*

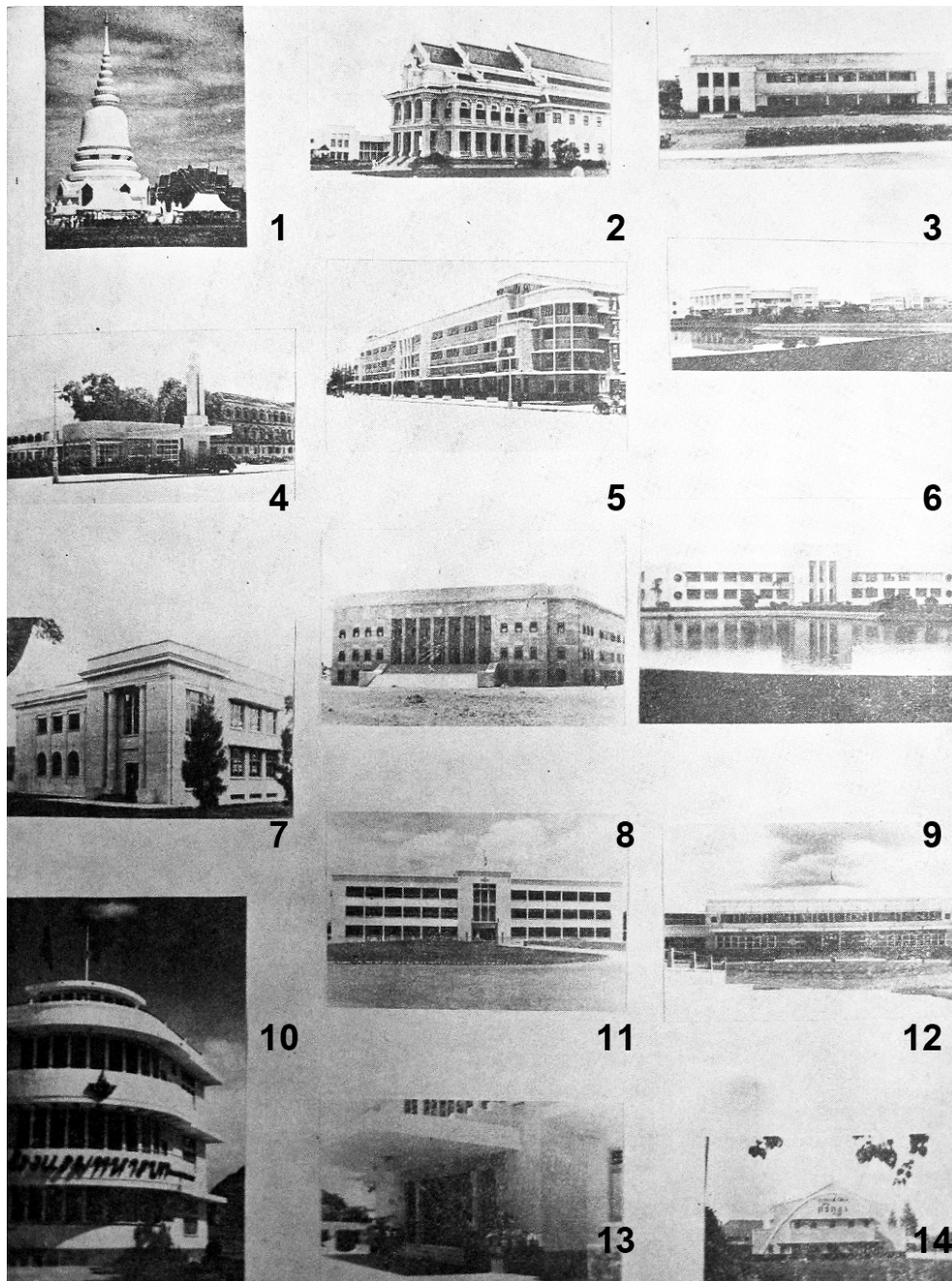


*Note.* Comparison between a capital of Chulalongkorn University's old Secretariat Building, designed by Edward Healey (1918) (left) (Coppé, ca.1940) and those of the Faculty of Architecture by Lucien Coppé (1941) (right) (photo © Fusinpaiboon, 2020). The styles of the capitals are based on a traditional ornament *Bua chong kon* (บัวจงกล) or *Bua waeng* (บัวแวง), inspired by lotus. The design of the window's ironwork was based on a traditional Thai pattern *Lai phum khao bin* (ลายพุ่มข้าวบิณฑ์).



**Figure 18**

*Prestigious buildings in Thailand*



*Note.* Prestigious buildings in Thailand, mostly built by the People's Party government between 1932 and 1941. The collection shows "modern" and some "Thai-style" architecture. 1. Chedi of Wat Mahathat, 2. Assembly hall, Chulalongkorn University, 3. unidentified building, 4. Petrol station, 5. One in ten of mixed commercial and residential building on Ratchadamnoen Boulevard, 6. Chemistry building at Chulalongkorn University, 7. Secretariat Building at Chulalongkorn University, 8. Court of justice, 9. Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, 10. Hotel in Lopburi City, 11. Office of the Railway Authority, 12. Dentistry Building of Ananda Mahidol Hospital, 13. Unidentified building, and 14. Sri Kung Movie Studio. The Faculty of Architecture has a unique style among all these contemporary buildings. It seems to be obviously modern from distant (as seen in this printed photo) but is actually decorated with modern Thai ornaments (*Pluk ban phid kid chon ban thalai*, 1942).



## CONCLUSION

In 1942, a book, published as a memorial for the funeral of an architecture student of Chulalongkorn University, showed images demonstrating progress in architecture and architectural education in Thailand. Prestigious buildings, mostly built by the People's Party government between 1932 and 1941, were shown (Figure 18). Most of their styles could be visually defined as either "modern" or "Thai-style" by their either simple forms and plain surfaces or traditional forms. The style of the Faculty of Architecture was unique among all these contemporary buildings. In the image, it seems to be obviously modern from distant, thanks to its form and surface, but is actually decorated with modern Thai ornaments in a subtle way as discussed earlier.

The design of the Faculty of Architecture offers an alternative to the argument of Prakitnonthakan (2004) for the People's Party's intention in promoting modern architecture with simple forms and plain surfaces as a symbol of a classless society and as against the absolute monarchy's architecture with ornaments. Once analyzed alongside with the assembly hall of the university, it demonstrated that Thai architects and master builders rather went beyond the immediate conflicts between the old and new regime. It showed their focus on the nation.

The Thai nation by now was defined differently from the absolute monarchy time. Instead of promoting the nation, religion, and monarchy, the nation was for the first time really territorialized by the Thai race. The Thai nation belonged to Thai citizens, not only the monarchy. So did the Thai tradition, art, and architecture. The modernization of Thai art and architecture was also part of their overall modernization.

In this sense, the People's Party, the architects, and master builders were by no means against traditional ornaments, which now belonged to all Thai citizens, not only the monarchy. The question was how to modernize it along with the modernization of the nation, and what should be done to ensure that all these constructions would be done by Thais, not foreigners. The establishment and the design of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, offered the most up-to-date answer at that time.

The origin and early development of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, show similarities with the establishment of several architecture schools in East Asia, such as in Japan and China, before World War II. These schools provided architectural training for Asian students who, in turn, no longer needed to travel to Europe or the United States. They were part of the establishment of a modern architectural culture in the region, engaging in the interaction between modernity, perceived to be derived from the West, and the traditions of local cultures. Their curriculums, students' projects, and buildings, as well as the works designed and built by teachers and graduates, embraced both modern architectural principles and traditional characteristics derived from the studies of historical monuments and vernacular architecture.

As regards the construction industry and foreign affairs during the 1920s and 1930s, Thailand's case shows uniqueness and relations among its Asian peers. While graduates from Japan's architecture schools were designing projects in their then colonies, like Taiwan and Korea, and those from China's school were helping the development of the new Republic to resist Western and Japanese colonialism, the establishment of Thailand's school was part of a plan to end Chinese and European domination in the construction industry, and a diplomatic plan to secure Siam's proper position in the context of late-1930s Southeast Asia, where tensions and doubts involving Western and Japanese imperialism, nationalism, and Chinese republicanism were rising.

The process to achieve these aims, however, involved the adoption of a Western curriculum, which was considered modern, and its adaptation to be more Thai for nationalist purposes. Paradoxically, this needed to be supported by hiring another foreign professor because the limited numbers of Thai architects who had graduated abroad were actively working on public projects for the new nationalist government that aimed to build a new nation, cut from its absolute monarchical past. Furthermore, some aspects of the Western curriculum were not intended to be adapted, but were hybridized with traditional practices due to the constraints of the modernizing nation.

Considering all of the above situations within the Asian context, this article emphasizes the involvement of socio-political, economic, and technological factors in the architectural education. The adoption, adaptation, and reinterpretation of Western curriculum all served to train Thai students how to materialize modern architecture within constraints and how to pass on and develop local traditions with their modern architecture. In this process, the arrivals and interactions among locals who had studied abroad, like the first generation of Siamese architects, locals who had had knowledge of traditional architecture through practices, like Thai master builders, or self-trained like Chinese migrants, and expatriate European architects (some were recently imported, others had worked in the country for longer than Thai architects), acted as 'mediators' or 'agents of transfer of knowledge' in the socio-political and economic contexts.

The establishment and the building of the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, provided an example of how art, science, and education were intertwined in the national(ist) and global politics of the 1920s and early 1940s. This article shows a possible transcend beyond the debate of how to incorporate both modern and traditional qualities into the design of contemporary buildings. It in turn questions political and economic circumstances that have formed such debate and why it is still going on in Thailand and many non-Western countries nowadays.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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